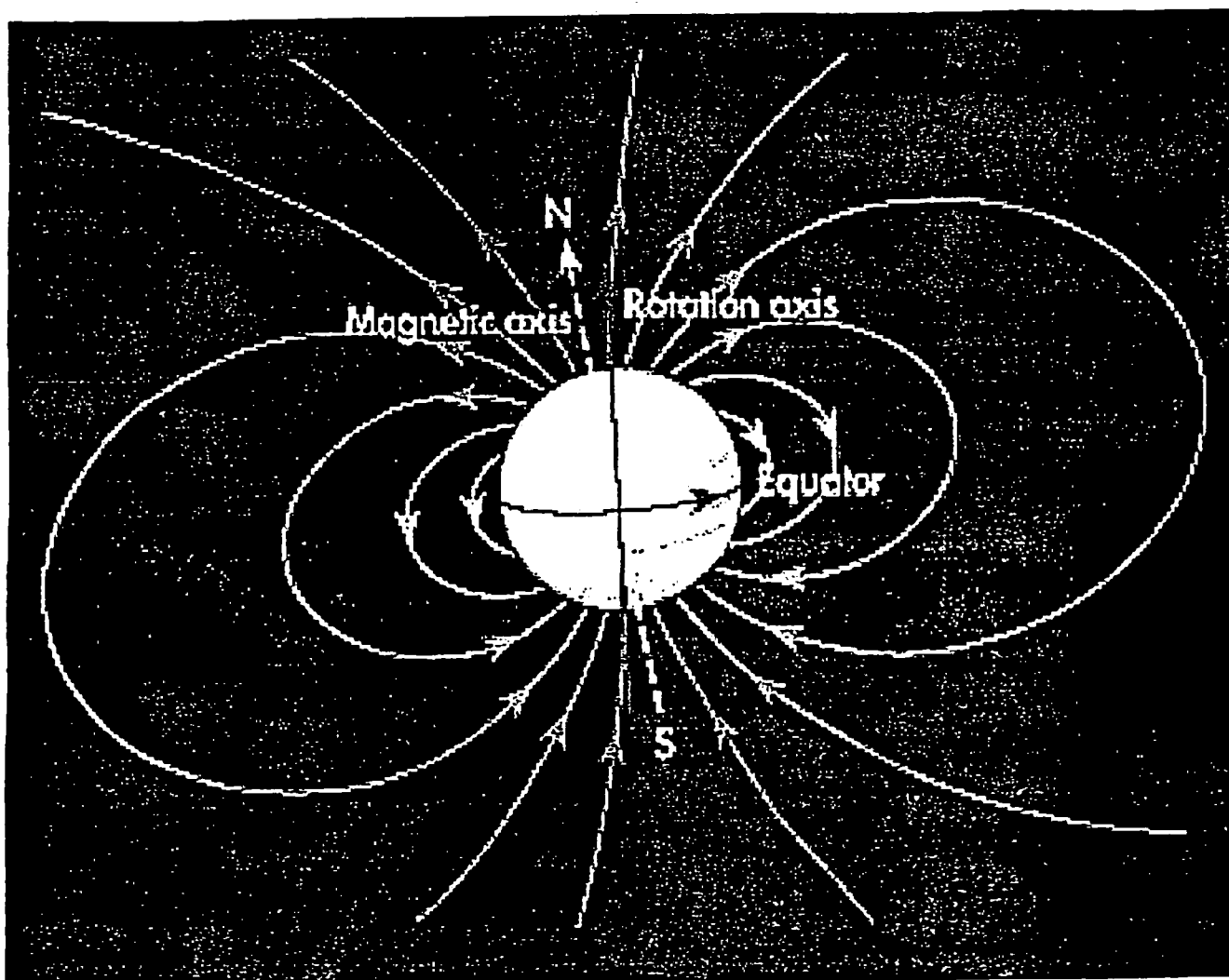
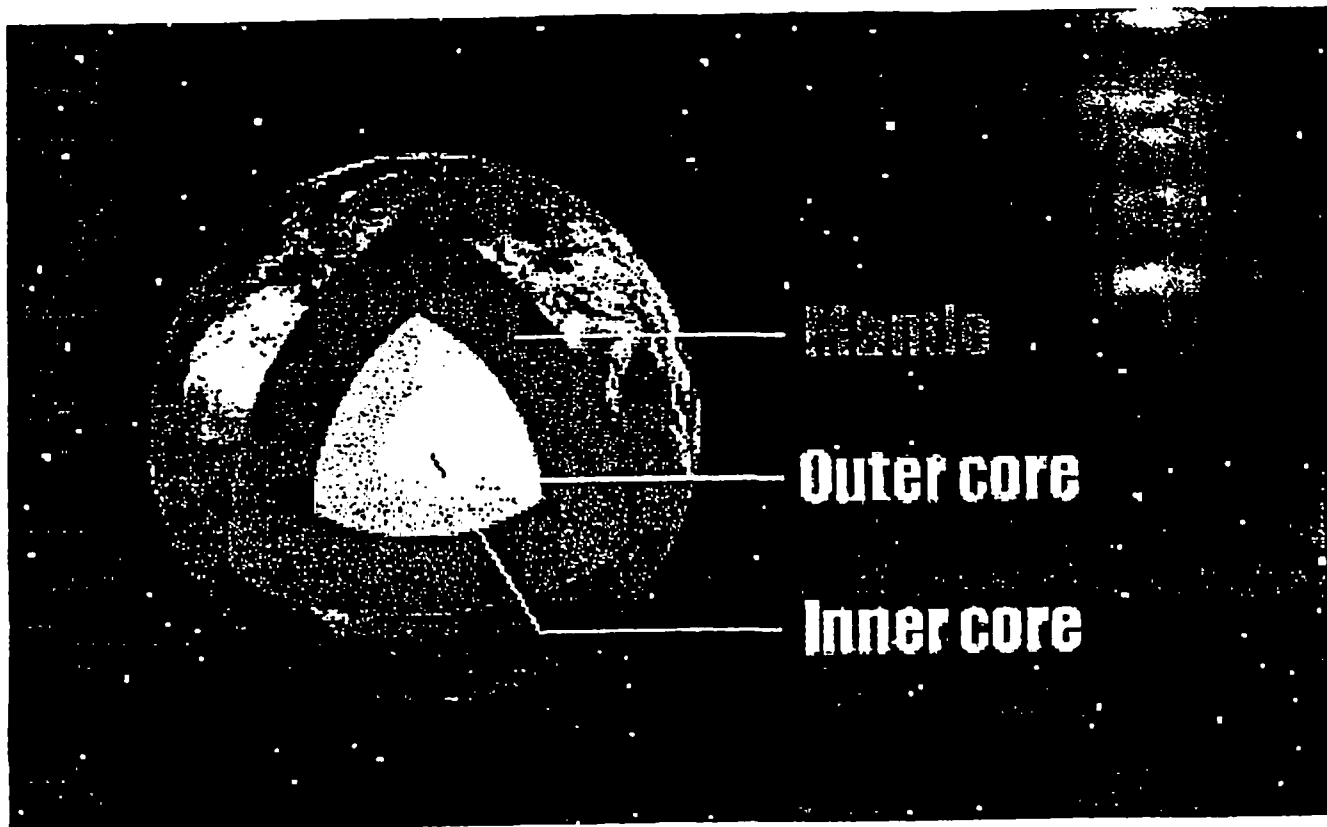


THE CORE

Written by

John Rogers

Writer's First Draft
(7th Revision)
July 6, 2001



FADE IN:

ESTABLISHING - MANHATTAN - DAY

Humanity in all its splendor. Behind it, a TICKING.
That ticking blends to:

ESTABLISHING - A WRISTWATCH

The sweeping second hand comes to a dead --

WIDEN TO REVEAL a young EXECUTIVE glancing at the watch.

EXECUTIVE

Hmm. Stopped.

INT. MANHATTAN INVESTMENT FIRM OFFICES - DAY

DAVID PERRY is the young executive. He's at his desk, grabbing a file. His friend PAUL is with him along with a half-dozen other EXECs. David is good-looking, smart, and obviously well-liked by the group.

PAUL

You say something, Dave?

DAVID

Nothing.

(to Secretary)

Everything okay in here, Kelly?

SECRETARY

It's brilliant, Mr. Perry.

Paul claps David affectionately on the shoulder. The group cuts away, David in the lead. The Secretary throws a longing look after him, as we FOLLOW --

David leads the team past the skyscraper windows toward a closed BOARDROOM.

DAVID

We ready guys?

The team gives an enthusiastic "Yeah!"

DAVID (CONT'D)

All right, let's go make thirty
million dollars!

Without breaking stride David throws open the Boardroom doors, smiling widely.

INT. BOARDROOM

A dozen EXECUTIVES glance up from their seats at the conference table as the team walks in, David in the lead --

David hits the edge of the table and FALLS, his momentum carrying his body up and onto the table.

And by the time his body comes to rest, David Perry is dead.

PAUL

David?

Total shock. Paul jumps up, rolls his friend over.

PAUL (CONT'D)

David! Jesus, David!

Someone SCREAMS. The Boardroom dissolves into panicked chaos. As they try to revive David --

ANGLE ON

the WINDOWS, showing an office on the other side of Fifth Avenue, where another group works over the unconscious form of an OLDER MAN.

EXT. FIFTH AVE. - MANHATTAN - CONT.

A CAB slams into a hydrant, the CABBIE slumps half-out of his vehicle. A few people shake their cell phones with puzzled looks. TRAVEL UP through the Fifth Avenue crowds to find a JOGGER collapsed on the sidewalk. AMBULANCE SIRENS sound.

ESTABLISHING SHOT: UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS - CHICAGO - DAY

The campus is suffused with the lazy glow of late summer.

INT. LECTURE HALL

The class is full, but half-dozing.

JOSH (O.S.)

Sonar mapping revealed a deeper discontinuity ...

REVEAL DR. JOSHUA KEYES, early 30's, in jeans and a button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up. A working guy's scientist. He's lecturing in front of a chalked cross-section of the Earth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)

The Gutenberg Discontinuity is at a depth of --

(looking at students)

God, is there a single active brain wave out there?

Josh does the flatline BEEEEEP. The students laugh.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Try to drag your beer-sodden minds to attention for just fifteen more minutes, people. Now who can tell me the depth of the Gutenberg Discontinuity?

(silence)

Can anybody even spell "Gutenberg"?

Josh stops. The students aren't looking at him. They're staring at the classroom doorway.

Two FEDERAL AGENTS stand in the door. Black suits, earpieces, the whole rig.

AGENT #1

Doctor Joshua Keyes?

JOSH

(beat)

Mayyy-be.

AGENT #1

Yes or no, sir.

JOSH

Yes.

AGENT #2

Please come with us, sir.

JOSH

Can't this wait --

AGENT #1

Now, sir.

Josh considers for a moment, tosses his chalk to his gangly Teacher's Assistant, ACKER.

JOSH

Finish up, Acker.

Josh EXITS with the Agents. The students BUZZ excitedly.

EXT. EARTH SCIENCES BUILDING - DAY

The Agents lead Josh to a government car.

JOSH

Guys, what's going on?

AGENT #1

We don't know, sir.

JOSH

You don't know.

AGENT #1

Your security clearance is higher than ours, sir.

JOSH

(beat)

I have security clearance?

AGENT #2

We were just told to bring you to your jet.

JOSH

Oh.

(beat)

I have a jet?

ESTABLISHING SHOT: MANHATTAN SKYLINE - THAT NIGHT

EXT. NEW YORK HOSPITAL - MAIN ENTRANCE

A black car pulls up. Josh and the Agents step out. Agent #1 guides Josh through an unlit side door.

INT. CORRIDOR

Josh and the Agents walk down a dim corridor. It's jammed with DOCTORS, SOLDIERS, and disturbingly enough a guy in a HAZMAT suit. Josh pulls up short at SERGEI PUTECHIN, a heavysset man in a topcoat, late 30's, banging on a soda machine and swearing in RUSSIAN.

JOSH

Sergei?

SERGEI

(grinning)

About time. They said they would brief me when you got here.

Sergei puts his arm over Josh's shoulder. The Agents lead them DEEPER into the basement of the hospital.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Big panic. Biochemists, lots of military. How are you, tovarisch?

JOSH

Great. Did you know I had a jet?

SERGEI

I think they are going to want it back.

JOSH

How's the family?

SERGEI

Gretchen is well. The children have become foul American brats. We used to stand in line for hours for meat. Now we stand in line for hours for Pokemon. I don't know which is worse. When are you going to meet a nice girl, bring her for dinner?

This is how Sergei talks. He's not big on segues.

JOSH

Ah, you know, married to my work.

SERGEI

So am I, which makes my wife my mistress, that's why I'm still in love with her. So, no girl?

They pass through another set of doors.

INT. HOLDING ROOM

Josh, Sergei and the Agents walk down a row of gurneys.

JOSH

Yeah, Geophysics, it's like being a rock starrrrrrfuck these are BODIES.

REVEAL seventeen gurneys with white-sheeted CORPSES on them. Josh and Sergei freeze.

SERGEI

We have taken a wrong turn.

GEN. PURCELL (O.S.)

I'm afraid not, gentlemen.

REVEAL GENERAL THOMAS PURCELL, early 50's, all Army but with a hawkish, intelligent gaze. He's in full uniform.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERGEI
General Purcell.

On the General's nod, the Agents exit.

JOSH
Why are we here?

GEN. PURCELL
I remind you, you're both bound by
the Official Secrets Act.
(they nod)
At ten-thirty a.m. local time
seventeen civilians, all within a
three block radius, died. They did
not get sick first. They simply hit
the ground dead.

Josh stares at the sheeted bodies. His hand reaches out
to touch one, hesitates, then drops to his side.

SERGEI
Bioweapon?

GEN. PURCELL
Our first guess, but no.

JOSH
They all died at the same time?

GEN. PURCELL
As far as we can tell, to the
second.
(then)
This hits CNN in one hour. I need a
reason or feasible cover story.

SERGEI
What good can we do? We just --

JOSH
They all had pacemakers.

Sergei stares at Josh. General Purcell nods.

GEN. PURCELL
Under one minute. Your reputation's
well deserved.

General Purcell pulls back a sheet. It's the unfortunate
David Perry, but now we see the SCAR on his chest.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH
(looking away)
Hey hey hey --

SERGEI
How did you guess? With no
information on the victims?

JOSH
You and I are information. We both
consult for the High Energy Weapons
Board. Calling us means they
suspect an electromagnetic pulse
weapon. If these are the only
fatalities, they must be people
susceptible to electronic
interference, Q.E.D. --

SERGEI
Pacemakers. Sometimes, my friend,
you are spooky.

GEN. PURCELL
The pacemakers are all from
different manufacturers. My big
question: did some sort of weapon
kill these people?

JOSH
(mentally calculating)
Three block radius -- any tremors
detected from a detonation?

GEN. PURCELL
No.

JOSH
The power you'd need to create an EM
pulse strong enough -- No. No tech
or weapon I've ever heard of.

GEN. PURCELL
(to Sergei)
Anything the former Soviet Union
might have on the auction block?

SERGEI
Phhh. I wish. Soviet technology
was not subtle. Vaporize New York,
yes. Silently kill seventeen
people, no.

General Purcell leads them to the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GEN. PURCELL

Thank you. Participate in tonight's briefings, then we'll get you home.

JOSH

What'll you put on the news?

GEN. PURCELL

For now we'll blame the "defective" pacemakers. We altered the times of deaths to cover the most sensational aspect of the case.

SERGEI

It is bizarre.

GEN. PURCELL

As long as it's not a weapon, we can all breathe a little easier.

Sergei and the General step out through the doors. Josh hesitates, looks at the seventeen white sheets. He doesn't seem prepared to breathe easier any time soon.

EXT. LONDON - TRAFALGAR SQUARE - THE NEXT MORNING

Tourists, commuters pack the Square. One COUPLE with a LITTLE BOY stop for a picture. The Boy begins to CRY.

MUM

What is it, sweetheart?

The Boy points. A DEAD BIRD is on the pavement amongst the hundreds of PIGEONS swarming the Square. The parents exchange a look, sigh.

DAD

Well, Sam, that happens sometimes, the birdie is flying and --

THUMP. Another dead pigeon lands not a yard from them.

DAD (CONT'D)

What the hell --

THUMP THUMP. Two more dead birds drop near them. They and other tourists DODGE as some of the airborne pigeons SWOOP around them wildly.

MUM

Let's go!

They run for the nearby Virgin Megastore. An eerie high-pitched CRY fills the air. The DAD looks up --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hundreds of birds swarming like insects, making a SOUND birds just don't make. Some SMACK into buildings. Others dive-bomb the crowd --

The Parents and their Son pull their coats over their heads, still running. The Square's in a panic, cars squealing to a halt, windshields SHATTERED. People are knocked down by errant birds, which now fill the sky, SCREAMING that bizarre tone ...

CRACKS sound as the birds CRASH into every building. Broken glass rains onto the street. The Family is caught up in the mob trying to get to cover, the birds SWOOPING into them, drawing blood. People are being trampled.

CLOSE ON the Little Boy, whose crying BLENDS into the cry of the birds ...

INT. GEOPHYSICS LAB - UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS - DAY

Acker and Josh's other Grad student, a red-headed girl named DANNI, work in the sprawling lab. The place is a mix of cutting-edge tech and borrowed academic make-do's. Josh drags himself into the lab.

ACKER

"He's a man who lives a life of dan-jahhhh ..."

DANNI

What did the Men in Black want?

JOSH

Can't talk about it. Professor needs caffeine.

Josh crosses to a complex apparatus wrapped in FOG from the LIQUID NITROGEN TUBES surrounding it. He reaches in between the coils, pulls out a SODA. He hops it between his hands, stung by the cold.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Ow, goddamit -- anything on the news about pacemakers?

DANNI

Yeah, but it got pushed off by the birds.

ACKER

It's one freaky news day.

Acker flips on a TV. CLOSE ON the screen, where a BBC reporter stands in the chaos at Trafalgar Square.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REPORTER

Eleven people are confirmed dead, trampled in the panic. Eyewitnesses state that the swarming birds were not attacking people, but seemed to be flying blind --

BACK TO

JOSH

Weird.

ACKER

It's not the first time, you know.

Acker nods at his desk -- it's covered with conspiracy magazines, Charles Fort books, etc.

ACKER (CONT'D)

This magazine *The Fortean Times* reported violent bird swarms twice last year in Australia and Japan.

Josh is thinking -- hard. Two bizarre occurrences ...

JOSH

How do birds navigate?

DANNI

By sight?

JOSH

No, I mean the long range stuff.

ACKER

Magnetic field, I think. Little ions in their brains align with the magnetic field of the Earth.

Josh moves through the lab with purpose, Acker and Danni trailing him.

JOSH

Acker, hit the 'Net, do a search for ... two years ought to do it. Any and all, uh, "weird news." Bizarre animal migrations. Unusual power outages, atmospheric phenomenon, unexplained plane crashes -- of course, plane crashes -- use your imagination.

ACKER

That's a huge search.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Josh is wiping blackboards, firing up computers.

JOSH

You can use our T-1 line to find
Sailor Moon porn, you're up to this.
Danni, get the brightest kids from
the Field Theory Class, design a
computer model of an electro-
magnetic field -- map the anomalies
Acker finds to grunt out the
equations. Grab those smelly kids
from the Non-Linear Diff class too.

DANNI

What are we doing?

JOSH

I need a 3-D computer model of the
Earth to lay the field over.

ACKER

The planet Earth?

JOSH

Yeah, the planet Earth, you know,
the pretty blue one. Do this and
I'll sign your doctorates
blindfolded. Do not pass "Go", go
directly to Ph.D.

Acker and Danni exchange a look, run off. Josh scrawls
equations on a whiteboard. He's muttering softly:

JOSH (CONT'D)

Be wrong be wrong be wrong ...

