# THE SUPERCONDUCTING SUPERCOLLIDER OF SPARKLE CREEK, WISCONSIN

by

David Koepp & John Kamps

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*This is based on a true story.*

*It just hasn't happened yet.*

A BLACK SCREEN

explodes in a beautiful display of fireworks. It looks like fireworks, anyway, but the patterns are too perfect, too symmetrical.

While Frank Sinatra sings "How Little We Know" and the credits roll, the light show goes on. And each time, just before the burst of color and beautifully patterned streaks, two tiny dots of light, nothing more than little tingles at opposite ends of the screen, fly slowly toward one another and collide, causing all the beauty and chaos.

What are these strange patterns? What makes these tingles intermingle? Not even Frank knows...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

A silver circle spins. And keeps spinning, on and on, around and around, endless, hypnotic. A WOMAN'S VOICE comes over.

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

Pulling back, we realize the spinning circle is the shiny chrome hubcap in the center of a tire.

VOICE (O.S.) (cont'd)
Hah! Maybe to him.

The tire is on a police car, a cruiser zipping down a country road as fast as it can, lights flashing, siren BLARING. Door says SPARKLE CREEK SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT. The sheriff behind the wheel is KAREN GREEN, pushing thirty, not that that's any of our business.

Karen drives like a maniac, rocking back and forth, pounding the wheel, urging every bit of power out of her car that she can possibly get. Determined. *Certain.*

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Geez, *look* at me. Some hurry, huh? Where am I headed? What's the rush? What's so important? You tell me.

CONTINUED:

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

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Einstein could understand the universe, but most of us can't even answer this one simple question --

Suddenly, Karen stops rocking, sits up straight, a confused look crossing her brow. She looks around, tries to get her bearings. She speaks. (Hers was the voice over.)

KAREN
Where am I going?

ABOVE THE CAR,

the cruiser approaches a fork in the road, a huge, spreading oak tree planted dead in the middle of it, demanding a choice from drivers, right or left, this is it, make your decision.

Karen's cruiser slows to a crawl, headed straight for the tree, and stops, just short of it.

INT CAR DAY

Karen just sits there at the wheel, puzzled as can be, not sure which way to go. Then, suddenly, for no apparent reason --

-- she bursts into tears. Worse than tears, horrible, wracking sobs of pain and loss.

KAREN
(between sobs)
What is... going... on?

Choking back the emotion, she reaches for the radio, keys the microphone.

KAREN (cont'd)
Uh, hey, Owen?

OWEN, a dispatcher, answers, officious.

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

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Hey, I know this is, like, a stupid question and everything, but, uh... where am I going?

A pause from the other end.

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

KAREN
Owen, talk normal. I'm serious, I'm having a very weird moment here, I'm in the car, I've got the --
(switches off the siren)
-- siren on, cherries are popping, and all of a sudden I'm -- well, I'm very upset, and I have no idea where I'm supposed to be going. Did you send me somewhere?

OWEN (O.S.)
Nope. Last I heard you were at Stellpflug's, ten, fifteen minutes ago, Tom and Helen were goin' at it pretty good again.

Wiping away tears, she keys the radio again. Trying to contain her voice:

KAREN
I'll call you back.

She signs off, hangs up the radio. Takes a deep, shuddery breath, trying to compose herself.

KAREN (cont'd)
This is ridiculous.

She drops the car into gear, cranks the tires to the right, hits the gas --

-- and SLAMS into a MAN ON A BICYCLE who has just hit a rock and gone flying into the air and sailing over her hood. He SMACKS into the windshield, ending up face to face with her.

KAREN (cont'd)
OH MY GOD!

CONTINUED: (2)

She whips off the eyeglasses she wears for driving, leaps out of the car --

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

-- and runs around the door to help HOWARD HEYWOOD, the unfortunate man who is peeling himself off her windshield.

KAREN
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!

Howard rolls over, toward her, now lying on his back on the hood of the car, his head against the windshield. He's had the wind knocked out of him, but seems otherwise uninjured.

KAREN (cont'd)
WHAT DID YOU DO THAT FOR?!

He turns, looks at her, blinking, disoriented. He sits up. Takes a look around, to get his bearings. Looks back at her.

HOWARD
I was... meeting someone. I think.

Suddenly, a wave of emotion passes over his face, he sits up, fighting back tears. Embarrassed, he turns slightly away, hides his face in his hands.

KAREN
What's the matter, sir?

His shoulders heave, he takes a deep breath, turns toward her. His cheeks are stained with tears.

HOWARD
I wish I knew.

He slides off the hood of the car, *really* embarrassed. He picks up his bike and starts walking away, past her, down the left fork of the road, limping slightly.

She calls after him.

KAREN
What the heck just happened here?

HOWARD
I don't have a clue.

CONTINUED:

And he continues away, down the road. She shakes her head, puts her driving glasses back on, gets back in the car, and heads off, down the right fork.

Rising up above the big old tree that's planted in the heart of the V, we watch as Howard and Karen head off in opposite directions. Separate. Alone.

CUT TO:

EXT KAREN'S FATHER'S HOUSE DAY

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

Karen isn't in the mood to see it.

INT KAREN'S FATHER'S HOUSE DAY

Karen enters the kitchen. Her father, MITCH, a barrel-chested man in his mid-sixties, is stacking beers in the fridge. He glances at a clock on the wall.

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

KAREN
You didn't tell me you were having people over.

MITCH
Just Bob and the Germaines.

KAREN
Just Bob and the Germaines.

Karen looks at a package of sausages on the counter.

KAREN (cont'd)
On your certificate, under cause of death, I'm writing suicide by tube steak.

MITCH
They're just brats. They cook down to almost nothing.

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Did you notice anything weird today?

MITCH
What do you mean?

KAREN
Strange. Weird. I don't know.

MITCH
You're starting over with Bob, it's a new season, we don't know the status of Dorsey's ankle, there's Brett's thumb, we're all a little tense.

KAREN
Does everything revolve around the Packers?

MITCH
Oh yes. Even the sun.

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

ON THE PATIO,

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

He sees her, waves. Taps his watch meaningfully.

BOB
Two minutes!

KAREN
(sighs)
I'm gonna take a shower.

CUT TO:

INT BATHROOM DAY

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

She cocks her head. Is something funny about that?

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

CONTINUED:

Clockwise is like it always does, right?

CUT TO:

INT MITCH'S HOUSE DAY

Karen has changed into cutoffs and a T-shirt. She stops at the door to the family room and looks inside. Her father, Bob Kugelmas, and the Germaines, BOOTS and CAROL, a sixty-something couple in pressed jeans and Green Bay Packer sweatshirts, are sitting at a semi-circle of TV trays set up in front of the set.

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

ON THE TV,

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

IN THE LIVING ROOM,

BOB
Ankle's still bothering Dorsey.

MITCH
Pulling guard dogged it.

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

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

They all laugh, for some reason.

CAROL
(rising)
I'm up!

Boots and Mitch hold up empty beer cans immediately.

BOB
I'm good.

As she collects their empty beer cans, Carol sees Karen.

CONTINUED:

CAROL
Hello, sweetheart!

Everyone turns.

MITCH
Come sit down.

KAREN
(wandering in hesitantly)
What'd I miss?

BOOTS
Just the crappy start to another crappy season.

BOB
Season's only five minutes old, Boots.

BOOTS
I can spot a trend.

Karen is standing in front of the television.

MITCH
Sit down.

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

Carol passes Karen.

CAROL
Can I get you anything?

KAREN
No thanks.

CAROL
I'm up.

MITCH
(still to Karen)
*Sit down.*

KAREN
Hey Bob, c'mere a sec.

Karen walks off, Bob gets up to follow, glancing back at the set apprehensively.

CONTINUED: (2)

Mitch and Boots lean all the way to the right to keep a clear view of the TV, then as Mitch and Karen pass in front of them, they snap back to the left.

IN THE HALLWAY,

Karen pulls Bob aside.

KAREN (cont'd)
Do you wanna go for a walk?

BOB
What do you mean?

KAREN
It's just so beautiful, I feel like being outside.

BOB
What... after the game?

KAREN
I was kinda thinking *during*.

BOB
(pause)
What do you mean?

MITCH (O.S.)
Both feet in! Review it! Review it!

Bob is desperate to go back in. But he is also in a relationship. These are the times that try Bob's soul.

BOB
Sure. Okay. I'll come with.

A collective GROAN comes from the other room, further increasing Bob's anxiety.

BOB (cont'd)
I'll go. I will. I want to.

Karen touches his cheek. The poor bastard.

KAREN
I'll catch up with you later.

Bob darts back into the room, like a little kid back into the swimming pool.

CUT TO:

EXT ROAD INTO TOWN DUSK

Karen walks down her father's street, headed toward a cluster of buildings at the far end, the village of Sparkle Creek, pop. 2626. The sun has set, but the sky is dark blue with late summer light. All along the road into town, the eerie white flickering light of television sets spills from the living room windows of every single house.

Game's on, and everybody's watching. We can hear it, too, through the open windows, echoing down the deserted streets.

A HEAVY GUY hurries past Karen, carrying a brown paper bag, fresh beer and chips inside. He's walking as fast as his legs will carry him, his face creased with profound concern.

KAREN
Hey Tommy.

TOM
Ankle's still bothering Dorsey.

And he keeps moving. Karen sighs. These are my people.

Up ahead is an ice cream stand. She heads for it.

EXT ICE CREAM STAND DUSK

Karen is at the window of the ice cream stand, being waited on by a TEENAGE GIRL with a vertical wall of teased bangs.

KAREN
Mint chip on a sugar cone.

Karen takes a look around while the girl goes off to fill her order.

A man sits at one of the picnic tables, bent over a black and white composition book. He writes furiously, with great excitement. Sensing Karen's presence, he turns.

KAREN (cont'd)
The idiot on the bike!

It takes him a moment to recognize Karen, with her being out of uniform and all, but when he does --

HOWARD
The maniac cop!

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Hey, you're the one who shot out in front of me.

HOWARD
Did I? It's kind of a blur.

KAREN
You probably have a head injury.

HOWARD
I'm fine.

KAREN
You seem a little out of it.

HOWARD
I'm like that.

Glancing at his notebook, Karen sees a page crammed with indecipherable equations.

TEENAGE GIRL
Single mint chip!

Karen gets her cone and carries it to a picnic table where she sits down.

Howard tries to get back to whatever it is he was doing, but his eyes are drawn to Karen. He watches as she takes a lick from her cone. She makes a face. Takes another lick.

