

JAC Draft

FR-1222

THE CHINA SYNDROME

A Screenplay

by

T.S. Cook and Mike Gray

SECOND DRAFT

December 20, 1976

This story is fictional.
Unfortunately, the technical
facts upon which it is based
are true.

FADE IN:

EXTREME CLOSEUP - BANK VAULT DOOR

In the intricate time-lock mechanism of the vault door, polished tumblers CLICK into place. PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT. VAULT

In f.g., a German SS OFFICER stands in silhouette, watching as the massive door hums open slowly.

Waiting outside is a YOUNG MAN, terrified, in the costume of a baker's helper. He's holding a pizza box marked "BRAND X."

YOUNG MAN

(begging)

Please, sir... could I have some
more t-t-t-t-t...

The SS Officer steps into the light. His uniform is bright red. Across the breast strap is the word "TOMATO."

SS OFFICER

(belligerent)

To-mat-to?

LONG SHOT

The vault is filled with people in the midst of shooting a TV spot. RICHARD HARTMAN, about 35, is directing. His style and manner of speech is direct and without affectation. One might take him for a younger man, but a close look at his face shows us maturity and a wealth of experience.

RICHARD

Cut.

CLOSEUP

Richard huddles with the cameraman, DAVID ADAMS, an intense 25-year-old, sitting behind his dolly-mounted Panaflex camera, attended by assistants and grips, all of whom are older than he. He, too, is confident and talented -- a quick study and a genius behind the camera.

Everyone is exhausted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD
Okay?

DAVID
What can I say? What you see
is what you get.

RICHARD
Okay, everybody, that was
fabulous. What's next?

KLINGMAN (C.S.)
Uh, Rich, could you hold it a
second?

LONG SHOT

KLINGMAN is one of three New York ad-men sitting on director's chairs behind the shot. Their suits and manners set them apart from the casual style of the crew

KLINGMAN
I'm still seeing that streak
in the door.

RICHARD
How'd it look, David?

DAVID
Like a highly-polished bank
vault door. We can re-light if
it bothers you. The bank opens
in twenty minutes and we've
still got to shoot 'Cheese.'

Sitting with the ad-men is a lovely young lady with a clipboard, JESSICA TURNER. She places her hand gently on Klingman's knee and leans toward him.

JESSE
I don't know. Dale... is that so
bad? I mean 'ominous' is the
operative motif in this scene.
I've always found highly-polished
things ominous, haven't you? Gun
metal... limousines.

KLINGMAN
Yeah... I see what you mean...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jesse stands suddenly, consulting her script.

JESSE
Terrific. Next shot is a reverse exterior on 'Cheese.' Where the hell is he? CHEESE!

INT. BANK

The crew, led by Jesse, emerges from the vault. Davis is being pushed out on the camera dolly. Grips and gaffers begin relighting for the next shot. Curious bank employees, just arrived for work, watch the scene along with the ever-present guards.

CHEESE! JESSE

A flustered, effeminate young man in a 1940 milkman's costume, hurries toward her. The word "CHEESE" is printed on his hat.

MILKMAN
Okay, okay. This stupid costume is giving me a fit! And my name is Bobby, not Cheese.

JESSE
Sorry. Just trying to help you get in character, Sir Laurence.

Richard crosses to a watching banker.

RICHARD
There a phone here I can use for a local call? Thanks.

He crosses to an empty desk, dials, then wearily lies down across the desk, a move that delights the tellers and fails to delight their superiors.

In f.g., Jesse and David study the storyboard.

DAVID
Who thinks these things up?

JESSE
I'd rather not know. It might change my feelings about capital punishment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

Look. I'm just gonna lock it down right here. There's no reason for a dolly on this shot. You think they'll go for that?

Jesse glances at Richard, flat on his back, talking on the phone.

JESSE

Richard will go for it, that's for sure. I don't know about the agency.

DAVID

Those assholes. They want a goddamn stainless steel bank vault with no reflections. Man, I --

JESSE

Easy, David.

Richard returns.

RICHARD

You're not gonna believe this, fans. Churchill got the clearance. He wants us to shoot today.

DAVID

(pause)

Holy Jesus.

RICHARD

It's either today or next Thursday. And next Thursday we won't make the air date.

David sags into a nearby swivel chair.

RICHARD

(continuing)

Don't worry, Flash, we'll swing by Eddie's and pick up a little speed.

David springs to his feet and strikes a Superman pose.

JESSE

(laughing)

Okay, let's wrap this turkey.

EXT. LOS ANGELES BASIN - DAY

It is a steaming day, in the high nineties, with thick smog.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

A Cherokee Chief jeep with whip antennas, spares, gas cans, equipped for the Beja, zooms along in light traffic.

INT. CHEROKEE CHIEF

Jesse rests her head on Richard's shoulder as he speeds through traffic. David sits in back. He takes a bite of cold pizza, then drops it back in the box with a plop.

RICHARD

Pretty bad?

DAVID

Just goes to show -- there ain't no free breakfast.

JESSE

I thought you were going to get the air conditioner fixed, Richard.

RICHARD

Nobody's perfect.

DAVID

Turn it up. I'm roasting back here.

JESSE

No! It's coming out in one stream right at my legs. I'm not gonna be the first person in the L.A. basin to die of frostbite.

INT. KMOT-TV NEWS DEPARTMENT

The newsroom, filled with desks and people, is supervised from a fishbowl office in the center. The scene is chaotic as reporters rush to assemble the noon report.

Jesse, David, and Richard enter, acknowledge a wave or two, and cross to a counter along the wall.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MILDRED RADKOWITZ, a raven-haired beauty, smiles across the counter.

MILDRED

Hello, David. What do you need?

DAVID

Mildred Radkowitz.

JESSE

Behave yourself.

DAVID

(singing a love
song to Mildred's
ample breasts)

But I'd feel neat,
Upon the seat,
Of a Radkowitz built for two...

News Director MAC CHURCHILL, handsome, fiftyish, silver temples, emerges from the fishbowl office and joins them. One of the things he enjoys about his success is working with smart, unorthodox people, and Richard and Jesse are two of his favorites.

MAC

Late.

RICHARD

Well, Mac, what would you do
all day if we didn't give you
something to think about?

MAC

(pinches Jesse)

Jess, when are you gonna drop
this gypsy? I can make you a
star, baby.

JESSE

Perfect timing, Chief. Let's
split now while he's asleep on
his feet.

DAVID

(to Mildred)

Ah, Mildred, must there always be
a slab of formica between us?

RICHARD

I'm not asleep, just resting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MILDRED

Two and two?

MAC

(to Mildred)

Better give them more than that,
Mildred. Three outdoor, five
indoor.

DAVID

It's a feature.

RICHARD

Who's the man?

MAC

(handing him
some papers)

Name's William Gibson. PR, based
up in Ventura. Slick but helpful.

RICHARD

And we have all the clearances?

MAC

You're covered. And that's what
I want, David. Coverage. Not
controversy.

DAVID

Now, Mac...

MILDRED

(handing David
film cans)

Here you go.

MAC

Go, go. You're late.

RICHARD

Who did we draw for a star?

Mac smiles innocently.

JESSE

Oh, no...

EXT. KMOT-TV PARKING LOT - DAY

The three filmmakers drag themselves across the steaming
asphalt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Waiting beside their jeep is MacARTHUR ERHARDT, a soft, paunchy young man in a KNOT blazer he refuses to take off even in this heat. He's wolfing down the last of the pizza.

ERHARDT

Hope you don't mind, guys. It was getting cold...

EXT. VENTURA FREEWAY - DAY

We PICK UP the jeep turning onto the freeway, heading into the hills.

AM RADIO CHATTER in background. Finally, they find some MUSIC.

ROLL TITLES

EXT. FREEWAY IN MOUNTAINS

as it approaches the sea. The jeep flashes past.

AERIAL SHOT - PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY

A ribbon of highway working its way between the pounding surf and the golden rolling hills.

ANGLE ON VARIOUS COVES

as SEEN from the highway. Surf piles up against the fantastically-carved seascape.

ANGLE ON THE CHEROKEE

FEATURING Jesse and Richard, on the sea side of the car, windows wide, soaking up the cool sea air. She points to something.

ANGLE ON SAILBOAT

close to shore, lee rail under -- a gorgeous sight against the sparkling sea.

CUT TO:

ANGLE ON A LINE OF PARKED CARS

mostly vans with surfboards. The jeep drives by and in b.g. we can SEE a golden California beach with golden California surfers to watch. Then the vans stop and we SEE a chain-link fence stretching the length of the beach. The Cherokee stops.

A STEEL FENCE GATE

swings open. Car tires cross traffic-control spikes.

CAR TIRES

come to rest in a parking stall.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Erhardt and the three filmmakers, burdened with equipment, walk TOWARD US.

DAVID

Little surfer/Little one/
Make my heart come all undone...

CUT TO:

INT. SECURITY BUILDING - DAY

This glass-enclosed structure with gates and turnstiles is the only entrance from the parking lot. Behind the long counter are banks of television monitors and several armed guards. Erhardt leads the crew in.

WILLIAM GIBSON, corporate Public Relations Executive for California Electric Power Company, is a steel-eyed bon vivant in his early forties with a modish suit and a hair style which must be the pinnacle of the "Dry Look." He rises from his chair with athletic energy and extends his hand.

ERHARDT

Mr. Gibson?

GIBSON

Mr. Erhardt? Pleased to meet you.
Always enjoyed your show. How was
the ride up?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERHARDT

Great, great. Beautiful site you have here.

GIBSON

Isn't it? Beach patrol is the plum assignment for our security force.

RICHARD

I'm Richard Eastman, Mr. Gibson. Jesse Turner. David Adams.

GIBSON

Hi, Richard; David; and Jesse, is it? Hot enough for you?

JESSE

Nope. I'm holding out for an even hundred degrees.

GIBSON

Say, it looks like it might happen before the day is out.

(to security chief)

Rafferty, we better get these people moving. We've got some ground to cover.

RAFFERTY steps up to the counter.

RAFFERTY

Okey-doke. First, we need your John Hancock here, here, and here. Also, we're gonna have to look through those cases there if you plan to take 'em inside.

Gibson sets a bunch of "VISITOR" hardhats on the counter.

GIBSON

These things are adjustable. One size fits all, and every size looks ridiculous.

RAFFERTY

(sliding plastic cups toward them)

Have any keys or metal in your pockets?

EXT. SECURITY BUILDING - DAY

Led by Gibson and Erhardt, the hard-hatted filmmakers emerge with their equipment.

A low but powerful HUM pervades the air. There is the distinct feeling that somewhere nearby, muffled by walls and steel, this HUM is a tremendous roar. The direct golden light of the California beach seems charged by some inconceivable force and the air seems to crackle. All look up as they exit the security hut. David turns his hardhat backwards and slowly brings the camera up to his eye.

DAVID

Jesus.

EXT. VENTANNA POWER PLANT - DAY

A massive, bullet-shaped dome rises above the surrounding dunes to a height of nearly fifteen stories. The equally massive buildings attached to it are windowless and forboding. In f.g., a sign says:

"VENTANNA NUCLEAR POWER STATION
California Electric Power Co."

PANNING SLOWLY ACROSS the structure, we SEE it is gargantuan in every detail.

ERHARDT (O.S.)

(stentorian)

It's about ninety-eight degrees where I'm standing right now. Like everybody else, I'd rather be inside, sitting in front of my favorite air conditioner.

PAN CONTINUES TO REVEAL Erhardt. He turns TO US.

ERHARDT

(continuing)

Hello. I'm MacArthur Erhardt. On the next three segments of 'CLOSE UP' there's precisely what we are going to look into -- air conditioning, microwave ovens, instant-on televisions -- in short, the incredible proliferation of electrical conveniences and the inevitable shortages we will face unless we develop new resources.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERHARDT (CONT'D)

(pause)

Tonight, 'CLOSE UP' will focus on nuclear power, that almost magical transformation of matter into energy that the experts tell us may be our best shot at energy selfish-sufficiency -- shit!

SWISH PAN to Jesse. She wears earphones; a tape recorder hangs from her shoulder. In her hand is a shotgun microphone aimed at Erhardt.

DAVID (O.S.)

Slate!

Jesse flashes the sync light and we hear a BEEP.

David ZOOMS IN for a CLOSEUP of Jesse's face. She blows a hot kiss to camera and says:

JESSE

Reload!

CLOSEUP - JESSE'S RECORDER

Her fingers deftly thread a new reel of tape.

RICHARD (O.S.)

Okay. This'll be take seven.

ERHARDT (O.S.)

Sorry.

DAVID (O.S.)

What was the matter with that one? He coined a new term: 'energy selfish-sufficiency.'

CLOSEUP - TAPE BOX (DAVID'S CAMERA POV)

On the back of the tape box, she has written: "ROLL 4" and she holds it up to camera.

JESSE (O.S.)

Beginning roll four 'CLOSE UP'
Ventanna Nuclear Power Plant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The CAMERA WANDERS down her arm to her breast, then PULLS BACK to catch her expression of mock disgust.

DAVID (O.S.)

Rolling.

JESSE

Speed.

EXT. POWER PLANT - DAY

Standing on the roof of the turbine building with the bullet-shaped reactor containment rising behind them, Erhardt interviews Gibson. Jesse and David work in close. Richard is directing.

RICHARD

Erhardt.

ERHARDT

Yes?

RICHARD

You're on, Erhardt Tuck.

ERHARDT

Oh.

(stenoerian)

Mr. Gibson... You say this plant took nearly twelve years to build. With a lead-time like that, how can nuclear power help us through the 1980's?

GIBSON

We've been using fortune tellers. Ha, ha. Not really. But we've definitely been looking into the future. And that's our most significant responsibility to the public. But it's hard. Best analogy I've heard is what they tell you in driver's education. 'Don't over-drive your headlights. Be able to react in time.' We're kind of like nighttime drivers. If we don't drive pretty fast toward our goal, we won't get there. But we've got to plan as far as our headlights can see. And we wish we had more powerful headlights.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERHARDT

What do you see down the road?
Do you see 'brown-outs,' shortages,
and massive unemployment as some
predict?

GIBSON

Simply put, the key to that question
is nuclear power. The oil is running
out. Coal pollutes the environment.
Solar energy is in the distant future.
Only nuclear power will be able to
save this country from an energy
disaster.

ERHARDT

What can we expect here? In
Southern California?

GIBSON

Fortunately, SCEPCO's second reactor
has been under construction for
over five years. We'll be licensing
Point Conception in October, and
the plant will go on-line in 1979.

(pause)

Together, those two plants will
generate more power than Hoover
Dam and Grand Coulee combined.

ERHARDT

Jesus.

RICHARD

Erhardt. Are you sure that's what
you wanted to say?

ERHARDT

Sorry. Forget.

RICHARD

Well, at least you're relaxed.
Keep rolling. Mr. Gibson, that
was very impressive. Could you
give us that last line again?
About the dams.

INT. VENTANNA POWER PLANT VISITOR'S CENTER

In a room filled with expensive displays, Gibson stands
aside as the filmmakers concentrate on Erhardt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Standing beside a cut-away model of the plant, Erhardt holds a small pellet of simulated uranium fuel.

ERHARDT

Does this tiny pellet really contain more energy than six carloads of coal? Is it really possible that nuclear plants may someday make more fuel than they burn up? The answer is yes, according to nuclear science. The Atomic Age is here, now, and without it...

(suddenly grave)

... we'd be missing a lot more than our air conditioners.

(brightly)

This is MacArthur Erhardt for Channel Three 'CLOSE UP.' I'll be back after this message...

RICHARD

Cut.

DAVID

Slate!

RICHARD

Erhardt, I take back everything I said. You're a vision of loveliness.

ERHARDT

(effeminate)

It's a living, sweetie.

(glances at his watch)

Hey, I've got to get out of here. I got a spot on the six-o'clock.

RICHARD

Hold it. We need some reaction shots.

ERHARDT

Christ, Hartman, can't we do it some other time?

DAVID

What's to do? Just sit there a few seconds and nod your head like you're going to sleep.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

David moves in for a head-shot. Erhardt stares off camera, listening to an imaginary person and nodding sagely.

Jesse and Richard stand back, watching with Gibson. She begins whispering into her microphone:

JESSE

(sotto voce)

Is it true you're the biggest phony in the business?

Oblivious, Erhardt nods sagely.

INT. TURBINE BUILDING SUB-STRUCTURE

A dark labyrinth of stainless steel piping, pumps, compressors, and cables. When Gibson appears in the distance leading the three filmmakers TOWARD US, we realize the scale of the room is titanic.

GIBSON

(shouting)

The turbine is eighty feet above us. These main supports go to bedrock, about sixty feet down.

David reads his light meter.

DAVID

We could probably shoot in here if we rented every light in Hollywood.

RICHARD

Forget it.

INT. TURBINE ROOM

The ROAR is incredible. A huge, two-hundred-foot-long turbine spins within its steel cocoon as David films and Jesse tries to find a way to record the sound without blowing her tape-heads.

GIBSON

(shouts)

Now you see what I meant about Hoover Dam!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JESSE

(shouts)

What?

Gibson shakes his head. Communication is impossible.

INT. PLANT CORRIDOR

In a barren antechamber between the elevator and a door marked "AUTHORIZATION REQUIRED," the three filmmakers stand easy for a moment. A shy young plant guard watches over them in Gibson's absence. He casts an occasional glance at Jesse. She is massaging David's weary shoulder as he groans with exaggerated pleasure.

DAVID

Man can go to the moon. Man can stack fifty perfectly-formed potato chips in a cardboard cylinder. But can he make a dependable sixteen millimeter camera that weighs less than a thousand pounds?

