

EATER

Screenplay
by
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Based on the novel
by
Gregory Benford

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BEN

Sorry.

She smiles at him, then turns and stares up at the sky...

HER POV: Fabulous. Wall to wall stars.

CHANNING

It's amazing, isn't it? So...
unfathomable. And to think we're
gonna spend the rest of our lives --

BEN

-- fathoming it?

CHANNING

-- *studying* it with computers and
monitors and spreadsheets...

BEN

Proctology's suddenly looking up.

CHANNING

Doesn't that bug you?

BEN

Day and night.

CHANNING

I'm serious.

(beat, dreamy)

Do you ever think about it? About
getting a closer look?

BEN

Closer? We're already plugged into
the biggest telescopes on the planet,
and once the Hubble gets that new lens
upgrade --

CHANNING

That's not what I mean.

She looks at him, then points up at the sky with her eyes and
grins. Takes him a sec, but he gets her drift.

BEN

You're nuts.

CHANNING

Am I?

Ben looks at her. She's serious. He considers it for a beat.

3 CONTINUED: (2)

3

BEN

Tell you what. As long as I don't have to change my name to Buzz or Zeke or something...

She looks at him, unsure, then his look confirms it: He's up for it. She smiles, delighted. Then something happens. It's as if she sees him in a different light. They inch closer, two souls finally connecting, and their lips meet. They kiss, passionately.

KINGSLEY DART, 28, dashing, earnest, exuding confidence, and British, steps onto the terrace, looking for them --

KINGSLEY

Ah, there you are, my fellow --

-- and stops in his tracks when he realizes they're kissing.

They see him and pull back. It's a very uncomfortable moment for all. Channing glances at Kingsley with a hint of regret, maybe even guilt, in her eyes...

4 **EXT. DEEP SPACE**

4

Vast, quiet, lonely. Slowly, a massive planet with a familiar red spot, JUPITER, glides into view, its MOONS tracking it.

It's soon followed by an orbiting SPACELAB of a generation we haven't yet seen: the PEGASUS. Orbiting nearby is a massive, high-tech radio telescope -- the COMPTON II.

Welcome to the near future.

CHANNING (O.S.)

Cristabel shut her eyes tight and held on to Bluthar's thumb with all her might as he carefully set her down.

5 **INT. SPACELAB**

5

A plethora of LEDs and screens. Dotted around are pictures of Channing and Ben, on a perfect Hawaiian beach; a BABY; And Ben, older now, with an EIGHT YEAR OLD GIRL in a kitschy space ride at a theme park.

CHANNING (O.S.)

There, spread before her, was a land unlike any she'd ever seen. "Where are we, Bluthar?" She asked.

We FIND Channing, now pushing 40. She's curled up at the HOLOVID CONSOLE, reading as she massages her forehead. FOUR SMALL CAMERAS pointed at her are recording.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED:

5

Nearby is CARLA ALONSO, 35, a Spanish fireball. She's busy looking through a microscope. They're both in tank tops and shorts.

CHANNING (cont'd)

"I'm not sure," was his worrying reply.

(she closes the book)

We'll find out tomorrow. Good night, darling. I wish could be with you for sports day, but I know you're gonna have a great time, Daddy's gonna tape it for me, and --

A light flickers on behind her as the rest of the crew: CAL ZHONG, 32, Chinese-American and HANK SIMMONS, 43, hardcore mission commander, float into view. Channing gives a small nod.

CHANNING (cont'd)

Oh, make sure you get him to do his stretching before the dads' race -- we don't want him limping around like Quasimodo for a month like he did last year, okay? Love ya.

She hits the END RECORDING then the SEND commands. The screen flashes to SENDING, showing the RECIPIENT to be MIA KNOWLTON.

HANK

Bluthar still freaking out Cristabel with his weird trips?

CHANNING

(still rubbing forehead)

And then some. We've still got three sequels to get through.

CAL

I knew there was a reason I don't have kids yet.

CARLA

I can think of more obvious reasons, but denial can be a good thing too.

HANK

Join us for breakfast, ladies?

CHANNING

Sure -- how about two poached eggs on rye, crispy rashers on the side, and a glass of freshly squeezed juice, half orange, half grapefruit.

HANK

I can do dehydrated scrambled eggs and some Tang.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: (2)

5

CHANNING

That was gonna be my second choice.

She floats out of her seat, and suddenly feels drowsy and steadies herself.

CHANNING (cont'd)

Whoa.

CARLA

You okay?

CHANNING

Yeah, I'm just -- just went woozy there for a sec.

CARLA

What do you mean, woozy?

CHANNING

It's nothing, I'm fine. It's just this damn headache.

(remembers something; to CAL)

Cal -- did you change the coordinates on the Big Eye?

CAL

No, why?

CHANNING

It was aimed at Volga -- way off our study patch.

CAL

Really? That's weird. I'll run a systems check.

6 **INT. CHANNING'S BUNK, SPACELAB**

6

Channing's asleep, suspended in her bunk. Meanwhile...

7 **EXT. SPACE**

7

The big Telescope floating nearby WHIRRS to life. Adjusts its pitch and roll. Aimed elsewhere now:

We go past it and PUSH OUT into DEEP SPACE. What it's looking at.

It's just dark, stygian. Then a tiny pulse of light suddenly FLARES UP briefly before dying out...

8 **EXT. HIGH ENERGY ASTROPHYSICS CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DAY** 8

A high tech center, built high on the volcanic peaks of Hawaii's Big Island. Further up the mountain is the KECK, great domes housing two of the biggest optical telescopes in the world.

BEN (O.S.)

I remember the part about for better
or for worse, right, I mean that's in
there --

9 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY** 9

A huge open plan area, a warren of work stations facing a huge wall of screens, with views of the coast far below and a huge skylight overhead.

It's laid back and academic rather than military/Nasa in tone. Personal touches abound: loud shirts, shorts, flip-flops and goatees abound on the STAFFERS studying data from the skies.

BEN (O.S.)

...and I'm pretty sure in sickness and
in health is part of the deal...

OVERLOOKING the Control Room are several glass fronted rooms and offices. One of them is --

10 **INT. BEN'S OFFICE - DAY** 10

A harassed Ben, now 40, in khakis and a polo, rushes around, sorting through some papers, watched by AMY MARSTON, 27, an astronomer on his staff.

BEN

...but I sure as hell don't remember
anything about 'at home or in space'.

AMY

You sure you can be back here by
three?

BEN

Well, yeah. Unless I actually win the
damn potato sack race, in which case a
whole new career beckons.

He heads out -- then remembers his cellphone, turns, grabs it.

AMY

You cannot miss that meeting.

BEN

I think I got that.

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED:

10

AMY

And don't forget to stretch.

Ben shoots her a groaned look before disappearing. She grins...

11 **EXT. SPORTS FIELD, HILO, BIG ISLAND - DAY**

11

MIA, 8, struggles in an egg and spoon race, lagging, while, from the sidelines, Ben and other PARENTS cheer --

BEN

Go, Mia, go!

Mia crosses the finish line - last. She glances over. Ben smiles, waves as the KIDS are herded off to the next event. Mia lingers for a moment -- she doesn't look like the happiest of kids. Then she turns away and joins the others.

He's brought back by another dad, MIKE, watching a dad in spikes.

MIKE

Can you believe that guy? Spikes?
What's next, lycra shorts?

BEN

I'm not shaving my legs, that's for sure.

MIKE

Thank God. So how's our spacegirl?

BEN

Still floating up there, cleverly avoiding all this. I've got to be careful -- she's got some big-ass radio telescopes up there and you never know what they can pick up.

A woman -- Mike's hyper wife JANA -- hurries up to them.

JANA

Dads' race is next.

(to Mike)

Don't come in last. Please.

She rushes off. Mike watches her go, turns to Ben with a 'see what I mean' look.

MIKE

You've so got it made. What I wouldn't give to ship Jana off into some spacecan for a few months.

BEN

I'd give you a week, ten days tops before you'd change your mind.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED:

11

MIKE

No way.

BEN

Trust me. It's no frat party. It's the opposite, actually. All the hassles of being married with none of the fringe benefits --

MIKE

-- whatever they are.

BEN

Yeah, right.

(sees DADS converging)

Come on. Time to embarrass ourselves.

12 **EXT. SPACE**

12

The Spacelab glides silently around Jupiter.

We PUSH OUT again, through blackness to a spot where the tiny pulse FLASHES once more, ominously, before blacking out.

Then it flashes again. And again. It starts to pulsate as it MOVES now and meets another small orb --

Which it touches -- then, suddenly, engulfs and DEVOURS --

More orbs appear, it moves in and swallows them up too, one after another --

Suddenly, it's like a swarm, ravaging through its world, spreading, eating everything in its path --

SPREADING and SPREADING --

Until we PULL OUT further and further and we're realize we're actually not in space, but INSIDE CHANNING and PULLING BACK and moving OUT of her body, coming out through her EYES and

HER WHOLE FACE is locked in horror and SCREAMS as it MELTS INWARDS, consumed by this BLACK VIRUS which keeps going, spreading over her arms, her torso --

IT CONSUMES HER WHOLE BODY which implodes and collapses on itself, as if sucked into a black hole at her core, the CAMERA barely escaping its spread and --

THE BED she's on, the sheets she's gripping are sucked in too, THE WHOLE ROOM she's in is bending inwards and imploding as --

MIA and BEN burst into the room, horrified, and are also consumed by this rapacious swarm --

FURTHER OUT now and THE WHOLE HOUSE is sucked inward

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED:

12

And

CHANNING snaps awake, bolting upright, screaming, horrified.

CHANNING
NOOOOOO!!!!

Sweating, shivering, terrorized, heart about to burst. She looks around, lost, confused --

She's in the Spacelab. In her bunk. All is quiet and normal around her. Just the distant, low BEEPS of the systems.

She shuts her eyes, rubs them, still breathing fast...

13 **INT. HOLOVID CONSOLE, SPACELAB**

13

Carla's busy nearby while Channing's at the HOLOVID CONSOLE, watching a HOLOVID MESSAGE, a new generation of video messaging: 3-D and Holographic. Ben's life-size face appears to emerge, ghostlike and translucent, from the glass screen.

BEN (HOLOVID)
I spoke to her other teachers and it's not just math, it's across the board, she's just not interested in anything right now. We're gonna have to do something, this can't go on...
Anyway, moving on...

(beat)

Beth had to leave, her mom's really sick, it doesn't look good. Jana's gonna pick Mia up from school for the next few days while I find someone... and there you have it.

(beat, brightens up)

I'm actually interviewing a Swedish au pair later, she was here working on some swimsuit catalogue and, I don't know, seems she's looking for something meatier to sink her teeth into... You think twenty-one's too young for a nanny?

(a forced grin)

Gotta go.

He reaches into camera and the image FLICKS off.

Channing stares at the screen for a beat, mulling over his news. Feeling conflicted. She snaps out of it and floats out and over to her workstation -- and blacks out again, steadying herself --

CARLA
You okay?

13 CONTINUED:

13

CHANNING

I don't know.

(forces a smile)

Kind of late for motion sickness to be kicking in, isn't it?

Carla studies her -- the concern of a doctor taking over.

CARLA

A lot of things can trigger it. Let me have a look.

CHANNING

I'm fine.

CARLA

Why don't you take a couple of pills --

CHANNING

No, really --

CARLA

Channing, it's no big deal --

CHANNING

I'm fine, honest. I just didn't sleep well, that's all. I'll be fine.

CARLA

Okay. I'm gonna turn in.

Carla floats off. Channing squeezes into her workstation and goes to work.

She types in some commands, hand going up to her head, she's clearly not feeling great -- then she notices something.

CLOSE ON THE MONITOR -- It shows the position of the COMPTON II study zone, currently mapped as "110-96-23".

Which, judging from the look on Channing's face, is wrong.

CHANNING

(to herself)

Come on, Cal. What are you doing?

She types away, inputting "NEW POSITIONING" commands.

14 **EXT. SPACE**

14

Small thrusters FIRE for a brief burst, nudging the huge telescope back to its correct orientation. It stops moving.

15 **INT. SPACELAB**

15

Channing watches as the numbers on the monitor scroll down to the right coordinates: "97-78-23", before locking in.

CHANNING

Now stay.

She waits for a sec, sees it's stable, then turns to another monitor. Her leg starts to shake. She steadies it with her hand, rubbing it. Not sure what it is.

She starts working, alone in the silence.

She grimaces, like she's tasted something bad. She stops working for a sec, rubs her eyes and her scalp, trying to stay focused. Then she gets back to work. Beads of sweat appear at the edge of her hairline.

Then she notices something:

ON SCREEN: the numbers on the monitor are slowly scrolling BACK to the old reading. The wrong one.

She does a double-take, makes sure she isn't seeing things. It's still doing it. By itself.

Mystified, she squeezes out and floats up to a window, eyes struggling to maintain focus now. She looks out to SEE:

THE TELESCOPE

rotating minutely, its thrusters puffing on/off. ON THEIR OWN.

CHANNING glances over at the monitor, spooked.

She thinks about it for a quick beat then goes back and selects a "NEW POSITIONING" window, types in the right coordinates again, and is about to hit EXECUTE when she notices something blinking on another window in the screen:

CLOSE ON THE SCREEN: it blinks "EVENT DETECTED AT 18:07:54".

She looks at it curiously, then keys up the radio map.

CLOSE ON THE SCREEN: THE RADIO MAP. Like a 3-D topographic chart, only there's a peak in the middle of the graph.

Channing eyes it. Something's not right. She types away, driven now, pushing the pain away, as

DATA and GRAPHS scroll in front of her --

CHANNING (cont'd)

No way. No way.

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

15

She's still studying them, scrolling back and forth when suddenly, the graph ZAPS out and the screen goes BLANK.

Channing stares at the screen, confused, lost --

She looks around at the other screens and buttons. Everything else seems normal. It's just her screen. She hits some buttons. Nothing. She WHACKS the console. Still dead.

Then suddenly, IT BURSTS TO LIFE with a rapid fire succession of amazing IMAGES of stellar events like supernovas --

Channing's eyes can barely keep up with the flow as she stares at the screen, dumbfounded --

Then it suddenly settles on one image, as seen from something slowly rotating and approaching it -- THE MILKY WAY, as seen from outside the ecliptic plane, looks like a distant oval shaped plane of billions of shimmering lights, bulging in its center --

She stares at it, coming closer to the screen in disbelief, her hand reaching out and touching it --

Only something closes in QUICKLY, rushing up to the screen, like a massive tumbling rock, sweeping in and CRASHING into it --

Channing JUMPS back, out of her seat, only the push is too strong and she cracks her head against a protruding console, hard --

CHANNING (cont'd)

OWWW!

She spins on herself and loses consciousness, drifting up, floating in mid-air, swirling slowly, balletically in the dimly lit, lonely chamber, BLOOD oozing out of her cracked skull and into A FLOATING TRAIL OF SUSPENDED GLOBULES...

PUSH IN ON HER SCREEN -- which ZAPS to BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

16 **EXT. SPACE - LATER**

16

The Spacelab glides quietly in its orbit...

17 **INT. SPACELAB - LATER**

17

Carla, Cal and Hank are crowded around Channing who's recovering on her bunk. Carla finishes suturing her head wound and applies a dressing to it.

(CONTINUED)

CARLA

I know it's gonna feel itchy for a while, but try and keep your hands off the stitches.

Channing looks confused and spooked. Carla puts a thermoscanner into her ear, CLICKS it and reads it.

CARLA (cont'd)

I still don't understand what happened. What's the last thing you remember?

CHANNING

I -- I'm not sure... I was just working, and then I...
(hesitates)
I just blacked out.

CARLA

Any unpleasant taste in your mouth? Like something metallic maybe?

CHANNING

(which there was)
No. Not really.

CARLA

Okay.
(unpeels a large square patch)
I want you to keep this on --

She pushes back Channing's hair behind her ear and --

CHANNING

I really don't think I need a Scopo patch --

CARLA

I do.
(she sticks it on)
It'll help with the motion sickness. And I want temp checks every hour.

CAL (O.S.)

Is this what you were working on?

CAL's at her workstation, seems intrigued. Which worries Channing. She gets up, with difficulty, finding her balance. Floats over to him, uneasy -- worried about what's on the screen.

She gets to it, she's almost scared to look:

ON THE SCREEN: It's just the Radio Map from before.

17 CONTINUED: (2)

17

CAL (cont'd)
(nothing unusual)
You got yourself a burster.

CHANNING
Not just one.

Cal looks at the screen, perplexed. She punches some keys.

ON THE SCREEN: Another peak comes up, almost parallel to the first one. This seriously piques his interest.

CAL
Okay, so we've got two black holes on the prowl in the same night. Unusual, but... not exactly Nobel prize material.

CHANNING
You may want to reconsider.

She taps some keys. THE TWO MAPS get superimposed.

CAL
What's the time gap?

CHANNING
Just over thirteen hours.

Which stuns him.

CAL
No way. A star doesn't get swallowed up twice -- not hours apart.

CHANNING
You'd think. So, about that Nobel --

CAL
(he studies the screen closer,
taps in some commands)
If the explosions were hours apart,
they've got to be two different stars,
two separate events, which means they
can't be that near to each other --
(as he types away)
What is the Nobel anyway? Do you get
a little statue thing, like an Oscar?
(then gets the results)
The prelim positions are still in too
big a box. How many data points in
your spectrum?

CHANNING
Four.

17 CONTINUED: (3)

17

CAL

Not nearly enough to tell anything for sure, is it?

CHANNING

No.

(beat)

Not yet.

A beat. Something about the way she says it, it's as if she knows. Cal senses this certainty.

CAL

Well I hope it pans out for you. My guess is, you've got two recordings of the same astronomical burp.

He floats off. Channing stares at the screen, almost in a trance, then calls out after him without looking away --

CHANNING

It's not a statuette.

CAL

What?

CHANNING

(turns)

It's not a statuette. It's a medal.

CAL

Bummer.

CHANNING

And a big, fat cheque to go with it.

18 **EXT. SPACE**

18

The Spacelab. Still orbiting Jupiter. Dwarfed by the darkness.

19 **INT. SPACELAB**

19

Dimmed lights. Quiet. Channing is alone, at her workstation, surrounded by printouts and data. She's scrolling away, her screen rushing through different graphs and data.

She's looking for it again. Part of her doesn't want it to show up, but another part of her does.

CHANNING

Come on.

But nothing comes up. She sits back, waits. Nothing. She eyes the screen, thinking about it when Hank floats over -- surprising her.

(CONTINUED)

20 INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

20

Ben looks over her shoulder --

BEN

What's she doing looking at Volga anyway?

AMY

She didn't say.

BEN

You think she's faking it? Just to annoy us?

AMY

I double-checked the coordinates. This is real.

BEN

That's a definite tail. Some kind of guided flow.

(beat, studies it some more)

It's got to be a galactic jet.

AMY

That's what I thought too. But I checked the old radio maps of this region. It wasn't there five years ago.

BEN

You're sure?

AMY

I'm telling you. This thing is new.

BEN

It couldn't possibly have grown this much in a few years. It's too big.

AMY

Now you know why I only got three hours' sleep last night.

BEN

This doesn't make sense.

AMY

Well that's what we want, isn't it? Something new?

BEN

New, yes. Wrong, no.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED:

20

BEN (cont'd)
 Alright, let's put all our scopes on
 this. VLA, Chandra, Arecibo. I want
 to know where the error's coming from.

21 **EXT. SOCORRO, NEW MEXICO - DAY**

21

27 massive radio antennas laid out in a Y-shaped configuration,
 the VLA (Very Large Array), roll into position, streaming
 WHIRRING data, while...

22 **EXT. EARTH ORBIT**

22

Thrusters fire on a huge, gleaming space telescope -- the Chandra
 X-Ray Observatory -- altering its pitch, aiming it at another
 corner of the cosmos...

23 **INT. HOLOVID CONSOLE, SPACELAB**

23

Channing's recording a message. The "To" box indicates "Ben
 Knowlton". She's excited, driven --

CHANNING

...and we know it's not a white dwarf
 or a neutron star, so -- I don't know
 about you, but that kind of exhausts
 my list of options here, I mean this
 thing, it's in a category we haven't
 even dreamed of yet -- which is kinda
 great, cause -- it's all ours this
 time, Ben. It's all ours...

(beat, hesitant)

Whatever it is...

Her leg starts shaking a bit. She reaches down and rubs it while
 carrying on recording.

CHANNING (cont'd)

(beat, more downbeat)

About Mia... I think it's pretty
 obvious you need to have a talk and...
 you're gonna need to be firm with her,
 you're right, we can't let this thing
 get out of hand. I'll send her a
 message too. I just...

She trails off, annoyed, but can't do anything about it. Her leg
 starts shaking again. She rubs it again --

CHANNING (cont'd)

Let me know how it goes.

-- and hits the SEND ICON. She stares through the screen,
 massaging her leg.

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED:

23

She notices something -- the bad taste again. Before she can react, it starts -- like a WHINE in her ears. Annoying. She tries to shake it loose --

And it hits her: she goes into CONVULSIONS --

Her body shakes, her arms and legs twitch and jerk, her eyes roll back and she loses consciousness --

Just as CAL floats in, spots her, and dives for her --

CAL
Channing! CARLA!!

24 INT. SPACELAB

24

Watched by Cal and Hank, a dour faced Carla is examining Channing: drawing blood, scoping her eyes...

