DEEP IMPACT

WRITTEN BY
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Deep, dark. Stars, distant planets, silence. The universe spreading out before us in all of it's terrifying mystery. Inviting, seductive. The dark edge of an infinite lethal precipice daring us to jump.

It BLURS. OUT OF FOCUS. And back. Brilliant, SHARP. The soft CLICK of a SHUTTER. It hangs open for an eternity. Then, CLOSES. The WHINE of film advancing. We're in a --

STATE PARK IN VIRGINIA - NIGHT

With a pretty girl, SARAH, no more than fourteen, taking photos of the night sky through her small telescope. She's surrounded by a dozen other telescopes, three or four feet long, reflectors and refractors.

TEENAGERS, a few adults, all take pictures of the night sky using cameras attached to their telescopes. The SHUTTERS open, close. The camera motors ADVANCE.

The teacher, MR. PERRY, supervises. WE MOVE TO:

LEO BIEDERMAN, whose interest in the sky is almost equal to his interest in Sarah.

LEO
Matt Sheperd?

Sarah doesn't look up from her telescope.

SARAH
He asked me. It's just a party. He's nice.

LEO
To you maybe...

PERRY
What's the bright one?

Perry, behind Leo. Leo returns to his telescope.

(CONTINUED)
LEO
Mizar, it's a double star.

PERRY
And the one next to it?

LEO
Alcor.

PERRY
And the one next to that?

Leo stares through the telescope, hesitates. Finally...

LEO
I don't know.

SARAH
It's Megrez.

LEO
No it's not.

SARAH
You said you didn't know.

LEO
I know where Megrez is. I'm talking about the other thing.

He stands up for Perry to take a look. So does Sarah, through her telescope.

LEO (CONT'D)
South, about ten degrees.

Leo can't help but glance down as Sarah's jeans part from her lower back when she leans over the telescope.

PERRY
(eye in the viewer)
Probably a satellite.

LEO
(distracted)
Huh?

As Perry starts to walk away.

PERRY
(an afterthought)
Take a picture and send it to Dr. Wolf.

SARAH
It's Megrez.

(CONTINUED)
LEO
It's not Megrez.

Leo looks through his telescope at this distant light, SNAPS the shutter, and --

THE SCREEN GOES BLACK.

REMOTE OBSERVATORY - NIGHT

And then, the black begins to OPEN. A platform moving, dim white running lights glide along the smooth circular sides of the massive dome above us.

(CONTINUED)
A huge telescope swings slowly into place beneath a crystal clear night sky.

SUPERIMPOSED ON SCREEN, A SINGLE WORD: "SKYWATCH"

Silhouetted against the brilliant stars, a man, plumes of white breath escaping into the bitter desert darkness, MARCUS WOLF. He releases the telescope from its clamps. LOOKS DOWN at the mirror as it swings into position. Wolf steps off, walks back to the --

FLICKS off the white running lights as he goes, bathing the scene in red. Studies the sky on a large computer (no one looks through an eyepiece anymore). He picks up an envelope leaning against the monitor. In it, photographs of the stars and a group shot, Perry and his kids. Leo and Sarah hold up a sign: LEE HIGH SCHOOL ASTRONOMY CLUB. Wolf grabs a slice of congealing pizza from a picked-over Domino's box, shuffles the kids' photos. Not much of interest. Stops at one. A beat. Turns it over, finds the scrawled coordinates indicating its location in the sky. Intrigued, he walks back into --

Controls the telescope with the kind of simple buttons you find on a hospital bed: Up, Down, Left, Right. The huge motors GRIND as the telescope moves.

The sky changes above us as he jogs back to --

The image on the monitor rotates, LOCKS into place. He compares the screen to the photo. Smiles.

WOLF
Hello, do I know you? ...where are you going in such a hurry...?

Taps in a command, the cursor squares on one area of the image, ENLARGES. He stares, enters the ascension and declination directions and observation time. Numbers race by, trajectories, speed. Finally...

WOLF (CONT'D)
...oh shit...

Drops his slice of pizza into the trash, swings around to his open laptop. Double clicks on his AOL folder.

The familiar AOL gateway graphic POPS up.
The modem CLICKS on, a DIALTONE, followed by rapid DIALING. He rolls back to the mainframe, hunts around for an empty disk, slaps it in, begins the download.

The modem SQUAWKS. A BUSY SIGNAL. The modem disconnects then CLICKS alive again. Dials the back-up number as Wolf EJECTS the downloaded disk from the mainframe. Wheels back to his portable, just in time to be met by...

VOICE (VO)
All circuits are busy, please try your call again later...

The modem CLICKS off, the screen returns to the AOL gateway.

WOLF
Perfect...

He grabs a manilla envelope, quickly addresses it to: "CAROLYN SHOEMAKER Ph.D. Department of Planetary Sciences, University of Arizona, Tucson." Finds the photo, checks the back for Leo's name. Where the disk label has a blank space, he writes "WOLF-BIEDERMAN" --

OBSERVATORY - NIGHT
A battered Jeep Wrangler. Wolf leaps in, ROARS off down the mountain. The observatory looms behind him.

TRUCK - NIGHT
A trucker, MCCLOUD, in the cab of a semi, a six-pack of Jolt Colas on the seat, the RADIO BLARING country.

WOLF'S CAR - NIGHT
Wolf listens to Puccini. The Jeep speeds around the snowy mountain curves shakily as he attempts to dial his portable cellular phone and stay on the road.

TRUCK - NIGHT
Puccini collides with Garth Brooks as McCloud guzzles his Jolts. A long cigarette ash dangles from his lip.

WOLF'S CAR - NIGHT
Wolf drives. The phone held to his ear. A distant RINGING.

(CONTINUED)
5.

CONTINUED:

WOLF
...come on...come on...

And finally, a voice answers.

WOMAN (VO)
You have reached the Department of
Planetary Sciences. If you know
the extension number of the person
you are trying to reach, enter it
now...

Wolf holds the phone down in front of him, trying to dial
the numbers, steer, and keep an eye on the road all at
once. Dialing wins out.

TRUCK - NIGHT

The cigarette ash fills the screen. We know it's going to
drop. We wonder when...

MCLOUD
...Oh fuck...!

His hand dances wildly, searching for the hot ash.

A MONTAGE OF ACCELERATING IMAGES

Wolf's Jeep rounds the bend in the wrong lane. McCloud's
hand digs between his legs, the ash burns his fingers as
Wolf's lights BLIND him. Wolf SCREAMS. McCloud YANKS the
wheel, the semi SKIDS.

MCLOUD
...Jesus...!

The collision is a ballet of destruction, the drama of two
bodies trying to occupy the same space at the same time.

The mass of the truck dominates the Jeep. The Jeep's small
frame has nowhere to go but back into itself. Abstractly,
this is sculpture, at the moment, this is death.

Flying glass is everywhere. The Jeep's canvas roof SHREDS
and flails. Its engine pushes the steering column up into
the cab. The semi shoves the Jeep up and through the
guardrail, twisting metal and wood BURSTING out into space.

The Jeep SURGES end over end, down the side of the mountain,
towards the snowy woods, a hundred yards below.

The MANILLA ENVELOPE WITH THE COMPUTER DISK soars out of
the rags that were the Jeep's roof. For a moment it lands
at the foot of a snowy evergreen. An EXPLOSION and a
massive rush of air send it further into the wintery
forest.
ON THE ROAD ABOVE - NIGHT

McCloud falls from the truck cab, drags himself up, stumbles to the edge of the cliff, picking his way through the strewn glass and metal. Grabs a roadsign for support, blood runs down his face. He stares through the twisted guardrail down into the canyon at the burning wreckage until:

A second EXPLOSION drives him back from the edge and we PULL AWAY. Finally able to read the large yellow roadsign lit by the fire below..."Watch For Falling Rocks."

DISSOLVE TO:

A title is superimposed on screen:

WOLF-BIEDERMAN MINUS TWO YEARS, FIVE MONTHS, NINE DAYS, THREE HOURS.

MOUNTAIN NEAR TELESCOPE - DAY

A brilliant summer day, hot, bright. Two state highway trucks are parked, orange cones, warning signs. A SUPERVISOR takes a drink from a greasy water cooler perched on the tailgate. Walks past the caged windows of a parked Department of Corrections bus. Crosses the road to the repaired guardrail and the roadside sign above it, "Watch for Falling Rocks". Yells below.

SUPERVISOR
Three o'clock. Let's go...

His voice CARRIES US DOWN the rocky hillside to the canyon floor below where a YOUTH OFFENDERS PRISON CREW, rough Teenagers in orange jumpsuits, pick up trash. The crew looks up the hill, starts back for the road.

A SURLY TEEN GANG GIRL turns to go, spies one last piece of weathered manila envelope tucked under a pile of decomposing branches and leaves. Spears it. Brings it up to her jam-bag. Stops. A name, faded, almost illegible.

Pulls it off her stick, brings it closer. An address:

"CAROLYN SHOEMAKER Ph.D. Department of Planetary Sciences, University of Arizona, Tucson."

CUT TO:

OMIT

LIMESTONE CLIFFS - NIGHT

The headlight of a helicopter settles down into the swirling dust of a massive construction sight. Hundreds of workers, train tracks, massive drills, four story earthmovers. Entrekin hops out, shakes the hand of a hard-hatted man.
ENTREKIN
No excuses, Parnell, all I want to know is are we going to be ready on time?

They walk out into the huge site, dodging heavy equipment.

FOREMAN
We'll be ready.
Lunch in a garden restaurant. JENNY LERNER 29, seated with her mother ROBIN, 55. Robin has a slight air of bohemia; if the women her age in the restaurant are dressed for business, she's more relaxed. She's also a lot more drunk. Jenny is lovingly concerned. Instead of looking at her daughter, though, Robin studies her watch.

ROBIN
At this moment, right now, the pretty little girls, the twins, oh what are their names? His sister's grandchildren...

JENNY
Emma and Susanna. Mother...

ROBIN
They're walking down the aisle, spreading flowers, dropping the rose petals, everyone is smiling at them.

JENNY
Mom, is this really a good idea?

ROBIN
Yes. And now she's walking down the aisle, and she stands beside him, and the priest...

JENNY
Judge, it's not a church wedding, mother.

ROBIN
And the Judge says, blab blah blah, sickness and health, blah blah blah, do you, Jason Lerner, take Chlorine...

JENNY
Chloe, her name is Chloe.

ROBIN
Of course it is. And Jason is saying, lie lie lie lie lie, 'till death do us blah blah blah blah... And she says yes and he says yes and it's kissy kissy kissy and congratulations, Jenny...

The weight of what is happening hits Jenny. She can't believe it.

JENNY
No...

(CONTINUED)
ROBIN  
(you understand, don't you?)  
That's right, the nuclear family just exploded.

JENNY  
As of this moment, I now have a stepmother who is two years older than I am.

ROBIN  
After fifteen years... Fifteen years, I can't believe how much it hurts me... Jenny, fifteen years, you'd think I'd have been past the pain, Jenny, it hurts me so much I'm embarrassed.

Jenny studies her mother. She realizes something.

JENNY  
When was the last time you slept with him?

ROBIN  
That's none of your business.  
(after a considered moment)  
The hell with my deadline. Have a Martini.

Jenny signals the Waiter for the bill. He brings it over.

JENNY  
It'd be a lot of fun to get drunk with you, Mom, but...

ROBIN  
(you don't have to say it)  
I know, I know, I know.

JENNY  
I'm sorry about this.

ROBIN  
We'll get over it. I love you.

JENNY  
I love you, too.

She pays the bill in cash.

ROBIN  
Let me.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

JENNY
No. Goodbye, Mom.

And Jenny leaves.

AT THE DOOR OF THE RESTAURANT: She goes to the Maitre d' and gives her a twenty.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Call a cab for my mother, would you, Sue?

MSNBC RECEPTION - DAY

Jenny comes in from lunch, in a hurry. Behind the receptionist is a television tuned perpetually to the news. The anchor is TIM URBANSKI, 46.

TIM
Tragedy struck today as a charter aircraft carrying an Army unit returning from duty in Japan crashed this morning into the waters of Puget Sound outside of Seattle...

MSNBC STUDIO - DAY

Jenny walks into the desks behind Urbanski's overlit anchor desk. It's half-set, half-work area. We see Urbanski's back, the cameras pointed at us, the blazing lights. Jenny dumps her purse into a desk drawer, the preoccupied researcher, BOBBY RHUE. Bobby gets up and walks with Jenny.

BOBBY
Would you sign a petition to get a new coffee machine?

JENNY
Would you call every hospital between Washington and Baltimore to see if anyone has admitted a Holly Rittenhouse in the last few days? Where's Stuart?

BOBBY
They started early today.
(what he wants to talk about)
The coffee is bitter. I hear that's why Bob Campbell is leaving.

JENNY
(this is important)
Bob Campbell is leaving?
BOBBY
I hear he's going to San Diego to be an anchor.

JENNY
And you told me...

BOBBY
Because I have faith in you, and because...

He gives her the petition.

JENNY
Don't forget the hospitals.

BOBBY
I never forget anything.

She signs the petition on the run and hustles past the windows of the Day Care Center where toddlers play.

Stops at the glass-walled conference room overlooking the studio floor. Tries her best to enter quietly.

The staff meeting's already in progress. A long table filled with an odd mix of impeccably attired and perfectly coifed on-air personalities interspersed with casually dressed couldn't give-a-shit senior staff. The meeting is run by STUART CALEY, late fifties, holding a piece of fax paper disdainfully. Behind him is a wall of monitors tuned to competing news outlets. Some have a large Starbucks coffee, some have Evian.

STUART
White House Press office says that Secretary of the Treasury Rittenhouse is resigning because his wife is sick.

That illicits a round of cynical hoots. IRA MOSKATEL is business news, 40's.

IRA
Sick, my ass!

Jenny squeezes into an empty seat on the outer ring of the room. BETH STANLEY, 40's, attractive, the senior White House correspondent, smiles back at Jenny, shakes her head in mock disapproval.

STUART
So who passed Rittenhouse the hemlock?

(CONTINUED)
BETH
AFL-CIO wanted him off the Council of Economic Advisors for not supporting the Pension Bill. President's going to need Labor next fall.

MARIANNE
State's still fuming about the Trade Office screw-up at the G-7.

MARIANNE DUCLOS: English, International news desk. JEFF WORTH, 50's.

WORTH
Pentagon's been unhappy with his readiness reduction proposals.

BETH
Greenspan dislikes him.

STUART
Christ, who didn't this guy piss off?

IRA
(grins)
No wonder the wife's sick.

That gets a few laughs. Jenny cuts in from the back.

JENNY
She's not sick, she's a drunk.

STUART
How do you know?

But she's not going down easy, stands her ground.

JENNY
I had breakfast with Mike Woodward over at Treasury.
(her notes)
Mrs. Rittenhouse started drinking a couple of years ago when her husband had a series of affairs. Stepped it up last summer when their son died of leukemia. Word at Treasury is she's got liver damage, may even need a transplant.

That shuts them up. Beth sneaks a smile back to Jenny.

BETH
You want to do something on the price the wives pay?
That's tired.

STUART
Look into it, Beth. What else, Ira?

As Ira begins his report, Beth looks back to Jenny, whispers. We listen to both conversations at once.

BETH
Mike Woodward, wife, three kids?

JENNY
He's been asking me out for months, so I let him have a breakfast and hit him up on Rittenhouse.

BETH
Why would I give up the White House for a graveyard weekend slot?

JENNY
Not for you, for me.

Beth stares at the younger, attractive Jenny. Smiles.

BETH
No. We'll talk about this later. (answers Stuart) Very calm, the President will be back from Camp David tomorrow.

STUART
Ira, business news?

Jenny isn't giving up on Beth yet.
JENNY
Beth...

BETH
Keep working on Rittenhouse.
(smiles)
Maybe Mike's available for dinner.

IRA MOSKATEL
A lot of market activity in Florida construction right now.

STUART
That's not a headline.

IRA
You asked.

STUART
Pentagon?

WORTH
Internationally deployed units continue to be recalled home. At this rate, everybody'll be back in ten months. Congress the is going nuts, rumors are the President plans to cut the Pentagon budget in half.

STUART
International: Marianne?

MARIANNE
Europe calm, Pakistan bloody, Japan elections, Nigerian famine.

BETH (CONT'D)
Try to find Mrs. Rittenhouse, see if you can get her to do a stand-up. The good wife, loving kids, throw in the family pooch if they've got one. Take a cameraman from the pool.