RICHARD

He's energetic for a P.R. man, I'll say that. I liked it better when they were all on downers.

GUARD

This gonna be on TV?

JESSE

Yeah... if any of it is in focus.

RICHARD

Don't say that.

Gibson opens the door.

GIBSON

All set.

INT. POWER PLANT CONTROL ROOM - ESTABLISHING

The main control room is large, quiet, and brightly lit. A seventy-foot console curves around three walls. Everywhere, lights wink among the labyrinth of gauges.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Banks of computer printouts spit continuous reams of paper. Half a dozen casually-dressed young men scan the instruments and make small talk, drinking coffee and telling jokes. Their conversation is punctuated by the plant paging system.

On a high stool at the central console sits TED SPINDLER, 55, the only man in the room who looks old enough to be there. The hardhat on his desk identifies him as: "SENIOR REACTOR OPERATOR," and "WORLD'S GREATEST FISHERMAN." He nods to the filmmakers as they enter with Gibson.

RICHARD

Perfect.

DAVID

(checking his
light meter)

Very sexy.

A couple of the young technicians follow Jesse with their eyes.

JESSE

My God.

GIBSON

Hm?

JESSE

Well, I mean, they're all so... healthy. Where's the silver hair and white coats?

GIBSON

Oh. Ha, ha, this is a young industry, Jessica. Most of our operators are from the Navy. Submarines.

David, scanning the room with his camera, finds his view suddenly blocked by an armed GUARD.

DAVID

Hey!

GUARD

Sir!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GIBSON

Sorry. You can shoot anything in here but that. That's part of the new plant security system. They don't --

P.A. SYSTEM (V.O.)

William Gibson, two-one-one,
William Gibson, two-one-one.

GIBSON

Excuse me. You can shoot anything else.

He exits into an adjacent office. The filmmakers wander about, fascinated.

DAVID

What's that up there? Big Brother?

He points up to a line of gray windows high on the opposite wall.

GUARD

Visitors' gallery...
(proudly)
Bullet-proof glass.

TECHNICIAN

You guys like a shot of coffee?

JESSE

Fantastic.

DAVID

None for me, thanks. Might keep me awake.

JESSE

Hey. Look at this.

She laughs. Someone has programmed one of the computer printouts to reproduce a facimile of the "Mona Lisa."

SECOND TECHNICIAN

Like it?

RICHARD

Very nice.

THIRD TECHNICIAN

This going to be on TV?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JESSE
This going to be on our electric
bill?

Their laughter is cut short.

A VIOLENT SHUDDER RATTLES the control room. A distant
RUMBLE is followed by a muffled ROAR.

JESSE
... hey.

TECHNICIAN
Turbine trip-out!

JACK GODELL emerges from the Shift Supervisor's office.

GODELL
Ted?

SPINDLER
Turbine trip-out.

Godell is much younger than Spindler, but clearly the man
in charge. He crosses to the printouts behind Spindler.
Here and there along the console, warning lights wink on,
each one accompanied by the high-pitched WARBLE of an
annunciator. The PHONES begin RINGING but everyone is
occupied.

GODELL
(reads)
Full load rejection.

SPINDLER
Reactor scram.

GODELL
Okay. It looks like --

A second SHUDDER -- a low VIBRATION that builds until it
RATTLES a coffee cup onto the floor with a crash -- then
slowly SUBSIDES.

GODELL
(continuing)
That's odd.

Suddenly, the cacophony is penetrated by a deeper, more
insistent ALARM.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TECHNICIAN

Radiation! Radiation in the
containment!

GODELL

(firmly)

Relax, Borden. Go down to
instrumentation and get me
core temperature at the rack.
Holt! Go to the rack and
confirm Reactor Scram. I
want positive confirmation
that K-19 doesn't get hung up
again. Barney! Come here.
Watch the delta-P and shout
these numbers out if they get
over a hundred.

(pause)

What do you think?

SPINDLER

Let's take a look at the steam
loop.

David and Jesse, with conditioned reflexes, are filming
the scene. But Richard has nothing to do and his expression
reflects the concern that all of them feel.

Gibson has returned to the room and he is petrified.
Particularly when he realizes Jesse and David are filming.

GIBSON

Say! Put those cameras down!
You don't want to film any of
this!

Gibson blocks David's view. David lowers his camera,
staring at Gibson, fear melting into rage. Jesse inter-
cedes.

JESSE

David!

She nods toward her tape recorder. She has set the machine
down, but we can SEE it's still running.

Slowly, David brings his camera up till it rests on his
hip. He holds it there, in the crook of his arm and
turns the viewfinder straight up. He finds he can literal-
ly shoot from the hip without being noticed. He switches
his camera on.

DAVID'S CAMERA POV

Godell is concerned, but not worried. As he and Spindler range about the chaotic scene, conferring here and there, they seem to be getting everything under control.

GODELL

Kill the goddamn bells!

Silence interrupted only by the rattle of the printout.

CLOSEUP - COMPUTER PRINTOUT

EVENT	EVENT	EVENT
Time start:	4:33:15	
Reactor Pressure Limits Exceeded		
Turbine Control Valves 11-E5		
11-E6	open	
Turbine trip out		
Full Load rejection		
REACTOR SCRAM	SCRAM	SCRAM

LONG SHOT

With the alarms cancelled, the room suddenly seems normal again. Only the myriad of winking lights and the distant RUMBLE of venting steam remains.

GODELL

Looks like we had a turbine trip-out, fellas, Everybody within parameters?

A chorus of affirmative answers, sprinkled with numbers, is interrupted by an ANNUNCIATOR.

SPINDLER

Barney, get that, will ya?

BARNEY

Yeah - hey!

TECHNICIAN

High-level warning!

BARNEY

Delta-P... one-oh-four!

Another ANNUNCIATOR... and ANOTHER...

EXT. POWER PLANT - DAY

With a THUNDEROUS, RUMBLING ROAR, a geyser of unwanted steam vents into the atmosphere.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Down the beach, a surfer and his lady stand rooted and open-mouthed, watching as tiny figures scurry around the plant grounds. Some cars are hurrying through the plant gates toward the highway.

Over the exterior loudspeakers comes an ECHOING ANNOUNCEMENT -- a spooky WOMAN'S VOICE...

P.A. VOICE

All personnel proceed to designated safety areas, Code Six. Code Six. This is not a drill.

INT. POWER PLANT CONTROL ROOM - AS BEFORE

The chaos, which before had a certain excitement, now seamed tinged with panic. Orders are shouted, then countermanded. One young man, trying to make an outside call, is knocked to the floor by Spindler.

Jesse holds Richard's hand in a white-knuckle grip, and David, trembling, makes so much noise changing film mags that Gibson almost discovers him.

CLOSEUP - COMPUTER PRINTOUT

Her inscrutable eyes completed, the "Mona Lisa" is oblivious.

WIDE SHOT

GODELL

(shouts)

All right now, relax, everybody!
We got high water in the core!
I'm gonna dump it! Somebody try
to figure where the goddamn water
is coming from!

CLOSE SHOT

Godell and Spindler stare at the water level indicator, a graphic display that shows the water in the core is much higher than normal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL

Wherever it's coming from, we've got to get rid of it. Open twenty-four and twenty-five and twenty-six.

SPINDLER

You can't do that, Jack.

GODELL

Do it!

SPINDLER

The book says --

GODELL

Screw the book, for Christ's sake! We're almost up to the goddamn steam lines!

With the Core Water Level the center of interest, Godell's position at the console has become the temporary command post. Other technicians, reporting in from distant points, are dispatched here and there on urgent missions.

TECHNICIAN

Jack, it must be a feedwater leak. One of the valves --

GODELL

Which one?

TECHNICIAN

Can't tell.

GODELL

Then shut the main.

TECHNICIAN

But --

GODELL

Would you rather go down there and close 'em by hand?!

TECHNICIAN

(shouts)

Closing Feedwater Main!

CLOSEUP - COMPUTER PRINTOUT

The "Mona Lisa." We SEE her just-completed smile.

BACK TO SCENE

Godell is holding it together, but the strain is overwhelming. Suddenly he's claustrophobic.

GODELL

All right, everybody! Back to your stations. We can handle the goddamn floodwater!

SECOND TECHNICIAN

Jack.

GODELL

I said cool it. Everybody back to your stations.

SECOND TECHNICIAN

Jack!

GODELL

What?

SECOND TECHNICIAN

Look at your out-flow!

A second instrument, beside the Core Level Indicator, gives a contradictory reading. It shows the water level to be dangerously low.

Godell's eyes jerk from one instrument to the other. He taps the Core Level Indicator with his finger. The needle plummets to the bottom of the chart.

SPINDLER

Holy shit.

GODELL

(shouts)

Floodwater! Gimme water! We're
about to uncover the core!

EXT. POWER PLANT - DAY

Warning HORNS ECHO from the empty hills. The scene is deserted. A mile off-shore a supertanker ghosts northward through the Channel.

INT. SUPERTANKER BRIDGE

A spotless British FIRST OFFICER lowers his binoculars.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIRST OFFICER
They seem to be in a bit of
difficulty, Allan.

NAVIGATOR
(over chart)
It says 'Ventanna Nuclear Power
Station,' sir.

CAPTAIN
Really? Perhaps we'd best move
upwind. Mr. Whittle, come left
to two-eight-zero. All ahead
flank. Beatty, get the men below.

INT. POWER PLANT CONTROL ROOM - AS BEFORE

GODELL
Where is it?

BARNEY
One-thirteen.

SPINDLER
That's less than nine inches!

GODELL
Is it holding?

BARNEY
It's dropping.

GODELL
My God. We're losing it, Ted.
It's the back-pressure. We've
got to dump it!

SPINDLER
Jack!

Godeell shoves aside Spindler and one of the Technicians.
His hand on the valve control, he hesitates a second, then
slams it home.

A single violent SHUDDER rocks the room. White with fear,
Godeell waits for whatever is next. No one speaks.

BARNEY
(terrified)
One-twelve.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SPINDLER

(whispers)

Eight inches.

Godell seems to be trying to lift the indicator with his eyes.

GODELL

C'mon, baby, agua, agua, agua,
agua --

BARNEY

It's holding.

Slowly, the needle inches upward. One by one, the lights wink out. Again, the ANNUNCIATORS are CANCELLED and we are left with blessed silence.

CLOSEUP - COMPUTER PRINTOUT

REACTOR WATER LEVEL	STABLE
	STABLE
205	
200	
200	
Core Temp	550
Contain. Press	.05 atmos
STABLE SHUTDOWN	
STABLE SHUTDOWN	
Event ends:	3:36:00 P
Event Duration:	2:45
END	END

CLOSEUP - COMPUTER PRINTOUT

The "Mona Lisa," just completed, has the only smile in the room.

DAVID'S CAMERA POV

Everyone seems dizzy. One by one the Technicians sag away from the console in sweating exhaustion. And Jack Godell turns away from the control panel, braces himself against a desk, and begins to vomit.

MATCH CUT TO:

SAME SCENE - ON SCREEN OF EDITING MACHINE

SLOW PULLBACK TO REVEAL we are watching this final scene on an editing machine in a darkened room.

INT. KMOT EDITING ROOM

Five figures watch the final frame: Richard, Jesse, David, Mac Churchill, and DON JACOVICH, the station's Programming Director. The film clip runs out, but they sit in the semi-darkness, silent for a beat.

MAC

What the hell was that?

DAVID

If they know, they didn't tell us.

A TELEPHONE RINGS on the console and Jacovich answers it.

JACOVICH

Who? All right, I'll be there.
(hangs up)

An interesting piece of film.
It would be more interesting if
we knew what it was we were
watching.

RICHARD

I'm sure we can find out.

JACOVICH

The decision is yours, Mac. If
you think it warrants it, put
a proposal together and let's go
to heaven.

Jacovich exits.

DAVID

What's he mean?

MAC

You go to heaven to meet God, right?

DAVID

The network? All right!

RICHARD

Is he serious?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAC
Jacovich? There's not a
lighthearted cell in his
brain. How do you see this
working, Richard?

RICHARD
I'll have to think about it,
Mac.

INT. NEWS FLOOR HALLWAY

The four of them walk TOWARD THE CAMERA. Richard, already
lost in thought, lags behind.

JESSE
We stick with the nuclear topic
strictly. It's safe. It's
clean, but it scares the hell out
of its employers.

DAVID
Network file footage, Congressional
hearings, intercut with the stuff
we got today. Mac, it could be a
very important film. An indictment.

MAC
Grand juries produce indictments in
this state, kids. We produce news.

Something catches Richard's eye as he passes an open door.

RICHARD'S POV

In a small conference room, we get a glimpse of two men
talking. One is Don Jacovich. The other -- William
Gibson.

INT. ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

Godell and Spindler sit in silence at the end of the bar.
They've had several drinks. Finally:

GODELL
Well... I guess that's what they
pay us for...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Spindler says nothing.

GODELL

(continuing)

Wasn't really that close.

SPINDLER

I guess not.

GODELL

Like the airline pilots say...
'Twenty years of boredom and
twenty seconds of stark terror.'

SPINDLER

Right.

GODELL

Bartender! One more round.

SPINDLER

I gotta get going, Jack. Alma's
gonna kick my ass.

Spindler stands and drops a bill on the bar.

SPINDLER

(continuing)

How soon will they start the
witch hunt?

GODELL

Couple of days, I guess. They'll
want to get it over with.

SPINDLER

See you in the morning.

Spindler exits. Godell has another. He notices the TV
at the end of the bar.

GODELL

Bartender, turn that up, will ya?

WAITRESS

Gimme two Cutts and water and a
martini up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 --ing, and the young man surrendered
 after police cordoned off the area.
 He said, 'I did it for the money...'
 We'll be back in a minute with film
 on that story. And also a report
 from Ventura County where a scare
 at the nuclear power plant turned
 out to be nothing more than... a
 stuck valve.

WAITRESS
 Bullshit.

GODELL
 What?

WAITRESS
 One of these days, that turkey's
 gonna blow us right into next
 Tuesday.

GODELL
 (slams his
 glass down)
 Now just what the hell do you
 know about it, sweetie?

She exits with her drink. Godell stands and throws some
 money on the bar.

CLOSEUP - TV SCREEN

The eleven o'clock news.

ANCHORMAN
 At the Ventanna Nuclear Power
 Station, south of Santa Barbara,
 alarms sounded early this afternoon,
 causing some concern to swimmers at
 nearby Gaviota Beach. A spokesman
 for California Electric Power said
 all the ruckus was caused by a
 stuck valve. He said the alarms were
 sounded because the company's first
 responsibility is public safety, but
 there was no danger at any time.
 Now here's John Fortman with the day
 in sports, John...

PULL BACK TO REVEAL...

INT. CEPCO CORPORATE OFFICES

In the Early American audience of CEPCO Chairman EVAN MacCORMACK's office, four worried men catch the tail end of the newscast. Watching with MacCormack is Gibson, Finance VP GORDON HATCHER, and Nuclear Station Superintendent HERMAN DeYOUNG. The conference table is littered with Col. Sanders leftovers.

Gibson, who now looks to be a hundred years old, snaps off the television.

GIBSON

That was close.

MacCORMACK

Bill, when this is over, how'd you like to use the place up at Coos Bay for a couple of weeks?

GIBSON

Great. I'll be ready for it. That or the bunny bin.

HATCHER

Well... I've said all along, I don't think you should allow the press in there in the first place.

GIBSON

God damn it, Gordon! If you --

MacCORMACK

(firm)

Easy.

(pause)

He's right, Gordon. You can't slam the door in the face of the media.

GIBSON

That's the last thing we need. That's one reason the nuclear industry's in trouble in the first place. Too much secrecy. You've got to get the press on your side, not shut them up.

MacCORMACK

Right. You'll never shut 'em up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WIBSON

Besides, those people were out there today to make a pro-nuclear film. It was going to be highly favorable.

HATCHER

Well, if I may disagree without creating an explosion, I'd like to point out that we've never had any publicity I'd call favorable. Every time the public hears the word 'Atomic,' they become insane and hysterical.

WIBSON

The public has to be educated. That's one reason we blew it on the last rate increase.

HATCHER

If we hadn't spent so much time and energy trying to educate the public, we wouldn't need a rate increase. We've had the world's foremost experts explain over and over that these plants are clean, safe, they can't explode... and the next day some lunatic refers to Ventanna as a 'time bomb.' We don't need unfavorable publicity, we don't need favorable publicity, we don't need any publicity. At least not until the hearings are over.

McCORMACK

When are the hearings?

DeYOUNG

The accident hearings?

McCORMACK

No, no. The new plant.

DeYOUNG

The Environmental Hearings on Point Conception -- this amounts to a license to operate -- will open on the twenty-seventh. Burdick says they should run about three weeks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

McCORMACK

I'm inclined to agree with Gordon for the moment, Bill. For the next two months, I think we should direct our efforts toward the lowest possible profile.

HATCHER

Everything hangs on those hearings. If --

GIBSON

I know.

HATCHER

If the permit on Point Conception is delayed, even slightly, our cash flow turns to mush.

(pause)

This morning I got a call from Goldman Ferman. He says the word on The Street is that our bond rating may be up for review. We've already got heavy debts on the power grid to every other utility west of the Rockies. And with Ventanna off the line --

(checking his figures)

-- we're losing four hundred ninety-two thousand dollars a day.

Silence.

McCORMACK

Herman. How soon?

DeYOUNG

Well, there's surprisingly little damage to the plant. We've got some cleaning up to do. And there will have to be an accident hearing --

GIBSON

Fernal?