There are all different ways people fall in love. Sometimes it's after years of acquaintance. Sometimes it's during a terrible crisis. In Howard Heywood's case, after a four second glimpse of Karen eating ice cream, he's a *goner.*

From the houses up and down the block, there is a collective CHEER from those watching the game.

Karen turns to Howard, holds out her cone.

KAREN
Taste this.
(he hesitates)
Go on.
(he takes a lick)
Does it taste funny to you?

HOWARD
Not really.

CONTINUED: (2)

But as soon as she looks away, Howard makes a face. It DID taste funny! He flips open his notebook and makes some quick surreptitious jottings. We bend down, peer over his shoulder, but he SNAPS the book shut just before we can see.

Karen tries her cone once more.

KAREN
Definitely off.

She flips the cone into a trash can.

KAREN (cont'd)
See you around --

HOWARD
Howard.

KAREN
Later, Howard.

CUT TO:

EXT MAIN STREET DUSK

Karen walks down Main Street, carrying her shoes. Howard catches up to her on his creaky bicycle.

HOWARD
(nervous)
Hey-wood.

KAREN
Did you just call me Wood?

HOWARD
Heywood, Howard Heywood. I am.

He dismounts, walks the bike.

KAREN
Are you an escaped mental patient?

HOWARD
No, I work up at the plant.

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

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
Ceramic r&d for mag-lev applications.

KAREN
Still don't. Which way does water swirl down the drain?

HOWARD
Counter-clockwise in this hemisphere, clockwise in the south.

KAREN
Are you sure?

HOWARD
I am absolutely positive. I got it wrong on a test once.

KAREN
And you never make the same mistakes twice?

HOWARD
That would be illogical, Captain.

KAREN
Well, Mr. Spock, it's my specialty. I divorced the same guy twice and now I'm sorta engaged to him again.

HOWARD
(hopeful)
Sort of?

KAREN
It's not like I don't have a choice. I have two -- go forward or backward. But both choices are identical.

HOWARD
Where K equals Karen, K+X=0 and K-X=0.

KAREN
And "X" is Bob Kugelmas, Jr.?

HOWARD
If that's the name of your ex.

KAREN
So with our without X, Karen equals zero.

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD
It's the Kugelmas Conundrum. What's your last name?

KAREN
Krauthafer.

HOWARD
So if you married him a third time you'd be Karen Krauthafer Kugelmas Kugelmas Kugelmas!

KAREN
I'm glad *you're* happy.

HOWARD
I am? I guess I am. It's an exciting time. At the plant, I mean. Big night, we might be on the verge of a kind of breakthrough.

KAREN
What is it you people do up there?

HOWARD
Ceramic r&d for-

KAREN
Just yankin' ya, Howard.

They look at each other. He has made her smile.

HOWARD
Nice talking to you.

KAREN
You too.

Bob watches Karen go. A thought makes her turn back.

KAREN (cont'd)
Did you remember who you were looking for?

HOWARD
Hmm?

KAREN
After I hit you, you said you were looking for someone.

CONTINUED: (3)

They're walking backwards away from each other, the space between growing larger, so they raise their voices.

HOWARD
(remembering)
Yeah! Huh! I don't even know!

KAREN
Couldn't have been too important!

-HOWARD
I hope not!

They turn and walk away from each other, opposite directions on the street. Up and down the block, a collective AWWWW! of disappointment comes from the houses.

CUT TO:

EXT HIGH ABOVE SPARKLE CREEK DUSK

As the last of the sun disappears over the horizon, we're high over the town. In the distance, we can see the creek that gives the town its name. This place couldn't be lovelier.

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

The image quivers.

EXT FIELD DUSK

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

Rising up above the cow, we see ten more cows. Also turning in circles.

Even higher, a total of fifty cows, all turning around and around in circles in the middle of the field.

Counter-clockwise, for the record.

CUT TO:

INT MITCH'S HOUSE NIGHT

Karen has dutifully taken her seat in front of the television set. The others are all in a bad mood. Game isn't going very well.

CONTINUED:

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

BOB
Not necessarily.

BOOTS
"The party's over..."

BOB
Two touchdowns and a field goal.

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

CAROL
I am not up.

BOB
Two touchdowns and a field goal.

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

BOB
Could be two touchdowns, two two point conversions and a safety, could be that.

Mitch shifts, holding his beer can out to Karen.

MITCH
Karen, you up?

Karen buries her face in her hands. If she's lucky, she will die soon.

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

MITCH (cont'd)
Karen, you up?

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

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

CONTINUED: (2)

*Ted Koppel's face streaks through the room.*

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

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

Pause.

Silence for a moment.

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

*A horse race gallops through the room.*

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

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

This time panic strikes. Which means, basically, everybody stands up and looks at each other.

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

And all hell breaks loose.

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

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

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

EXT STREET NIGHT

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

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

INTO THE NEIGHBOR'S KITCHEN,

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

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

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

A CYLINDER OF CHAOS,

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

HIGH OVER THE TOWN,

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

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

Outside the circle -- unspoiled Wisconsin natural beauty.

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

CUT TO:

INT KAREN'S SQUAD CAR NIGHT

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

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

These killer bees are called static.

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

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

*WHAM!*

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

EXT SHERIFF'S OFFICE NIGHT

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

She fights her way toward the door.

INT SHERIFF'S OFFICE NIGHT

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

Karen and Owen have to scream to be heard over the sound and fury blasting through the sheriff's office.

KAREN
OWEN!

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

CONTINUED:

KAREN
OWEN!

OWEN
HOLY GOD THEY'RE RUNNING IT!

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

KAREN
*OWEN!!!*

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

ANNOUNCER
First down!

Owen claps once, and turns to face Karen.

OWEN
Wha'sup?

KAREN
It stopped.

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

KAREN
Yeah, Owen, the thing.

OWEN
Hey, what's the story with that?

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

CUT TO:

EXT MAIN STREET NIGHT

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

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

CONTINUED:

She jumps in the squad car and follows.

EXT ALLEY NIGHT

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

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

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

IN THE SQUARE,

the Technicians with crowbars pry open manhole covers on opposite sides of the square. The other two snap open their armored cases. Commands are quickly entered on miniature keypads.

Two monitoring devices emerge pneumatically from the manholes, each with a rotating satellite dish and a cluster of clear lenses arrayed in a sphere.

The Technicians with crowbars begin collecting samples -- water from the fountain, a spade full of soil, a frightened squirrel is netted and dropped in a cage.

More commands are entered. The monitoring devices begin to HUM and the lens cluster spins rapidly. The Technicians put on thick goggles with amber glass.

A sharp beam of white light fires between the monitoring devices, rises into an arc, then rapidly cuts across the sky in millisecond slices of light.

IN THE ALLEY,

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

IN THE SQUARE,

the briefcases SNAP shut, the monitoring devices WHIR back into the ground, the manhole covers BANG back into place.

The four Technicians slip off their goggles and head back to the van, heads swiveling, making certain they weren't seen.

CONTINUED:

They slip into the van, BANG the doors shut, one after the other. The Driver starts it up, hits the headlights --

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

He does.

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

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

DRIVER
We're with the cable company?

KAREN
Okay, why don't you go ahead and hop out of the van.

Even though she's wearing her gun belt, her cutoffs and T-shirt don't inspire a great deal of respect. The Technicians confer once again, then the Driver turns back, looks right at her --

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

KAREN (cont'd)
You little weasels!

CUT TO:

EXT ROAD OUT OF TOWN NIGHT

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

She picks up her radio.

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

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

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Do we have back up?

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

KAREN
So what do you think, Owen?

EXT TEKCOM NIGHT

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

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

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

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

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

The Guard checks out her outfit.

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

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

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

MOMENTS LATER,

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

CONTINUED:

GUARD
I DIDN'T SAY TEX!

KAREN
Close enough, Tiger.

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

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

KAREN
Who are you?

JERRY CORNDELL
Jerry Corndell, head of public relations for TekCom. Happened to be on my way home when I heard all the huzzarei. What seems to be the problem?

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

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

KAREN
*Horses* ran through our living room.

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

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

CONTINUED: (2)

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

KAREN
Your smile lines get very twitchy when you lie, Jerry.

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

KAREN
Rupert failed to show respect for the badge. As did the driver of a white van that just pulled through your gates. I was questioning him when he drove off, then failed to stop for the lights and siren. He went up the hill and into your facility, there.

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

He turns to go.

KAREN
I have a lot more zip strips, Jerry.

Jerry Corndell stops, looks at Rupert, who is nibbling at the plastic zip ties around his wrists. He looks back at Karen. Then picks up the phone in the guard shack and punches a three-digit number.

JERRY CORNDELL
(on phone)
Jerry C., sorry to bother. Down at the gate with a bit of a sixty-two twelve. Uh huh. Um hmm. Riiiiiiiiight.

He hangs up the phone and turns to her. He looks impressed.

CONTINUED: (3)

JERRY CORNDELL (cont'd)
Well, well, well. The gates of knowledge have been laid open for you.

He gestures up the hill, for her to come on in. She looks at him, more suspicious than ever.

KAREN
What's a sixty-two twelve?

JERRY CORNDELL
Just our shorthand for guest.

KAREN
"Guest" is tough to say? You need a code for it?

Jerry Corndell's folksy accent disappears.

JERRY CORNDELL
We got a lot on our minds.

We rise up above him, toward that sprawling, single-story office complex at the top of the hill.

CUT TO:

INT TEKCOM LOBBY NIGHT

Karen and Jerry Corndell sit in two tiny chairs in the vast TekCom lobby, mostly dark at this hour. Two hallways stretch off into darkness on either side of a reception desk.

Jerry Corndell picks up a small tray and holds it out to Karen.

JERRY CORNDELL
Johnny Cake?

She looks down. There are a dozen small lemon cakes wrapped in plastic on the tray.

KAREN
No, thank you.

Jerry sets the tray down on the table between them. They wait. In the distance, they hear shoes CLICKING on the floor of the hall. Somebody's coming.

Karen starts to stand up. Jerry motions her to sit down -- you've got plenty of time.

CONTINUED:

Karen sits. The CLICKING goes on. Doesn't really get much louder, just CLICK CLICK CLICK as somebody keeps walking. There is a *tiny* increase in the volume of the clicking.

Karen starts to stand. Jerry shakes his head. Karen sits.

The clicking goes on. This place is huge.

Karen hears a SQUEAKING sound. She looks down. Jerry is sliding the tray of Johnny Cakes toward her. She scowls, shakes her head. Jerry shrugs.

The CLICKING gets louder still. Jerry stands, buttons his coat, motions -- up, up.

Karen stands and looks toward the mouth of the hallway.