TRACK along the whiteboard, GLIDING along the white
surface until we reach an edge and PEEL OFF and AWAY to
find --

Perfect BLACK OUTER SPACE. The white surface was --

THE SPACE SHUTTLE "ENDEAVOUR", coasting under a million
stars.

SUPER: TWO DAYS LATER

INT. ENDEAVOUR - CARGO HOLD - DAY

MAJOR REBECCA "BECK" CHILDS, U.S.A.F., 35, floats through
the aft bulkhead. She's got the face of an angel, eyes
of a gunfighter, and moves like she was born in zero-G.
Her mission commander, IVERSON, speaks over intercom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

IVERSON (V.O.)

One minute to interface, Major Childs.

Beck removes the left glove of her pressure suit. She slips off a DIAMOND ENGAGEMENT RING. Her face softens.

BECK

Hated the goddamned bridesmaid dresses anyway.

She drops the ring into a waste-tube marked "LIQUIDS ONLY", then hits a red button. We hear SUCTION.

EXT. ENDEAVOUR - CONT.

The ring spins off into space.

INT. ENDEAVOUR COCKPIT

Beck floats past several MISSION SPECIALISTS and into the COCKPIT. She floats into the pilot's seat, past FLIGHT ENGINEER TIMMINS, 30's, minding his panels. Commander RICHARD IVERSON, 40's, gives Beck an icy glare.

IVERSON

Interface in twenty-three seconds, Major. I need you focused.

BECK

I know the timetable, Commander Iverson, and I have the controls.

She takes over as Iverson lifts his hands off, stares at her. She ignores him.

MISSION CONTROL (V.O.)

Endeavour, this is Houston, at this time we are go for re-entry.

BECK

Houston, Endeavour descending through two-one-six miles coming up on re-entry interface.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - HOUSTON, TX.

Flight and System ENGINEERS crowd the room. NASA Control Chief TALMA STICKLEY, 50's, wears rose-tinted glasses, her hair in a tight bun. She has a smooth Southern drawl, but she's the iron fist in the velvet glove.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STICKLEY

Endeavour, this is Control Chief Stickley. I do believe this is the first time there's been a woman on both ends of this conversation.

INT. ENDEAVOUR COCKPIT

Beck's mouth shows precisely one millimeter of mischief.

BECK

Affirmative, Chief, and I'm sure everyone is filled with delight at this momentous occasion.

Her eyes slide toward Iverson. Timmins shakes his head.

INT. MISSION CONTROL

Stickley also has the ghost of a smile.

STICKLEY

I am sure, Major. Endeavour, you are go for re-entry on my mark.

BECK (V.O.)

Roger that, Houston.

CHIEF ENGINEER

What the hell --

A KLAXON screams. Some Engineers stand, others SHOUT frantically into their headsets. Stickley raises a single eyebrow. All eyes go to the TRACKING WALL MAP.

STICKLEY

(implacably calm)

Endeavour, y'all are deviating from course. Verify re-entry coordinates, please.

No response. The SHOUTING of Engineers fills the room. In a perfectly normal tone of voice, Stickley says:

STICKLEY (CONT'D)

Quiet.

The room immediately falls DEAD SILENT.

STICKLEY (CONT'D)

They're in the ionosphere, we've temporarily lost radio contact.

EXT. ENDEAVOUR

The ship careens into the Earth's atmosphere, the HEAT SHIELD BURNING with extraordinary intensity.

INT. MISSION CONTROL

Stickley remains the cool center of the hubbub. -

STICKLEY

I want their location to the inch,
boys, to the inch.

INT. ENDEAVOUR COCKPIT

Descending, they break through a thick layer of overcast. Iverson looks out his window, checks his instruments.

IVERSON

We've made an error.

TIMMINS

Not according to the Nav computer.

IVERSON

I've made this re-entry 213 times in the simulator. We're not where we should be.

BECK

He's right. Where are we?

INT. MISSION CONTROL

Engineers call up a new course on the TRACKING MAP.

CHIEF ENGINEER

We have a problem, Ms. Stickley.

STICKLEY

We've had problems before.

She sees the new course.

STICKLEY (CONT'D)

That's ... interesting.

(into radio)

Endeavour, this is Houston, re-entry was flawed, and you are now 3-niner-2 miles off course.

(to Engineers)

Three hundred ninety-two miles off course?

INT. ENDEAVOUR COCKPIT

BECK

Houston, we're at 4-6-zero miles
from Edwards Air Force Base at 6-
zero thousand feet.

TIMMINS

The Navigation computers, the
satellites, everything's wrong --

IVERSON

We won't make Edwards.

BECK

We'll make Edwards.

INT. MISSION CONTROL

STICKLEY

They'll never make Edwards.

CHIEF ENGINEER

Decrease the descent angle.

STICKLEY

They're four hundred miles from the
landing zone and they've got two
hundred miles of glide time. The
Shuttle glides like a brick.

FLIGHT ENGINEER #1

No alternate sites within range.

STICKLEY

Find me some desert --

FLIGHT ENGINEER #2

In three minutes they're over Los
Angles.

All eyes go to Flight Engineer #2, then to Stickley.

CHIEF ENGINEER

They hit L.A. at full speed, they'll
wipe out a bunch of city blocks.

An L.A. MAP pops up on the wall display. Stickley cocks
her head. The Engineers look where she's looking, REACT.

STICKLEY

(radio)

Endeavour, we have a landing site
for you.

EXT. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

ZOOM in from the Pacific. As always, LAX's runways are jammed with arriving and departing flights.

INT. LAX CONTROL TOWER - DAY

ALARMS RING, people SCRAMBLE all over each other. -
Intercoms scratch messages to ground crews. CONTROLLERS frantically re-route incoming traffic.

LEAD CONTROLLER

Los Angeles Control to all aircraft!
Clear the runways! We are declaring
an emergency!

INT. ENDEAVOUR COCKPIT

The astronauts are shocked. Beck FIGHTS the controls.

BECK

Say again, Houston.

STICKLEY (V.O.)

Endeavour, turn to heading one-eight-zero. Expect contact with Los Angeles Center for approach vectors.

TIMMINS

We are coming in hot and low.

EXT. LOS ANGELES SKYLINE

The SKYSCRAPERS of downtown, Endeavour's screaming down --

INT. LAX CONTROL TOWER

A CONTROLLER spots a BLIP on his screen.

CONTROLLER

Got 'em! Inbound at 2-niner-thousand!

LEAD CONTROLLER

Space Shuttle Endeavour, this is Los Angeles Center. Descend at 1200 feet per minute to runway 1-6 Right.

BECK (V.O.)

Roger, Los Angeles, turning 2-6-zero for localized intercept.

EXT. DODGER STADIUM

A sold-out crowd watches their team lose to the Cardinals.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGLE ON

Mark McGuire at bat. The pitch --

McGuire swings, connects --

A SONIC BOOM as the SPACE SHUTTLE hurtles overhead! The crowd sits, stunned, as a thousand CAR ALARMS go off.

INT. ENDEAVOUR COCKPIT

IVERSON

Keep your hand on the ejection ring,
Mr. Timmins.

BECK

Don't you punch us out, Timmins.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DAY

QUICK CUTS -- VARIOUS LOCALES: Angelenos stop their cars in a skid, pedestrians point as the SHUTTLE descends over their heads. Car RADIOS SQUEAL with news updates.

EXT. LAX RUNWAY

Machinery's been cleared, emergency crews are ready ...

INT. LAX CONTROL TOWER

Fifty bodies press against the glass ...

INT. ENDEAVOUR COCKPIT

Beck is fighting, muttering through gritted teeth.

BECK

Don't you do this to me! Come on!

EXT. PLAYA DEL REY AVENUE

The last street before the runways, people instinctively DUCK as the Shuttle SKIMS the rooftops at 300 m.p.h.

EXT. LAX RUNWAY

The Shuttle crosses the runway threshold -- INTERCUT the COCKPIT and the SHUTTLE --

WITH THE SHUTTLE as it TOUCHES DOWN HARD, still doing 300 --

Beck throws a switch --

The SPEED BRAKES fly open, but they're still rolling --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

IVERSON

230, 220, 210 -- We're not going to make it!

A STEEL BLAST FENCE waits at the end of the runway. The tires SMOKE, the wheel brakes CATCH FIRE --

WARNING HORNS in the cockpit! Timmins crosses himself.

IVERSON (CONT'D)

Punch it!

BECK

DO NOT EJECT!

She SLAMS a LEVER, and A BLUE NASA PARACHUTE BURSTS from the Shuttle, air-braking them --

BAAAAAMM!! Endeavour SMASHES though the BLAST FENCE, the LANDING GEAR SHEARS OFF --

It SLEDS across DOCKWEILER BEACH, but slowing --

Finally coming to rest SLAMMING into the surf of the PACIFIC OCEAN, a huge SPLASH covering the cockpit.

ON ENDEAVOUR

Nose in the water, waves breaking over the windshield.

INT. ENDEAVOUR COCKPIT

A moment of stunned silence.

BECK

... We took the collision insurance, right?

INT. JOSH'S GEOPHYSICS LAB - CHICAGO - DAY

The place is a wreck. Pizza boxes everywhere, every blackboard covered with equations. It's empty except for Josh, who stands with his back to us, staring at one of the boards. Acker and Danni RUSH IN.

DANNI

Turn on the news! The Shuttle --

JOSH

(soft)

Danni.

They stop short. Josh turns his head in partial profile.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)

Acker's had a mad crush on you for a year, Danni.

ACKER

Doc!

JOSH

Acker. Danni's had a mad crush on you for eight months.

Acker and Danni stare at each other. Josh reaches back without turning.

JOSH (CONT'D)

This is my credit card. Go to the Four Seasons. Get a suite. Order some champagne.

The two grad students don't know what to make of this, but the tone of Josh's voice ... Acker tentatively takes the card, and they BACK OUT.

We SWING around to see Josh's ravaged face.

JOSH (CONT'D)

(soft)

Why me?

He slides down, sits down hard on the floor.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Not me. Don't make me the one.

ANGLE ON

Josh staring at the equations in the background. In the foreground, a model of Earth is on his computer, covered by multi-covered layers. The numbers "4 months 3 days" flashes on the monitor over and over again.

ESTABLISHING SHOT: THE PENTAGON - AFTERNOON

EXT. PENTAGON GROUNDS

Huge crowds of people crisscross the quad.

JOSH (O.S.)

Dr. Zimsky!

One man turns -- DR. LLOYD ZIMSKY, late 40's, strong nose, shock of unruly hair, all cultivated to look exactly like the genius he is. Josh has been waiting. He jogs up with a FOLDER. The following is done WALKING.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)

My name's Josh Keyes.

(hands him the folder)

I need --

Zimsky's AUTOGRAPHING the folder.

ZIMSKY

A fan, eh? "Got my start because of your book" kind of thing. Glad to meet you. Now pardon me, I'm late for the White House, the usual --

JOSH

Don't sign it, read it. I need you to confirm my results.

Zimsky vibrates with annoyance.

ZIMSKY

Do you have any idea who you're talking to -- no, of course you do, I'm Lloyd Zimsky.

JOSH

Read it.

ZIMSKY

Listen, I'm sure you're the best in your field --

JOSH

Geophysics.

ZIMSKY

(beat, smile)

Then you're not the best.

JOSH

I know, and this combines geophysics and electromagnetic field theory, so --

ZIMSKY

And your doctorate is in -- ?

JOSH

Both.

Zimsky raises an eyebrow. He playfully brandishes the folder.

ZIMSKY

All right, I'll bite. What is this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH

The end of the world.

Zimsky LAUGHS. Josh doesn't.

INT. ZIMSKY'S OFFICE - HOURS LATER

Josh paces, desperately waiting to be proven wrong. Zimsky has Josh's data spread out on his desk. He alternates between it and his own equations on a whiteboard. Finally Zimsky just stares at the data. Josh and Zimsky exchange a look --

JOSH

Shit.

ZIMSKY

No. My lab's got the most delicate detection instruments in the world. There's no way I missed this. You must be wrong.

JOSH

Arrogance as scientific principle. Great.

ZIMSKY

I'll review your data. I'm sure with careful comparison to my own work, we'll find you're mistaken.

JOSH

Fine. But the bigger effects are going to start happening soon.

Josh opens the door.

ZIMSKY

Where are you going?

JOSH

Just got to keep moving. Just gotta keep --

He can't finish, chops the air with his hand for "moving." His control's fraying. He steps out SLAMMING the door, CRACKING the glass. As soon as he's gone, Zimsky grabs his phone.

ZIMSKY

(into phone)

Get everybody to the lab! NOW! And get me Brazzleton's latest research!

INT. DC SUBURBAN HOME - EVENING

A doorbell RINGS. Two little girls, nine year old KATYA and four year old ANNA, rush to answer it. Josh is there.

ANNA

Josh! Josh! Josh!

Josh forces a weak smile, steps through the threshold. Anna's attached herself to him. Katya walks backward.

KATYA

What did you bring us, did you bring us anything?!

Sergei's wife GRETCHEN comes in. She's as delighted as the girls.

GRETCHEN

Why didn't you call?!

(to girls)

Get off, let Mom hug her boyfriend.

She gives him a hug. Josh squeezes back. Gretchen can sense something. They make eye contact for a second.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

... Josh?

Before he can say anything, Sergei blows in.

SERGEI

You! Great! You can hook up this satellite dish I bought. Go, go, all of you!

Gretchen scootches the girls out. Anna runs around screeching in delight, sucking Katya into the game. A wonderful family hubbub. Sergei leads Josh in.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Katya has a crush on you, better you than those boy bands, little punks can't even grow a proper beard just those scraggly -- you know, like they've got hamsters on their face.

Sergei stops. Josh is still back by the door, immobile.

JOSH

I didn't have anybody else to call.

(beat)

How sad is that?

Sergei stares at him, puzzled.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)
You're so lucky, Sergei. Wife, kids
... home.

SERGEI
(long pause)
I'll get my coat, yes?

JOSH
Yeah. Ahh, Christ yeah.

INT. PENTAGON CORRIDOR - LATER THAT NIGHT

General Purcell is heading home. He stops, surprised.
Major Beck Childs is standing there in her Air Force
dress uniform.

GEN. PURCELL
Rebecca?

BECK
Only you and Dad ever call me that.

GEN. PURCELL
Sorry, "Beck."

They fall into step together.

GEN. PURCELL (CONT'D)
What are you doing in Washington?

BECK
The Board of Review is next week.
Just trying to get a sense of the
brass' mood.

The General falters a step. Several PERSONNEL RUN BY.

BECK (CONT'D)
It wasn't my fault. The navigation
satellites were on the fritz.

GEN. PURCELL
They need a fall guy.

They walk a moment. More PERSONNEL race by.

BECK
How bad could it be?

GEN. PURCELL
You crashed the Space Shuttle. How
good do you think it could be?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BECK
This is my life --

GEN. PURCELL
Beck --

BECK
I was studying for the Academy when
I was thirteen! It's always been
and it still is my whole damn life --

GEN. PURCELL
It's over.

They stop near the EXIT DOORS. The General makes eye
contact with Beck for the first time.

GEN. PURCELL (CONT'D)
Your career's over. I'm sorry.

Beck stares at him, jaw clenched. More PERSONNEL rush
outside. General Purcell SNAPS in annoyance.

GEN. PURCELL (CONT'D)
Where the hell is everybody going in
such a hurry?

The General and Beck STEP OUTSIDE --

EXT. PENTAGON EXIT - NIGHT

General Purcell and Beck join a CROWD staring up in
amazement. A bizarre, phosphorescent MULTI-COLORED GLOW
shines down on everything from the sky above.

BECK
Oh. My. God.

INT. LUCKY STARS MOTEL BAR - WASHINGTON D.C. - THAT NIGHT

TRACK to a back table COVERED with EMPTY BEER and VODKA
BOTTLES. Josh and Sergei are slumped in the booth,
staring off into space. They're both toasted.

SERGEI
Boschze-moi.

JOSH
Yep.

SERGEI
Zimsky really tried to give you his
autograph?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Josh gives a dry, broken chuckle, rubs his eyes.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Any chance you're wrong?

Josh shakes his head "no." Sergei reaches into his wallet, produces a PHOTO. It's a cheap K-Mart wallet-size of GRETCHEN AND THE GIRLS. He places it on the table between them. Sergei looks up at Josh. Josh, knowing what he's just done to his best friend's world, can't even look at him. He takes another drink.

Two FIGURES block our view. REVEAL Agents #1 and #2.

AGENT #1

Dr. Keyes, your presence is required
at the Pentagon.

JOSH

I'm drinking.

AGENT #2

I can see that, sir. Please come
with us.

JOSH

And if I say no?

AGENT #1

We have no sense of humor, and we're
armed.

EXT. MOTEL BAR

The Agents lead Josh and Sergei outside. A CROWD is staring up, faces reflecting brilliant lights from the sky. The Agents pause, stare up with Sergei --

REVEAL: the **AURORA BOREALIS**, the "Northern Lights", a hundred times BRIGHTER and FARTHER SOUTH than it's ever been. A fantastic RAINBOW dances, rolls across the full expanse of the sky like a living thing.

Josh takes in the sky, slumps against the building.

JOSH

Oh. That.

INT. PENTAGON CONFERENCE ROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

A CADRE OF SCIENTISTS and high-ranking GENERALS sit waiting. General Purcell is up front. Some people pick at the food and coffee laid out on a long table.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Josh and Sergei enter. Josh looks at Zimsky.

JOSH

Told them?

GEN. PURCELL

Dr. Zimsky claimed he knew what was going on. Further ... conversation revealed that you were the one I actually needed.

Zimsky shrugs -- he's shameless. Josh steps up.

JOSH

(pause)

I'm just drunk enough for this:
Everybody on Earth is dead in a year.

The CROWD breaks into agitated CHATTER. Josh rolls up his sleeves, falls into the same rhythm he used in the classroom. This is how Josh deals with stress -- puts on his teaching hat, denies his fear.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Wrapped around the planet is an invisible field of energy. It's made up of electricity and magnetism, so it's called, creatively enough, the **Electromagnetic Field**, or "**EM Field**". It's where we get our magnetic North Pole and South Pole. This EM Field does a lot of good things for us.

ZIMSKY

Primarily it protects us from deadly cosmic rays which hammer the planet.

JOSH

But now, this Field's falling apart.

GENERAL #1

Why?

JOSH

For that, you've got to understand how the planet works.

Josh goes to the food table, takes a PEACH. He BITES it, revealing a CROSS-SECTION.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)

Earth isn't just a huge rock. It's a complex device with its own self-contained motor.

He points out layers on the peach.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Quick and dirty. The thin skin, that's the Earth's **CRUST**. That's what we live on. It's thirty miles thick. The meat here, call it the **MANTLE**. That makes up most of the Earth. Forgetting all the funky transitions, it's 1800 miles thick, seven thousand degrees Fahrenheit, and the pressure is --

ZIMSKY

-- about 1.37 million times that at sea level.

JOSH

What he said. The **CORE** -- the peach pit in the center -- that's a tricky one, because there's two parts, the **INNER** and **OUTER CORE**. Following me?

The Scientists are, and the Military men nod slowly.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Inner Core might be solid iron, doesn't matter to us, it's just sitting there, solid and ten thousand degrees Fahrenheit.

ZIMSKY

Theories suggest a giant hexametric crystal --

JOSH

Zimsky. We're on the peach.

ZIMSKY

(sigh)
Right.

JOSH

The Inner Core's surrounded by the **Outer Core**. That's **liquid**.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)

Melted iron and nickel, a thousand miles thick, eight thousand degrees Fahrenheit and -- most important -- that liquid is constantly spinning in one direction.

ZIMSKY

The Outer Core actually spins faster than the Earth itself.

JOSH

Physics 101: Hot metal, moving fast, makes an electromagnetic field. The spinning liquid Outer Core makes the Electromagnetic Field of the Earth. North Pole. South Pole. The Core is the engine that drives the EM Field.