DeYOUNG

No, no. The RAS will be there, but just as observers. We'll be conducting the investigation ourselves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HATCHER

What's this business about a stuck valve?

DeYOUNG

Well, when the main loop vent system was retrofitted --

HATCHER

Never mind. Will you be back on line by the end of the week?

DeYOUNG

Oh, no, sir. No way.

MacCORMACK

By the twenty-seventh?

DeYOUNG

(pause)

That shouldn't be a problem.

MacCORMACK

I want you to keep that investigation on track, Herman. Be thorough, but let's get it over with.

DeYOUNG

I understand, sir.

HATCHER

And Herman... we've had our surprise for the year.

DeYOUNG

Right.

DeYoung, uncomfortable in this environment, rises to leave. Gibson, exhausted, exits with him. Hatcher lingers.

MacCORMACK

Scotch?

HATCHER

Mac. I sat right here in this room with you thirteen years ago when you pitched the Old Man on nuclear power. I said at the time I was against it. It was too big, too exotic, too expensive for a small utility. Now it's a case of the tail wagging the dog.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MCCORMACK

I don't want to hear that shit,
Gordon.

HATCHER

All I'm saying is that if anything
deflects the hearings at Point
Conception --

He taps his briefcase.

MCCORMACK

I wish all I had to worry about
was numbers.

HATCHER

Right now, our corporate ass is
riding on those numbers.

MCCORMACK

We also have some small responsibility
to the public, Hatcher!

(stands,

You money changers seem to forget
that without the old electrons --

(flips off the
lights)

-- nothing moves -- nobody works --
and people starve!

INT. STUDIO LOFT

The filmmakers have converted the top floor of an old loft
building into a combination studio, living quarters, and
playpen. It is cluttered with props and bric-a-brac
accumulated from earlier adventures.

An impromptu party is underway. Six or eight neighbors
and fellow artists have gathered to smoke dope, drink wine,
and hear the story.

They are riveted.

JESSE

-- So this guy jumps in front of
him and says, 'You can't film that!!'

DAVID

Just what I need, you know? My
one chance to be a combat photographer
and I've got a FR-man standing in front
of the lens.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JESSE

I thought you were gonna deck him.

DAVID

So did I.

JESSE

So I put my NAGRA down on the console, right? But I didn't bother to turn it off. And David --

DAVID

(demonstrates)

See, this camera, with the viewfinder turned up -- you can hold it like this -- I was shooting from the hip and the dumb sonofabitch didn't even know it.

RICHARD

You should shoot all your stuff that way, David. That was some of your best work.

Laughter.

DAVID

(serious)

You know, it's weird. Intuition or something. But that was some of my best footage.

RICHARD

That happens. When you're scared shitless, your reflexes take over. You get out of your own way.

JESSE

Well, I must say, Richard, that was one of the best scenes you've ever directed.

Laughter.

RICHARD

Certainly the most convincing.

FRANCOISE

Jesus.

Silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TONY ENRIETTO
What happened? You have any
idea?

DAVID
'A stuck valve.'

RICHARD
Who knows?

DAVID
(holds an imaginary
camera up to his
eye)
That's what the network's gonna
pay us \$30,000 to find out.

LORETTA
God damn, that sounds exciting.
Listen, if you guys need any
help...

TONY
(pause)
You should get in touch with
Lowell.

RICHARD
Lowell?

TONY
Write this down. Elliott Lowell,
professor of Physics, U.C.
Berkeley. He's an 'intervenor.'
Kind of like Ralph Nader. He
goes all over the country putting
down nuclear power.

RICHARD
You know him?

TONY
No, but he was on television.
Remember when Proposition
Fifteen was on the ballot? He
was all over the state like a
rubber blanket. He really knows
his shit, too. He'll scare the
pants off you.

INT. FREIGHT ELEVATOR

Richard rides down with the guests.

EXT. LOFT BUILDING - NIGHT

They emerge onto the loading dock and Richard says good night. Tony lingers.

TONY

Keep your head down, man.

RICHARD

What do you mean?

TONY

I mean these power companies don't have much of a sense of humor.

RICHARD

(smiles)

Neither did Lyndon Johnson or the Pentagon.

TONY

That was politics. This is money.

RICHARD

That was Vietnam. It can't get much heavier than that.

TONY

That was also ten years ago. If you get your head cracked this time, it might not bounce off.

RICHARD

We got the network behind us.

TONY

Don't count on it.

(pause)

Look. All I'm sayin' is, watch your ass. I don't wanna have to come down and bail you out again. You never paid me back for the last time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Ingrate! I bought you a Big Mac
and a large order of fries.

SONY

How could I fail to remember such
a gracious gesture.

They embrace.

INT. LOFT BEDROOM

With Jesse sleeping fitfully on his shoulder, Richard lies
awake, staring at the ceiling.

INT. KMOT-TV CONFERENCE ROOM

Richard is finishing his pitch to network representatives
DWIGHT EISNER and GERRIE EVANS. David and Jesse sit at
the far end of the table. Mac Churchill and Don Jacobson
sit on opposite sides taking notes.

RICHARD

Other issues, such as nuclear
waste and genetic dangers could
be mentioned, but the real subject
here is the day-to-day operation
of these facilities and, as our
central piece of evidence indicates,
the sudden terror and danger which
can result.

(pause)

That's essentially it, gentlemen.
A straightforward, objective,
real-life nail biter.

He sits. The table bristles. A decision is about to
arrive.

EISNER

First, let me say... your film has
a great deal of impact. And I can
appreciate that it was shot under
difficult circumstances. And
that indicates a high degree of
skill and dedication. We cannot
praise that too highly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EVANS

The camerawork particularly.

DAVID

Thanks. It's hard to hold a steady focus when they won't let you look through the viewfinder.

EISNER

Really? How did you shoot it?

DAVID

(demonstrates)

Just shot from the hip. Fastest camera west of Vine Street.

Laughter.

JACOVICH

I think that relates directly to the point we were discussing earlier, Dwight.

EISNER

Yes... Gerrit?

EVANS

Yes. You see, you've put us in a difficult position. That footage wasn't authorized.

JESSE

What do you mean?

RICHARD

We had authorization to shoot there. You can't even get in the gate without authorization.

EVANS

(extracts document)

This is a general release, and there's nothing in here that specifically mentions the control room.

DAVID

But Gibson took us in there himself!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EVANS

But he told you not to film it.

DAVID

After the shit hit the fan!

Evans shrugs.

RICHARD

Now wait a second. When did you guys get so sensitive about legal details? On that 'wetback' special' --

EVANS

This is a little different, Hartman. Nuclear power plants are considered...
(reads)

'... security installations, and as such, fall under the protection of Title 18 of the U.S. Criminal Code. Unauthorized photography in or around such an installation is a felony.'

(pause)

In the strictest technical sense, we could all be considered accessories just for having the footage on the premises.

Silence.

DAVID

That's legal bullshit! Once the thing runs on the air, they won't dare touch us and you know it. That film will scare the shit out of everybody.

JACOVICH

Which brings me to my next point.

JESSE

I can hardly wait.

MAC

Easy.

JACOVICH

According to GEPCO, you were in no real danger at any time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

I wonder if we shouldn't get a second opinion about that, Mr. Jacovich.

Richard and Jacovich lock eyes.

MAC

Look. Maybe we should do some more research --

DAVID

I don't believe this! You people are talking like it was some grade-B drive-in circuit horror film. We didn't dream this up! It happened, man!

JACOVICH

What happened?

DAVID

For God's sake, Mac, did you run the film for them or not?

JESSE

We'll find out what happened. From experts. That's the heart of Richard's idea -- explain it, point by point --

EVANS

Which brings me to our final problem area: Accessibility of Material. This is very complicated stuff. Now I'm a fairly intelligent person...

David "drops" his pen. Sacks stiffen.

EVANS

(continuing)

... and I have doubts whether the whole subject area could be satisfactorily explained to me in an hour, let alone to our audience.

JACOVICH

And explained so thoroughly and so objectively that California Electric Power Company could not then turn around and sue this station to death.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Silence.

DAVID

(stands)

Well, you're finally using a word I can identify. Death! That's what this is all about. Radiation and death. You think so little of the American people, you'd rather feed them Roadrunner cartoons until...

JACOVICH

This is objectivism?

DAVID

... they wake up one morning with third-degree burns and flippers for fingers.

JACOVICH

You're being hysterical.

DAVID

And you're being a chickenshit asshole!

David storms out. Jacovich stands collecting his papers.

JACOVICH

I don't need this.

JESSE

What do you need?

JACOVICH

I'll tell you, Miss Turner...

He pulls out a contract and tosses it in their direction.

JACOVICH

(continuing)

I need production services on two more segments of 'Close Up,' as called for in the contract you people signed. And I can't find the clause which specifies the cameraman be foul-mouthed and hysterical.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EISNER
(rising with Evans)
Well, it seems to be a local
matter. The position of the
network is clear.

JESSE
Transparent.

Eisner and Evans exit.

MAC
Now, wait, let's not leave it
like this. Can't we --

JACOVICH
Do you want to break your contract,
Mr. Hartman?

RICHARD
(pause)
If we can work up a more detailed
proposal and map out every
incident in the film --

JACOVICH
No. That footage stays in the
vault.

JESSE
Tell me, when you get up in the
morning --

RICHARD
I'll let you know in a few days.

JACOVICH
Fine.

He exits.

Jesse is stunned -- more by Richard's apparent vacillation
than the network sellout. She stares at Richard as if she
has never seen him before. But he and Churchill are lost
in their own thoughts.

INT. NEWSROOM

David storms through the newsroom with a purpose. He stops
at Mildred's counter. She is busy with invoices.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

Mildred, I need that neg footage
we shot yesterday.

MILDRED

Should be there somewhere. Hasn't
been filed yet.

David rummages through the film cans stacked near the
door. He finds what he wants.

MILDRED

(continuing)

Sign for it.

David pretends to sign, but doesn't. Mildred is still
preoccupied. He closes the log book and walks away, the
film cans under his arm.

INT. GARCIA'S TAVERN

Garcia's is a dark, musty working-class tavern near the
filmmakers' loft. The bar is wood and the billiard table
is old and massive. A mixture of truck drivers, bums,
and long-haired construction workers are doing some day-
light drinking.

Richard enters with Jesse. He sees David at the far end
of the bar.

RICHARD

Don't ever do that again, David.

DAVID

What am I supposed to do? Sit
there while that schmuck tore us
apart --

RICHARD

That schmuck is program manager
of the station.

JESSE

That's no reason to kiss his ass.

RICHARD

Is that what I did?

JESSE

What would you call it? He
flicked that contract at you
and you...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Thanks, partners. A lot of support. It took us five years to get next to those guys, and we blow it because he hasn't filled his daily quota of calling fifteen people assholes!

DAVID

Asshole...

RICHARD

I think you just went over your quota, kid.

JESSE

(frightened)

Hey, wait, you guys, this is crazy! We're all on the same side! This is a nightmare!

(to bartender)

Patrick!

(guides them to a booth)

Let me buy you a round, okay? Look, Richard, there must be something we can do. I mean, this is what you used to be --

RICHARD

Unfortunately, our options just got cut in half, thanks to supermouth.

DAVID

What was I supposed to do, sit there while that gardenia from the network wilted all over us?

RICHARD

Well, I certainly wouldn't want you to think anything over before you say it, so maybe you can give us a few ideas off the top of your head on what to do next.

DAVID

We can make our own film.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Wonderful. Assuming you've got fifty or sixty grand you haven't told us about, where do you expect to show it when it's finished? Not on television. Not after today.

JESSE

We can show it in theatres.

RICHARD

Ah ha! Take the easy way out. Start our own coast-to-coast distribution company.

DAVID

Cut her some slack, man. We don't have all the answers.

RICHARD

You don't have any answers. In the first place, we don't even have the footage --

DAVID

I think that's the least of our problems.

RICHARD

-- and assuming we could get it, they've got a perfect excuse to bust us.

DAVID

Bullshit! Once the public finds out about this, we'll have those bastards by the balls. They won't dare touch us.

Richard looks at Jesse.

RICHARD

This kid's got a lot to learn.

JESSE

Maybe we all do, Richard.
(pause)

You can't be serious about finishing that 'Energy in the Year 2000' hand-job for Jacobovich?

(CONTINUED)

40.
CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Whose name is on the contract,
hon?

Jesse is looking at someone she's never seen before.

DAVID

Maybe he's right, Jesse. Let's
bury the footage in a time capsule.
In a few hundred years, some
two-headed, ten-foot-tall chicken
can scratch it up and eat it for
breakfast.

RICHARD

You know, some UCLA film school
twit once told you you had a good
eye so you figure that's all there
is to it. It's a little more
complicated than that, kid. There
ain't no free ride. Not on this
canoe.

DAVID

Right now, it looks like this
canoe is taking on water.

RICHARD

You could always go back to grad
school and splash around in the
shallows.

David slams his drink to the bar and exits. Jesse, in
deep pain, watches, then turns slowly back to Richard.

JESSE

What does it take to satisfy
you?

RICHARD

I'm only satisfied when I'm down
on my knees, kissing ass.

JESSE

(distant)

I'm sorry I said that, Richard.

(stands)

I'll see you.

RICHARD

(rising)

Wait a second.

She follows David out the door.

EXT. BEACH APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Young, nearly naked California bodies decorate the outdoor pool.

A young MAN in a suit peers through a glass wall at the bathing beauties. Then he turns and enters the building.

INT. GODELL'S APARTMENT

ESTABLISH the living room. A vacuum cleaner is ROARING in the bedroom when the KNOCK on the DOOR REPEATS itself. The cleaner dies and Godell comes to the door, revealing the young Man in the hall.

MAN

John Godell?

GODELL

Yes?

MAN

This is from the corporate office.
Written notice for you to appear
before the investigation board
at three p.m. tomorrow for
purposes of...

GODELL

I know about it already.

MAN

Just a formality. This sure
is a great place you live in,
Mr. Godell.

Godell takes the card, examines it, then crosses to his dining table, preoccupied.

GODELL

Thank you.

MAN

If I was you, I'd be down by
that pool.

The young Man leaves.

ANGLE ON GODELL

as he leans over the table. It is covered with figuring and notepaper. Godell lifts a copy of the computer event record and studies it carefully one more time.

CUT TO:

INT. LOFT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

An old BOB DYLAN album is PLAYING in background. Richard sits at the large, round table. A rolodex is open in front of him.

RICHARD

(on telephone)

No? Okay, Dan. If you see them...
Okay, thanks.

He hangs up, toys with the rolodex, gets up, paces, sits down, makes another call.

EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY - DAWN

In b.g., dawn tips the Sierra mountains. The highway is virtually deserted, except for one vehicle heading TOWARD THE CAMERA at high speed. It flashes by and we SEE it is the Cherokee.

INT. CHEROKEE

Jesse is at the wheel, David asleep against the door. Jesse looks at a passing sign:

HER POV - SIGN

reading:

"Oakland - 36
San Francisco - 50"

EXT. VENICE BEACH - EARLY MORNING

Richard walks up from the surf line toward the street fronting the ocean, past sleeping winos and case-hardened street kids.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Richard stands at a crosswalk, waiting for the light to change. The Coast Highway is clogged with rush-hour traffic.

The faces of drivers and passengers are indistinct, but the shared expressions are universal -- frustration, captivity.

INT. FREIGHT ELEVATOR

Richard slowly ascends. At the top he pulls the doors open to reveal:

INT. LOFT LIVING ROOM

Richard crosses to the phone answering machine.

The flag is up, indicating "Message Received." He turns the knob and puts the earphone to his ear.

He grabs for the phone and dials information. Holding the phone with his shoulder, he slips on his jacket and sorts through his credit cards.

RICHARD

Yes, yes, I know all that shit,
just gimme the goddamn number...
Hello, operator? Number for
Hughes Air West.

INT. POWER PLANT CONFERENCE ROOM

A utilitarian conference room serves as a court of inquiry into the accident. A court reporter is taking down Godell's testimony. Seated around the table with Herman DeYoung are several other engineers, consultants, and a lawyer or two. They range in age from MORTON ROBERTSON, sixtyish, white-haired, and stylish, to KENNETH LEVER, faceless young NRC technocrat.

GODELL

... as a result of SCRAM, sub-cooled feed-water entered the system, and this caused void collapse. The steam discharge activated the low-pressure sensor and closed the main steam isolation valves. Too rapid a boiling off due to low pressure would have exposed the core.

Robertson examines the Event Recorder printout.

ROBERTSON

And except for the source of this secondary shock wave --

GODELL

More like a shudder. Heavy vibration.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBERTSON

Except for this 'shudder,' you are clear in your mind up to this point.

GODELL

Yes, sir.

ROBERTSON

(reading)

Now... the reactor water level begins to fluctuate.

GODELL

Yes, sir. We were trying to balance it out, using the valves and inflowing coolant water. A few seconds later...

FORRESTER

(incredulous)

This all took one minute and forty seconds?

GODELL

Yes, sir. A few seconds later, we believed we had it stabilized at high water maximum.

ROBERTSON

Believed. And this is when the chart pen stuck. You were pumping water out in the belief that the water was too high.

GODELL

Yes, sir.

ROBERTSON

When, in fact, the water level was dangerously low.

GODELL

Yes, sir.

LEVER

May I ask something at this point? This sits in the middle of three other dials which read out the same data, all three of which were accurately recording the water level, is that not true?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL

Yes, sir.

LEVER

Why didn't your operator look at the other dials?

GODELL

I don't know.