*Howard Heywood* steps out from the back. Karen is stunned. So's he. But then he breaks out into an enormous smile.

HOWARD
Hey. Can you keep a secret?

Before Karen can answer, Jerry Corndell practically *leaps* between them.

JERRY CORNDELL
Uh, 'scuse me just one second there, Mr. Heywood, I wonder if I might just tug on your sleeve for uno segundo.

He hauls Howard off to the side, out of Karen's earshot.

JERRY CORNDELL (cont'd)
Just exactly what is it you intend to do vis a vis our young visitor, here, sir?

HOWARD
Come on, Jerry, that woman is smart. And she's *curious.* We send her away now she'll show up tomorrow with a search warrant and a video crew.

JERRY CORNDELL
You're not suggesting...

HOWARD
I'm gonna show her Big Rick.

CUT TO:

INT CORRIDOR NIGHT

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

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

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

DISSOLVE TO:

-- the far end of the hall. They finally reach the double doors, an elevator.

Howard slides in a key card and a panel opens, revealing another set of doors, these made of glass. Howard keys again and they WHOOSH open.

They step inside and turn around to face the front.

KAREN
Why is there an elevator in a one story building?

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

EXT TEKCOM NIGHT

The high pitched WHINE of the turbo-charged elevator carries over to a shot of the outside of the TekCom complex, situated on a low rise from which it overlooks the town of Sparkle Creek.

Inspired by the elevator, we begin to descend ourselves, down the outside of the building, down to ground level --

-- and then *below* ground level, down through the grass, down through the dirt, down through the roots and rocks and rodents and stuff, *far* below ground, a hundred feet or more, where suddenly mother nature's browns and grays and blacks gives way to --

INT BIG RICK LAB NIGHT

*-- SPARKLING WHITE!*

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

There's a makeshift basketball court built in one corner of the lab, and a game of three-on-three is underway, an interesting game in that none of the SCIENTISTS ever seems to make a shot, or really get all that close to the rim, except for the seven foot AFRICAN MAN who dunks with great rapidity.

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

As we finally settle down to floor level, we find Howard and Karen in the foreground, dwarfed, the roof of the cavern five stories over their heads. Karen looks at Howard, tries to form words.

KAREN
This... is Big Rick?

HOWARD
Oh heck no, this is just where he lives. C'mere.

He leads her across the lab, to the great surprise of everyone they pass. Don't get a lot of visitors in the lab. Karen cranes her neck, taking it all in. They pass a massive excavating machine with three rotating heads, each the size of a mini-van. Explains the tunnels.

Against the far wall of the room, there is an enormous, suspended plexiglass tube, a dozen feet in diameter, which curves off into the mouth of the two tunnels at each end. There is a huge control panel nestled up alongside the side of the tube, and a tall flight of stairs leading up to it.

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

ON THE CONTROL DECK,

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

HOWARD
*This* is Big Rick.

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

KAREN
What is Rick?

HOWARD
An acronym. Stands for Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider.

KAREN
What is it?

HOWARD
Also called a superconducting supercollider. It's just a particle accelerator, when you get down to it.

Karen nods, thinking. Finally:

KAREN
What is it?

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

HOWARD
Conrad!

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

CONRAD
Well, it is.

HOWARD
Conrad co-authored "Limits on the Neutral Penetrating States in a Beam Dump!"

CONTINUED:

KAREN
Huh.

CONRAD
It's a tunnel. Twenty-six miles in circumference. It encircles the entire town.

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

KAREN
That was you?

CONRAD
That was us.

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

KAREN
What kind of science?

HOWARD
(like a kid)
Well. The tunnel's got two concentric rings of five thousand superconducting electromagnets wrapped in titanium wire, supercooled with liquid helium --

KAREN
You say "super" a lot.

HOWARD
-- to near absolute zero.

KAREN
And why would a boy build something like that?

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

CONTINUED: (2)

KAREN
What happens inside the tunnel?

HOWARD
Well. Pretend you're the nucleus of an atom of gold.

He takes her hand and leans her forward, so she can look down the tunnel as far as she can see. It's a dizzying perspective.

KAREN
What are you gonna do to me?

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

KA-BOOM!

TAKING THE GOLD ATOM'S PERSPECTIVE,

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

HOWARD (O.S.)
DESPERATE FOR AN ELECTRICAL CHARGE AND PULLED ALONG BY THE ELECTROMAGNETS, YOU ACCELERATE DOWN THE TUNNEL AT 99.998 PERCENT THE SPEED OF LIGHT!

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

IN THE LAB,

Conrad interrupts, prideful.

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

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

CONRAD
We call that one Little Ricky.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
Anyhoo.

BACK IN THE SIMULATION,

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

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

HIGH ABOVE THE TOWN,

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

IN THE SIMULATION,

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

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

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

BACK IN THE LAB,

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

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

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

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (cont'd)
Captured for our perusal on twenty-four wall current display screens. We have it!

KAREN
Have what?

He looks at her, completely puzzled, as if no question could come from further out in left field. Realizing she's not kidding:

HOWARD
Quark gluon soup.

KAREN
A quart of glue soup?

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

He looks back up at the screens. So does she, not daring to break his mood.

KAREN
That's what happened tonight?

HOWARD
Tonight was a mistake.

CONRAD
My bad. All me.

HOWARD
Some housing on the niobium wires was stripped, sending out energy into the UV spectra, which as you know, is normally visible only from four to eight hundred angstroms, but tonight broadened its aural and visual activity all the way down to zero and up to nine hundred. "I see, said the blind man as he picked up the hammer and twenty micron caliper."

CONTINUED: (2)

Everyone around them GUFFAWS, inexplicably.

Karen raises an eyebrow. Howard, quieting the group, holds out a hand reassuringly.

HOWARD (cont'd)
But it's okay now. In terms of energy, it was like a mosquito hitting a screen door. Won't happen again.

KAREN
The truth is, Dr. Heywood, you have surrounded Sparkle Creek and its three thousand unsuspecting residents with an experimental device which you can't control.

HOWARD
Oh, come on. Did you know that before they tested the first atom bomb, there was a substantial group of scientists who actually believed the blast would ignite the entire atmosphere?

KAREN
And look how well nuclear weapons turned out.

HOWARD
I'm not reassuring you, am I?

KAREN
My job is to be concerned with public safety.

HOWARD
Everyone's safe. You're safe.

KAREN
Whether we're safe or not, you have a responsibility to tell the town. These people have a right to know.

CUT TO:

INT JERRY CORNDELL'S OFFICE NIGHT

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

CONTINUED:

JERRY CORNDELL
Yes sir, hello. It's Corndell. Sorry to wake you, sir, I know it's late. But we've had some alarming developments here.

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

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

JERRY CORNDELL (O.S.) (cont'd)
The cat is out of the bag.

CUT TO:

INT KAREN'S HOUSE NIGHT

Karen comes home. It's late. The TV is still on, tuned to a Packer wrap-up show, and Bob Kugelmas, Jr. is asleep in front of it, alone in the living room.

Karen stands there for a moment, looking at him. She sighs. A lot to think about tonight. She sees the remote under his left hand. She moves toward it, leans over him --

-- and he sits bolt upright and grabs her.

BOB
HA GOTCHA!

Karen SCREAMS, he pulls her around in his powerful arms, and her screams turn to giggles as he flips her over onto his lap and tickles her.

BOB (cont'd)
Where've you been?

KAREN
Oh...

She looks him in the face. Remembers for a moment why she fell in love with him. So many times.

KAREN (cont'd)
Lost in space.

CONTINUED:

He kisses her, well. She responds. As he moves on to kiss her neck, we see her face over his shoulder. Torn.

CUT TO:

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

One single word, in big block letters. BUDGET.

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

INT CAR DAY

The speedometer holds like a rock on "55."

A squeaky-clean black polished Florsheim rests on the accelerator.

A razor-sharp part divides the driver's hair into manageable quadrants.

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

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

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

EXT ROAD INTO TOWN DAY

The town of Sparkle Creek lies in the distance. The rented car HUMS over a rise and descends into town, past the fork in the road we saw in the opening.

CUT TO:

EXT VFW HALL DAY

A white church with steeple atop has been transformed into a meeting hall. A black felt placard behind glass announces upcoming events:

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

CONTINUED:

The White Crown Vic glides into a parking space in front of the church. The Undersecretary climbs out, takes his briefcase from the passenger side, and heads into the building.

INT VFW HALL DAY

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

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

Jerry Corndell stands on stage in front of the packed meeting hall. Most of the town is there, drinking coffee out of Styrofoam cups. Among the crowd are Karen, her father Mitch, Bob Kugelmas, the Germaines, and Owen, who stands at the door, directing traffic.

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

IN THE BACK OF THE ROOM,

the Undersecretary stops at a table with two big urns of coffee and many plates of Johnny Cakes. He takes a cup and a cake.

AT THE FRONT,

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

JERRY CORNDELL
Dr. Conrad Davies here is the director of our superconducting magnet division. He's going to hand out a schedule of when we plan to do our experiments. Although we don't foresee any more of the unforeseen, we want you to be ready. Also, to be on the safe side of small town U.S.A., you'll be given an interference kit, which consists of this --

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

CONTINUED:

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

He turns and starts packing up, but there are disgruntled MUMBLINGS from the crowd behind him.

Howard, who is hovering near the edge of the stage, takes Jerry by the arm.

HOWARD
What are you doing? These people have questions, at least let me answer some of them!

JERRY CORNDELL
I don't need you getting us in any more trouble than we already are. I'll handle the questions.

HOWARD
You feel confident with the physics?

JERRY CORNDELL
This ain't about physics, my friend, this is about throwing a bucket of water on the fire of idiocy that rages inside the head of John Q. Lunchpail.

He picks up a yellow cushball and heads back to the microphone.

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

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

MRS. KNOEBEL
Oh!

CONTINUED: (2)

JERRY CORNDELL
Little help!

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

MITCH
What if it isn't safe?

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

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

Mitch shrugs and throws the cushball. SOME LADY with a frosted blonde perm catches it.

SOME LADY
Is it important to buckle up the chin strap when we put on the helmet?

JERRY CORNDELL
Matter of individual taste and style! Next!

She throws the ball. It's caught by a guy in an ORANGE HAT.

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

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

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

CONTINUED: (3)

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

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

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

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

JERRY CORNDELL
Did everyone get a Johnny Cake?

BOB
Answer the question.

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

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

JERRY CORNDELL (cont'd)
(to himself)
Gotcha.