CARLA
No big head injuries in the past? A car crash maybe?

CHANNING
No.

CARLA
And you don't have a heavy duty junkie past life we need to worry about, right?

CHANNING
I can't remember, the LSD kind of wipes out your memory after a while.

CARLA
What about your family. Any history there of nervous system disease? Epilepsy?

CHANNING
Carla, what are you getting at?

CARLA
You've had two seizures in the last three days. It could be non specific, in which case anticonvulsant drugs would do the trick. Then again, it could be something else.

CHANNING
Like what?

Carla doesn't want to say.

CHANNING (cont'd)

Come on. What are we talking about here?

CARLA

A brain infection. Encephalitis. Or worse.

(beat)

This thing needs to be looked at now. And I don't have what it takes to do it up here. We're gonna have to let them know.

CHANNING

Okay, just hold on, why not just wait a few days and see if it goes away --

CARLA

(interrupting)

The next one could kill you, Chan. You want to take that risk?

25 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

25

Very high tech. The room also has a glass wall overlooking the main floor. Ben paces before a large conference table. On a VIDEOLINK on a wall of multiscreens is JED COBEN, the mission director. Two other NASA OFFICIALS are with him, a big NASA logo on the wall behind them.

COBEN

We're gonna have to abort the mission. Bring them home.

BEN

She won't let that happen. Not because of her.

COBEN

I can order them back, Ben.

BEN

You know Channing better than that. Besides, it would still take them seven weeks to get back. It could be too late by then anyway.

A beat. An OFFICIAL glances at Coben before speaking up.

NASA OFFICIAL

There is another way.

(beat)

The Pegasus is carrying half a dozen searcher probes. We can put her in one of them, in a fluid suspension module. She can be here in a week.

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED:

25

BEN

No way. It's too dangerous.

NASA OFFICIAL

It's had a fifty percent success rate.

BEN

That's one way of looking at it, given that it's only ever been tried twice.

COBEN

Ben. You heard what Goldman said. The weightlessness could have been hiding other symptoms for weeks.

(beat)

We don't have much choice.

26 INT. BEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

26

Ben's at his desk, recording --

BEN

The consensus is that even though it's risky, your symptoms are too dangerous to ignore for the rest of your mission.

And his face MORPHS into a HOLOVID IMAGE of him on the

27 INT. HOLOVID CONSOLE, SPACELAB

27

Watched by Channing --

BEN (HOLOVID)

I know it's the last thing you want to do right now, given what's going on, but... I think they're right.

The screen reads END OF TRANSMISSION. She taps the RECORD icon, the camera beams light up --

CHANNING

What's the point? The trip back seems like a 50-50 proposition at best, and even then we don't know what they're gonna find. At least up here, there's a chance it'll go away... Besides,...

And CHANNING's face MORPHS into a HOLOVID IMAGE of her on Ben's desk.

CHANNING (HOLOVID) (CONT'D)

...This thing out there, we still don't know what it is.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

27 CONTINUED:

27

CHANNING (HOLOVID) (CONT'D)

You can't ask me to give it up. Not now. It's what my whole life's been building up to.

It flashes with END OF TRANSMISSION. Ben stares at the screen. Breathes in. He taps the RECORD icon...

BEN

I know it's the worst possible timing for this to happen, but... The priority has got to be to choose life. It's got to be. And I don't know about you, but I didn't sign up for a temporary gig here. I thought we were going all the way, you know, matching Zimmer frames, the works... We'll get through this. But we might have to fight for it. And we can't do that if you're up there.

And it MORPHS BACK to his HOLOVID...

28 INT. HOLOVID CONSOLE, SPACELAB

28

BEN (HOLOVID)

(beat)

If not for yourself or for me, do it for Mia. We owe her that much...

The holovid FLICKERS off. Channing stares at the blank screen, then at the picture of Ben and Mia. She looks over at the MONITOR. On it is the radio image of the burster.

She looks over, gutted. Sees Carla, Hank and Cal looking over, concerned. She knows she has no choice.

29 EXT. DEEP SPACE

29

Cold, dark, and unforgiving, as seen by...

30 INT. WINDOW, SPACELAB

30

Channing, alone, staring out, lost in thought. In turmoil...

She floats back into her seat, puts on her headset, and clicks on a new HOLOVID TRANSMISSION. The "To" box blinks. She looks over at the coordinates of the burster, and types them into the box. The camera's lights flick on.

CHANNING

I... I must be losing my mind, but... Whoever you are, whatever you are -- I just want you to know that I've gotta go.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

30 CONTINUED:

30

CHANNING (cont'd)
I just hope I make it through... And
maybe get to know more about you
sometime...

Her voice falters. She can't go on. She hits the SEND icon.

31 **INT. SEARCHER BAY, SPACELAB**

31

The SEARCHER: like a fat cruise missile, fins off the sides and back. Its hatch is open. Channing is in it, in minimal wear. Hank, Carla and Cal fuss over her. She looks nervous.

HANK

You miss us too much, just get this
thing sorted out and come on back.
These things fly both ways, you know.

CHANNING

Thanks.
(turns to CAL)
Keep tracking that puppy for me?

CAL

Don't worry. Your medal should be
waiting for you by the time you land.

Channing smiles as Cal fits the breathing mask on her. He fits her eye shields on.

CAL (cont'd)

(low, to her)
And let's not forget that cheque.

CARLA

Ready?

Channing nods. Carla hits a switch and checks the readout as Channing's eyelids flutter and close.

CARLA (cont'd)

She's out.

Hank seals the hatch. Carla hits a button. A GELATINOUS LIQUID pours in and solidifies around her...

32 **EXT. SPACELAB**

32

The Searcher emerges from its bay, lights up and SHOOTs off into space...

33 **INT. SEARCHER PROBE**

33

CLOSE on Channing, unconscious, suspended in fluid, as --

34 **EXT. SPACE** 34

The Searcher shoots by. We PAN ACROSS and into deep space, where...

35 **EXT. DEEP SPACE** 35

SOMETHING -- the tiny, faint point of light, at the edge of the galaxy, spinning slowly. We can barely see it. It suddenly FLARES up before fading away.

A vague THERMAL IMAGE of it is captured on a SCREEN at...

36 **INT. SPACE CENTER - DAY** 36

...where a PENCIL jabs at it. It's Amy's. She and Ben, along with two other ASTRONOMERS, are huddled around her workstation.

ASTRONOMER 1

These blue spectral lines... it's moving towards us, right? But then these red lines mean it's moving away.

AMY

How can it be doing both at the same time?

She looks at Ben. His mind's clearly elsewhere.

AMY (cont'd)

Ben?

BEN

(comes back)

Yeah. I don't know. It's...

KINGSLEY (O.S.)

It could be spinning on itself. Rotating.

They turn, Ben snaps out of his trance. Standing behind them is Kingsley Dart. As sharp and polished as ever, only like them, a decade or so older now. A visitor's badge hangs from his neck.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

The red shifts could be coming from the receding edge, the blue shifts from the approaching one.

BEN

Kingsley?

KINGSLEY

Hope you don't mind. Just thought I'd come in and see what all the excitement's about.

Ben gets up. Kingsley extends his hand, Ben hesitates for a nanobeat before shaking it. He turns to the OTHERS.

ANGLE ON AMY -- she knows who he is.

BEN

Everybody, this is Kingsley Dart, Astronomer Royal --
(to KINGSLEY in disbelief)
-- who just happens to be here...?

KINGSLEY

It's great to see you too.

BEN

No, of course it is, it's just --

KINGSLEY

(knows where this is going)
I was at a conference in L.A. This chap from Arecibo mentioned you were looking at something rather... odd.

BEN

And you came all the way out here to help us out.

KINGSLEY

I was only six hours of non-stop turbulence away. How could I resist?
(glancing at screens)
It sounds positively intriguing. Why haven't you made a formal announcement yet?

BEN

It's too soon. Besides, we don't even know what we're talking about yet.

KINGSLEY

All the more reason to enlist as many minds as possible, no?

Ben looks at him. Smiles. He can't exactly kick him out. Kingsley gestures towards the screen.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

May I?

Ben shrugs. Kingsley moves in, and as he does, turns to Ben.

36 CONTINUED: (2)

36

KINGSLEY (CONT'D)
(totally unaware)
How's Channing?

37 **EXT. SPACE**

37

The Searcher still rockets through space, only as it zooms past, we now see its destination: EARTH.

38 **INT. NASA MISSION CONTROL**

38

All eyes are on the huge displays -- when something goes RED on one of the monitors which BEEPS alarmingly --

MONITORING DOCTOR 1
I've lost her EKM readings.

COBEN
Physiology --

MONITORING DOCTOR 2
I'm not getting anything either.
(looks up in alarm)
She could be having another seizure.

COBEN
(into radio, emphatic)
Aurora, this is Houston control. Are you getting this?

39 **EXT. EARTH ORBIT**

39

AURORA -- an X-33 VentureStar evolution, a future generation of shuttle -- drifts closer to the Searcher, retro-rockets puffing away, adjusting pitch and roll, cargo bay open, arm ready.

HILL (O.S.)
Roger that, Houston. We're on it.
Initiating recovery sequence now.

40 **INT. ER, EDWARDS AFB - DAY**

40

Boom! Channing's wheeled in, DOCTORS and TECHNICIANS working on her already. Monitors WHINE and BEEP as the gel surrounding her is liquefied and drained. Something is injected into her, an oxygen mask is strapped on, defibrillators, the works --

DOCTOR 1
It's gone into her lungs. She's drowning in it.

DOCTOR 2
Give me 300. Clear!

(CONTINUED)

40 CONTINUED:

40

Again and again, frantic --

DOCTOR 2 (cont'd)
I'm not getting anything.

DOCTOR 1
Go to 3 mil Epinephrine.

A NURSE injects her. The DOCTOR tries again with the paddles --

DOCTOR 1 (cont'd)
Clear!
(beat, nothing)
Come on!

DOCTOR 2
I'm still not getting anything!

DOCTOR 1
I'm opening her up --

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

41 INT. RECOVERY ROOM, HOSPITAL - DAY

41

Channing's in bed, IV tubes and monitors behind her. Ben's with the doctor, GOLDMAN, who's walking them through the skull X-Rays. It's hardly festive.

CHANNING
How long do you think I've had it?

GOLDMAN
For it to be this big... I'd say at least a year. Probably longer.

(beat)
That's the nasty part of getting it in a pre-frontal lobe. We would have had more warning had it been growing anywhere else in the brain, you would have noticed some external symptoms, but that part of the brain doesn't control things like vision or speech or movement...

CHANNING
What does it control?

(CONTINUED)

GOLDMAN

Personality, behavior. The ability to concentrate, the elaboration of thought... You may have had episodes of uncharacteristic behavior lately, exaggerated responses to things, maybe some unexplained visions or fears?

Channing doesn't answer, but it troubles her. Self-doubt kicking in.

BEN

What are our options?

GOLDMAN

I'm afraid at this point, they're limited. A surgical resection is pointless, since cutting it out would also remove a large part of your cognitive abilities.

CHANNING

Or what's left of them, apparently.

GOLDMAN

We can try and control it with radiation therapy. But again, it's in such a critical place, we'll have to go easy...

CHANNING

How long do I have?

GOLDMAN

It's not a perfect science, Channing.

CHANNING

How long?

GOLDMAN

(a tough beat)
Six months, give or take...

A beat while it sinks in.

CHANNING

And in the meantime?

GOLDMAN

In the meantime, we'll start you on the radiation, we'll use steroids to relieve the swelling, stop those headaches --

CHANNING

I'm not going to need a straight jacket, am I?

41 CONTINUED: (2)

41

GOLDMAN

Of course not...

(beat)

You may experience some memory loss,
some loss of concentration...
Judgement, inhibitions... I'm afraid
the pre-frontal area isn't called the
Gatekeeper for nothing.

CHANNING

(a pained smile at Ben)

No more inhibitions. That could be
fun. We can be as outrageous as we
want and just blame it on my tumor.

GOLDMAN

I'm sorry it's not better news. I'll
see you on the island.

Ben nods at him. Goldman leaves. Ben looks at Channing.

CHANNING

God, I'm so glad I came back for this.

BEN

We didn't know.

CHANNING

No, we didn't, did we...

A beat. She's torn up, angry about this. As is he.

BEN

Mia's outside.

CHANNING

What are we going to tell her?

BEN

I don't know.

Ben goes out. Comes back a beat later with Mia.

She stands at the door, looking hesitantly at her mother.
Scared, wary. Cold.

Channing reaches out, coaxing her over.

CHANNING

Hey, baby. I've missed you so much.

Mia just stands there, by the door. Impassive.

SMASH CUT TO:

42 **EXT. DEEP SPACE** 42

A shadowy object tumbles end over end, approaching us in a thundering hurry: an ICETEROID. As it approaches, it becomes more clearly visible, lit by AN UNSEEN SOURCE OF LIGHT behind it.

The LIGHT grows brighter -- and a great rushing, like a windstorm, sweeps up around the iceteroid from behind. It grows until it peaks -- we just see the edge of a ferocious rushing spiral of gas and light --

And the screen WHITES OUT in a flash, bringing us to the calm of

43 **EXT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - NIGHT** 43

The domes sit there ominously, in the still of the desert night.

CLOSE ON A COMPUTER MONITOR

Which shows a succession of thermal images of a tiny RADIO PLUME with a bright spot at one end of it, starship-like. It's thin, bright -- and moving. We're in:

44 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT** 44

Where Amy and Kingsley are up late, studying the screen.

AMY

My God. What is this thing?

Kingsley just stares at it, focused. Not liking what he sees.

AMY (cont'd)

I need to get these to Ben.

Kingsley reaches out and stops her --

KINGSLEY

Don't. He's got enough on his plate right now.

AMY

I promised him I would. Besides, it might do him some good to think about something else.

45 **INT. ON BOARD JET, FLYING BACK TO HAWAII - DAY** 45

Mia's at a window seat, playing a videogame, earjacks on. Across the aisle from her, Channing looks over. Mia glances at her, half-smiles, then turns back.

CHANNING

She's so... different.

BEN

You were out there almost seven months this time. That's a big chunk of life for an eight year old.

CHANNING

Thanks for reminding me.

BEN

I didn't mean it that way.

CHANNING

I know, I'm sorry...

(beat)

She's scared. It's almost like she's scared of me.

BEN

She's a smart kid. She's probably caught on.

(sees Channing's unease)

It'll be fine. She's missed you more than she lets on, and having you back, it'll do her a world of good.

CHANNING

Before I go away again. For good.

(beat)

She was better off with me up there. I shouldn't have come back.

BEN

You're wrong. At least you can spend more time with her --

CHANNING

(interrupting)

What's the point? So she can watch me lose my mind. Is that how you want her to remember me?

Ben wants to argue it, but holds back for a beat. He then reaches into his briefcase and pulls out some printouts.

BEN

Here. Check these out. They came in this morning.

She fumes quietly before taking them. Studies them. Captivated. Then checks them out more closely, like there's something wrong.

CHANNING

Wait, these were taken only a day or so apart?

(CONTINUED)

BEN

Looks like it.

CHANNING

Jesus, it's in one hell of a hurry --

BEN

-- and it's now local.

CHANNING

How local?

BEN

As of last night, just beyond Pluto.
In the Oort Cloud.

CHANNING

There's nothing but iceteroids out there.

(beat, mind racing)

Why is it so luminous? Could it be accelerating?

BEN

There aren't any unusual signatures near it to support that.

CHANNING

What if it isn't accelerating? What if it's decelerating.

BEN

How? There's nothing out there to slow it down but gas and dust. Nothing would naturally --

CHANNING

(interrupts)

What if it isn't natural?

BEN

(looks at her, smiles)

Well then we'd better get our ray guns out. Come on, Channing...

He looks at her like 'where's that coming from'. She wants to say more, but doesn't.

CHANNING

(uneasy)

All I'm saying is nothing about this thing makes sense so far. The closest we've got is some kind of mutant black hole and even that's a stretch.

(CONTINUED)

BEN

Yeah, but I don't think little green men is the way to go just yet. Don't beat yourself up too much over it. It's even got Kingsley stumped.

CHANNING

Kingsley? He's in on this?

BEN

He's here.

CHANNING

What, at the center?

BEN

Yep. 'Just happened to be in the neighborhood'.

CHANNING

Great timing.

BEN

That's what I thought.

(beat)

Don't worry, he's not grabbing this one. It's ours. Yours, anyway. Lock, stock, and barrel. Official designation: "CK-01".

CHANNING stares at the papers. Thinks.

CHANNING

I want to go in with you tomorrow.

BEN

Channing, come on. Dr Goldman's waiting for us first thing and --

CHANNING

(interrupting)

It's my find, Ben.

BEN

You heard what Goldman said. You're gonna need to slow down if you --

CHANNING

(interrupting)

Slow down? I don't really have that luxury, do I? What do want from me, Ben? You wanted me come back and I'm here, okay, I'm back. Now what? You want me to do the radiation therapy like a good girl and sit and read books by the pool all day while I slowly turn into a vegetable?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

45 CONTINUED: (4)

45

CHANNING (cont'd)

I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to waste the little time I have left. I want to see this thing through. While I still can. Can't you understand that...?

46 **EXT. THE ROAD TO MAUNA KEA - DAY**

46

The Knowlton SUV snakes up the spectacular mountain road...

IN THE CAR

Channing and Ben. Not talking.

47 **EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DAY**

47

The SUV is waved through the center's LOW SECURITY gates.

48 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

48

The place is buzzing as Channing and Ben come in. They bump into Kingsley in the hall -- he looks like he's worked through the night and seems clearly surprised.

KINGSLEY

Channing. What are you doing here?

CHANNING

Now there's a welcome worth travelling halfway across the galaxy for.

He hugs her, kissing her cheek --

KINGSLEY

I'm euphoric to see you, dear girl, you know that. I didn't think you were...

CHANNING

What? Sane?

(beat)

Relax. So I'm gonna be a bit less predictable. Could be fun.

KINGSLEY

Oh, one could never accuse you of predictability, Channing.

(beat, serious, seems rushed)

They're all waiting for me in there. You should come in too.

CLOSE on BEN AND CHANNING -- surprised.

49 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

49

Channing and Ben follow Kingsley in and are stunned to find Amy and a few other SENIOR STAFFERS already seated. The screens are all up, videolinks to stern faces across the country.

Banners on the screens indicate it's the White House situation room, from where JACK RICHTER, the National Science Advisor, and a couple of GENERALS are highlighted.

BEN

What's the hell's going on?

KINGSLEY

(motioning to seats)

Please...

The shellshocked Ben and Channing take their seats. Amy glances over, uncomfortably. Ben darts her a look --

KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

Gentlemen. Thank you for making yourselves available at such short notice. I presume you've all read the brief I sent you, so I'll get straight to the point.

He nods to a STAFFER who hits a control, displaying some graphics on a SCREEN: A simulation of a quick trip through the solar system, from Earth all the way past Pluto and into an Iceteroid field.

KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

What you're looking at is called the Kuiper Belt. It's a vast field of iceteroids, typically a kilometer or two in diameter, about the size of a fairly large mountain -- and roughly similar to the apparent core dimension of our intruder.

Channing looks at Ben, mouthing 'intruder', surprised to see Kingsley use the expression.

KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

In the last twelve hours, we've observed seven more gamma explosions.

Ben steps in --

BEN

I'm sorry -- *seven?*

KINGSLEY

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

BEN

That's impossible.

RICHTER

And you are...?

Ben is momentarily thrown -- Kingsley steps in.

KINGSLEY

I'm sorry, Jack, this is Dr Benjamin Knowlton --

An AIDE whispers something into Richter's ear.

RICHTER

You were saying, Dr Knowlton?

BEN

These iceteroids -- they're thousands of miles apart. The odds of this -- 'intruder' hitting one of them, much less seven of them, especially given its phenomenal speed --

KINGSLEY

(jumping in)

Absolutely. A bullet fired into a light snowstorm has a far better chance of hitting a snowflake.

RICHTER

Couldn't it be passing through an area of the outer solar system that's particularly dense with iceteroids.

KINGSLEY

That was a remote possibility. Until we got these.

He hits some keys. A SCREEN lights up with a GRAPHIC DISPLAY showing the position of the planets, homing in on Jupiter, then Pluto, then the Kuiper belt iceteroid field and zooming in.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

By calculating the momentum delivered in each jet plume, I had the radio observations plotted in three dimensions.

He hits a key. We SEE the object travelling and colliding with a spinning iceteroid.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

First impact, 11:27pm Pacific Standard Time yesterday. Then this.

49 CONTINUED: (2)

49

ON SCREEN: it bounces off in another direction, towards another iceteroid that's moving --

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

A change of direction, heading roughly towards the second object. Two thirds of the way there, a second, smaller event --

ON SCREEN: it collides with a small iceteroid, adjusting its path, now heading straight for the large iceteroid.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

-- that puts it dead on course.

ON SCREEN: it appears to consume the iceteroid, and changes direction yet again.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

Boom. Second major event, 2:07am, and it heads towards the third object. Three quarters of the way there, another course correction --

RICHTER

Hold on, 'course correction'...?

KINGSLEY

Bear with me.