(pause)

I don't think Spindler should shoulder all the blame. I was standing right beside him and I didn't look at them either.

INT. POWER PLANT OFFICE

Waiting his turn outside the hearing room, Ted Spindler sits with one of the young control room technicians. Godell emerges, drawn and weary.

SPINDLER

How'd it go?

GODELL

Okay.

SPINDLER

What did you tell 'em?

GODELL

They asked us not to discuss our testimony, Ted.

Exhausted, Godell turns away. Spindler watches him leave. He is uneasy.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - AERIAL SHOT - DAY

Only the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge are VISIBLE above the fog as the Hughes Air West jet settles into Oakland Airport.

EXT. BERKELEY CAMPUS - DAY

Richard pays the cab driver, and comes TOWARD US through Sather Gate. He looks out across the campus, lost for instant in memory. He looks into the face of a marble lion, then throws it a "Power" salute, and walks on.

INT. SCIENCE BUILDING

Down a dim, deserted corridor, past display cases filled with the bones of less successful species, Richard searches for a doorway into the past. When he finds it, we ENTER with him.

INT. LECTURE HALL

In the darkness of the vast lecture hall, the rows of empty seats descend to a small stage and there, on the screen, we SEE the Ventanna "accident footage." Instantly, the film stops and the lights come on, revealing David, Jesse, and DR. ELLIOTT LOWELL seated by the projector.

LOWELL

(stands)

Can we help you?

JESSE

Hi, Richard. Doctor Lowell, this is Richard Hartman.

LOWELL

How do you do? Shut the door.

Lowell sits, the lights go out, and the film resumes. In the darkness, Richard feels his way to a seat beside Jesse. With a mixture of relief and anxiety, he glances at her profile, illuminated by reflections from the screen. She turns to him.

JESSE

(whispers)

This is the third time he's seen it. It's spooky. He hasn't said a word.

Richard and David avoid looking at each other. Eyes straight ahead, they watch the final stages of the accident with the mesmerized Lowell as the room echoes with the SOUNDTRACK of SHOUTS and ALARMS.

When the film ends and the lights come up, the three filmmakers -- uncertain what to say to each other -- wait for Lowell to speak. But he is lost in thought. Wordlessly, he begins rewinding the film. Finally, Jesse breaks the ice.

JESSE

(continuing)

Doctor Lowell, what do you think? Do you have any idea what was going on there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOWELL

(looks up)

What are you going to do with
this film?

The filmmakers glance at each other.

DAVID

We're not sure, Doctor...

JESSE

Can you explain to us what was
happening?

LOWELL

Not precisely.

(turns to them)

But my guess is you're lucky
to be alive. For that matter,
we can probably say the same
for the rest of Southern
California.

They are stunned by Lowell's grim, quiet conviction.

LOWELL

(continuing)

I think you may have been dancing
on the edge of what is known in
the trade as the 'Maximum Credible
Accident.' There are studies --
government studies -- suppressed,
of course -- that indicate you
might have killed a couple-of-
hundred-thousand people. And
rendered an area the size of
the state of Pennsylvania
permanently uninhabitable.

DAVID

Permanently --

LOWELL

Forever. Plutonium, for example,
has a half-life of 24,000 years.

JESSE

(reeling)

You mean -- if that plant had
blown up it might have killed
two-hundred-thousand people?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOWELL

Not right away. Bone cancer and leukemia sometimes take ten years to show up. Certain forms of radiation-induced liver cancer take longer. Only a few thousand would have died immediately. You people probably would have been among that contingency.

DAVID

(incredulous)

But they told us the plant couldn't possibly blow up! They said there isn't enough enriched uranium there to form a critical mass and no matter what happens, it can't become an atomic bomb.

LOWELL

It can't. It can do something worse.

Lowell, slender and gray, but still agile, bounds up to the podium and flicks on the overhead projector. As he sketches, the image is projected on the screen behind him. He draws a cutaway of the reactor core and a simple schematic of the steam loop.

LOWELL

(continuing)

This is the core. Generates tremendous heat. Boils the water, makes the steam, runs the turbine, which makes the electricity. Neat, simple, efficient. With one compelling danger. If, for any reason, the core is uncovered -- say, for example, the pipe breaks, a well gives way, or somebody opens the wrong valve -- and the water drops below the top of the core -- then the temperature begins to rise. It increases at the rate of one hundred degrees a second.

DAVID

Ooga-booga.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOWELL

-- So you have about seventeen seconds to figure out what to do. If you haven't covered the core by then, the steel support structure will start melting and the jig is up.

JESSE

You mean it's out of control in seventeen seconds?

LOWELL

Give or take a few seconds. So in thirty minutes, the core -- by now about two hundred tons of white hot uranium -- will start melting through the bottom of the pressure vessel. In a few hours it will melt right through the bottom of the plant and nothing can stop it. It's called the 'China Syndrome.'

DAVID

'China -- ' How far down will it go?

LOWELL

Nobody knows, but it doesn't really make any difference. The catastrophe will occur when it hits ground water -- in the case of Ventanna -- about sixty feet down.

(sketches)

Geysers of radioactive steam will fracture the earth all around the plant and blast into the atmosphere. The number of people killed will depend strictly on which way the wind is blowing. The core...

(circles it
emphatically)

... has the radioactive fallout equivalent of a thousand atomic bombs of the type they dropped on Hiroshima.

He glances up. They are speechless. He flicks off the projector and steps down from the stage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

They must have some safety devices...

LOWELL

Several. The most important is the Emergency Core Cooling System. It's never been tested. That is to say, it's never been tested successfully. They did test a model of it in Idaho several years ago and it failed six times in a row.

JESSE

My God...

LOWELL

Yes. AEC managed to keep it buttoned up until 1972, when some anonymous public servant cracked under the strain and sent us a Xerox of the test results.

RICHARD

Well, for Christ's sake, didn't they do any more tests?

LOWELL

They talked about it from time to time. The latest series of tests was abandoned about half way through. Too expensive. You see, the government considers this kind of an accident 'unthinkable.' They figure if they don't think about it, why should we?

INT: LOWELL'S KITCHEN

Richard, Jesse, and David sit at the kitchen table as Lowell digs through the refrigerator, setting cold-cuts in front of them.

JESSE

Richard, have you had anything to eat? I'll bet you haven't eaten a thing, have you?

RICHARD

Don't be Jewish.

JESSE

I can't help it. It goes with the job. Here. Let me fix you a fiesta.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOWELL

Now where the heck did I put that stuff?

JESSE

We've got everything we need, Doctor Lowell.

LOWELL

I'm looking for the -- here it is. Anchor Steam Beer. Ever tried this?

DAVID

Fantastic.

Lowell opens four bottles and sits.

JESSE

Doctor, I understand The China Syndrome. But... exactly how poisonous is uranium?

LOWELL

Uranium? Uranium is mother's milk compared to by-products like plutonium. Actually, I shouldn't say mother's milk -- that's one of the first places it shows up. Here...

Lowell shakes some salt into the palm of his hand, blows most of it away, retains one grain and holds it up on the tip of a finger.

LOWELL

(continuing)

One crystal, say it's Plutonium 135. Cut it in a thousand pieces and each of us inhales one piece. In six months, all of us will have terminal lung cancer. The Ventanna Reactor produced five hundred pounds of plutonium a year. It is the most deadly substance known to man, and it will remain just that deadly for 250,000 years. As a famous Nobel Laureate says, 'It will give our children something to do.'

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A moment of silence, then Lowell pops the grain of salt onto his tongue.

LOWELL

(continuing)

But back to you folks. What do you intend to do with that film?

They look at Richard.

DAVID

We'd like to make a documentary... Something that would let the American people in on what's going down...

RICHARD

Unfortunately, Doctor, that footage is stolen. My guess is it would be confiscated the first time it was screened in public.

LOWELL

Not necessarily.

(stands)

Not necessarily.

(paces)

You know that CEPCO is planning a new plant at Point Conception. The Union of Concerned Scientists has selected the Point Conception environmental hearing as the focal point of the 'stop-nuclear' drive. Everyone will be there -- Goffman, Nader, and so on. We're zeroing in on CEPCO because it's the smallest utility, the most vulnerable financially. And they have a shabby operating history.

(sits)

With this film we'll blow them right out of the water.

RICHARD

But how will you be able to show it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOWELL

Keep it secret. Spring it on them. The final blow. No T.K.O. A clean knockout.

(pause)

And once it's shown at the NRC hearings, it becomes public records. It can't be suppressed.

DAVID

Could we film those hearings.

LOWELL

You can. I can arrange it.

EXT. BERKELEY - NIGHT

Leaving Lowell's house, Richard, Jesse, and David walk in silence. Finally...

DAVID

What do you think, chief?

RICHARD

How'd you get hold of that footage?

DAVID

I found out why Mildred Radkowitz is in love with me. She's blind as a bat.

They walk in silence.

JESSE

Richard? What are we going to do?

RICHARD

My opinion make any difference?

JESSE

(pause)

All the difference in the world.

RICHARD

Well, we could always sell the studio.

DAVID

(feminine)

But, Rhett, what's to become of Tara? What's to become of me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Frankly, madame --

JESSE

Wait. I've got a better idea.
David, you be the Tin Man --

RICHARD

And I'll be the Cowardly Lion.

JESSE

No. You be Glenda, the Good
Witch of the North.

RICHARD

An offer I can't refuse.

JESSE

(stops)

Are we off to see the Wizard?

RICHARD

(shrugs)

Looks like the only game in town.

She grabs him, hugs him, kisses him. Then she grabs
David, hugs him, kisses him. Richard watches.

DAVID

Massah! I'se gwine to run up
an' fetch de carriage.

David runs on ahead.

JESSE

He sure is a bundle of energy.

RICHARD

Is he?

JESSE

He's also a bundle of nerves. We
drove straight through last night.

CLOSEUP - RICHARD

His face is lit by a flickering light.

INT. LOFT EDITING ROOM

Seated at the editing machine, Richard is reviewing the
accident footage. Jesse is on the phone.

CONTINUED:

JESSE

(to phone)

Right. We'll be arriving on the, uh...

(checks notes)

Tuesday, the 27th.. So if you and Doctor Kendall will be arriving late, possibly we could film you in your motel room that evening. Right. We'll be filming you at the hearing in any event. Yes. Thank you, Doctor Goffman. Right. It'll be easy -- I'll be wearing earphones. Thank you, sir. I'll look forward to meeting you.

(hangs up)

That guy sounds like a great interview. A real sharp talker, as they say.

RICHARD

(watching film)

What's his act?

JESSE

(crosses to him)

He's a scientist who got fired for blowing the whistle on the Atomic Energy Commission.

RICHARD

(watching film)

Incidentally, Boots, I forgot to tell you. Lowell called. I put it down in your book. He said the three G.E. engineers who resigned after the Brown's Ferry incident will be there. He said they've agreed to an interview.

JESSE

Fantastic. That's fabulous. Those guys are perfect. We've got a hell of a line-up, you know that? I mean, talk about your basic believability. Two Nobel prize-winners... I think --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD
(watching film)
I think the key is this fellow
right here. This man. This
moment.

On the screen of the editing machine, Richard has frozen
the image of Jack Godell vomiting into the wastebasket.
The sense of fear is overwhelming. They are transfixed.

JESSE
Think you can get through to him?

David enters.

DAVID
I was just going through some of
that stuff of Lowell's. Listen
to this...
(reads)
'During a routine check at a
power reactor, abnormal
radioactivity was confirmed
in the plant drinking fountains...'

RICHARD
Jesus Christ!

DAVID
'... The contamination... came
from... an inappropriate cross-
connect between a 3000 gallon
radioactive waste tank and the
water system. The report
concludes... Quote... 'the
coupling of a contaminated
system with a potable water
system is considered poor
practice in general.'

JESSE
(incredulous)
In general?

He hands her the paper.

DAVID
(sarcastic)
In general. There are times when
drinking a little radioactive water
would do you a world of good.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JESSE
The ultimate cure.

Richard lights a joint and passes it to Jesse.

RICHARD
I don't think I'll go up to the hearings.

JESSE
Why not?

RICHARD
You guys can handle it. All you've got is a bunch of head shots.

DAVID
All I need is a light, a lens, and a long, tall sound person.

David slips his arm around Jesse.

JESSE
I think you should come up, Richard. These hearings are going to be important.

RICHARD
(turns back to screen)
It's important for us to reach this guy if we can. We can't afford the luxury of a three-man crew. There isn't time.

INT. POWER PLANT CONTROL ROOM

Shift change. Spindler chats with his replacement, packs his lunch box, and dons his "World's Greatest Fisherman" hardhat. As he's leaving, Godell intercepts him.

GODELL (O.S.)
God, could I see you for a second.

Spindler has aged. He seems worn out. He clearly doesn't want to go into Godell's office.

INT. GODELL'S OFFICE

Spindler enters. Godell is at his desk studying a clutter of computer printouts.

GODELL

Ted -- I want to get your impressions on one phase of our accident.

SPINDLER

C'mon, Jack.

GODELL

I'm just trying to confirm something. Right here...

(pointing to
print-out)

... about fifteen seconds after the turbine trip. Did you feel a secondary vibration.

SPINDLER

Main steam line closure.

GODELL

No, that was here, right at the start. I felt that, too. I'm talking about later. More of a vibration than a shock.

SPINDLER

No.

GODELL

They didn't ask you about that at all?

SPINDLER

(cooling off
toward Godell)

They told us not to discuss the hearing procedure.

GODELL

(looks up)

They meant during the investigation, Ted.

SPINDLER

Is this part of the investigation?

GODELL

What the hell's wrong?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SPINDLER

(pause)

They had me in there seven hours, Jack. Twice as long as anybody else. You and the rest of the hot-shot Navy boys have credentials. I'm a 25-year company man who didn't know shit about nuclear until they built this place. Now you tell me, Jack, where do you think the ax is gonna fall?

GODELL

What makes you think they're looking for a scapegoat?

SPINDLER

Tradition.

INT. HEALTH PHYSICS LAB

The crew going off duty must read their Dosimeters, turn them in, and record the readings in the log. Standing in silence, Godell and Spindler wait their turn. A TECHNICIAN enters.

TECHNICIAN

It just came down! The preliminary report. It's down on the board.

SPINDLER

The accident report?

GODELL

(muttering)

Seems like they could've given us a chance to look at it before they nailed it on the goddamn wall.

Everyone exits.

INT. PLANT CORRIDOR

Two technicians stand at the bulletin board reading as Spindler, Godell and the rest come down the hall.

READER

Congratulations, you guys.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SPINDLER
What is it?

READER
Listen to this... 'Operating personnel responded swiftly and professionally to these unforeseen circumstances, etc., etc. While some operator error was evident, and procedures violated to some degree, the overall result was a swift containment of a potentially costly event.'

They cheer. Everyone slaps Godell on the back as he tries to read the report. No one is more relieved than Spindler. He seems dazed, but happy.

Godell, however, is unhappy. He searches the report in vain. Whatever he hoped to find isn't there.

EXT. PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Godell and Spindler head for their cars.

GODELL
Stop at Harmon's?

SPINDLER
I don't think so, Jack. Thanks. I feel more like sleeping than drinking.

GODELL
Listen. Tomorrow, let's go over the printout of the first minute and see if we can figure out --

SPINDLER
Jack. Let's let sleeping dogs lie.

Godell stops in his tracks.

GODELL
Ted!
(jerks his thumb over-shoulder)
Ted, that ain't no sleeping dog.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SPINDLER

(gets into his car)

Jack. I really don't know anything.
And that's the goddamn truth.

Spindler starts his car and follows the exodus. As the cars spill out onto the Coast Highway, Godell stands alone in the parking lot. Finally, he gets into his BMW.

EXT. PLANT GATE - AFTERNOON

Godell's BMW is the last car through the gate. As he flashes past a line of surfer vans, one of them pulls out close behind him. It is Richard in the Cherokee.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

The licensing hearings for CEPSCO's nearly-completed reactor at Pt. Conception are underway. On stage, five NRC commissioners sit behind a long table. To one side is a witness table, where Dr. Ellicott Lowell has the microphone.

Lowell is suave and sarcastic. Although the audience isn't basically friendly, they can't help laughing at his incisive wit.

LOWELL

(leafs through
a massive report)

I hope the citizens of Lompoc will take the time to examine this report carefully... Certainly the impact of its prose will be diminished if one cannot fully savor the skillful turns of phrase, the almost Joycean mastery of word creation. For example, on page three, last paragraph, where we find a phrase that would seem to herald the blossoming of a new Golden Age of Euphemism: 'These predictions are less reliable should the Plutonium dioxide take residence.' 'Take residence'? Why are they so afraid to say it? It gets into your body, your lungs and trachea. And wherever it touches, cancer is likely to follow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Near the back of the room, Jesse sits at her tape recorder, listening on earphones, as David ranges about the scene with his hand-held camera.

LOWELL

(continuing)

... and here on page 32, a neatly drawn little table, the purpose of which is to assure you that radioactive poisons are strictly controlled. So many pounds to processing, so many pounds to medical use, and all the way over, the last column, so many pounds to 'MUF.' M-U-F. What's 'MUF'? MUF stands for 'Material Unaccounted For.' No need to worry, folks. It's not 'lost.' We've accounted for it. Right here it is -- it's 'MUF.'

CLOSE SHOT - JESSE

As Jesse watches her meters, a YOUNG MAN in a suit approaches.

YOUNG SUIT

(whispers)

Hi. What are you doing?

JESSE

(lifts one earphone)

What?

YOUNG SUIT

What are you doing? This going to be on TV?