GEN. PURCELL

You're saying there's something wrong with the Core of the Earth.

JOSH

Yeah. It's stopped.

ZIMSKY

The Core of the Earth has stopped spinning.

The Scientists express loud disbelief, the Military men puzzled indignation.

ZIMSKY (CONT'D)

We think it's a Pole Shift.

JOSH

Every five hundred thousand years, the North and South Poles switch places.

ZIMSKY

Yes, the spinning Outer Core changes directions and the Poles shift.

JOSH

It's usually pretty subtle, nobody ever notices except some confused birds.

SCIENTIST #1

What's gone wrong this time?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH

A trillion tons of hot metal spinning a thousand miles an hour is trying to change direction. There's gonna be some tiny hiccups. Tiny for the planet -- big for us.

ZIMSKY

The Core's simply stalled in the middle of a very complex process.

JOSH

In planetary time, it could start up again any second. But the way planets measure time, that "second" is more than a human year.

ZIMSKY

The Earth won't even notice that delay, but we will: with the Core stalled, nothing's driving the planet's Electromagnetic Field.

JOSH

So now the EM Field is decaying, spiking, causing high weirdness. Notice how extreme the weather's been the last few years? That was the first clue and we missed it. Now we've got electromagnetic pulses that fry pacemakers, overload bird navigational senses. Probably messed up the Shuttle too.

GEN. PURCELL

Timeline.

JOSH

As the Electromagnetic Field becomes more and more unstable, we'll start seeing isolated incidents -- one airplane'll fall from the sky, then two, some random EM pulses, but in a few months anything, everything electronic will be fried.

ZIMSKY

Static discharge in the atmosphere will create "super-storms" with hundreds of lightning strikes per square mile.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH

Eventually the EM pulses will be strong enough to overload human nervous systems. People will start having seizures by the millions. And after that, well, then --
(deep breath)
-- then it gets bad.

ZIMSKY

The Earth's EM Field shields us from deadly solar radiation. When that shield collapses, microwave radiation will scour the planet.

JOSH

Every human being left on this planet will be ... fried alive.
(pause)
Total extinction.

A stunned silence comes over the crowd.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Feel free to throw up. I know I did.

ZIMSKY

Four months, gentlemen, until we're back in the Stone Age. A full year from now, the EM Field collapses and lets the fatal microwaves through.

SCIENTIST #1

How'd you discover this?

JOSH

I analyzed a pattern of freaky news incidents, then had my grad students grind out the equations.

SCIENTIST #2

(to Zimsky)

You missed this while a college professor --

JOSH

-- and his grad students --

SCIENTIST #2

-- deduced the problem.

JOSH

They're very smart grad students.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY

My foundation was crucial --

GENERAL #1

Why hasn't this happened before?

JOSH

Probably has, just to a lesser degree: Ice Ages, continental drift --

GEN. PURCELL

How do we fix it?

The room goes silent.

JOSH

We can't.

GEN. PURCELL

Not in my vocabulary.

JOSH

Then it's time to get one of those Word-A-Day calendars, because it's impossible.

(frustrated)

The Core is the size of Mars. You're talking about jump-starting a planet. We can't do it, and even if we could, the Core is 1800 miles down and a thousand miles thick. The deepest we've ever gone is seven miles, and that's with a two inch drill bit.

GEN. PURCELL

We go into space --

JOSH

Space is easy! It's empty! We're talking nine thousand degrees Fahrenheit, millions of pounds per square inch. Even if we somehow came up with a brilliant plan to fix the Core, we just can't get there!

The group digests Josh's words.

ZIMSKY

What if we could?

Josh turns to stare at him. Then Sergei. General Purcell. All the other Scientists and Military men turn to face him. Zimsky happily basks in the attention.

EXT. HIGH UTAH DESERT - DAY

The sun bakes the desert under a flawless blue sky. A biblical wilderness, unspoiled by man.

It is then spoiled by a MILITARY CHOPPER THUNDERING over a ridge, pounding out into the wastes.

INT. CHOPPER

Josh, Sergei, Zimsky, and Gen. Purcell are studying research reports. Josh focuses on not getting sick.

ZIMSKY

Ed Brazzleton's been working on deep Earth exploration for twenty years. If he can't help us, nobody has the technology we need.

JOSH

I noticed you use his numbers in your analysis. You work well together.

Zimsky nods.

EXT. DEEP EARTH RESEARCH STATION - DAY

A low, BLACK BUNKER squats in the open sand, surrounded by several old hangars. The chopper circles in.

DR. ED "BRAZ" BRAZZLETON, 40's, a mountain man in khaki, ruddy from the sun, steps from the bunker flanked by some RESEARCH ASSISTANTS. He watches the chopper land.

The rotor cycles down, out step the General, Josh, Sergei, and escort SOLDIERS. Zimsky steps down last. At the sight of Zimsky, Braz runs forward enthusiastically --

-- and COLD-COCKS Zimsky with a right hook. Zimsky drops like a sack of hammers. The Soldiers restrain Braz.

BRAZZLETON

You've got a set of brass balls coming here!

Zimsky staggers to his feet.

ZIMSKY

Hello ... Braz ...

BRAZZLETON

(calmly)
Hello, dickhead.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GEN. PURCELL
Settle down! NOW.

Braz pulls away from the soldiers. He's raging, but icy.

GEN. PURCELL (CONT'D)
I'm General Thomas Purcell, United States Army. Dr. Joshua Keyes and Dr. Sergei Putechin, both consulting for the government on a matter of national security.

(beat)
And I see you know Dr. Zimsky.

BRAZZLETON
(dry)
Sort of. Twenty years ago he stole my wife and my research. Since then we've lost touch.

A Research Assistant listens to an EARPIECE.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT
Coming up now, sir.

BRAZZLETON
You didn't fly out here just so I could clock Zimsky, so tell me what you need while we walk.

Brazzleton turns, strides towards open ground. The men fall into step with Brazzleton.

SERGEI
You stole his wife?!

ZIMSKY
The woman was incidental. It was the research that really upset him.
(to Braz)
Research that was equally mine.

BRAZZLETON
You hack. What I can't figure out is how you're still stealing my data. How do you get my numbers? Got a spy in the oil company?

JOSH
(realizing, to Zimsky)
All that "groundbreaking research" you've won awards for, it's his?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY

Please, I am Lloyd Zimsky. Any overlap between our research is coincidental. Occasionally his numbers point me in the right direction, no more.

SERGEI

That is a lot of words to explain how you're not a thief.

BRAZZLETON

For two decades he's been publishing articles, getting millions in grant money, all using my work!

ZIMSKY

Yes, yes, twenty years in the desert makes you a prophet and a martyr --

BRAZZLETON

I complained to PetroCore --

Braz stops out in the desert. The others stop with him.

BRAZZLETON (CONT'D)

-- that's the oil company that pays my bills -- but I'm bound by a corporate non-disclosure clause. I can't publish anything!

(then)

But I didn't give them everything.

(grinning)

I didn't give them Virgil.

SERGEI

What's that ... humming?

A throbbing HUM GROWS in the background, becoming louder, oppressive. Zimsky stares at a triumphant Brazzleton.

ZIMSKY

My God, you built it.

BRAZZLETON

Yeah. Just took me twenty years.

The HUMMING becomes painful. All the men cover their ears but Brazzleton ...

An EXPLOSION of SOUND and EARTH ERUPTS from the desert floor twenty yards away from them, SPEWING DEBRIS straight up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The humming reaches an INSANE PITCH, then DIES as a charred, wrinkled car-sized black TUBE LURCHES up from the dirt, crests, and THUMPS onto the ground. HEAT RADIATES off the thing like a miniature sun.

The men approach the device cautiously. The tube is-made up of an **IMPELLER** -- which is like a **propeller that SUCKS** -- a smaller central tube, the **RESONANCE TUBE** that produces the **ULTRASONIC DRILLING SOUND WAVE**, and ringed by **LASERS**.

BRAZZLETON (CONT'D)

That's just the ultrasonic drill and the laser/impeller. Come on, the -- whole rig's in that hangar. You're screwed Zimsky. I've got five Nobel Prizes coming and I'm gonna piss on you in every speech.

Brazzleton storms off. Josh, Sergei, Zimsky and Gen. Purcell hesitate a moment, staring at the smoking husk.

SERGEI

(to Zimsky)

He does not like you.

ZIMSKY

Once we explain what's going on, he'll settle down.

JOSH

Assuming he doesn't beat you to death first.

GEN. PURCELL

If that man can get us to the Core, I'll hold his jacket while he does.

INT. PROTOTYPE HANGAR - DAY

Brazzleton strides in. Josh and the others follow, then stop in surprise. The hangar's exterior is ratty, but the inside's a high-tech construction zone. Dozens of ASSISTANTS attend monitoring equipment attached to:

THE METALLIC FRAME of a sharklike, Jules-Verne-ish VESSEL the size of a small submarine.

BRAZZLETON

Meet VIRGIL.

The men walk down the length of the ship, Braz pointing to the long **INTERIOR TUBE**.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRAZZLETON (CONT'D)

Y'ever see ultrasonic waves break up a kidney stone on *The Discovery Channel*? Same deal. Concentrated sound waves fire out from Virgil's resonance chamber, crushin' the rock in front of the ship. The laser melts the crushed rock, and that slag is pulled by the impeller blade through this tube and shoots out the back. Virgil cruises underground at sixty to seventy-five miles per hour. Theoretically.

ZIMSKY

How deep has that testing device outside gone?

BRAZZLETON

One hundred eighty-eight miles, well into the Mantle.

One section of Virgil is covered in a slick BLACK SKIN. Josh touches it. He pulls his hand back, startled.

JOSH

It's moist.

BRAZZLETON

You know how spider's silk is a thousand times stronger than steel?
(stroking the skin)
This is all organic, a blend of high-compression living molecules linked in a carbon matrix.

GEN. PURCELL

This stuff is alive?

JOSH

Jesus, that chemistry's wild --

BRAZZLETON

I can't fight the pressure in the earth, so I use it. The more pressure, the more the molecules in the skin align to become stronger. And the frame contracts under pressure to reinforce the ship. Hell, on the surface, you could take Virgil apart with a screwdriver. But the deeper she goes, the stronger she gets. Theoretically.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERGEI

Why does the skin not burn?

BRAZZLETON

The nano-microbes that replace the skin grow faster the hotter it gets.

JOSH

"Virgil?"

BRAZZLETON

He was the poet who guided Dante through the depths of Hell in "Dante's Inferno."

(grinning)

I like to show off the book learnin' every now and then.

ZIMSKY

What's the highest temperature it can handle?

BRAZZLETON

Nine thousand degrees Fahrenheit. Theoretically.

JOSH

(to Gen. Purcell)

That's the temperature of the Core.

Brazzleton revels in Zimsky's awe.

BRAZZLETON

Got an agreement with PetroCore. Once Virgil's finished, I can publish everything --

ZIMSKY

There is no PetroCore.

Brazzleton goes quiet. Zimsky moves behind the Soldiers.

ZIMSKY (CONT'D)

I knew you needed funding. So when the Army hired me, we made a deal, set up a dummy corporation ... Braz --

BRAZZLETON

Don't call me that --

ZIMSKY

You've been working for me for the last twenty years. I'm PetroCore. I own everything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Brazzleton collapses into a chair. Zimsky stares straight ahead, ignoring the disgust of the other men.

JOSH

(to Braz)

If you want to start pounding him,
I'm good to go.

GEN. PURCELL

Dr. Brazzleton, the United States government wants you to finish your ship. We'll back you one hundred percent, and all rights to your work revert to you. One catch: we need you to do it in three months.

Brazzleton stares at Gen. Purcell ... and LAUGHS. Hard.

BRAZZLETON

Three months?

(roaring with laughter)

That's insane! You want me to wrap up twenty years worth of work in three months?

GEN. PURCELL

Can you or can you not complete this prototype in three months?

BRAZZLETON

Well, yeah, if I had a BILLION DOLLARS!

They stare at Braz. His laugh tapers off. He stops.

GEN. PURCELL

Will you take a check?

JOSH

Use a credit card. You get miles.

EXT. DEEP EARTH RESEARCH STATION - NIGHT

The military chopper LIFTS OFF into the night sky.

INT. MILITARY CHOPPER

Josh, Sergei, Zimsky and the General review more plans.

GEN. PURCELL

You've got a ship that travels underground --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY

Theoretically.

GEN. PURCELL

-- and I'll find you a pilot. What else do you need?

JOSH

A genius computer guy. Virgil runs on a neural algorithm, we have to integrate with Mission Control, prep for EM spikes, security protocols -- we need a hacker. The Hacker. Whoever he is.

ESTABLISHING SHOT: SAN BENITO PENITENTIARY - DAY

SUPER: SAN BENITO FEDERAL PENITENTIARY

A hardcase penitentiary, the place the government puts people and secrets they never, ever want to see the light of day again.

INT. PRISON CORRIDOR

The WARDEN leads Josh, Sergei, Zimsky and General Purcell down an underground corridor lined with heavy IRON DOORS.

WARDEN

Do not pass him anything. Do not accept anything from him. Do not tell him anything personal.

The Warden stops, UNLOCKS one of the doors.

WARDEN (CONT'D)

I hope to God you know what you're doing.

INT. CELL

The Warden SLAMS the door behind Josh, Sergei, Zimsky and General Purcell. They move forward into the shadows ...

REVEAL TAZ "RAT" FINCH, early 20's, a gawky, completely harmless young man in prison orange. He stands awkwardly by a school desk covered with notebooks and an old TYPEWRITER. Circuit DIAGRAMS cover the walls.

AH, J RAT
 Sir, hello sirs. Can I help you
 with something?
 (from his table)
 Hot Pocket? Mountain Dew?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH

Taz Finch. Carnegie-Mellon
University, M.I.T, worked at Sun,
Lucent, D.o.D.?

^{4:06} RAT
"Rat". My handle's "Rat" --

GEN. PURCELL

Sixty-three computer fraud
indictments, two convictions.

SERGEI

A real gangster.

ZIMSKY

He's the best we could come up with?

Rat spots Josh's CELL PHONE peeking out from his jacket
pocket. His face lights up.

RAT
Oh, wow, could I see that? I
haven't been allowed any
telecommunications equipment since
they locked me up.

Josh tosses the phone to Rat, who studies it obsessively.
For the next while, he never looks up when he speaks.

ZIMSKY

You shouldn't --

JOSH

The kid's a hacker, not Merlin.
This sort of overkill just proves
how clueless the government is about
how the Internet really works.

RAT
(studying phone)
It was all just a misunderstanding.
I was exposing a security window.

GEN. PURCELL

Mr. Finch, that little stunt you
pulled cost the United States
Government forty million dollars.

RAT
More of a security door, really.

Rat produces a PACK OF GUM, takes out a PIECE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He unwraps it, throws the gum over his shoulder, and obsessively folds the TINFOIL wrap into a THIN STRIP.

GEN. PURCELL

Mr. Finch, we have a situation.
Many, many lives are at stake. We
need your help.

Rat finally LOOKS UP. He reads their expressions. He stands a little straighter.

RAT

What can I do?

GEN. PURCELL

You'll be briefed in detail when you accept the assignment. We need you to coordinate a highly complex network system we're using.

Rat is distracted again. He's now sliding the tinfoil strip between the TEETH of an old black COMB.

RAT

There's other guys can do that.

JOSH

There'll be complications. You'll also need to control the flow of information on the 'Net.

RAT

You're dreaming. Nobody controls the 'Net.

JOSH

Could you, with unlimited resources?

Rat BLOWS across the COMB, producing a high-toned WHINE. He cocks his head, considers both the tone and Josh's offer. He fiddles with the COMB/HARMONICA he's made.

RAT

You want me to hack the planet.

(beat)

Gee, I don't know, sirs, I'm really out of practice. I've been isolated from technology for two years now.

GEN. PURCELL

Everybody we've asked says you're still the man for the job.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rat BLOWS across the comb again, produces a higher TONE. Satisfied, he DIALS a number on Josh's cell phone.

We HEAR sudden MODEM STATIC from the cell. Rat punches a number, then BLOWS the Comb/Harmonica into the phone. There is a beat of SILENCE, then rapid BEEPS and CLICKS. Rat tosses the cell phone back to Josh.

RAT
(to Josh)
You've got free long distance on
that phone. Forever.
(then)
Okay. I'll do it. But I'll need
"Xena" tapes and Hot Pockets. They
help me concentrate

Josh, Sergei, Zimsky and General Purcell all NOD mutely.

JOSH'S PHONE (V.O.)
Bonjour? Qui est la?

(NOTE: The above hack is quite possible, by the way. During the 1980's, AT&T was horrified to discover that a one-note whistle given out as a prize in Captain Crunch cereal was the exact tone necessary to access deep control levels of their line operating systems. Rumor has it that the backdoor was never fully closed.)

EXT. BRAZ'S RESEARCH LAB/VIRGIL CONTROL BASE - UTAH - DAY

HUNDREDS OF WORKERS are TRANSFORMING Braz's Deep Earth Research Station into a combination Groom Lake/Mission Control, dotted with LIVING QUARTERS and LABORATORIES. SOLDIERS unload TRUCKS of every size. White-coated SCIENTISTS run among them. The pace is frantic. These people are working 24/7 to save every life on Earth.

SUPER: VIRGIL BASE - UTAH - ONE WEEK LATER

Josh, Sergei, and Zimsky push through the chaos, trailed by other SCIENTISTS. This is an on-the-fly-briefing.

JOSH
Jet Propulsion Lab and Geophysics,
you coordinate through Dr. Zimsky --

ZIMSKY
-- Dr. Putechin is working on the
laser because of his experience with
the Soviet Anti-Ballistic Systems --

SERGEI
Russian "Star Wars."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH

-- who knew that load of shit would pay off --

ZIMSKY

-- he's also reviewing calculations for re-starting the Core --

JOSH

You should be doing that --

ZIMSKY

Sergei can handle the basic work.

SERGEI

Oh 'nzdya.

INT. CENTRAL LAB COMPLEX - DAY

The group enters. Laboratories branch off the central corridor. The Scientists PEEL OFF. Josh, Sergei and Zimsky continue down the corridor.

INT. MISSION CONTROL ROOM - DAY

The trio enter what looks like NASA Mission Control. ENGINEERS work on panels, ELECTRICIANS wire up computers -- the major difference is that **instead of a FLIGHT PATH PANEL, there's a huge CROSS SECTION OF THE EARTH.** General Purcell waves Josh and the others over to him.

GEN. PURCELL

How are you holding up?

JOSH

I spent the morning telling a couple hundred people it's the end of the world. I've had better days.

They pass Rat, who's donned custom-wrinkled Army fatigues. Rat whips off a half-assed yet sincere salute. The General responds wearily, waves him off. He's obviously been putting up with this all day. General Purcell then spots somebody he wants to see, starts away.

GEN. PURCELL

Dr. Keyes, come meet your Mission Control Chief and Virgil's pilot.

Josh breaks off from the others.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGLE ON

the raised MISSION CONTROL CHIEF DAIS. Stickley and Beck are there with the General. Josh joins them.

GEN. PURCELL (CONT'D)
Chief Stickley, Major Childs, meet
Dr. Josh Keyes. He's the scientist
who discovered our problem.

Beck pumps his hand. Josh can't help but stare.

BECK
Pleasure to meet you, sir.

GEN. PURCELL
You up for this, Major?

Beck looks at Josh for a second.

BECK
This is for real?

Josh nods. Beck exhales sharply, her expression steady.

BECK (CONT'D)
I'll get the job done.

GEN. PURCELL
Excellent. Chief?

STICKLEY
I reckon there'll be a bit of
adjusting, going down instead of up,
but we'll muddle through. Less
chance of getting lost, anyway.

Beck starts to say something, stops herself.