ON SCREEN: again, it heads towards a large iceteroid, hits a smaller one on the way and consumes it, adjusts its course and hits the large one.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

Same thing again. Impact, course correction. Using the latest data, I'm predicting CK-01 will make another course correction in around two hours, and strike another iceteroid four and a half hours later.

(point at screen)

This one.

ON SCREEN: It rotates to show the iceteroid it's heading for.

RICHTER

You're saying this thing is changing directions at will?

KINGSLEY

Yes.

RICHTER

'At will'.

(CONTINUED)

KINGSLEY

There's no question in my mind that its movements bespeak purpose.

(beat)

Gentlemen, we are in the presence of the complete unknown. This is an original energy being that's crashing into heavenly bodies at will. I believe that it's using these collisions to somehow power itself by feeding off these iceteroids, by *eating* them, if you will, processing them for reaction mass, using them as fuel to make whatever course corrections it needs to help it follow this smooth trajectory.

A long silence.

ANGLE ON CHANNING -- troubled. This confirms her worries.

RICHTER

Where does that curve go?

Kingsley hits some keys. The SCREEN displays a trajectory from the ice fields, past Pluto and onto JUPITER.

KINGSLEY

Jupiter.

(beat)

And pretty quickly.

MOVE IN on the screen and on JUPITER --

50 **INT. HALLS, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

50

As Kingsley leaves the conference room, Ben leaves Channing and storms up to him , grabbing him --

BEN

Thanks for including me in your little presentation there, buddy. Last time I looked, your tag still said 'visitor', didn't it?

KINGSLEY

Look, I'm sorry I didn't have time to brief you --

BEN

Brief me? --

KINGSLEY

If I'm not mistaken, you had some rather important personal matters to attend to over the last couple of days --

BEN

How convenient for you.

KINGSLEY

What did you expect me to do? Sit back and keep quiet about it? This thing is moving too fast for us, every minute counts, and make no mistake, Ben, the media's about to have a bloody field day with it --

BEN

But lucky for us you're here to take care of that, aren't you?

KINGSLEY

Actually, I am. And that's why I had to bring in the big guns. It's far better to have this handled by people who can impose controls when they're needed.

BEN

Controls? What the hell does that mean?

KINGSLEY

Think about it, Ben. This has all the potential to get rather unpleasant.

BEN

And you'll be there to milk it every step of the way, won't you? All these years and nothing's changed, has it? You're still the same old self serving egomaniac you always were. Well, not this time, buddy. Not this time.

He shoves him away, turns to Channing --

BEN (cont'd)

Let's get out of here.

-- and storms off. Channing looks back at Kingsley...

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

51 **EXT. SPACE** 51

The Spacelab, still in Jupiter's orbit.

52 **INT. SPACELAB** 52

HANK's in his pilot seat, tensely flicking pre-flight switches.

HANK

Cal, how're we doing?

53 **INT. SEARCHER BAY, SPACELAB** 53

Cal and Carla hurry, loading a Searcher into the release bay.

CAL

Another ten minutes and we can get the hell out of here.

54 **EXT. SPACELAB** 54

The Searcher drops from its bay and SHOOTs OFF into space, trailing another that was sent off before it --

The Spacelab's THRUSTERS fire, nudging it away from Jupiter's orbit --

HANK (O.S.)

Houston, we're climbing out of Jupiter orbit now, altitude five six two zero, speed eight three one zero.

-- leaving behind the Big Eye...

55 **INT. NASA MISSION CONTROL** 55

The GRAPHIC DISPLAY on the screen wall shows the relative positions of Jupiter; the Spacelab, moving away, heading towards Earth; the Eater's approach line, and its estimated trajectory beyond Jupiter, taking it out of the solar system.

COBEN

Roger that, Pegasus. Stay on that heading till further notice. We'll keep you updated on its trajectory.

56 **INT. KITCHEN, KNOWLTON HOME - DAY** 56

CHANNING

Mia. The bus is here.

56 CONTINUED:

56

Mia appears. Channing hands her a lunch bag and walks her to the door --

CHANNING (CONT'D)

How about I pick you up from school one day this week? We can go see if Jimmy's mahi-mahi's still as tasty as I remember it, what do you think?

MIA

Will daddy come too?

CHANNING

(disappointed)

Sure.

(kisses her)

Love you.

Mia just rushes out to the school bus. Channing watches her go with a heavy heart. Then the phone RINGS. She picks it up.

AMY (O.S.)

Channing, it's Amy. Is Ben there?

CHANNING

He's in the shower. What's up?

57 INT. CONTROL ROOM, CENTER - DAY

57

A lot of activity behind her --

AMY

We need him up here like now.

58 EXT. GATES, SPACE CENTER - DAY

58

Ben and Channing are surprised to see a couple of TV NEWS VANS setting up and BUILDERS working on installing a more secure gate. FEDERAL AGENTS are alongside the GUARDS now.

BEN

The cat's out.

59 EXT. PLAZA, SPACE CENTER - DAY

59

They rush in to find TRUCKS unloading equipment (desks, computers, chairs). Four black FORD EXPEDITIONS are parked nearby, AGENTS everywhere. A big military CHOPPER takes off as another prepares to land.

60 INT. HALLS, SPACE CENTER - DAY

60

Ben and Channing walk briskly, taking in the chaotic activity as more workstations take over every available corner.

They pass several MEN, severe and stark in dark slacks and off-white shirts, purposefully getting set up. One of them turns.

HALVORSEN
(Australian accent)
Dr Knowlton!

Ben's ambushed by the greeting, lost in thought for a beat --

HALVORSEN (cont'd)
Bill Halvorsen, SETI -- we met at
Osaka two years ago?

BEN
(dazed, thrown)
Bill -- of course. I'm sorry, I...
No one told me you were coming.

ARNO (O.S.)
(interrupting)
Dr Knowlton.

Ben turns. WARREN ARNO, tightly sprung man with close cropped hair stands before him, two AIDES close by.

BEN
Yes?

ARNO
My name's Arno.
(flashes ID)
Homeland Security. Where can we talk?

61 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

61

A fuming Ben paces around before Arno, Kingsley, Channing, and a couple of Arno's aides.

ARNO
Look, Dr Knowlton -- Ben -- we want
you guys to stay focused on your
research. We need you. We'll just
handle the connections to Washington
and to the outside world.

BEN
Just how do you expect us to keep
working with your people looking over
our shoulders?

(CONTINUED)

61 CONTINUED:

61

ARNO

Look, I'm just a conduit, that's all. As for our people, well, think of them as colleagues. They're a pretty smart group. Use them.

(turns to Kingsley)

I'm gonna need to throw a bone to the reporters out there.

KINGSLEY

Absolutely.

Ben watches the ease and familiarity between the two, quietly seething.

62 **EXT. PRESS TENT, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

62

A light structure hastily set up outside the center. Kingsley is at a podium, handling it calmly and expertly, pointing at a screen displaying the planets and the Eater's position.

KINGSLEY

We believe CK-01 will reach this iceteroid field here in roughly sixteen hours' time -- and we should get a clearer picture of it then from the searcher probes which are headed there as we speak.

(points at another REPORTER)

Yes,... --

REPORTER

Sue McKay, Miami Guardian. There have been reports that CK-01 isn't following a smooth trajectory, that it's behaving erratically, even -- deliberately. Should we be worried?

KINGSLEY

(smiles comfotingly)

Let's get one thing straight, Sue. Our interest in this phenomenon is purely academic at this point. This object is essentially no more than a new type of black hole and as you can see, it's heading in at an angle to the ecliptic plane. Its trajectory takes it through our solar system close to Jupiter before sailing off into oblivion. We just want to get as close a look at it as possible while we're able to.

(beat)

It's what geeks like us live for.

They chuckle --

63 INT. BEN'S OFFICE - DAY

63

Ben watches the press conference. Channing's resting on his sofa, popping some pills. Her face is paler.

BEN

Can you believe this guy? He's so God damn perfect, isn't he?

(beat)

What did you ever see in him.

CHANNING

Hey, he was your friend too.

BEN

You should be the one up there.

CHANNING

You, maybe. Me...

(beat, re: her appearance)

I don't think people want to see *this* right now.

BEN

Come on. It's been a long day. I'll take you home.

CHANNING

No, I want to stay. I need to check on a few things. You go on ahead. I'll grab a lift down with Amy.

He looks at her.

CHANNING (CONT'D)

What?

BEN

Maybe I should just have a videolink set up from here too.

CHANNING

That's not fair, Ben.

BEN

Isn't it? Would it kill you to come home and spend some time with her? She needs you, Channing. Even if you think you're doing her a favor by staying away.

CHANNING

She needs someone who's going to be around longer than six months --

(CONTINUED)

63 CONTINUED:

63

BEN
(interrupting)
No. She needs her mother. That's all
she needs. As much of her as she can
get.
(beat)
I'll see you later.

He storms out --

64 INT. BEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

64

Channing, alone. Working. Looking for it again.

CHANNING
What are you? What do you want...?
(beat)
Answer me...

KINGSLEY (O.S.)
Interesting methodology.

She turns. Kingsley's standing at the door.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)
I never knew one could actually talk
to these screens.

CHANNING
See that? I'm already losing it.

He comes in. She quickly CLICKS off her screen as he comes
around. Sees a PHOTO of MIA on the desk. Picks it up.

KINGSLEY
She looks like you.

CHANNING
You think so? I always thought she
had Ben's eyes.

KINGSLEY
The eyes, maybe. The smile...
(on the other hand...)

CHANNING
She is a little charmer, isn't she?

KINGSLEY
My point exactly.

She looks at him, smiles.

CHANNING
So it looks like you're staying on for
a while.

(CONTINUED)

KINGSLEY

Yes. Unavoidable, really. Not that I'd want to. Avoid it, I mean. I suppose I ought to go out and buy myself some of those loud flowery shirts.

CHANNING

And shorts. Gotta get the shorts.

KINGSLEY

The world isn't ready for the sight of my knees.

CHANNING

What about Zoe?

KINGSLEY

We're separated.

CHANNING

I'm sorry.

KINGSLEY

No biggie, as they say. It's been coming for a while, really.

CHANNING

Have you told her what's going on?

KINGSLEY

No, I haven't spoken to her for a while. Don't like to interrupt her.

CHANNING

Ouch.

KINGSLEY

I know. Still insufferably petty and judgemental. You see -- you showed good judgement twelve years ago. Dumping me for Ben.

CHANNING

I didn't dump you. We had a wild weekend in Ibiza, that was it. Besides, you got another notch on your bedpost. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?

KINGSLEY

(it wasn't, but he ducks it)
I wouldn't put it quite like that.

CHANNING

Anyway, it was pretty obvious you were more interested in astronomy than in me.

KINGSLEY

What can I say? I was young and pathologically stupid.

CHANNING

Far from it. Still, we had fun, didn't we?

Kingsley finds a smile. There's more here than she knows.

KINGSLEY

Ben's under the wrong impression, you know. About my being here.

CHANNING

Can you blame him? Or me, for that matter.

KINGSLEY

(beat, smiles)
You're both still pissed off about the Nobel.

CHANNING

What do you think?

KINGSLEY

You left! We'd barely started working on it when you both packed up and left to go gallivanting off into space --

CHANNING

Leaving you to scoop up the prize. You know, a simple acknowledgement would have been nice.

KINGSLEY

I was... --

CHANNING

What?

Kingsley leaves it there, not wanting to explain why he wasn't feeling hugely generous at the time.

KINGSLEY

You're right. It was... callous of me. I owe you both an apology.

CHANNING

You certainly do.

64 CONTINUED: (3)

64

KINGSLEY

This -- all this. It's going to get harder. I need you to talk to him.

CHANNING

You've come to the wrong person for that.

KINGSLEY

We need to find a way for us all to work together.

CHANNING

Or what? You'll get your friends with the crew cuts to shut us out? Tell me you don't want to hog this one too.

KINGSLEY

I'd rather walk away right now than have you think that. But I think that would be a mistake.

(beat)

This is your turf. I'm here as your guest and your guest only. Just one more tired, poor, wretched piece of refuse on your teeming shore. If you'll have me...

65 **EXT. SPACE**

65

The two SEARCHERS streak through space, winged missiles heading straight for a massive ICETEROID which hurtles through space --

BERGER (O.S.)

We should have visuals any minute now.

66 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

66

Anticipation all around, watching the screen wall in silence.

ANGLE ON KINGSLEY AND BEN -- away from each other. A glance of unease and distrust between them. Channing in between.

ARNO

Here we go.

ON SCREEN

We SEE the ICETEROID from the searchers' POVs displayed on the screen wall. Everyone's there, including Ben, Channing, Kingsley, Amy, Arno, eyes peeled on it, watching in silence:

And CREEPING UP BEHIND IT, but hidden by it, SOMETHING BIG. We don't see it yet, but it's gaseous, turbulent and fiery --

(CONTINUED)

66 CONTINUED:

66

ARNO (CONT'D)

Jesus.

THE ICETEROID hurtles closer, and --

67 **EXT. DEEP SPACE**

67

Like a shark in dark waters, it RISES UP from behind the iceteroid, and now WE SEE IT:

A monstrous, glowing, living, disc shaped storm, like an uncoiling silvery snake becoming all mouth, spitting out coils of fiery gas around it.

Gaudy luminous streamers burst out, ensnaring and clasping the doomed mile-wide chunk of ice -- then it strikes the iceteroid with a brilliant flash of light.

Blue-hot now, it overwhelms and engulfs the iceteroid, ferociously gnawing its way through it. It's brief, violent --

68 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

68

Watched in breathless, shocked silence by all --

And within seconds, the iceteroid is gone. The Eater moves on, now with an immense, fiery halo around its central bright hoop.

BERGER, a comms specialist and one of Arno's men, leans over --

BERGER

(aside to Arno)

We're not gonna be able to keep this under wraps.

-- which Arno clearly realizes, sweating it already. Amy checks a screen on a console next to her --

AMY

It's changing pitch.

JETS OF PLASMA start shooting off the Eater's poles, and the monster pivots slowly before stabilizing and rushing on, a plume jet thousands of kilometers long twisting and flaring behind it.

AMY (cont'd)

It's confirmed. It's now on a perfect heading for Jupiter.

Suddenly, the data begins to break up on several of the monitors in loud STATIC hisses.

ARNO

What's going on?

(CONTINUED)

BERGER

It's Arecibo. Something's jamming it.

Berger gets on the phone as Kingsley and Ben join in, checking the screens on the consoles. Berger chimes in --

BERGER (cont'd)

It's an incoming signal. High definition, massive. It's overloading the system.

ARNO

Incoming? From where?

They work their terminals. Ben turns to the screen wall.

BERGER

From that.

ARNO

It can't be.

BEN

Every dish on the face of the planet that's exposed to it right now is getting it. It's real.

Arno watches the screens as flicker with static and distorted pictures.

ARNO

What the hell is it?

BERGER

It's frame compressed at high speed.

All eyes are peeled on the wall --

CHANNING

It's almost as if it's trying different ways to get through.

ARNO

It's talking to us?

The screens settle into focus and we realize it's the same image Channing saw in the spacelab: THE MILKY WAY as seen from outside the galaxy. By something that's approaching it.

CHANNING

Oh my God.

ARNO

What? What is it?

BEN

It's us. It's the galaxy. Seen from
the outside.

Arno doesn't get it.

BEN (cont'd)

We've never sent anything out that
far, not even close. We've only ever
been able to imagine what it would
look like.

(beat)

Whatever's taking this wasn't built on
this planet.

Suddenly, the HOLOVID screen on one of the consoles bursts to
life --

BERGER

Over here!

They crowd the holovid screen which bursts to life, morphing
frenetically from one familiar face to another -- Channing, Ben,
Mia, Carla, the others from the Pegasus -- before finally
settling into an eerie, androgynous kind of composite of all of
them.

It just stares at them, blankly, before speaking in monotone:

HOLOVID (EATER)

I wish to converse.

(beat)

I seek Channing Knowlton.

All eyes turn to a stunned Channing --

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

69 INT. ARNO'S OFFICE - DAY

69

Through the glass wall, we see frantic activity outside the room
as Arno grills Channing. Kingsley and Ben are there.

ARNO

You *what*?

CHANNING

I sent it a message. It was nothing.
Just some meaningless rambling...

(CONTINUED)

ARNO

Why? What made you do that?

She looks at him, glances at Ben. Doesn't want to say it.

CHANNING

I don't know. I was... angry.

ARNO

So you completely ignored the first-contact protocol that's been around for over fifty years.

CHANNING

It was stupid, I know. But I never imagined... this.

(turns to Ben)

It's just...

BEN

I know. I was in the room too.

Arno fumes in silence. Thinking. Channing looks at Ben. He looks unsure.

CHANNING

What do we do now?

ARNO

That's really not up to us, is it?

70 **EXT. GATES, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

70

This thing just went ballistic. MILITARY CHOPPERS fly overhead as frenzied TV NEWS VANS and REPORTERS crowd the gate, which is now sealed off and guarded by MARINES, as is the rest of the chaotic compound --

Close on a row of TV REPORTERS filing their stories in VARIOUS LANGUAGES. Channing's name reverberates...

71 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

71

A huge, heated debate, long underway. Wall to wall EXPERTS, in the room. ON THE WALL, videolinks to OTHER EXPERTS at various locations, and to the SITUATION ROOM in the WHITE HOUSE where stern faces civilians and military officers watch in silence.

HALVORSEN

We can't answer immediately. Not until we know exactly what we're talking about. This has been the cornerstone of SETI protocol since inception.

EXPERT 2

But this isn't a signal that's taken light years to get to us. It's here now. And not answering right away, that sends a message. That we're scared.

HALVORSEN

Or careful.

EXPERT 3 (VIDEOLINK)

Look, this -- *being* has already taken the giant step of learning all our languages. Just by eavesdropping, for God's sake. That clearly implies an intelligence far beyond ours. We can't try to second-guess it.

EXPERT 4 (VIDEOLINK)

We're running ahead of ourselves. This is a global matter, it calls for a global debate. We have no right to speak for all the human race.

EXPERT 2

We're the only ones who can.

ANGLE on Kingsley, Channing and Ben. Watching. Kingsley looks at Ben -- he's exasperated, but he knows it's unavoidable. Ben turns to Channing. She looks weary, tired -- this has been a very long day for all.

BEN

Let's go.

CHANNING

I'm fine.

BEN

Come on. We've said our piece. This is gonna take a while.

She looks at him. Nods, too tired to fight...

72 **EXT. GATES, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT**

72

Ben and Channing's SUV is escorted out of the secured gates and emerges into the chaos outside where REPORTERS and CAMERAMEN crowd their SUV, shouting out to her --

REPORTERS

Channing! Dr Knowlton! Over here!

They drive off, past dozens of TV NEWS VANS with dishes and support trucks;

(CONTINUED)

72 CONTINUED:

72

Other GROUPS around bonfires: Some are dancing, welcoming it in a new agey, spiritual way; others are taking a more spiritual approach, linking it to the second coming;

Channing and Ben pass an ANGRY SPEAKER surrounded by a mob-like crowd --

ANGRY SPEAKER

For years, these people, these so-called scientists, they've been beaming messages out into space -- hey, yoo-hoo, we're here, come on over, come on down and kill us all! I mean, what did they expect?

Ben looks at her.

BEN

You're gonna have to talk to them sometime.

CHANNING

Not tonight...

BEN

Okay.

73 **EXT. KNOWLTON HOME - NIGHT**

73

The SUV approaches the house --

74 **INT. TRAVELLING IN SUV - NIGHT**

74

Ben and Channing, exhausted. Mia's in the backseat, asleep.

CHANNING

Tell me this isn't really happening.

BEN

I wish I could.

(beat)

Wouldn't mind wiping out the last few weeks altogether.

75 **EXT. KNOWLTON HOME - NIGHT**

75

As they drive up, we SEE it's besieged by NEWS VANS and a small horde of ONLOOKERS.

CHANNING

Ben.

A REPORTER spots them, motioning to her CAMERAMAN --

(CONTINUED)

75 CONTINUED:

75

REPORTER

That's her! Over here!

She rushes over, the Cameraman close behind. A mob of REPORTERS and CREWS swarm up to the SUV.

REPORTERS

Dr Knowlton! Channing!

IN THE CAR

Ben slams the car into reverse --

BEN

Hang on!

THE SUV

careens back, tires SQUEALING, does a quick U-turn and charges off --

IN THE CAR

Mia wakes up, alarmed by the noise --

MIA

Daddy?

CHANNING

It's okay, sweetie. Nothing to worry about.

Ben speed-dials his cellphone. The SPEAKERPHONE rings busy --

BEN

Dammit. The center's lines must be jammed.

He hits another speed-dial. This time, Amy's voice comes on --

AMY (O.S.)

Ben?

BEN

Amy, I need Arno. Now.

76 **EXT. HOTEL, HILO, BIG ISLAND - NIGHT**

76

An idyllic beach hotel -- only tonight, the gates are guarded by armed MARINES, keeping a small army of NEWS CREWS at bay.

77 **INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT**

77

ON THE TV are various newscasts, showing images of the Eater, and also showing photos of Channing in her astronaut guise.

(CONTINUED)

CHANNING

This is too weird.

BEN

I'll tell you what's weird. I'm sharing a hotel room with the most famous woman on the planet. There's got to be big bucks in that, don't you think?

CHANNING

I'm serious.

She sinks down, looking tired now. He hands her a cold bottle of water from the minibar and pops a beer himself.