JESSE

It's an educational film. For Encyclopaedia Britannica.

YOUNG SUIT

How'd you get into this business?

JESSE

I lied about my age.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

YOUNG SUIT

(laughs)

I hope you're not going to let this guy Lowell make you think there's only one side to this story.

JESSE

(smiles)

We're always interested in another opinion.

YOUNG SUIT

That's good. Maybe we'll see you later.

He squeezes her shoulder and departs.

CLOSE SHOT - GIBSON

Sitting unobserved at one side of the audience, Gibson listens as Lowell's testimony continues O.S. The Young Suit approaches.

YOUNG SUIT

(sits)

She says they're working for Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Gibson nods. He's unconvinced.

INT. MOTEL ROOM

Jesse and David are setting up lights to film an interview. Dr. Lowell is holding court with several other scientists and environmental intervenors, among them, MIT physicist DR. HENRY KENDALL.

KENDALL

So I ran into him on the plane coming out here. And we got to talking and finally I said to him, Jackson, I hear there's an opening on the ACRS. And without blinking an eye, he suggested that I apply for it.

They laugh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KENDALL

(continuing)

He said the only qualification was twenty-five years' experience in the nuclear field.

They howl.

KENDALL

(continuing)

Jackson, I said, the only people with twenty-five years' experience in this field are the original Alamogordo crowd -- the bomb-makers. I said, Jackson, how will it look if it gets out that the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safety wants to hire a bomb-maker?

They are convulsed.

DAVID

Excuse me, Doctor Kendall.

David adjusts a light stand, then holds his meter in front of Kendall's face. In b.g., Jesse answers the phone.

CLOSE SHOT - JESSE

Holding the phone with her shoulder, she threads a new reel on her tape recorder.

JESSE

(to phone)

Yes, operator, I'll take it.

(pause)

Richard? Hi, baby, where the hell are you?

(pause)

Man, I might have known. Turn my back for a second and you're out cruising...

INT. ROADHOUSE

Richard is in the phone booth at Harmon's, the tavern where Spindler and Godell stopped the night of the accident.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: ~

RICHARD

(to phone)

I found him. Yeah. Looks like we were right.

At the bar, Jack Godell sits with two plant TECHNICIANS. He's drinking heavily.

RICHARD

(continuing; to phone)

When're you coming back?

(pause)

Whatever. Well, I guess I won't see you till Saturday. I love you, too, kid. Stay outa trouble.

Richard hangs up. After a moment, he crosses to the bar and takes a stool at the end. Godell, listening as the two Technicians tell war stories, orders another drink.

TECHNICIAN

Scotch? Man, I don't see how you can stand that stuff. Gimme good old American bourbon.

SECOND TECHNICIAN

Make it another round, Jerry.

TECHNICIAN

I O.D.'d on Scotch up in the Orkney's. You ever been to the Orkney's? Godforsaken, man. Desolate. I was on the Silverfish in '73 and we lost a main seal in the reactor. We were laid up in Scapa Flow for eight months. Man, it was rotten. Rain --

SECOND TECHNICIAN

I was there with you, dummy.

TECHNICIAN

Oh, yeah, that's right, so you were. Where were you, Jack?

GODELL

I was on carriers. No way you could get me on a submarine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SECOND TECHNICIAN

One thing I like about workin' on these civilian reactors. At least if you got a problem, you know you ain't gonna sink.

They laugh.

GODELL

Gotta go to the head. Get me another one, will ya?

As Godell works his way to the men's room, it's clear he's had some experience at handling himself under the influence. A moment later, Richard follows.

INT. MEN'S ROOM

Godell stands at the urinal with one hand braced against the wall. Richard enters and takes the urinal next to him.

RICHARD

How's it going?

GODELL

Couldn't be better.

RICHARD

Yeah. I heard you guys talking. How soon will you start the plant up again?

GODELL

Tuesday.

RICHARD

Got a clean bill of health, I hear.

GODELL

Clean bill of health.

RICHARD

But you aren't convinced, are you, Jack?

Godell flushes the urinal and moves to the washbasin. Sober now, he eyes Richard in the mirror.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL

Who the hell are you?

Richard flushes the urinal and crosses to him.

GODELL

(continuing)

You were there!

RICHARD

Right. I was as scared as you were
and I want to know why...

GODELL

You were with that television
crew.

RICHARD

For all I know, that plant could
be ready to blow up any second.

GODELL

(trying to escape,
but can't let this
go uncorrected)

It can't blow up!

RICHARD

(has him)

But it can blow down!

Godell exits.

RICHARD

(continuing)

This is no goddamn submarine,
Godell! This is a passenger
ship!

EXT. ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

In the parking lot, Godell says good night to his drinking companions, then searches for his car. When he finds it, he discovers a large envelope under the windshield wiper.

Ripping it open, Godell is astonished to find it contains a picture of himself -- a blow-up of a single frame from the accident footage, showing him vomiting into the waste basket. OVER we HEAR a HIGH-PITCHED WHINE, like the wail of some outraged banshee. SLOWLY BUILDING IN INTENSITY.

CLOSEUP - SPINNING DRIVESHAFT

Polished steel spinning at high RPM, the massive pump driveshaft produces an intense WAIL that pierces the ROAR surrounding us. A strange shape moves by in f.g.

INT. REACTOR BUILDING

The shape is a man in an anti-radiation suit. Orange with black rubber boots and gloves, the suit seems to double his size. As he turns to descend a steel stairway, we SEE he is wearing a gas mask as well. Behind the mask is the face of Jack Godell. As he descends, sweeping his Geiger counter from side to side, we FOLLOW WITH him to REVEAL the titanic sweep of the building known as "The Containment."

It is an appropriate name. Although it is an incredibly massive structure -- the center of the dome rises nearly ten stories above us -- it is built like a pressure cooker. There are no windows, no ventilation, and only mighty pressure doors for access. The scale is staggering. Thousands of four-story pumps and pressure tanks shoot up from the foundation, all tied into a central steel and concrete grid by girders and pipes large enough for a man to stand inside. In and around the oversized equipment is a web of crawlways and catwalks. The heavy explosion-proof lamps that dot the building do their best to light it, but there is the pervading atmosphere of the subterranean -- it is a cavern worthy of the monstrous power that lives here.

The orange speck which is Godell slowly makes its way to the lowest level.

INT. PUMP CHAMBER

Moving like a spaceman through a hostile environment, he reaches the lowest level, an area populated by huge support girders and pipes. He stops by the stairwell and unfolds a blueprint. It is impossible to read in the dim light. He walks to a steel box mounted nearby and retrieves a flashlight.

Godell is looking for something. Checking out various pieces of equipment, he shakes the flashlight once. It seems to be running out of power. As he moves through a forest of pipe supports, we suddenly HEAR the GEIGER COUNTER begin to CHATTER.

CLOSEUP - GODELL

An expression of grave concern. His eyes flash around in the semi-darkness.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The failing flashlight beam plays across valves and pipes as the GEIGER COUNTER CRACKLE INCREASES in intensity until it is a constant BUZZ. The light is searching frantically, then there is a SPLASHING SOUND. The light flashes down to reveal:

GODELL'S RUBBER BOOTS

splashing into a shallow pool of water on the concrete floor. The boots step back immediately. The flashlight beam plays across a large pool of water.

BLINDING FLASH

A tripod-mounted trouble-light swings its powerful beam to illuminate:

INT. PUMP CHAMBER

Now there are five orange spacemen, all looking up at the massive recirculation pump rising two stories above them. The pump is held off the ground by three large supports. The huge outlet pipe arcs downward into the reactor which is very near.

Beneath the mighty pump, a shallow sump is filled with contaminated water.

From behind their separate masks, Godeill's eyes meet DeYoung's.

DeYOUNG

Martin, you get a crew down here and clean this up. Rusty, have your boys go over this pump. I want them to check every flange, every seal, every rivet and nut in the whole loop. Stay on top of them. I want a full report before the end of each shift. Jack, let's go up on top.

Godeill and DeYoung clamber up the steps.

INT. REACTOR BUILDING ACCESS CHAMBER

We are in a concrete bunker just outside The Containment. The ROAR of the reactor is muffled by the heavy pressure door in background.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In a roped-off area marked with radiation warning symbols, Godell and DeYoung strip to their shorts and drop their contaminated suits into the incinerator. DeYoung picks up a Geiger-counter probe and begins carefully examining every inch of his skin. Sweating and exhausted, Godell awaits his turn.

DeYOUNG

We're gonna have to test that pump.

Godell nods.

DeYOUNG

(continuing)

God damn it!

(pause)

Well. It's a good thing you found it, Jack. But I sure ain't lookin' forward to this next phone call. They're gonna crap downtown.

GODELL

They giving you some heat, Herman?

DeYOUNG

You don't know the half of it. Hatcher wanted us back on-line yesterday.

He hands Godell the probe, peels off his disposable socks, and steps across the barricade.

DeYOUNG

(continuing)

Doesn't make any difference. We gotta check the recirc pump and that's all there is to it. What do you recommend?

GODELL

I think we should pull a turbine trip test. Duplicate the accident conditions.

DeYOUNG

(pales)

We can't do that, Jack. A trip test would keep us down for another week.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DeYOUNG (CONT'D)

(pause)

Look. The load obviously came from the main recirc pump. Let's not take apart the whole plant.

Godell says nothing.

DeYOUNG

Put TV monitors on the thing and run the motor up to a-hundred-twenty percent of rated power. That might tell us what's happening.

GODELL

It might.

DeYOUNG

Good. Get on it. Let's keep it moving.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

This is the corridor just outside the gymnasium where the hearings are taking place. The hallway is alive with witnesses and spectators, entering and leaving the hearings. FEATURE one corner where David and Jesse are filming an interview with ex-G.E. engineer GREG MINOR.

JESSE

You've mentioned the 'Grandfather Clause' a number of times, Greg. Can you explain that a little?

MINOR

(UNSCRIPTED --- answers in own words, explaining the "Grandfathering" procedure, where older plants are exempted from mandatory installation of newer control equipment. Also briefly discusses how new generations of plants are often designed by marketing personnel to fit customer needs, rather than by knowledgeable engineers whose concern is for safety.)

RICHARD HUBBARD, a co-worker of Minor's, interrupts at this point. David pans to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HUBBARD

(UNSCRIPTED -- explains the "Yes, but..." syndrome as symptomatic of the specialization in this high-technology area and how that discourages anyone from having an overview of the problems.)

Near the end of Hubbard's explanation, there is a LOUD CHORUS OF LAUGHTER from the auditorium behind them.

HUBBARD

(continuing)

Sounds like Elliott has the floor...

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

As the NRC commissioners listen, take notes, and leaf through the agenda, CEPCO representative Morton Robertson is on the stand. He's in a heated exchange with Elliott Lowell, who stands at the audience microphone in center aisle. The house is just quieting down from one of Lowell's witty stabs. Even Robertson manages a smile.

ROBERTSON

I won't say that our Point Conception design is bolt-for-bolt the same as our Ventanna Plant. My point is that it is the same generation. General Nucleonics Boiling Water reactor, Generation Four. There is already a Generation Five, but we preferred to use a proven design and one with which our personnel have experience.

LOWELL

They've certainly had some experiences at Ventanna.

CHAIRMAN

Doctor Lowell...

LOWELL

I would submit, Mr. Chairman... that inasmuch as CEPCO chose this design because its staff has experience with it at Ventanna that an examination of the most recent operator experience at Ventanna would be relevant and valuable to this hearing.

CONTINUED:

CHAIRMAN
Doctor Robertson?

Robertson looks like he's swallowed a bug.

CLOSE SHOT - GIBSON

Unobserved on the sidelines, Gibson sits, narrow-eyed. He's beginning to get the drift.

ROBERTSON (O.S.)
Mr. Chairman, between now and the end of the hearings, it would be impossible for us to get together all the operating data for the last six months.

LOWELL (O.S.)
How about the last six weeks?

Gibson exits.

WIDE SHOT - COMMISSIONERS

CHAIRMAN
(exhausted)
I don't have any objection. Doctor Robertson?

CLOSE SHOT - JESSE

She turns to David.

JESSE
Beautiful.

CLOSEUP - BLUEPRINT

Under a brilliant fluorescent light, we SEE an engineering drawing of the recirculation pump. In background, the HUM of the plant can be HEARD.

A moving finger traces a line across the drawing and stops at a number. A pocket calculator slides INTO THE FRAME and the finger enters the number and performs mathematical functions.

CLOSEUP - GODELL

Leaning over the drafting table, he rubs his eyes from the strain.

INT. POWER PLANT RECORDS ROOM

A windowless room full of filing cabinets. It is dark except for the pool of light in which Godell is working.

As he wearily returns to his task, we SEE his eyes tick across the drawing, and then stop. An expression of curiosity crosses his face.

Godell moves to a filing cabinet, searches through a drawer and extracts some envelopes. He tilts the light on the drafting table. The envelopes contain X-ray negatives. He holds one up to the light.

CLOSEUP - RADIOGRAPH

We can SEE the outline of a pipe weld. Beneath the weld is a serial number, "2233." The radiograph disappears and is replaced by the next, "2234." Then another, and another.

CLOSEUP - GODELL

He is about to raise another to the light when something suddenly hits him. He snatches the first radiograph back and puts it up to the light. Then he takes the next one and places it on top.

CLOSEUP - RADIOGRAPHS

He moves them slightly and finds they match. Pipe, support, and weld are identical, as if he were looking through one transparency. Only the serial numbers are different. He slips another radiograph over the first two, then another. They are all the same picture.

CLOSEUP - GODELL

GODELL

My God...

Godell checks the name of the technician who signed them all. The signature reads: "D.B. Royce." Suddenly, a plant shift HORN SOUNDS. Godell jumps.

INT. POWER PLANT CORRIDOR - DAY

DeYoung strolls toward his office, a cup of coffee in one hand, a cigarette in the other. It is the first few minutes of another working day. He chats with subordinates as he approaches his office.

INT. DeYOUNG'S OFFICE

A spartan room. The walls are decorated with framed blueprints and artifacts made by DeYoung's children. As he enters, he sees Godell on a chair against the far wall. Godell has not shaved this morning, nor has he changed clothes since we last saw him.

DeYOUNG

Jesus, you look like you've been up all night.

GODELL

Herman, we've got some serious problems...

DeYoung hangs up his coat.

DeYOUNG

Jack, what can I tell you? I realize we still don't know where the leak was, exactly. But the pump checks out, and that's what's important.

GODELL

Those static tests didn't tell us a thing.

DeYOUNG

My God, Jack. You ran the thing up to nearly a hundred-thirty percent power. It was steady as a rock. Surely you could see that with your own eyes.

GODELL

But that won't tell us what'll happen if we have another reactor SCRAM at full power. Any sudden jolt to the system --

DeYOUNG

But that's --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL

God damn it, listen to me!

Godell's tone brings him up short. DeYoung's eyes narrow.

GODELL

(continuing)

I was going through the Quality Assurance reports and I found something weird in the contractor's documentation on the pump support structure. So I decided to check out the X-rays of the welding.

He hands him the radiographs. DeYoung holds them up to the light.

GODELL

(continuing)

They're identical, Herman. It's the same picture, over and over. They're all fake. That means we don't have any idea what the pump supports will do if they're hit with a sudden stress. But worse than that -- if these QA reports are faked, then others could be. The whole plant could be riddled with sub --

DeYOUNG

My God, Jack, take it easy! This is ancient history. No contractor can possibly supply every stupid document the government calls for. So they didn't take all the pictures they were supposed to. So what? These X-rays are six years old.

GODELL

(narrow-eyed)

So are those welds down there.

DeYoung thrusts the pictures back to him.

GODELL

(continuing)

I think we should get new radiographs of the pump support structure.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DeYOUNG

That's absurd. That would cost fifteen to twenty-million dollars. Forget it. I'll tell you what I think. I think you need a vacation.

GODELL

That sounds like an order.

DeYOUNG

That's advice. Here's the order: get back to the control room and start her up.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

The full complement of operating personnel is preparing for start-up. The room is awash with TECHNICAL DIALOGUE. Spindler sits at the central control station.

The pressure on Godell seems unbearable. DeYoung enters. He leans against the back wall, observing. Godell scans the board with anxious eyes.

SPINDLER

We've got a green board, Jack.

GODELL

(pause)

Okay. Automatic sequence.

SPINDLER

Rods up thirty percent. Automatic sequence.

Hands move about the console; dials, gauges, and chart recorders begin to dance; the computer printouts CHATTER to life.

An ANNUNCIATOR comes on but is quickly SILENCED.

Godell's attention is drawn to the TV monitors, jury-rigged above Spindler's console. On the screens we SEE several views of the suspected circ pump. It is functioning normally.

P.A. SYSTEM (O.S.)

Jack Godell, call two-one-one.

Jack Godell, two-one-one.

As Godell enters his office, he looks eyes for an instant with DeYoung.

INT. GODELL'S OFFICE

Without bothering to turn on the light, he picks up the phone.

GODELL

(to phone)

Hello. Yeah, this is Godell.

(panics)

Listen! I told you I don't want to talk to you. Not now, not ever. Don't call me again.

He hangs up, further shaken by this unexpected intrusion.

INT. LOFT EDITING ROOM AS BEFORE

Richard hangs up, ponders a moment, then turns his attention back to the editing machine. On the screen, David is running newsreel footage of hideous skin lesions on the back of an otherwise beautiful Japanese girl. He reads the narration as it rolls...

DAVID

(reads script)

... the effects of radiation is cumulative. The body cannot throw off the dosage. If you receive a rad a month, to the end of the year, you will suffer the effects of twelve rads...