STUART
Lead with the Pentagon again, follow with the famine.
(looks around)
Jenny, get some famine statistics. Maybe we can do a world hunger series.

BETH
She's on Rittenhouse for me.

JENNY
I can do both, Stuart.

That gets a smile and a head shake from Beth.

STUART
Great. Okay, that's it.

Everyone stands, gathers papers. Jenny dogs Beth out into:

(CONTINUED)
JENNY
Beth...

BETH
(laughs/smiles)
Oh god, Jenny, please... Look, this is how it works. You've done your two years in research, now do three as a segment producer, five on air doing domestic features, a couple as a Bureau Chief in some cholera ridden hellhole, and then, I'll quit if they don't give you a weekend anchor shot.

Jenny stares at her, uncertain.

JENNY
Are you protecting me, or just holding me back?

BETH
(smiles)
Yes. Rittenhouse tape and text by four, we'll drop in my reverses for the five o'clock.

Beth walks into the Day Care center. We see her lift her daughter through the window.

BETH (CONT'D)
Caitlin! Hello Sweet Pea...


JENNY
Stuart...

He's on the move to his office, reading, barely looks up.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Bob Campbell's Saturday slot is open. I hear he's leaving. I'd like to sub for him.

STUART
Anchor?

JENNY
I think I'm ready.

STUART
I don't.

(CONTINUED)
He disappears into his office. She crosses to her desk.

INT. NASA SHUTTLE PREP BUILDING - NIGHT

A shuttle surrounded by gantries, and men and women in furious preparation to send the rocket into space.

A new point of view, taking in the scene. TRACK from the new point of view.

ON THE ASTRONAUTS

We HEAR the echo of old cowboy boots on the hard concrete floor.

This should be like Norma Desmond's return to the Paramount Stage in "Sunset Boulevard". While the Astronauts are suspicious, all around them the older NASA hands stop what they're doing, wherever they are, and begin to applaud.

PARTENZA
That's him.

SIMON
Unbelievable.

BAKER
How long has he been out of the saddle?

MONASH
They don't trust us without him.

TULCHINSKY
We should give him a chance.

MONASH
And if he blows it?

TULCHINSKY
You have a point...

RETURN TO THE MAN'S POV

We HOLD BACK and SPURGEON TANNER enters frame. Tanner walks proudly into the applause, knowing that to acknowledge the support of the old hands is to give them encouragement. We come around him as he walks ahead to greet a man in the crowd who is coming out to him, MITCH HEFTER, in his sixties, another old engineer.

HEFTER
How have you been, Fish?

(CONTINUED)
TANNER
I didn't know how much I missed this place until just now. It's good to be back.

HEFTER
I was against it. But they need your help.

TANNER
I know. Let's meet the crew.

And he walks forward, and from a safe distance we see him shaking hands with everyone, and we see that Monash is reluctant, and Tanner knows it.

(CONTINUED)
A new face, SHEILA MARTIN, African-American, late-30's, at the anchor desk. We hear and see her live on the various monitors scattered throughout the room. Jenny and Bobby walk through the room.

BOBBY
I tried the hospitals, no Rittenhouse...

JENNY
The rehab hospitals?

BOBBY
I know my job. I called everyone from Florida to Connecticut.

JENNY
Is there a maid, is there a driver?

BOBBY
Patricia Ruiz, Rittenhouse's Secretary, was dropped from the payroll.

JENNY
(The first good news of the year)
I'll bet she's happy about that.

They reach her desk. Where we find, ERIC VENNEKOR, twenties, handsome. He's made himself comfortable at her desk, watching cartoons.
23B CONTINUED:

JENNY
Who are you?

ERIC
Eric Vennekor, your new cameraperson. The pool sent me over.

JENNY
Could you please get your feet off my desk.
(she grabs her coat and the remote and changes the channel)
Time to run.
(to Bobby)
You didn't happen to get Mrs...

BOBBY
Ruiz, you're meeting her for coffee,

ERIC
There's plenty of room in the van.

JENNY
Good. Follow me.
I'll take my car.
After I see Ruiz we go to Rittenhouse's place and either surprise him or find out what the maid knows. You grab a couple of pretty shots of the house, and I'll let Beth tell me what the story is.

ON TV: SENATOR BOXER in the Capitol.

BOXER (ON TV)
First the massive troop redeployments and now the cancellation of a second carrier. The President has been playing with the Treasury as though he doesn't have to answer to Congress, and I'm very disappointed.

BETH
The President was quick to respond.

INSERT PRESIDENT BECK

BECK
I am not canceling the carrier. I'm saying that there's new technology which would lower its construction costs and I want to give it more study.

ON TV: Beth is on her feet, asking him a follow-up question.

BETH
But what about the three billion dollars already committed to the ship?

BECK
We'll save it for a rainy day.

ON TV: Beth in front of the White House, a standard shot.

BETH
This is Beth Stanley, reporting from the White House.

They are watching Beth on the monitor.

BOBBY
You're getting a little too good at this.

JENNY
Come on.

And they go.
Jenny and MRS. RUIZ, a fifty-ish career secretary, a decent person, very wounded by something. Eric's leaning against the van smoking, parked illegally over by the steps. Office workers eat lunch outdoors in the warm weather.

RUIZ
I've been with the Secretary since he was Governor of Connecticut. I came with him to Washington. I moved here because I was dedicated to his career. I trusted the man. And then he fucked me.

JENNY
He what?

RUIZ
No... I didn't have sex with him... or I should say, I didn't have sex with him, but somebody sure did. And it was about to come out, so he resigned. But since I was hired from outside the government pool, I don't get conveyed to the next Secretary, so now I'm out a job. Because he couldn't keep his hands off of women.

JENNY
Do you have proof?

RUIZ
He thinks he was so clever. He had a private phone line installed in his office. Nobody else could answer it. I picked it up once, said "hello"... and it's nobody home. It rings, he shuts the door. Why not hang a sign?

JENNY
Do you have a name?

Ruiz balks. Her years of loyalty hard to shed.

RUIZ
This is what I get for talking to the press. I am selling my soul right now, I can feel it, I can feel it. I name a name and get someone into trouble.

(Continued)
JENNY
So you know her name?

RUIZ
Just her first name. Oh my God, I'm going to say it...
(a beat)
Ellie.

Jenny writes, suppresses a grin, this is great.

JENNY
Just Ellie? Nothing else?

RUIZ
I think the President knows her, too. I overheard the Secretary talking to him about her. Isn't Washington sick?

Jenny nods as if agreeing, but frankly, right now, Washington is pretty damn great.

RUIZ (CONT'D)
I almost feel sorry for him.

JENNY
Sorry for the man who cost you your job?

RUIZ
Thank you. That's a reality check I'm going to cash right now.
Half-million dollar homes on a beautiful cove by the bay. Huge trees, gravel lined drives, azaleas. Jenny and Eric climb out of a MSNBC van, look down the rolling lawn to a lovely brick Colonial.

ERIC
You drive like a maniac.

JENNY
Thank you.

ERIC
Have you ever seen a Scottish cameraman naked before 3:00 p.m.? It's a custom...

Eric grabs his camera gear. He follows Jenny down the lawn.

26A EXT. ON THE DOCK – DAY

LILY is a pretty ten year old, stuffing a sailbag.

JENNY
Hi.

LILY
Can I help you?

JENNY
We're looking for your mom.

LILY
My Mom's sick, she's not here.

Jenny studies the scene on the dock: duffel bags, travel gear, freeze dried food, several cases of ENSURE.

JENNY
I love boats. Looks like you're going on a long trip.

LILY
Uh huh.

JENNY
That's exciting. Where are you going?

ALAN RITTENHOUSE, a patrician in his fifties, comes out of the boat.

RITTENHOUSE
She's going up to the house. Lily, please.

(CONTINUED)
JENNY
Lily, what a pretty name. Jenny Lerner, MSNBC, Mr. Rittenhouse...

RITTENHOUSE
Lily, do as I say.

Eric shoulders the camera.

RITTENHOUSE (CONT'D)
What do you want from me?

JENNY
We want to talk to you about your resignation.

RITTENHOUSE
My wife is sick, she is in the hospital. This is why I resigned, everybody knows that.

JENNY
Sir, we can talk about your wife, or we can talk about Ellie.

RITTENHOUSE
Turn your camera off. If you want to talk, turn it off.

Jenny gives the okay to Eric. He puts it down.

JENNY
We know everything.

RITTENHOUSE
Nobody knows everything.

JENNY
We know about the secret phone line. The whispered calls to the President. A Secretary of the Treasury keeping his entire department in the dark about what he's really doing. A cover story about his resignation that's just been blown. You want me to keep going?

RITTENHOUSE
And you're just going to break it?

JENNY
That's what we do for a living. You keep secrets, we expose them. Democracy in action, sir.

(CONTINUED)
RITTENHOUSE

Congratulations, now you've got the biggest story in history. Good luck to you. Personally, I think it's a mistake to run it, but, hey, what the hell, why not? What difference does anything make anymore?

(beat)

I know you're just a Reporter, but you used to be a person, right? I wanted to be with my family. Can you understand that?

Rittenhouse turns away from Jenny and walks over to Lily who has been curiously watching the exchange. Rittenhouse takes Lily's arm and they quickly leave the dock together.
Jenny's driving her Honda, talks into a microcassette recorder as the sun sets over the mall.

JENNY
(figuring out the story, making notes)
Okay, so... It's obvious. The Secretary of the Treasury resigns because of a mistress named Ellie. The President knows about this. But why... the people... the Secretary of the Treasury... the President... whoa... the President of the United States has a girlfriend named Ellie, and the Secretary of the Treasury is pretending to have an affair with her, and he resigns... and the President buys him a yacht?
(she's got it, now she's pretending to be on air)
MSNBC learned today that a shocking sex scandal has rocked the White House and the Treasury Department. In the still unfolding drama, sources within the Treasury Department have confirmed...

BOOM! The recorder flies out of her hand and SMASHES against the window as her head WHIPS forward. She's been RAMMED from behind, looks in her rear view mirror.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Son of a bitch.

A dark domestic sedan, two men in the front seat. They RAM her again. She's not stupid, this is serious. She tries to speed up but the car ahead slows down. She tries to pass, but the car beside her won't move, its male passenger motions for her to pull over.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Oh no... Shit...

She pulls to the side of the road, the three escort cars surround her. A man in a grey suit opens her car door.

GREY MAN
If you would please, ma'am.

JENNY
Who the hell are you?

FBI badges. He points inside the sedan.

(CONTINUED)
GREY MAN

Please...

It's not a request. She steps out cautiously, he opens the passenger door of his sedan. She climbs in as a younger man hops in behind the wheel of her Honda.

(CONTINUED)
JENNY
You guys wouldn't have a warrant or anything, would you?

But nobody answers, nobody even looks at her as the convoy pulls away and disappears into the heavy traffic.

OMITTED

OMITTED

KITCHEN HALLWAY LATE - AFTERNOON

Jenny is brought down a long, oppressive concrete hallway, overhead pipes, conduit, ducts. Is lead into a --

HUGE UNDERGROUND INDUSTRIAL KITCHEN LATE - AFTERNOON

A few men are there, waiting. MORTON ENTREKIN steps forward, 40s, hip, Southern, shirtsleeves. The kitchen counters are covered with food from an interrupted luncheon clean-up.

ENTREKIN
Morton Entrekin, Ms. Lerner.

He offers his hand. She thinks about this, then takes it. Everyone is watching her, no one gives anything away. There's another few jars of that damned Ensure. What's going on?

JENNY
MSNBC... They know what I am working on... they expect from me and I think they should.

ENTREKIN
People knew about the Manhattan Project and they kept it secret.

JENNY
And that was just the creation of the atom bomb.

ENTREKIN
You do understand. Hundreds of thousands of people kept that secret. That's how we won World War Two. Thousands are keeping this secret.

JENNY
I'm a reporter.

ENTREKIN
With no concern for national security?
Jenny is thoroughly confused, trying desperately to figure out what he's talking about without revealing her ignorance. But he's not watching her, he's still waiting. An FBI agent picks luncheon meat off a large deli platter, eats. What the hell is going on?

The double doors BURST open and PRESIDENT BECK enters followed by Secret Service Agents. To say he enters doesn't quite explain it, his presence seems to proceed him, as if he's the dawn sun just breaking the horizon.

BECK
Ms. Lerner, Tom Beck. I understand you've come into a little information.

Jenny stands there as if slapped. Beck offers the smile that got him elected. Holy shit, the water's suddenly very deep.

ENTREKIN
Ms. Lerner was just expressing her lack of enthusiasm for matters of national security when journalist competitiveness is at stake.

Beck nods, seeming to agree with Jenny. The reasonable, understanding father, the legislative compromiser. Jenny's staring at him. He's not unaware of the effect he's having on her. She takes a deep breath, plays her only card.

JENNY
(fighting now to collapse in front of the man)
At this moment Mr. President, I am not interested in using Ellie to further my career.

When she says the word Ellie, the President studies her. He wants to speak to her as someone he can trust.

BECK
So what do you know about E.L.E.?

When Jenny hears the phrase E.L.E. something snaps into place. She realizes she has a card to play for the first time since she was taken here.

JENNY
I know you should have chosen a better cover story than a sick wife.

Beck looks unhappily to Entrekin.

(CONTINUED)
BECK
You see? What did I say?

Entrekin holds up his hands, guilty as charged.

BECK (CONT'D)
We always thought that the deadline for going public was the publication of the budget. We've spent more money than we could hide. But the budget comes out in two weeks. I don't suppose I can convince you to sit on this for two weeks?

JENNY
There's no such thing as two weeks in the news business.

BECK
And I can't appeal to your sense of what's in the nation's best interest.

JENNY
I always thought the truth was in the nation's best interest.

Beck and Entrekin look at each other.

ENTREKIN
Should we hold her?

BECK
What if we went public in forty-eight hours? That's doable, isn't it?

ENTREKIN
It'd be very difficult.

BECK
If she knows, how many days before The Post or CNN break the story? This was never going to be a secret as long as you wanted it to be, Morton.

(back to Jenny)
If you give us two days, you get second row center at the White House press conference. And from what I know about your career, that's a promotion.

She considers this. She has to play a big card.

JENNY
I want exclusivity.

(CONTINUED)
BECK
Now you listen to me, Ms. Lerner.
This is a Presidential favor. I'm letting you go because I don't want another headache and I'm trusting you because I know what this can do for your career. Somehow, we have each other over the same barrel. But who really has the power in this room?

He's scary, and they're eye to eye. But she is still strong enough for one last volley.

JENNY
I want the first question.

BECK
Want?

JENNY
May I? May I have the first question?

BECK
(the political pro)
See you on Tuesday, Ms. Lerner.
Jenny rushes into the newsroom, most of the desks are empty, save for a small news staff, the anchor out front, and a cleaning crew. She tosses her stuff down, throws herself in front of her computer, types in ELE.

BEEP...BEEP! The screen comes alive with hits. Paint companies, an exterminating outfit in Atlanta, an upholsterer in Boise, a website for Ella Fitzgerald.

She jumps to information on Ellesmere Island and it's snow blasted Eskimo settlements. Nothing's right.

She then has a thought and types in E.L.E. The search reveals a single hit: E.L.E. -- see University of California at Berkeley, Department of Paleontology.

JENNY
When does Paleontology have to do with anything?

Next hit -- Department of Paleontology. A list of subheadings: Invertebrate Paleontology, Vertebrate Paleontology, Oceanographic Prehistory, Hominid Paleontology (see Department of Anthropology), Extinction Studies. That stops her. She clicks on "Extinction Studies". Up comes a graphic with the dinosaurs and the comet, and the definition: E.L.E. -- Extinction Level Event.

She clicks the hot word, "Extinction" and up comes: "The act or fact of dying; death, decease, demise, dissolution, passing, quietus, rest." We're close on Jenny when we hear --

BETH
Hey, look who's working late.

Jenny is petrified, but covers.

JENNY
Hi.

(CONTINUED)
BETH
How're we doing on Rittenhouse?

It's Beth, carrying her daughter, Caitlin, briefcase slung over one shoulder. She's on her way home.

JENNY
I... Uh... No sign of his wife, not yet, we're working on it. We'll get her.

BETH
Is she missing?

JENNY
She's not available for comment.

BETH
I know it's a dull story ...

JENNY
Yeah ...

BETH
I'll find something more exciting for you next time.

JENNY
Great.

BETH
Are you okay?

JENNY
Yes.

BETH
Come to dinner with us?

JENNY
I have to meet my Father.