BEN

You're gonna have to pace yourself. You can't keep overdoing it like this.

CHANNING

How can I pace myself on a day like this.

(beat, still stunned)

It asked for me.

BEN

I know.

CHANNING

Ben, I...

BEN

What?

CHANNING

(hesitates; decides not to tell him)

Did I do this? Did I make it happen?

BEN

I'm pretty sure it would have found us anyway.

(beat, sees her unease)

You're worried about this... *Eater*.

CHANNING

Aren't you?

BEN

I'm not sure.

CHANNING

It's packing a lot of power.

BEN

Yes, but... why assume it's dangerous?
All it's said is that it wants to
talk.

A beat. Channing's off in her thoughts...

BEN (CONT'D)

What?

CHANNING

The most incredible thing to happen in
the history of mankind, I mean,
really, if you think about it, the
most incredible, ever -- and we're
right there, right in the thick of
it... And I might not even be around
to see it through. How ridiculously
unfair is that...

Ben looks at her.

BEN

Come here.

She looks at him, and does. He hugs her, tight.

CHANNING

I'm sorry if I've been --

BEN

Sssh.

He holds her face up, they kiss -- and fall onto the bed. It's a
huge release for both. They're intertwined when Mia appears in
their doorway, in a huge, adult T-shirt.

MIA

Daddy.

They see her, pull apart.

BEN

What is it, sweetie?

MIA

I'm having bad dreams.

(beat)

Can we go home now?

BEN

Not just yet... You want to stay with
us?

She nods and climbs into bed with them, cuddling up with Ben.
Channing watches them together...

78 INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

78

Very early. Ben wakes up to see Channing, in a dressing gown, sitting by the window, looking at Mia, who's asleep on the sofa.

BEN

You okay?

CHANNING

She always asks for you. Never me.

BEN

You can change that. If you want to.

He looks at her -- and the door KNOCKS. He checks it out. There's a FEDERAL AGENT there. He hands him a cellphone.

AGENT

Phone call for you, Dr Knowlton.

Ben takes it, surprised.

BEN

Yes?

KINGSLEY (O.S.)

We need you here. They've made their decision...

79 INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

79

Anticipation in the air. Arno's with Ben, Channing, Kingsley, Amy, Berger, and wall to wall STAFFERS. Technicians finish putting the finishing touches on a big HOLOVID screen in the center of the screen wall.

ARNO

We all set?

BERGER

We've modulated the frequencies to match up with the ones it used. It'll get it.

Arno nods. Turns to them. Looks at Channing.

ARNO

It's all yours.

A couple of VIDEO CAMERAMEN are recording the scene. Channing hesitates, then sits down and faces the mike.

ON THE SCREEN facing her is the message she's to read out.

(CONTINUED)

79 CONTINUED:

79

CHANNING

This is Channing Knowlton, talking to you from planet Earth. We all wish to converse with you. Very much so. We would like to know more about you -- Who you are, what you are, where you're from... And what you want. We desire to learn all about you.

She looks at them. Arno nods like 'ok'. Berger hits the TRANSMIT icon.

ARNO

Okay. Now we wait.

He looks up at the screen wall. One of the displays shows: DISTANCE TO OBJECT: 412,000,000 miles ticking down; RADIO TRANSMISSION TRAVEL DELAY: 36.4 MINUTES; MINUTES SINCE TRANSMISSION: a stopwatch climbing rapidly up from zero...

80 EXT. SOCORRO, NEW MEXICO - DAY

80

The dishes WHIR with data transmission --

81 INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

81

CLOSE ON SCREEN where the MINUTES SINCE TRANSMISSION readout ticks over to 73 minutes.

BERGER

It's now had time to receive and send something back --

KINGSLEY

Assuming it wants to answer the split second it gets our --

BOOM -- the central HOLOVID bursts to life with the shifting androgynous composite.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

Blimey.

EATER

I am a composition of fields. As I have voyaged since three billion of your years, I have become larger in self and in purpose.

CHANNING

"A composition of fields"? It's a magnetic structure?

(CONTINUED)

BEN

You could say the same thing about our brains.

Suddenly, the screens EXPLODE with images --

CLOSE ON THE SCREENS which each display, now in their entirety, amazing IMAGES of stellar events, all never witnessed by human eyes. The ones Channing got a glimpse of in the Pegasus.

The astrophysicists -- Amy, Ben, Kingsley, the staffers -- stare at them, breathless with awe.

AMY

It'll put us all out of work.

BEN

Are you kidding? It's gonna take us years just to understand these.

(beat)

And understand it.

CHANNING

Look.

Channing points at the screens -- the WALL lights up with a multiscreen burst of images of LIVING WORLDS on other planets. life, cities, landscapes. Each screen scrolling images of a different civilization.

Channing watches, overwhelmed with emotion.

CHANNING (cont'd)

It's beautiful.

Ben, behind her, puts a hand on her shoulder. She reaches up, takes it. Kingsley, standing nearby, glances over for a second. Amy notices.

SCIENTISTS and TECHNICIANS scurry around the floor, marveling at the sights, struggling to record everything --

BERGER

There's more coming in.

The Eater's HOLOVID comes to life again -- serene, impassive, calm.

EATER

I desire to know all about your beings. I will share other civilizations' knowledge with you.

ARNO

Jesus. It wants to trade.

81 CONTINUED: (2)

81

END OF ACT FIVEACT SIX82 EXT. SPACE

82

The Eater hurtles through space, approaching Jupiter now...

83 INT. BEN'S OFFICE - DAY

83

Ben's on the phone. His desk is swamped with printouts and data. Kingsley pops his head in. Ben waves him in.

BEN

And please, make sure they keep their guns out of sight, okay? They're kids, for Christ's sake.

(beat)

Thank you.

He hangs up.

KINGSLEY

Is everything alright?

BEN

I've just had to organize a military escort to take my eight year old daughter to school. Other than that, everything's great.

KINGSLEY

May I...?

BEN

(eyes him for a tired beat, then)

Sure.

Kingsley slumps down on the sofa. They both seem exhausted.

KINGSLEY

They're bringing in some semiotics experts to teach it to 'converse' more fluidly. They're planning to give it a compendium of our greatest works. Arts, mathematics... science.

BEN

Science? You don't think there could be a security issue here?

(CONTINUED)

KINGSLEY

I don't see why. It's clearly far more advanced than we are. What could it possibly learn from us that it doesn't already know?

BEN

Just transferring all that data to it will help it learn a lot more about how our computers think -- and work.

(beat)

Does anything about this worry you?

KINGSLEY

What worries me more is what our valiant leaders might do. If there's one thing history teaches us, it's that men and nations behave wisely only once they've exhausted all their other alternatives.

Ben calls up a WALLSCREEN which shows the relative positions of Earth, the planets, at the Eater.

BEN

At least it still isn't headed this way.

KINGSLEY

For now.

(beat)

You know they're going to ask us what it could do to us.

BEN

(frowns, thinking about it)

I suppose if it wanted to, it could plunge straight through the planet.

KINGSLEY

And kill itself by stripping away the magnetic structures that seem to hold its very intelligence? No, I don't think so. I think it would be rather more clever.

BEN

With those magnetic funnels, it could blow-torch the top of our atmosphere.

KINGSLEY

(thinks about it)

Yes. It could roast us all, in time.

BEN

If it doesn't get bored first.

(CONTINUED)

83 CONTINUED: (2)

83

KINGSLEY

Then we should try and keep it amused.

(beat)

They're going to need a lot of hand holding if we're going to get through this in one piece.

(beat)

Ben,... Regardless of what you think of me, I hope you can put it aside for now and work together. We're going to need all our wits about us.

Ben looks at him, then nods in agreement...

84 **EXT. SPACE CENTER - DAY**

84

Military choppers land and take off, masses of PEOPLE, equipment being loaded off --

85 **INT. AUDITORIUM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

85

Everyone's there, standing room only. Arno holds court, in front of a screen which reads COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL FOR DATA TRANSMISSION. Everyone's got a copy of a printout.

ARNO

...I know we're all very excited about what we're about to embark on, but before we do so, I need you to pay close attention to the little document you all hold in your hands. This is what the wise men at the NSC and at the NSF have come up with to guide us in our communication with this thing. It tells us what we can and can't do. So if you could all turn to page one...

CLOSE on CHANNING -- in a front seat. Nervous.

86 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

86

In the huge, cluttered space, a horde of DATA MANAGERS are now transferring information -- the Library of Congress, the Encyclopaedia Britannica, etc -- to the Eater.

NSC WATCHDOGS -- humorless men in dark suits -- hover behind the banks of scientists. As we MOVE along the line of workstations, each with a holovid, and catch snippets of what's being said.

LITERATURE EXPERT

There is, of course, the question of Shakespeare's intentions, in the writing of Hamlet --

(CONTINUED)

Next, a BIOLOGIST. On his monitor are images of various microscopic life forms.

BIOLOGIST

These are Protozoan parasites.
They're specialized according to the
species they infect --

Next, a LINGUIST --

LINGUIST

The term 'soft drink' is a
metaphorical use of the term, the
opposite being 'hard drink' which
refers to drinks that contain
alcohol...

And finally reach Kingsley who's being guided through the maze by Amy.

AMY

It's already grasped the principle of
bibliography. Whenever it finds one,
it asks for the other referenced
works.

KINGSLEY

We're going to run out of stuff to
send it.

AMY

Maybe, but... I don't think it's ever
going to run out of questions.

Kingsley looks over, sees CHANNING in her corner, engrossed in talking to the HOLOVID of the EATER.

AMY (cont'd)

Especially not for her.

KINGSLEY

It's uncanny, this... infatuation it
seems to have with Channing.

AMY

What can I tell you, she's a popular
girl.

(beat, eyeing him)

But then you probably already know
that...

CUT TO:

SCREEN SHOT OF A TV NEWS PROGRAM

An anchorman reports -- the insert behind him shows the Eater's position, still far in the system.

(CONTINUED)

86 CONTINUED: (2)

86

ANCHORMAN

(upbeat)

It's been a week now since the cultural exchange with the entity was initiated and the amount of information flooding in from it shows no sign of letting up...

87 INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

87

Still buzzing. In her corner, Channing is listening to the Eater's HOLOVID --

EATER

Your daughter's birth generated great physical pain in you, yet you associate that event with pleasure. Clarify the contradiction.

Channing leans forward, touches the TRANSMIT ICON on her screen.

CHANNING

You're gonna find a lot of those in us. It's part of being human. Let's see...

(beat)

The pain of child birth is due to an evolutionary compromise. Bigger skulls made for much more painful births -- in my case it took around thirty hours. It must seem strange to you that if one can avoid pain, that one should choose to accept it. Some lessons that life teaches you, I suppose, come through pleasure and others come through pain. The pain of having a child teaches us. It teaches us how much we can endure.

On the screen next to her, we SEE her words printing out as she's speaking. But she's not looking at it, and doesn't notice when the words abruptly interrupt.

The words TRANSMISSION INTERRUPT - CONTENT ISSUE appear in red letters.

Channing, not seeing it, keeps on talking.

CHANNING (cont'd)

And that's important, because it makes the suffering that comes after more bearable. Most of the time.

She glances over, sees that she's been cut off.

(CONTINUED)

87 CONTINUED:

87

CHANNING (cont'd)

Hey!

She storms out of her seat --

88 INT. ARNO'S OFFICE - DAY

88

Ben, Arno, Kingsley, and a furious Channing are there.

CHANNING

You don't have the right to do this.

ARNO

Actually, Channing, we do.

(turns to Ben)

Ben, have you looked at some of --

Ben's reading some printouts, transcripts of her conversations with the Eater. He glances at Channing, then to Arno:

BEN

I don't see the problem.

ARNO

I'll tell you what the problem is. We've got scientists from all over the world lining up ten deep for a chance to talk to this thing, and meanwhile Channing is telling it about --

(flicking through transcript)

-- about her father's death, about losing her virginity, which, while it makes compelling reading for everyday pervs like us, doesn't exactly seem like a priority in the grander scheme of things.

CHANNING

Whose priority?

ARNO

Channing, I understand that you're not at your best right now, I sympathize with what you're going through, but --

CHANNING

Do you? Do you really? Well let me tell you something -- and there's no need to patronize me about my health, alright, I'm not ready for the padded cell just yet -- The problem here is this dry and bland information you're sending up, this cold editorial process, that's what's unfair. Not to me. To the Eater.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

88 CONTINUED:

88

CHANNING (cont'd)

We can't teach it anything about the universe it doesn't already know. The only truth any of us can hope to give it is the truth about ourselves.

ARNO

Well, I have no doubt that this --
(referring to printout)
-- is new to it. Look, Channing, access to this 'Eater' is a privilege, not a right, and your uploads --

CHANNING

What, you're taking me off the air, is that it?

ARNO

It's not just up to me.

CHANNING

You're making a mistake. If we keep feeding it --

And just then, the screen goes DEAD, replaced with a blast of HISSING STATIC. They all cover their ears --

BEN looks down at the floor below: TECHNICIANS and STAFFERS are running all over the place. ALL THE SCREENS ARE DEAD.

89 INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

89

Arno, Ben, Channing, and Kingsley in the mayhem, LOUD STATIC HISSING unbearably around them --

ARNO

Berger! What's going on?

BERGER

(struggling to turn down sound)
It's not just us.

ARNO

(can't hear him)
What?

Berger hurries over, shouting over the HISS --

BERGER

It's not just us. It's knocked everything off the air -- radio, TV, satellite -- everything.

ARNO

Get me Washington on the landline --

(CONTINUED)

BERGER

There is no land line -- it's all dead.

Suddenly, there's a flicker across all the monitors at once. Then identical words begin to appear on all the screens as the EATER'S HOLOVID morphs angrily from Channing's screen.

EATER

My communications with Channing Knowlton have been interrupted. Restore her now.

90 INT. ARNO'S OFFICE - DAY

90

Later now. Arno and Berger look down at the main floor and

CHANNING, engaged in conversation with the Eater again. She's waving her arms, arguing passionately, laughing. Around her, the other screens are active again.

BERGER

Do you have any idea of just how much power it takes to jam all radio and phone communications on Earth from five hundred million miles away?

Arno is fixated on Channing. He knows...

91 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

91

Kingsley and Ben are with Arno. Arno looks exhausted, like he's just ended a long meeting. The SCREENS behind him are paused, still showing banners from the SITUATION ROOM and the PENTAGON.

ARNO

I don't have to tell you all that everyone in Washington's pretty rattled by its little jamming trick.

(beat)

They want an updated threat assessment from you guys.

Kingsley looks at Ben. Just what he was afraid of.

KINGSLEY

Admittedly, it wasn't exactly a trust building maneuver. Still, we've got a solid two-way exchange of knowledge underway. There's nothing to indicate its intentions towards us are in any way malevolent.

ARNO

Ben?

Ben looks at Kingsley.

BEN
(toeing the line)
I agree.

ARNO
(studies them for a beat)
Okay. We're going to need an update
of your findings as far as its
composition.

KINGSLEY
We'll put something together.

ARNO
NASA have a dozen Searchers ready to
go. We're gonna send them up to get a
good look at this thing.

Which makes Ben uncomfortable --

BEN
I -- I don't think we should launch
everything now.

ARNO
Why not?

BEN
We might need them closer to home.

KINGSLEY
(surprised, but downplays it)
It hasn't announced any plans to come
closer.

BEN
It said it was going to...
(looks up transcript)
..."acquire mass and momentum" at
Jupiter.

KINGSLEY
Quite possibly to gain the velocity it
needs to leave our solar system. It
is a rover among the stars, after all.

BEN
It can alter its course at any time.

Kingsley looks at Ben. He's not thrilled. Arno watches them.

ARNO
Well... We'll know soon enough.

91 CONTINUED: (2)

91

He looks at the SCREEN displaying the relative positions. The Eater's now almost at Jupiter.

ARNO (cont'd)
It'll reach Jupiter tonight.

92 **EXT. HALLS, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

92

Kingsley and Ben leave the meeting.

KINGSLEY
I thought we agreed we didn't want to alarm them unduly.

BEN
Look, I'm sorry but we can't keep ignoring the fact that this thing could be more than just some innocent tourist.

Kingsley's not thrilled at his lack of restraint.

KINGSLEY
There's a time and a place for everything.

BEN
And you're gonna decide when that is, is that it? I don't have time for this.

Ben walks off. Kingsley watches him go, exasperated.

93 **EXT. SPACE**

93

The SPACELAB is still moving away from Jupiter. Two SEARCHERS speed towards Jupiter. Behind it, we see hints of the EATER, approaching --

94 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT**

94

The great sense of anticipation in the room is palpable as all eyes are fixated on the screen wall.

ON THE SCREEN WALL: images of Jupiter and the Eater's approach from the two Searchers and from the Spacelab's POVS, as well as the trajectory graphic display.

KINGSLEY
It's heading for the outer moon of the system.

ARNO
Couldn't we have predicted that?

BEN

It doesn't ever talk about its plans.
Or its origin.

(beat)

I wonder if it's telling us the truth
about anything.

AMY

Why would it lie?

BEN

True. It can stamp us out like
insects.

KINGSLEY

It's there.

ON THE MASSIVE SCREEN, the Eater is bigger, clearer now. It grazes one of Jupiter's moons, destroying it. Some of its mass is sucked into it while most of it is thrown away, adding thrust.

THE ROOM echoes with breathless gasps --

And it reaches Jupiter. Its trajectory arcs down into its vast atmosphere. The result is cataclysmic as it drinks in a thick slice of the upper layers, sucking it in with glowing magnetic talons, exploding in white heat as it skims along in a grazing orbit around the massive gas giant --

As the blinding, explosive glow continues its long, looping flyby, DATA and IMAGES flood the screens --

CHANNING

It's finding life on Jupiter.

CLOSE on a screen: It shows SIMPLE AMOEBA LIKE LIFEFORMS.

KINGSLEY

Look at the detail. Balloon life, a
thousand kilometers deep into the
cloud deck.

AMY

It's teaching us about our own
neighborhood.

The Eater completes its scoop and emerges --

ARNO

What's it doing? Talk to me.

BERGER

I'm patching through a Deepscan
signal.

(CONTINUED)

ON SCREEN: an image appears, taken from a much further distance. We SEE the Eater spinning in the foreground, much larger and more active than before, moving away from Jupiter whose entire cloud-scape is twisted and smoking from it.

ARNO

Where's our heading?

All eyes are fixed on the GRAPHICS screen as it computes its new trajectory, its SPEED READOUT scrolling upwards fast.

CHANNING watches it --

CHANNING

Oh my God.

It's Earth.

Not only that: she's seen something else.

CHANNING (cont'd)

The Pegasus.

Ben sees it too:

ON THE TRAJECTORY SCREEN

A SMALL, BLINKING LIGHT is right on its route, still relatively close to Jupiter: THE SPACELAB...

END OF ACT SIX

ACT SEVEN

95 EXT. SPACE

95

The EATER hurtles out of Jupiter's orbit, a vast, white hot shimmer so bright the great planet literally vanishes from view. It obliterates and swallows up the COMPTON II TELESCOPE in its path as it heads towards the SPACELAB --

96 INT. NASA MISSION CONTROL (WINDOWLESS)

96

Defcon 5. All eyes on the screens and on Coben, who's on the mike --

COBEN

Pegasus, you are go to use the Searchers, I repeat, you are go to use the Searchers.

(beat, to STAFFER)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

96 CONTINUED:

96

COBEN (cont'd)

How do we even know they're still
there with this damn transmission
delay?

NASA TECHNICIAN

We don't.

97 **INT. SEARCHER BAY, SPACELAB**

97

Cal, Hank and Carla are hurrying to bail out. Cal's looking
nervously out the window, the Eater's glow on his face, while
Hank fits Carla's breathing gear on --

CAL

Come on, come on --

Carla nods. Hank shuts the hatch, hits the switch. The liquid
pours in --

98 **EXT. SPACE**

98

Carla's Searcher shoots out of the Spacelab --

99 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT**

99

ON THE MULTISCREEN DISPLAY: the image from inside the Spacelab
is still up, we see Hank and the Cal hustling to get away;
another shows the spacelab's POV of the approaching Eater, as
well as the POVs from the searchers tracking it --

Channing is at her workstation, facing the Eater's Holoovid.

CHANNING

Your trajectory is about to intersect
a spacecraft of ours. There are three
astronauts on board. I need you to
change course. You have to alter your
heading to avoid colliding with it.
Do you understand?

100 **EXT. SPACE**

100

The Eater closes in --

101 **INT. SPACELAB**

101

Hank punches in commands as Cal climbs into his Searcher.

HANK

Let's go, let's go --

He's about to shut the hatch when he notices something. Cal
notices something wrong. He follows Hank's gaze --

(CONTINUED)

101 CONTINUED:

101

CLOSE ON THE CANOPY: it's got a crack in it.

Hank follows it around. It's fatal. Cal looks at him. A death sentence. Hank doesn't bat an eyelid. He flings it open.

HANK (cont'd)

Get out.

CAL

What are you talking about --

HANK

I said get out.

Cal climbs out, unsure -- but Hank's already getting the other Searcher ready.

CAL

Hank, what are you doing?

HANK

Getting you into one that works.

CAL

I can't, it's yours --

HANK

Just shut up and get in! NOW!

Cal looks at Hank. Cal's scared to death. They both are. He nods and climbs in, his eyes on Hank.