CUT TO:

INT VFW HALL - EVENING

It's dark now. The meeting is breaking up and people are filing out with their football helmets, schedules, and boxes of foil.

CONTINUED:

Owen, the deputy, is at the door, urging them along. Mrs. Knoebel inches toward the door at a snail's pace, helped by a walker.

OWEN
Move it along Mrs. Knoebel, show's over. Nothing to see here.

Howard is near the door, answering a few more questions.

JERRY CORNDELL (O.S.)
Howard! Howard!

Jerry C. bursts through the crowd, actually knocking a person over. His face is all flushed and girlish.

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

He points. Howard turns and looks.

Over in the corner, the Undersecretary stands beneath an oil painting of Vince Lombardi, hands folded neatly in front of him.

CUT TO:

EXT VFW HALL NIGHT

Seen from above, the rear doors of the Undersecretary's Crown Victoria slam shut.

INT CROWN VICTORIA NIGHT

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

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

UNDERSECRETARY
Which one is Heywood?

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

CONTINUED:

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

UNDERSECRETARY
I am the Undersecretary.

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

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

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

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

He pronounces it Os-Rack. So do they:

JERRY CORNDELL
An OSRC!

UNDERSECRETARY
An OSRC.

HOWARD
An OSRC?

CONTINUED: (2)

JERRY CORNDELL
Oversight and review committee.

CONRAD
We don't want that!

UNDERSECRETARY
No sir, you do *not* want that. This is where I think we are. You people have made me get up from my desk. You have made me bend over. I have located the plug that says superconducting supercollider. My hand is on that plug. One more "little mishap" --

He looks at Howard for the first time.

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

EXT VFW HALL NIGHT

Howard, Conrad, and Jerry Corndell stand on either side of the car as it CRUNCHES gravel beneath its wheels and pulls back onto the street. They stand there watching as the Undersecretary's taillights fade into the night.

JERRY CORNDELL
*God,* he's good.

Karen steps up to Howard, her father and Bob Kugelmas, Jr. alongside her.

KAREN
Excuse me, Dr. Heywood. A lot of people are saying they'd feel more comfortable if there were a representative from the town in your lab during the next experiment.

HOWARD
Sure. No problem. How about you?

KAREN
Uh...
(a glance at Bob)
Great.

HOWARD
(a glance at Bob)
Great.

CONTINUED:

BOB
(a glance at both of them)
Great.

Karen's father notices all the glances.

MITCH
Well, we're just going home for a bite, why don't you join us?

Bob frowns at Mitch, but it's too late.

HOWARD
(quickly)
Love to!

CUT TO:

EXT KAREN'S BACK YARD NIGHT

Bob, sulky, stands next to the smoking grill again in Karen and Mitch's back yard. He's holding a raw T-bone at the end of a long fork, poking it at Howard.

BOB
You're not a vegetarian, are you?

HOWARD
No, I'm not.

BOB
You look like a vegetarian.

SMACK! SIZZLE! The meat hits the red hot grill.

Howard SHRIEKS as a cold beer bottle is suddenly placed against his neck. Mitch is offering it.

MITCH
(kidding)
You're not a teetotaller, are you?

HOWARD
Do I look like a teetotaller

MITCH
(leading him away from the grill)
Don't worry about Bob. He's just a little insecure.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

MITCH (cont'd)
Understandable, he knows he's gonna get his ass handed to him sooner or later.

HOWARD
What do you mean?

MITCH
Just hate to see people you care about making themselves unhappy. But it's not like there's anything I can do.

He has walked Howard over to the picnic table and rather elegantly shoved him down next to Karen.

MITCH (cont'd)
I'll get the potato salad.

He turns and walks away, leaving them alone.

An awkward moment passes. Howard looks up. And stays looking up. Karen looks at him. Then follows his gaze, up to the sky. There are a million billion stars out.

HOWARD
I spend so much time thinking about the universe, I forget I live in it. It's beautiful.

KAREN
It's freezing.

Howard turns and gives her his coat. He looks at her face. Keeps looking, and it makes her uncomfortable.

KAREN (cont'd)
What?

HOWARD
Do you always wear glasses?

KAREN
Oh. Just for driving.

HOWARD
(thinking)
There's something about those frames...

She takes them off and pockets them, self-conscious.

CONTINUED: (2)

KAREN
The weather sure turned in the last few days. That's not your fault too, is it?

HOWARD
(laughs)
We can't control the weather.

But then he pulls out his notebook and scribbles a note -- can we?

KAREN
When's the next test?

HOWARD
Friday noon.

KAREN
Can I ask you a question?

HOWARD
(still writing)
Yep.

KAREN
Why?

He stops writing, looks at her, smiles broadly.

HOWARD
My *favorite* question.

KAREN
No offense, but... what's any of this got to do with the price of milk? Why do it?

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

KAREN
Theory of...

CONTINUED: (3)

HOWARD
Everything. Theory of Everything.

KAREN
You're ambitious, I'll give you that.

HOWARD
I've always liked to take things apart.

KAREN
What if you can't put it back together?

HOWARD
That's not how the universe works. See, we assume everything ends in cataclysm because human life is tragic. People die. Always, that's why we think of beginnings, middles, ends. But time doesn't march straight forward, the universe loops around and around itself, it's buoyant, it inflates, it expands, and if it tears... it repairs itself. Begins life again.

There are all different ways people fall in love. This is hers. She looks at him, eyes shining, smiling at the childlike wonder with which he can speak.

KAREN
Promise me. When you figure it all out, don't tell me.

HOWARD
You're not curious?

KAREN
Sure. But if you know how everything is going to end, you're not living, you're waiting. The questions are what keep us going, give us hope. You know, faith. That this time things'll turn out right.

SLAP! SIZZLE!

They turn and look. Bob has turned the meat and is glowering at them through billowing greasy flames.

CUT TO:

EXT TOWN SQUARE DAY

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

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

EXT RESIDENTIAL STREET DAY

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

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

INT MRS. KNOEBEL'S HOUSE DAY

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

From inside the helmet, we hear her tiny voice:

MRS. KNOEBEL
Oh!

EXT BACK YARD DAY

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

MOTHER
I said inside, NOW!

KID
Five more minutes!

MOTHER
NOW!

KID
Five more minutes!

MOTHER
NOW!

CONTINUED:

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

KID
Five more minutes!

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

THREE OLD MEN sit on a bench on the road into town, all wearing their helmets. Not goin' anywhere. Wouldn't miss this for the world.

CUT TO:

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

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

UP ON THE CONTROL DECK,

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

HOWARD
Roll the detector.

CONRAD
(into a microphone)
Roll the detector.

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

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

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

NEARBY,

CONTINUED:

the Undersecretary stands at the edge of the indoor basketball court, arms folded across his chest, staring at the hoop, shaking his head in disapproval. Jerry Corndell stands beside him, arms also folded, also shaking his head in disapproval.

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

UP ON THE PLATFORM,

Conrad calls out last minute checks.

CONRAD
Vacuum.

VOICE (O.S.)
Check.

CONRAD
Magnets.

VOICE (O.S.)
Check.

CONRAD
RF.

VOICE (O.S.)
Check.

CONRAD
Forward time projection chamber.

VOICE (O.S.)
On line!

CONRAD
Photomultiplier.

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

CONRAD
Silicon vertex tracker.

VOICE (O.S.)
Fixed and running.

BELOW THEM,

CONTINUED:

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

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

A Worker turns and SHOUTS up to the deck.

WORKER
DETECTOR IS UP!

ON THE CONTROL DECK,

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

HOWARD
Let's bang some stuff together.

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

KAREN
You have *got* to be kidding me.

Howard casts a sheepish look around, shrugs.

HOWARD
More fun than pressing "enter."

CONRAD
And...

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

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

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

HOWARD
Water through the pipes. Cooling system.

A steady BEEPING sound begins to echo from the walls.

CONTINUED:

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

A loud electrical BUZZ comes from the wiring in and around the detector.

HOWARD (cont'd)
AC power hum. Takes thirty thousand volts to strip the nuclei of their electrons.

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

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

KAREN
I knew that.

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

HOWARD
(to Karen)
You won't see anything yet. Not till the nuclei lose their electrons, then they get really hungry for electrical charge, so when they're introduced to 1700 electromagnets they're, uh, interested.

CONRAD
Stable.

HOWARD
Great. Start beam injection from the Alternating Gradient Synchrotron.

CONRAD
Use your words.

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

CONRAD
Much better.

CONTINUED: (2)

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

INTO THE TUNNEL,

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

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

INSIDE THE TUNNEL,

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

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

BACK ON TOP OF THE TUBE,

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

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

THE SUB-ATOMIC LEVEL,

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

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

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

There is much GASPING, did it work?!

CONTINUED:

CONRAD
Negative. Negative. Glancing blows only.

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

KAREN
What happened?

CONRAD
The molecules have to collide precisely head to head. Otherwise there's nothing to read.

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

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

CONRAD
Hang on... let me clean up the beam.

CUT TO:

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

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

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

Birds CHIRP. Still waiting.

EXT BACK YARD DAY

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

MOTHER
I said *NOW!*

KID
Five more minutes!

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

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

BAM! BAM! BAM! The steady pounding of their hammers is interrupted briefly as Bob glances at his watch, sees what time it is.

He GRUNTS, dubious of the whole thing, and goes back to POUNDING.

CUT TO:

FROM A BLACK SCREEN,

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

IN THE BIG RICK LAB,

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

Conrad bolts up, right out of his chair.

CONRAD
WE HAVE BEAM ON BEAM COLLISIONS!

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

The Undersecretary looks almost disappointed.

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

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

Howard grabs her, giddy.

HOWARD (cont'd)
*This is it!*

CONTINUED:

CONRAD
Stable data-taking mode!

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

Howard grabs Karen, giddy.

HOWARD
*This is it!*

CONRAD
Stable data-taking mode!

Howard's face wrinkles up in concern for a moment, then he lunges toward a tabletop and fumbles for a pen and paper on Conrad's desktop.

HOWARD
Something.

CONRAD
(equally puzzled)
Yeah.

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

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

*00 Loop*

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

Howard is jostled as the two dozen Scientists rush back to their monitors.

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

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

*-- and floats back out the way it came.*

CONTINUED: (2)

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

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

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

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

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

KAREN
Cool. How'd you do that?

HOWARD
Uhhhh...

KAREN
Oh no.

But she wasn't talking to him, she was noticing something behind him. Howard turns around, following her gaze. Within the ring area --

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

CUT TO:

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

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

OLD MAN 1
I feel good.

OLD MAN 2
I feel *great.*

OLD MAN 1
Light as a feather!