BETH
Then I'll see you tomorrow. Say goodnight, Caitlin...

CAITLIN
...'night...

What Beth hasn't seen is Jenny's computer screen: a full color and text encyclopedia page, illustrated dinosaurs, a comet, extinction.
A great old wood paneled bar. JASON LERNER is about sixty three; an international lawyer, serious and somewhat guarded. His relationship with his daughter is civil, and terrible. CHLOE WEBBER, his new wife, is just two years older than Jenny. She is not a joke, which makes this more painful. Of course she is lovely, but she is a serious person, too, not unlike his daughter.

JASON
Here she is. Jenny...
And Jenny comes into the room, looking like she just found out the world is coming to an end. The more deeply she stares into herself, the more her father and mother-in-law read this as hatred of them. The Waiter arrives.

WAITER
Would you like a drink?

JENNY
A big Martini, up, big.

JASON
I missed you yesterday. It hurt me very much that you didn't come to the wedding.

CHLOE
(making peach)
Jason, you promised. Jenny I wanted you to have something.

She hands her a blue box from Tiffany. Jenny stares at the box, as though she's never seen a present.

She gives him no reaction. Indicates another round for him and Chloe. The waiter leaves. Jenny handles the box without comprehension.

JASON
Jenny, you should open the present.

Jenny opens it numbly. Two pearl earrings. She shakes her head, but not about this.

CHLOE
You can always exchange them if you don't like them. I know this is hard, but I want you to be happy.

JENNY
Happy.

The drinks arrive. Jason lifts his glass. While Jason is talking, Jenny downs the Martini.

JASON
Alright. I want to forget about yesterday, and I want to say how important it is to me that we're together now.

But Jenny had finished her Martini in the first five words of the toast, and she's staring deep into herself.

JASON (CONT'D)
Are we going to have an evening or not?
CHLOE
I know you hate me. I know you want
to say something terrible to me. I
know you want to ask me what my major
is, or how long I've been driving, or
if my mother let's me cross the
street by myself. But my parents
were divorced too. You have to get
over it. Life goes on.

Jenny looks at her, and starts to smile, and then laughs to
herself.

JENNY
Life goes on.
(a beat)
Dad, you have to get back with Mom.
She's all alone in the world, and
she needs you.

JASON
Jenny, I got married yesterday.
(to Chloe)
I'm sorry for the way my daughter
is behaving.

CHLOE
(she's not happy)
It's not your fault.

JENNY
I have to go. I'm not a bad person.
I'm really not. I know you think I
am and I don't hate you. I have to
go.

Jenny gets up and leaves. We stay with Jason and Chloe.
She picks up the earrings.

(CONTINUED)
The press corps is in full force. Reporters every ten feet, each with a backdrop of the White House. We TRACK ALONG, hearing them all say essentially the same thing.

BRENT HUME
President Beck begins his address in fifteen minutes...

COKEY ROBERTS
The White House has maintained a complete blackout on the purpose of tonight's speech...

FRENCH REPORTER
Le President a demande ace que les televisions du monde entier...

AFRICAN REPORTER
Hotuba itatafsiriwa kwa lugha mia moja na ishirnini...

Jenny shoves her way through the tangle of reporters and cameras, makes her way slowly. Uncertain where to go.

BETH
Jenny...?

Beth coming through the crowd. Shocked to see Jenny.

BETH (CONT'D)
What are you doing here?

Beth stares down at Jenny's White House credentials.

(CONTINUED)
BETH (CONT'D)
Stuart sent you without telling me?

JENNY
(trapped)
No, I a... I was going to talk to you about this but...

BETH
(she's pissed)
If Stuart thinks he can push me out of the White House after all these years --

ENTREKIN
Ms. Lerner?

Morton Entrekin interrupts, takes Jenny's arm.

ENTREKIN (CONT'D)
Hi, Beth...

Pulls her to the front of the room. Beth is left behind, stunned. Watching them go. Jenny steals a look back.

ENTREKIN (CONT'D)
He'll find you for the first question, after that, you're on your own.

Entrekin rips a "Reserved" sign off a chair dead center. Plops the dazed Jenny into it and is gone. All around her, seasoned reporters stare; Hume, Roberts, Thomas, Lowenstall. But nobody's staring harder than Beth, taking her seat three rows back on the side.

STOFSKY
Ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen...please!

It's the Press Secretary, standing at the lectern in front of the White House seal, trying to get their attention.

STOFSKY (CONT'D)
The President will begin by addressing the nation. Please hold your questions until he's finished his remarks.

The room quiets as cameras swing to find President Beck and his entourage entering.

STOFSKY (CONT'D)
Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States.

(CONTINUED)
Still cameras WHIR, electronic flashes POP. Beck takes the stage, smiles warmly to the assembled.

BECK
Hello everybody.

ASST DIRECTOR
Ten seconds Mr. President...


ASST DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
Five...four...

Counts down the last three on his fingers.

BECK
Good evening. A few minutes ago, the United States Ambassadors to every country in the world told the leaders of those nations what I am about to tell you. It's complicated and it's going to take a little time, so I hope you'll bear with me and listen to what I have to say. A little over eight months ago two American astronomers, Marcus Wolf and Leo Biederman, working alone on a mountaintop in Arizona, saw something in the night sky that gave them great concern.

46A INT. BIEDERMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

The Biederman family is watching.

LEO
Nobody say anything.

BECK (ON TV)
They saw a comet, and the comet was, well, there was a remote possibility that the comet was on a path that could bring it into direct contact with the Earth.

47 MSNBC NEWSROOM - NIGHT

The President's on every monitor, but the newsroom EXPLODES. People leap for phones and computers, it's bedlam.

STUART
We need astronomers, astrophysicists, geologists, climatologists!

(CONTINUED)
IRA MOSKATEL
Where the hell is Science!?

MARIANNE
Paris, London, Tokyo, Tel Aviv...
everywhere, hell yes!

The CAMEP A roams through the chaos.

WORTH
Who was that guy at Berkeley, did
the Hale-Bopp stand-ups?

IRA MOSKATEL
And graphics, I need graphics!

(CONTINUED)
The President continues, teleprompter feeding him his words.

BECK

Now, we get hit every day by rocks and meteors, some of them are the size of cars and some of them the size of your hand. But the comet we discovered is the size of New York City from Central Park to the tip of the Island, about seven miles long. Put another way, the comet is larger than Mount Everest, and weighs five hundred billion tons.

The room stirs, reporters stare at each other. Jenny's rapt, she knew the punch line, but not the joke.

BECK (CONT'D)

Chances are, this thing will miss us, because comets aren't on railroad tracks, they're sliding and side-slipping through space. But this one is too big for us to just cross our fingers and hope it scoots on by. So tonight, I want to tell you what I can about what we're doing to take care of the comet before there's even a chance it might hit us. And if the grown-ups of the world don't mind, right now I want to talk to the children of the world.

Everyone watches as the speech continues. The BARTENDER reaches for a bottle of the oldest scotch on the shelf and starts to pour tall drinks without comment. A SMOKER reaches into his pocket and takes out a full pack of cigarettes. He blithely holds it open and EVERYONE at the bar reaches for one.

The President walks to a large monitor on stage with him. Projected on the TV, we see a NASA film about the comet.

BECK

Comets begin far out in space. They're what's left over from the creation of the solar system after the planets were formed, billions of years ago.

(MORE)
BECK (CONT'D)
These chunks of space debris are in an orbit around the sun, very much like our own, but every now and then; one of them is bumped, a bit like a billiard ball
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
on a pool table, and it gets knocked into a new orbit.

51 MSNBC NEWSROOM - NIGHT

People are screaming on the phones. A few are in shock, still watching the set, Bobby's one of them.

MARIANNE
We've got stand-ups on line; Beijing, Rome, San Paulo, Cairo, Berlin...
(yelling out)
Anybody know how big the one was that wiped out the dinosaurs!

A musician sets up a portable keyboard to begin composing, Worth frantically gives him instructions.

WORTH
Something majestic, mysterious, with a fanfare for intros and a theme for longer promos . . .

The CAMERA finds Stuart and Ira hunched over a computer monitor with a graphic artist working on a comet graphic.

STUART
It's hitting the goddamn earth!

IRA
That's what he's saying!

STUART
It'll scare the shit outta everybody!

52 NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The streets are alive with people, people pouring outside, some with binoculars and long lenses on their cameras, everyone looking up, to see the comet.

53 WHITE HOUSE PRESS ROOM - NIGHT

BECK
Now, if the comet passes around the sun and were to hold to it's present course, then sometime on August 16, 2000 there's a chance we might have an impact.

Jenny's sitting there with her notebook, what's she going to say when the time comes?

(CONTINUED)
BECK (CONT'D)
So for the past eight months, the United States and Russia have been building the largest spaceship ever constructed; it's being built in orbit around the earth. We call it the Messiah. I want to emphasize that some scientists argued that there was no reason to spend the time and money to intercept something that probably won't hit us, but we decided not to take that risk. And right now, a team of American astronauts, and one Russian, are at Cape Canaveral in Florida. In two months they will leave on the Shuttle to board the Messiah; this is the crew that will stop the comet.

THE MONITOR CUTS TO:

54 CANAVERAL SHUTTLE PREP BUILDING - NIGHT

Five men and one woman in new flight suits.

BECK
I'd like the world to meet some extraordinary people. First is Mission Commander Oren Monash. Commander, would you introduce us to your Team?

MONASH
It'd be an honor, sir. Executive Officer Andrea Baker, Navigator Mark Simon, Medical Officer Gus Partenza, from Russia, Nuclear Specialist Colonel Mikhail Tulchinsky, and Rendezvous Pilot Spurgeon Tanner.

BAKER has the relaxed confidence of a woman who has never failed at anything. SIMON is black, military. TULCHINSKY, being Russian, shows his life on his face, every woman, every smile, every heart-break.

ASTRONAUTS
Hello, Mr. President.

BECK
Captain Tanner, you flew six Shuttle Missions and were the last man to walk on the moon, weren't you sir?

(CONTINUED)
TANNER

Yes, sir. But Oren will be doing most of the flying on this one. I'll just be taking us down to the comet surface.

Monash is smiling for the camera, but something's going on behind his eyes. Jealousy? Pride? Frustration?

(CONTINUED)
BECK
It's good to know we're going to have your kind of experience up there. Godspeed to you all. We're counting on you.

The cameras' red lights go dark at the Cape. The astronauts drop their public personas, pull off their mikes.

MONASH
Goddamn dog and pony show.

Monash shoots a look to Tanner, starts off.

TANNER
Are we having a problem, son?

MONASH
...No problem...

But he doesn't look back. Tanner watches him go.

55 WHITE HOUSE PRESS ROOM - NIGHT

Beck's back at his podium.

BECK
I want to let the children know that you're going to hear a lot of people worrying about this. Some of your Moms and Dads, grandparents, even your big brothers and sisters... well, they might be scared. So I'm telling you to tell them, everything is going to be okay. I promise.

56 UNIVERSAL CITY WALK - DAY

The big TV screen, the President. People pour out of the Cineplex to watch as the word spreads.

57 WHITE HOUSE PRESS ROOM - NIGHT

Beck drops the smile he'd used for the kids, looks directly into CAMERA, suddenly hard, tough.

BECK
Now I want to talk to the grownups. We know that the threat of an apocalypse is going to give some people an excuse for lawlessness. As of this evening, I've placed the National Guard and the Army on full alert.

(MORE)
We will not tolerate any disruption of our way of life. Our society will continue as normal. Work will go on. You will pay your bills.

As the CAMERA moves in slowly on Beck, Jenny shifts in her seat, preparing for the biggest moment of her life.

There will be no hoarding. There will be no sudden profiteering. I am freezing all wages, all prices. I have instructed the Secretary of the Treasury to close the nation's financial markets. All stock, bond, interest and commodity rates, all currency exchange rates and precious metal prices will remain fixed at today's prices. What a bottle of water cost you yesterday, it will cost you tomorrow. Anyone selling something for more than it cost this morning will be arrested. Anyone rioting, anyone looting, anyone..., well, that person is going to be shot on sight.

(let's it sink in)
Now I'll take a few questions.

All hands shoot up in the air, questions are shouted. The sound of Nikon MOTORS and SHUTTERS is like jungle noise in a Tarzan movie. Jenny tries to be heard, but she's a novice, buried by the regulars.

Who? The press room regulars look around. Jenny. It's her moment in the sun, she stands.. Man, is she nervous.

Jenny Lerner, MSNBC. Mr. President, why wasn't the announcement made sooner?

Chaos reigns, anchors move into place, ready themselves for when the press conference ends. But Stuart's head has snapped around to stare at the screen, his mouth open.

Jenny Lerner?

IRA
Son of a bitch...
But Eric and Bobby are grinning in back, loving it.

WHITE HOUSE PRESS ROOM - NIGHT

BECK

Until we knew that a rocket could be built and the comet intercepted, there was no reason to alarm the planet.

Beth's staring at the back of Jenny's head, if she had an ice pick she'd bury it in her scrawny skull. Everyone raises their hands for the next question, yelling.

BECK (CONT'D)

You have another question, Ms. Lerner?

She didn't really. She fumbles nervously. The press corp's near mutiny, the fix is in and they know it.

OMIT AND AND

INT. ROBIN'S MAGAZINE OFFICE - NIGHT

Robin and her STAFF, putting their magazine together, watching Jenny on TV as she asks a question. Some look from Robin to the set and back, as she is comprehending that her daughter has just moved up in the world.

JENNY (ON TV)

Is there a connection between the comet and the recall of American troops from abroad?

Beck's not happy with that question.

BECK (ON TV)

Our fighting men and women are coming home because we felt it prudent in light of domestic security concerns, to have them available, although I certainly hope we don't need to use them.

(looks for next question)

Joy and Robin share a smile, her mother's daughter.

INT. JASON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jason and Chloe watch Jenny on TV.

JENNY (ON TV)

Mr. President! Sir! One final question!

Now they understand why she was behaving so strangely at the bar.
Beck smiles, points to her again. Now it's not only Beth, the entire Press Corp's sharpening their long knives.

JENNY
MSNBC has learned that Secretary Rittenhouse did not leave for the reasons your administration announced. Isn't it true sir, that not everyone in your administration is convinced that the Messiah will save us?

Beck gives Jenny a hard look.

BECK
Secretary Rittenhouse served this country with full devotion, and resigned for personal reasons. We have more important things before us than to consider the petty soap opera of Washington. I promise you, Ms. Lerner, and all of you, those in this room and those hearing my voice, that all of us, at some point in the next eight months, will entertain our worst fears and concerns. But I promise you, life will go on. We shall prevail. There will be no Armageddon!

The questions erupt again. Beck nods to Jenny, she smiles, sits. This part of their deal concluded.

BECK (CONT'D)
(pointing)
David.

REPORTER
Exactly when and how was the comet discovered?

BECK
Two scientists searching the skies found the comet and while racing from their observatory to alert the world, were killed in a car crash. That was thirteen months ago. It took another five months for their papers to be discovered.

The questions erupt again.
BECK (CONT'D)
Sally?

ANOTHER REPORTER
Sir, what's the comet's name?

BECK
Since Marcus Wolf and his colleague Leo Biederman discovered the comet we named it for them: Wolf-Biederman.

BIEDERMAN HOUSE - NIGHT
Leo and his family watch in their suburban living room. His father, DON. Mother, ELLEN. Little sister, JANE.

DON BIEDERMAN
Leo Biederman?

They watch in shock. Their phone begins to RING.

DON
He means you doesn't he?

REPORTER (ON TV)
How much notice did you give other world leaders?
ELLEN
Shhh... I'm trying to listen!

BECK
Our ambassadors were given briefing papers this afternoon, and instructed to convey them to their host countries. The Russians, with their expertise in nuclear propulsion systems, were told last year.

Now the DOORBELL joins the phone that's still RINGING. Jane looks at all the grown-ups not answering either, confused. Hops off the couch, heads for the front door. On the TV, President Beck concludes the questioning.

BECK (CONT'D)
Thank you all.

Beck steps back from the podium, heads for the door as reporters continue to SHOUT questions.

Six year old Jane stands beside Leo.

JANE
The front door's for you.

Leo turns away from the set, walks to the still open front door, still in shock. It's Sarah, breathless. Excited.

LEO
I'm not dead.

SARAH
Dr. Wolf? From astronomy club?

LEO
I think maybe so.

Leo looks past her to the residential street and a crowd outside. The Hotchners are on the lawn behind Sarah.

SARAH
I think it's neat. Nobody on our block ever discovered the world was going to end before.