Richard glances at Jesse and shakes his head. Jesse wordlessly admonishes him to go easy.

RICHARD

David. Hold it a second.

David halts the film with a particularly sickening frame frozen on the screen.

RICHARD

(continuing)

It's too much. It punches you in the gut, not the brain.

DAVID

This is a gut issue if I ever saw one.

JESSE

Like you said, people will have to use their brains.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

You've got to get their attention first.

RICHARD

Okay, I could be wrong. I've been wrong before.

JESSE

When?

RICHARD

1947. What happens after this?

DAVID

First scientist interview. From the hearing.

He turns back to the machine and rolls the film forward. On screen, the image cuts to Greg Minor.

MINOR

(on editing machine screen)

It was just after the Brown's Ferry fire that I started to question the whole thing...

David fades the track under and reads narration.

DAVID

(reads)

For fifteen years, engineer Greg Minor worked at General Electric's Nuclear Power Division in San Jose. By 1973 his title was Manager of Safety Systems and he was responsible for design safety in a dozen reactors then under construction. But in April, there was a fire at Brown's Ferry, Tennessee. A fire they said couldn't happen.

MINOR

(on editing machine)

... I think that fire shocked us all. It was just exactly the kind of thing we had been designing against. And to think it was started by a workman inspecting for leaks with a candle... it really brought home to us that there are some things you just can't foresee.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

David stops the film.

DAVID

Etcetera.

RICHARD

(ponders)

Might work.

(shrugs)

It's an opening. But I think you should hold that Hiroshima footage to a minimum. You know? I mean this whole thing is so sensational that you almost have to play it down.

DAVID

Jesse shot that.

RICHARD

You did? It looks perfect.

JESSE

Fluid camera style...

David snaps the projection light off.

DAVID

Yeah... but it ain't enough.

RICHARD

What?

David swivels around on his chair and propels it across the small room to his master scene list, tacked on a wall.

DAVID

I'll show you: Interview with Gibson, interview with scientist, interview with scientist, stock footage of plant, interview with scientist, interview with scientist...

JESSE

Where's our accident footage?

DAVID

Oh, it's here, but it don't mean shit. We have no way of understanding it. I'm sorry to go Hollywood on you, friends, but there, as they say, is 'the topper'?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jesse and Richard look at each other, realizing David is right.

DAVID
(continuing)
I'll tell you what we need.

RICHARD
Godell.

DAVID
Right on.

RICHARD
Well, I welcome all help on that front. The man doesn't trust me, and his motives ain't exactly a mystery.

JESSE
Well, then... you two better find him. One sample lesson from the David Adams School of Human Relations and he may run into your arms, Richard.

They laugh.

DAVID
Hey, whatever it takes...

EXT. GATE TO PT. CONCEPTION SITE - DAY

A crude guard building sits before a modern steel and glass guard shelter now under construction. Through the door, we SEE Jack Godell presenting his credentials, then receiving directions. Godell dons his hardhat and walks into the construction area.

EXT. QUALITY CONTROL TRAILER - DAY

A long, modern house trailer with permanent wooden steps. A sign on the side reads:

FOSTER - SULLIVAN

Pt. Conception Quality Assurance

A sign on the other door says "PULL," but Godell pushes instead. He's greeted with a CRASH.

JESSE
God damn it...

INT. QUALITY ASSURANCE HOUSE TRAILER

The trailer is a mess. Men engineers in shirts and ties are sweltering in a tiny compartment filled with desks, boxes of bolts, drawings, tons of computer printout. The unfortunate ENGINEER nearest the door is now gathering a box of bolts off the floor.

ENGINEER

It says pull, doesn't it?

GODELL

Sorry. I'm looking for the Head of Quality Assurance. Redman.

ENGINEER

Back there, through the door.

Godell turns sideways and inches through the cluttered room toward the door at the back. He knocks, then enters.

INT. QA MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

The manager's office is almost as cluttered but he has a larger desk, a plant, and an actual window. CLIFF REDMAN looks up from a massive manual and sees Godell.

REDMAN

Yes?

GODELL

I wonder if you can help me?

REDMAN

You from CEPCON?

GODELL

Yes. Ventanna. I've been reviewing some of our equipment down there and...

REDMAN

You have all our QA reports on file. All we've got here is...

GODELL

Actually, I'm trying to find a guy who works for you. D.B. Royce?

Redman locks eyes with Godell, then slowly closes his book.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REDMAN
No, I don't know him.

GODELL
He did some QA at Ventanna. Must
have been... five years ago.

REDMAN
Don't know him. Try headquarters,
in Encino. They'll have records.
Sorry I can't help.

GODELL
That's okay. Thanks.

Opening the door, Godell's eyes catch sight of a plaque
on the wall: "CLIFFTON REDMAN... 15 YEARS SERVICE."

INT. QA HOUSE TRAILER

When Godell emerges from Redman's office, he finds the
desks deserted.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION AREA - DAY

Godell walks across a dusty yard to a coffee vending
truck. The QA team is taking a break. Godell buys a cup
of coffee and begins talking with them.

EXT. HOUSE TRAILER

In the reflection of the manager's office window, we can
SEE Godell talking to the QA engineers. Behind the
reflection, Redman is watching. He picks up a telephone.

EXT. LOCKHEED AIRCRAFT CORP. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

ESTABLISH exterior of building. Godell enters.

EXT. GENERAL MOTORS STAMPING PLANT - DAY

in Van Nuys. A man in a suit escorts Godell out the front
door of the white-collar building. He points out some
directions on surface streets, then shakes his hand and
returns inside.

EXT. MIL-SPEC SUPPLY COMPANY - DAY

in Panorama City. This is nothing more than a large warehouse with a small steel "executive office" attached. Godell emerges. If this is the last place Royce worked, he has just about hit bottom for a professional engineer.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

An old tract in the Valley. Godell's BMW pulls up. He gets out and walks toward one of the houses. He steps over a lawnmower, abandoned and overgrown by grass. There is also a rusty tricycle near the front door. The house is just a few months short of being an eyesore.

ANGLE ON GODELL

at the front door. Only the screen door is closed and it is torn and battered. This kind of neglect looks very out of place in a tidy suburban neighborhood.

GODELL

Mr. Royce?... M.B. Royce?

There is no answer. A cat darts out past his feet through the busted lower screen.

Godell opens his briefcase quickly and rechecks the address. He works his way slowly around the corner of the house and heads for the back yard. As he approaches it, the SOUND of a TV GAME SHOW is HEARD.

EXT. ROYCE'S BACK YARD - DAY

FEATURING ROYCE, a young, prematurely-bald man in a bathrobe, asleep in a faded lawn chair before the game show. Godell slowly approaches him.

GODELL

Mr. Royce? Mr. Royce...

Royce slowly rouses from his alcoholic slumber. He studies Godell with bleary eyes, then throws him a look of disgust. Royce reaches for his bottle.

ROYCE

You clowns never give up, do you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL

My name's Jack Godell...

ROYCE

Yeah... And yesterday it was Benny
Pierce. And a week ago you said
you were with the sheriff's office.
You goddamn coward people should be
run out of the city.

ANGLE ON GODELL

as he fishes around in his briefcase and comes up with the
radiographs -- a bundle of oddly-shaped manila folders.

GODELL

No, I'm from the Ventanna Nuclear
Power Station.

ANGLE ON ROYCE

who is frozen at the sight of the manila folders. Their
shape tells him immediately the reason for Godell's visit.

ROYCE

Who are you? What do you want?

Royce's outburst reveals a mass of jumbled, intense
emotions: angry, humble, frightened, betrayed. It shocks
Godell.

GODELL

Mr. Royce...

ROYCE

A nice, quiet, tractable dead man.
Leave me alone.

Godell breaks open a manila envelope and pulls out several
radiographs. He thrusts them at Royce.

GODELL

This is your signature, Royce.
It's the same damn shot, over and
over again. What does that mean?

ROYCE

What does it matter?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL

I have to know.

Royce stares at Godell, then laughs.

ROYCE

You have to know, huh? You must clear this up. It's your obligation as a man, as a scientist, as a loyal employee. Because you hear the voice of duty, responsibility. That it?

GODELL

(angry)

Yes.

ROYCE

You're a lucky man.

Royce stands unsteadily.

ROYCE

(continuing)

Why shouldn't I tell you? They came to me. Everybody knew Ventanna was behind schedule. Between the goddamned environmentalists, the press... the goddamned intervenors, we were finally two years behind schedule. Redman came to me. Just a couple, Don. No need to shoot all of these things. When you see one with a blue mark... look on the lower corner, see it there... Redman's mark. Just a few at first. He went on vacation, three weeks. But they kept coming. And coming. And I signed them.

GODELL

How many?

ROYCE

The booze destroyed D.B. Royce, you know. That's the prevailing theory. But it's wrong. The voice is what did it. Have another drink, friend. Have three. Have a hundred. It's strong-willed men like you and who made Jack Daniels great.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Godell is shocked by Royce's penetrating analysis of his situation.

GODELL

How many welds are substandard?

ROYCE

(tips his glass)

How many you got?

Godell heads for his car.

ROYCE

(continuing)

... Look, I'm sorry. I don't have much tact left. What are you going to do?

Godell turns back to Royce, barely able to control his anger.

GODELL

Call the NRC in Washington.

ROYCE

Then you're dumber than I thought.

GODELL

(controlled)

Jack Daniels won't fix the welds, Mr. Royce.

ROYCE

(alarmed)

Wait a second. You don't know what you're talking about. You're talking about a billion-dollar lawsuit! It would send them into receivership.

Godell turns away.

ROYCE

(continuing; panicked)

Look. This is not some piss-ant electric utility you're dealing with. Foster-Sullivan is a construction company.

(grabs Godell)

They might have a problem with King Feisal, or The Mob, but they sure as hell ain't gonna waste any time on you!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Godell pulls himself and . . . As he wades off through the uncut grass, Royce watches in amazement and terror.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

As Godell returns to his car, he notices two men in a blue Chevy parked down the street.

INT. GODELL'S BMW

Godell opens the door and gets in. He's sweating. The fear is contagious. Now -- as when we first saw him in the accident -- Godell consciously forces himself to maintain control. But he can feel the fear like a rising tide.

He hesitates a second before turning the key. Suddenly, he turns it, angrily. The engine starts and he pulls away.

As he passes the Chevy, he locks eyes for an instant with the two men.

EXT. BEACH RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Godell's BMW drives past and disappears into the garage of a tall apartment building.

INT. PARKING GARAGE

Godell walks toward the elevator. Suddenly, behind him, he hears two men running down the ramp from the street.

David and Richard run INTO VIEW.

The elevator doors open and Godell ducks inside.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

David gets a foot in the door and he and Richard join Godell. There is a beat of silence. David hits the emergency stop.

GODELL
I'll call the police.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

And what will you tell the police, man?

RICHARD

This is my partner, David Adams. His temper is a little shorter than mine, I'm afraid.

GODELL

I told you before, Hartman --

DAVID

Tell me! That wiser-than-thou' attitude pisses me off. You came within a couple of seconds of blowing us off the map --

GODELL

That's not true.

RICHARD

I've tried to explain it to him, but he --

DAVID

But I don't understand. I'm dense. When people won't talk to me, I naturally figure they've got something to hide. Just because we don't understand every last little goddamn law of nuclear physics, we're supposed to keep our mouths shut and not ask --

Godell slams his fist into the wall with such force that David is speechless. After a moment, Richard recovers.

RICHARD

We're trying to help, Mr. Godell. Just tell us what happened. We'll forget we ever saw you.

GODELL

(pause)

There was an identical accident outside Chicago in 1971. The 'blowdown' at Dresden One.

RICHARD

You mean this has happened before?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL

Twice. Except this time we managed to keep it from venting into the containment.

Richard takes out a notebook.

GODELL

(continuing)

Keep my name out of this.

RICHARD

Absolutely.

GODELL

We think it started with a spurious signal that caused a turbine trip-out. At first, it looked like a normal SCRAM...

INT. GODELL'S APARTMENT

Godell wearily finishes his story as Richard and David take notes.

GODELL

... and now they're up to seventy-five percent power and claiming everything is okay. And it'll stay okay as long as the hearings are on at Point Conception.

Godell stands, now tense, anxious to have it over with.

GODELL

(continuing)

Look. Whatever you do, don't call me at the plant again.

David and Richard get up to leave.

RICHARD

I know it's been a strain --

Godell cuts him off. He doesn't need sympathy. He needs time to think. They move to the door.

INT. APARTMENT CORRIDOR

As Richard and David emerge from the apartment, Godell sees two men emerge from the elevator.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

All eyes meet. Godell doesn't like what he sees. He pulls Richard and David back into his apartment.

INT. GODELL'S APARTMENT

Godell thrusts the envelope of radiographs into Richard's hand.

GODELL

(urgent)

Here. Hang on to these things.
This is the key to the whole thing.
There's a hundred more where these
came from.

DAVID

What's this?

GODELL

I'll talk to you later. Be
careful. Don't call me at the
plant.

INT. LOFT LIVING ROOM

Jesse looks through one of the radiographs against a bare light bulb. The rest of them lie scattered on the circular table. At one end of the table, Richard is on the phone. At the other end, David is pouring Dr. Lowell another drink as Lowell looks over his notes.

JESSE

Is it defective?

LOWELL

Oh, no. It's an excellent weld.
Hold a thousand years.

JESSE

So why is that dangerous?

DAVID

Welds are like fingerprints, Jesse.
No two should be the same.
According to Godell, there are a
hundred more just like that.

JESSE

All faked?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOWELL

Yes. This (the notes) is pretty much what I expected. It's good, David. But these (the X-rays), these are more damaging than anything I've ever seen. Foster-Sullivan is the prime contractor for half-a-dozen nuclear installations. This is the kind of hard evidence we've been looking for. It'll bring the house down.

Richard hangs up and joins them.

RICHARD

That was Mac Churchill. He'll have a camera crew there.

LOWELL

Excellent.

RICHARD

He was screaming for an exclusive...

LOWELL

No. We've got to spread it as wide as possible.

RICHARD

I agree.

Lowell begins to gather up his belongings -- coat, briefcase, etc.

LOWELL

Well, I've got to get back. We are set?

RICHARD

We'll bring the footage and anything else Codell can get for us between now and noon tomorrow.

LOWELL

Good. I really think we're going to stop them this time...

He moves with Richard toward the freight elevator.

INT. EDITING ROOM - LATER

RICHARD
(angry determination)
No!!

JESSE
I want to do it, Richard.

DAVID
Use your head, man! They've seen us. They'll be watching every time we pick our noses.

RICHARD
I'd like to see them try and stop us...

JESSE
They don't have to stop you. All they have to do is delay you. I'm the only one they haven't seen.

RICHARD
Look, I'm not being protective. You guys aren't using your heads.

DAVID
They'll be following us, man, so we draw them away from her. You and I head up there tomorrow morning in the Rover, ringing bells and carrying signs. Jess takes the film, she gets the stuff from Godell, and she sneaks up the back way, in her car. It makes sense.

Jesse moves behind Richard and puts her arms around his waist.

JESSE
Come on, let's talk about it.

David watches them depart into the bedroom. He slowly begins to place the radiographs back in their envelope. Absently-mindedly...

DAVID
(singing)
Daddy, won't you take me down to
Muhlenburg County,
Down by the Green River, where
Paradise lay...

EXT. STUDIO BUILDING - NIGHT

The street is quiet.

DAVID (V.O.)

(singing)

I'm sorry, my son, but you're too
late in asking,
Mr. Peabody's Coal Train has hauled
it away...

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. STUDIO BUILDING - DAY

The Cherokee is parked in front, motor running, rear hatch open. David appears from the freight elevator, carrying large manila folders and a can of film. Richard follows with a 16mm projector. He locks the studio, they place the stuff in the jeep, then pull away. From the other street, Jesse's MG appears. We CATCH just a glimpse of it between buildings.

EXT. FREEWAY INTERCHANGE - DAY

Jesse's MG takes a turn onto an intersecting freeway.
A sign says: "VENTURA/OKNARD"

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - DAY

As the morning traffic whizzes into the city, we PAN to DISCOVER the dome of the Ventanna Reactor on the nearby beach.

INT. POWER PLANT CORRIDOR

just outside the Records Room. Godell is closing and locking the door. The briefcase in his hand is bulging. He moves toward the stairwell.

INT. STAIRWELL

Godell starts down the stairs to ground level. Suddenly, around the turn, he sees DeYoung and a couple of technicians coming up. Panic sweeps him for an instant, then he controls it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL

Morning.

DeYOUNG

(to his party)

Be with you in a minute, fellows...

The others move on. DeYoung looks Godell up and down

DeYOUNG

(continuing)

Have a good vacation, Jack?

GODELL

Yes, I did. I'll be coming back tomorrow.

DeYOUNG

See you tomorrow.

He trudges up the stairs. Godell descends as fast as he can without running.

INT. VENTURA POST OFFICE - DAY

Godell stands at a long writing table. He has a number of letters and packages with him, including two massive bundles of radiographs, wrapped in brown paper and string. He is slowly putting stamps on letters, furtively looking around. Suddenly, Jesse is beside him.

She is also nervous. She pulls out a piece of paper and begins "writing." Godell shoves the radiographs toward her. In so doing, one of his letters falls to the floor. Instinctively, they both duck for it, narrowly missing a collision of heads. They straighten up.

GODELL

Thank you.

He swiftly gathers up all his parcels and letters and walks toward the postal window. All parcels except the radiographs.

EXT. VENTURA POST OFFICE - DAY

Jesse exits with the radiographs under her arm.