INT CAR DAY

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

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

BOOTS
What in the name of heavenly glory?

He opens the door, takes a peek outside.

ON THE STREET,

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

Boots SCREAMS.

INT SUPERMARKET DAY

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

EXT BACK YARD DAY

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

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

KID
MOOOOOOM!

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

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

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

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

CONTINUED:

MITCH
Holy cheese in rice!

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

EXT ABOVE THE TOWN DAY

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

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

HOWARD
Graviton theory is correct!

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

KAREN
What?!

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

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

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

UNDERSECRETARY
Get up there! Handle it!

CONTINUED:

JERRY CORNDELL
Yes *sir!*

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

HOWARD
Karen, wait!

Karen shakes her arm free and heads for the door.

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

KAREN
Why do you think I'm going?

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

CONRAD
I got severe errors in the beam path, something's pulling it to the edge of the tube.

HOWARD
Gravitons!

CONRAD
Gravitons?!

HOWARD
Gravitons! Gravitons!

INT TEKCOM LOBBY DAY

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

EXT TEKCOM DAY

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

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

CONTINUED:

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

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

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

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

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

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Those three Old Men are clinging to a clothesline, hung up like upside-down wash.

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

EXT FARMER'S FIELD DAY

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

COW
Moo?

EXT BACK YARDS DAY

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

DOGS
Woof?

INT SUPERMARKET DAY

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

EXT TEKCOM DAY

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

CONTINUED:

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

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

Momentarily.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

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

UNDERSECRETARY
TURN IT OFF!

HOWARD
YOU CAN'T JUST-

UNDERSECRETARY
OFF OFF OFF OFF RIGHT NOW!

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

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

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

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

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

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

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

AT THE END OF THE ROPE

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

He holds on tight.

FROM THE GROUND,

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

CUT TO:

EXT TEKCOM DAY

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

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

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

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

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

JERRY CORNDELL
Uh...

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

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

Jerry Corndell floats away like a lost balloon.

CUT TO:

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

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

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

UNDERSECRETARY
Get out of my way!

CONTINUED:

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

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

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

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

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

UNDERSECRETARY
Thank God.

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

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

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

HOWARD
Oh God.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

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

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

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

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

INT SUPERMARKET DAY

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

EXT MID-AIR DAY

High above the town, maybe a couple thousand feet, in fact, Jerry Corndell suddenly stops rising.

He LAUGHS, giddy, happy.

Then he starts to fall.

He SCREAMS, horrified, sad.

He plunges down toward the town.

EXT BACK YARD DAY

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

But unhurt.

KID
*EXCELLENT!*

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

More chaos. More screaming.

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

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

EXT FARMER'S FIELD DAY

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

EXT PARKING LOT DAY

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

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

CONTINUED:

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

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

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

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

Boots Germaine limps up to join the group. For a second, nobody says anything. Finally:

BOOTS
Was this all covered in the meeting?

OLD MAN 1
Is anybody hurt?

OLD MAN 2
I think I fractured my hip!

OLD MAN 1
That happened last week, you old fool.

OLD MAN 2
The other hip!

BOOTS
At least nobody's dead.

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

They all take a step back and Jerry Corndell's scream is abruptly cut off as he kisses the pavement right in the center of their circle. They all look down at him for a moment.

BOOTS (cont'd)
Nobody from *here,* anyway.

EXT NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE DAY

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

EXT ROAD INTO TOWN DAY

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

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

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

Just as they pass the sign --

-- *they disappear.*

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

FROM A HIGH ANGLE,

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

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

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

BOB
I'm buyin'.

MITCH
I'm lettin' ya.

Mitch picks up his tool belt, steps out the front door --

-- *and vanishes into thin air.*

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

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

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

KAREN
Dad? Bob? Hello? Are you here?

CONTINUED:

Karen runs towards the front door, the same one her father disappeared through. Bob grabs her just in time. He hugs her.

BOB
Thank God you're all right.

Karen sees her Father's tool belt in Bob's hand and is gripped by panic.

KAREN
What happened to Dad? Where is he?

BOB
Gone.

KAREN
What do you mean, gone?

BOB
He walked through that door and disappeared.

KAREN
He floated away?

BOB
(shakes his head no)
*Vanished.* I don't know how else to say it, Karen. Your dad is gone.

EXT TEKCOM DAY

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

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

Howard drops to the ground, legs folding up under him.

HOWARD
Oh God... what have I done?

CUT TO:

EXT SPARKLE CREEK DUSK

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

EXT VFW HALL DUSK

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

*Tonight: Why All Hell Has Broken Loose*

INT VFW HALL NIGHT

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

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

Nobody pays any attention. Karen stands off to the side. She raises a bullhorn and pulls the trigger.

KAREN
(amplified)
MOUTHS SHUT AND ASSES IN CHAIRS!

The crowd begins to settle down and take their seats.

UNDERSECRETARY
Thank you, Sheriff.

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

KAREN
(amplified)
THAT MEANS YOU, BOOTS.

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

CONTINUED:

The Undersecretary walks back to the table and picks up the photo of Jerry Corndell.

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

CONRAD
(whispers)
Corn-*dell.*

UNDERSECRETARY
What?

CONRAD
(still whispering)
His name was Corndell, not Corndike.

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

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

BACK ROW AGITATOR
Screw you!

An ANGRY CITIZEN bolts to his feet.

ANGRY CITIZEN
We want answers, not silence!

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

Karen raises her bullhorn.

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

Silence.

CONTINUED: (2)

MRS. KNOEBEL
Oh.

EXT VFW HALL NIGHT

Mr. Knoebel is all alone on the sidewalk in her wheelchair. She has been ejected.

MRS. KNOEBEL
Oh.

INT VFW HALL NIGHT

The Undersecretary stands before the crowd.

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

Bob Kugelmas stands.

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

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

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

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

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

UNDERSECRETARY
Sir, there are children present.

CONTINUED:

ANGRY CITIZEN
Not *mine!* They disappeared!

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

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

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

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

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

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

He pauses. There is widespread agreement.

PRIEST (cont'd)
And then stone them.

Silence.

EXT VFW HALL NIGHT

The meek little Priest has been placed outside with Mrs. Knoebel.

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

INT VFW HALL NIGHT

The crowd is angry again.

BOB
I watched Mitch vanish with my own eyes and I want answers! Where the hell did he go?!

The Undersecretary turns to Howard.

UNDERSECRETARY
Perhaps you'd like to field this one?

Howard rises, nervously. He looks to Karen, who is furious with him.

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

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

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

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

HOWARD
If we assume, as string theorists have, that there are as many as fourteen dimensions, and as Kaluza suggests, that both gravity and electromagnetism are associated with ripples in the fabric of space, the missing people may have been delivered into a yet unseen and curled up dimension.

CONTINUED:

They're listening.

HOWARD (cont'd)
That's just a theory. But it's the one I believe in. You see, I don't think we live in just a universe, I believe we live in a *multiverse* where time and place are as fluid as water, where they move back, forwards, up, down, and *through* one another. This machine is the only way into those universes... and the only way out. It's our only chance to put things back the way they were.

The crowd is quiet. His sincerity is impressive.

HOWARD (cont'd)
Please. We can't just pull the plug.

Karen finally speaks up.

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

HOWARD
"Guarantee?"

KAREN
Yes. As in, give us your word.

HOWARD
(pause)
No. I can't.

The Undersecretary steps forward.

UNDERSECRETARY
All right, let's put it to a vote. Those in favor of giving Dr. Heywood another chance, please raise your hands.

Not one person raises their hand.

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

CONTINUED: (2)

Everyone raises their hand.

CUT TO:

EXT OVERLOOKING THE TOWN NIGHT

Howard sits on a rock, looking at the mess of the town below, the mess he made. Down below, he sees the Sheriff's squad car, battered and beaten, cruising the streets, a spotlight roving from yard to yard.

INT SQUAD CAR NIGHT

Karen's at the wheel of the car, slowly cruising the town, checking all the back yards with the spotlight. Searching. Fruitlessly.

CUT TO:

EXT KAREN'S HOUSE DAWN

The next morning. A handwritten note is on the front door of Karen's house:

*Dad -- Out looking for you. STAY HERE!*

Karen's hand comes into frame, pulls the note down. She's just coming back, she's been out all night looking for him.

She thinks. Crumples up the note.

Turns and hurries back to the dented squad car.

CUT TO:

EXT TEKCOM DAY

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

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

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

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

CONTINUED:

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

CONRAD
Hey. How'd you get in?

HOWARD
Over the fence. You?

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

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

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

HOWARD
It's a catastrophic screw-up.

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

HOWARD
When this is all over, we're going to work on your people skills.

Conrad shuffles papers, cleaning up his desktop.

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

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

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

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD
They *hate* us.

CONRAD
Can you blame 'em?

HOWARD
They want to *kill* us.

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

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

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

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

CONRAD (cont'd)
This yours?

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

HOWARD
Nope.

Conrad starts to throw it away, then looks again.

CONRAD
It's your handwriting.

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

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

*00 Loop*

Howard wrinkles up his face, puzzled.

CONTINUED: (3)

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

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

CONRAD
Must have been during the test.

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

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

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

HOWARD
Something to think about.

CUT TO:

INT SHERIFF'S OFFICE DAY

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

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

Karen appears in the doorway, makes a face, can I talk to you? The Undersecretary holds up a finger -- in a minute.

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

He points to a chair. She sits.

CONTINUED:

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

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

KAREN
Sorry, what?

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

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

UNDERSECRETARY
What can I do for you?

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

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

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

Karen drops her head in her hands.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
Have you looked at the variances? Have you looked at the overages? Because this isn't a variance. This is an overage. You were saying?

Karen turns, he's talking to her again.

KAREN
Oh. Right. A lot of people, me included, want to know exactly what you intend to do next.
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

KAREN (cont'd)
We're going along with this whole news blackout of yours, we don't want a bunch of TV crews here any more than you do. What we *do* want is our people back.

UNDERSECRETARY
I understand. I understand. I understand.

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

KAREN
Ah. Thanks. So, now that everybody's had a chance to cool down a bit, a lot of us are wondering if maybe Dr. Heywood wasn't right. I mean, if we don't let him continue with what he was doing, how *else* are we going to fix this mess?

UNDERSECRETARY
You're not listening to me.

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

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

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

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

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

UNDERSECRETARY
You cut off the directorate sub-head.

KAREN
Please answer my question. What do you intend to do with Dr. Heywood and the collider?

UNDERSECRETARY
Well.

CONTINUED: (3)

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

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

KAREN
PILR?