LEO
It's not going to end.

SARAH
Well it's still really neat.
It's clearing out, fast. TV rushing to stand-ups. Print phoning copy desks. Jenny stands, still at her place in the second row of the now almost empty room. Savoring it, this moment, everything she's worked for.

Turns. Beth's there. Doesn't say anything. Turns, and walks away. Leaving Jenny alone. Jenny wants to feel ashamed, or guilty. But she doesn't. She's where she's always wanted to be.

Everyone is cheering and clapping for Leo on stage. Mr. Perry's there moderating. Leo's parents. The local press is in full force. Sarah's with her girlfriends.

**LEO**

It was really just luck, I guess, that I found it. Anyone could have. As far as we know, what happened was that Dr. Wolf saw the comet in my photograph so he shared the discovery with me. Then he was killed in that crash and everything got mixed up in Washington so the President thought I was dead too.

**KID**

How does it make you feel having your name on it?

(Continued)
LEO
Well, I don't want anyone to think that I'm trying to take something away from Dr. Wolf, because, you know... I'm not.

One of Sarah's friends nudges her, shows her a Newsweek: Leo on the cover with his telescope.

STUDENT
Are you sorry you found it?

LEO
No. If I hadn't taken that picture of the comet, and it hadn't gone to Dr. Wolf at the observatory, who knows what would have happened?

Sarah leans forward, calls out a question.

SARAH
Are you scared?

LEO
I have a history test tomorrow. I'm scared of that.

Appreciative laughter and applause from the student audience and the press. Another kid, a smartass showing off.

HAROLD
You know you're going to have sex a lot more now than anyone else in our class.

That gets a chorus of adolescent HOOTS and APPLAUSE.

LEO
Really?

Perry intercedes good-naturedly.

PERRY
Thanks for your sexual insight Mr. Thurman, you can sit down now.

But all the attention only spurs the kid on.

HAROLD
Famous people always get sex, Mr. Perry. That's one of the main reasons it's good to be famous.

More applause, Perry smiles, Harold takes a bow to his adoring peers. Leo sneaks a look out to Sarah. She's smiling back. All this talk about sex. Her friends notice, grin. Sarah notices them noticing.
Simon, Tulchinsky, Monash, Baker, and Partenza are sitting at a table in a crowded military bar. The juke box is playing. The Astronauts are deep in a somewhat drunken huddle. Monash is upset.

**MONASH**
Frank Gifford was a great football player, but I'd bust his ass if he played against me now.

**PARTENZA**
I wish I'd been to the moon, I respect everyone who went there, but this isn't the moon.

**SIMON**
All of his training was for a stable surface, the moon didn't have two pound dust particles ejecting at three hundred feet a second.

**MONASH**
This isn't about ego.

**BAKER**
Of course it is, it's all about ego... but sometimes the ego is right.

**SIMON**
And dust particles...

**PARTENZA**
(drunker than the others)
The moon, the moon, the moon wasn't spinning when he landed on it, the moon didn't have a fourteen hour rotary... Rotational period, seven hours of sun, seven hours of darkness, it was light all the time when he landed on the moon. He could see. We're not going to be able to see.

**SIMON**
You can't see now anyway.

**TULCHINSKY**
Don't worry...
(in Russian)
We can do it.

**BAKER**
What?
TULCHINSKY
We can do it.

And then we hear a familiar Voice.

TANNER
I woke up this morning and I realized that none of you want me here. You don't even really know who I am. I walked on the moon, but I didn't belong to you. I belonged to your Daddies. Now, if I ask you to ask your Daddies what I meant to them, to explain to you what I'm doing here, that's only going to make things worse. So what do we do?
MONASH
You haven't trained for this mission. We respect you...

TANNER
I appreciate that...

MONASH
But you're here...you're here because the powers that be think we need someone familiar on the trip. You're here for public relations.

TANNER
I'm here because the powers that be know that I am the only one on this mission who has ever landed on the moon and I have five hundred landings on aircraft carriers...

MONASH
We've trained...

TANNER
On flight simulators. And this is not a video game, son.

69 LEO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Leo's little sister JANE changes the channel on the TV. On every station there's a comet graphic, some in the manner of Chuck Jones, others are Soviet Realism, Moebius, computer enhanced photos of the real thing. This is all that anyone is watching or talking about. She lands on a documentary.

NARRATOR
Fifty thousand years ago, a 300,000 ton meteor landed here in Arizona.

JANE
I want Xena! Where's Xena?

The phone's RINGING. Ellen answers it.
ELLEN NARRATOR
The Tunguska River, Siberia, in 1908, trees fell for 30 miles... A railroad engineer 300 miles away had to stop his train because the tracks were shaking, and were hot to the touch. All of this caused by a meteor only two hundred feet wide.

ELLEN
Jane, please, it's not on anymore,
(into phone)
No... I don't think so, he really can't.

DON BIEDERMAN
Who is it?

ELLEN
Primetime Live again.

Jane changes channels to find POLITICALLY INCORRECT.

BILL MAHER (ON TV)
Is the sky really falling? Do we really think the world is coming to an end? And how can we trust Russian nuclear rockets when the Russians can't figure out how to get phones to work in Moscow?

GOLDTHWAITE
I love the comet! I want to die! I want everyone to die! You know how you hate it when you leave the room and you know everyone is going to talk about you? That's one problem that the comet's going to take care of!

BILL MAHER
I think they only say lovely things about me.

GOLDTHWAITE.
Leave the room.

Changes channels again. LETTERMAN.

DAVID LETTERMAN
A drum roll. So here it is, tonight's top ten list: the ten things you'll miss least when the world ends. Ten, Broccoli. Nine, Iraq. Eight, commercials for Grey Poupon...

And again:

CHARLIE ROSE (ON TV)
The Messiah Mission, too little too late? Not all scientists agree with NASA's plan for destroying the comet.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
Joining us tonight are Morton Entrekin, from FEMA, and from The University of Arizona's Interplanetary Sciences Department Dr. s Gene and Carolyn Shoemaker --

Sarah and her folks watch, Vicky now pregnant.

Mr. Entrekin, the Shoemaker's have been critical of the science suggesting that this mission is feasible or necessary.

During this Sarah gets up and walks to the front door.

(Continued)
Where are you going?

Out front.

It's midnight.

I don't think there's anyone in the world who isn't watching television. I want to be the only one who's outside.

The comet is traveling at a hundred thousand miles an hour. The Messiah has to catch up, hold onto it, set the bombs, and get off. We've never attempted anything remotely this complex in space.

Sarah comes out of her house. The street is deserted, TVs dance in every living room window. A SOUND. Wheels on pavement. Leo rollerblades across the street under the streetlight.

Hi...

Leo stops, smiles. Watches her approach.

You're not watching TV?

They just keep saying the same things.

She stares above her at the stars.

It looks so peaceful.

A beat as he joins her staring at the night sky.

The only reason I joined astronomy club was because of you.
SARAH
Really?

LEO
You liked the stars and I figured
if you liked them they must be
worth looking at.

SARAH
That's so nice.

This is too close for them, too emotional.

LEO
We got invited to the White House.

SARAH
Of course. You're an important
person now.

LEO
We're going to see the launch with
the President. My whole family.

SARAH
That's so neat.

Yeah.

She smiles, he can be very disarming.

SARAH
You've changed.

LEO
No, I haven't.

SARAH
Your braces.

LEO
(he grins, no braces)
I got them off today.

They don't know what to say. Look up again to the stars.
Running around are TEN OR TWELVE CHILDREN.

The CAMERA tracks through the cluster of people, and we hear packets of conversation. The mood, fueled by beer and chips, is happy. Music plays in the backyard speakers.

MIKHAIL TULCHINSKY is with TWO VERY PRETTY WOMEN.

PRETTY WOMAN
A nuclear reactor in space? Isn't that dangerous?

TULCHINSKY
No, no, no. This is all Russian design, Russian science, the same people who designed Chernobyl.

He waits for the response he wanted, horror.

TULCHINSKY (CONT'D)
Well, Chernobyl almost worked.

And the camera goes to: SIMON and his fiancee, WENDY. She's showing off her diamond ring to another GROUP OF WIVES AND FRIENDS.

SIMON
Wendy, I'm going to marry you, but the day we get back I can't just go to the church.

WENDY
The church will come to you, Simon. You're all invited.

The camera finds GUS PARTENZA, with ANDREA BAKER, and her husband, DAVID, and their toddlers, BRITTANY and ALICIA. David holds the squirming Brittany.

DAVID
What happens when you set off the bombs?

Baker tries to answer, but Brittany squirms away.

(CONTINUED)
BAKER
Well, as, long as we plant the bombs... We have seven hours...
Brittany! Brittany, come back here... As long as we plant the bombs and... Brittany...

Partenza answers for her.

PARTENZA
We have seven hours to plant the bombs and get off the surface before the sun heats it up.

(continued)
We leave them and find Monash and his wife MARIETTE. He is seated, she is standing and he is talking to the Baby in her very large belly. As he narrates, he follows the curvature of her belly to her breasts.

MONASH
Oren Junior! Here are your orders: upon your first entering into earth's atmosphere, proceed directly along the exterior of the mothership to the twin storage tanks for refueling.

MARIETTE
He's not a rocket-ship... he's a Baby, Oren, your Baby, our Baby.

MONASH
I know.

They kiss. Brittany, free again, runs past us leading the camera to Tanner, talking to his two grown sons, DWIGHT and STEVE. They're both in uniform.

TANNER
When my father went to war in 1942, he didn't see me or your grandmother for three years. I was eight when he left. You boys were what, four and six when I went to the moon?
(they nod)
You saw me go into space seven times, didn't you?

DWIGHT
Yessir...

TANNER
And I came back every time, didn't I?

(MORE)
TANNER (CONT’ D)

(they nod)
Your mother and I used to play a
game when she was still alive. The
game was, if there was a chance I
might not be coming back, she
wouldn't say it, and I wouldn't say
it. But this time, I want to say
it to you.

TANNER (CONT' D)

(a beat)
This time I probably won't be coming
back. You know that?

SONS

(quietly)
...Yessir...

The three men stare at each other. Don't see Mitch Hefter
come up behind them.

HEFTER

Another beer?

TANNER

Thanks. You remember my boys don't
you, Mitch?

HEFTER

(handshakes all around)
Sure I do...

A LITTLE GIRL SNAPS their picture. Tanner smiles, wraps
an arm around his two boys.

HEFTER (CONT'D)

What'd you think of the crew?

TANNER

Heroes all. The finest group I've
ever had the privilege of serving
with.

HEFTER

Off the record.

Tanner looks to his sons, then:

TANNER

They've been trained in ways I'll
never understand. They're smarter
and in better shape than we ever
were in the old days. They're
sober, they're serious.

(MORE)
TANNER (CONT'D)
(looks to his sons)
I guess I'd be a little happier about this whole thing if I thought that any of them were as scared as I am.

HEFTER
They're not afraid of dying, they're afraid of screwing up on TV.

Two CATERERS wheel out an immense cake in the shape of the earth. People APPLAUD, the children are dazzled.

HEFTER (CONT'D)
Fish, would you do the honor?

We see that Monash is uncomfortable with Tanner getting the spotlight. Mariette settles him. Tanner raises the knife to the cake. A few people with cameras are ready to snap the picture. He hesitates. Hefter motions with his hand: Cut the cake. Tanner raises the knife. He can't.

TANNER
Is this supposed to be a joke? Cutting up the earth, is that supposed to give us good luck?

HEFTER
Fish, do it for the kids.

We see how desperately the children want the cake. They've surrounded Tanner. Everyone is watching him. He takes the knife and uses it like a trowel, smearing the icing until everything is a swirl. He looks to the children.

TANNER
You know what this is?

A Kid shakes his head, no, very soberly.

TANNER (CONT'D)
It's the comet. And what do we do to comets?

He plunges a hand into the comet, and the children do the same, laughing. Hefter gives him a look, and the Astronauts are unhappy with his sudden mania. Tanner sees the earth destroyed, the coast lines wrecked.
WOLF-BIEDERMAN...INTERCEPTION 8 MONTHS 9 DAYS, 6 HOURS, 1 MINUTE. IMPACT 12 MONTHS, 9 DAYS, 12 HOURS, 35 MINUTES.

THRU

81A INT. WHITE HOUSE OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

The President, Entrekin, aides, Leo, and the Biedermans, watch the Shuttle launch on TV. Jenny's on a stand-up in front of a large NASA wall mural.

JENNY (ON TV)
We're now only minutes away from the launch of the Shuttle Atlantis
(MORE)
JENNY (ON TV) (CONT'D)
and the beginning of the historic
Messiah Mission...

HEFTER (VO)
Okay, all flight controllers, we're
at T minus 3 minutes and
counting... give it a close look.

CAPCOM COLWELL
APU's look good, LOX and LH2 are
pressurized.

A shot of the Atlantis on its pad. The President makes
his way to a glass jar of M&Ms and grabs a handful.

TIM (VO)
Who's voice are we hearing now,
Jenny?

JENNY (VO)
Tim, that's Flight Director Mitch
Hefter, former Gemini and Apollo
astronaut...

Leo tries to concentrate on the TV but can't help staring
at his surroundings, the Presidential Seal, the desk.

BECK
Who's your book agent, Leo?

LEO
Sir?

BECK
You're writing a book about this
aren't you?

LEO
(not sure where the leader
of the Free World and the
Commander in Chief is
going)
I have a book report due on Tuesday.

BECK
So you're not going to write a book?

LEO
I don't know.

BECK
What kind of American are you?
You're famous and you don't want to
get rich from it? You'll kill the
economy.

(CONTINUED)
LEO
I...

BECK
I'm issuing an executive order, Leo; when the President makes a bad joke, would you laugh?

LEO
(smiling)
Yessir.

BECK
(referring to M&M's)
Green?

LEO
Blue.

BECK
Everything's is going to be okay, you know that, don't you?

LEO
Yessir.

BECK
Thank you.
(the countdown is past ten)
Here we go.

ASSISTANT FLIGHT DIRECTOR
Flight, we're go for autosequence.

HEFTER
Good luck and Godspeed, Atlantis.

CAPE (V.O.)
... Three... Two... One... Liftoff!

The Shuttle lifts off the pad in a burst of painfully hot light. The big ship ROARS above, tearing into the night sky. Everyone in the room watches, and then applauds. The President puts his hands on Leo's shoulders.
WOLF-BIEDERMAN INTERCEPTION: 8 MONTHS, 8 DAYS, 6 HOURS, 1 MINUTE. IMPACT: 12 MONTHS, 8 DAYS, 12 HOURS, 35 MINUTES.
ROBIN
Well, and what are you doing here?

JENNY
I've been busy, and I haven't been paying attention to you.

ROBIN
I've been busy, too. This is the last issue of the magazine...

JENNY
No!

ROBIN
(lightly mocking Jenny's shock)
Yes! The advertisers are calling, up and canceling. Why would anyone support a magazine devoted to old, expensive, beautiful things when all the attractive young women are on television spreading panic?

JENNY
That's not fair! The news is good, the mission is going to succeed.

ROBIN
I stopped watching the news. Does anything I do have any effect on anything that happens in space?

JENNY
I mean... but... the whole world is watching.

ROBIN
The whole world minus one. For years I've always been a little ashamed of what I do, worrying all day about whether this piece of furniture is real or a fake, or whether that painting is better than this painting. No, now that no one has the time to buy antiques, old, beautiful things, it means that I actually have a sacred purpose. It's like the Russians who saved the old palaces when the Germans were coming; they didn't have time to cart everything away, so they chopped out a bit of the floor and cut away a few feet of (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
ROBIN (CONT'D)
curtain, and when the war was over
they built everything back from
the pieces. I'm saving the pieces
now, keeping a record. If the
comet does hit, and they want to
know what the world looked like,
they'll be looking at the work I'm
doing today.

JENNY
Mother, listen to me! The comet is
going to be turned away and everyone
is going to be so relieved that
they'll spend money like the world
really is coming to an end.

ROBIN
That's pretty to think so.
HEFTER (ON COM)
You're right on the numbers,
Atlantis.

On the monitors, a huge docking device fills the view.
But Tanner's not watching, he's staring out the side at
something they're passing but we can't see. Whistles
softly.

TANNER
...Jesus, that's big...

Partenza and Tulchinsky follow his gaze.

PARTENZA
Whoa...no shit...

BAKER
Contact in three meters
...two...one...
(a little nudge)
We're here.

(CONTINUED)
HEFTER (ON COM)
Well done, Atlantis...