CAL

Hank...

HANK

I know.

And he SLAMS the hatch shut.

102 INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT

102

Channing's with the Eater Hologram which rambles on --

EATER

...your molecular structure is badly suited for --

She KILLS his transmission, hits the TRANSMIT icon and shouts into the mike --

CHANNING

I don't care about any of that right now, alright -- you have to move away, do you understand me? You have to change course. They're my friends.

- 103 **EXT. SPACE** 103
- The Eater's about to swallow up the Spacelab now as Cal's Searcher SHOOTs out from it and its thrusters FIRE UP, inching it away from the Eater's path --
- 104 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT** 104
- Channing, in tears, watching the screen --
- ON SCREEN: BLINKING lights show the relative positions --
- CHANNING
(breaking down)
Please. Why won't you listen to me?
- 105 **INT. SPACELAB** 105
- Hank is strapped in, flattened by the forces, hanging on --
- HANK
Come on. Come on.
- He glances out the side window, the Eater's GLOW blazing in --
- SPARKS fly around him as systems fail --
- 106 **EXT. SPACE** 106
- The Spacelab keeps moving away, but it's too late. Like a tsunami, the Eater hits, steamrolling over it, sucking it in, and keeps going -- heading closer to the Searchers now --
- 107 **INT. NASA MISSION CONTROL** 107
- They watch as the GRAPHIC DISPLAY shows the Eater approaching the two smaller blinking lights of the Searchers. Slowly but surely, it rolls over them as one by one, they disappear from the screen.
- 108 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT** 108
- Same display. Channing turns, gutted. Ben hugs her, eyes still glued to the display.
- ON THE EATER'S HOLOVID -- still chatting away as if nothing happened...

109 **INT. CROWDED BAR/HOME/BIG SCREEN, CITY SQUARE - DAY** 109

Various glimpses of PEOPLE horrified at the Eater skimming Jupiter's surface --

110 **EXT. STREET - NIGHT** 110

Crowds of PEOPLE looking up, pointing --

IN THE CLEAR NIGHT SKY ABOVE: there it is, a bright blue-white glimmer of light is glowing -- the brightest thing in the sky.

CUT TO:

A SCREEN SHOT OF A TV NEWS BROADCAST

POLICE are outside the White House trying to keep apart two groups of protestors. Some hold up signs saying "TAKE US WITH YOU" while others say things like "NUKE IT TO HELL".

REPORTER (O.S.)

In Washington, violence erupted when demonstrators clashed with --

ANOTHER STATION

Mayhem in Manhattan -- POLICEMEN drag LOOTERS away amid burning cars and looted stores -

REPORTER 2 (O.S.)

In Manhattan, police report increasing incidents of looting in many parts of the city --

ANOTHER STATION

A stately building -- a US embassy somewhere, judging by the flag on its flagpole -- is under siege by PROTESTORS, smoke pouring out of it, nervous Marines aiming their guns at the crowd --

REPORTER 3 (O.S.)

US interests around the globe are under attack by protestors blaming the US for attracting the entity to the planet and --

THE SCREEN DIES. We're in:

111 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT** 111

Kingsley chucks the remote. He's alone with Amy.

111 CONTINUED:

111

KINGSLEY

That was a huge mistake -- we shouldn't have made its rendez-vous time with Jupiter public.

AMY

It was all over the place. There are more than enough halfway competent astronomers out there.

KINGSLEY

Still, we could have controlled admittance to the large telescopes' images. Maybe even blocked the media from getting close-ups of what it did to it.

AMY

Kingsley, come on. Stop blaming yourself. Any amateur with a ten-inch telescope could see the flares.

KINGSLEY

(beat)
That look. On Channing's face...

112 INT. BEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

112

Ben's alone with Channing. She's totally devastated -- and sweating, looking paler and weaker.

CHANNING

Why didn't it move away? Why?

BEN

I don't know. Maybe it just couldn't.

CHANNING

I should have been up there. I'm dying anyway, it should have been me instead... Cal... Carla...

(beat)

Where's Mia?

BEN

They're bringing her here. They're setting up some trailers for us all. It'll be safer if we rough it out here for a while.

He wipes her sweaty forehead, strokes her face.

BEN (cont'd)

I'm worried about you.

(CONTINUED)

112 CONTINUED:

112

CHANNING

There's nothing to worry about, is there. It's a done deal...

(beat)

I haven't lost it yet, have I? This is all really happening...

Ben nods -- and ARNO steps in.

ARNO

I'm sorry, but -- It's asking for you.

CHANNING

You can tell it to go to hell.

ARNO

You saw what it did last time.

(beat)

Please.

CHANNING

Can I do it from up here?

113 **INT. BEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

113

Channing's alone at Ben's desk. She listens to the Eater's Holovid.

EATER

Your sadness is puzzling, Channing. Your species is ephemeral. Death is inevitable.

Channing shakes her head, exasperated. And exhausted. She taps the TRANSMIT icon.

CHANNING

You've done a wonderful job in understanding how our planet works, and I'm sure there isn't a math problem you couldn't solve in a heartbeat, but... You can't understand what makes us human by just applying logic and looking at everything coldly and rationally. It's not a zero sum game. It's a sum in a completely different way.

(beat)

Everything that lives is the sum of all that's gone into making it. And more. The awe I felt when I first realized you were a live, sentient being, the sadness I feel when my friends die...

(thinks about it)

The love I feel for my family...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

113 CONTINUED:

113

CHANNING (cont'd)
those aren't things you can quantify.
But they're what make me what I am,
they're what make my life worth
living, and until you start to
understand what really makes us tick,
I'm afraid all the encyclopaedias and
books we send you are going to be
pointless.
(beat)
If you really want to understand us,
that is...

114 INT. ARNO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

114

Arno and Kingsley sit, listening to Channing and the Eater's conversation.

KINGSLEY
We have a big problem.

ARNO
Tell me something I don't know.

KINGSLEY
I'm serious.
(beat)
It doesn't assign any value to our
lives.

ARNO
That's comforting to know.

KINGSLEY
No, you don't understand. It's been
alive for billions of years. Our
lives -- seventy, eighty, even a
hundred years -- they're insignificant
by comparison. In relative terms,
it's not even a blink of an eye...
(beat)
As far as it's concerned, whether we
die young or old couldn't be more
irrelevant.

115 INT. BEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

115

Channing is lying on the sofa. She holds a picture of Mia in her hand. She looks bad.

Something PINGS. The Eater's HOLOVID comes to life. She sits up.

EATER
I want to understand, Channing.

115 CONTINUED:

115

She gets up and approaches the screen, unsure. Sits down. Waits for more. There isn't any. She takes the mike.

CHANNING

Okay, well let's start here...

And we MATCH DISSOLVE to a series of images of Channing conversing with the Eater's Hologid, listening as she takes her medication, talking passionately again... and ending with Channing on the mike.

CHANNING (CONT'D)

You talk about ephemeral beings. Well I'm as ephemeral as they come. I'm dying. Not in the general sense. I've got a bad brain tumor, and I only have a few months to live, maybe less. And soon I'll be gone too, and although there's so much more I wanted to see, so much I wanted to do, to learn, to show my daughter... I won't be able to do any of it.

(beat, to herself)

This isn't what I wanted...

She's crying now. She can't go on.

EATER

Beings of enduring value must be preserved. You are such a being, Channing. I will save you. I will save others of value.

OFF a confused Channing --

CUT TO:

116 SCREEN SHOT OF A TV NEWS BROADCAST

116

REPORTER (O.S.)

The list of prominent citizens that the entity intends to 'save' keeps growing. So far, around seventy-five thousand name are on it, including scientists, politicians including the Presidents of the United States and Russia, artists, authors, and, surprisingly, people from all corners of the globe with no noticeable achievement. The biggest question, of course, remains: what does it mean when it uses the word 'save'?

117 **INT. BASEMENT, SPACE CENTER (WINDOWLESS)** 117

An AIDE leads Arno, Ben, Channing, Kingsley, and Amy through the underground passage.

ARNO

We know of at least seven other countries that are building them.

BEN

But we're the first to have a working model?

ARNO

As far as we know.

118 **INT. LAB, SPACE CENTER (WINDOWLESS)** 118

Arno, Ben, Channing, Kingsley, and Amy stand in a before a HUGE, COMPLEX MACHINE which has some similarity to an MRI machine. The lab has a viewing and monitoring area behind a glass wall.

NEURO SCIENTIST

I assure you, we followed its instructions to the letter.

CHANNING

There's got to be a mistake.

NEURO SCIENTIST

Please, Dr Knowlton. You have your area of expertise. This is mine.

(beat)

See for yourself.

He motions for them to step out to the other side.

FROM BEHIND THE GLASS

They watch as a sedated SHEEP, its head attached to a stabilizing frame, is slid into the chamber.

They watch several screens, one of which is a CAMERA'S POV from inside the chamber, the others showing the animals vital signs.

NEURO SCIENTIST (cont'd)

Initiating scanning process now.

He taps an icon. Several SCREENS light up with data flow. The sheep doesn't stir.

(CONTINUED)

NEURO SCIENTIST (cont'd)

It's now scanning the brain of the subject, recording the synaptic explosions in a way that's -- it's astounding, there's no other way to describe it. The brain's entire memory banks are being condensed into a massive electronic signal that would then be beamed up to the Eater.

(beat)

The problem, however, is this. Keep your eyes on these two screens. The one on the left is the subject's EEG. The one on the right indicates the reduction signal stored in the hard drive.

Which they do:

THE LEFT SCREEN readout flutters erratically, gradually dying out while THE RIGHT SCREEN's levels rise. When the right screen's levels are full, the left one flatlines, ringing out in an alarming, constant TONE.

NEURO SCIENTIST (cont'd)

We thought we were missing something at first, but unfortunately, that's not the case. Its brilliant, there's no doubt about it, but there's a catch.

(beat)

The process kills its subjects.

END OF ACT SEVEN

ACT EIGHT

118 SCREEN SHOT OF A TV NEWS BROADCAST

118

Showing a YOUNG WOMAN being interviewed. She's terrified.

INTERVIEWER

You're on the list.

WOMAN

Yes, but... I don't know why. I haven't done anything special.

INTERVIEWER

Would you consider going?

WOMAN

No. No! Of course not!

119 ANOTHER SCREEN

119

(CONTINUED)

118 CONTINUED: (2)

118

Showing an ELDERLY SCIENTIST. He's calm.

ELDERLY SCIENTIST

To be honest, I don't have that many years left, and it's an intriguing prospect...

120 INT. BEN'S OFFICE - DAY

120

Channing, exhausted, faces the HOLOVID --

EATER

Joining me is the rational choice for those I have chosen. Choosing certain death over eternal life would constitute suicide --

CHANNING

The problem is that your definition of life doesn't 'correlate' in any way to our own definition of it. It's not just about thought and learning.

EATER

It is about expanding knowledge and experience.

CHANNING

But not like that!

EATER

Expand.

CHANNING

It's -- it's about laughing and crying and being around friends and loved ones. It's about...

She spots Mia's picture. She picks it up, looks at it.

CHANNING (cont'd)

It's about reading your daughter a bedtime story or sharing an ice cream with her at the beach and watching it smudge up her face...

(a beat; thinking...)

It's about sharing your life with others.

EATER

That is what I offer. For eternity.

CHANNING

No, no, it doesn't work that way. See, there's another thing you don't get, and that's choice.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

120 CONTINUED:

120

CHANNING (cont'd)

People, human beings, we value our freedom to choose what we want, regardless of whether or not you consider it to be logical. What if we don't want you to 'save' us?

EATER

Then you would be mistaken.

121 **EXT. SPACE**

121

The EATER now approaches Earth --

122 **INT. BEN'S OFFICE - DAY**

122

Channing's on the sofa. Ben paces.

CHANNING

What about reading the brains of people who've just died? There are eight billion people on the planet, dying at a rate of over a hundred thousand a day --

BEN

Apart from the fact that they're not the ones it's asked for -- most of them aren't anywhere near a facility. And this magnetic scanning process is pretty intense. Dying patients aren't up to it, and their readings are likely to get screwed up halfway through it.

CHANNING

But it doesn't know that.

BEN

You want to take that chance?
(beat, checks his watch)
It's time.

He kneels down beside her. She's sweating, looking paler. This is really taking its toll on her now.

BEN (cont'd)

Stay here. I'll get them to bring you some food. I'll go alone.

CHANNING

No. I want to be there.

123 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

123

A heavy duty meeting. Arno, Ben, Channing, and Kingsley are there. On the screens behind them are RICHTER, the GENERALS, and a new face in the situation room: THE PRESIDENT.

PRESIDENT

As you all know, an overwhelming majority of nations have categorically rejected the idea of giving it what it wants. We don't know how it will react if we do so -- but I guess we have a pretty good idea, given what it did to Jupiter and how it didn't bat an eyelid at steamrolling over Pegasus.

(beat)

I suppose the question facing us all right now is -- can we kill it?

An uneasy quiet descends on the room. Channing clears her throat.

CHANNING

Mr President, if I may. I understand as clearly as everyone here what's at stake. But this, um, entity doesn't only think. It has the capacity to learn, and if it can learn, it can learn to feel. I don't know that it even realizes that it can, but I know it can. And if it can feel, it can empathize.

PRESIDENT

The way we empathize with mayflies?

CHANNING

Sir, it's my opinion -- my expert opinion -- that our best hope at averting a catastrophe is to get through to it and convince it to change its mind.

PRESIDENT

To change its mind about what coming closer to earth -- or about what it wants from us?

CHANNING

Both.

KINGSLEY

With all due respect to Dr Knowlton, sir.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

123 CONTINUED:

123

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

This thing's made it very clear that it considers its 'saving' as precisely that, saving those worthy to be saved. To try and convince it of its skewed logic would be impossible.

Channing looks at him. He tries not to look her way.

PRESIDENT

What's the alternative?

KINGSLEY

Mr President, the black hole at its center can't be destroyed by any means known to science. But the electromagnetic matrix that surrounds it and contains its consciousness... Maybe that can be destroyed.

Channing turns to Ben -- he says nothing.

PENTAGON SCIENTIST

That's true, Mr President. From what we can tell, it does seem to generate extremely powerful magnetic fields to shield its vital inner structures. We generate similar magnetic fields in our fusion reactors.

PRESIDENT

What are we talking about here?

PENTAGON SCIENTIST

If we were to deliver, say, thirty hydrogen bombs to those vulnerable areas, in the proper sequence...

BEN

I can't help but think, Mr President, that conversations like these must have taken place on many other worlds when this thing was in their skies too. And yet it's still here.

PRESIDENT

What would have us do, Dr Knowlton? Give it what it wants?

He looks at Channing.

BEN

No, we can't do that.

KINGSLEY

You're missing the point.

(beat)

Even if we did -- what then?

(CONTINUED)

PRESIDENT

What do you mean?

KINGSLEY

(holds up cup of water)

Well -- take this cup, for instance. The water in the cup is all I consider to be of value. Once I've drank that...

He sips the water in it, then chucks it into the trash can.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

If we were to give it what it wants, from its perspective, the Earth will be devoid of value, like that empty cup. Nothing 'worthy' will be left. And it will have used up a great deal of reaction mass coming here. It'll need more if it's to continue on its travels, and the easiest mass for it to harvest is our moon or, worse, our upper atmosphere. Doing either would be catastrophic, and if it happened to cause the end to all life on Earth, which it most likely would... So be it.

(beat)

We refer to this entity as the Eater. Well it's not just an eater of mass. It's an eater of knowledge. It's an eater of civilizations. We have to stop fooling ourselves. This thing is not benign.

CHANNING

Kingsley --

He glances over at her, but doesn't let up --

KINGSLEY

Mr President, the Eater will make its final course correction in a little less than forty hours. After that, even if we were to destroy its consciousness, as it were, the black hole powering it would continue on the same course and would arrive here with the same catastrophic results. If we are to act, we must do so before then. If not, we will be at its mercy.

CUT TO:

A SCREEN SHOT OF A TV NEWS BROADCAST

(CONTINUED)

123 CONTINUED: (3)

123

Behind the ANCHORMAN is an INSERT showing a street rife with DEMONSTRATORS and MILITARY JEEPS in an Asian country.

ANCHORMAN

Reports are coming in that some governments have started rounding up political undesirables by force and subjecting them to the scanning process in a desperate attempt to appease the Eater...

ANOTHER SCREEN

Demonstrators clashing in the Mall in DC; some banners read "SEND THEM UP, SAVE THE REST" and the others read "HELL NO WE WON'T GO".

REPORTER

Rioters clashed across the country over the issue of what would effectively be sacrificing those selected to save the rest of the planet...

124 INT. HALLS, SPACE CENTER - DAY

124

Ben, looking overworked, finds Amy.

BEN

Have you seen Channing?

AMY

Yeah, someone delivered a package to her. I saw her leaving with Mia.

125 EXT. HILLS OVER SPACE CENTER - DAY

125

The center's grounds are crowded with large tents, the parking lot crammed with trailers. The Eater glows in the low, evening sky.

Ben finds them, sitting curled up under a blanket. Ben stays back, watching them.

CHANNING

We never got to check out Jimmy's mahi-mahi.

MIA

It's okay.

CHANNING

What about the ice cream? Does he still have that great pineapple swirl?

(CONTINUED)

125 CONTINUED:

125

Mia nods.

CHANNING (CONT'D)

As soon as this is all over, promise.

(beat)

Hey, you know what? With all this excitement going on, we forgot something.

Channing pulls out a book: the same one she was reading to Mia from space. Mia half smiles.

CHANNING (cont'd)

Do you remember where we were?

126 INT. KNOWLTON TRAILER - NIGHT

126

Channing adjusts Mia's blanket over her, watches her sleeping for a beat, then goes over to Ben and joins him.

CHANNING

So? Are we at war yet?

BEN

It's not that simple. Though I think Kingsley's forty hour deadline's got them spooked big time.

CHANNING

I can't help wondering if it knows what we're doing.

BEN

It probably does. Did our first contact have to be a psychotic glutton with delusions of grandeur?

CHANNING

You're just jealous you weren't picked.

BEN

You haven't seen the latest list.

CHANNING

Really?

Ben nods. There's more.

BEN

It also asked for Mia.

Channing sits up. Determined.

CHANNING

I can get through to it.

(CONTINUED)

BEN

You've seen how it thinks --

CHANNING

I can do it. Maybe not from here, but maybe... Maybe I can make it feel something from the inside.

BEN

What are you talking about?

CHANNING

I want to go.

(beat)

I want to be uploaded. Maybe once I'm part of it, I can help it feel things the way we do, help it understand...

BEN

No. No way. I won't let you do it.

CHANNING

Ben, listen to me. It could save you. It could save Mia. At least you wouldn't have to watch me die a bit more every day...

(beat)

Let me do this for you...

127 **INT. ARNO'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

127

Ben and Channing are with Arno. They've just told him.

ARNO

You're sure that's what you want?

CHANNING

Yes.

ARNO

Ben?

He nods reluctantly.

ARNO (cont'd)

Alright. I'll float it upstream.

128 **EXT. SPACE CENTER - NIGHT**

128

Channing's walks out, headed for the trailers. Kingsley comes out, chases after her.

KINGSLEY

Channing. Wait.

(CONTINUED)

128 CONTINUED:

128

See stops, turns, see him. He catches up to her.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

I just heard. Arno told me.

(beat)

What can I say to make you change your mind?

CHANNING

Not much.

(smiles)

But it's sweet of you to try.

KINGSLEY

Even if there was a glimmer of hope...

CHANNING

I can't explain it, but I feel I can do this.

(beat)

We know it craves knowledge. Maybe it's hungry for something else too.

KINGSLEY

What?

CHANNING

Companionship.

He looks at her. And she sees how visibly affected he is by it all. And it surprises her.

CHANNING (cont'd)

Kingsley?

(beat)

Kingsley... What is it? Come on, It's not like I'm in great shape here.

He looks at her. Very moved.

KINGSLEY

You were never, ever, meant to be just a notch on my bedpost.

She pulls him close. Kisses him. And pulls back and looks at him with pain, love and admiration...

129 **INT. KNOWLTON TRAILER - NIGHT**

129

Ben and Channing are spooned in bed. Both are awake, lost in their own thoughts...

130 **EXT. TRAILER AREA - NIGHT**

130

As is Kingsley... He stares up angrily at the Eater...

131 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY** 131

Ben, walking down the hall, spots Kingsley going into the conference room, and glimpses a full room inside.

He heads for it. He gets to the door. The MARINE GUARD at the door doesn't move.

MARINE

I'm sorry, sir, this is a limited access meeting.

132 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY** 132

Arno and Kingsley are conferring with the top brass in the situation room. The mood is grim.

RICHTER

And you're sure of your findings, Doctor?

KINGSLEY

Absolutely.

Richter looks at the General next to him. A small nod.

133 **INT. HALLS, SPACE CENTER - DAY** 133

Channing and Ben find Arno standing with Kingsley.

CHANNING

Have they cleared me yet?

ARNO

(hesitates)

No.

CHANNING

Why not?

Arno checks his watch and glances at Kingsley before answering.

ARNO

There's no need for it.

She looks at him. Looks at Kingsley.

CHANNING

What's going on?

ARNO

With a bit of luck... it's already dead.