GEN. PURCELL
Question, Major?

BECK
Yes, sir. Why me, sir?

JOSH
Virgil uses a modified Space Shuttle
control and guidance system --

BECK
(shaking her head)
Why me? You need the best pilot in
the program. I ditched the Shuttle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Stickley's ghost-smile returns.

STICKLEY

Over at NASA we ran simulations of your incident. We put twenty-two other NASA pilots through three hundred simulations of your landing.

BECK

My crash.

GEN. PURCELL

You landed. They crashed.

STICKLEY

Three hundred simulations, not a single one got the Shuttle down in one piece. Three hundred crash-and-burns. Lowest projected fatality count was nine hundred dead.

GEN. PURCELL

Congratulations, Major Childs. Turns out you're the best Shuttle pilot in the world.

The General walks away. Stickley starts after him.

BECK

What about Iverson?

STICKLEY

Iverson? Iverson took out the Hollywood sign.

Beck fights a grim, satisfied smile. Josh sighs.

JOSH

Well, it's official. I am the least qualified person on this base.

BECK

Come on, Dr. Keyes, I'm sure the people in charge have full confidence in you.

JOSH

I'm in charge.

Beck takes in his rolled up shirt-sleeves, his rumped, sleep-deprived look.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Yeah. I know.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM - DAY - LATER

Sitting row by row in the briefing room are the Project's high-ranking SCIENTISTS and the MISSION CONTROL CHIEFS, including Stickley and Rat. The large room is packed.

Josh, Sergei, Beck, Braz, Zimsky and General Purcell are at the front of the room. Josh is in a JACKET AND TIE, which he's continually tying wrong and then re-tying.

Josh stands beneath a huge DIGITAL SCREEN. ALL the following TECH DIALOGS are illustrated by ANIMATIONS on that digital screen. (NOTE: These ANIMATIONS are so vivid, so brilliantly conceived, so flawlessly executed, that even small, not-particularly-bright children will understand the scientific principles which follow.)

JOSH

Virgil should reach the bottom of the Outer Core in two days. You're probably asking: "What then?"

BRAZZLETON

(sotto)

Lord knows I am ...

Zimsky indicates the Inner Core/Outer Core border on a huge Earth CROSS-SECTION on the SCREEN.

ZIMSKY

My calculations show that the Core's "stalled state" is unnatural. A tiny nudge in any direction will force the Core back into its normal flow.

JOSH

A "tiny nudge" in planetary terms means the biggest bang we can come up with. Sergei?

ANIMATION: a CLUSTER of eight spherical NUCLEAR DEVICES.

SERGEI

The Soviet atomic weapons program followed "bigger is better" rule. We made warheads in the 100 megaton range. We found eight of these warheads in storage in Russia. We take all eight to the Core.

JOSH

Even an eight hundred megaton detonation will barely have an effect this deep in the planet. But it will be enough to nudge the Core's flow back to normal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERGEI/ZIMSKY/BRAZZLETON

(sotto)
Theoretically ...

STICKLEY

Where's our launch site?

DISPLAY: A SEA PLATFORM with a GANTRY.

ZIMSKY

I have decided the most effective --

Brazzleton CLEARS HIS THROAT with hostile intent.

ZIMSKY (CONT'D)

-- we've decided the Launch Site
will be the Marianas Trench in the
Pacific Ocean.

BRAZZLETON

The Crust is much thinner under the
ocean. We drop through five miles
of water, hit the bottom running.

GEN. PURCELL

We'll have more for you in detailed
section briefs. For now, good luck,
and dismissed.

The other Scientists FILE OUT, leaving Josh, Beck,
Sergei, Zimsky, and Braz sitting with General Purcell.
Rat waves them over with the COMIC BOOK he's reading,
which is, of course, Warren Ellis's "Planetary."

RAT

Department of Disinformation here:
What's our cover story for the
freaky nature? There was another
bird swarm in Japan. The Northern
Lights are popping up in Georgia
every two weeks. The proles are
gonna start asking questions.

ZIMSKY

Every hundred thousand years, the
Earth wobbles a little in its orbit.
We're due. Go with that.

GEN. PURCELL

That's true?

(Josh nods)

What is wrong with this planet? The
earth wobbles, the Core stalls ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRAZZLETON

God has a sense of humor.

ZIMSKY

Rather dark one, I'd say.

SERGEI

Now you know why Russians drink.

BECK

Is that going to hold up? The incidents are isolated now, but ...

GEN. PURCELL

We have total mainstream media containment. In the old days there were too many information outlets to control, but now we just contact AOL/Time-Warner, Viacom, Disney, and Fox Corporation, and boom, nothing hits the world news we don't want.

JOSH

I'm pleased and yet incredibly fucking creeped out at the same time.

Rat exits.

ZIMSKY

There are other scientists out there, British, German --

BRAZZLETON

-- some kick-ass Chinese fellas --

ZIMSKY

-- we need them all.

GEN. PURCELL

That's why Dr. Keyes is addressing a meeting of foreign ambassadors tonight in New York.

ZIMSKY

I should be doing that. My international reputation is impeccable.

GEN. PURCELL

Dr. Keyes is lead scientist here.

Zimsky throws an annoyed look at Josh. Josh shrugs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH

I've got the tie. But there are
people out there way more qualified
than me to run this place --

ZIMSKY

Thank you.

BRAZZLETON

But you're so busy healing the lame --

GEN. PURCELL

(to Josh)

I don't need some science doink, I
need you. You explain things in
small words, people like you.
You'll do until I decide otherwise.

BECK

General, when do I meet my crew?

GEN. PURCELL

You already have.

Beck stares at the four quarreling scientists. She's
thinking: "That's the most fucked-up thing I've ever
heard." But she's Beck, so all she says is:

BECK

Sir, I don't think that's such a
good idea.

JOSH

Join the club.

GEN. PURCELL

Dr. Brazzleton knows the ship. Dr.
Zimsky knows the planet. Dr.
Putechin knows the Soviet weapons
system, Dr. Keyes built your
navigation system and is supervising
the entire project. There's no time
to train anyone else what these men
already know. These are your fellow --

BECK

Terranauts?

They consider the word a moment. General Purcell nods.

GEN. PURCELL

So be it. Dr. Keyes, our flight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

General Purcell exits, Josh trails him still FIDDLING with his tie.

BECK

Oh for God's sake --

She can't stand it anymore. She walks over, grabs Josh's tie and starts tying it for him.

JOSH

You can fly the Space Shuttle and tie a full Windsor. Is there anything you can't do?

BECK

(matter-of-fact)

Not that I'm aware of.

JOSH

I find that incredibly intimidating.

BECK

Most people do.

Beck SLIDES the knot tight. Josh exits, Beck WALKS OUT the opposite door. Sergei, Braz and Zimsky watch her go.

SERGEI

In the Soviet Union, female cosmonauts do not look like that.

BRAZZLETON

What'd they look like?

SERGEI

You.

INT. SIMULATIONS DECK - VIRGIL BASE - THE NEXT DAY

A cut-away MOCKUP of Virgil's COCKPIT -- two seats up front, three behind, all on RUNNERS, allowing people to switch positions without leaving their seats. Beck and Josh sit in the front two seats. Zimsky, Sergei, and Braz are in the rear three, watching PANELS.

The entire assembly is on a gimbal-framework which is SHAKING slightly. Cables run from the mock-up to a CONTROL BOOTH, where Stickley and some ENGINEERS work. We're in mid-simulation.

BECK

Speed sixty miles per hour, all systems are green.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Stickley gives a signal. RED LIGHTS pop up on Zimsky's panel. "Virgil" begins VIBRATING.

ZIMSKY

Feedback in the resonance tube.

Brazzleton and Zimsky SWING around and switch places.

BRAZZLETON

It's not feedback.

BECK

Talk to me, gentlemen.

SERGEI

We are losing structural integrity --

The vibration becomes a pitched, disorienting SWAYING.

ZIMSKY

The density of the mantle --

BRAZZLETON

I know my ship --

BECK

What part of "talk to me" do we not understand?

The SWAY becomes a VIOLENT SWINGING.

JOSH

Braz, make the call --

ZIMSKY

I should make the call.

BECK

Advise me --

SERGEI

HULL BREACH!

BANG! The mock-up LURCHES FORWARD and SLAMS to a stop at an angle, leaving the Terranauts hanging awkwardly in their seat belts. There is a painful pause.

STICKLEY

For the twenty-second time in a row, everyone on Earth is dead. Let's take a little quiet time, and then y'all are going to try this again.

Stickley and the Engineers leave.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The crew hang in their seats. Josh is about to say something. Becks stops him cold with a glare.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

-- Soldiers unload supplies under the GLOWING NIGHT SKY.

-- Trucks arrive with FOREIGN SCIENTISTS. They're greeted by General Purcell, led to their labs ...

-- Josh, Sergei, Braz and Zimsky are working at a whiteboard. They disagree over an equation; it quickly becomes heated, and Braz TOPPLES the board. The men step away, trying to cool down, consumed with tension ...

-- Another simulation, "Virgil" bucking wildly, the Terranauts flailing about, still failing miserably ...

--In Mission Control a hundred people are wiring, welding, all under the direction of Rat and Stickley. Rat offers her a Hot Pocket. Stickley takes it, bites into it delicately.

-- Braz BELLOWS at TECHS working on the real Virgil ...

END MONTAGE.

INT. LAB SPACE - DAY

Beck walks in to find Josh and some TECHS working at what resembles a **FLATSCREEN** TV about the size of a car windshield. She looks: brightly colored IMAGES of PEOPLE AND FURNITURE. Josh sees her questions.

JOSH

I invented this. It's what made me a consultant for the Army way back when -- and it's how you're going to steer underground.

Beck sees an electronic ARRAY facing the opposite wall.

BECK

Not very good reception.

JOSH

We're looking through three feet of lead fifty yards away. It ain't bad.

Beck looks at him, walks to a WINDOW. HER POV reveals a BUNKER fifty yards away. She runs back to the screen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)

It's like a CAT SCAN at a hospital, but souped up. I invented it for deep earth surveying. One day the Army showed up, bought my research, killed my student loan guys, made me a "consultant".

They both sit under the electronic antennae, examining them. It puts Josh and Beck very, very close together.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Then they called me in when the pacemakers quit, and boom, I'm Apocalypse Boy.

BECK

(arching an eyebrow)
"Apocalypse Boy?"

JOSH

I'm having t-shirts made up.

BECK

You have a very weird sense of humor.

JOSH

Hey, I'm the guy who discovered the world was going to end, and now for some ungodly reason I'm the guy in charge of stopping it. I am a little ragged around the edges.

BECK

You know, you --

JOSH

(not angry, just honest)
What could you possibly say to make me feel at all good right now?

Beck considers this. She smiles a little, points at the Flatscreen and says, honestly, one tech-head to another:

BECK

This is pretty cool.

A beat, then Josh matches her little smile. Beck reaches in, TWEAKS an antennae. The Flatscreen DISPLAY becomes a little clearer. Josh and she make eye contact again.

JOSH

Is there anything you can't do?

INT. VIRGIL HANGAR - DAY

Virgil's 3/4 covered in its black skin. The Frame and interior COMPARTMENTS are being finished and wired.

Braz is showing the other Terranauts a full **ANIMATED SCHEMATIC** of Virgil's interior on a large **DIGITAL SCREEN**.

BRAZZLETON

We're powered by this experimental miniature nuclear reactor snuggled right up under the cockpit.

JOSH

How much testing have we done on the "experimental nuclear reactor"?

BRAZZLETON

Technically? Not much.

JOSH

I want you to start lying to me.

From the SCHEMATICS, Braz points out sections of Virgil:

BRAZZLETON

Living Quarters, Science Lab, the bombs are here in this large rear compartment, Weapons Control for the nukes is in this compartment here --

ANIMATION: shows sections of the Virgil JETTISONING AWAY.

BRAZZLETON (CONT'D)

Any section of Virgil breaches, it seals up and ejects.

SERGEI

That is really the best option?

BECK

One damaged compartment degrades the entire hull. A compartment springs a leak, we cut it loose.

Techs are LOADING the **BOMB CLUSTER** of **EIGHT NUKES** into the **REARMOST COMPARTMENT** of Virgil. It **CLANGS** against the loading **CRANE**. Everybody instinctively holds their breaths -- then exhales. Carefully.

INT. TESTING HANGAR - A WEEK LATER - DAY

The Terranauts are wearing orange, modified **SPACE SUITS**. They're streamlined -- pressurized, but more like padded flightsuits. **TECHS** pass out **HELMETS**, which the Terranauts examine dubiously as they put them ON.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRAZZLETON

They're a blend of Virgil's skin and synthetic asbestos. Won't save us from a pressure breach, but if hot magma or gas leaks through, we should be okay.

ZIMSKY

It's far too thin to work!

They have their helmets on now. Braz steps OUT OF FRAME.

ZIMSKY (CONT'D)

This is ludicrous. There's no way --

A WHISTLE from OFF. REVEAL Brazzleton holding a FLAMETHROWER. He FIRES!

FLAMES EXPLODE from the weapon, engulfing Zimsky! He SCREAMS over the ROAR of the flames. Zimsky FLAILS, then collapses to the ground, still hysterically SCREAMING.

Braz cuts the flame. There's an awkward moment as Zimsky still screams, then stops. Without a word, Braz puts down the flamethrower and walks out. The entire room is frozen. Sergei flips up his visor, leans over to Zimsky.

SERGEI

He really does not like you.

Rat BURSTS IN.

RAT

We're on the Internet!

INT. CONTROL ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Everyone's gathered around RAT'S STATION in the Control Room - it looks jerry-rigged from fridge parts and a VW. Rat's FLYING through WEB SITES with multiple screens:

RAT

Conspiracy site linked to bird swarm theories linked to French research on the earth's Electromagnetic Field -- not a lot, but they do have a couple threads from our secret blankie.

BECK

What now?

Rat opens a WINDOW containing a massive amount of CODE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAT

-Virus-bot. Computer virus that'll seek out files anywhere on the Web that contain keywords we designate. It then destroys those files. Back in '99 a primitive version was used to wipe out files on the German Internet. This is my kung-fu.

GEN. PURCELL

Do it.

RAT

It won't work forever, once information reaches a critical mass --

GEN. PURCELL

We just need a few more weeks. Do it.

Rat is about to execute the code. Josh raises his hand.

JOSH

People should know.

(off their looks)

It's the end of the world. People should have a chance to take care of things, go to the Grand Canyon, apologize to their parents, get married ...

(pause)

Am I the only one it's killing to keep this secret?

They all stare at him uncomfortably.

GEN. PURCELL

I want people to live out what may be the last few weeks of their lives with dignity. There is no dignity in panic and flames and riots.

SERGEI

There is an old Russian proverb. "Every dog is two meals away from being a wolf." And every crowd is two meals away from being a mob.

Josh looks at them a moment, nods, then walks away in frustration. The others stand in silence.

RAT

That took all the fun out of it.

EXT. BUNKER ROOF - THAT NIGHT

The rooftop's dotted with EQUIPMENT SHEDS. Zimsky stands near one edge, watching the unnatural AURORA BOREALIS dance across the desert night sky. Brazzleton climbs up a steel ladder next to him, carrying a six-pack.

BRAZZLETON

Oh. Was looking for Josh, the boy comes up here sometimes.

(beat)

If you're thinking about jumping, don't let me stop you.

ZIMSKY

I would never take the easy way out.

BRAZZLETON

(snorting)

Hell, all you've ever done is take the easy way out.

ZIMSKY

You wouldn't say that if you knew how brutal being married to your wife was.

BRAZZLETON

Think what we could have done if you'd stayed out here with me. We could have built Virgil together --

ZIMSKY

Please. We're too competitive, we hated each other even when we were friends. We still hate each other. I was right to go.

JOSH (O.S.)

And yet here you two are --

Josh APPEARS from behind the SHED where he was sitting.

JOSH (CONT'D)

-- twenty years later, standing next to the same man in the same place.

Braz passes Josh a beer. They all turn as Sergei climbs the ladder.

SERGEI

Josh, Gretchen -- oh.

Josh nods him up. Sergei joins the group.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERGEI (CONT'D)

I just got off the phone with
Gretchen. She and the girls say
hello, and send their love.

JOSH

What are the girls doing up so late?

SERGEI

They like to look at the night sky.
(his voice breaks)
They think it's pretty --

Josh puts his hand on Sergei's neck.

BECK (O.S.)

Should run the simulations up here.

Beck is at the top of the ladder.

BECK (CONT'D)

You actually vaguely resemble a
team.

Braz underhands her a beer. She catches it and opens it
one-handed. Josh continues his previous conversation.

JOSH

Twenty years, what have you got to
show for it?

BRAZZLETON

I've got a ship.

ZIMSKY

Fame, respect.

BECK

I'm an astronaut.

JOSH

You never wanted anything more?

Beck glances down at her bare RING FINGER, back up.

BECK

No.

JOSH

I think about the things I wanted to
do, and if we don't pull this off --

BECK

We'll do it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY

Bravado.

BECK

(ticked)

No, confidence. I'm confident that my training's made me good enough to do anything I need to do. That's what I got for my twenty years.

JOSH

Seven foot tall and bulletproof, huh?

BECK

Damn straight. I know I'm good enough. I just pray to God you guys are.

They all think a moment.

JOSH

I don't know. I think Sergei's the one who's got something worthwhile to show for his life.

SERGEI

Mmmm. But that also makes me the one with the most to lose.

The Terranauts stare up at the night lights for a long time, each lost in their thoughts. Finally:

ZIMSKY

God I hate that sky.

INT. VIRGIL BASE - SIMULATIONS DECK - LATER THAT NIGHT

Beck is working alone, obsessively, in a stripped-down version of her command station that's on its own gimble-frame. It's SHAKING, display lights reflected on her face --

Then, as before, the sim-pod CLANKS to a halt. Beck's face reflects all RED FAIL LIGHTS glowing in the darkness. She PUNCHES the panel, hard. Pause. Punches again, twice this time.

She absently flexes her bleeding knuckles, looks at her bare ring finger again, now bloody.

BECK

Oh shut up, Josh ...

She restarts the simulator.

INT. TESTING HANGAR - DAYS LATER - DUSK

A SHOT of SLEEK, BLACK VIRGIL looking like the billion-dollar-organic-skunkworks-wet-dream miracle ship she is.

The Terranauts are lined up, admiring it.

BRAZZLETON

It's ready.

JOSH

Yeah, but are we?

BECK

(thoughtfully)

No. I would say no, not even close.

Long pause. Josh speaks through gritted teeth.

JOSH

That was a rhetorical question.

BECK

... sorry.

EXT. VIRGIL BASE COMPOUND - MOMENTS LATER - DUSK

The Terranauts cross the compound as a group. Out on the desert HORIZON, a LIGHTNING BOLT flashes, thunder CRACKS.

They all turn away, head for Virgil Control. Another BOLT of lightning, another THUNDERCLAP.

WIDE on the DESERT HORIZON. Another LIGHTNING STRIKE in the distance. Then ANOTHER. Then TWO at the SAME TIME.

The Terranauts TURN, stare out into the desert --

Now FIVE LIGHTNING BOLTS at the same time, the THUNDER becoming a continuous RUMBLE ...

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL - CONT.

Chaos. One corner of the room is a large **MONITORING STATION** of video feeds, news channels, meteorological info, etc. General Purcell and Stickley watch Rat make the **DISPLAYS DANCE** to his touch.

JOSH

Lightning superstorm --

GEN. PURCELL

They're popping up all over the world.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAT
Got 'em! Tracking!
(pointing at monitor)
Rio.

ESTABLISHING SHOT: RIO DE JANEIRO - EVENING

From the hills above, Rio is a vast grey sprawl.

EXT. SLUM HOUSE ROOF - CONT.

One of hundreds stretching off of as far as the eye can see. Some Brazilian SLUM KIDS point at a single LIGHTNING BOLT in the distance. Then TWO MORE crackle. The Kids think it's cool.