Monash turns around, grins.

MONASH
Wow.

Tanner still staring out the porthole.

TANNER
...Sweet mother of God...

OUTSIDE THE ATLANTIS

WE PULL AWAY from Tanner in the window, out past the Shuttle, past the spindly, solar panel arms of the Station to find --

THE MESSIAH

Docked and tethered to the Space Station. It's massive, a 747 next to the Shuttle's Cessna. Workers float in space, putting the finishing touches on its assembly.
Tulchinsky is in the cargo hold, checking the loaded nukes in zero gravity. Monash is on the intercom.

MONASH (ON COM)
How we doing, Mikhail?

TULCHINSKY
Nukes prepped and stowed.

MONASH (ON COM)
Let's get moving.

Tulchinsky grabs a handhold, pulls himself along the cargo compartment, through the hatch into the living quarters. Past the toilet, shower, galley. Pulls himself into the aft compartment.

It's tight but functional, conduit, switching panels, bundles containing thousands of wires. Monash is up front with Baker and Simon. Tanner buckling up in back, Tulchinsky sets himself down with Partenza in front of a complex set of monitors and oscillators that bank up to the ceiling.

PARTENZA
Nervous?

(CONTINUED)
TANNER
Just not used to the back seat.

PARTENZA
It's not so bad. View stinks.

Monash turns in his seat, looks back at Tulchinsky.

MONASH
Colonel, let's see what this baby can do.

Tulchinsky grins. Punches commands into his keyboard.

PARTENZA
Hope you're right about this thing working, Mikhail.

TULCHINSKY
Just between you and me...

TANNER
Oh, shit...

TULCHINSKY
Orion burn in ten...nine...eight...

The rapidly moving pattern on the oscillator gets closer and closer to a straight line.

MONASH
Hold onto your hats, boys and girls.

TANNER
It's not my hat I'm worried about.

THE MESSIAH IN SPACE

The nuclear reaction EXPLODES against the backplate, lighting up the darkness with a tremendous, BLINDING pulse. The Messiah takes off like a bat out of hell, CATAPULTED out into space. Disappears among the stars.

VIRGINIA PARK - NIGHT

Snow on the ground. Leo and Sarah look through his telescope. IN HIS EYEPIECE, the Orion pulses.

LEO
There it is!

He steps back so she can look. She looks.

SARAH
It's beautiful Leo...

(CONTINUED)
Now she takes his hand. Still looking.

LEO
What if it doesn't work? What if the world ends?

SARAH
The world is not going to end.

LEO
(delights in tormenting her)
It could, it could, let's just say the comet hits... how do you not want to die?

SARAH
You are morbid.

LEO
Think about it, maybe the comet is a great way to die. No time to think, squished like a bug. I'd rather die like that than by drowning.

SARAH
Leo!

LEO
And even if it doesn't hit us on the head, even if it lands somewhere else, the heat from the comet as it passes through the atmosphere burns up all the forests in the world.

SARAH
I don't want to talk about this, Leo. It makes me sad. It makes me think about all the things I'll never get a chance to do... Shakespeare in London and ... hiking in Colorado and... even... Disneyland, just a nice time with my Mom and Dad and... and love. I'll never get any of that now. So just shut up.

LEO
I'm sorry.

SARAH
It's not your fault.

(MORE)
SARAH (CONT'D)
We're too young. It's all wrong now, because I don't have time for you to figure things out, I don't have three years for you to wake up and know what you feel about me.

LEO
What do you mean?

SARAH
That's just it, you have to ask. Because you're still just a little kid, part of you. And if the world is coming to an end, we don't have time for that.

LEO
What?

SARAH
(exasperated)
You love me and I love you.

And she runs away from him.

WOLF-BIEDERMAN INTERCEPTION: 2 DAYS, 14 HOURS 22 MINUTES.
IMPACT: 4 MONTHS, 2 DAYS, 4 HOURS, 22 MINUTES

Tulchinsky, Baker and Partenza load aluminum encased bombs into the MOLES, already mounted on the SLED. Metal, wires, radioactive warnings. It's demanding work with no gravity.

MONASH (ON COM)
How's it coming?
BAKER

Inserting the last nuke now.

When it CLICKS in place, the digital readout BLINKS ALIVE.

102 MSNBC CONFERENCE ROOM

Stuart leads the staff meeting. Ira, Worth, Marianne, Beth, Tim, Jenny. Jenny sits at the grown-up table, quiet, lost in her own thoughts.

STUART
Beth, White House reactions.
Marianne, all the world watching.
We have enough satellite space?

WORTH
Seventy-eight up-links.

STUART
Tim, Mission Control in Houston.
(Tim looks up, surprised)
Ira, the science guys lined up?

IRA
If they've got a PhD, we own them.

STUART
This is the most important story of our lives. Let's not fuck it up.

The end of the meeting, people start out. Jenny looks up.

JENNY
...Stuart? What about me?

People stop, is she finally going to get her comeuppance?

STUART
You're on the anchor desk and don't you ever hold back a story for two days.

JENNY
I'm sorry but, the President...

STUART
The hell with the President. He has no right making deals with a reporter who has no authority to accept his terms. I probably would have held the story, but that would have been my decision and not yours. And I would have protected you. It was your scoop. You own the story. Don't do that again.
JENNY
Thank you, Stuart.

STUART
Yeah. Okay.
Monash lines the Messiah up with the tail of the comet, following a computer path in the cockpit.

BAKER
Auto trajectory, two thousand feet, R-dot .3, 5 X, 2 Y...

Monash guides it expertly, a high tech video game.

BAKER (CONT'D)
A thousand feet, point 3, 3 X, one-point-five Y...
(a beat)
Go for auto trajectory.

Monash reaches up, locks it on with a BEEP.

BAKER (CONT'D)
We're on... Disengage the Orion.

TULCHINSKY
Orion disengaged. You're on chemical propellant.

MONASH
Look, Fish, I can do this if you want.

Monash slides out of his seat, let's Tanner slide past.

TANNER
I'll keep that in mind.

Monash goes. Tanner pulls out a decades old shot of a mother and seven year old son, sticks it on the console.

TANNER (CONT'D)
On the Mississippi River, in Mark Twain's time, there were riverboat pilots who only knew a few miles of the river. Conditions changed so much, you couldn't know the whole trip. Floods, sandbars, fallen logs, it was all a riverboat pilot could do to know his little piece of the puzzle.

SIMON
What the hell is he talking about?
PARTENZA
Summer job he had last century.

Tanner finishes strapping himself in.

TANNER
For the next few hours, this is my ship.
(flips toggles)
Starting the approach.

AND

THE CARGO BAY

The now fully suited astronauts check their gear in buddy groups. Tulchinsky with Partenza. Simon with Monash.

TULCHINSKY
Helmet lights.

PARTENZA
Your sublimator looks good, Mick.

TULCHINSKY
Visors down.

They test the gold face shields on their helmets. Lights mounted on the side of the helmets CLICK on.

TANNER (ON COM)
Disengaging auto...now. I'm eyeballs out from here on in.

MONASH
How come that doesn't make me feel better?

SIMON
Cameras on.

IN THE COCKPIT

Baker checks the helmet cams. Each monitor marked with a name. WE SEE the cargo bay from the HELMET POVs.

BAKER
Okay, we're going live. Mikhail, wave for the folks back home.

Mikhail waves as he floats around.

TANNER
Andy, I need you on the laser. She looks up, Christ.

Ahead, a floating three dimensional mine field of every imaginable size of rock. Tanner nudges one, THUD. It's like playing dodge ball with really big, slow rocks.

(CONTINUED)
BAKER
My God, look at the size of that thing. It's as big as a house.
Jenny is walking across the studio with an ASSISTANT.

ASSISTANT
Your father is on the phone.

JENNY
Tell him I'm not here.

DIRECTOR (ON STUDIO COM)
Jenny, forty-five seconds...

ASSISTANT
That's great. You're on live, Jenny.

Jenny gets into her chair.

DIRECTOR (ON STUDIO COM)
In ten, nine, eight...

The Assistant goes to a phone.

JASON
Thank you.

Jason is looking at the TV, as the final logo sequence and music of the intro to a MSNBC SPECIAL REPORT... Then:

JENNY (ON TV)
Tonight we have the first pictures from the Messiah as it begins its descent to the comet Wolf-Biederman...

BOBBY
How's she doing?

ERIC
Okay so far...

The Hotchners and Biedermans watch MSNBC together. Vicky Hotchner now very pregnant. Leo and Sarah hold hands.

(CONTINUED)
Tanner's looking for a place to land. There's lightning, floating debris. They BANG around, the emergency lights FLICKER on, then off. The sun's just setting on the surface below, the outgassing only beginning to settle down.

TANNER
Use primary thrusters.

BAKER
Jesus Christ...

She's scared, they're taking quite a beating from the jets.

TANNER
How are we doing back there?

On the helmet cams we see the boys bouncing around in back, it doesn't look fun strapped to a sled. Like riding a bull.

PARTENZA (ON COM)
Peachy...

The Messiah approaches a small flat zone wedged between a crater and a cliff. The long shadows of the sunset stretch across the rugged landscape below.

Rocks bounce off the windshield and hull.

TANNER
Hold on tight. Descent rate.

The Messiah descends over the comet, outgassing jets send up streams of fine carbon, obscuring the landing site. The BANGING and CHOP is getting worse.

BAKER
Three feet per second... two...

TANNER
Fire tether pitons.

Umbrella shaped pitons shoot out from the underside of the ship, blast down into the surface. The cables pull TAUT as winches draws them down to the comet's surface and onto the spindly landing gear. A high speed surface jet FIRES, shoving the bow port (front left) section of the ship up and YANKING the piton up out of the ground, with a SNAP.
IN THE COCKPIT

The Messiah BUCKS up from the force, tilts precariously back. The horizon disappears below.

TANNER

Whoa...

Tanner's trying to hold it. Baker checks frantically.

BAKER

Tether two, not engaged!

OUTSIDE THE MESSIAH

It noses up, a horse rearing back with three legs tied to the ground. The stern CRUNCHES LOUDLY into the surface.

IN THE COCKPIT

The astronauts cling to the sled on the helmet cams.

PARTENZA (ON COM)

What the fuck was that?

Tanner tries to hold the nose up as it dips to the right.

TANNER

Override on the forward jets.

Baker is flipping overhead switches.

BAKER

You got 'em...we crunched the aft pod.

OUTSIDE THE MESSIAH

It edges down to the left front where the tether came loose. It's a meter from the surface, going to slam hard. A jet fires from the undercarriage. The ship slows but still HITS.

IN THE COCKPIT

The bronc riders get tossed around some more on the helmet cams as they rock back to the stern again, a tethered teetertotter.

TANNER

Cross-feed aft. I need all the jets.

BAKER

Cross-feed aft...pressure's holding.
They fire the starboard aft jet. The ship disappears in the ejecta of the comet, steam and carbon dust. Slowly levels out, the three remaining tethers finally going. TAUT.

Baker watches the artificial horizon on the instrument array.

(CONTINUED)
120. CONTINUED:

BAKER
She's leveling out...

121 IN THE CARGO BAY

PARTENZA
Pretty much like the simulator
back at Johnson, huh boys?

MONASH
Son of a bitch doesn't know what
he's doing.

122 IN THE COCKPIT

Tanner still has the stick in a death lock. Baker looks
shell shocked. Holy shit... A beat.

TANNER
Houston, this is Messiah, we've
landed.

123 UNIVERSAL CITY WALK - NIGHT

A CHEERING CROWD watches the huge pixel vision screen. A
fuzzy, space transmitted image of Tanner and Baker.

TANNER (ON TV)
...we've landed...

124 THE BIEDERMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The families cheer, applaud. Sarah hugs Leo.

ELLEN
Oh, thank god...

125 COCKPIT

Tanner and Baker work. Locking in computer coordinates.

BAKER
Depressurizing bay.

TANNER
Opening payload doors. Don't let
that little bit of gravity down
there go to your heads.

126 OMIT
AND
127
The huge doors open and the Astronauts float down. We see what is ahead: The dead terrain of the comet.

The sled floats a few feet above the shale strewn surface.

Tanner reaches up above him, HITS a button.

**TANNER**

Start the clock.

A red LED SNAPS on, above it an embossed tag "Sunrise". It's counting down, 6:47:14...:13...:12...

A small blast from the chemical propellant and they fly by with the sled, skimming over the surface.

**PARTENZA**

Looks like all you did was dent a fender, Fish. Dad's gonna be mad when we get home.

The comet is mostly very old terrain, worn smooth by eons of travel, hilly in places, craters. All sizes of rocks float past them, have to be batted away. The weather is made even stranger by the frequent gas lightning above. Graphic heads up displays are projected onto the inside glass of their helmets, indicating the composition of the substrata layers beneath them.

A cross-sectional computer image of the comet emerges. Tanner and Baker watch as computer images are joined by overlays of geological schematics detailing fault lines and possibilities for nuclear warhead placement. The clock counts 5:21:39...

The computer stops, zeros in. Circles coordinates.

**BAKER**

We've got your first location. Range two meters above point Alpha 16, bearing 224.
Jane is sleeping in her mother's lap. All watch Jenny on MSNBC, doing VO commentary for the footage from the comet.

JENNY (VO ON SET)
What we're looking at now is...God, isn't that an amazing picture? They're setting the MOLEs in place now, and the MOLEs are, well, they're what they sound like. The MOLEs are drilling machines that burrow to a depth of one hundred meters, and then they wait to be detonated. Of course the MOLEs in your backyard don't carry 5,000 kiloton warheads. Although it feels like they do sometimes, doesn't it?

ON THE COMET SURFACE - NIGHT

The MOLE comes to life, the auger head digs slowly into the surface. Monash reels out control line.

SIMON
Ooh, look at that baby dig.

MONASH
Fish, tell the guys at JSC their mole works like a charm.

SIMON
Like butter baby.

PARTENZA
Go get 'em, boy.

MESSIAH COCKPIT

Baker and Tanner work at the computer, get the mapping coordinates for the final 2 MOLES. Look unhappy.

TANNER
Dammit...

BAKER
Christ, that's over four miles away.

(CONTINUED)
Tanner goes to the helmet cam monitors.

**TANNER**
The computer's calculated the last two MOLE, locations, guys. Range 4 miles. Target One: bearing 166. Target Two: bearing 168.

(CONTINUED)
On Simon's helmet cam we see Monash look up.

MONASH (ON MONITORS)
How long's that going to take?

TANNER
At least an hour.

There's a beat. Everybody knows what that means.

MONASH (ON MONITORS)
An hour?
(dry WASP)
An hour? Darling, that gives me no time at all to go home, get dressed and be at the theater on time for the curtain. What were we thinking when we made these reservations?

Tanner and Baker look at the clock. 1:49:47...:46...

A SMALL MONITOR ROOM AT JSC

Monitors, a few sofas, very governmental. The families of the astronauts watch MSNBC, hold each other’s hands. MSNBC has added a sunrise clock on screen, not very comforting. Jenny's on camera, interviewing Dr. Van Sertma.

JENNY (ON TV)
What happens if they don't get off of the surface in time?

VAN SERTMA (ON TV)
The sun striking the comet will cause the temperature to rise three hundred and fifty degrees in only a few minutes and activate the high speed gas jets. If that happens it'll be like trying to work in a mine field.

COMET SURFACE - NIGHT

Monash and Simon angle the sled to the final location.

MONASH
We're on Target Two, Messiah.

ABOUT TWENTY YARDS AWAY

Partenza and Tulchinsky drill at Target One. A trail of debris rises out of the hole, shoved up by the MOLE.

PARTENZA
How's our time?
The clock.  00:36:34...:33

TANNER
Getting tight.  36:30.

(CONTINUED)
BAKER

It's taking too long.

ON THE COMET'S SURFACE

Simon and Monash Work above their final MOLE hole. Feed out the control line, read the digital depth LED.

SIMON

MOLE 4 running true, at 26 meters.

MONASH

Son of a bitch...

What?

SIMON

It's stuck.

MONASH AND SIMON

Monash looks down the hole. All he can see is debris.

SIMON

Try backing it up.

IN THE MESSIAH

Tanner and Baker watch all this on the helmet cams.

BAKER

What's your depth?

MONASH (ON COM)

Sixteen meters.

TANNER

That enough?

BAKER

No, it'll just blow pieces off the surface.

TANNER

That's not deep enough.

MONASH (ON COM)

No shit, thanks for the insight. Blow three pitons, back the sled off.

ON THE SURFACE

Simon releases all but one piton, shoves the sled away.
PARTENZA
Mole three at depth. Coming your way.