INT. JESSE'S MG

The radiograph bundles land on the right-hand seat atop a small can of film.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DAY

The MG speeds away from the curb, into traffic.

EXT. LOMPOC HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The parking lot is full to capacity. Near the entrance are several vans from Los Angeles and San Francisco television news outfits, including KMOT-TV.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

The gym is nearly full and many television film crews have set up in the aisles. On the witness stand, Dick Hubbard is testifying. The gym is charged with energy and expectation.

High up in the stands we SEE four men talking, obviously coordinating something. They are David, Richard, Dr. Lowell and Mac Churchill.

CLOSEUP - GIBSON

In his usual seat, he is studying the filmmakers' conference with a cool eye. Then, a CEPCC official approaches Gibson, whispers in his ear.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Gibson works his way through the maze of cars toward a limousine. The door opens for him.

INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY

Gibson sits on one of the jump seats across from MacCormack.

MacCORMACK

You better be sure about this,
Bill.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GIBSON

Last night one of my news contacts called me and said the word was spreading that something big was going to happen up here today. And when I found out it was this Hartman character spreading the story, it could mean only one thing.

MacCORMACK

I thought you had that film buttoned up.

GIBSON

Apparently they simply stole it.

MacCORMACK

Then it's a criminal matter. Why are we getting involved?

GIBSON

We are not involved. It would normally be up to KMOT to press charges, either for theft or copyright infringement, but that would take time.

(removing document
from case)

Instead, we've got a temporary restraining order, confiscating the film on the grounds that it contains pictures of security installations in a nuclear power plant, under Title 18 of the U.S. Criminal Code. This way, the government takes the heat. The marshals are already here.

MacCORMACK

Are you sure it wouldn't be better just to let them show it?

GIBSON

Even, I've seen it. We can knock it down technically, but emotionally, it's devastating. Panic in the control room. If it gets out...

MacCORMACK

It will get out, sooner or later.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GIBSON

Then I choose later. You should see it.

MacCORMACK

No, thanks.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - DAY

Jesse's MG moves rapidly up the winding road between mountain and sea.

ANGLE ON THE MG

from the front, showing a heavy-duty van closing in from the rear at high speed.

INT. MG

Jesse looks up into the rear-view.

EXT. APPROACHING VAN

As the outside turn signal begins to flash, it moves out into the narrow left lane, attempting a high-speed pass in a short straightaway.

INT. MG

The van is alongside, towering over her car. It moves ahead, but then, before clearing her, swings back into her lane. Jesse stands on the brake, but she is not fast enough.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The MG spins off the road in a shower of dirt.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

Lowell looks at his watch. His time to give testimony is rapidly approaching. He cranes his neck and searches the back of the gym.

David sees him and shakes his head. He exits.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CORRIDOR

Richard is on a pay phone as David comes up to him.

INT. GODELL'S LIVING ROOM

The PHONE RINGS. Godell lets it ring. He's busy packing. The room is full of shipping cartons and it's clear he is moving out in haste. Finally, he reaches for his glass. He watches the phone a moment longer, then answers it.

GODELL

Yes?

(pause) A :

Hartman?

(pause)

What do you mean? I gave her the stuff over two hours ago.

Godell's phone lands in its cradle.

He's a very worried man. He thought his end of the deal was concluded at the post office. He drains the glass.

GODELL

(continuing)

Shit!

He grabs a suitcase and goes for the bare essentials.

INT. PARKING GARAGE

As Godell emerges from the elevator, he looks around for some sign of trouble, then heads for his car. He tosses a jacket and a suitcase into the front seat.

EXT. STREET - DUSK

The BMW emerges from the garage. Godell looks around cautiously, then pulls out. Halfway down the block, he passes a familiar car. The two men in the blue Chevy meet his astonished stare.

INT. BMW

In the mirror he sees them pull out after him.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

Two beefy gents in drab suits sit just behind Gibson. These are obviously the marshals, waiting for Lowell to show the film. But Lowell is having problems of his own.

CHAIRMAN

Doctor Lowell, it is now three-ten.

LOWELL

Mr. Chairman, there has been some delay in getting the evidence to this hearing. I would request another time, perhaps tomorrow...

A great moan wells up from the press. The Chairman raps his pencil against the base of the mike.

CHAIRMAN

Please! Doctor Lowell. If you are not prepared at this time...

LOWELL

Mr. Chairman, my evidence is of the most vital nature.

CHAIRMAN

If you are not prepared at this time, you must yield.

Lowell exits and a great commotion fills the gym as newspeople tag along after him.

CHAIRMAN (O.S.)

(continuing)

Quiet, please...

CLOSE SHOT - GIBSON

As Lowell storms out, Gibson makes the most of his unexpected good fortune. He's holding an impromptu press conference.

GIBSON

(to reporters)

... You see what the utilities have been up against. Irresponsible scare tactics, unnecessary delays. This is exactly the sort of thing that is costing the public millions. It hits us all right in the pocketbook...

INT. ADJACENT CORRIDOR

The pay phones are jammed. In f.g., a female NEWSCASTER is calling her boss.

NEWSCASTER

It's a wash, Frank. Maybe on the way south we could cover that labor dispute...

In the next phone booth is Richard.

RICHARD

Operator, get me the State Police.

EXT. VENTURA STREET - DUSK

Twilight shades the mountains as the BMW threads through evening traffic. The blue Chevy is a few cars behind.

INT. BMW

Caught at a stop light, Godell anxiously studies the rear-view mirror. A car pulls alongside and he's almost afraid to look. It contains three teen-agers passing a joint and a large dog that stares him down.

He's beginning to sweat now. The stakes have escalated much quicker than he imagined.

A SIREN approaches. Traffic on the cross street pulls over and an ambulance speeds past. As the traffic begins to move again, Godell makes his decision. Jumping the light, he cuts off several cars and pulls in behind the ambulance.

EXT. FREEWAY ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A sign reads: VENTURA FWY NORTH

As the ambulance proceeds on the surface street, Godell speeds up the ramp and onto the freeway.

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

The BMW hugs the left lane moving at high speed.

INT. BMW

In the mirror, he sees no sign of anyone following. He tries to get a grip on himself. He slows down slightly, turns the RADIO ON, pulls into the right lane, and takes a map from the glove box.

He snaps on the dome light and spreads the map across the steering wheel, trying to pick a destination on the run.

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

The blue Chevy pulls alongside Godell's BMW.

INT. BMW

Godell glances up from the map to see the two goons looking him over. He snaps off the dome light. The map slips to the floor. He stares straight ahead, driving into the night, neck and neck with his pursuers.

But in Godell's eyes, we see his fear is under control and his mind is evaluating alternatives.

Suddenly, he downshifts, speeds ahead into the left lane with the Chevy racing to keep up. At the next exit, he waits until the last possible second, then sweeps across traffic into the off-ramp.

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

The Chevy nearly rolls over trying to make the exit. But they recover and peel off after him.

The BMW disappears into the freeway underpass.

EXT. BEACH - GODELL'S POV - NIGHT

Rising before us against the dark sea is the great floodlit dome of Ventanna.

EXT. VENTANNA POWER PLANT - NIGHT

The screaming Chevy ENGINE ECHOES from the dunes as they realize where Godell is headed. But they are too late. As the BMW screeches to a halt at the gate house, two armed GUARDS emerge with guns drawn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUARD

(holsters his gun)

Jesus, Mr. Godell! That's a hot car and all, but you could get yourself shot comin' up here like that.

INT. BMW

Once inside the fence, Godell finally looks back. Chevy is parked down the road, lights off.

INT. POWER PLANT LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Godell enters and proceeds to his locker. He opens it in a daze. He dons his hard hat and clips his film badge onto his sweat-soaked shirt. Then, for a few seconds, he stares at himself in a small mirror tacked to the inside of his locker as he installs his ear plugs.

INT. TURBINE BUILDING

Through the maze of pumps and compressors, Godell makes his way toward the control room. Under his hard hat his ear protectors keep out the ROAR.

GODELL'S POV

The SOUND MUTED by ear protectors, we SEE the plant now through Godell's eyes. It is a bizarre vision. The workmen who pass in disconnected silence seem disembodied and unreal.

The SOUND from ANOTHER SCENE intrudes.

P.A. VOICE (O.S.)

Doctor Martingayle, O. B.

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM

P.A. VOICE (O.S.)

Doctor Martingayle, O. B.

Richard and David are conferring with the DOCTOR. A Highway PATROLMAN waits in b.g.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR

We have her stabilized. No
evident spinal injuries.
Concussion is probable. We'll
be taking her to X-ray now.
You want to come in and wait?

PATROLMAN

Sir...

DAVID

(to Richard)

Go on. I'll take care of this.

Richard follows the medical party through the double doors.

PATROLMAN

Are you a relative?

DAVID

Friend.

PATROLMAN

Could you help me with some
details?

The Patrolman uses the Nurse's Station as a desk.

PATROLMAN

(continuing)

The victim's full name and address?

DAVID

Are you the one who found her?

PATROLMAN

Yes. First one on the scene.

DAVID

Did she... I mean, were there any
objects in the car?

PATROLMAN

(consults notes)

Purse, hat, a F-jacket... that's it.

DAVID

Yeah. That's it.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR

Richard sits outside the X-ray room, waiting. David
enters and sits beside him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

Any word?

Richard shakes his head.

RICHARD

What did you tell the cop?

DAVID

What could I say? 'The goons did it'?

RICHARD

(pause)

They just beat us, man. They just hauled off and knocked us on our ass. There's no way to fight that. No way.

INT. POWER PLANT CONTROL ROOM

There is a BUZZ and the entry light comes on. The guard checks the TV monitor and sees Godell. He BUZZES him in. He goes to the inner door and peers through the peephole. He unlocks the door and admits Godell.

Godell nods to others who nod back with curiosity. He crosses to his office.

INT. GODELL'S OFFICE

As Godell enters, he's shocked to see Ted Spindler behind his desk. Spindler looks up from his work, equally shocked.

SPINDLER

Jack?

GODELL

What're you doing here?

SPINDLER

(embarrassed)

They made me shift supervisor... just temporary.

(pause)

What brings you out this time of night?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL

I forgot something.

He makes a lame attempt to fake a search.

SPINDLER

(pause)

Are you okay, Jack?

GODELL

Sure. I'm fine.

SPINDLER

Anything I can get you?

GODELL

Where are you?

SPINDLER

What do you mean?

GODELL

The plant. You up to seventy-five percent yet?

SPINDLER

(hesitant)

No. Ninety percent. We're on our way up to the line. We should be there by midnight.

(stands)

We've still got that surging in one of the repressurization circuits, but otherwise, she's behaving like a lady.

Spindler starts to exit, but Godell closes the door.

GODELL

Ted. We've got to shut it down.

SPINDLER

Jack... please...

GODELL

I just found out the support structure may be defective. A whole bunch of QA reports were faked! Any sudden surge -- a SCRAM -- anything might kick off that vibration!

Spindler tries to take the edge off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SPINDLER

Jack, what the hell have you been smoking? Some little flower child must have got you by the pecker and turned you right around.

He laughs awkwardly and exits. Godell sinks into a chair, unsure if a nervous breakdown is in progress.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Godell emerges and the conversation stops. Everyone glances nervously away.

Godell makes a tour of the control consoles as the embarrassed technicians watch him from the corners of their eyes. Godell makes one last attempt to talk to Spindler, but Spindler avoids him by beginning a conversation with one of the TECHNICIANS.

TECHNICIAN

We've got a Delta-Q of 10-to-the-minus-4.

SPINDLER

(scans printout)

Might as well keep it moving.
Let's take it up to ninety-three percent.

The printouts CHATTER to life. As the power indicators creep upward, Godell scans the winking panels in mute frustration. Finally, he turns to the GUARD.

GODELL

Fred, let me out.

The Guard turns to his console and Godell grabs the gun from his holster.

GUARD

Hey!

As everyone watches open-mouthed, Godell waves the gun.

GODELL

Okay, everybody out.

A moment of paralysis.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CODELL
(continuing; louder)
I said out.

A couple of technicians look at Spindler and start to move for the door.

SPINDLER
(as he steps toward him)
Jack...

CODELL
Get out of here, Ted, or I'll drop you right where you stand.

Spindler exits.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR

David sits in a chair outside Jesse's room.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

Jesse is barely conscious and heavily sedated. Richard sits close, holding her hand, touching her.

JESSE
(tries to smile)
We should've listened to you, chief.

RICHARD
No, babe. I should've listened to you a long time ago. We'd be sitting in a cabin up in the Rockies right now.

JESSE
Think it's too late?

Richard is fighting tears.

RICHARD
Nope.

JESSE
How soon they gonna let me outta here?

RICHARD
A little while, babe.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR

William Gibson bursts through the doors, glances up and down the corridor and spots David waiting outside Jesse's room. Gibson approaches David.

DAVID

You slimy son-of-a-bitch.

GIBSON

Where's Hartman?

DAVID

I suppose you came here to finish the job.

GIBSON

What are you talking about?

Richard emerges from Jesse's room. He's outraged at the sight of Gibson.

RICHARD

Get out of here.

GIBSON

Look, Richard, I can understand how you feel, but however low your opinion may be of me, I assure you that I had nothing to do with this accident.

RICHARD

Accident?

GIBSON

Believe me, it has created as many problems for me as it has for you.

RICHARD

Your concern is touching.

(pause)

What do you want?

GIBSON

(looks around)

I need a minute with you in private.

INT. JESSE'S HOSPITAL ROOM

Jesse lies still. The sedation has taken effect. Richard enters. He touches him.

The WHUMP-WHUMP of HELICOPTER BLADES builds in the background.

He exits.

INT. CEPCO CORPORATE CHOPPER - NIGHT

in flight. The PILOT is chattering over his radio, preparing for a descent. Gibson sits in the right-hand seat, staring into the blackness. Richard and David are in back.

PILOT

We've over the plant now.

RICHARD

I don't see it.

PILOT

There...

RICHARD'S POV

A circle of landing lights blinks. But the dome of the reactor is strangely dark.

EXT. POWER PLANT - NIGHT

The place seems almost deserted. An official car pulls up and Gibson hustles Richard and David toward the entrance.

At the door to the main building, we SEE the guards are carrying rifles.

INT. POWER PLANT

There is intense activity at every turn. An engineer runs past with an armload of blueprints. His hard hat clatters to the floor, but he has no time to stop for it.

Accompanied by security officers, Gibson guides Richard and David through the bowels of the turbine building.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They pass a group of men in radiation suits, with oxygen supplies on their backs, sweltering in the heat of the turbine building, nervously smoking and glancing at watches.

Here and there we SEE clusters of technicians, pouring over circuit diagrams and delicately probing over the innards of their hardware as if defusing a bomb.

INT. STAIRWELL

Richard, with one of the guards, stops at the bottom, while Gibson leads David up the staircase and into...

INT. VISITORS' GALLERY

A temporary command post. Behind the bullet-proof glass, CEPSCO executives and engineers have been turned into 'visitors' in their own plant. MacCormack is there with DeYoung. As Gibson enters with David, we HEAR GODELL'S VOICE THROUGH THE INTERCOM.

GODELL (V.O.)

(intercom)

Look! I know what you're trying to do and I want you to knock it off.

GIBSON

He's here.

David crosses to the window and looks down at the gleaming control room. Godell stands at the printout, gripping the gun.

GODELL (V.O.)

(intercom)

I can tell somebody's tampered with the control rod circuits. Tell them to stop it right now. If I lose control in here, you're in big trouble... Do you hear me?

DeYoung steps to the window and hits the intercom switch.

DeYOUNG

(into mike)

Okay, Jack -- we hear you.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DeYOUNG (CONT'D)
(releases mike, speaks
into a walkie-talkie)
Ted, he's on the you guys.

SPINDLER (V.O.)
(from walkie-talkie)
For God's sake, if we can't tie
up the control rod circuits...

DeYOUNG
(insistent)
Then you'll find another way.

GODELL (V.O.)
(from intercom)
Who's that?! Tell them to get
away from the door.

Gibson steps up to the intercom.

GIBSON
(into mike)
It's Richard Hartman.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Godell, gun trained at the door, stands at the security
station.

RICHARD (V.O.)
(from intercom)
Mr. Godell? Jack? It's Richard
Hartman. They said you wanted to
talk to me.

Godell hits a button on the panel. Then he crosses to the
inner door, checks the peephole, and unlocks it.

Richard enters.

GODELL
(pause)
What happened to your young lady?

RICHARD
They ran her off the road.

GODELL
Is she all right?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

(pause)

I hope so.

Richard looks about, at the myriad winking lights, the CHATTERING TELEPRINTERS, as the plant runs blindly forward on its own.

CODELL

Looks like I need your help after all.

RICHARD

What're you planning to do?

CODELL

I want you to listen to me, hear the whole story. You can take it with you and tell everybody.

RICHARD

Your timing's a little off.

CODELL

You're a newsmen. They'll listen to you.

Richard is stunned. Slowly the absurdity of the situation dawns.

RICHARD

Me? Who do you think I am, man? Walter Cronkite or something? They'll drive me into the ground like a nail. Look at them...

He glances up to the grim faces lining the gallery windows.

RICHARD

(continuing)

What do you think is going on out there? Alarms, emergency evacuation? Hell, they don't even have the lights on! As soon as you give in, they're gonna bury you. Sooner than that if one of the guards can get a clear shot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Godell is confused, perplexed. Richard is overwhelmed to find himself the focus of this incredibly lethal situation. He racks his brain for a way out.

RICHARD

(continuing)

Jack, can they hear us down here?