FIVE LIGHTNING BOLTS strike in the distance, but the THUNDER indicates they're moving closer. The Kids stir as a BREEZE picks up.

Now MULTIPLE BOLTS are stabbing downward, a dozen at a time. The THUNDER is becoming louder.

The Kids break for the roof door, rushing for cover. One last Kid turns to look, is FROZEN WITH TERROR --

WIDEN TO REVEAL the horizon from edge to edge is FILLED with HUNDREDS OF LIGHTNING BOLTS, the ROAR of thunder has become DEAFENING!

EXT. RIO STREETS

And the STORM STRIKES! LIGHTNING BOLTS TEAR through downtown, flames, EXPLOSIONS leaping up!

FAST CUTS of PEOPLE running, screaming, BLOWN AWAY as the lighting bolts SHRED the buildings, CHEW up the streets.

EXT. RIO DE JANEIRO

HIGH SHOT of the city. The LIGHTNING CYCLONE is still BLAZING through the city, leaving behind it a smoking ruin of flames and wreckage.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

Total shock as reports of the Rio disaster trickle in.

JOSH
The planet's decaying faster than we
thought --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GEN. PURCELL

Get that goddamned ship in the ground. Now.

JOSH

How many times do I have to tell you people, I'm not in charge.

Josh nods to Beck. She REACTS, then steps forward and SALUTES sharply. The General returns the salute. Stickley SNAPS her fingers and the Mission Control Room HUMS to LIFE.

STICKLEY

All right, folks, pack your bags -- y'all are goin' to Disneyland.

ESTABLISHING SHOT: VIRGIL LAUNCH SITE - SOUTH SEAS - DAY

What looks like a high-tech DRILLING PLATFORM sits in the vast flat plain of the Pacific, attended by NAVY SHIPS

SUPER: MARIANAS TRENCH LAUNCHPAD

SUPER: MISSION: DAY ONE

EXT. LAUNCH PLATFORM - SOUTH SEAS - DAY

It's a NASA GANTRY with all the usual MONITOR LINES and SCAFFOLDING, but with one crucial difference. Virgil is latched to the gantry but ... upside-down.

The ship's nose points down into a WIDE OPENING in the gantry pad and into the OCEAN WATERS below. ENGINEERS move about, checking and rechecking every detail.

ANGLE ON

Sergei, Zimsky, and Brazzleton, SUITED UP, standing to one side, staring at Virgil. Sergei opens a FLASK, pours vodka into PAPER CUPS. He hands one each to Braz and Zimsky.

ZIMSKY

I don't --

BRAZZLETON

Oh for Christ's sake --

SERGEI

To my children.

Brazzleton and Zimsky stop arguing. They look at Sergei, RAISE their paper cups and DRINK.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGLE ON

Josh and Beck, SUITED UP, standing away from the others and also staring at Virgil.

BECK

Come on. Look at that thing. Tell me you're not just a little stoked.

JOSH

We're doing this because people are dying.

BRAZZLETON

We're doing this so a lot more people don't die.

They look at each other for a long moment. Unreadable.

JOSH

Okay. Let's go save the world.

BECK

That's your job. I'm just driving.

EXT. VIRGIL COCKPIT - MINUTES LATER

The Terranauts walk down a ramp and enter the COCKPIT through an open IRISED DOOR in the ROOF of the cockpit.

INT. COCKPIT

Although Virgil is pointed down, the SEATS are at an UPRIGHT ANGLE. The seats tilt on their own gimbals, and the entire COCKPIT INTERIOR is set in a BUBBLE which also tilts to a limited degree.

The Terranauts are STRAPPED IN. Their seats now TILT DOWN so they have access to their equipment. They flip SWITCHES, PANELS BRIGHTEN all around them. One of the DISPLAYS is a miniature CROSS-SECTION of the EARTH that matches the one in the Virgil Mission Control Room.

Sergei tucks the WALLET-SIZE PHOTO of his WIFE AND DAUGHTERS under the edge of his DISPLAY MONITOR. Beck takes hold of the STICK in front of her, looks at the FLAT-PANEL VIEWSCREEN stretching across the front of the Cockpit (it's the one Josh invented). Josh turns it ON.

The VIEWSCREEN's like a windshield: we can see the ocean water below. But we can also see some fish, and the rock WALLS of the MARIANAS TRENCH stretching off below the surface -- all outlined by targeting RETICLES and READOUTS. Beck allows herself a small smile of wonder.

EXT. COCKPIT

TECHS step away from the iris door, which CLOSES in several nesting layers. When it seals, the Techs SPRAY the surface skin with a COAGULANT. Instantly, there is no evidence there was ever an opening.

INT. COCKPIT

The Terranauts don their headsets. Each one is running through their PREFLIGHT, muttering into HEADSETS.

BECK

Vigil Control, this is Virgil,
signal check.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL - UTAH - CONT.

The room is fully staffed. General Purcell and Stickley are on the Command Dais. Rat's just below them.

STICKLEY

This is Virgil Control. You are
loud and clear. And I have thumbs
up across the board.

Rat is posting a note on his Control Station: "Murphy's Law: Anything that can go wrong, will." Below that is a scrawled "Rat's Law: Murphy was an optimist."

INT. COCKPIT

BECK

Confirm reactor power.

STICKLEY (RADIO)

You are at 100%. We will count-down
to release on your mark.

BECK

Mark.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

Excited background CHATTER from the Engineers and Techs.

STICKLEY

All right, let's dig a hole. Mr.
Finch, the gantry count.

RAT

Ten, nine, eight ...

INT. COCKPIT

The crew braces itself. Sergei throws Josh a wink.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAT (RADIO)

... seven, six, five, four, three,
two, one ... release.

EXT. LAUNCH GANTRY

GRAPPLES release the Virgil, which immediately PLUMMETS
toward the water, free-falling --

INT. COCKPIT

The crew flinches as the water rushes up to meet them --

EXT. LAUNCH GANTRY - WATER LEVEL

Virgil SLAMS into the Pacific Ocean with a ROAR of SPRAY.
The streamlined vessel DIVES smoothly into the depths.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - UNDERWATER

Virgil DROPPING like a rock.

INT. COCKPIT

Beck pulls back on the stick.

BECK

3,000 feet, levelling out.

EXT. UNDERWATER

Virgil's nose PULLS UP and BANKS RIGHT. The descent
changes to a lazy SPIRAL. The water is completely DARK.

INT. COCKPIT

The Terranauts are all eyes on their panels.

BECK

5,500 feet.

SERGEI

Hull integrity holding.

JOSH

Keep her nose down about fifteen
degrees and -- wow.

They all look up. Josh is staring at the Viewscreen --
or rather, at the GIANT SQUID that's appeared on it.

EXT. UNDERWATER

The magnificent creature SWEEPS its TENTACLES along the starboard side of Virgil.

INT. COCKPIT

A sudden SHUDDER runs through the ship. The Terranauts simultaneously get that sudden stomach-lurch we've all felt when an elevator does something funky ...

ZIMSKY

Was that the squid?

JOSH

Nope. Depth?

BECK

8000 feet, plenty of room on both sides. Hull?

SERGEI

It is still good.

Another SHUDDER, a little longer this time.

BRAZZLETON

Start the impeller, we might need some additional control.

Beck throws a SWITCH.

EXT. UNDERWATER

In the NOSE of Virgil, an APERTURE irises OPEN. The **IMPELLER** is revealed, SPINNING up to speed. In the center of this impeller is the curious device which is the **ULTRASONIC BORING TUBE**. Circling the impeller are several **LASING TUBES**.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

RAT

I'm getting a hinky seismic reading!

An ALARM SOUNDS. Tension immediately rises.

GEN. PURCELL

What is that?!

RAT

T-phase! An underwater earthquake!

INT. COCKPIT

Another SHUDDER, the crew gets TOSSED AROUND a bit.
PINGING from the panels.

BRAZZLETON

You gotta be shitting me.

ZIMSKY

We chose this location because the
Crust was so thin! The downside is --

BANG! Virgil LURCHES nose down. Beck fights the
controls.

ZIMSKY (CONT'D)

-- lots of seismic activity!

BECK

Ten, twelve thousand, we're caught
in a downdraft --

EXT. UNDERWATER

DEBRIS FALLS from the walls of the Marianas Trench.
Virgil is caught in a WHIRLPOOL, being whipped around
like a toy.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

KLAXONS are SOUNDING.

RAT

They're all over the place!

STICKLEY

(radio)

Virgil, the walls of the trench
close in as you get deeper. You
need to regain control.

INT. COCKPIT

OMINOUS CREAKS ROAR over their voices, and the Terranauts
are plainly not in control.

ZIMSKY

(dryly)

Why thank you, Virgil Control ...

BRAZZLETON

We're not deep enough for the
pressure effects to kick in! We hit
the wall, we're rabbits on a
highway!

EXT. UNDERWATER

Virgil is THRASHING in what is now a HUGE WHIRLPOOL, skimming the TRENCH WALLS!

INT. COCKPIT

The CREAKING of the ship is DEAFENING.

BRAZZLETON

Shit's going wrong and we're not even in the ground yet!

JOSH

God, I am officially pissed off at you --

BECK

I'm an idiot.

Beck pulls the stick to her right.

JOSH

What are you doing?!

BECK

Turning into the skid.

The Terranauts are suddenly JAMMED back into their seats.

EXT. UNDERWATER

IN the MAELSTROM the Virgil aligns itself with the whirlpool's current. The ship STEADIES COURSE but --

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

RAT

Course corrected --

GEN. PURCELL

Good, Beck.

RAT

-- but their speed is way too fast.
20,000 ... 21,000 ... 23,000 ...

INT. COCKPIT

Beck wrestles the stick, the others work their panels.

ZIMSKY

We're at twenty-five thousand feet,
Major, get us out of this!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BECK

I can't!

SERGEI

Bottom is at 36,000 feet!

JOSH

Start the ultrasonic boring beam!

BRAZZLETON

That takes five minutes to warm up!
It's a twenty-step process!

JOSH

Well skip to step fifteen 'cause we
hit bottom in thirty seconds!

SERGEI

We are at 30,000 feet!

BECK

DO IT!

Braz HITS a bunch of SWITCHES simultaneously.

EXT. UNDERWATER

The GRANITE SEAFLOOR is RUSHING UP to meet Virgil --

A low HUM starts, and then the WATER in front of Virgil
ERUPTS in a BOILING MASS, a column of blinding TURBULENCE
swirling out from the nose of the ship!

INT. COCKPIT

BRAZZLETON

Lasing!

Beck JAMS the stick forward!

EXT. UNDERWATER

At the bottom of the whirlpool, with BOULDERS RAINING
down around them, Virgil PLUMMETS toward certain doom,
then the nose DROPS --

The LASERS FIRE, joining into ONE BEAM of unimaginable
power, STEAM ERUPTING along with the ULTRASONIC BEAM --

Just as Virgil SLAMS into the OCEAN FLOOR and --

KEEPS GOING!

INT. COCKPIT

The IMPACT ROCKS the crew, an unholy SHAKING rattles them like ball bearings in a can! They're SPINNING, all of them BELLOWING in fear, Beck lets out an angry "C'MON!"

EXT. THE CRUST

FOLLOW the Virgil, trailing in its BOREHOLE. Hot melted GRANITE is EJECTED from the tail end of the ship.

Then SWING OUT and ALONGSIDE Virgil. We can now see the ship as if through a THICK, GRANULATED METALLIC FOG (Gentlemen, start your CGI ...) It's SHAKING, it's SHUDDERING, it's ROLLING, but it's moving.

SWING OUT to a 3/4 HEAD ON SHOT. The combined ULTRASONIC/LASER BEAM is CHEWING through solid rock and GULPING it through the IMPELLER BLADE. As we watch, Virgil stabilizes...

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

RAT

Annnnd ... we've got a signal!

APPLAUSE rips from the Flight Engineers. Stickley looks at the TRACKING MAP. A DOT appears in the Crust of the giant EARTH CROSS-SECTION.

STICKLEY

How accurate is that position?

FLIGHT ENGINEER #1

Within 1.75 miles, Chief.

STICKLEY

Make it better. Mr. Finch, you have your communications up yet?

RAT

(radio)

You guys alive?

GEN. PURCELL

Mr. Finch.

INT. COCKPIT

The extremely rattled but so-far-still-alive Terranauts exchange grim nods. Josh has a death grip on his seat.

JOSH

Switching to electron spin burst transmitter.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)

(radio)

That is affirmative, Virgil Control.
We'll yell if we need anything.

SERGEI

Hull integrity 100%. Reactor power
100%. All green on the bomb array.

BECK

We're in a shallow spiral so we can
walk around freely now.

JOSH

Speed is sixty miles an hour.

BECK

Hot damn.

ZIMSKY

We'll be through the crust in
fifteen minutes and into the Mantle.
Twenty-four hours to the Core, and
then, assuming we survive --

The crew together ECHOES "assuming."

ZIMSKY (CONT'D)

-- another fifteen hours to the
Inner Core/Outer Core border.

BECK

Heads up.

All eyes go to the Viewscreen. Their POV REVEALS a
magnificently SPARKLING assembly of vertical COLUMNS
coming at the ship.

JOSH

It's crystalline. Has to be for the
MRI to sparkle like that.

BECK

Go around it?

JOSH

No, the Viewscreen is density
calibrated. Anything we can't just
plow through will appear black.

Zimsky chuckles.

ZIMSKY

It's a petrified forest.

EXT. CRUST

Virgil CRACKLES through the PETRIFIED FOREST, the crystalline trees SHATTERING around the ship like Christmas ornaments. The laser beam REFRACTS through the fragments, and a brilliant RAINBOW dances at the bow of Virgil like St. Elmo's Fire. It is mind-bendingly BEAUTIFUL, almost beyond comprehension...

INT. VIRGIL

Zimsky reveals a MINI-DAT RECORDER.

ZIMSKY

"We are the first to ever see this,
the first in all of mankind ..."

Beck's eyes are MOIST. She looks at Josh with quiet, breathtaking joy.

BECK

... I'm John Glenn.

A vast WHITE SHELF RACES toward the ship.

ZIMSKY

Dr. Keyes, care to show off your
Ph.D. in geophysics?

JOSH

I'll let you. I know it'll bring you
infinitely more joy anyway.

ZIMSKY

That's a Drumlin. A glacier that
got swallowed by a tectonic shift.

EXT. / INT. VIRGIL

Another STARBURST as the LASER meets the ice, and then they're IN. The ROAR of the melting ice is unholy.

BECK

(pointing)

That is not --

Virgil SLICES through the glacier past a perfectly preserved WOOLY MAMMOTH, then re-enters SOLID ROCK.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL - MINUTES LATER

Gen. Purcell and Stickley watch as the VIRGIL DOT reaches the border marked "MANTLE" on the TRACKING MAP.

GEN. PURCELL

They're doing well.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STICKLEY

The Crust is just rock. Now it gets tricky.

(radio)

Virgil this is Control, you make the transition to the Mantle in two minutes, can we get a status check?

INT. COCKPIT - CONT.

BECK

(radio)

We're all green on the panels, but it's a little warm in here.

ZIMSKY

That's because it's 6000 degrees right out there.

JOSH

Do you have to say that? No. Then don't. Ever again.

(they're staring at him)

What?

EXT. MANTLE - MOMENTS LATER

Imagine a vast, craggy MOUNTAINSCAPE, with peaks larger than Mt. Everest, stretching as FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE...

Imagine that above this huge alien landscape is a sky of BRILLIANT, FLOWING ORANGE and BLACK, smeared like a psychedelic Impressionist painting ...

NOW FLIP IT ALL UPSIDE-DOWN. And that's what WE'RE SEEING -- the **CRUST/MANTLE BARRIER.**

Virgil BURSTS from the granite Crust into the orange-black MANTLE, a pseudo-solid mix of MINERALS and MAGMA. The ship CHUGS through this goopy mix.

INT. COCKPIT

The ever-present background ROAR has changed tone to a deeper GROWL. The Viewscreen casts the landscape in a bizarrely exaggerated FLAME-WORLD.

BECK

Slowed a little, but we're moving.

JOSH

Exterior pressure's at 800,000 pounds per square inch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERGEI

- Hull integrity is still 100%.

BRAZZLETON

That's my baby.

ZIMSKY

(into DAT)

"It's as if we're diving through the memories of the planet. But soon, we will pass from memory to madness --"

BRAZZLETON

Are you going to be doing that Carl Sagan shit all the way to the Core?

ZIMSKY

I have a responsibility --

BRAZZLETON

A responsibility for what? To make a book deal?

BECK

Children, if you keep this up, there'll be no dessert and we won't buy any souvenirs.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL - HOURS LATER

The Virgil TRACKING DOT is now well into the Mantle on the TRACKING MAP. Everything is going smoothly. General Purcell enters, pulling on his jacket.

GEN. PURCELL

Status.

STICKLEY

Second shift's coming on. Virgil's seven hundred forty miles into the Mantle, and we're still all green.

Rat is slumped in his chair, dozing. Stickley wakes him.

STICKLEY (CONT'D)

Let your back-up take the comm.

RAT

I'm irreplaceable, Ma'am. Says so on my temporary release papers.

(radio)

Virgil, how you doing?

EXT. MANTLE

Virgil is still BORING through the BLACK-ORANGE MAGMA.

INT. COCKPIT

The Terranauts are all sweating, but working.

ZIMSKY

Internal temp's up five degrees.

BRAZZLETON

Remind me to pack more Freon next time.

SERGEI

What is it like? To finally have this ship?

BRAZZLETON

Dream come true ...

He nods at the photo of Sergei's family.

BRAZZLETON (CONT'D)

But at that price? It tastes like a mouthful of blood.

Josh is staring at the VIEWSCREEN.

JOSH

What the hell?

HIS POV reveals a distinct BUBBLE of STATIC on the screen. It's like STATIC on a television, but only one little CIRCLE of it. It's BLIPPING in and out of existence, but it seems to be GETTING CLOSER.

BECK

Dr. Zimsky, you're our geophysicist.

The BUBBLE OF STATIC is getting LARGER.

ZIMSKY

The Mantle's a chemical hodgepodge --

BRAZZLETON

Say it with me. "I don't know."

SERGEI

When in doubt, go around.

BECK

It keeps popping in and out of view, at different distances.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY
Must be a problem with the scanner --

SERGEI
Go. Around.

JOSH
There's nothing wrong with my
scanner --

ZIMSKY
Arrogance as scientific principle.
Interesting.

BECK
This is what I get travelling with a
crew of geniuses.
(radio)
Virgil Control?

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

RAT
(radio)
Working on it.

INT. COCKPIT

BECK
Okay, anything we can't go through
displays as black. What's static
mean?

JOSH
Nothing!
(realizing)
Oh God, nothing. It's EMPTY SPACE!

ZIMSKY
That's impossible ...

THE STATIC FILLS THE SCREEN --

JOSH
I never taught the computer how to
read empty space, because there's
not supposed to be any down here, so
it shows up as static --

ZIMSKY
-- We're at a million pounds of
pressure per square inch, any empty
space would collapse --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRAZZLETON

Virgil can't fly, boys --

EXT. MANTLE - CONT.

Virgil is RACING through the MANTLE MAGMA when suddenly a HUGE silver-black SPHERE LOOMS into view! The Virgil SLAMS into the SURFACE!

EXT. CRYSTAL GEODE SPHERE SURFACE

Virgil SHAKES MADLY as it PENETRATES the Sphere's hard COBALT SHELL then --

EXT. HOLLOW GEODE

The craft SMASHES through the CRYSTAL INTERIOR of the shell and FALLS! The LASERS immediately illuminate the entire chamber -- the SPHERE is a VAST HOLLOW GEM!