Simon screws a pitch into the surface, attaches a line to hold him in place. Monash is using the MOLE control line as a tether, they're stirring up carbon as they work.

MONASH
I'm going in.

SIMON
The hole?!

MONASH
See if I can free it up.

Monash goes in feet first, using the line as a rope.

IN THE MESSIAH

They watch Monash's helmet cam as he descends into the hole. Like dropping into a small well, his helmet lights illuminate the dark, veiny walls close around him.

MONASH
How's my time?

TANNER
24:10.

BAKER
Another six minutes and they won't have time to get back to us.

A beat. Tanner leaps for the pilot's seat.

TANNER
Blow the tethers.

She realizes what he's thinking.

BAKER
We go get them and we may not have enough fuel to get back off the surface.

TANNER
Blow the goddamn tethers!
TANNER
Calculate exactly how much prop we need to get off this rock! Shut us down when we hit it.

She types into a keyboard. Numbers rush by. A BEEP.

BAKER
Got it!

OUTSIDE THE MESSIAH
The aft thrusters ignite and the ship moves away fast.

OMIT

IN THE HOLE
Tulchinsky and Partenza arrive. Monash works his way down to the top of the MOLE. Braces himself against the walls, gets his feet on it.

MONASH
Give it some juice.

The MOLE shimmies a little, shakes, but doesn't move.

MONASH (CONT'D)
Hold up.

It stops, Monash rocks it back and forth with his boots.

MONASH (CONT'D)
Try backing it up again.

IN THE MESSIAH
Baker's computer BEEPS.

BAKER
That's it.

TANNER
Little more, little more...

She looks at the fuel usage whizzing by.

(CONTINUED)
BAKER
Shut it down!

TANNER
They always put extra in the tanks!

Baker leans across, shuts it down. A beat, Tanner knows she was right.

TANNER (CONT'D)
We have a visual?

Across the valley. The yellow sled.

BAKER
Straight ahead one hundred yards.

Monash kicks and shakes the MOLE, tugs up on the feed line.

MONASH
...Come on... you bastard. Time?

TANNER
11:04. Figured we'd better pick you kids up after school. Check your six...100 yards.

Partenza looks, sees the Messiah hovering in the distance. Notices the sun striking the hilltops on the other side of the valley. Checks over his shoulder at the coming dawn.

PARTENZA
I think we'd better hurry, boys.

MONASH (ON COM)
One more time, Mark.

The MOLE struggles, RUMBLES and then...begins to DIG.

MONASH
It's going!

Baker stares at the dawn horizon.

BAKER
I don't think they've got 10 minutes.

The sun is rising between two mountains, it's going to pour straight down into the valley, right where they are.
Debris is shooting up from the hole.

SIMON
MOLE’s at forty-two meters.

TANNER (ON COM)
Sun’s rising behind you, coming up fast.

Partenza sees the rapidly shrinking shadows. They move much faster than earth. Everywhere it strikes, the surface gets unstable. Rocks fly, jets explode.

TULCHINSKY
Face shields down!

The three men on the surface down their gold shields.

Monash is pummeled with debris shooting up from the digging MOLE. Pulling himself up the control line as fast as he can. No way he has time for his face shield in this mess.

The sun marches closer and closer. Now only thirty yards away, jets explode like mortars in the heat.

SIMON
MOLE's at depth and armed!

Tanner and Baker watch the sun's approach with alarm.

TANNER
Get the hell out of there!

Partenza screams back into his headset.

PARTENZA
Oren's still in the hole!

Simon stares into the hole, sees the top of Monash's helmet.

SIMON
Another three meters!

PARTENZA
Oh, Christ...

The sun is only yards away.
SIMON
Oren, come on, go...go...!

MONASH grabs the line. Pulls hard, propelling himself up much too fast, like a missile. Shooting out onto the --

PARTENZA
Get us down!

Simon grabs the tether line, pulls them back, spinning them slowly as they come. Partenza looks up, realizes.

PARTENZA (CONT'D)
Oren, your face shield!

Monash looks down, what? Just as his face rotates full into the blinding sun. Screams in pain.

MONASH
Ahhhhhh...AAHHHH...!!!

Monash claws at the helmet, trying to get to his blinded eyes. They get him back to the surface, SLAM his shield DOWN, drag him behind them to the sled. The sun hits them as they FLOP Monash on top, lash him down. The ground begins to boil and steam.

MONASH (CONT'D)
My eyes...oh god...my eyes...

TULCHINSKY
Gus, come on! Come on...!

It's only yards around the sled to Partenza's seat but the sunblasted surface is cracking, EXPLODING. He's trying to cross a jet minefield.

TANNER (ON COM)
Get out of there!

Partenza dodges one, sees a clear spot, steps and BOOM! A jet explodes into his chest. Rocketing him up like a human cannonball.

TULCHINSKY
Gus...Gus...!

Partenza's sling-shot out into space hundreds of feet.
BAKER
We're losing one!

Tanner leaps to look. Partenza's helmet cam has a quickly diminishing view of the comet below.

BAKER (CONT'D)
He's got escape velocity. A thousand feet and climbing.

162A PARTENZA IN SPACE

He watches the comet recede.

163 ON THE SURFACE

They're looking up, frozen. Jets EXPLODING all around.

TANNER (ON COM)
Mikhail, Mark, get the hell out of there!

Simon fires the sled and they head for the Messiah.

164 IN THE MESSIAH

The sun works its way across the valley, closer and closer to the Messiah.

TANNER
Houston, all MOLES are at depth, nukes hot and ready. We lost Partenza to explosive outgassing. Monash is injured.

165 IN THE SMALL ROOM AT JSC

The families stare at the TV, in shook. Hold each other. The sun clock now blinks 0:00 on the screen.

166 MSNBC STUDIO

Jenny and the MSNBC staff watch the Messiah pictures.

167 UNDER THE MESSIAH

Tulchinsky helps load the GROANING Monash onto a hoist.

SIMON
Retract hoist one!

Monash is pulled up into the Cargo bay. The sun now fully striking the Messiah. Rocks and jets shoot all over the place. Tulchinsky SNAPS onto another hoist.

(CONTINUED)
TULCHINSKY
Retract four!

Tulchinsky starts up. Simon connects himself.

(CONTINUED)
SIMON
Retract two!

The hoist starts and BOOM! A rock SLAMS into Simon's forearm, hard. Sends him swinging like a kid on a rope over a river SLAMMING into the underbelly.

IN THE COCKPIT

The hull vibrates from the rocks like POPPING corn.

TANNER
Firing primary thrusters.

BAKER
Payload doors are still open!

TANNER
Close them as we go!

BAKER
Is Oren with you, Simon? Is Oren on the ship?

TANNER
We're going now!

UNDER THE MESSIAH

The ship fires its thrusters. Lifts up, the men still dangling below.

IN THE COCKPIT

It's choppy. Rocks BANG. Tanner steers as best he can.

EXT. THE MESSIAH

The ship flies off.

IN THE CARGO BAY

The three men are being reeled in through the now closing doors. A final rock EXPLODES up through the doors, SHATTERS a light. Tulchinsky releases himself, swings Monash over safety.

SIMON
I think my arm's broken...

Tulchinsky reels Simon in. Releases him.
TANNER
Repressurize the cargo bay.

BAKER
Cargo bay repressurized.

Tulchinsky comes in out of his EVA suit.

TULCHINSKY
We have to go get Gus.

TANNER
There's not enough time.

TULCHINSKY
He's going to die out there!

Something SLAMS into the underbelly, sends them careening off to the left as Tanner wrestles the stick.

(CONTINUED)
TULCHINSKY (CONT'D)
We can still find him, he has a beacon!

TANNER
I don't have time to argue with you. Sit down and shut-up.

The ship BUCKS and SLAMS through debris.

TULCHINSKY
Turn it on! Turn on the fucking locator!

BAKER
We barely have enough propellant to get out of the coma!

TULCHINSKY
We can't just leave him. We have to go back.

TANNER
If we go for Gus, we all die...!

172A INT. CARGO BAY – CONTINUOUS

Monash hears this.

TULCHINSKY (ON COM)
We can't just leave him in space.

MONASH
Tulchinsky, listen to Tanner. It's his ship now.

172B IN THE COCKPIT – CONTINUOUS

Tulchinsky slowly lowers himself into a seat. Leans his head back, exhausted, tears run down his face.

173 MSNBC STUDIO

It's very quiet on the set. Finally, Jenny:

JENNY
This has been such an indescribable day, hasn't it? Where do you begin? The Messiah has lifted safely off the comet, and so we're cheering for that, but Gus Partenza is dead.
His photo appears behind her.

    JENNY (CONT'D)
    He was...everyone who knew him loved him. Even more than that, they liked him. It's hard to report the news when you're torn between excitement and sadness. I can't even imagine how they feel on the Messiah.

174 INTERIOR MESSIAH

The astronauts are floating silently in the living quarters. Monash is lying on the table, Baker works on his eyes with the med kit. It's painful. Tanner speaks quietly to Baker.

    TANNER
    Bad?
Her look says it all. Tanner goes back to checking Simon. Partenza begins to cry softly.

ROBIN'S HOUSE – NIGHT

Robin watches in silence.

JENNY (ON TV)
They're going to set off the bombs in thirteen minutes, well, less than thirteen now.
(beat, she's reflecting)
We're supposed to see a large increase in the comet's brightness as dust from the explosion is hit by the rays of the sun.

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS CITY WALK – DAY

The crowd watches Jenny on MSNBC.

JENNY (ON SCREEN)
(she's looking off camera)
Do we know if that's going to be visible to the naked eye or only on telescopes? ... We don't know. We do? Oh... naked eye. You'll see the brightness. We will, we'll see it together.

MSNBC STUDIO

On the monitors we see images from around the Messiah.

TANNER (ON TV)
Prepare to remove safeties and fire.

TULCHINSKY (ON TV)
Safeties removed...

JENNY
After the death of Dr. Gus Partenza and with Oren Monash injured, (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
JENNY (CONT'D)
Spurgeon Tanner is now in command of the mission.

BIEDERMAN HOME

The Biedermans and Hotchners are still watching together.
The comet as seen from the Messiah fills the screen.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Okay, this is what's coming next: the radiation burst is going to wipe out the transmission from the Messiah, just for a minute, maybe a little longer, so don't panic when the picture goes out.
Tanner, Baker and Tulchinsky are now up front.

TULCHINSKY
Weapons armed.

Tanner looks over at Partenza's helmet cam, only space in and out of heavy static.

TANNER
We're detonating the bombs now, Gus.

PARTENZA
...okay...

He's very distant. None of them know what to say. A beat.

TANNER
Unlock firing switches.

Tanner and Baker unlock switch guards, exposing red "fire" switches, side by side in the console.

TANNER (CONT'D)
Three... two... one... NOW.

Light shoots from the MOLE holes, then BLINDING WHITE.

The screen fills with static. Tanner's breaking up.

TANNER
Weapons detonation... confirmed...
10:04, Zulu ...time, 24 Augu..., ...99.

Debris is hurled from the comet. SLAMS into the Messiah, shuts down the electrical system. FLIPS them sideways, BURSTING lights and a stern cargo WINDOW. ALARMS sound.

BAKER
Decompression in area six!

Tulchinsky leaps up out of his chair, pulls himself along the blender that's now the Messiah's interior, SLAMS against pipes, floors, ceilings. THROWS himself against the cargo hatch door, trying to close it and not be sucked out.
The static is beginning to clear.

JENNY
Now we're just waiting for the picture to come back. This is hard. Twenty seconds.

Slowly, the view of the comet from the Messiah returns.

The comet's surrounded with debris, breaking into two pieces, one five times larger than the other. A huge CHEER erupts, the staff CLAPS, CRIES, they hug each other. Beth holds her daughter Caitlin.

CAITLIN
What happened, Mommy?

Tulchinsky struggles the last few inches, gets the sucking hatch door closed, the wheel turned. Smoke, wires exposed, Simon extinguishes a small fire.

Baker looks to Partenza's helmet cam, only STATIC.

They watch the set, the dust, the two comets in space.

HEFTER (ON TV)
Messiah, this is Houston... Messiah can you respond...

Everyone is elated, hugging, except for Leo. Sarah holds him, tears running down her face, but he's still watching the TV, worried. Slowly, she realizes.

SARAH
...Leo...?

But he doesn't answer, something's wrong.
The room's crammed full of electronic gear, computers. The President, Entrekin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs SCOTT, other aides and advisors. No one says a word. All are turned toward Bekey, a phone to his ear. Waiting.

IVAN BEKEY
(into phone)
...I’m still here

Listens for a long beat. Then hangs up, slowly turns to the President. He doesn't have to say it, they all know. The President stares at his feet, the weight of his job too great today. Then finally, quietly:

BECK
Your people ready, Morton?
(Entrekin nods)
General?

SCOTT
Yes, sir.

The President nods, heads for the brightly lit Oval Office next door.

Champagne, smiles, relieved tears. The President appears on the monitors, his voice cutting through the celebration.

BECK (ON TV)
Good evening.

He takes a long time to say the next thing. The staff quiets, turns to watch. The President's grim expression slowly sucking the joy from the room.
BECK
You know what just happened. There was one big comet, and now there are two. And they're both headed to earth.

188A MSNBC STUDIO - NIGHT

We MOVE SLOWLY through the faces, then onto the long wall of monitors; every station carrying the speech.

BECK (ON TV)
Let's call the big one Wolf and the smaller piece, Biederman. Wolf is six miles wide, Biederman a mile and a half. Separately or together, they are capable of destroying life as we know it. We have lost communication with the Messiah spacecraft although we continue to track it visually. It left the comet under power and has made course corrections under power. The ship is coming home. We don't know how many are alive. We don't know their condition.

He takes a moment. All stare, the words sinking in.

BECK (ON TV) (CONT'D)
Now we have to make some decisions together. What do we do? You have a choice, we have a choice right now. Ever since the comet was discovered, we've been hoping and working for the best, but we've also been planning for the worst. Our strategy has been two-fold. First, our Strategic Missile Command is preparing to coordinate with the Russians a massive strike of Titan missiles to intercept the incoming comets. If we can deflect these comets only two degrees they will bounce harmlessly off of our atmosphere and head out into space...

188B IN THE BIEDERMAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

They watch the speech. Sarah clinging to Leo.

BECK (ON TV)
Unfortunately, the Titans cannot be launched until the comets are...(MORE)
BECK (ON TV) (CONT'D)
only a few hours away and while we
are confident the Missile attack
will succeed, it is only prudent
that we now take cautionary steps
to insure the continuation of our
way of life. To guarantee that
there will be enough of us left to
rebuild a new world in the unlikely
event that the comets do strike the
earth...
87.

188C THE OVAL OFFICE – NIGHT

The CAMERA moves in slowly on the President.

BECK
So, in the soft limestone of Missouri, we've been preparing a network of immense caves, and they're almost finished, and we can put a million people in them, and that million people can survive there, underground, for two years, until the air clears and the dust settles. The cave is more than a dormitory, it's our new Noah's Ark: we're storing seeds and seedlings, plants and animals, enough to start over. On August 10, we're going to hold a national lottery...

188D MSNBC STUDIO – NIGHT

The faces of people watching; in Times Square, in Chicago, Seattle, Houston and San Francisco.

BECK (ON TV)
A computer will randomly select eight hundred thousand Americans, to join the two hundred thousand scientists, doctors, engineers, teachers, soldiers and artists who have already been chosen. Other countries are preparing similar caves along whatever lines they feel are best to preserve their ways of life. This is ours.

188E ROBIN'S TOWNHOUSE – NIGHT

Robin is watching alone.

BECK (ON TV)
Beginning tonight, and continuing until the crisis passes, I am declaring a state of Martial Law. The Armed Forces and the National Guard are working with local law enforcement. A national curfew begins at midnight tonight. Wherever you are, go home. Stay off the roads after sunset. Crimes against persons or property will be dealt with swiftly and harshly.
BECK (ON TV)
News stations around the nation
are being faxed copies of the
lottery procedure as we speak and
they'll be broadcasting the
details to you in a few moments...

Worth takes off running for the fax, Ira following.
The President takes a break and stops reading copy. He tries to unburden his heart.

BECK (ON TV)
I... wish... no, wishing is the wrong word right now. That's not what I mean. Look... I believe in God. A lot of you don't. At times like this, it would just be obscene to use faith as a weapon. But I still want to offer a prayer and I've been trying to find the right one. So let me offer this. It'll pray for our survival, mine included, because I believe that God hears all prayers... but I also believe that sometimes His answer is No. May the Lord lift up His divine countenance upon you, and give you peace.