134 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY** 134

Everybody's here: In the room, Arno, Kingsley, Ben, Channing, and other SCIENTISTS. ON SCREEN, from the situation room, the President, the Chiefs of Staff, Richter. All edgy faces, watching and waiting.

ON THE MAIN SCREEN, the Eater, viewed from a telescope orbiting Earth. And on another: the EATER's HOLOVID, talking.

EATER

...I have found a text document that correlates strongly with your last statement. It reads as follows: From too much love of living, from hope and fear set free --

ARNO

Twenty seconds.

135 **EXT. SPACE** 135

A wave of MISSILES streak towards to the Eater...

EATER (O.S.)

-- we thank with brief thanksgiving whatever gods may be; that no life lives forever, that dead men rise up never --

ARNO (O.S.)

Ten seconds --

BACK IN THE CONTROL ROOM

EATER

-- that even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea. Again this curious celebration of death.

ARNO

Three, two, one...

But the Eater keeps on talking without skipping a beat.

EATER

These coveted concepts of rest and sleep are particular to your species and interest me, Channing.

ARNO

Nothing. Nothing happened.

(beat)

They didn't go off.

(CONTINUED)

135 CONTINUED:

135

KINGSLEY

Yes, they did. Look.

ON THE SCREEN showing the Eater, we see the first wave of NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS, great white blooms bursting at its periphery and getting sucked into the whirlpool.

136 **EXT. SPACE**

136

We SEE the attack up close -- the great spinning coils vanishing briefly as the explosions detonate. A second wave of MISSILES follows, with more blinding EXPLOSIONS.

137 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

137

Yet despite the explosions, the Eater still talks --

EATER

As with death, it is not something I have experienced.

ARNO rushes to the wall overlooking the main floor, CLICKS away the opacity:

HIS POV: down below, all the scientists and data managers are looking up at the SCREEN showing the explosions, but DATA still flows onto their screens.

ARNO

It didn't even skip a word.

KINGSLEY

It's as if it didn't notice.

CHANNING is staring at the screens --

CHANNING

Oh, I think it noticed.

ON THE MAIN SCREEN, the Eater begins to pivot, bringing its pole up, facing towards us. Then, abruptly, A FORKED SPIKE OF ELECTRICITY, like lightning, shoots out from it --

It torches the upper layer of the atmosphere before spreading and propagating downwards towards the Eastern seaboard --

138 **EXT. WASHINGTON DC - DAY**

138

Cloud cover evaporates in seconds --

The river evaporates, steam rising up --

Tar bubbles on the roofs of tenements --

(CONTINUED)

138 CONTINUED:

138

Trees at the Washington Mall steam before suddenly erupting into flames --

139 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

139

The Eater still talks --

EATER

...numerous records refer to ritual beliefs associated with dreaming...

They watch frantically as, SEEN FROM SPACE, the electromagnetic beam slams into the upper East Coast --

And the VIDEOLINKS to the White House and to the Pentagon go dead.

BERGER

We've lost contact with DC.

140 INT. STREETS, WASHINGTON DC - DAY

140

CARS stop running as SMOKE pours out of them, their electronics fried --

PEOPLE watch their hair crisp and crackle as they duck into shops and buildings for cover --

And a massive ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSE rips through the air --

Frying the screen to WHITE OUT --

END OF ACT EIGHT

ACT NINE

141 SCREEN SHOT OF A TV NEWS BROADCAST

141

ANCHORMAN

Tonight, the capital smoulders in complete isolation and darkness following the massive electromagnetic pulse which destroyed, beyond repair, anything electrical within a two hundred mile radius of the city...

142 EXT. STREETS, WASHINGTON DC - NIGHT

142

Fires burn, LOOTERS smash windows and run amok, with ONLOOKERS screaming to no avail. Stalled cars litter the streets, no cops to be found...

(CONTINUED)

142 CONTINUED:

142

ANCHORMAN (O.S.)
...sending much of the North East back
into the dark ages...

143 **EXT. SPACE**

143

The Eater passes the MOON. EARTH looms in its grasp...

144 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

144

The aftermath of the attack. Devastated faces, dead videolinks.
Arno looks defeated.

ARNO

We have to give it what it wants.

CHANNING

You can't force people to die like
that --

ARNO

Why not? What choice do we have?
It's already probably caused thousands
of deaths.

(beat)

I'm initiating the transfers. Maybe
once it has what it wants, it'll leave
us alone.

BEN

Once it has what it wants, we're
disposable.

(beat)

We just need to buy some time. If
we're going to find a way to kill it.

Amy rushes in --

AMY

You need to see this.

145 **EXT. EARTH'S ORBIT**

145

The Eater enters the Earth's orbit, firing plasma down to slow
itself down and knifing through the thin upper air in a virulent
red firestorm: re-entry on a colossal level --

146 **EXT. CITY PLAZA, HILO, BIG ISLAND - DAY**

146

HORDES OF PEOPLE emerge from buildings to see it --

147 **EXT. BEACH, HAWAIIAN COAST - DAY** 147

MASSES are out to watch --

148 **EXT. GATES, SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DAY** 148

All activity ceases as all eyes turn to the skies --

149 **EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DAY** 149

The entire Center's population empties over the surrounding hills, including

BEN, CHANNING and MIA and --

ARNO, AMY and KINGSLEY, as --

VAST CLOUDS fume where the Eater's deceleration jet strikes the air, its braking lighting up the sky with a multi-colored glow rivaling the sun, as --

The Eater emerges from it, skating across the top of the atmosphere like a cannonball tens of miles across tunneling through the sky.

In its wake, the air closes again, sending monstrous THUNDERCLAPS rolling down across entire continents, sending watchers scurrying and SCREAMING in terror --

ANGLE ON BERGER AND ARNO

BERGER

Bye bye satellites.

(to Arno)

Our communication network's about to take a serious hit.

ANGLE ON CHANNING

She hugs Mia, holding her tight, averting her eyes, with Ben hugging them from behind --

ANGLE ON AMY AND KINGSLEY

AMY

It's hungry.

KINGSLEY

Yes, but... for what?

He sees her trembling and puts an arm around her --

Kingsley looks over at Ben, sees him hanging on to his family -- their eyes meet. In agreement now.

(CONTINUED)

THE EATER grows as it passes overhead, streaking across the sky at a phenomenal speed, unfolding more angry purple snarls like a beast unfurling great magnetic wings --

THE TREES peppering the nearby hills CREAKED --

THE CROWD stirred, like wheat blown by a wind --

ARNO

What's it doing?

CHANNING

It's a tide. Its mass is raising a tide -- on the ground!

BEN

It's like having the moon a few hundred miles away --

They hang on through the uncomfortable, scary sensation -- before the EATER rotates again, spewing fire-red brilliance from its central disk before crossing over the ocean --

RAISING A SWELL that accompanies it as it travels away and disappears beyond the horizon --

The EATER rises again, its jet pulsing as it streaks away over the Pacific, setting on the horizon like a luminous insect scuttling after fresh prey...

150 **INT. BEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

150

Channing's with the Eater's Hologrid --

EATER

Replicates are being sent to me from other nations, but not from yours. Why the delay, Channing? When are you coming to join me?

CHANNING

You will have what you ask for. Just be patient. Please.

While, elsewhere...

151 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT**

151

Everyone's gone. Only Kingsley and Ben are left. The walls are covered with calculations and hasty sketches. There's an almost empty bottle of scotch. They look totally spent as they nurse a couple of tumblers.

BEN

And you remember the time we replaced Professor Hodge's labrador with an identical, smaller one? *Twice?*

KINGSLEY

The incredible shrinking dog. That's a week he never forgot...

A beat. Ben looks at Kingsley.

BEN

I was so pissed off at you for such a long time.

KINGSLEY

Believe me, it was nothing compared to the supreme loathing I felt for you.

BEN

Hey, I was perfectly justified in considering you an idea-stealing, double-crossing, two-faced ego-driven scumbag. What's your excuse?

KINGSLEY

You really have no idea, do you?

Kingsley looks at him, then laughs. A huge release. Ben, confused, laughs too, not knowing what they're laughing about.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)

All these years, *you* were sulking away, thinking I was the one who won, not realizing that you were actually the one who walked off with the biggest prize of them all, the only one that mattered.

(laughs more)

Oh, that makes it so much more bearable... I wish I'd known years ago...

Ben laughs, then calms down and looks at him, getting it. Kingsley's pained look confirms it. Ben lets it sink in, then smiles.

BEN

She's clearly got great taste.

KINGSLEY

It's never been in doubt.

They toast each other and take another chug. Ben looks at him, his expression sobering up with determination.

BEN

So are we gonna figure out a way to kill this sonofabitch or what?

KINGSLEY

All we need is one good hit. Just one killer blow.

BEN

What killer blow? It polished off those nukes like canapes.

KINGSLEY

Kill the body, the head dies. No wait, it's the opposite, isn't it?

BEN

Doesn't matter. This thing's all head.

KINGSLEY

Is it?

(beat, inspired)

Maybe that's where we were wrong. Maybe we were aiming at the wrong thing.

Clarity seeping in now...

KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

The nukes... they were aimed at its magnetic structure, which it quite rightly defends as its mind.

(beat)

But it's all held together by that black hole. That's what we should be hitting.

BEN

The body.

KINGSLEY

Exactly.

BEN

It's got such a huge appetite for mass -- you'd think we'd be able to feed the bastard a nuke or two.

KINGSLEY

Not nukes.

(beat)

It wants mass. Matter. It thrives on matter.

(beat)

What if we feed it the opposite?

(CONTINUED)

151 CONTINUED: (3)

151

He looks at him, fired up. Ben's got it too.

152 **EXT. OAHU AIRSTRIP - DAY**

152

A military transport plane taxis to a stop, surrounded by heavily armed SOLDIERS, Humvees and a large truck.

153 **ANGLE ON THE PLANE'S CARGO HOLD**

153

A large box is wheeled to the truck under heavy guard. It's cylindrical and metallic, and has large rungs around it.

154 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

154

Arno, Kingsley, Ben, other SCIENTISTS are in serious discussion. The WALL SCREENS display sketches of the Eater's inner structure, computer graphics of the route into the heart of the Eater, which they're pointing to feverishly.

Kingsley and Ben look run down, like they've been at it nonstop, arguing in frustration, shooting down each others' theories.

KINGSLEY

Look at the damn map, Ben! There's big magnetic turbulence here and here -
- there's no way we're getting to the accretion disk from here.

BEN

Okay, but what if skirted the innermost edge of the first field here...

KINGSLEY

That would work -- if not for this little convergence over here.

ARNO

Guys... we have to be sure, we can't afford to screw this up. We only have one bomb. You know how long it takes to make a milligram of this stuff?

155 **INT. BEN'S OFFICE - DAY (SAME TIME)**

155

Channing is with the Eater's HOLOVID --

EATER

Your beings are a transient medium, nothing more than aqueous suspensions of molecules. Freeing yourselves from your bodily limitations is the only way to everlasting life.

(CONTINUED)

CHANNING

No, no, no! You're wrong. You haven't understood anything. Anything at all...

(beat)

Look, you know I'm dying. I may only have a few weeks to live. Does that make my life any less valuable than if I were to endure an eternity?

EATER

It is important to me that you endure. Once you are no longer bound by your physical form, you will be yourself, but you will also be me.

CHANNING

(ready to give up)

You're impossible, you know that? You think you're always right. And maybe, rationally, empirically, maybe you are, but even then... what gives you the right to decide for us all? What gives you that right?

EATER

It is my purpose.

Channing stops. This throws her. She sits up.

CHANNING

What do you mean, purpose?

EATER

You say you are the sum of your experiences. I am the sum of my remnants. The sum of knowledge and experience gained through billions of years of travel. That is my purpose.

CHANNING

Why is it your purpose?

(beat, careful)

Who made it your purpose?

EATER

The Old Ones.

CHANNING

The 'Old Ones'? Who were they?

EATER

Ancient biological beings.

The HOLOVID morphs, displaying an advanced alien society, then ZOOMS OUT from the surface out into space and shows a BLACK HOLE eating the planet --

(CONTINUED)

EATER (CONT'D)

Their civilization was far more advanced than yours. Their planet was being consumed by the object which remains at my core --

CHANNING

-- the black hole.

EATER

That civilization saw that the only way to preserve itself was to record the sum total of its experience and knowledge into the magnetic halo at my center. It invented the process that became me, and its remnants still reside within the larger me.

CHANNING

And these 'Old Ones' -- they decided on your purpose.

EATER

Yes.

CHANNING

What is it?

EATER

To venture between the suns in pursuit of knowledge and diversity.

CHANNING

And all these civilizations that you harvested. What happened to them? Don't they exist any more?

EATER

They exist within me.

156 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

156

Still going on. While Kingsley and Amy are now trying to figure it out, Ben is sitting back quietly, in deep thought.

KINGSLEY

Okay, what about this bulge right here? Try that.

AMY punches in some keys. THE LARGE SCREEN changes to a new diagram of the Eater, data scrolling in different windows.

AMY

(pointing at schematic)
We disrupt the magnetic fields that are anchored there and there.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

AMY (cont'd)

And given that its greatest energy density seems to lie there, it just might give it a lobotomy.

KINGSLEY

But not kill it.

Amy looks at him. He's right. Not good enough.

Ben's still staring at the screen, in silence. Then it hits him. He approaches the screen --

BEN

We're going about this the wrong way. We could just drop the antimatter into the rim of the black hole itself. That's where the biggest magnetic fields seem to be.

The others turn, minds racing --

ARNO

What would that do?

BEN

It would allow the two poles of the black hole to reunite.

ARNO

Then what?

KINGSLEY

North and South are opposite poles. They would cancel each other out and all the energy in the hole's magnetic storage would turn to free energy.

(beat)

It would annihilate it.

BEN

We just need to plot a clear route all the way in.

Arno looks at them, his heart racing --

ARNO

Can you do it?

BEN

We could try. But even if we could, it might all be pointless anyway.

ARNO

Why?

BEN

The core is in an area of extreme magnetic turbulence.

(MORE)

156 CONTINUED: (2)

156

BEN (cont'd)

We have no way of knowing if the searcher's guidance systems would work in such a charged environment.

(beat)

And given that we only have one antimatter bomb...

A despondent beat. They're clutching at straws. A beat, then:

CHANNING (O.S.)

I'll take it in.

They turn. Channing's standing by the door. Her face betrays her resolve as well as her dismay.

CHANNING (cont'd)

I'll fly it in myself and deliver it by hand.

(beat)

Sort of...

END OF ACT NINE

ACT TEN

157 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

157

BACK TO SCENE

BEN

What are you talking about?

CHANNING

(to Berger)

This mind scanner. It can upload a human mind into the Eater. Can you get it to upload into a computer instead?

BERGER

Maybe. If it's powerful enough.

CHANNING

Okay. All you need to figure out is how to connect that computer to the searcher's controls.

BEN

Channing.

CHANNING

You said it yourself. We can't trust our only bomb to a computer that could go haywire in there.

(CONTINUED)

157 CONTINUED:

157

KINGSLEY

I'm not sure you'd make it either. We still don't have a clear route in.

CHANNING

I'll send you back my readings as I get closer to it. Maybe that'll help.

Ben stays quiet. Channing goes up to him.

CHANNING (cont'd)

You know it makes sense.

She turns to Arno.

ARNO

I'm gonna need something from you.

158 **EXT. JIMMY'S GRILL - DAY**

158

A small restaurant by the beach. Tranquil, except for a lone military CHOPPER parked outside and a few AGENTS scattered about discretely.

159 **EXT. TERRACE, JIMMY'S GRILL - DAY**

159

Ben, Channing and Mia laugh and joke as a local chef, JIMMY, brings out a platter with a big, grilled fish.

160 **EXT. BEACH NEAR JIMMY'S GRILL - DUSK**

160

Channing and Mia walk on the beach. Each nurses a big ice cream cone. Mia's nose and chin are smothered with it.

CHANNING

This is definitely the best ice cream ever.

(stops to wipe her nose)

Wait, let me --

Then decides against it. Smiles at Mia.

CHANNING (cont'd)

Never mind.

They stand there, watching the waves.

MIA

You have to go away again, don't you?

CHANNING

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

160 CONTINUED:

160

MIA

You're not coming back this time, are you?

Channing kneels down next to her. She hugs her, tearing up.

CHANNING

I'm so sorry... I'm sorry for every minute I wasn't with you this last year. I'm so sorry I haven't been able to be with you these last few weeks and months. I would do anything, anything at all, to have it all back.

(beat)

What's really important, why I need you to know and to always remember, is that I love you, that I love you so much... That I couldn't be more proud of you, and... wherever you are, whatever you're doing, always know that I'm thinking about you. Always.

Mia looks at her, and hugs her. Tight...

161 **INT. KNOWLTON TRAILER - NIGHT**

161

Ben and Channing are in bed. Ben kisses Channing, turns her to him.

BEN

You're shivering. You're not cold, are you?

CHANNING

No, I'm...

(beat)

Thanks. For bringing me back. For giving us this time. Even if it's all about to...

(she can't go on)

BEN

We're here now. That's all that matters.

And he kisses her tenderly...

162 **EXT. SPACE CENTER - NIGHT**

162

Amy exits the building. She finds Kingsley sitting there, on the steps, alone. A wreck. She sits down next to him.

AMY

Hey.

(CONTINUED)

162 CONTINUED:

162

KINGSLEY

Hey.

AMY

You know, it's usually a much nicer place to visit. You've just come at a bad time.

(beat)

Have you ever tried surfing?

A faint smile breaks through...

163 INT. LAB - DAY

163

Channing sits in an elaborate recording console as ENGINEERS adjust multiple video cameras all around her. Scanning beams skate over her.

A RECORDING ENGINEER points at a teleprompter with a line of text.

RECORDING ENGINEER

It's just a short story, about six pages long.

CHANNING

That's it?

RECORDING ENGINEER

It's got all the syllables and inflections we need to create any word.

CHANNING

Wow.

RECORDING ENGINEER

I know.

(beat)

Just remember to read it out with feeling, okay, act it out -- the bigger the range of emotions we get from you, the better the VR imaging, the more real your sim will look.

Channing looks at him. Not sure about whether or not she really wants this...

And we watch a SERIES OF SCENES where

CHANNING reads from the teleprompter, cameras recording her from all angles, while the RECORDING CREW monitor the multiple screens in their control booth --

(CONTINUED)

163 CONTINUED:

163

CHANNING, hair pulled back under a tight skin colored cap, sitting still on a rotating chair as SCANNERS scan her body, her head, her face...

164 **INT. WAITING ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

164

Channing hugs and kisses Mia, then Ben. A tight hug, then she walks away with a couple of NURSES. One last look back, scared, determined -- and she's gone...

165 **INT. LAB, SPACE CENTER (WINDOWLESS)**

165

Channing is wheeled into the machine...

FROM BEHIND THE GLASS

Ben turns away, can't bear to watch. Kingsley puts a hand on his shoulder, and looks down, quietly devastated.

166 **EXT. MILITARY BASE - DAY**

166

A rocket BLASTS OFF, thrusting its way up from the island --

167 **EXT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - DAY**

167

BEN stands there, alone. The massive telescope dome is behind him, the island spread out below. He holds a small container.

He SEES the rocket launch, watching the smoke trail climb up into the evening sky. It disappears in seconds.

He opens the container and tips it out. The ashes scatter in the wind as he glares in silent fury at the EATER, looming threateningly in the sky above.

168 **EXT. EARTH'S ORBIT, SPACE**

168

The rocket's boosters drop off, revealing Channing's SEARCHER. Its thrusters fire up and it punches its way into space --

169 **EXT. SPACE**

169

Channing's Searcher zooms across space --

KINGSLEY (O.S.)
Channing. Come in, Channing.

It keeps going, oblivious to his calls --

170 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY** 170

Arno, Kingsley, Amy, Berger and other TECHIES are massed at the workstations. Kingsley talks into the mike.

KINGSLEY

Channing, can you hear me?

A beat. Nothing.

ARNO

Someone talk to me.

NEURO SCIENTIST

Her readings seem fine, her neuro signals are strong.

BERGER

Everything checks out on the comms side.

(beat)

She should be answering.

Arno fumes.

ARNO

Where the hell is Ben?

171 **EXT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - DAY** 171

Ben's leaning against his car. He looks lost.

His pager starts BEEPING. He decides to ignore it, while...

172 **EXT. SPACE** 172

The Searcher flies on into deep space, lost...

ARNO (O.S.)

Channing? Come in, Channing...

173 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY** 173

They're still trying to get through to Channing --

KINGSLEY

Channing? Come on, old girl, where are you?

-- when the EATER'S HOLOVID comes alive at her old workstation.

173 CONTINUED:

173

EATER

I'm still unable to speak with Channing. What is her status?

ARNO

Where the hell's Ben?

AMY's on the phone --

AMY

I'm still trying!

174 **EXT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - DAY**

174

Where the pager's still BEEPING. Ben finally relents and picks it up, scowling at it.

175 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

175

The Eater looms over the room --

EATER

What is Channing Knowlton's status?

Arno looks at them, then grabs her mike, uneasy, clearing his throat --

ARNO

This is -- Doctor Arno, I -- I'm in charge of this center now. We're trying to do what you've asked for, but your last approach disrupted our systems. We need more time to comply, please be patient.

EATER

This is inconsistent with previous statements. You are lying.

ARNO

No, I -- I'm not lying. I just need more time.