INT. COCKPIT

The crew holds on for dear life helplessly in free-fall --

EXT. GEODE

Virgil CRASHES through VAST million-colored CRYSTAL SPIRES, some a THOUSAND FEET HIGH, SLAMMING into them, tossing and turning like a man falling from a tree and hitting every branch on the way down --

INT. COCKPIT

They've given up and are just SCREAMING now --

BRAZZLETON

KILL THE BEAM!

Beck throws a switch --

EXT. GEODE

The POWER BEAM cuts out from the front of Virgil, and the vessel finally SLAMS onto an INCLINE, still CRASHING forward, SLICING through the crystal --

And STOPS.

Virgil's on its belly, resting on a spiky bed of SMALLER CRYSTALS. A dim ORANGE GLOW now refracts everywhere.

INT. COCKPIT

Beck takes a deep breath, looks around. Everybody's roughly intact. A LOUD GROAN comes from the ship.

BRAZZLETON

Virgil's decompressing from the pressure change.

SERGEI

Hull is at 90%. I said "go around."
Nobody listens to me.

BECK

Dr. Zimsky, you're supposed to anticipate --

ZIMSKY

Major, down here we are so far beyond what science knows, even genius is merely gambling. I do, however, have a theory.

Josh and Braz unstrap themselves.

JOSH

Tell it to us on the way outside.

SERGEI

WHAT?!

BRAZZLETON

Read my mind, son.

JOSH

Exterior temp is 300 degrees, within the comfort level of our suits --

They're all up now.

ZIMSKY

I'm going. I need to collect samples --

BECK

I am not authorizing this.

JOSH

Give me an alternative.

BECK

No, you give me an alternative.
Give me three alternatives, and then I decide if you do an EVA.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY

Major, you drive, but when it comes
to science I am in command here --

Braz SLAMS Zimsky against the wall by his throat. Josh
grabs Braz, tries pulling him off, Zimsky's swinging --

BECK

FREEZE!

They do.

BECK (CONT'D)

(to Braz)

You touch any member of this crew
again, and I will confine you to
quarters.

(to Zimsky)

I am a Major in the United States
Air Force, and I have a mission to
complete. Question my command again
and you walk home. Now, somebody
talk to me.

BRAZZLETON

Virgil doesn't go anywhere unless
it's digging. We've got to angle it
down. That's why we need to go
outside, to at least get a visual
assessment.

BECK

Thank you. Lay out your Extra-
vehicular Activity plan.

They stare at her.

BECK (CONT'D)

How were you planning on getting out
of the pressure-sealed ship?

(no answer)

Jesus. Call up the specs.

Sergei calls up **SHIP SPECS** on a **SCREEN**.

JOSH

Our first problem is, we don't have
an exit. We weren't planning on
getting out and walking around

BRAZZLETON

There are double-sealed access
hatches to the impeller. We can
crawl through, come out the front.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY
Then what?

JOSH
Figure some way to tilt Virgil down.

SERGEI
That metal inside that impeller is
still at 5000 degrees.

BECK
Flush it with Freon from the cooling
system.

JOSH
The cooling system that's keeping us
from roasting to death in this ship?

BECK
Alternatives?
(again, no answer)
Notify Virgil Control.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

Chaos.

STICKLEY
There are no protocols for this!

RAT
An underground cavern. Man, I wonder
if they'll find, like, a lost
civilization and dinosaurs --

Rat notices General Purcell and Stickley glaring at him.
He shrugs, gets back to work.

EXT. GEODE

STEAM and ICE SHOOT out Virgil's NOSE. A beat later:

BRAZZLETON (O.S.)
Move your ass, Zimsky.

From the opening at the front of the ship, where the
Drilling Beam usually emerges, comes the orange-suited
Zimsky. He DROPS to the ragged crystalline ground. He's
carrying a bulky CHEMICAL SAMPLING CASE.

ZIMSKY
(to himself, satisfied)
First.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Now Brazzleton and Josh also APPEAR, in their suits. They DROP next to Zimsky. Brazzleton's got a bunch of TOOLS on his suit. Josh looks up --

JOSH

Oh sweet God of mine.

WIDE SHOT:

This is the money shot, folks, the VIEW of the ENTIRE INSIDE of a ten-mile HOLLOW SPHERE. The scientists are dwarfed by vast CRYSTAL GROWTHS the size of redwood trees SOARING into the "sky". The surface that Virgil's resting on CURVES UP in the DISTANCE to form the VAST DOME TOP. Near the top is a SWIRLING WHIRLPOOL of ORANGE, like a SPIRAL GALAXY, set in the fantastic mosaic. That whirlpool is getting bigger.

BACK TO

JOSH (CONT'D)

(stunned)

Theories, guesses, wild-ass hunches?

ZIMSKY

Crystal geode, chemically bonded to cobalt on the outside. A gem bubble.

BRAZZLETON

Biggest one on record's twenty-six feet across.

Braz kneels to inspect the SPIKY CRYSTALS Virgil rests on top of. The ship looks like a man on a bed of nails.

ZIMSKY

This probably formed in the Crust. An earthquake broke it loose, the spherical shape and the cobalt kept it intact, and it began to drift through the Mantle.

JOSH

I'm inside a floating bubble of living crystal seven hundred miles below the surface of the Earth.

(beat)

Helluva day.

A THUNDER echoes through the SPHERE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY
(pointing at "galaxy")
There's where we came through.

JOSH
That whirlpool ...

ZIMSKY
... is the shell melting where we
punctured it. This chamber is
collapsing.

A CRYSTAL the size of the Chrysler Building PLUNGES DOWN
and EXPLODES on IMPACT with the ground a quarter-mile
away. It's still enough to knock them off their feet.

INT. COCKPIT

Beck and Sergei are strapped in.

BECK
(radio)
Quit sightseeing and get us out of
here!

EXT. GEODE

Brazzleton FIRES UP a small CUTTING TORCH.

BRAZZLETON
Josh, I can cut away these front
crystals holding the ship up --

JOSH
-- Virgil's weight will tilt the
nose down so we can dig. Try it.

CLOSE ON

One of the CRYSTALS as Braz tries cutting it. No good.

BACK TO

More HUGE CRYSTALS are DROPPING from the top of the
Geode. The WHIRLPOOL on the "ceiling" is growing
brighter, stronger, and faster. This is all going on as --

BRAZZLETON
This isn't working!

So many CRYSTALS are COLLAPSING it's like they're being
SHELLED by ARTILLERY. The ROAR, the COLORS, the SHRAPNEL --

Zimsky raids his sample case, mixing chemicals.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY

Get out of my way -- Quartz,
silicates, but with the cobalt --

He MIXES two CHEMICALS, PLUGS the chemical tube into a
HOSE on the cutting torch.

ZIMSKY (CONT'D)

This solution mixed with the flame,
should dissolve the crystal --

ANGLE ON

Braz CUTTING THROUGH the Crystals, like a hot knife
through butter.

BRAZZLETON

Goddamit, I owe you a big wet kiss!

JOSH

Zimsky, get inside!
(radio)

Beck, get ready to start her up!

INT. COCKPIT

BECK

Don't have to tell me twice ...

EXT. GEODE

Zimsky CRAWLS back into the IMPELLER. Josh and Braz DUCK
as a huge SHARD of flying crystal ZOOMS by them. Braz
cuts another small crystal ... Virgil SHIFTS slightly --

BRAZZLETON

SHIT! I'm losing the Oxygen feed on
this torch!

Another HUGE CRYSTAL CRASHES just a hundred feet from
Virgil. Josh and Braz are KNOCKED OFF THEIR FEET --

INT. COCKPIT

SERGEI

Echo sounding gives us another three
minutes on the collapse!

BECK

Josh, Braz, get in here!

EXT. GEODE

Josh and Braz struggle to their feet in the DEAFENING CHAOS. Braz attacks another crystal --

BRAZZLETON

It won't work without oxygen!

Josh reaches up and TUGS his oxygen line from his helmet and JAMS it onto a feed spindle on the TORCH.

BRAZZLETON (CONT'D)

What the hell --

JOSH

Just CUT!

Braz goes to work on the remaining crystals as Josh begins BREATHING HEAVILY, SLOWLY ...

INT. COCKPIT

Sergei's watching his panel. He unbuckles himself.

SERGEI

Josh's vital signs are dropping!

EXT. GEODE

Brazzleton's soaked with sweat in his helmet, cutting, KICKING away crystals. Virgil is TILTING DOWNWARD, but now the WALLS of the Geode are CLOSING IN at a terrifying speed! Josh is SUFFOCATING TO DEATH in his helmet.

JOSH

... there I go ...

BRAZZLETON

NO!

Josh COLLAPSES as Braz SLICES through the last two support crystals! Virgil PITCHES DOWNWARD, pointing at the "floor." It's RAINING high-speed GEM SHRAPNEL --

Braz tosses the torch aside, picks Josh up, starts muscling him toward the impeller opening.

BRAZZLETON (CONT'D)

Come on, kid, come on --

INT. COCKIT

Beck's head snaps around as Josh's VITALS go spiky, SCREAMING a warning ALARM --

EXT. GEODE

The Geode CHAMBER is in full COLLAPSE, an APOCALYPSE of SCREAMING DESTRUCTION and CRUSHING ROCK --

Braz tries desperately to get both he and Josh into the ship, but Josh is dead-weight, Braz can't lift him --

Sergei APPEARS in his suit, leaning out from the opening! With a surge of adrenalin he PULLS Josh into the ship! Braz LEAPS in after them!

INT. ENGINE COMPARTMENT CRAWLSPACE

A cramped space between the Impeller rig and the Virgil's interior as Sergei and Braz MUSCLE Josh into the ship.

BRAZZLETON

BECK! FIRE IT UP!

INT. COCKPIT

Beck throws a dozen SWITCHES at once and a WHINE SCREAMS --

EXT. VIRGIL/GEODE

Virgil's POWER BEAM ERUPTS from the nose of the ship! Virgil DIVES into the floor of the Chamber even as the millions of tons of crystal and cobalt CRUNCH down --

EXT. MANTLE

-- and Virgil EXPLODES from the shattered SHELL of the destroyed crystal. It PLUNGES into the magma-silicate Mantle, VIBRATING from its near miss, but stabilizing ...

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

All eyes go to the Tracking Map as the Virgil-dot begins moving again. Several people break out in APPLAUSE.

FLIGHT ENGINEER #1

Virgil is a go at depth seven hundred fifty-five miles!

STICKLEY

Mr. Finch, get me a crew status report. Everybody else, back to shift change. They hit the Core in twelve hours, and I want fresh faces for whatever fresh hell that brings.

BRAZZLETON (RADIO)

Virgil Control, this is Ed Brazzleton. We've got a problem.

INT. VIRGIL MEDICAL COMPARTMENT - HOURS LATER

Josh is lying on the one and only BUNK in the cramped Sickbay. He opens his eyes to find Braz, Sergei, and Zimsky jammed in there with him. Beck's giving him an INJECTION. The lights are DIMMING up and down.

They've all moved past sweating -- they've adopted the slow movement tourists use in tropical climates.

ZIMSKY

Good news or bad news?

JOSH

Good news.

SERGEI

We are alive.

JOSH

That's the best news you could come up with?

(coughing)

Christ it's hot.

BRAZZLETON

That Freon we flushed out of the cooling system, we're paying for it. It's 100 degrees and the temperature's climbing one degree an hour.

JOSH

At that rate --

ZIMSKY

Yes, we've done the math.

The lights FLICKER again. Josh squints, puzzled.

BRAZZLETON

Cold-starting the ultrasonics twice in a row -- we burned out some reactor rods in that fancy engine. We're running out of power, probably stop dead in a few hours.

ZIMSKY

We'll suffocate in the dark before we have a chance to roast alive.

JOSH

... I'm going back to sleep.

BECK

We're alive now, that's all that matters.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRAZZLETON

(to Zimsky)

I'm glad Josh was out there with me when it got hairy. Never would have occurred to you to pull your own air line out to save the rest of us.

ZIMSKY

That wouldn't have been necessary. You would have pulled my air line out for me.

BRAZZLETON

True enough.

ZIMSKY

Don't worry, I'm sure there'll be plenty of opportunities for me to sacrifice myself for the greater good.

BRAZZLETON

I'll make sure you don't miss the chance.

BECK

Excellent, actual death threats.

SERGEI

It is because you are attempting the impossible.

ZIMSKY

And you're not?

SERGEI

No. You are all trying to save the world. Six billion lives. It is overwhelming. I have come here to save my wife and my two little girls. To save six billion lives, this is too much. But I think I am smart enough, and brave enough, to save three.

Braz and Zimsky consider this, then EXIT, studiously avoiding each other. Sergei takes Josh's hand.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Nice job, *tovarisch*.

JOSH

You would have done the same thing.

Sergei waggles his hand doubtfully.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He exits, and Beck sits next to Josh.

BECK

So you're really some college professor? Not from the NSA, or the CIA, just ...

JOSH

... boring college professor. Wrong place, wrong time.

BECK

Right place, right time.
(he reacts)

Bravest thing I've ever seen.

JOSH

The lack of oxygen kept me from weeping like a little girl, as is my custom in dangerous situations.

She brushes a bit of damp hair from his forehead, EXITS. Josh stares at the door a moment, struggles to his feet.

He shudders, starts to SHAKE ... a cumulative attack of the willies. With a hard SNORT he forces it down.

INT. VIRGIL COCKPIT - HOURS LATER

FLAMES reflect off Beck's face from the Viewscreen.

BECK

Tick tick, guys. Power levels are dropping and temperature's rising.

INT. VIRGIL ENGINEERING COMPARTMENT

Josh, Zimsky and Braz work at a table covered with NOTES.

ZIMSKY

(headset)
We're working on it!

BECK (RADIO)

Great. Where's Sergei?

JOSH

(headset)
He's in Weapons Control priming the bombs just in case we can only get to the Outer Core. He's the only one who really understands how the damn things are cross-wired.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)
 (to the others)
 All right, think harder.

The LIGHTS DIM again.

JOSH (CONT'D)
 Correction. Think faster.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

The Scientists and Engineers are all frantically working on a plan. Dread fills the room.

STICKLEY
 Status report?

Scientists and Engineers GATHER at the dais.

ENGINEER #1
 The damage to the reactor is extensive, they're maxed out on available power.

GEN. PURCELL
 Find them more.

SCIENTIST #1
 We've run every simulation, sir. You can't shut down any of the systems completely, and a partial shutdown of several systems just risks all of them failing.

GEN. PURCELL
 They're sitting on the world's smallest, most powerful nuclear reactor, and they're out of power?

SCIENTIST #2
 They're also ...

FOCUS on the TRACKING MAP and Virgil-dot in the Mantle.

SCIENTIST #2 (CONT'D)
 ... one thousand six hundred thirty-six miles below the surface of the Earth with a hull temperature of 7000 degrees and a pressure of one million atmospheres per square inch. That takes a lot of power. Sir.

There's a despairing pause. Rat raises his hand. Stickley gives him a go-ahead nod.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAT

When you're hacking and, uh,
borrowing computer power and
bandwidth from a computer network
you're not, um, technically supposed
to be in ... like say, the Pentagon?

General Purcell squints at Rat. Rat shrugs.

RAT (CONT'D)

There's a hacking riff called
"skipping." You lift resources from
different systems on a cycle, like--
(as if picking berries)
"There there there" so they all seem
like tiny glitches to a SysOp. But
then you combine those bits into one
steady stream of power.

The Scientists and Engineers stare at Rat ... then ERUPT
into a MADHOUSE of activity, rushing to their computers.

GEN. PURCELL

Why didn't you so-called experts
think of that?!

RAT

Because they're not criminals, sir.

STICKLEY

Nice job Mr. Finch.

RAT

I am the Stainless Steel Rat, ma'am.

INT. COCKPIT - AN HOUR LATER

Beck's piloting. Josh is on his back next to her under
an open PANEL. Sergei's standing behind them, working on
more controls. Josh YELPS as wires SPARK around him.

The POWER WHIRRRRS down, darkness comes. Beck PUNCHES a
panel, does it again.

SERGEI

What, did they teach you that at
astronaut school?

Sergei hits some switches, the lights struggle on.

BECK

Worked on the *Millenium Falcon*.

Shaking his head and muttering in Russian, Sergei EXITS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH

"I'm John Glenn."

(off Beck's look)

What did you mean?

BECK

Every astronaut wants to be the first, to go where nobody's gone. But for ones my age, it's all been done. First to break the sound barrier, first into space, first on the moon ... no frontiers left.

(off viewscreen)

Until today. Today I am John goddamn Glenn.

JOSH

I get it.

BECK

Nice to hear somebody say that.

(beat)

I was engaged, you know.

JOSH

To be married?

(off her look)

Okay, that came out wrong.

BECK

Just, you asked me back at the Base, if I ever wanted anything else.

(pause)

Anyway. He didn't get it. Nice to hear you do.

JOSH

What was this knob's problem?

BECK

He found me ... "intimidating".

Josh smiles at the call-back.

BECK (CONT'D)

He couldn't handle the astronaut wife scene.

JOSH

That's nuts.

BECK

Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH

-An astronaut wife would be great.
The access to squeezie food alone...

Beck is about to say something. Instead, she chuckles, and they just take comfort in each other's company. -

EXT. MANTLE - HOURS LATER

Virgil CHUGS through the thickening BLACK-ORANGE SLURRY of the Mantle.

SUPER: MISSION: DAY TWO

INT. COCKPIT

Beck checks her TRACKING DISPLAY. We see that the Virgil-dot is almost all the way through the Mantle, almost to the Core. Zimsky is at his station, continuing the constant jerry-rigging and re-wiring they're doing to keep the power on.

BECK

(headset)

Virgil Control claims they've come up with some help on the power, they're crunching the numbers now. Where are you?

INT. WEAPONS CONTROL COMPARTMENT

Josh, Braz and Sergei look up from their work.

JOSH

(headset)

We're in Weapons Control, checking the controls on the nukes.

(NOTE: The nukes are not in this room -- this is only Weapons Control. The nukes are in a separate, rear compartment. We saw them being loaded in there earlier.)

INT. COCKPIT

Beck checks the Viewscreen, double-takes.

Her POV reveals DOZENS of sharp-edged BLACK SHAPES appearing on the Screen ahead. Zimsky comes to her side.

BECK

Black. Black is bad. We can't go through anything black on the screen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY

(off instruments)

They're scattered everywhere, one hundred twenty miles across ... two miles deep, not quite as high ...

BECK

It's like a mine field ... I'm plotting an evasion vector --

ZIMSKY

You can steer in between them, I think.

BECK

Going to be tight.

ZIMSKY

They're diamonds!

EXT. MANTLE

We see through the black-orange Mantle the VAST DIAMOND FIELD, craggy as asteroids, but with miles-deep, infinite FACETS on each. Vicious SPIKES rise from the surfaces. It is indeed a deadly, infinitely dense MINE FIELD. In a journey that has shown us things we've never seen, this is something we could never imagine.

INT. COCKPIT

BECK

Zimsky, less cryptic utterances, more explaining to the boss lady.

ZIMSKY

The pressure's so high down here, these huge diamonds have been compressed over and over again for millions of years.

BECK

Great. Giant, hard, sharp things.

ZIMSKY

Worse than you think. These are even harder than a normal diamond.

ALARM LIGHTS go on.

BECK

Proximity alert -- we're on a collision course.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BECK (CONT'D)

(headset)

Guys get up here, we've got trouble.

INT. WEAPONS CONTROL COMPARTMENT

JOSH

(headset)

What kind of --

The ship suddenly TILTS, throwing them all off balance.

EXT. MANTLE

Virgil CHUGS slowly away from the first vast diamond, then CORRECTS again, dodging away from another ...

INT. COCKPIT

Beck is throttling, working the stick. Zimsky straps in.

BECK

(headset)

We're dodging diamonds the size of Cape Cod, and we're not exactly nimble down here.

JOSH (V.O.)

How much time we got?