GODELL

(glances about)

No.

RICHARD

Give me an hour and I can get you the real Walter Cronkite.

The printouts CHATTER above the distant ROAR. Richard looks up at the gallery. He reaches for the phone.

INT. VISITORS' GALLERY

A heated debate is underway. David stands with phone in hand awaiting their verdict.

GIBSON

You've got to talk him out of that, Adams. For his own safety. So far we've managed to keep this thing in the family, so to speak. But one outside call and it's out of our hands. The sheriff will be up here with the SWAT Squad.

McCORMACK

Get him to come out and we'll listen to anything he has to say. We don't want anybody to get hurt.

DAVID

If I were you fellows, I wouldn't mess around. He says he'll either make a public statement -- now -- or he'll flood the containment.

McCORMACK

(aside, to DeYoung)

Can he do that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DeYOUNG

(pause)

Right now he can do pretty much anything he wants. If he floods the containment, we'd just as well take a shovel to this place and bury it.

He looks down at Godell, then turns sharply to David.

MacCORMACK

Tell him we'll do it.

GIBSON

Are you crazy?

MacCORMACK

Shut up, Gibson.

(pause)

Guard, keep an eye on this gentleman. We'll be back in a minute.

MacCormack exits with Gibson and DeYoung.

INT. PLANT CORRIDOR

Just outside the visitors' gallery, the three men hold a strategy session.

GIBSON

Have you lost your mind?

MacCORMACK

What's your alternative? Let that lunatic wash out a billion-dollar investment? At least this buys time. It'll take the press an hour to get here --

GIBSON

Don't count on it.

MacCORMACK

I'm counting on you to take care of the goddam press. You do your job and I'll do mine.

Gibson exits. MacCormack turns to DeYoung.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

McCORMACK

Now what the hell's holding you people up?

DeYOUNG

Mr. McCormick, you spent a fortune on security in this place. Everything is designed to prevent a forced entry into the control room.

McCORMACK

God damn it, DeYoung, I'm tired of hearing what you can't do. I want to know what you can do.

DeYOUNG

The only other choice we have is to try to SCRAM the plant.

McCORMACK

(pause)

How?

DeYOUNG

An emergency shutdown. If that process can be initially triggered without Godell knowing -- then it's on automatic. He can't do anything manually for three or four minutes.

McCORMACK

And you think you can do it without the maniac catching you?

DeYOUNG

We'll sure as hell try.

McCORMACK

(sigh)

Then SCRAM the son-of-a-bitch. Just let me know when you're ready.

DeYoung exits down hall; MacCormack stares at him for a moment, then reenters visitors' gallery.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Godell sits at the central console, absently fiddling with the gun as he stares beyond the winking panel, reflecting. Richard studies him in silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Abruptly, Godell begins talking.

GODELL

I don't blame any of these people at the plant. I know you think they're evil, but they're not. They are men who have faith in themselves and in their... machines.

(pause)

But when you think of the power involved here... My God... You just have to believe. It's just... I lost that faith.

(turns to Richard)

I know people will think I'm crazy... but I had to do something. Nobody would listen. I just hope I know how to explain it to everybody. I wish I knew what to say.

RICHARD

(pause)

I think you just said it.

INT. CABLE SPREADING ROOM

The doors have been removed from dozens of the electrical relay panels and several technicians probe the circuits under the directions of the weary and haggard Spindler. Dr. Robertson, unshaven and hastily dressed, stands over a table anxiously pondering blueprints with DeYoung.

DeYOUNG

Can we get a man into the penetration chamber?

ROBERTSON

That's on the other side of the interlock. He'd know what we were up to right away.

DeYoung nods.

ROBERTSON

(continuing)

There's one thing here I'm thinking about...

(looks up)

If we can get control over the turbine circuits, we could give it a false trip-out signal.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBERTSON (CONT'D)

That would automatically throw
the reactor into a SCRAM.

Spindler overhears this.

SPINDLER

(uneasy)

Herman, you realize this is
exactly what McDell's spooked
about. A SCRAM at full power.

McYOUNG

Whose side are you on, Spindler?
Maybe you should go up there and
give him a hand.

SPINDLER

Get off my ass.

He turns back to his work.

McYOUNG

How long will it take?

ROBERTSON

We'll have to bridge around about
a dozen circuits, but most of them
terminate here, one way or the
other. Could take thirty minutes,
could take an hour. I can't say.

EXT. POWER PLANT - NIGHT

The lights are definitely on now. Beneath the great dome,
winking red lights seem to be everywhere as the press and
police converge on Ventana. The Sheriff must wait his
turn in the landing pattern as the newscopters descend
into the parking lot. The KMOT-TV mobile van is already
parked near the turbine building.

David emerges from the building in the company of two plant
guards and heads for the trailer.

Lights have been set up and Erhardt is interviewing
Gibson.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GIBSON

(to TV camera)

An employee who was about to be discharged as a result of last month's incident has barricaded himself in the plant. Please be assured that there is no danger to the public whatsoever and we should have the situation under control momentarily.

David passes and disappears into the KMOT trailer.

ERHARDT

(to Gibson)

Mr. Gibson... what kind of a madman would do something like that?

GIBSON

Well, he's obviously quite disturbed. We understand there were some family problems...

INT. KMOT TRAILER

David is being outfitted with a mini-camera. Mac Churchill is supervising. Erhardt's interview with Gibson continues on the monitors.

MAC

Looks like you're gonna make the network after all, kid.

DAVID

You pay double-time for hazardous duty?

MAC

For this scoop, you might even get my job.

David pauses at the exit.

DAVID

Don't let us down this time, Mac.

Churchill gives him the thumbs-up.

EXT. KMOT TRAILER

David, still under guard, emerges with camera, followed by a crew laying cable.

Erhardt's interview continues.

ERHARDT

We understand one of his demands is to make a public statement on television.

GIBSON

That has been mentioned. However, we're negotiating with him now and we don't think that will be necessary.

INT. PLANT CORRIDOR

A S.W.A.T. Squad is suiting up for battle as DeYoung studies blueprints with their COMMANDER. Their conversation stops abruptly when David enters with his camera, followed by guards and the men laying cable. He snakes his way through the police and moves on.

COMMANDER

What about the other guys in there?

DeYOUNG

Don't worry about them. But if anybody goes for the control console, stop him.

INT. POWER PLANT

The activity is feverish. Hard-hatted engineers with tools and equipment race through the plant on urgent missions. Everyone seems to have a walkie-talkie and the airwaves CRACKLE with REPORTS.

INT. KMOT TRAILER

Gibson, trying to talk to Churchill, is buffeted about the cramped quarters by technicians hastily preparing for the broadcast.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GIBSON
Goddamn it, Churchill, listen
to me.

Churchill is concentrating on the monitors. Erhardt is interviewing someone. His words are buried by the NOISE of technicians at work inside the trailer.

GIBSON
(continuing; shouts)
It's a totally irresponsible act
to put this maniac on live
television.

CHURCHILL
Listen, Gibson, you asked us to
come here.

GIBSON
But this whole thing was supposed
to be a ploy to get him out of
the control room!

CHURCHILL
(eye to eye)
My network is not part of your
goddamn company politics. I'm
the news director of this station
and there's one thing I can promise
you. If we get a signal from the
control room, they're going on live.
This is news, Mr. Gibson. Now get
out of my office.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

David appears on the monitor at the guard station. Godell hits the switch, unlocking the outer door. As he crosses to unlock the inner door, we SEE Richard standing in stocking feet on one of the consoles, hauling camera cable down through the ceiling, where one of the acoustical panels has been removed.

Godell checks the peephole and unlocks the door. David enters with his camera.

DAVID
(pause)
Jesus, I knew you were a tough
interview, but this is ridiculous.

INT. VISITORS' GALLERY

MacCormack, grim and silent, watches David hooking up the camera.

In background, the walkie-talkie CRACKLES with RADIO TRAFFIC as Spindler and Robertson check with their crews. Someone has brought a portable TV into the gallery. On screen, Erhardt is interviewing someone.

MacCormack grabs the phone.

MACCORMACK

DeYoung? Goddammit, do something!
The son-of-a-bitch is about to go
on the air.

INT. CABLE SPREADING ROOM

The tension is overwhelming. Spindler and his crew are working with desperate haste, but each move must be carefully considered.

SPINDLER

(into walkie-talkie)

Marty, you've got to short it out
exactly on my signal. If you're
one second too soon, he'll
figure out what we're up to.

(to a nearby
technician)

Marty's down there now. Let me
know when you're set.

In f.g., two technicians perform delicate surgery on racks of multicolored wires.

INT. CONTROL ROOM ACCESS CORRIDOR

The S.W.A.T. team inches into position, carrying heavy weapons.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Godell, tense and jumpy, frets about what he will say as Richard helps David shoulder the camera.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL

You'll tell me when to start?

RICHARD

No problem, Jack. I'll give you the high sign.

DAVID

Ready.

He flicks on the camera switch.

RICHARD

(into the headset)
Ready for color test, Mac.

INT. KMOT TRAILER

Churchill, wearing a headset, sits at the controls. We SEE Erhardt on the monitor, interviewing someone. Suddenly, another image appears on the second monitor. Churchill deftly adjusts the color and we SEE Godell in the control room.

MAC

(to headset)
Lookin' good, Richard. Stand by.
(to nearby technician)
Here we go.
(to headset)
Gene, camera's inside. Take it in.

Churchill begins the countdown.

ERHARDT

(on monitor)
Ladies and gentlemen, I've just received word that we have a camera in the control room. This is a KMOT exclusive. We take you there now.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Richard, hearing end of countdown, holds his hand aloft. Then he points to Godell.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GODELL
(clears his throat)
Hello. I'm ... This is --

DAVID (C.S.)
Just talk to me, Jack.

GODELL
(pause)
My name is Jack Godell -- and
I'm the shift supervisor here.
About a month ago, we had an
accident here...

INT. VISITORS' GALLERY

We SEE Godell on the small portable. MacCormack slumps
in his chair.

MacCORMACK
Jesus Christ.

INT. JESSE'S HOSPITAL ROOM

Jesse is propped up, watching the broadcast. Several
nurses and interns have gathered to watch with her.

GODELL
(on set)
The accident was far more serious
than the public was led to believe...

INT. KMOT TRAILER

Mac watches Godell on monitor.

GODELL
(on set)
For the past several weeks I've
been investigating the possibility
that some of these reports might
be fraudulent...

INT. CABLE SPREADING ROOM

Silence. Even the walkie-talkies are mute. Everyone
seems frozen in place, eyes fixed on Spindler.

CLOSEUP - ELECTRICAL JUNCTION

Spindler's hand reaches IN and delicately connects an alligator clip to a terminal.

INT. CONTROL ROOM ACCESS CORRIDOR

The S.W.A.T. Squad is in position. DeYoung waits silently with the Commander. Suddenly, his walkie-talkie CHATTERS to life.

ROBERTSON (V.O.)
(from walkie-talkie)
DeYoung! This is Robertson.
We've got it!

INT. VISITORS' GALLERY

Gibson and MacCormack, resigned and defeated, watch Godell's broadcast.

The WALKIE-TALKIE intrudes.

DeYOUNG (V.O.)
(from walkie-talkie)
Mr. MacCormack, do you read me?

MacCormack reaches for the radiophone.

MACCORMACK
(angry)
This is MacCormack. What is it?

DeYOUNG (V.O.)
(from walkie-talkie)
We're ready to SCRAM. Repeat,
ready to SCRAM.

MacCormack and Gibson are galvanized. Gibson rushes out the door.

MACCORMACK
(into walkie-talkie)
Then do it, for Christ's sake.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CLOSEUP - GODELL

GODELL
... These men have faith both in
themselves and their machines...
At one time, I did, too. But...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

An ANNUNCIATOR GOES OFF. Godell's concentration is broken.

A SECOND ANNUNCIATOR GOES OFF. Godell glances about. He heads for the panel.

ANGLE TO INCLUDE DAVID AND RICHARD

David and Richard, confused, follow him. As he reaches the panel, all hell breaks loose. Annunciator lights blinking everywhere. KLAXON HORNS ECHO in the distance.

GODELL

Oh, my God, no... NO!

INT. CONTROL ROOM ACCESS CORRIDOR

Gibson is standing near the S.W.A.T. team, gripping a fire ax.

DeYOUNG (V.O.)

(over walkie-talkie)

SCRAM in progress, SCRAM in progress.

Moving faster than the S.W.A.T. Squad, Gibson swings the ax into the TV cable. The first EXPLOSION of the armor-piercing shells blasts the control room door.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

DAVID

(flicking camera switch)

We're dead.

Godell is frantically trying to manipulate the controls manually. David and Richard watch helplessly.

GODELL

My God, this is exactly what I was trying to prevent.

EXPLOSIONS reverberate as the S.W.A.T. Squad attacks the inner door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

(shouts)

Jack, look out. They're comin' in.

Godell, unheeding, frantically tries to take corrective action at the console.

First S.W.A.T. man enters, sees Godell manipulating controls at the console and FIRES.

Godell falls to the floor, as other S.W.A.T. members enter, quickly followed by Spindler and DeYoung. The crew immediately takes over the control panel, shutting OFF the ANNUNCIATORS, and seemingly controlling the SCRAM.

Richard and David both realize Godell has been forgotten. In the sudden silence, Richard goes to Godell.

DAVID

(shouts)

Get a medic in here!

Spindler, having concentrated on the controls, now turns and realizes Godell has been seriously wounded. Shaken, he starts toward him, but events call him back to the console.

Richard tends to Godell, but he is unable to stop the flow of blood. Godell, near death, lies where he fell, his ear against the cold floor. He mumbles something. Richard bends close.

GODELL

(barely audible)

I can hear it.

Suddenly, everyone else can hear it, too. An unearthly VIBRATION builds deep in the bowels of the reactor building.

Spindler looks at Godell. Their eyes meet.

INT. REACTOR BUILDING

The massive pump is beginning to gyrate on its mounts.

In one of the monolithic steel supports, a tiny crack appears.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The pump supports are ripped from their mounts and transformed into shrapnel. One impacts into the concrete wall of the reactor. The other flies off into darkness, EXPLODING into a shower of sparks as it severs a bundle of cables.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Events have clearly been consigned to the gods. Everyone -- MacCormack, DeYoung, Spindler and the rest -- stands frozen in midstep amid the CACOPHONY of ALARMS.

Suddenly, the room is plunged into darkness. The ALARMS FADE AWAY. They are replaced by SHOUTS and CRIES. A few seconds later the emergency lighting goes on to reveal a freeze of stark terror.

Spindler looks down at Godell. He is dead.

INT. REACTOR BUILDING

The pump supports are gone but the massive machine is still suspended from its own piping -- tilted, shivering, oscillating ominously up and down -- but holding.

The WHINE DIMINISHES, the pump RATCHETS to a halt. There is a final violent SHUDDER, then blessed silence.

CLOSEUP - TELEPRINTER

Prints:

CORE TEMP	502	
	502	
	499	
R H R		NORM
STABLE SHUTDOWN		
STABLE SHUTDOWN		
EVENT ENDS	2332:05	A
EVENT DURATION	3:00:25	

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Spindler watches as the bodies cover up Godell and carry him out. Richard is on the phone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

(on phone)

They shot him, Jesse. Cut him right down.

(pause)

I think they're about to let us out of here. We'll be there as soon as we can.

(pause)

I know, honey, I love you, too.

He hangs up.

DAVID

She okay?

RICHARD

She's as good as they get.

DAVID

Did any of it get on the air?

RICHARD

Enough to make Godell look like a lunatic. 'Ex-employee seeks revenge, sabotages power plant.'

David picks up his camera, begins to walk out -- then abruptly smashes his foot into one of the consoles.

CLOSEUP - SPINDLER

One last look around. Slowly he gets up and leaves.

EXT. POWER PLANT - NIGHT

David and Richard emerge with the camera equipment, beaten and weary. They head for the KMOT trailer.

Gibson, indefatigable, is holding a press conference.

INT. KMOT TRAILER

Richard and David lay down their gear.

RICHARD

Looks like they did it again, didn't they?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAC

Well, some of it got out, anyway.

David is drawn to the image of Gibson on the monitor.

DAVID

That son-of-a-bitch never quits,
does he?

GIBSON

(on monitor)

The main thing I want to stress
is the public was in no danger
of any kind. Unfortunately, he
did cause some damage to the
plant itself, but that damage was
completely contained.

(pause)

I have a gentleman here with me,
Mr. Ted Spindler, who was in charge
throughout the accident. Ted,
maybe you could explain how your
team handled this problem.

Spindler, weary and hostile, appears on the monitor.

REPORTER (O.S.)

Mr. Spindler, is it true that this
fella, Godell, had a history of
mental disturbance?

SPINDLER

(on monitor)

No, that's not true. As far as
I'm concerned, Jack Godell was
probably the only sane man in
the place.

DAVID

Hey, Richard! Mac! Listen to
this.

INT. LOWELL'S RESIDENCE

On the edge of his chair, he watches Spindler spill the
beans.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SPINDLER

(from television)

If someday the full truth is known, and I feel it will be, Jack Godell may come to be regarded as a hero.

On TV we SEE Gibson trying to get Spindler out of there, but it's too late. The reporters won't allow it.

INT. D.B. ROYCE'S HOUSE

Bleary-eyed, glass in hand, Royce, too, is watching.

SPINDLER

(from television)

To the best of my knowledge, everything the man said was true.

MONTAGE

As Spindler's devastating speech continues, we CUT from one viewer to another, reviewing our cast, as we ROLL CREDITS.

THE END