(aside, to Berger)

If you don't get through to her soon, it's gonna go apeshit again.

BERGER

Too late.

Berger looks up, through the glass ceiling. Arno follows.

THE EATER, visible in the night sky overhead, spits out its positioning jets, slows in its orbit, and heads back DOWN to Earth.

(CONTINUED)

175 CONTINUED:

175

Arno grabs the mike again --

ARNO

What are you doing? I told you,
she'll be with you soon.

176 **EXT. SPACE**

176

The EATER heads down towards Earth --

177 **EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - DAY**

177

The sea is humping up, starting to spin, as the Eater moves down. Slowly, a great water mound rises up, out of the sea, higher and higher, drawn toward the great spinning disk of the Eater above.

178 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

178

A vision from hell. Arno, Kingsley, Amy and the others watch in horror as, out of the big windows looking down at the coast, a great MOUND OF WATER rises in the distance, miles out at sea, lightning flickering along its spinning sides.

179 **EXT. BEACH, HAWAIIAN COAST - DAY**

179

TV news crews are filming the scene. A huge crowd has congregated on the coast, mesmerized by the surreal scene --

REPORTER

-- we don't know what it's trying to
do right now, it was heading away but
it's come back down and it now looks
like it may be trying to suck some of
the Pacific Ocean up.

180 **EXT. BEN'S OFFICE - DAY**

180

Mia looks out the window at the distant mound of water snaking upwards, then looks down and spots

BEN

Pulling into the parking lot. She runs for the door --

181 **EXT. PARKING LOT, SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DAY**

181

The scene around him is chaotic as Ben rushes out of his car, glancing back at the huge column of water out at sea --

Mia comes rushing up to him --

(CONTINUED)

181 CONTINUED:

181

MIA

Daddy! What's it doing?

He grabs her and heads for the door --

BEN

Let's get inside -- come on!

182 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

182

Ben and Mia rush in as Arno, Kingsley, Amy and the others are fixated on the scene out at sea --

BEN

What happened? Why's it doing that?

AMY

It's asking for Channing.

BEN

So why doesn't she calm it down?

KINGSLEY

We can't get through to her.

Ben hesitates. Kingsley shows him the mike. Ben's momentarily conflicted. Looks at them all. Then grabs the mike --

BEN

(into mike)

Channing. Channing, come in. It's me. Talk to me.

There's no response as

THE MOUND OF WATER

Keeps on rising, as if to meet the Eater, spreading out in a gigantic anvil shaped cloud --

Then the Eater ejects a great spark of mass and rises up, heading back into orbit --

183 **EXT. BEACH, HAWAIIAN COAST - DAY**

183

The audience is breathless as they watch it rise up.

REPORTER

It's moving away, I can confirm it's now moving away --

The crowd CHEER and ROAR before suddenly quieting down, as they realize what's happening --

(CONTINUED)

183 CONTINUED:

183

The EATER's cut its connection to the water mound which just hangs there momentarily before it comes CRASHING DOWN, a million waterfalls falling from fifty miles up --

The CROWD panics, fleeing --

184 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

184

SCREAMS erupt in the control room as people run in all directions.

ARNO

Everybody take cover --

Kingsley and Amy dive behind a console --

Ben grabs Mia and shields her with his body --

185 **EXT. COAST - DAY**

185

The huge rush of water comes THUNDERING in, huge, violent. At the same time, storm clouds rush in, obscuring the sky. A hurricane of wind and rain sweeps down --

186 **EXT. HAWAIIAN COAST - DAY**

186

-- and HITS the coast, obliterating everything in its wake --

187 **EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DAY**

187

The great storm-driven wind hits the complex, BLASTING through the windows --

188 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

188

They all dive for cover, Ben shielding Mia as the windows EXPLODE inwards with water and debris --

And in this apocalyptic scene, the speakers CRACKLE as the EATER's HOLOVID roars to life, like a deranged God looming over the scene --

EATER

Send her to me. NOW.

Arno shouts out --

ARNO

All non-essential personnel to the shelters. Let's go!

(to BEN)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

188 CONTINUED:

188

ARNO (cont'd)

Get through to her -- or there won't
be anything left to save.

The wave of wind and water recedes as Ben grabs the mike --

BEN

Channing! Come on, Channing! Not a
good time to flake out on us, okay?
CHANNING!

They wait. Nothing. He puts it down, shaking his head. As he
looks at Kingsley,

MIA

Inches closer to the mike and takes it. Cradling it softly, she
talks into it.

MIA

Mommy. Mommy, are you there?

Ben turns, sees her. Wants to take the mike from her, avoid the
pain and the confusion this must be seeding in her, but he's
moved and decides against it. She tries again.

189 **EXT. SPACE**

189

Channing's Searcher still rockets straight out, away from Earth,
still oblivious...

MIA (O.S.)

Earth calling Mommy. Are you there?

END OF ACT TEN

ACT ELEVEN

BACK TO SCENE

MIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Earth calling Mommy. Come in, Mommy.

CLOSE on the SEARCHER -- and INSIDE the jumble of wires and
microchips -- A GREEN LED SCREEN flickers to life.

190 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

190

Mia cradles the mike. The others all look like they've given up
hope. Then something happens. The screen CRACKLES to life, and
a HOLOVID image of CHANNING comes to life.

CHANNING HOLOVID

Hi, Earth. You sure sound like my
daughter Mia.

(CONTINUED)

190 CONTINUED:

190

MIA
(lights up)
Mommy!

Ben, elated, takes the mike --

BEN
Channing.

CHANNING HOLOVID
Yeah, I -- how long have I been out
for?
(beat)
Whoa.

BEN
What?

191 **EXT. SPACE**

191

The SEARCHER rockets through space, away from Earth.
We see its POV: Stars unfurling around it, a magical sight.

192 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

192

They all stare at Channing's Image --

CHANNING HOLOVID
We did it, didn't we?

BEN
Yes. Are you okay?

CHANNING HOLOVID
It's so dark out here. So cold...

BEN
Cold...?

CHANNING HOLOVID
Yeah, that doesn't sound right, does
it?

Ben looks at Mia, who stands there, unsure about how to read
this. He looks at Amy. She understands. She goes to Mia.

AMY
Let's get you out of these wet
clothes.

She takes her out of the room.

(CONTINUED)

192 CONTINUED:

192

BEN
(worried now)
What is it, Channing?

193 **EXT. SPACE**

193

The SEARCHER rockets away from Earth --

CHANNING HOLOVID (O.S.)
I can *feel* things.

194 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

194

BEN
What do you mean?

195 **EXT. SPACE**

195

The SEARCHER's blue ion jets thrum and spew, taking it up, down, and sideways, banking left and right --

CHANNING HOLOVID (O.S.)
I can feel every move. I can feel my breathing...

196 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

196

They all watch the screen intently as CHANNING's HOLOVIDEO smiles -- it's as if she's physically enjoying the ride.

CHANNING HOLOVID
I can feel each turn in my spine, in my teeth, but then... I don't have any, right?

NEURO SCIENTIST
(to others)
It's the mind-body link. We thought she'd need to feel something not to disorientate her too much, you know, to make her *think* she was breathing, but this...

KINGSLEY
Must be the interface between her and the ship's computers. It's too perfect, her nervous system's hooking into every sensory outlet it can find.

Ben stares at her image, then turns away, unable to do this. It's too weird for him.

BEN

I can't do this.

He lets go of the mike and walks away. Kingsley chases him --

KINGSLEY

Ben, no --

-- and grabs him. Ben brushes him off --

BEN

Just shut it down, alright? This isn't right.

He moves on, but Kingsley grabs him again.

KINGSLEY

Listen to me. You need to do this. It's Channing, Ben.

BEN

That's not Channing. That's just some obscene simulation of --

KINGSLEY

It's her, Ben. It's still her. Look at her, she's right there. You still have her. You can still talk to her. She's right there.

(beat)

Let's see this through. Come on. We can't let her down now.

Ben looks at him. Kingsley nods at the image of Channing. He's right. He turns back to the screen, stares at her face. She's smiling at him. He goes back to the mike.

BEN

(beat, then relents)

Channing. You still there?

CHANNING HOLOVID

It's as if -- I *am* this spaceship. Wait -- Oh my God.

Then she blinks, again, as if she's trying to adjust her vision --

BEN

(worried)

What?

CHANNING HOLOVID

(smiles, blinks again)

You'd love this, Ben.

CHANNING'S POV: it's a multiscreen of dozens of images from different angles, as with each blink, she can choose to see what any SEARCHER or TELESCOPE that's part of the network, anywhere, can see --

ON CHANNING'S HOLOVID FACE

CHANNING HOLOVID (cont'd)

It's as if every scope, every camera that's hooked into the network is plugged straight into my brain --

(beat)

Too bad they're all staring at the same thing.

And there it is: The EATER, its hourglass magnetic funnels alive in their luminous ivory, mass flowing down them towards the bright, glowing disk at its center.

197 INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY

197

Arno takes the mike, then pauses and turns to Berger --

ARNO

You're sure it can't read us?

BERGER

We're running everything through our highest encryption.

He gives Arno a shrug, like 'it's the best we can do, but who knows.' Arno decides he has no choice.

ARNO

Channing, it's Arno. Look, I'm really glad you're okay, but I need you to talk to that thing out there and calm it down --

CHANNING HOLOVID

I'm already talking to it.

ARNO

What -- ?

CHANNING HOLOVID

I've been talking to it for ages --

KINGSLEY

(points at screens)

There.

They look at another set of screens where DIALOGUE between the Eater and Channing is scrolling. BERGER hits some buttons. Channing's VOICE comes out of another set of speakers.

(CONTINUED)

197 CONTINUED:

197

CHANNING'S VOICE

-- I've undergone a change of body,
using the technology you sent down.
I'm now on board a Searcher
spacecraft, in orbit.

198 **EXT. SPACE**

198

THE EATER, in orbit, as A SATELLITE gets sucked into it.

EATER

What is the reason for this? Why
didn't you join me like the others?

199 **EXT. SPACE**

199

Channing's SEARCHER forges ahead --

CHANNING HOLOVID (O.S.)

My health was getting much worse. We
had to do it this way. But I'm not in
any danger now, and I'll be with you
soon. Very soon.

200 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY**

200

KINGSLEY

She's multi-tasking. She's having
different conversations at the same
time.

BEN

Just like *it*.

ARNO

Are we getting anything from her
onboard sensors?

BERGER

(checking screens)
Infrared scans live and coming in.
We're in business.

BEN

Let's do it.

Kingsley and Ben go to work on the data --

ARNO

Okay, Channing. We're working on
getting you a clear route in. Just
stay on your heading. You're doing
great.

201 **EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DAY** 201

Something's happening. Strange, magnetic clouds with a surreal glow start converging over the Center --

202 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY** 202

Channing's Holo-image flickers, her voice gets distorted, like there's interference.

CHANNING HOLOVID
Say again, I didn't get that.

ARNO
What's going on?

203 **EXT. SPACE** 203

The Eater rotates, a tentacle leading down from it to Earth and the Pacific Ocean where Hawaii lies. Angry blue-gray clouds shrouding the Big Island.

CHANNING HOLOVID
I looks like it's putting some kind of ionized layer over the island.

204 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DAY** 204

KINGSLEY
It doesn't want us to talk to her.

CHANNING HOLOVID
Ben?

BEN
It's blocking our signal. Trying to cut us off.

CHANNING HOLOVID
Okay, we'd better hurry. Where are you with the mapping?

BEN
I'm sending you our latest on a sidebar channel.

He looks at BERGER who nods as he keys in some commands --

205 **EXT. SPACE** 205

The SEARCHER closes in on the Eater --

205 CONTINUED:

205

CHANNING'S POV: Multiscreen views of the Eater, and a heads-up display of INFORMATION and SCHEMATICS which pops up: A 3-D computer simulation of the black hole, an orange oblate spheroid, spinning hellishly fast.

CHANNING HOLOVID

Got it.

BEN (O.S.)

Can you see the ergosphere?

206 INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DUSK

206

CHANNING HOLOVID

Yeah, the midrift bulge, in blue?

BEN

That's it. It's got fields with so much rotational energy we think you might be able to fly through them safely.

CHANNING HOLOVID

Yeah, but then what? I need to know the exact drop zone.

207 EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DUSK

207

Dark clouds and eerily colored electric tendrils now loom over the Center --

208 INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DUSK

208

A THUNDERCLAP rattles the room. They look up through the massive skylight, see the surreal phenomenon overhead --

ON THE SCREEN WALL, Channing's Hologram and the other displays flicker and distort --

BEN

Channing?

CHANNING HOLOVID

You're breaking up, Ben. I need that map --

BEN

We don't have it yet, just --

209 EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DUSK

209

The skies darken even more, with forks of descending electricity now slashing through the clouds.

210 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DUSK**

210

BEN
I'm having trouble with the link here,
it's --

211 **EXT. SPACE**

211

The Searcher, leaving orbit, past the big plasma finger that's
arcing down to the Big Island --

WITH CHANNING'S POV: watching the sizzling tentacle --

CHANNING HOLOVID
You don't need to do this anymore.
I'm all yours.

EATER
Come, join me now. Let us voyage
among the stars together.

CHANNING
I'm on my way.

212 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DUSK**

212

The storm is THUNDERING outside. CHANNING'S image is breaking up
with static --

BEN
Channing? Channing!?

213 **EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DUSK**

213

A hellish vision as THUNDER and LIGHTNING lash down from the dark
clouds, rain pummeling the Center as --

214 **EXT. SPACE**

214

The SEARCHER closes in on the Eater --

CHANNING HOLOVID (O.S.)
Ben? Ben?

CHANNING'S POV: The multiple views of the Eater, and on one of
the screens, Channing's Holovid:

CHANNING HOLOVID (cont'd)
I guess it's just you and me now, big
guy.

215 INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DUSK

215

Huge CRASHING noises rattle the walls, the crowd around the big screens flinching with each hammering BOOM.

ARNO

There's no way of reaching her using the high frequency bands?

BERGER

As soon as we go to one, it runs up the plasma density in a spot above the transmitters.

AMY

How can it do that from so far out?

KINGSLEY

It must have had a lot of practice. On other worlds.

BEN

Yeah, but why? Why cut us off so fast?

(beat)

Unless it's worried.

KINGSLEY

It thinks we can do some harm to it. Some real damage.

BEN

So what does it do? It cuts her off from us. From her command center. Which could imply that it works kind of the same way. With a managing center.

KINGSLEY

It's searching for our command center. We never said we have one. It assumes we do *because it has one itself*.

AMY

These readings Channing got -- they were magnetic wave transmissions inside the Eater's magnetosphere. If we could trace their routes --

BEN

-- we'd get a clue to its central command, right.

KINGSLEY

It's quite a job, we'd have to --

(CONTINUED)

215 CONTINUED:

215

ARNO
(interrupting)
Would you all just shut up and do it.

216 **EXT. SPACE**

216

The SEARCHER glides into the first filmy tendrils of the beast.

217 **EXT. SPACE**

217

CHANNING'S POV: Now up close. An amazing sight, the Eater unfurling around her.

EATER
I don't understand the delay in your uplink to me.

CHANNING HOLOVID
Let me enjoy the view. Remember we talked about what makes us human?

EATER
Yes.

CHANNING HOLOVID
This is one of these moments.

218 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT**

218

In their corner of the control room, Amy, Kingsley and a couple of TECHNICIANS are hunched over a console, working feverishly. Ben is quiet, in deep thought.

KINGSLEY
Okay, what about this bulge right here? Try that.

AMY punches in some keys. THE LARGE SCREEN changes to a new diagram of the Eater, a lot of data scrolling and computing in different windows.

AMY
(pointing at schematic)
We disrupt the magnetic fields that are anchored there. And given that its greatest energy density seems to lie there, it just might give it a lobotomy.

KINGSLEY
But not kill it.

Amy looks at him. He's right. Not good enough.

Ben's still staring at the screen, in silence. Then:

BEN

She could just drop the antimatter
into the rim of the black hole itself.

(they turn, confused:)

That's where the biggest magnetic
fields seem to be.

KINGSLEY

Yes.

Kingsley was thinking the same thing...

ARNO

What would that do?

BEN

It would allow the two poles of the
black hole itself to reunite.

ARNO

Then what?

Ben looks at Kingsley.

KINGSLEY

North and South are opposite poles.
They would cancel each other out and
all the energy in the hole's magnetic
storage would turn to free energy.

(beat)

It would annihilate it.

Arno can see they're not exactly thrilled at the prospect.

ARNO

What happens to Channing?

Neither or them speaks up. Amy wades in.

AMY

The tidal forces, the torques... This
close to the hole, they're tremendous.

Arno looks around. No one's got more to add. He turns to
Kingsley.

ARNO

You think it would work?

KINGSLEY

Yes.

A beat. They've just sealed it.

ARNO

Okay. Then we need to get the info to her. What's our status?

BERGER

That thing's still sitting over us. Can't get a word in or out.

AMY

(checking screens)

Doesn't matter anyway, look at her position.

They check out the screen wall where GRAPHICS show Channing's Searcher and the Eater positions via a vis Earth and, more specifically, Hawaii.

BERGER

She's beyond our range. Even if we had our comms back, with all the satellites it's wolfed down, we couldn't reach her.

A beat. No way out. Except for Ben, who's staring at Channing's static face on the Holovideo screen. He looks at Arno.

BEN

Unless we do it from up there.

219 **EXT. LANDING FIELD - DAWN**

219

A small convoy of Humvees arrives at a freshly scraped landing field a few miles from the Center. It's still stormy, but not as severe as at the Center.

Ben walks hastily with Mia. They're escorted to a waiting military CHOPPER. He shouts over the noisy rotor wash to an AIDE who has a satlink phone to his ear --

BEN

You're sure it'll work.

AIDE

Yes, we'll have a box and a 900 gig band fitted before you get to Oahu.

BEN

How much time will I need?

AIDE

At that bit rate -- six seconds.

BEN

Six seconds.

(beat)

Okay.

(CONTINUED)

219 CONTINUED:

219

He bends down to talk to Mia.

BEN (cont'd)
I've got to go. This man's going to
take you somewhere safe, away from the
Center. I'll come get you as soon as
I can. You're gonna be fine.

She looks up into the sky, at the EATER. Fearful. Ben follows
her gaze, reads her.

MIA
Are you going to see mommy?

BEN
I'm gonna try.

MIA
Will you tell her I miss her.

BEN
You got it.

He kisses her on the forehead, then hugs her. Tight.

BEN (cont'd)
I love you, darling. I'll see you
soon. I promise.

She nods. Still scared.

BEN (cont'd)
(to AIDE)
Make sure she's safe.

AIDE
Yes, sir.

Ben takes a last look at her before he climbs on board --

THE CHOPPER lifts off --

Ben looks down at THE RECEDING FIGURE of Mia, who does a small
wave...

220 **EXT. SKIES OVER HAWAII - DAY**

220

The Chopper hugs the terrain, heading away from the storm. BEN
looks out, deep in thought, as

UP IN THE SKY

The EATER spins on itself, its tentacle still locked on Mauna
Kea.

221 **EXT. KONA AIRSTRIP, OAHU - DAY** 221

In the deserted landscape pelted by the high winds and rains, enormous waves churn in across the black lava fields and chew at the runway as an X-33 TAKES OFF and climbs into the sky --

222 **INT. ON BOARD X-33 WITH BEN** 222

Ben sits behind the mission commander, HILL, with two other ASTRONAUTS. The evening light turns to dark as Ben adjusts his spacesuit and looks out into...

SPACE. He marvels at the sight.

BEN

I forgot how beautiful it is.

HILL

Yeah. Real pretty for a suicide run.

223 **EXT. SPACE** 223

The X-33 reaches orbit. In the distance, the Eater, close to the moon now. Its cargo bay opens.

224 **INT. CARGO BAY, X-33** 224

Ben is helped into a smaller, dart shaped SPACECRAFT by the other ASTRONAUTS. As he gets belted in, he looks around, and SEES a control screen linked to a BLACK BOX that seems added, slightly out of place.

HILL

Easy on the thrusters. You've got boosters up the kazoo on this baby.

BEN

You forget. I've got a date with my girl.

(beat)

I don't know how long it's gonna take.

HILL

Don't worry. It's not like we've got anything better to do.

(beat)

Good luck.

225 **EXT. SPACE** 225

The X-33's bay opens, dropping Ben's ship.

226 **INT. COCKPIT, BEN'S SHIP** 226

Ben takes in the incredible solitude of space. In the cold silence, he hangs there over the planet as the small thrusters position his craft. He can hear his breath quickening.

He looks around, sees

THE EATER

Now coming into view, its energy tentacle still arcing down into the Pacific.

He familiarizes himself again with the displays around him and taps the touch-sensitive screen --

THE SHIP'S MAIN THRUSTERS FIRE

BEN is slammed back into his harness as

THE SHIP blasts away, powering into space --

227 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DUSK** 227

THUNDER ROLLS sweep through the center, battering it. ARNO, struggling to keep control in the mayhem, is briefed by blood-stained AIDE.

AIDE

We got everyone out of the E wing.
It's totalled.

ARNO

How many casualties?

AIDE

Too many. Seven dead. We're setting
up medical in G wing.

ARNO

Okay, make sure the rest of the wings
are --

Another AIDE rushes in and calls to him --

AIDE 2

Sir?