We hear a murmur of AMEN from the people in the Oval Office, or wherever we see this, if on a monitor in MSNBC.

188H MSNBC STUDIOS – NIGHT

The Presidential Seal's on the monitors. Jenny's camera light CLICKS ON. She looks off, all formality gone.

JENNY
Do we have the fax yet, Stuart?
(Stuart shakes "no")

Worth and Ira reappear from the hall, running. Worth carries a sheet of paper overhead, rushes it to the anchor desk. Jenny reads it as the crowded studio waits, silent.

JENNY (CONT’D)
My God... Stuart, how old are you?

DIRECTOR (ON STAGE COM)
Jenny, in five, four...

STUART
Fifty-five...

Her camera light blinks RED. She slowly turns to camera.

(CONTINUED)
188H CONTINUED:

JENNY
We now have the details of the national lottery.
(reads)
Those of you who have been pre-selected for the Ark will be notified within the next few minutes...

188I UNIVERSAL CITY WALK - NIGHT

We MOVE ACROSS the stunned faces, watching Jenny.

JENNY (ON TV)
For the rest, on the night of May 14, those who's social security numbers have been randomly selected by computer will be notified. All phone systems will be turned off for 72 hours beginning on May 13th. The only phones that ring will be those of the people selected...

188J INT. ROBIN'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Robin watches her daughter deliver the news on TV.

JENNY
While some Americans over fifty years of age have been pre-selected for the Ark due to their expertise in a necessary field of study, no men and women over fifty in the general population will be included in the lottery...

188K INT. JASON'S APARTMENT – NIGHT

Chloe gives Jason a look. I don't know about you, but I will survive.

JENNY (ON TV)
The evacuation of those who have been selected for the Ark will take no longer than two days beginning on May 18th...

188L THE BIEDERMAN'S - NIGHT

The phone RINGS. Everyone looks. It RINGS again.

ELLEN
...Hello...?

JENNY (ON TV)
During this two day period, no unofficial travel will be permitted.
(MORE)
JENNY (ON TV) (CONT'D)
Those selected will be taken by
bus and train to the underground
Ark site by military personnel...

Ellen hangs up slowly, turns back to the room.

ELLEN
We've been pre-selected.

All turn to Leo, they know why. Chuck leaps up, rushes
for the front door.

VICKY
Chuck...? Where're you going?

CHUCK HOTCHNER
Our phone! They could be calling!

And he's gone. They look among themselves, they all know
the Hotchner phone isn't ringing across the street.

JENNY
You are being notified now because
there is still time to construct
your own shelters in basements and
backyard pools. Civil Defense
teams have been formed in every
town and city in America with a
population over five thousand.
They will distribute supplies and
organize group shelters in
underground parking facilities and
other appropriate sites.
Construction plans, equipment
lists and locations for securing
the necessary provisions along
with information on how to grow
your own food underground and how
to purify water are now available
free of charge on the Internet at
WWW.FEMA.Com.

Jenny stops reading. It's silent. She sets the fax down
slowly, looks directly into camera.

JENNY (CONT'D)
That's all there is.
Monash strapped down, gauze covering his eyes, in pain. Tanner and Baker work on the radio, Tulchinsky at the Orion, Simon pours over schematics, his arm now roughly splinted.

(CONTINUED)
TANNER
The interior camera circuitry is shot. Andy, can we get back into the cargo bay to reroute the video junctions?

BAKER
Starboard cargo porthole is blown. We could try to get in there with the EVA's but there's not much left in the life support packs.

SIMON
We should be able to raise Houston on the low band when we get closer.

TANNER
The Orion still functioning?

TULCHINSKY
System check was okay, but I don't know about the radiation shielding.

TANNER
So, if we fire it up, we beat the comet back to earth, but we may start glowing in the dark. Anybody?

A silent beat, then from the corner, hoarsely --

MONASH
Let's go home...

189B SPACE (OLD SCENE 199)

The Orion fires against the backplate, the Messiah picks up tremendous speed, leaves the comets behind.

189C OMIT (MOVED TO 18A)

189D THE ED SULLIVAN THEATER --NIGHT

David Letterman on stage, talking to his audience.

DAVID LETTERMAN
The comets are such great set-ups for a joke, but the problem is that we're the punchline. So here's my last top ten list. Ten: be grateful to the crew of the Messiah for everything they tried to do. Nine: Make peace with your enemies. Eight: Be strong for the children. Seven: Try to help someone you don't know. Six: Don't get crazy.

(MORE)
DAVID LETTERMAN (CONT'D)

Five: Don't be selfish. Four:
Love your friends and family.
Three: Love your friends and
family. Two: Love your friends
and family. One: Love your
friends and family...

Slowly, he walks off stage.

189E EXT. WASHINGTON PARK - DAY

Jenny walks with Robin.

ROBIN
I have to say it's liberating
knowing that I won't be called. I
don't think I've ever been happier.
I've even stopped smoking.

JENNY
What are you going to do with all
of the money you save?

ROBIN
Do you know that the National
Gallery is saving all of the art?
They're shipping it to the caves.
I gave them the most beautiful
eighteenth century desk from New
England, and all of my Sheraton
silver. I really felt like I'd
protected something when I gave
them to the museum. You should
see my apartment now. After all
these years collecting, there's
nothing there now, it's
practically Japanese.

JENNY
It doesn't seem fair that I got
selected. I'm not a doctor, or a
scientist.

ROBIN
People need continuity. You're
someone everyone knows. People
trust you.

JENNY
But I can't help you.

ROBIN
Don't worry about me. I'm going
to be happy as long as I know that
you're going to live. Have you
spoken to your father?
JENNY
(reflexive anger)
No.

ROBIN
The world he lives in is coming to an end, Jenny, you don't want him to die with bitterness in his heart. Talk to him.

JENNY
Why?

ROBIN
(the answer is coming)
When your Father and I were young, I used to think of us as the perfectly matched pair: he was the most graceful man in the world, and he always said I was the most beautiful. But this is what the comet has taught me; that grace is deceptive, and beauty is passing. Don't leave all the unfinished stuff of your life to the comet. Don't let the comet take away your dignity. You're better than that.

They keep walking.

189F INT. MSNBC – NIGHT
A scientist's being interviewed by Tim at the anchor desk.

VAN SERTMA (ON TV)
It is impossible to say what is happening on the Messiah now! From the telescopes orbiting the earth, yes, we see evidence that they're using the nuclear propulsion system, but who knows what kind of damage it sustained when the comet exploded?

The CAMERA finds Jenny and Eric watching this from a corner of the studio. They drink a couple of beers.

VAN SERTMA (ON TV) (CONT'D)
The Russians are very pessimistic about this. Radiation contamination, overheating: the Orion system is just as likely to blow up as it is to work.

TIM (ON TV)
That certainly isn't good news.

(CONTINUED)
JENNY
(amazed at the stupidity of what Tim just said)
"That certainly isn't good news?".
What a genius.

VAN SERTMA (ON TV)
No one is taking seriously the extent of the risks here.

TIM
What do you think the world should be doing?

VAN SERTMA (ON TV)
I don't know.

TIM
(to the camera; time for a commercial)
Thank you. Now this.

ERIC
(to Jenny)
What do you think the world should be doing? Does everyone do what they didn't have time to do, or what they were afraid to do? What happens to everyone's morals?

JENNY
Morals? Eric where are you going...

ERIC
In social crisis, there's a collective unconscious yearning for the disaster everyone pretends to fear...

JENNY
Eric, why don't you just ask?

ERIC
Ask? What? What do you want me to ask?

JENNY
If the world is coming to an end, why not just have sex.

There it is.

ERIC
No, no, no, Jenny, keep this in the abstract as much as you can. It's much sexier to be vague.

(MORE)
ERIC (CONT'D)
The longer we talk about abstract morals, and the weirder the conversation gets, the longer and more twisted your sentences, the more I know what you'll be like in bed.

JENNY
Well, that's quite a long and twisted sentence you've got there.

ERIC
Maybe that should tell you something...

They burst out laughing at the absurdity of this conversation. He kisses her. They look at each other and start laughing again.

190 OMIT

WOLF BIEDERMAN IMPACT: 4 WEEKS, 2 DAYS, 21 HOURS, 19 MINUTES

190A LEO AND SARAH'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Leo rides his bike up the street fast, knapsack slung over one shoulder, standing on the pedals. The neighborhood's transformed. Every driveway has sprouted a tricked-out SUV: brush guards, twin Jerry cans, CB whips. Yards have six foot chain link fences, now guarded not by neighborhood mutts, but by gnarled Junkyard dogs. Chainsaws fell prized family trees, drop them into the street for firewood. Sandbags piled in front of doors.

Inside open garages, weekend warriors build bulk storage where the Buick used to sit. Fill the shelves with cases of canned goods, fifty pound sacks of flour, drums of oil. Propane storage tanks are the new yard ornaments of choice.

Leo rides his bike up the Hotchner driveway, to the garage where Chuck Hotchner is carrying a drill. Leo comes up beside him as they pass Chuck's dirt bike, standing just inside the garage.

LEO
Mr. Hotchner?

CHUCK HOTCHNER
Who did I think I was going to be when I bought that bike?

LEO
Well, every kid on the block wants one now, and every Mom on the block hates you for it.
CHUCK HOTCHNER
Thank you, Leo, that's the best news I've had in years. Give me a hand.

LEO
Yes, sir.

They go around to the porch where Chuck takes his drill to a steel bar over the window. Sarah's mother, Vicky, nurses the baby on the porch. She has a little portable TV, with a small screen. This plays in the background. We may see it or hear it:

JENNY (ON TV)
Nationally, authorities report that record numbers of Americans are taking their own lives, with more than twelve hundred suicides in the past twenty-four hours alone...

(riot footage)
It was another day of rioting for building supplies throughout the East. In Florida, a mob attacked and killed a Miami rental yard operator who was charging five thousand dollars an hour for backhoe and tractor rentals. Marines had to intervene to stop the violence...

A big Deere combine plowing through green corn.

Leo grabs the heavy bars going up over the bay window. He's startled by a big BOOM! Coming from a few doors down.

LEO
What was that?

CHUCK HOTCHNER
Bob Smith's using dynamite to dig a shelter in his backyard.

Down the block a huge dust mushroom cloud rises behind a ranch house. Guess this passes for normal now. Chuck drills the bar into place.

(CONTINUED)
Farmers in the Midwest continue to harvest their crops prematurely, even though Department of Agriculture officials are now threatening to impound farmland found to have been harvested early...

(a beat)

In Arizona, the stand-off between Army Rangers and the Armageddon Doomsday Militiamen entered its fifth day...

LEO

Uh... Mrs. Hotchner...

VICKY
Sarah's on the hill.

Leo runs up to the pretty hilltop. He finds Sarah sitting under a tree, the city spread out below them; they see the burning FIRES, hear the SIRENS, and the GUNSHOTS.

LEO

Where were you today? I've been looking everywhere for you. How come you weren't at school?

SARAH
My Father said I didn't have to go. He said there's no point.

Leo digs two wedding bands out of his pocket.

LEO

I have a point.

SARAH
Those are wedding rings.

LEO

Yeah, I got 'em from Jeremy Landers' dad, he needed a Coleman lantern. Look at them, don't you get it? I figured it out.

SARAH

What?
LEO
If you marry me, I can get you into the Ark. You'll be safe. I went to FCDA! They said that if you and I got married, then you're my family, and I can take you.

SARAH
What about my parents? They're not your family, I can't leave my parents.

LEO
You don't have to. I'm the famous Leo Biederman and I haven't used my fame for anything, but I got them to bring your family too, because we're going to be married.

She looks at him. He's so young.

SARAH
You're a sophomore in high school. And you're asking me to marry you so I can hide in a cave for two years.

LEO
So you can live. So we can both live. So we can have children.

SARAH
But we are children. Really, we're just children.

LEO
Marry me, Sarah, please, marry me. It's the only way you'll survive.

She studies him. He's changed. She understands something.

SARAH
You love me. You know it, now, don't you?

LEO
Yeah. I love you.

She leans in, and kisses him. His lips first, then his cheeks, his eyes, his neck.

He kisses her back, still unsure, a boy. And then she slowly begins to unbutton his shirt. If he thinks she's coming with him, we might see from the way she kisses him that for her, this could be goodbye.
We move into windows...

Americans rich and poor wait by their phones.

We hear a phone RING. Everyone in the apartment rushes.

FATHER
Hello? Yes... Yes, this is he...

Families by the phone; all waiting.

Some phones RING. Some don’t.
Other phones RING. Others don't.

The street's deserted, inside every brightly lit window a family waits for their phone to ring.

Leo stands on Sarah's lawn in the dark. Inside her living room bay window, he can see the Hotchners waiting. Their phone isn't ringing.
Jenny at the anchor desk. The dress around the newsroom has become very informal. No more coffee cups and Evians, now it's beer and wine. And everyone, absolutely everyone, smokes.

JENNY
Confusion over Civil Defense food distribution erupted into riots again today in Denver, and a number of other cities across the country.

Film of EMPTY PRISONS.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Prison guards in California walked away from their jobs, and released prisoners on their way out. It's feared this trend will spread nationally.

Ira stands in the hallway, looking through Stuart's office window. Stuart's inside in a suit and tie, packing up a few mementos, that's it. Worth stops beside Ira, a beat.

(CONTINUED)
WORTH
He tell you where's he going?

IRA
Home...

WORTH
Where's that?

IRA
He didn't say...

In the studio, Jenny continues. Film of RIOTING on screen.

JENNY
On the other side of the country, rioting continued for the second day at the Lorton Reformatory outside Washington, D.C. Prisoners there had heard of the inmate releases in California, and wanted to be set free as well.

THE COMETS
Continue their journey towards Earth. They're getting closer and closer. The sunlight striking them, warming the ice. The long comet trails lengthening.

MESSIAH COCKPIT
Tanner watches this on the computer monitor. Something catches his eye. He's not sure, makes some notes, a small sketch. Floats back into the crew quarters. It's a mess, hanging wires, blackened debris, broken equipment. The lights are low. Baker, Simon and Tulchinsky asleep.

Tanner grabs a foil pack, sits across from Monash. Tanner squeezes the foil pack into his mouth. He wipes Monash's lips. This is tender. They talk quietly, not to waken anyone else.

TANNER
None of you children brought any real books to read, did you know that? I brought Moby Dick and Huckleberry Finn, and Baker and Simon had never read them. I'm afraid to ask you. Have you ever read Melville or Twain?

MONASH
I'm a child of the movies, Fish.

(CONTINUED)
TANNER
You got a shitty deal, Oren.

MONASH
Don't worry about me. Really... don't worry about me.
(reaches to Tanner and brings him closer, so no one can hear)
Y'know, all my life... you know what it's like for guys like us, you and me, we're the same... be the best... be the best. I gotta wife. I'm a father. I see little flashes of light, and color, I go to sleep and dream, but there's a part of me which is always awake now, so I... I get to see myself dreaming. I'm seeing things differently.
(pause)
How come they call you Fish?

TANNER
Spurgeon, Sturgeon, Fish. That took about fifteen minutes of my first day at Annapolis.

MONASH
Your boys went there?

TANNER
Yeah. Good men. Both of them. I don't see them as much as I used to when Mary was alive, she was always better at keeping the family together.

Monash senses Tanner's unhappiness.

MONASH
You don't have to talk about it.

TANNER
You're married, you know what it's like. Every marriage has its good years and bad...we ended on a great one. Anyway... Let's get started.

(CONTINUED)
Tanner pulls out a copy of Moby Dick. We can fade out on this.

TANNER
You have a child at home, a boy or girl, and that child needs a Daddy who knows about books, so here we go, Moby Dick, chapter one. "Call me Ishmael. Some years ago never mind how long precisely having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on the shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world..."
MONTAGE:  

205A INT. ROBIN'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT  

On Robin's TV: Jenny, then VIDEO FOOTAGE OF LOOTERS.  

    JENNY (ON TV)  
    In Columbus, Ohio looters continue to set fire to abandoned stores. The fires have been left to burn since many firefighters are no longer reporting for work.  

CLOSET: Beautiful dresses. Robin's hand in frame takes out one dress, then another, then puts them back and takes out a beautiful antique robe.  

ON A MAKE-UP TABLE: Make-up, lipstick, perfume. Robin's hand picks up the lipstick.  