BECK'S POV of the DIAMONDS as they FILL THE VIEWSCREEN.

BECK

None!

She WRENCHES the stick --

EXT. MANTLE

Virgil SKIMS the spiky SURFACES of the Diamonds at seventy-miles an hour! It's handling like a sluggish Jet-Ski, but the ship somehow avoids the JAGGED EDGES surrounding it.

INT. WEAPONS CONTROL

Josh, Sergei and Braz being TOSSED AROUND --

INT. COCKPIT

Beck squeezes every inch of control she can from the ship --

EXT. MANTLE

Virgil WEAVES drunkenly past the deadly spikes, open space ahead, but at the last second --

A DIAMOND'S edge GRAZES Virgil! It SLICES through the black skin like a SCALPEL!

INT. COCKPIT

ALARMS SOUND!

BECK

BREACH! WE'VE GOT A BREACH!

INT. WEAPONS CONTROL

A THUNK echoes through the compartment, and YELLOW LIGHTS come on. Josh and Braz are at the door. Sergei glances up, sees a FINE DISCOLORATION appear on the wall --

He grabs up a NOTEBOOK and in one smooth motion leaps and SLAMS into Josh and Braz. The two men and the Notebook are SHOVED through the IRIS DOOR as the Lights go RED --

-- and the DOOR SEALS, trapping Sergei in the room!

INT. NEXT COMPARTMENT

Josh leaps to his feet, hits the VIDEO INTERCOM on the wall showing him the interior of the Weapons Control.

JOSH

Sergei! What are you doing!

INT. WEAPONS CONTROL

The sound of GROANING METAL fills the compartment. Sergei is working feverishly on a panel.

SERGEI

I must transfer control of the bombs from here to the cockpit! You won't be able to arm them if this compartment is ejected!

The groan becomes a SHRIEK ...

INT. COMPARTMENT

Josh POUNDS on the door.

JOSH

(headset)

Beck! Override the ejection system!

INT. COCKPIT

BECK
(headset)
Working on it!

Beck reaches for the over-rides --

-- and stops. Her hand hovers above the buttons. She locks eyes with Zimsky.

BECK (CONT'D)
... a damaged compartment weakens
the whole ship ...

CLOSE ON a panel BUTTON LIGHTING.

SERGEI (V.O.)
There, you should have bomb control!

JOSH (V.O.)
BECK! OVERRIDE THE DAMN DOOR!

Beck and Zimsky just stare at each other. Beck's hand is SHAKING from the will it's taking not to help Sergei.

INT. WEAPONS CONTROL

Sergei turns from the instruments, watches the WALL begin to BULGE IN --

INT. NEXT COMPARTMENT

Brazzleton's opened a wall panel, Josh is re-wiring.

BRAZZLETON
Almost got it --

JOSH
Sergei, hold on, almost there --

The Video reveals the WEAPONS COMPARTMENT IS COLLAPSING.

INT. WEAPONS CONTROL

Sergei rushes to the Video Intercom. The WALLS RUSH in on him --

INT. NEXT COMPARTMENT

Josh has just an instant of eye contact --

Sergei throws him a wink --

SCREAMING in all the headsets as Sergei is crushed alive.

INT. VIRGIL - VARIOUS

FAST CUTS of the Terranauts REACTING to Sergei's dying SCREAM, ending on --

JOSH, slumping onto the floor, pressing his earpiece against his head as if hearing Sergei die were some terrible atonement.

The scream finally ENDS. Josh throws his headset away, SMASHING it against the opposite wall.

EXT. MANTLE

As demonstrated in the earlier computer simulations, the crushed SECTION of the Virgil SEPARATES FROM THE SHIP. Instantly it COMPACTS to a tiny BALL of wreckage and disappears in Virgil's wake.

INT. NEXT COMPARTMENT

Braz picks up Sergei's NOTEBOOK from the floor.

JOSH

He was the only one who knew all the procedures for arming the nukes ...

BRAZZLETON

Josh, son, look. We've got his notebook. He pushed it out with us!

Josh opens the notebook. He turns it to show Braz.

JOSH

We've got to figure out how to work eight hydrogen bombs. From a handwritten instruction manual.

(beat)

In Russian.

REVEAL Sergei's Cyrillic handwritten notes. Braz is speechless.

INT. COCKPIT

Beck's hand is still locked, as if rigor has set in.

ZIMSKY

(quiet, tempting)

We don't have to tell them.

Beck turns to face him, slowly.

BECK

I didn't hate you ... until right this moment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY

Would you like to hear a secret?

(beat)

I don't care.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL - MINUTES LATER

The Flight Engineers are all silent. Rat is KICKING his computer station. Stickley puts a hand on his shoulder as Rat seethes in frustration.

GEN. PURCELL

How bad is this?

SCIENTIST #1

All the automated weapons controls were in that compartment. Dr. Putechin managed to transfer partial control to the cockpit, but ...

GEN. PURCELL

You don't know.

Scientist #1 shakes his head.

GEN. PURCELL (CONT'D)

Have you worked out the numbers for Mr. Finch's power solution?

SCIENTIST #1

Almost.

GEN. PURCELL

(deadly quiet)

I want some good news to give these people. Go now.

INT. COCKPIT - MINUTES LATER

Beck and Zimsky are there. Josh and Braz enter. Josh is barely holding it together.

BECK

You okay?

JOSH

No.

He sits down, hangs his head. He spots something, picks it up. It's the PICTURE of Sergei's wife and daughters. It's been on the floor, trampled, starting to melt, but still identifiable. He FLIPS it onto Beck's panels. He stops, looks at her panels again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)
Did you reset the overrides?

BECK
I never pushed them.

Josh looks at her.

BRAZZLETON
Jesus.

JOSH
You let him die.

Beck won't look away.

BECK
I had to.

All of it runs silently across Josh's face. He stands, walks out. Beck turns back to her instruments.

BECK (CONT'D)
You two go get some rest.

BRAZZLETON
We can stay --

BECK
GET OUT.

INT. COCKPIT - LATER

CLOSE ON the Tracking Display, with the Virgil-dot closer to the Mantle-Core line. Beck is alone at her station. Suddenly she POUNDS the panel with the exact same "not-good-enough" rhythm she did in the simulations pod. Tears are in her eyes.

(NOTE: These are the tears of a seasoned professional, bitterly disappointed in her performance, mourning the loss of a friend. These are not the movie-convention tears of a female character who's finally emerged from her hard shell and gotten in touch with her feelings. If they somehow become those tears, I will find who is responsible. And I will hurt them.)

RAT (RADIO)
Virgil, this is Control, we're beaming the fix for your power problems down to you.

BECK
Thank you, Virgil Control.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Zimsky and Braz enter, move slowly to their stations. The heat's beginning to hurt them -- eyes getting red, lips peeling, breathing hard.

BECK (CONT'D)

Okay, Virgil Control sent us this solution for the power --

The light and power WARBLE dangerously.

BECK (CONT'D)

Rat came up with this idea.

ZIMSKY

God help us.

BRAZZLETON

I trust the kid. Boy's sharper than a whore's smile.

Zimsky and Beck exchange a look.

ZIMSKY

I don't even ask anymore.

BECK

We're going to need the power, we're almost at the Core.

(then)

Initiating "skipping" on my mark.

BRAZZLETON

Give us a three count, Commander.

BECK

Three. Two. One. Mark.

The Terranauts throw SWITCHES, and the Cockpit LIGHTS and PANELS DIM for one tense moment. They then BRIGHTEN, but not to full intensity.

BRAZZLETON

Battery reserves are climbing!

ZIMSKY

I have a little extra power to throw into the cooling unit, that should slow the temperature rise.

BECK

Thank God.

ZIMSKY

I said "slow" not "stop", Major.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BECK

Now that we know we're not going to die -- right now, anyway -- we'll be at the Core in a few hours. Will the nukes be ready?

Zimsky and Brazzleton exchange looks.

BECK (CONT'D)

We need Josh, don't we?

Brazzleton nods right away. Zimsky hesitates, pride wounded, but he still nods. Beck gets up.

INT. VIRGIL LIVING QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

Four tiny bunks are crammed in here. Josh sits on one, eyes closed. Beck slides open the door.

BECK

You think you're the only one? You think you're the only one who wants to curl up in a ball? God, I want to pop you one right now!

JOSH

Nice pep talk ...

BECK

Do you think I wanted to let our friend die?

JOSH

It's my fault, I got him in the project, I convinced him to be a part of this crew --

BECK

Get over yourself. Fate or destiny or God --

JOSH

God hasn't answered the phone in a long time, what happened to Sergei is my doing, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time --

BECK

The right place at the right time! He died so we could complete our mission. And he died in vain if you don't finish the job.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH
Oh, that's right, the job of saving
the world.

BECK
Not everybody in the world. Just
three of them.

Beck FLIPS the picture of Sergei's family onto the bed.

JOSH
(long pause)
Damn you.

BECK
I can still hear Sergei screaming in
my head. "Damn me"? Too late.

Beck SLAMS the door closed.

INT. COCKPIT - LATER

Beck, Zimsky and Braz are in their seats. Braz checks
the EARTH CROSS-SECTION DISPLAY. The Virgil-dot is right
at the CORE-MANTLE BORDER. The COCKPIT VIBRATES.

BRAZZLETON
Here it comes ...

BECK
Relax. We're about to see just what
this baby can do.

The COCKPIT SHAKES WILDLY --

BRAZZLETON
IT'S THE CORE!

EXT. MANTLE/CORE

We're SPEEDING with Virgil, and without warning --

BURST from the semi-solid MANTLE into a BLINDING GOLDEN
SEA, VAST electrical CHARGES ARCING through the glowing
space. It's like traveling through a golden NEBULA in
outer space, brilliant COLORS SWIRLING around in the mix.

This is the **Outer Core**, the engine put in place by God to
drive the entire planet, and you can feel every single
iota of that POWER here.

Tiny Virgil plunges down into the blinding infinite...

INT. COCKPIT

Even the glow from the Viewscreen is blinding. The Terranauts try to speak, can't. Finally Zimsky croaks:

ZIMSKY

Welcome to Hell.

BECK

We just got a huge speed jump.
We're at ninety-five miles an hour.

JOSH (O.S.)

It's a hyperfluid.

They turn. Josh is in the cockpit entrance.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I published a paper on this once.
Heat liquefies the iron, but
pressure forces it into a semi-
gaseous state.

BECK

How long have you been there?

He slides into the seat next to Beck. They have a
whispered exchange.

JOSH

Forgive me?

BECK

Not yet.

JOSH

Fair enough.
(to the others)
What we got here, gentlemen?

BRAZZLETON

I've got a different density read-
out than our estimates.

BECK

This is great, at this speed we'll
reach the Inner Core in a little
over ten hours. We finally bought
some luck --

ZIMSKY

How different?

BRAZZLETON

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY

-The different Core density. Punch
it into the equations for the
nuclear detonation.

Braz calls up a SCREEN, punches in the equations. -

BRAZZLETON

I get sick of you always being
right.

BECK

Not what I want to hear.

ZIMSKY

(off the display)
The force of the explosion won't
dissipate as we planned.

BECK

You're telling me the eight hundred
megatons of nuclear warheads we
hailed down here isn't going to cut
it?

JOSH

The whole plan hinged on the
explosive power from the nukes
rippling out all through the Core,
getting it moving again. This Core
material's too thin. The explosion
will just dissipate harmlessly.

BECK

All right, my genius boys, now what?

BRAZZLETON

Now we pray.

Josh, his eyes closed, SNORTS.

BECK

I will take alternate suggestions.

ZIMSKY

It took us months to compute those
equations --

JOSH

It took us months to derive those
equations. This is just a new set
of numbers to plug in. Don't tell
me Lloyd Zimsky isn't up to the job.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRAZZLETON

Niiiiicce ...

ZIMSKY

Contact Virgil Control. Get me the
Programmers.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL - LATER

On large SCREENS we can see cross-sections of the Earth
as the Scientists work on this new problem. Huge
SUPERCOMPUTERS HUM frantically.

SCIENTIST #1

There's a staggering number of
variables needed in these new
detonation equations. It's going to
take time --

STICKLEY

I am beginning to believe someone
does not want us on this planet.

GEN. PURCELL

Mankind has tamed every challenge on
Earth, we will overcome this one.

STICKLEY

We are, at the end of the day, very
clever apes in a very large universe.
For life to have evolved even this far
took a run of luck that is
mathematically inconceivable.

(beat)

Perhaps we have simply reached the
end of our streak.

All the IMAGES on the COMPUTER SCREENS suddenly WOBBLE.

TECH

General, we have a massive EM burst
in the upper atmosphere!

GEN. PURCELL

Speak English!

RAT

A wave of electromagnetic energy is
heading this way, like the spike
that destroyed the pacemakers, but
thousands of times stronger.

ENGINEER #1

We're shielded --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TECH

-- this is a huge variance!

Rat stands up from his station, backs away.

RAT

This ... is going to sting.

EXT. VIRGIL BASE

It's a perfectly blue desert sky. Then, RIPPLES of color appear, subtle at first ... a low GROWLING, CRACKLING begins ... finally, like a fast-moving STORM, a WAVE of ALIEN VIOLET LIGHT ROLLS from over the distant hills, ROARS across the sky and PASSES over the BASE.

Everything metal SPARKS, transformers, fuse boxes, electronic devices EXPLODE.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

The lights DIM, and SPARKS EXPLODE from the supercomputers. People leap back in panic as monitors FRY and SHATTER, ELECTRICITY ARCS between every computer. The room is one enormous LIGHTNING SHOW.

And in an instant the effect is GONE. Techs put out the small fires. Engineers return to their consoles.

FLIGHT ENGINEER #1

We've barely got communication --

FLIGHT ENGINEER #2

Tracking's gone, and the network's --

SCIENTIST #1

Down! There's no way we can solve the new detonation equations.

But Rat is unperturbed, almost cheerful, as he takes a POWER DRILL from under his station.

RAT

Never really thought I'd need this.

To everyone's amazement, Rat ATTACKS the base of the Control dais, prying off the surface, revealing a sealed PANEL in the wall. General Purcell and Stickley peer down on him.

RAT (CONT'D)

When I hack a planet, I do it right. There was always a possibility of an EM spike.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rat opens the Panel; there's a series of nesting metal PANELS behind it. He works on removing them.

RAT (CONT'D)

So I built a safe-box. Five feet of magnetically neutral alloy and concrete with a compensating EM Field generator.

Rat's CRAWLED halfway into the dais. He then slides out a DRAWER, on the end of which is a --

GEN. PURCELL

What is that?

RAT

A TRS-80. Home computer from 1984. You can play "Pong" on it. Barely.

The Scientists gather around Rat.

RAT (CONT'D)

Buuuut -- seventy percent of the world's infrastructure runs on computers this old. Very few parts, easily replaceable --

Rat clicks the computer ON. It comes to life.

RAT (CONT'D)

-- and very rugged.

ENGINEER #1

You're insane!

RAT

You're spoiled. There's more computing power in this box than we used to put a man on the moon.
(taking a seat)
Fire it up.

The Scientists and Engineers stare at Rat in disbelief.

SCIENTIST #1

You're going to program three-dimensional fluid dynamics equations in Assembly language on the fly.

RAT

(grim)
Aw, c'mon. Give me something hard.

EXT. OUTER CORE - LATER

Virgil struggles through the Sun-like maelstrom of the liquid iron Outer Core.

INT. VIRGIL - NAVIGATION COMPARTMENT

Beck, is watching from the doorway as Josh, Braz and Zimsky examine a READOUT. A CROSS-SECTION of the Outer and Inner Core is on a screen that reacts to TOUCH.

BECK

Control's been hit by an EM pulse.
We've lost voice, but we can spit
numbers back and forth.

ZIMSKY

I've come up with a theory.

BRAZZLETON

Amazing. 2300 miles down, nine
thousand degrees hot, the fate of
the world at stake and he's still an
arrogant prick.

BECK

Cool it, boys.

ZIMSKY

Virgil Control will confirm my
calculations. The gist of it is --
one explosion won't do it. We'll
use wave interference.

Zimsky illustrates this on the COMPUTER SCREEN.

ZIMSKY (CONT'D)

It's like dropping stones in a pond.
The ripples will reinforce one
another, spread the effect around.

JOSH

Eight 100 megaton explosions instead
of one 800 megaton explosion...

BRAZZLETON

All right. You are a genius.

JOSH

We'll seed the nukes through the
Core, then detonate them in
sequence.

The computer screen SIMULATES individual NUKES being
DROPPED OFF in different spots around the Inner Core.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH (CONT'D)

Dump the first one, then race around
the Core and dump the other ones.

He DEMONSTRATES on the touch-map. Those nukes in
different places DETONATE ONE AFTER ANOTHER. WAVES of
power RADIATE out from each on the display, and OVERLAP.

(Remember from earlier? Vivid ANIMATIONS, no problem.)

JOSH (CONT'D)

Then we outrun the huge nuclear
shockwave, penetrate the Lower
Mantle, and dodge the biggest
earthquake in history.

BECK

That's the plan?

BRAZZLETON

The problem is we don't have any way
to dump the bombs individually.

BECK

That's the problem?

Josh picks up a tool kit and Sergei's notebook.

JOSH

First things first. Let's go
hotwire the hydrogen bombs.

BECK

I'm going back to the cockpit. I do
much better in the cockpit.

EXT. OUTER CORE - LATER

As the Virgil travels, we can SEE a DIM SHAPE taking form
in the distance ...

INT. WEAPONS COMPARTMENT

Josh, Braz, and Zimsky are elbow deep in the guts of the
disassembled NUCLEAR BOMB CLUSTER. Josh is squinting at
Sergei's notebook.

JOSH

I think this word is "disarm." I
hope it's "disarm."

ZIMSKY

I can't believe we didn't bring
instructions for these in English --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRAZZLETON

They're hydrogen bombs. They don't
come with instructions.

INT. COCKPIT

Beck peers at the Viewscreen.

BECK

(headset)

We're closing on the Inner Core.

EXT. OUTER CORE

The DIM SHAPE grows larger ...

INT. COCKPIT

Josh, Zimsky, and Braz appear behind Beck, somber. They
can't tear their eyes from the Viewscreen.

EXT. OUTER CORE

Through the blinding molten iron, the **INNER CORE** suddenly
appears, like a leviathan breaking from a fog. Its
crystalline surface is a **MIASMA** of unimaginable **COLORS**,
vast **ARCS** of mystical, universe-old **ENERGY CRACKLE** from
the surface hundreds of miles into the liquid **OUTER CORE**.

Even though it's 500 miles away, Virgil looks like a tiny
Apollo capsule racing over the surface of the moon.

INT. COCKPIT

The Terranauts sit down to think.

JOSH

The nukes are ready. They're all on
timers.

BECK

So let's start dumping them.

ZIMSKY

The bombs aren't built for these
pressures. They'll be crushed
instantly.

BECK

I'm going to assume your big brains
have solved this problem.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRAZZLETON

Caught us. We were making this up
as we went along.

JOSH

Virgil's compartments.
(off their looks)
We put a nuke in each section of
Virgil and then eject the individual
sections one at a time. Undamaged
compartments should stay intact long
enough for the nuke to go off.

ZIMSKY

Those bombs weigh --

JOSH

They're manageable. Gravity's at
half strength at this depth.

BRAZZLETON

We'll tear the ship apart as we go.

BECK

Ten sections left intact. By the
time we're done, nothing'll be left
but the cockpit with the reactor,
the ultrasonic drill and laser.

(beat)

This plan just gets better and
better.

BRAZZLETON

And better. Virgil's not designed
to eject intact compartments. The
manual override's in that crawlspace
we used to get out earlier.

JOSH

One of us has to go in there and
throw the ejection override.

BECK

That crawlspace has Core fluid
passing through it! It's at nine
thousand degrees!