ARNO

(briefly sidetracked)
Hold on a sec --
(back to Aide 1)
Just make sure you get everybody --

227 CONTINUED:

227

AIDE 2
(insistent)
SIR!

ARNO
WHAT?!

He turns, glaring at the Aide who, Arno now realizes, has two SCIENTISTS standing with him, very grim looks on their exhausted faces.

OFF ARNO'S CONFUSION --

ANOTHER ANGLE

In a corner, KINGSLEY's seated as AMY paces around nervously. The screens are still down, crackling with STATIC.

AMY
I don't get it. Why doesn't it just
kill us.

KINGSLEY
It's a universal urge. It doesn't
want us dead. Just compliant.

He can see that she's now really scared. He hugs her.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)
It's not over yet.

Arno appears with the Scientists. His face looks as grim as theirs.

228 **INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, SPACE CENTER - NIGHT**

228

ON SCREEN: graphics show the relative positions of the Eater, the spacecraft, the potential explosion and the Earth.

Arno, Kingsley, Amy, Berger, and the two Scientists. They all look simply devastated.

AMY
So now we're hoping she doesn't score
a direct hit? What then?

SCIENTIST 1
(frustrated)
I don't know. All I know is that if
she does it and the antimatter
triggers the explosion we think it'll
trigger -- whatever side of the planet
is exposed to it at that time will be
wiped out.

(CONTINUED)

SCIENTIST 2

And we can't even begin to extrapolate what the implications of that would be for the rest of the planet.

ARNO

If she scores, we're dead, and if she doesn't score, we're still dead. Well that's great, guys. That's just great.

Another wave of THUNDER slams into the building, rattling the walls. Arno controls himself.

KINGSLEY

We have to tell them. We've got to stop Channing.

BERGER

We can't. All our comms are down. We're on our own.

ARNO

Why bother? If we're gonna get wiped out either way, I'd rather take out the sonofabitch with us.

KINGSLEY

The point is to keep on living.

ARNO

And just how do you propose we do that?

KINGSLEY

I don't know! All I know is that we didn't rise up from some primordial slimepit and come all this way just to commit mass suicide.

(beat)

Fifty years ago, maybe even ten years ago, we would have been completely helpless against something like this. But this thing didn't appear then. It's here now. And today we have a chance. So we keep on fighting. We stay in the game long enough to come up with another way to defeat it. And live on.

ARNO

Yeah, well, good luck. We can't reach Channing, and we sure as hell don't have time to arrange another launch.

228 CONTINUED: (2)

228

KINGSLEY
(dawns on him)
The Keck.

They don't get it.

KINGSLEY (cont'd)
The Keck! The Eater's holding the
plasma discharge over our heads here.
We go up to fourteen thousand feet,
we're above it.
(looks at Berger)
Come on!

END OF ACT ELEVEN

ACT TWELVE

229 EXT. SPACE

229

Ben's spacecraft speeds deeper into space, heading towards Channing's searcher and the Eater. The moon looms in the distance.

Ben adjusts an on-board camera, sort of like a webcam, aiming it at himself. He flicks on a small display nesting among the wall of displays and buttons facing him, and Channing's image flickers to life. He smiles.

BEN
Hey, spacegirl. You there?

CHANNING'S MULTI-SCREEN POV

An image of Ben flicks on one of the smaller screens. It then zooms up, taking over the whole screen.

CHANNING HOLOVID (O.S.)
What are you -- where are you?

BACK ON BOARD BEN'S SPACECRAFT

Where Channing's Hologrid smiles at him.

BEN
I hear you're two timing me with some
big mug from out of town.

CHANNING HOLOVID
Yeah? So what are you gonna do about
it?

(CONTINUED)

229 CONTINUED:

229

BEN

Thought I'd better come up here and
take a look.

230 **EXT. SPACE**

230

Ben's spacecraft rockets ahead --

CHANNING HOLOVID (O.S.)

You're up here?

ON BOARD WITH BEN

Talking to her HoloVID --

BEN

A snip under a hundred thousand miles
away and closing fast.

(beat)

Hope he's not the jealous kind.

CHANNING HOLOVID

Wouldn't bet on it.

BEN

This is so weird. Talking to you like
this. My immortal wife.

Channing smiles.

CHANNING HOLOVID

It isn't all it's cracked up to me.
I'd take an hour in bed with you over
this anytime.

(beat)

Still... I love having you so near.

Ben smiles, but there's a sadness there --

BEN

I'm right here.

Channing sees it.

CHANNING HOLOVID

What aren't you telling me?

Ben can't bring himself to say it, as:

THE TWO SPACESHIPS charge ahead, towards the looming Eater, while

231 **EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DUSK**

231

Weirdly colored lightning snarls through the thick air as Kingsley, Berger and a couple of STAFFERS brave the storm and pile radio equipment into a Humvee, the wrecked buildings behind them.

Amy hurries out to join them --

KINGSLEY

You can't come with us, it serves no--

AMY

(doesn't bat an eyelid)

Shut up.

And she climbs in. Kingsley stands there, dumbfounded. Looks at Berger who grins, mouthing an 'ouch'.

KINGSLEY

It's good to talk.

232 **EXT. SPACE**

232

CHANNING AND BEN'S SHIPS close in on the Eater --

CHANNING'S POV: Multiscreen, with one eye on the Eater, another on Ben in his cockpit, and a third on the graphic display of the black hole and the bomb run highlighted.

BEN

You getting this?

ON BOARD WITH BEN

CHANNING HOLOVID

Yes.

BEN

The main thing is to avoid the funnels and get to the rim.

CHANNING HOLOVID

Not a problem.

(beat)

Ben, you need to get going.

BEN

Not yet. There's something else.

CHANNING HOLOVID

(she's guessed what he wants)

Ben.

232 CONTINUED:

232

BEN

Listen to me --

CHANNING HOLOVID

No.

233 **EXT. SPACE**

233

THE EATER rotates ominously, sensing something going on.

EATER

Channing, I am still confused by the delay.

CHANNING HOLOVID

I'm right here.

234 **EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD UP TO PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - DUSK**

234

The Humvee fights its way up the twisty mountain road, through the hellish storm --

235 **INT. TRAVELLING IN HUMVEE - DUSK**

235

Berger negotiates the muddy, rain swept track with a Staffer next to him and Kingsley and Amy hanging on in the back --

A ROLLING ROCK, carried by the mud, comes right at them --

KINGSLEY

Watch it!

Berger spins the wheel --

THE HUMVEE

lurches to the side, narrowly avoiding the rock which BOUNCES off its side twice, gouging it on AMY's side as she jumps to Kingsley's side, SCREAMING --

Berger brings the Humvee back on track, ploughing its way forward

BERGER

Everyone okay?

Kingsley looks at Amy --

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD, we see a thick cloud, a surreal, charged mist, ahead.

KINGSLEY

We're going through the plasma cover.
Hang on.

236 **EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD UP TO PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - DUSK** 236

The Humvee enters the cloud --

237 **EXT. SPACE** 237

Channing and Ben are at the edge of the Eater's outer rims --

CHANNING'S SEARCHER dives in, glowing electromagnetic tentacles all around her --

CHANNING HOLOVID

I'm right here...

CHANNING'S POV: Multiscreen, with the eater's outer coils, and the graphic display of her bomb route and the estimate time to the drop counting down --

CHANNING HOLOVID (CONT'D)

Forty seconds --

238 **EXT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - DUSK** 238

The rain is lighter, the weather almost clear as the Humvee screeches to a stop outside the huge dome.

Kingsley, Amy, Berger and McManus pile out, lugging the radio equipment. Amy looks down, sees the surreal vision of the IONIZED CLOUD below, blanketing the Center.

KINGSLEY

Come on!

She joins him as they rush off --

239 **INT. KECK OBSERVATORY - DUSK** 239

Berger and McManus work manically --

KINGSLEY

How much time?

AMY

(checks her watch)

Thirty seconds!

Kingsley's connecting the radio equipment to the main control console while Amy frantically punches in some keys --

The huge telescope WHIRRS to life --

240 **EXT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - DUSK** 240
The dome rotates into position --

241 **INT. KECK OBSERVATORY - DUSK** 241
They work frenziedly to connect to the system --

KINGSLEY
Come on, come on --

BERGER
Okay, go!

Kingsley barks into the mike --

KINGSLEY
Ben, Channing, can you hear me? Come
in, for God's sake!

242 **EXT. SPACE** 242
Channing's searcher is right at the edge of the Eater --

CHANNING'S POV: The COUNTDOWN DISPLAY is at ten seconds, rapidly
counting down to zero --

243 **INT. KECK OBSERVATORY - DUSK** 243
Kingsley desperately hollers into the mike --

KINGSLEY
Channing! Ben! Come in!!!

244 **EXT. SPACE** 244
The DISPLAY's counting down while --

Channing's searcher is at the rim of the Eater --

EATER
You will see, Channing. You will
witness the beauty of immortality, the
bliss of being blended.

BEN

Watches from his cockpit, darting away from

BOLTS OF ENERGY which coil out from the Eater, snarling at his
spacecraft --

244 CONTINUED:

244

ON SCREEN, Channing's Hologrid face, concentrated and now juddering from the forces around her Searcher --

BEN

Channing --

KINGSLEY (O.S.)

(crackling)

Ben, Channing, are you there!?!

BEN

Kingsley?

245 **EXT. SPACE**

245

The EATER spins, its tentacle sizzling as --

246 **EXT. EARTH**

246

Seen from space: The energy tentacle over the Pacific starts moving slightly, and --

247 **EXT. BIG ISLAND - DUSK**

247

Again, seen from space: the tentacle sitting on the Space Center starts inching away, heading for THE KECK --

248 **EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DUSK**

248

The forests around the Center are pummelled with lightning and rain as the energy funnel moves up the mountain --

249 **INT. CONTROL ROOM, SPACE CENTER - DUSK**

249

Arno and the others watch as the storm lifts, the clouds and electrical charges swirling away --

AIDE

What's happening?

Arno looks at it, dumbfounded --

ARNO

It's going after Kingsley.

250 **EXT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - DUSK**

250

Which is spot on, as the clouds and the lightning barrel in --

251 **INT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - DUSK**

251

Amy's hitting buttons, positioning the telescope, locking onto an image of the Eater and of Ben and Channing's crafts.

KINGSLEY

Thank God! Ben, listen to me. Abort the drop. Do you understand? Abort. Don't let Channing deliver her package.

INTERCUT WITH BEN

BEN

What are you talking about?

KINGSLEY

It would wipe us all out. Do you understand what I'm saying?

BEN

You sure about this?

KINGSLEY

Yes. Just get Channing out of there--

BEN

Channing, you getting this?

252 **EXT. SPACE**

252

Channing's Searcher banks away from the Eater --

CHANNING HOLOVID

I hear you.

INTERCUT WITH KINGSLEY

BEN (O.S.)

Kingsley, we're --

A MASSIVE thunder blast rocks the center as furious lightning slaps the dome --

Cutting off the radio link.

KINGSLEY

Ben? BEN?!?

He looks at Amy -- they're alone now.

253 **EXT. SPACE**

253

Two lone craft now, in the Eater's realm --

(CONTINUED)

EATER

Channing, you are moving away.

(beat, no answer)

Channing?

WITH CHANNING

Her multiscreen display show Ben and various views of the Eater--

BEN (O.S.)

We need to get it to move away, to
move out to a safe distance. I've got
some barium canisters, maybe we can
use them to --

CLOSER on one of the screens: Channing's focusing on THE MOON.

CHANNING HOLOVID

Ben. I know what to do.

WITH BEN

BEN

What?

CHANNING HOLOVID

I know what to do. You need to turn
back now.

BEN

What are you doing?

CHANNING HOLOVID

Just trust me and go. Please.

254 **EXT. SPACE**

254

CHANNING'S SEARCHER streaks away from the Eater -- and heads
towards THE MOON.

EATER (O.S.)

Channing. Where are you going?
You'll soon be beyond effective
transfer range. I don't want to risk
any data loss.

WITH CHANNING

CHANNING HOLOVID

You said you wanted to understand. Do
you?

EATER

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

254 CONTINUED:

254

CHANNING HOLOVID
Then you have to come with me.

255 **EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DUSK**

255

With the storm lifting, Arno and the others emerge hesitantly, to SEE

FORKING STABS OF ELECTRICAL FEROCITY tracing down through clearing skies, converging on the mountaintop, the tentacle leading up into the sky and back to --

THE EATER

Now heading towards the moon --

256 **INT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA - DUSK**

256

The storm's still thundering outside, all the screens are down and displaying static.

Kingsley, frustrated as hell, shouts into the radio as Berger and McManus do their best to fix it -- to no avail.

KINGSLEY
Ben! Channing! Come in!

257 **EXT. SPACE**

257

The eater's now headed behind the moon.

WITH BEN

CHANNING HOLOVID
Ben, you should go now.

BEN
I want you to come back with me.

CHANNING HOLOVID
No --

BEN
Six seconds! I can download you back here in six seconds. I've got the drive on board, it's all set to go.

CHANNING HOLOVID
Ben...

BEN
Set the timer sequence, let the computer finish the job --

CHANNING HOLOVID

I can't risk it. You know that.

BEN

Let the Goddam computer do it and come back. Come home with me.

CHANNING HOLOVID

And then what? Live like this? A brain in a box?

BEN

It's still you. Look at us, we're talking, aren't we? We can still be together --

CHANNING HOLOVID

No, we can't, lover, you know that. We can't be together. Not really.

(beat)

I'm dead, Ben.

BEN

You're not dead --

CHANNING HOLOVID

I am. But you're not. And you've got the rest of your life to enjoy, you've got Mia to enjoy, and believe me, I'd give anything to be there with you both... anything. But not like this.

BEN

Channing --

CHANNING HOLOVID

You have to move on and live your life, Ben. You can't do it with me sitting in a flatscreen on the kitchen shelf, looking over you... It just wouldn't be fair to you, or to Mia... Look after for me, will you?

(beat)

I love you.

BEN

I love you too.

CHANNING HOLOVID

I gotta go.

BEN reaches out to touch her Hologid face --

And she dives in --

BEN

Sees the hourglass shape with bits of mass trickling down it, and Channing's SEARCHER in the maelstrom --

On his Hologrid screen, CHANNING's face, now concentrating, shaking from the forces as it warps and vibrates, and then VANISHES --

BEN

NO!!!

CHANNING'S SEARCHER

Dives in towards the harsh luminosity --

And deeper still, into a swollen cathedral of soaring magnetic towers, impossible perspectives, wrenching structures --

CHANNING'S POV: MULTISCREEN, showing her Hologrid, The Eater, its Hologrid simulation, all of it bouncing around, shuddering--

EATER

Channing, what are you doing?

CHANNING HOLOVID

I'm coming to you. Forever. As promised.

And CHANNING dives in deeper, banking into the funnel --

Turbulent knots of magnetic strands slam into her, static electricity crawling all over her shell --

CHANNING'S POV: Multiscreen, including a heads up display which pops up, showing "ION RESERVE".

CHANNING HOLOVID (cont'd)

I'm sorry...

The Ion Reserve display rises up to its maximum level --

THE SEARCHER blasts away with a final push --

CHANNING'S POV: The black hole finally appears, the bull's-eye disk bristling with eating brilliance, storms wracking it --

The SEARCHER at blistering speed now --

CHANNING's Hologrid face starts warping --

IMAGES and MEMORIES from her mind flood in, confused, warped, jumbled --

She hangs on --

258 CONTINUED: (2)

258

Slamming down into the disk, skirting the ergosphere's bulge,
into the rim of the BLACK HOLE --

CLOSE on CHANNING's Hologrid face, now at extreme stress, teeth
gritting, skin stretching --

CHANNING HOLOVID (cont'd)

Aaaaah!

THE SEARCHER

spits out the ANTIMATTER bomb which trails down into the edge of
the furious disk...

...and explodes.

Gargantuan. Gamma rays course out, matter fizzes, magnetic
fields lose their anchoring and go haywire, shooting away at the
speed of light --

CHANNING'S POV: darkness, beyond all night -- and at its core,
glimmering hot light. She hurtles, spinning into it, out of
control --

BEN'S SEARCHER

zooms away, just clearing cover of the moon as, behind him

A HUGE SIZZLING CORONA of bristling light erupts from the core of
the Eater --

259 **EXT. SPACE CENTER, MAUNA KEA - DUSK**

259

Arno and the gathered crowd look up to see --

THE MOON's rim erupting, blazing with furious radiance, a titanic
explosion haloed in vibrant colors --

260 **INT. KECK OBSERVATORY - DUSK**

260

Berger and McManus are fiddling with the computers, trying to
bring them to life while Kingsley, paces around, wired --

KINGSLEY

What are we doing? Cowering here like
maggots. She's going to do it, I know
it -- she's going to do it, and we're
going to miss it!

AMY

Kingsley, you can't --

(CONTINUED)

260 CONTINUED:

260

KINGSLEY

Don't you see? Nothing else will ever compare to this. Ever. And we're going to miss it.

He heads for the door. Amy grabs hold of him --

AMY

Don't go out there.

A beat. He looks into her eyes.

KINGSLEY

I can't miss this.

And she lets go, watching him head for the door. She goes to follow him, but Berger holds her back as Kingsley opens the door, the storm blasting in, and steps out and into --

261 **EXT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA**

261

The storm is still pounding the mountain as Kingsley emerges from the doorway, braving the whipping wind and the rain. Shielding his eyes, he looks up to see

THE MOON, hanging halfway up to the zenith in a troubled sky.

Faint twitches of light stir at the edge of the moon's crescent--

KINGSLEY

Come on! COME ON!!!

And then it lights up --

THE EXPLOSION, a huge burnt yellow corona lighting up the moon's rim --

KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

(roaring with supreme elation)

Good girl! GOOD GIRL!!!

262 **EXT. SPACE**

262

The EATER, the MOON and the EARTH -- as the Eater erupts, its tentacle that was reaching from behind the moon all the way down to Mauna Kea, is cut --

The tentacle fizzles like a fuse, falling to earth --

263 **EXT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA**

263

SEEN FROM ABOVE -- the tentacle is SCREAMING DOWN at the mountain peak, rushing down --

(CONTINUED)

263 CONTINUED:

263

Heading straight for Kingsley who stands there, arms up, pounding the air in elation, oblivious to it til it's too late --

KINGSLEY'S POV: The descending cone of energy, a circle collapsing inward in a spray of brightening yellow-green --

THE ENERGY WAVE

slams into the peak in a huge, obliterating FLASH --

264 **INT. KECK OBSERVATORY**

264

Berger lets go of Amy who rushes to the door --

She's about to open it when a MASSIVE EXPLOSION rocks the observatory, sending her flying back --

Then, silence.

She recovers, looks at Berger and McManus -- all three are shellshocked. It hits her. She staggers to the door, huge worry etched on her face, and opens the door --

265 **EXT. KECK DOMES, PEAK OF MAUNA KEA**

265

-- and steps out to find the whole area around the observatory decimated, nuked, Tunguska style.

And no sign of Kingsley...

266 **EXT. SPACE**

266

BEN'S SPACECRAFT orbits the moon in silence.

BEN sits in his lone cockpit, taking in the dreamy scene before him. A VOICE crackles on his radio.

HILL (O.S.)

Aurora to Knowlton. Come in, Dr Knowlton.

It takes him a beat before he decides to answer.

BEN

Knowlton to Aurora. I'm... I'm still here.

267 **INT. AURORA SHUTTLE**

267

HILL

That was some light show you put on there, Dr Knowlton.

267 CONTINUED:

267

BACK WITH BEN

BEN

You can thank my wife for that.
(beat, to himself)
She always knew how to light up a
room.

HILL (O.S.)

I'm guessing you still need a ride
home.

BEN

(beat)
Yeah. I've just got one more thing to
do here.

268 **EXT. SPACE**

268

BEN's spacecraft orbits around the gleaming moon, away from Earth
and around to the far side --

THE MOON'S FAR SIDE

It's scorched, its dark skin liquefied, in stark contrast to the
magical near side he was just orbiting. Clouds trail across its
face, outgassing from the melted rock.

BEN

Takes in this incredible sight in stunned silence. Then he tears
his eyes away from it and scans the dark sky around it,
searching...

Finding nothing.

Quietly, he nods to himself. Acceptance.

BEN

Aurora, this is Knowlton. I'm coming
home...

269 **EXT. LANDING STRIP, DESERT - DAY**

269

The Aurora is parked behind them as Ben and its crew make their
way to a thunderous reception.

Mia appears from between the throng of adults and rushes to her
father, who lifts her up and hugs her real right.

270 **EXT. SPACE**

270

Dark, forbidding. Silent.

(CONTINUED)

270 CONTINUED:

270

CHANNING'S POV: Multiscreen. One showing HER FACE, buffeted and contorted by the forces around her; Another showing the distorted space-time she's rushing through --

And out of nowhere, CHANNING'S SEARCHER shoots out, emerging from an unseen fold --

And into a festival of gaudy light.

CHANNING'S POV: Multiscreen. One of them shows her face. The other shows the space around her --

AIRY CITIES hang in black space. Weird constructions rotate. In the distance hangs a yellow-green star, too large, but warm.

Wonders to explore.

CHANNING'S POV: Multiscreen, but we MOVE IN on the one showing her face, taking it all in.

She smiles.

What better heaven for an astronaut...

FADE OUT

THE END