UNDERSECRETARY
Personal Injury Liability Rating.

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

KAREN
Can't you just tell me -- what is it you're *doing?*

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

KAREN
You're covering your ass.

UNDERSECRETARY
That will be a fortuitous side benefit of my actions, which are undertaken solely in the interests of the public good.

KAREN
And if somebody thinks it should stay open? If somebody tries to stop you?

CONTINUED: (4)

UNDERSECRETARY
The pendulous weight of the federal court system will fall on them like a cartoon safe. The law, Sheriff, is on my side. *You...* are on my side.

Karen just looks at him.

CUT TO:

EXT ROAD INTO TOWN DAY

Howard rides a bicycle as fast as he can down a lonely road, headed for town. As he approaches the fork in the road which we saw in the opening (the one with the big tree in the middle of it), he ZIPS right past the squad car, which Karen is driving in the opposite direction, toward the plant as fast as she can.

HOWARD
HEY!

INT SQUAD CAR DAY

Karen looks up, sees him in her rear view.

KAREN
HEY!

EXT ROAD INTO TOWN DAY

Howard zips around on his bike. Karen zips around in the car. Now they barrel toward each other, pass each other once more (they do not collide) before Howard finally ditches the bike and goes running up to her.

Karen leaps out of the car, pulling off the eyeglasses she wears when she drives. They meet right at the fork in the road.

HOWARD
I was on my way to see you!

KAREN
I was on my way to see you!

They double take at the simultaneous dialogue, then try to start again:

HOWARD
I want you to let me-

KAREN
I think you should-

She gestures, you go first.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
(deep breath)
We think we know what happened. Not why, exactly, but at least what. I want you to let me activate the collider one more time. And before you say forget it, I think you should know that-

KAREN
Okay.

HOWARD
(surprised)
What about the Undersecretary?

KAREN
I don't think he'll be bothering you.

She gestures to the back of her car, where the Undersecretary is literally tied up -- handcuffed to the grill in the back seat, and none too happy about it.

Howard looks back at her, thrilled.

HOWARD
Can I ask why?

KAREN
What's the matter with you, can't take yes for an answer?

HOWARD
I just... how could you, how could *anyone* ever trust me again? After everything I've done... your father... Jerry Corndell... all those cows...

She steps up to him, puts her hands on his shoulders, looks into his eyes.

KAREN
Dr. Heywood. Sometimes you've just got to have a little faith in people.

He looks at her, overcome --

-- and kisses her. It's a big kiss, arms around her, mouth pressed hard, and she returns it immediately, right there under the big spreading elm where anybody in the universe could see them.

CONTINUED: (2)

She pulls back first, all conflicted.

KAREN (cont'd)
I'm engaged to Bob.

HOWARD
I'm in love with you.

She looks at him, moved --

-- and they're at it again, all arms and lips and limbs intertwined.

She pulls back again.

KAREN
Stop kissing me.

HOWARD
Stop kissing me back.

KAREN
That's beside the point!

HOWARD
That *is* the point.

KAREN
I... can't have this happen right now. I had everything all figured out and this time it was gonna work, I was gonna *make* it work.

HOWARD
There's this story called "Flatland." In Flatland, they only have two dimensions. No depth. Everybody's a triangle, a straight line, or a circle. And one day this straight line, he's perfectly happy just living his flat little life but all of a sudden he sees this sphere. And he... he had no *idea.* That anything could be so beautiful. I've never been in love before, I thought I was a couple times, but the truth is I didn't even notice when they left.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (3)

HOWARD (cont'd)
But then you come along with your mint chip ice cream cone and you ruin everything, *nothing* is the same anymore, I'm freezing to death and the quiet is killing me and I'm just lost in all this empty space I thought I loved, but I don't, I love *you*, Sheriff.

KAREN
You're a real pain in the ass.

She grabs him and kisses him again. Between breathless kisses:

HOWARD
I'll get your father back. I promise.

KAREN
How?

CUT TO:

EXT TEKCOM DAY

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

Howard's voice comes over the image:

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

FLASHBACK IMAGE:

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

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

MITCH
Karen, you up?

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

CONTINUED:

MITCH (cont'd)
Karen, you up?

ANOTHER FLASHBACK IMAGE:

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

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

INT BIG RICK TUNNEL DAY

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

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

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

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

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

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

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

KAREN
Then how do you know it ever happened?

HOWARD
Because we checked the Forward Time Projection Chamber!

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

HOWARD (cont'd)
(about to explain)
The Forward Time Projection Chamber --
(thinks better of it)
-- is real complicated!
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

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

ACROSS THE ROOM,

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

HOWARD
Doubles! Thousands of them! *Identical collisions!*

CONRAD
Which are impossible.

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

CONRAD
By an order of magnitude.

HOWARD
By an order of magnitude!

KAREN
Then why did it happen?

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

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

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

CONTINUED:

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

HOWARD
But you don't, that's the point! None of us do! I didn't remember writing this note because the memory no longer existed! The *impression* was there, briefly, it ghosted around in my synapses for a few seconds, just a lingering electrical charge, but then it faded, evaporated into the only dimension that matters, the here and now.

KAREN
How does this help us fix what happened?

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

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

HOWARD
*YOU BET YOUR ASS I DO!*

INT DETECTOR MECHANISM DAY

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

CONRAD (O.S.)
*ROLL THE DETECTOR!*

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

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

UP ON THE CONTROL DECK,

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

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

KAREN
By energy, do you mean speed?

CONRAD
We mean energy.

KAREN
I thought speed was energy.

CONRAD
Speed is speed.

KAREN
Then what's energy?

CONRAD
Mass.

KAREN
Then what's mass?

CONRAD
Mass is energy too.

KAREN
Mass is energy?

CONRAD
Mass is energy.

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

CONRAD
(thinks)
Mass *is* energy.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
SO LIKE I WAS SAYING...

DOWN ON THE MAIN FLOOR,

we're back aboard the enormous rolling detector, which is creeping toward the collision diamond inside the tunnel overlap section. Howard's voice continues:

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

Drawing closer, we notice something interesting. It looks like a flywheel, fitted right over the center of the exit point of one of the tunnel tubes. There are five distinct areas on it, each a different color.

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

BACK UP ON THE MAIN DECK,

Howard goes on, to Karen.

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

BACK INSIDE THE DETECTOR,

the first wing of the flywheel is a silvery color.

HOWARD (O.S.)
First is mercury.

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

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

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

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

BACK IN THE LAB,

CONRAD
But I'm opposed to iridium.

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

KAREN
Why is he opposed to iridium?

HOWARD
Long story.

BACK IN THE MACHINE,

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

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

BACK UP ON THE MAIN DECK,

Howard is finishing:

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

BELOW THEM,

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

WORKER
DETECTOR IS UP!

ON THE DECK,

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

CONTINUED:

KAREN
But Howard... three days ago, we won't have met.

HOWARD
I know.

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

CONRAD
Vacuum!

VOICE (O.S.)
Check!

KAREN
We might never meet, we'll forget that any of this ever happened.

HOWARD
It *won't* have happened.

CONRAD
Magnets!

VOICE (O.S.)
Check!

KAREN
I'll forget everything you said to me.

CONRAD
RF!

VOICE (O.S.)
Check!

HOWARD
But your father will be back. And the others too.

KAREN
*But we will forget.*

CONRAD
Forward time projection chamber!

VOICE (O.S.)
On line!

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD
(still to Karen)
Unless... unless we remember.

CONRAD
Photomultiplier!

VOICE (O.S.)
Five by five!

KAREN
We won't remember. We'll be strangers again.

CONRAD
Silicon vertex tracker!

VOICE (O.S.)
Fixed and running!

Howard grabs Karen by the arms.

HOWARD
*Unless we remember.* Like when you first wake up from a dream, and you have those few in-between moments where you can *force* yourself to remember, to find that one little clue that leads you back into the whole dream. But if you wait too long it's gone forever. We won't have much time when we come out of this. We have to see each other, pick a place and meet.

KAREN
The tree! At the fork in the road, where we met this afternoon!

Conrad enters commands wildly. The AC power hum begins. The WATER RUSHES through the pipes.

HOWARD
(still to Karen)
Maybe we can do it. Maybe we're not all doomed to repeat our mistakes over and over again, maybe we're *not* stuck in an infinite loop. Maybe our lives *do* belong to us.

KAREN
But that's just... hope.

CONTINUED: (3)

HOWARD
Oh. *That.*

Conrad flips open the metal box, exposing the big ON/OFF switch. He turns, looks at Howard. *Everyone* looks at Howard.

CONRAD
On your word, Boss.

Howard looks at Karen.

HOWARD
You do this one.

Karen swallows. Puts her hand on the switch.

CONRAD
And --

She SLAMS it up into place.

CONRAD (cont'd)
*-- we are in collider mode.*

CUT TO:

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

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

*DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY*

They're coming.

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

A SPEAKER atop the squad car BLARES a message.

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

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

CONTINUED:

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

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

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

EXT BACK YARD DAY

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

MOTHER
KIDS! INSIDE, NOW!

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

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

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

INT SHERIFF'S OFFICE DAY

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

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

OWEN
Step away from the desk, Sir!

BOB
Where are the keys to the cell, Owen?

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

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

CONTINUED:

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

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

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

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

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

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

BOB
Make me!

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

CUT TO:

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

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

At the controls, Conrad stares intently at his screen.

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

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

CONRAD (cont'd)
*BEAM ON BEAM!*

CONTINUED:

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

HOWARD
Don't be ridic-

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

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

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

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

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

EXT POND DAY

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

EXT TOWN SQUARE DAY

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

INT SHERIFF'S OFFICE DAY

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

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

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

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

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

OLD MAN 1
My back!

OLD MAN 2
My leg!

OLD MAN 3
My bladder!

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

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

HOWARD
Plenty of gravity now!

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

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

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

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

ON THE SCREENS,

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

INT SHERIFF'S OFFICE DAY

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

OWEN
That's a felony, Bob!

CONTINUED:

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

He swings the cell door open wide.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

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

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

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

A MECHANICAL VOICE speaks up:

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

KAREN
Christ in a blanket!

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

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

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

OLD MAN 2
Give 'em a minute.

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

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

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

The mechanical voice BOOMS in the lab:

CONTINUED:

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

INSIDE THE MACHINE,

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

IN THE LAB,

Conrad spins in his chair.

CONRAD
Polonium electrons are stripped and collisions occurring...

Once again, the monitors explode with fireworks.

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

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

KAREN
Is it me, or do you feel weird?

HOWARD
Weirder than before?

KAREN
Oh, yes.