JOSH

We'll flush it with Freon again --

ZIMSKY

Nine thousand degrees. Even if we
shut down the impeller, cool the
chamber, and these suits hold up ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOSH
... whoever goes in that crawlspace
is not coming back.

INT. COCKPIT - MINUTES LATER

CLOSE ON

Braz's FIST, with three WIRES sticking out.

REVEAL Josh, Zimsky and Braz staring at them, about to
"draw straws."

BECK
You forgot a wire.

JOSH
You're the pilot. Whoever lives
will need you to get out.

Zimsky and Braz stare at each other.

BRAZZLETON
Try your luck, Zimsky?

ZIMSKY
Will it be luck, Brazzleton?

Zimsky selects one of the wires, but before he can pull
it out, Josh picks one.

JOSH
Together.

They DRAW ...

Both their WIRES are the same length.

Braz is holding the SHORT WIRE between his fingers.

BRAZZLETON
Huh. Well, I better --

Zimsky GRABS Braz's wrist.

ZIMSKY
Please. This is childish.

Braz sighs, opens his hand. The wire UNBENDS to the same
length as the other two.

BRAZZLETON
(to Zimsky)
I thought you'd be happy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY

Not at the expense of you treating
me like a fool.

JOSH

What gives you the right to commit
suicide?

BRAZZLETON

Because it's my damn ship.

ZIMSKY

That makes no sense --

BRAZZLETON

I got nothing besides Virgil. I
can't let it fail, not after twenty
years.

(pause)

Don't you understand? We've come to
Hell, and now we need a sacrifice.
And if this ship needs blood, it's
going to be my blood.

Braz storms out of the cockpit.

INT. VIRGIL CORRIDOR - SECONDS LATER

Brazzleton's heading back to get his helmet.

ZIMSKY (O.S.)

Braz.

Zimsky's caught up to Braz. Braz ignores him.

ZIMSKY (CONT'D)

Braz!

Zimsky grabs Braz's arm, stopping him.

ZIMSKY (CONT'D)

You're right. It is your ship. But
I have to tell you: I wish to God it
was our ship.

Braz stares at Zimsky, then nods. Without another word
they part.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

All the personnel is clustered around Rat's station.
He's drenched in sweat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FLIGHT ENGINEER #1
They're requesting the coordinates
for the nukes.

STICKLEY
Communications?

FLIGHT ENGINEER #1
I'm barely keeping a signal
together. We might pull off one
clean transmission. Maybe.

RAT
We're ready. Let's do it.

TECH
We should wait --

STICKLEY
For what, the Archangel Michael to
hand-deliver the data to them? Send
the coordinates.

INT. VIRGIL COCKPIT - MINUTES LATER

Josh, Beck and Zimsky are gathered around Beck's seat.

JOSH
Got the bomb coordinates ...

BECK
(headset)
Braz?

INT. VIRGIL MAINTENANCE PASSAGE

Braz, suited up, is crouched atop an ACCESS PANEL in the
floor, which opens DOWN into the CRAWLSPACE.

BRAZZLETON
Good to go, darlin'. Josh, Beck,
I'm real proud to have known ya.

INT. COCKPIT

BECK
Helluva a boat you built.

INT. VIRGIL MAINTENANCE CHAMBER

BRAZZLETON
And Lloyd?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZIMSKY (RADIO)

Yes, Edward?

BRAZZLETON

I win.

INT. COCKPIT

Zimsky just smiles sadly.

BRAZZLETON (RADIO)

The chamber's empty. Do it.

Beck's hand goes to a BUTTON. She hesitates for a long moment. It's a replay of when she had to let Sergei die.

Josh slides his hand under Beck's. They make eye contact.

Beck PRESSES the button, her hand on his.

INT. VIRGIL MAINTENANCE CHAMBER

Brazzleton DROPS as the HATCH OPENS --

INT. ENGINE CRAWLSPACE

Braz SCREAMS as he lands in the RED-HOT CRAWLSPACE. His thermal suit immediately BURSTS into small FLAMES ...

CU of his helmet shows his skin BLISTERING.

The HATCH CLOSES automatically.

INT. COCKPIT

JOSH

Braz, hold on!

INT. CRAWLSPACE

Blind from pain, Braz clumsily POPS open a PANEL. REVEALED is a large metal LOCKING PISTON.

INT. COCKPIT

Josh and Beck stare at the intercom, willing Braz to live longer. Zimsky is stone-faced. Braz is still screaming.

INT. CRAWLSPACE

Braz's FLESH is SIZZLING in his suit. He's in shock. His hands find the PISTON. He PULLS and TURNS it ---

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

It LOCKS into a different position --

INT. COCKPIT

A LIGHT goes from GREEN to RED in front of BECK.

BECK

Manual override is complete!

(headset)

Braz, we can get you out of there --

INT. CRAWLSPACE

BRAZZLETON

... start ... the impeller

INT. COCKPIT

It's killing them, but they know it has to be done.

BECK

Goodbye, Braz.

INT. CRAWLSPACE

Above the constant ROAR comes the WHINE of the IMPELLER starting up. Braz is ROASTING ALIVE in his suit. But he PATS the ship's metal --

BRAZZLETON

Virgil ... GET ... THEM ... HOME.

CORE FLUID ROARS into the chamber. Braz is INCINERATED.

INT. VIRGIL COCKPIT

They sit in silence a minute. Finally:

JOSH

We have a job to do.

EXT. OUTER CORE - LATER

The Virgil ZOOMS BY on its orbit of the giant Inner Core.

INT. VIRGIL COMPARTMENT

Josh and Zimsky ease one of the huge, spherical HYDROGEN BOMBS into the compartment. The HEAT is now INCREDIBLE in the ship. Both men have heat BLISTERS, cracked SKIN.

INT. COCKPIT

Beck is fighting the controls and her heat delirium.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BECK

(headset)

Coming up on the first drop-off point. I'm going to do a high speed "flyby" around the Inner Core and then slingshot back towards the Mantle. We get one shot at this, boys.

INT. COMPARTMENT

JOSH

(headset)

Hey, there's nothing you can't do, remember?

INT. COCKPIT

Beck smiles through cracked lips.

BECK

(headset)

Initiating flyby now. Drop the first nuke in one minute.

EXT. OUTER CORE

Virgil RACES over the surface of the INNER CORE.

INT. COMPARTMENT

Josh hits a SWITCH on the bomb.

JOSH

Timer on!

ZIMSKY

Clear!

They DIVE through the iris door as it SEALS behind them.

EXT. OUTER CORE

THAT SECTION of Virgil PEELS OFF and drifts behind the ship as it RACES ONWARD.

INT. SECOND COMPARTMENT

JOSH

(headset)

Timer's on. We've got ten minutes!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIEF MONTAGE:

-- Josh and Zimsky pulling ANOTHER BOMB into another COMPARTMENT, hitting the timer and JUMPING OUT.

-- EXTERIOR of Virgil as SECTIONS EJECT from the ship.

-- Beck struggling with the controls as the ship becomes more and more fragmented.

-- Josh and Zimsky with another BOMB ...

-- Another SEGMENT POPPING off the ship ...

END MONTAGE.

INT. LIVING COMPARTMENT

This and the Nav Compartment are the last two sections of the craft intact. Zimsky and Josh are putting the last bomb in place.

JOSH

(headset)

This is the last one, Beck.

INT. COCKPIT

BECK

(headset)

Two minutes til primary detonation!

The Viewscreen suddenly FLASHES WHITE!

EXT. OUTER CORE

One of the POWER ARCS from the Inner Core FLASHES close to the Virgil, sending it into a spin ...

INT. LIVING COMPARTMENT

Josh and Zimsky are TOSSED. The bomb SLAMS into one wall then CRASHES into Josh. The ship stabilizes at an ANGLE, trapping Josh under the bomb.

JOSH

AAGGGGHHHHHHHH!

Josh shoves, Zimsky pulls, tugs, pushes, but it's no use, they can't shift the bomb!

: BECK (V.O.)

I'm can't hold us on course!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BECK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Ejecting that compartment in fifty
seconds!

Zimsky and Josh lock eyes. Zimsky battles with his
essential nature ...

And loses. He backs away toward the iris door to the
next compartment.

JOSH
I can move this if you help me!

ZIMSKY
There's no use both of us dying.
I'm very sorry.

Josh's headset is just out of reach.

BECK (V.O.)
Disengaging failsafes!

Josh's hand scrabbles for his headset ... almost ...

Zimsky JUMPS through the door to the Navigation
compartment ...

BECK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Ejecting!

Josh SNATCHES UP his headset.

JOSH
(headset)
BECK! NOSE DOWN!

INT. COCKPIT

Without question, Beck JAMS the STICK FORWARD. Virgil
ANGLES FORWARD in response.

INT. LIVING COMPARTMENT

The momentum LIFTS THE NUKE OFF JOSH! It BOUNCES OFF one
wall then PLUNGES through the open door to --

INT. NAVIGATION COMPARTMENT

-- Zimsky turns and raises an arm as the bomb SLAMS into
him, PINNING him to the wall. The IRIS door CLOSES --

INT. LIVING COMPARTMENT

The doors are CLOSING!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Josh grabs his thermal suit helmet and LUNGES for the door to the interior ACCESS CORRIDOR. At the last second he JAMS the door to the interior hallway OPEN. A WAVE of HEAT rushes in --

INT. COCKPIT

BECK

(headset)

What's going on? Both compartments are compromised! I've got to eject them! Interior passage temperature is 500 degrees and climbing!

INT. LIVING COMPARTMENT

Josh is completely SUITED UP. Objects are BURSTING into FLAME around him.

JOSH

(headset)

No kidding. Keep the nose down. I'm going to slide down to you!

INT. COCKPIT

BECK

(headset)

You can't come through that passage! Internal temp's now -- 1000 degrees!

INT. LIVING COMPARTMENT

Josh squeezes himself out into the corridor.

JOSH

(headset)

No worries, I'm seven foot tall and bulletproof.

And he JUMPS.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Josh FALLS, SLIDING down the tilted corridor along the MELTING METAL. He SCREAMS in pain, PLUMMETING toward the --
-- COCKPIT DOOR which he SLAMS into. Instantly it IRISES open, dropping him into the cockpit AIRLOCK.

INT. COCKPIT

The INNER DOOR CYCLES open, dumping Josh onto the floor. Beck jumps to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She GRUNTS from the heat she feels even through her suit as she strips off Josh's helmet.

Josh's face is BURNED, his hair SINGED to STUBBLE. But he's breathing.

JOSH

... thought you were drivin' ...

Beck grins, hops back into her seat. She grabs the stick and at the same time hits the EJECT BUTTON.

INT. NAVIGATION COMPARTMENT

Zimsky BELLOWS as he feels the last two compartments BLOW off the side of the ship ...

EXT. OUTER CORE

Those compartments fall into orbit around the Inner Core.

INT. COCKPIT

Josh is strapped in. Beck's in full fighter jock mode.

BECK

Initiating slingshot.

JOSH

The first nuke is about to --

EXT. OUTER CORE

A Virgil SEGMENT drifts along.

INT. NAV COMPARTMENT

The walls are BUCKLING but still holding.

CLOSE ON the BOMB TIMER, ticking down ...

EXT. OUTER CORE

A NUCLEAR DETONATION FLARES! Waves of incalculable power radiate out from the blinding center. The liquid of the Outer Core RIPPLES ...

RACE along with one of the RIPPLES to find another SEGMENT, which just then EXPLODES!

EXT. OUTER CORE - OPPOSITE SIDE

Of the Inner Core the Virgil RACES away as the NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS daisy-chain towards them, WARPING the fantastic fabric of the Outer Core ...

INT. COCKPIT

Josh and Beck are JAMMED back in their seats.

BECK

We're riding the shockwave, doing
three hundred miles per hour! Here
comes the Mantle!

(then)

What happened to Zimsky?

EXT. OUTER CORE

The twisted Nav and Living Compartments, floating.

INT. NAVIGATION COMPARTMENT

Zimsky, barely conscious, focuses in on the TIMER counting to ZERO --

And LAUGHS. A good, hearty LAUGH.

Then everything goes WHITE.

EXT. OUTER CORE

As Virgil ROARS toward the Mantle, we can see the last NUKE -- and Zimsky -- go up behind them. The Outer Core's material is now visibly beginning to move ...

INT. COCKPIT

On the Viewscreen, the MOUNTAINSCAPE of the MANTLE RUSHES toward the ship.

JOSH

(still weak)

Zimsky ... sacrificed himself.
Hero.

BECK

Got an opening, hold on!

EXT. MANTLE SURFACE

Virgil RUSHES toward the fierce, almost SOLID black Mantle/Core interface. Like flaws in a dark gem, rivulets of weaker ORANGE MAGMA trace through the surface of the Mantle. At incredible speeds, Beck threads the needle and the Virgil SLAMS into one of the weak spots!

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

Everyone holds on as the Base SHAKES in a tremor.

STICKLEY

What's the center of this quake?!

RAT

It's everywhere! This earthquake is coming from EVERYWHERE! It's one big shockwave!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Cars, people are scattered on the bridge.

ANGLE ON

A RIPPLE, like an ocean SWELL, rolling into the BAY --

BACK TO

The Golden Gate Bridge, which WARPS, ROLLS SIDEWAYS for one moment, lifting people and cars into the air a few feet then DROPPING them with a THUD.

EXT. SAHARA DESERT - DAY

The SWELL continues on land, like being on the deck of a ship that just DIPPED then ROSE.

EXT. PARIS - CHAMPS ELYSEE - DAY

The SWELL ROLLS through here, bringing down loose roofing tiles, knocking people off-balance, then

ANGLE ON

The EIFFEL TOWER SCREECHES under the strain, but HOLDS.

QUICK SHOTS

of PEOPLE in different COUNTRIES SWAYING with the SHOCKWAVE.

EXT. MANTLE - CONT.

HUGE CHUNKS of semi-solid Mantle are SLIDING back and forth, MAGMA JETS like arteries ROAR through the chaos.

All that's left of Virgil -- the Cockpit atop the ultrasonic boring beam and laser -- CHEWS its way through this madness, WEAVING and DODGING.

INT. COCKPIT

Beck is "flying" by the seat of her pants, rolling and pushing the Virgil like a jetfighter through the OBSTACLES on the Viewscreen.

JOSH

... damn, you are good ...

BECK

... good enough. Now shut up and let me drive. Shortcut.

EXT. MANTLE

Virgil CUTS into one of the Magma Jets, RIDES the molten silica like a germ in a vein!

INT. COCKPIT

SHAKING Josh and Beck almost to death.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

The earthquake STOPS. Several of the PANELS LIGHT UP.

FLIGHT ENGINEER #1

We've got partial instrumentation.

TECH #1

The chart! They're in the Mantle!!

STICKLEY

Where are they headed?

RAT

Major Childs found a space between some tectonic plates --

EXT. MANTLE

The Virgil ROARS UPWARD, but we can see VAST DARK MASSES beginning to GRIND TOGETHER, strangling the magma artery --

INT. COCKPIT

BECK

Our escape route's closing up!

There's one brief moment of silence in the chaos.

JOSH

I should have kissed you that day on the launchpad.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BECK
(pissed off)
Yeah, you should have.

Josh reaches out his right hand. Beck GRABS it with her left hand. The DARKNESS fills the Viewscreen -- -

EXT. MANTLE

Virgil DISAPPEARS into a CRACK between tectonic PLATES, which then GRIND SHUT, a CONTINENT-SIZED CRUSHING PRESS.

INT. VIRGIL CONTROL

The Flight Team watches as Virgil's tracking DOT disappears from the Earth cross-section. There's a horrible silence.

RAT
It could just mean we lost them in all the interference. It could.

A SOLDIER comes running in. He snaps a salute.

SOLDIER
General, sir! The sky!

EXT. VIRGIL BASE - NIGHT

Hundreds of people throng out into the compound as the NORTHERN LIGHTS WAVER. Then, slowly, it ROLLS BACK. The desert sky reclaims its flawless, starry mosaic.

ANGLE ON

General Purcell, Stickley and Rat. Rat stares up at the sky. Suddenly he SITS heavily in the dirt, CRYING. Surprisingly, General Purcell squats next to him, puts a hand on the hacker's shoulder.

ESTABLISHING SHOT: THE PACIFIC OCEAN

A NAVY FLEET is stationed out near the Marianas Islands.

SUPER: THREE DAYS LATER

EXT. U.S.S. AIRCRAFT CARRIER ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Rescue teams are prepping on the vast deck.

INT. NAV DECK

The Carrier CAPTAIN is sitting in his chair. General Purcell is with Rat, Rat studying the GPS READOUTS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GEN. PURCELL

Mr. Finch, they have no way of
contacting us, their life support --

Rat never takes his eyes off the instruments.

RAT

Josh would have figured something
out.

(faltering)

He would have.

A SCREEN OP pokes her head inside the room.

SCREEN OP

The sub sonar's picked something.

CAPTAIN

Punch it up in here.

A STATICKY WHINE comes up on the speakers, FUZZY IMAGES
on a SCREEN. Rat and General Purcell look hopeful.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

That's just a pod of whales. They're
way off their usual path, but it's
not uncommon since that, what was it
called -- orbital wobble?

GEN. PURCELL

Yes. That's what they called it.

EXT. CARRIER TOWER - MOMENTS LATER

Stickley is waiting for them when the General and Rat
emerge onto the observation BALCONY. They stare out at
the ocean.

GEN. PURCELL

She's a pilot. She should have died
seeing blue sky.

(pause)

We should go now.

Trailed by a line of SAILORS and the CAPTAIN, they start
down the steep exterior STAIRCASE, Rat in the lead.

EXT. CARRIER DECK

A LOUDSPEAKER BLARES "Stand down!". The rescue
preparations cease, and the CREWMEMBERS grow solemn.

EXT. TOWER STAIRWAY

Halfway down the staircase, Rat STOPS. The people behind him JAM UP behind him.

RAT

Whales.

(stunned)

WHALES!

Rat turns and CLAMBERS up the RAILING of the stairs, not even waiting for people to get out of his way!

INT. NAV DECK

The others rush in to find Rat PROGRAMMING on the computer. We hear the WHALE NOISES.

RAT

I can't believe I didn't think of that. Of course it's whales!

CAPTAIN

Get away from that computer!

RAT

Their communications are out! He's pulsing the ultrasonic beam! It's super low frequency sound waves, so when he pulses it to get our attention --

GEN. PURCELL

It attracts the whales.

Rat punches a button. From the mix of WHALE SOUNDS comes the low, steady HUM of the ULTRASONIC DRILL.

Stickley rushes forward and KISSES Rat on the head. General Purcell LAUGHS for the first time.

GEN. PURCELL (CONT'D)

Josh Keyes is a goddamned genius!

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - LATER

A POD of WHALES is CRESTING the surface. TRACK through the mammoth beasts, until, bobbing on the surface of the water, in the very center of the whales, we find ...

VIRGIL'S COCKPIT!

One of the RESCUE CHOPPERS soars in over the Cockpit.

CHOPPER (V.O.)

Virgil Crew, this is Navy Rescue!

INT. COCKPIT.

Josh and Beck stare at their salvation on the Viewscreen. They're on the brink of death, every word a painful rasp.

BECK

I told you ... pulsing the
ultrasonics ... would work.

JOSH

Is there anything ... you can't do?

BECK

(pause)

Can't ... drive a stick shift.

Josh stares at her. Beck weakly raises her right hand.

BECK (CONT'D)

Swear ... to God.

JOSH

You fly the Space Shuttle!

BECK

No clutch in the Shuttle ... It's
that whole right hand/left foot
thing ...

Josh laughs -- a dry, bloody laugh. Beck chuckles.

BECK (CONT'D)

... feel ... better?

JOSH

No ... not really.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN

As a Navy RECOVERY CHOPPER lowers to the Cockpit, the
WHALES DANCE nearby in the warm waters of the Pacific
Ocean. PAN UP to the perfect BLUE SKY ...

FADE OUT:

END