She moves her arm. Something isn't quite right about the way it moves, it's robot-like, rising straight up like a paper doll's arms.

The entire screen image pivots, like a painting hanging on a center wire. As the image flattens out, we see what the problem is.

*They're in a two-dimensional world!*

The image keeps rotating, now becoming almost paper-thin, giving us a sideways view of their world, which is all there is. It keeps turning, all the way around, doing a one-eighty, and when the image fills the screen again, we're seeing them from behind.

CONTINUED:

Everything in the lab is flattened out, including the people. There's no depth anymore, everything looks like photographs cut out and pasted on the same background.

KAREN (cont'd)
You said there were fourteen dimensions...

HOWARD
I said there might be...

KAREN
WELL YOU JUST LOST TWELVE!

EXT TEKCOM DAY

Outside, the whole *town* has lost its depth, it looks like a photocollage with no perspective.

The D.O.E. convoy moves up the hill of the flattened landscape, an absurd image of cutout trucks and cars that makes us squeal with delight like little children.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

Howard rotates toward Conrad, showing us his flat side.

HOWARD
Conrad! Manually rotate the flywheel!

CONRAD
You got it, Slim!

Conrad turns and slithers across the walls like a shadow, heading for his control seat, which he then wipes into.

CONRAD (cont'd)
Radon molecules on deck!

INSIDE THE MACHINE,

the 2D flywheel rotates to another brightly-colored section. The beam shines through, turning the entire screen red for a moment.

EXT HIGH ABOVE SPARKLE CREEK DAY

From high above Sparkle Creek, we hear the WHINING of the supercollider reach its peak level.

*And the entire town disappears.*

CONTINUED:

Oh, not the trees and birds and streams and stuff. The idyllic grasslands are still there, there's just no buildings. Or streets. Or, you know, people.

Birds CHIRP. The creek BABBLES. A badger peeks his head out of his hole. Several DEER prance into frame and begin to graze.

But suddenly the deer turn their heads and freeze, cocking an ear to the wind. Danger is in the air, and it ain't no hunters.

A low RUMBLING sound rises up, grows rapidly louder.

The deer take off.

The image shudders, undulates, and with an enormous WHOMP the entire town of Sparkle Creek re-emerges, inflating in a split-second like a balloon at the end of a fire hose.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

Well, everybody's back and they're all 3D. And they're not saying much at this point. Karen flexes her fingers, pats her hair.

Howard clears his throat, embarrassed. The moment of silence is punctuated by that mechanical voice:

VOICE (O.S.)
Flywheel rotation in thirty seconds.

Everybody runs everywhere.

KAREN
OH LORD NO MAKE IT STOP NO!

Conrad's chair zips up in front of Howard.

CONRAD
This is gonna be iridium. I am deeply, deeply, deeply opposed to using iridium.

HOWARD
What? Because of the Walker Treatise?

CONRAD
Of *course* because of the Walker Treatise!

KAREN
What's the Walker Treatise?

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
It's bad science! Irresponsible, alarmist doomsday claptrap!

CONRAD
(fast, like the whole rest of the movie)
Walker et. al. conjectured that iridium collisions could create a roving black hole which would swallow up not only our solar system and the Milky Way, but the entire Virgo Supercluster and all matter in the observable universe.

HOWARD
Uh, NO.
(to Karen)
I'm pretty sure I'm right about this.

KAREN
(sarcastic)
God knows you were right about everything else!

HOWARD
Come on, even Walker said it was just a one in seven hundred million chance! I *really* don't think I'm wrong.

KAREN
So some purple headed alien who's just minding his own business is gonna get obliterated because *you* can't put your ego aside?!

HOWARD
(hurt)
Do you think I have a big ego?

VOICE (O.S.)
Flywheel rotation in fifteen seconds.

INT TEKCOM LOBBY DAY

Led by the Undersecretary, the D.O.E. CRISIS TEAM, which includes many uniformed FEDERAL MARSHALS, bursts through the doors of the TekCom lobby and takes off toward the elevators.

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

The argument in the lab is reaching a fevered pitch.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD
Because I try to listen to others.

KAREN
THAT'S NOT THE ISSUE!

HOWARD
But they're usually wrong.

Conrad has his fingers poised over the keyboard.

CONRAD
Your call, Boss, I can still stop it!

VOICE (O.S.)
Flywheel rotation in five...

KAREN
(to Howard)
Admit it, you could be wrong!

VOICE (O.S.)
Four...

KAREN
Say it!

VOICE (O.S.)
Three...

KAREN
"I could be wrong!" SAY IT!

Howard bites his lip.

VOICE (O.S.)
Two...

KAREN
SAY THE WORDS! "I. COULD. BE. *WRONG!*"

HOWARD
(trying his hardest)
I...

VOICE (O.S.)
One...

HOWARD
... really don't think I am.

INSIDE THE MACHINE,

the flywheel rotates. Iridium slides up into place. It's a very creepy amber color.

The beam shoots through it.

IN THE LAB,

the screens erupt in a beautiful display. Collisions like we've never seen.

From across the room, a tiny black pinpoint appears right in the center of the event triangle, where the collision itself is taking place.

It begins to move, or, *rove*, if you will, growing larger as it does. Within a second or two it's the size of a cue ball.

But this little guy's got a lotta juice. Every single thing in the laboratory, including the air, bends toward it, stretches, elongates, and then, with one great slurp, all matter in the lab is sucked into the cue ball and swallowed.

The entire screen goes black, but only for a second, as we cut to --

EXT VIRGO SUPERCLUSTER SPACE NIGHT

Seen from a distance, that little black cue ball fella, now pulsing with a swirling halo of light around it, appears in an outer spiral arm of the Milky Way.

Mirroring the process that happened in the lab, all light from all stars in the Virgo Supercluster begins to bend toward it and is sucked away in an instant, leaving a black screen.

No sound. No light.

No movie.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED: (2)

This is not a printer error.

CONTINUED: (3)

CONTINUED: (4)

CONTINUED: (5)

Finally, just as some audience members begin to BOO --

CONTINUED: (6)

*KA-BOOM!*

All that dark and all that quiet is replaced by the biggest, brightest, loudest explosion you've ever seen, all emanating from that black little cue ball guy who was at the center of the screen the whole time.

Out of the swirling gases and birthing stars left in the explosion's wake, a legend appears:

*THIRTEEN BILLION YEARS LATER*

In three seconds, we see the Milky Way re-form itself, we hyper-zoom toward it, right toward that outer spiral arm, where --

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

-- Conrad's face pleads with us, back in the Big Rick lab, which is identical in every way to what we saw before. He's talking fast, the exact same words (and same shot) as we just saw:

CONRAD
Walker et. al. conjectured that iridium collisions could create a roving black hole which would swallow up not only our solar system and the Milky Way, but the entire Virgo Supercluster and all matter in the observable universe.

Howard looks at him, skeptical.

HOWARD
You know...

But this time he really considers it.

HOWARD (cont'd)
I could be wrong about this.

CONRAD
So, bail on the iridium?

HOWARD
Yeah, better safe than sorry.

KAREN
Hey, it takes a highly evolved man to admit when he's wrong.

Howard shrugs modestly. The mechanical voice speaks up:

CONTINUED:

VOICE (O.S.)
Final flywheel rotation in thirty seconds.

HOWARD
Do we have enough energy without the iridium?

CONRAD
(checking his screen)
Just barely.

HOWARD
This is it.

VOICE (O.S.)
Ununoctium rotation in twenty seconds.

BAM! The doors of the lab burst open, SMASHED THROUGH by a battering ram. GOVERNMENT AGENTS pour inside, SHOUTING commands. The Undersecretary is in the lead, Bob Kugelmas not far behind.

UNDERSECRETARY
STEP AWAY FROM THOSE CONTROLS!

Howard and Karen turn toward them, Conrad shoots one quick glance and knows the score. He looks from them to the big on/off switch in the metal panel.

He dives onto his keyboard and starts typing as fast as his fingers will allow.

VOICE (O.S.)
Ununoctium rotation in fifteen seconds.

Howard is grabbed by two Agents and shoved roughly up against the wall.

HOWARD
Wait! You don't know what you're doing!

UNDERSECRETARY
Neither do you!

He turns to an Agent, points to Karen.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
Restrain her too!

CONTINUED: (2)

Two BURLY AGENTS grab Karen, a little too roughly. Bob K. doesn't like it.

BOB
Keep your hands off her!

He reaches for the Agents, but two MORE AGENTS grab him, they're swarming everywhere now.

VOICE (O.S.)
Rotation in ten seconds.

The Undersecretary turns, sees Conrad still at the keyboard, typing like there's no tomorrow.

UNDERSECRETARY
GET HIM AWAY FROM THAT KEYBOARD!

Agents race across the floor toward Conrad, who types even faster.

VOICE (O.S.)
Rotation in five...

The Agents race up the steps.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Four...

The Agents pounce on Conrad.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Three...

Just as they drag him away, Conrad hits the "ENTER" key with an outstretched finger.

The voice stops. It never says "two."

CLICK! Handcuffs bite into Howard's wrists.

CRUNCH! Karen is shoved onto the floor, a foot in her back.

SMACK! Howard's face hits the floor next to hers.

Around them, the WHOOSH of the water through the pipes ceases. The electric power hum stops. The sound of the machine quiets.

In the silence of the lab, the Undersecretary stands over Howard and Karen, staring down at them officiously.

CONTINUED: (3)

UNDERSECRETARY
Now. I'm gonna put this thing out of my misery once and for all.

He turns to Conrad, who's being held by Agents.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
Shut it off.

CONRAD
It is off.

UNDERSECRETARY
What do you think I am, some local official?! A dog catcher, a vote counter?! I am the Appropriations Undersecretary of the Department of Energy of the United States of America, and I can read an on/off switch!

He sweeps an arm out, pointing it at the big on/off switch, still clearly in the "ON" position.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
NOW SHUT DOWN THAT MACHINE!

CONRAD
It is off.

He looks at Howard meaningfully.

Howard's eyes widen. He looks at Karen.

HOWARD
It *is* off.

KAREN
It *is* off?

UNDERSECRETARY
Fine! I'll do it myself!

He marches across the lab, up the steps to the console, and over to the switch.

CONRAD
(under his breath)
You do that.

CONTINUED: (4)

On the platform, the Undersecretary puts his hand on the switch and SLAMS it into the off position. He turns to face the others.

UNDERSECRETARY
File this one under-

But he stops, hearing a sound. The WHOOSHING of water through the pipes. The HUM of electricity. He turns, confused, looks at Conrad.

UNDERSECRETARY (cont'd)
WHAT DID YOU DO?!

CONRAD
I reversed the switch.

The mechanical voice returns, picking up where it left off.

VOICE (O.S.)
Rotation in three... two... one...

UNDERSECRETARY
YOU REVERSED THE SWITCH?!

CONRAD
I did that.

VOICE (O.S.)
Ununoctium rotation.

INSIDE THE MACHINE,

the flywheel rotates its last time, sliding a translucent blue element into place -- ununoctium.

Behind it, the red beam begins to glow.

BACK IN THE LAB,

Howard turns toward Karen, still next to him on the floor.

HOWARD
Remember... the big tree.

KAREN
By the fork in the road.

INSIDE THE MACHINE,

the red beam EXPLODES through the translucent blue, creating a gorgeous, diamond-flecked PURPLISH BLAST.

BACK IN THE LAB,

we see the entire lab from across the room as that familiar *ripple* waves through it, but this is one is strange, bigger, more powerful and distinct than the others. The ripple shudders, the image bends, and the ripple fades away over a shot of --

CUT TO:

EXT PIG FARM DAY

-- a bunch of pigs. SNUFFLING and CLAMORING for the slop being poured into a trough by MRS. STELPFLUG, three hundred pounds, mean and strong.

MRS. STELPFUG
You should file a missing person's report, that's what you should do!

Karen stands in front of her, in her sheriff's uniform. She looks around, completely disoriented, like she just landed here. As confused as we are.

KAREN
Huh?

MRS. STELPFLUG
Emry! We're talkin' about Emry.

KAREN
What about him?

MRS. STELPFUG
He's gone again! Three days this time! Bring him in! Arrest him!

KAREN
(scratching head, still confused)
Arrest him for what?

MRS. STELPFUG
For not doin' a damn thing around here!

CONTINUED:

KAREN
OH MY GOD! IT'S MONDAY!

MRS. STELPFUG
Yeah. He left Saturday, that's three days.

KAREN
THIS IS THREE DAYS AGO! I ALREADY DID THIS! IT WORKED! THE TREE! I GOTTA GO!

She turns and races toward her squad car. Mrs. Stelpflug SHOUTS after her.

MRS. STELPFUG
Don't be afraid to use force!

INT SQUAD CAR DAY

BAM! Karen leaps into the car and SLAMS the door behind her.

ROAR! The engine comes to life.

FLICK! She hits a couple switches on the dash.

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

The lights on the top of the car burst to spinning red life, the SIREN begins to scream, and Karen's car takes off down the road.

CUT TO:

INT BIG RICK LAB DAY

The Big Rick lab is back to normal, everybody doing what they were doing three days ago.

HOWARD'S HEAD suddenly leaps up into frame. He's wearing the clothes we was wearing in the beginning of the movie. He looks around, wild-eyed.

He reaches in front of Conrad and snatches up the distinctive note pad on which he doodled the infinity symbols earlier.

But now the top page is blank.

HOWARD
IT WORKED!

Conrad, sitting in his chair, is calm.

CONTINUED:

CONRAD
Well, let's not get ahead of ourselves, I'm a little concerned about the niobium wiring, I wonder if we should double coat it before the test tonight...

Howard, already racing toward the exit, turns and SHOUTS back over his shoulder.

HOWARD
YES! THAT! DEFINITELY!

CONRAD
Where are you going?!

HOWARD
THE TREE!

And he's gone.

CONRAD
Oh.

EXT TEKCOM DAY

Howard comes racing out of the plant. Down below, the town of Sparkle Creek looks calm again. The cars in the parking lot are un-smashed and neatly parked. Howard laughs, deliriously happy, grabs a bicycle, hops aboard, and starts down the hill.

CUT TO:

EXT NEW HOUSE DAY

Mitch, Karen's father, is back. Or, never left. He's working on the skeleton of the new house with Bob Kugelmas, just as they once were.

Karen's squad car SCREAMS past them on the road, lights and siren blaring. They stop hammering, watch her go.

MITCH
Someone's in a hurry.

Suddenly, her brake lights light up and the car spins around in a perfect bootleggers 180. The engine ROARS and the car races right toward them.

MITCH (cont'd)
You do somethin' to make her mad?

CONTINUED:

BOB
I don't know. Probably.

The car SCREECHES to a halt inches from the structure. Karen leaps out, races over to her father, and barrels into his arms.

KAREN
Dad! Dad, thank God, Dad!

MITCH
Well, I love you too.

KAREN
You do, I know, and I love you, thank God you're here, Dad, I love you.

She turns, sees Bob.

KAREN (cont'd)
Listen. Bob. I have something to tell you too.

BOB
Okay.

KAREN
Let's not make the same mistake over and over *and* over again. The chance to change only comes along once or twice in a lifetime -- let's grab it! I don't think we should get married. Ever again.

BOB
Okay.

KAREN
Great! I gotta run!

She takes off to the car again, jumps in, and speeds away. Bob looks at Mitch.

BOB
We still on for tonight?

MITCH
Game starts at eight.

They go back to work.

CUT TO:

EXT MAIN STREET DAY

Howard pumps hard, riding the bike as fast as he can. He rides down the middle of Main Street, which is restored to what it once was.

He sees the statue of the General on the horse, now unbroken. He sees the Three Old Guys, also unbroken. He waves like a crazy man, they nod and smile.

Howard turns back and almost hits a guy crossing the street with a big foamy latte. He swerves at the last second.

GUY
Where's the fire, Chief?!

HOWARD
Sorry!

He looks back over his shoulder, recognizes the guy -- it's Jerry Corndell, alive and well! Howard SHRIEKS with glee, happy to see Jerry alive, points at him.

HOWARD (cont'd)
HAH! ZUZU'S PETALS!

He turns back to the road, bears down and pedals even faster.

JERRY CORNDELL
Knew he'd snap one of these days.

CUT TO:

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

Karen's squad car swerves by and passes a tractor at about ninety miles per.

INT SQUAD CAR DAY

Karen drives like a maniac, rocking back and forth, pounding the wheel, urging every bit of power out of her car that she can possibly get. Determined. *Certain.*

We've seen this before -- it was the opening of the movie!

We look closely at Karen's face. A slight, almost imperceptible *ripple* slithers through the image, so faint it could have been a printing mistake. *That* ripple.

CONTINUED:

Suddenly, Karen stops rocking, sits up straight, a confused look crossing her brow. She looks around, tries to get her bearings.

KAREN
Where am I going?

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

Howard is pumping hard up a hill. He can't see the horizon beyond it.

HOWARD
Don't forget... don't forget... don't forget...

But his legs are tired, he's running out of steam, desire, something. We rise up and peek

OVER THE CREST OF THE HILL,

where we see Karen's cruiser approaching a fork in the road, the huge, spreading oak tree planted dead in the middle of it.

Karen's cruiser slows to a crawl, headed straight for the tree, and stops just short of it.

INT CAR DAY

Karen just sits there at the wheel, puzzled as can be, not sure which way to go. Then, suddenly, for no apparent reason --

-- she bursts into tears. Worse than tears, horrible, wracking sobs of pain and loss.

KAREN
(between sobs)
What is... going... on?

Choking back the emotion, she reaches for the radio, keys the microphone.

KAREN (cont'd)
Uh, hey, Owen?

EXT COUNTRY ROAD DAY

Howard pumps hard, comes over the rise, sees the squad car in the distance as it starts up, backs away.

HOWARD
WAIT!

CONTINUED:

He pedals even harder. The squad car turns toward the other fork in the road.

HOWARD (cont'd)
DON'T GO!

Karen hits the gas, the squad car ROARS off, and Howard lunges his bike across the grass. He hits a rock, it sends him flying into the air, he sails over the hood of the car --

-- and SLAMS into her windshield. Through the glass, we see Karen's eyes widen in shock.

She leaps out of the car and runs around to help Howard, who is peeling himself off her windshield.

KAREN
Are you all right?!

Howard rolls over, toward her, now lying on his back on the hood of the car, his head against the windshield, rubbing the back of his head.

KAREN (cont'd)
What did you do that for?!

He turns, looks at her, blinking, disoriented. He sits up. Takes a look around, to get his bearings. Looks back at her.

HOWARD
I was... meeting someone. I think.

KAREN
Who?

Suddenly, a wave of emotion passes over his face, he sits up, fighting back tears. Embarrassed, he turns slightly away, hides his face in his hands.

KAREN (cont'd)
What's the matter, sir?

HOWARD
I wish I knew.

His shoulders heave, he takes a deep breath, turns toward her.

HOWARD (cont'd)
I'm having the strangest moment of deja vu.

CONTINUED: (2)

KAREN
(surprised, realizing it)
So am I.

He climbs off the hood of the car.

HOWARD
Strange when that happens, isn't it?

KAREN
I'll say.

HOWARD
It always makes me think there's something I should remember.

KAREN
Too bad there never really is. Are you sure you're all right?

HOWARD
I guess so.

She reaches in her shirt pocket, takes out the eyeglasses she wears to drive, and puts them on.

KAREN
You take care now, sir.

She starts to turn away.

But Howard's eyes light up, and suddenly he grabs her by the shoulders and turns her to face him.

KAREN (cont'd)
Hey!

He pulls her in close, staring at her face. We go in close too, to see what he's staring at. It's her eyeglasses.

KAREN (cont'd)
What are you doing?

He doesn't answer, just snatches them off her face and holds them up even closer, studying the outline of the black frames. That outline leaps out at us, it's a perfect sideways figure eight, we've seen this shape before.

*IT'S THE INFINITY SYMBOL!*

Karen unsnaps the holster flap of her gun.

CONTINUED: (3)

KAREN (cont'd)
I'm gonna need you to turn around real slow and put your hands behind your back, sir!

But he doesn't. Instead, he grabs her and kisses her!

She pulls away.

She says nothing for a moment, just staring at him, squinting hard, trying, *knowing* there's something she has to remember.

KAREN (cont'd)
Do that again.

He kisses her again. *What* a kiss. This time, they pull apart slowly, just a few inches, breathing each others' breath.

Her face breaks out in a smile like a sunrise. She remembers. She whispers.

KAREN (cont'd)
Just... one more time?

And as they fall into the kiss to end all kisses, we rise up above them, above the tree that marks the intersection, the point at which the two roads come together. Karen's voice comes over once again, like it did at the beginning:

KAREN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
To Einstein's supposition that mankind might one day know all that there is to know about the universe, I say this. Albert...

We climb higher and higher above them, to see the sleepy town in the distance and the whole world beyond.

KAREN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Where's the fun in that?

FADE OUT.