    JENNY (O.S.)  
    Throughout Latin America's major cities, business districts have been abandoned to looting gangs. Military patrols have not succeeded in stopping the violence, and food and medical shortages in outlying areas have become critical. Emergency airlifts have been ruled out as too dangerous.  

205B EXT. LEO AND SARAH'S HILLTOP - NIGHT  

A torch. People climbing a hill. More torches.  

Leo with his parents.  

Sarah with her family.  

ROBIN'S TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS  

JEWELRY CASE: A collection of beautiful pieces, earrings, rings, necklaces, a locket. Robin holds up different earrings. She chooses something beautiful. She tries on rings, puts rings on a few fingers of each hand. She puts on a heart shaped locket.  

    JENNY (O.S.)  
    More street fighting in Moscow as food and fuel shortages continue. One observer at the U.S. Embassy describes the scene as pure anarchy. A group of Moscow officials chartered a helicopter to get out of the city, but when angry rioters heard about it they shot the chopper down. No one survived the crash.  

(CONTINUED)
LEO AND SARAH'S HILLTOP - CONTINUOUS

IN THE LIGHT: Leo and Sarah are brought to each other. A CLERGYMAN is there. Sarah is beautiful, flowers are in her hair. Leo is in a suit that's too small for him.

The CLERGYMAN. His Bible.

JENNY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
In Europe, rioting continues as the EEU general evacuation plan has fallen apart due to continuing disagreements among participants.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
Meanwhile, because the national health services in many of these countries have stopped providing services, hospitals have become armed encampments to keep from being over-run by angry citizens.

(a beat)
Refugee camps, like this one near Syria, continue to form along national borders as nation after nation refuses passage to those seeking safer ground before the missile hits.

The rings. Don has the ring.

Parents are crying.

CLERGYMAN

... to love..., cherish..., so help...

JENNY (O.S.)
The government in Mexico has outlawed the private use of gasoline and diesel fuel after a round of severe price-gouging. In Mexico City, residents are fleeing to higher ground on foot. Several thousand people were trampled when police tried to re-route the crowds from main streets leading out of the city.

ROBIN'S TOWNHOUSE CONTINUOUS

The TV is turned off.

LIVING ROOM: For the first time in the sequence, we see Robin in full frame. She puts on music.

She lights the candles in the living room.

LEO AND SARAH'S HILLTOP CONTINUOUS

CLERGYMAN

... till death do you part?

LEO

I do.

ROBIN'S TOWNHOUSE CONTINUOUS

The room is beautiful, she was right when she told Jenny that this was one of the most beautiful rooms in the world.
She sits down and pours an old red wine into a large glass. She is in a chair beside a photograph of Jenny and Jason, when Jenny was a child, on the beach.

LEO AND SARAH'S HILLTOP CONTINUOUS

CLERYMAN
Do you... Sarah...

SARAH
I do.

Leo kisses Sarah.

ROBIN'S TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Robin drinks her wine and closes her eyes. She is at peace.
Making it's way slowly down Leo's block, more fortress than transportation. Inside, the haunted, passing faces of the already chosen. On top, soldiers. The Biedermans and Hotchners are on the sidewalk, suitcases beside them. Other families stand sullenly on their lawns.

The bus stops, soldiers pour out of the bus in full battle gear, form a perimeter. It's precise, frightening. A young LIEUTENANT with a clipboard jogs over.

LIEUTENANT
Biederman?

DON BIEDERMAN
That's us.

LIEUTENANT
ID’s please.

A small line; Ellen, Jane, Don, Leo and Sarah, the Hotchners. He checks IDs, shines his flashlight in their faces. Sends them to the bus. Don carries two suitcases.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)
Only one suitcase.

DON BIEDERMAN
It's our family photos, keepsakes.

LIEUTENANT
Only one suitcase is going, sir. I don't care which one.

Don looks to his wife, stricken. Leo sets his bag down.

(CONTINUED)
I don't need my stuff, Dad. (shows his ID) This is my wife, Sarah. Here's our notarized marriage license.

The Lieutenant takes it, reads. Nods toward the bus.

...okay. Get on.

Leo and Sarah smile at each other. Start for the bus. The Lieutenant signals to his men.

That's it, let's go.

They close in behind Leo and Sarah. Leo turns, the Hotchner's have been left behind.

The Lieutenant turns his small flashlight back on, studies the list. There's a long, torturous wait.

H..o..t..c...?

.h..n..e..r.

Not here.

He starts off again. Leo stops him again.

They have to be there! FCDA [ficda] sent their names to the White House!

They aren't there.

Check again... please!

The Lieutenant's getting annoyed, looks again. A beat.

They're not on the list. (to his men) Let's go...!

They're here! They have to be! (MORE)
LEO (CONT'D)
(to the Hotchners)
I put you on the list, they said you were on the list. Sarah, I put them on the list!

CHUCK HOTCHNER
(it hits him)
We're not on the list.

VICKY
But... You said...

CHUCK HOTCHNER
We're not on the list...

VICKY
But Sarah, and the baby...

LEO
Sarah can come.

VICKY
Tell them the baby is yours... Tell them the baby is yours.

LEO
(to the Lieutenant)
This is our baby...

LIEUTENANT
Oh, come on... I can't do that!

VICKY
What do we do?

SARAH
(help me, please...) Mommy... Daddy... I don't want to leave you...

Don Biederman is behind Leo.

DON
Leo, just grab her, get her inside!

Leo and Don hold onto Sarah, she pulls back.

SARAH
I can't!

CHUCK HOTCHNER
Sarah... Sarah... You have to go.

He tries to push her onto the bus.

(CONTINUED)
LIEUTENANT
Come or stay, girl... this bus is moving out!

LEO
I'm not going without you!

SARAH
I can't leave my family!

VICKY
Sarah! Get on the bus.

SARAH
I don't want to leave you!

CHUCK HOTCHNER
You don't know what you're doing, Sarah...

LEO
Listen to them! You'll die if you stay here, you know that!

(CONTINUED)
SARAH
(resolute)
If I die, I'll live on in you, in your memory.

Tears run down Leo's face. She leans in, kisses him.

SARAH (CONT'D)
If you love me. You'll go...

The bus STARTS. She stares into his eyes.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Please...

Leo backs slowly away from Sarah, anguished. She nods, encouraging him to keep walking. He's to the bus door, Don pushes him up on board. The Lieutenant climbs on. The bus doors close. It PULLS AWAY.

(CONTINUED)
Leo rushes to the back window, stares out at Sarah, his hand smashed against the glass, as if to touch her. She waves, her mother sobs in her father's arms. And Leo's gone.

217A MSNBC STUDIOS - DAY

Jenny's Assistant takes us through the now sparsely populated MSNBC. Only a few desks are occupied, most have gone to be with their families. She KNOCKS on Stuart's old office door, now Worth's. He hasn't done anything to personalize it. Jenny has her feet up, Eric's there, Ira. They're watching footage of the interior of the Ark on a monitor.

ASSISTANT

Jenny...

JENNY

Here I am.

ASSISTANT

It's for you. It's the coroner's office.

Everyone is quiet now. Jenny takes the phone.

JENNY

(apprehensive)
This is Jenny Lerner.
(listens)
Yes. Yes. Robin Lerner. Yes. My mother. Sixty-one. Yes... That was her address, yes... What time?

Everyone is watching her. She's crying while she talks.

JENNY (CONT'D)

I'll be right there. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you.

She hangs up the phone. Everyone in the room knows that something awful just happened. Jenny walks out.
Jenny and a CLERK at a counter where she collects Robin's things, the rings, necklace, and earrings she put on before she died. Everything fits in a manila envelope.

CLERK
Sign here. And sign here.

JENNY
That's it?

CLERK
You'll need to make arrangements. The funeral homes haven't been very responsive in the last few weeks. Everyone's waiting to see what happens.

Jenny can't talk. She goes outside.

In the rain. Cabs pass by. There's one that's free. It stops for her. She's about to get in when her father pulls up in his car and opens his window.

JASON
Jenny! Come with me.

Jenny whips open his passenger door.

JASON (CONT'D)
Come with me.

JENNY
You're too late, I already took care of it.

JASON
Jenny, get in the car.

(Continued)
JASON (CONT'D)
It wasn't my fault.

JENNY
I don't give a shit, go tell Chloe.

JASON
She left to be with her parents, they're scared. She'll come back, I hope.

JENNY
You deserve it. You deserve to be alone!

He gets out of his car.

JASON
No, no, I don't. Get in the car.

JENNY
Don't you dare get out of that car.

Jason reaches to her, but she pulls her hand away and the bag she is holding opens up, spilling jewelry. Jason gets out of the car, he chases the locket, but Jenny grabs it.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Don't touch it! It's mine.

Now he's soaking in the rain, too.

JASON
Well. So. I'm sorry for you.

JENNY
I feel like an orphan.

She gets in the cab and leaves Jason in the rain.

(CONTINUED)
Leo and his family are on the crowded bus. Leo stares out the window, lost, empty. Outside, soldiers try to hold back a mob jamming the entrance the bus can force its way through a set of heavily armed gates between tall fences topped with razor wire. The whole area's lit up like Monday Night Football.

SECTION LEADER
Welcome to the Ark. I'm the section leader for Orange 254. Remember that, that's what we're going to be calling home for the next two years. Please gather your things and follow me to the orientation gallery.

They file off the bus. Leo steps down into the --

People everywhere, heavily armed soldiers, trucks, GUNSHOTS, CHOPPERS coming and going. Animals are unloaded from railroad box cars not just cattle and sheep; lamas, pandas, tigers, peacocks, ostriches. Noah's Ark.
Huge piles of palleted grain are moved by forklifts, large wooden crates move past marked "National Gallery" and "Library of Congress". A PA system BOOMS:

PA SYSTEM (VO)
Please proceed in an orderly fashion to the orientation gallery for medical examination and inoculation. Please proceed in an orderly fashion...

They do as they're told, frightened, confused. No more in control of what's happening to them than the cattle being herded beside them.

SECTION LEADER
There are a million people living here. Two hundred food service centers. You'll be eating freeze dried beans and vegetables, and fish sticks, a lot of fish sticks...

Ahead, massive doors open into the cliffs. The dark tunnel's uninviting, ominous. Leo stops. His father realizes.

DON BIEDERMAN
Leo...?

LEO
I'm not coming.

A beat. Jane and Ellen turn back.

LEO (CONT'D)
I have to go back for Sarah.

(CONTINUED)
ELLEN
Leo, come with us right now.

LEO
I'm going back for her, we're going to make it.

ELLEN
We're fifteen hundred miles from home.

DON
It's beyond everyone's control.

LEO
She's my wife.

JANE
Please don't go.

LEO
I'll see you again. I'll see all of you again.

Don pulls out money, and he pulls off his watch and his ring.

ELLEN
What are you doing? Don't let him go.

DON
He'll need something for trade.
And take this...

He gives Leo his Swiss Army knife.

DON (CONT'D)
I'm sorry your childhood was stolen from you like this.

Leo hugs them all and begins to back up.

LEO
Mom, Janie... I love you...

His little sister waves softly. Leo turns away, walks fast, not daring to look back. Disappears into the crowd.
FROM A HELICOPTER we fly into the city center, past abandoned cars and looted stores, there's trash everywhere, on the streets, stacked in vacant lots, find CIVIL DEFENSE WORKERS shepherding a crowd into an underground parking garage.

WOLF BIEDERMAN IMPACT: 1 WEEK, 3 DAYS, 6 HOURS, 47 MINUTES

They remind you of nothing so much as refugees; pushing shopping carts overflowing with their belongings, walking beside their overloaded cars pioneers heading west.

And finally, WE FIND Sarah, carrying her baby sister. Vicky drives their stuffed to the ceiling Astro Minivan, her father pulls a cart loaded with mattresses.

They follow the crowd down into the parking garage, past a distribution area manned by CD volunteers handing out blankets, crates of freeze dried food, Ensure.

Vicky pulls the van into the first vacant spot. Other families are already setting up camp.

SARAH
...Home sweet home... I'll start unloading the van.

Hands the baby to her mother. Vicky looks to Chuck bleakly.

VICKY
Oh god...

Chuck wraps an arm around her, hugs her.
Jenny is on the newsroom floor, talking to Worth.

JENNY
They're working completely by press release now. I don't feel like a reporter anymore.

WORTH
What about Entrekin?

Ira is coming over.

JENNY
He hasn't taken my call in two weeks.

IRA
Jenny.

JENNY
Yeah?

IRA
Your Father is here.

And there's Jason.

JENNY
Excuse me.

And she goes to him.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Hello, Jason.

JASON
I can't stay long, I'm leaving the city, but I wanted to show you something. I wanted to show you that you're not an orphan. I have proof that you're not an orphan. Look.

He takes a few photographs out of his Jacket pocket. These are pictures of Jason and Jenny when Jenny was a baby. These are pictures of Jenny and Jason on the beach, at a beach house. These are not snapshots, they're black and white, beautifully exposed and printed; a great camera, a good photographer.

JENNY
Where's Mom?

JASON
Behind the camera.

(CONTINUED)
JENNY
She took these pictures?

JASON
Yes. She was an artist. You don't remember when they were taken?

JENNY
I'm five years old here. How would I remember that?

JASON
I don't know.

Jenny is deeply moved by the pictures, but she can't show her father how much they mean to her.

JENNY
How come I never saw them?

JASON
You'd have to ask your mother. We were alone on the beach. She would have been in the pictures, but there was no one else to hold the camera. It was a good day for all of us.

(a beat while Jenny studies them)
Goodbye, Jenny.

And he turns, and walks away.

JENNY
Goodbye.

And he's gone.
Tanner is studying the comets on the monitor, makes more notes, taps into the computer. Heads into the main cabin.

TANNER
Could I bother everyone for a minute?

Tanner brings up the comets on the cabin computer.

TANNER (CONT'D)
Take a look at the big one.
(points)
The outgassing at perihelion has created a vent a half mile wide and at least two miles deep. Comet gets closer to sun, sun melts ice, ice turns to steam, we get a big hole.
(...so?)
How many nukes we have left in back, Mikhail?

TULCHINSKY
Four.

TANNER
If we can get the remaining bombs in that vent there shouldn't be anything left of that comet bigger than a suitcase. We can't do anything about the little one, but it might give them a chance.

Baker realizes what he's talking about, holy shit.
TANNER (CONT'D)
Without the arming codes, we'll have to wait to set the bomb timers until we get close enough to earth to raise Houston.

Tulchinsky looks to Tanner. Doesn't get it.

TULCHINSKY
We may not have enough life support left in the EVAs to get back into the cargo bay for the nukes, much less to work down on the comet.

SIMON
And we sure as hell don't have enough propellant left in the Messiah to maneuver much. How do we get back off the surface once we're down?

MONASH
We don't.

Simon and Tulchinsky look at the others, realize.

SIMON
To get the nukes into the vent...

TANNER
We have to put them there.

Tanner shows them his sketch, arcs and ellipses, the Messiah going into the vent. There's a long beat.

TULCHINSKY
So, if we fail, we'll never know, and if it works, we'll never know?

Tanner nods. Another long moment. Finally:

BAKER
Look at the bright side, we'll all get-high schools named after us.

A moment of silence.

(CONTINUED)
BAKER (CONT'D)
I have to admit something. I feel despair.

MONASH
Yep. Me too, despair, over here.

OTHERS
Despair... Uh huh.

TULCHINSKY
Well, I'm Russian, despair in Russia is already an improvement over normal feelings. And in Russia, for such feelings. I... well... we have a cure.

He brings out a bottle of vodka. Water in the desert.

MONASH
Drinking and driving, Commander? What do you think?

TANNER
We could hit something.

They pass the bottle.
EO'S in the back of a stake bed truck. It's dark, cold. The truck's filled with men, women, children.

Leo looks up into the crystal clear night sky. The comets are white hot points of light with long vapor trails, the image from medieval manuscripts. He smiles, closes his eyes.

SARAH
I love you, Leo...

Leo's face still turned to the sky, eyes closed. The truck PULLS AWAY underneath us, disappearing up the dark road.

Brilliantly lit Titans sit on their launch pads, ready to go. Suddenly, rockets IGNITE. ROAR off into space.

We're looking STRAIGHT DOWN at a closed missile door. The door SLIDES open, revealing a Titan below.

WE CRANE down as the huge metal hole in the desert floor begins to belch white exhaust. The Titan LAUNCHES.
Peaceful, calm. Miles of uninterrupted horizon abruptly PIERCED by more Titans, ROARING up out of the sea.

INSIDE THE MESSIAH

The radar begin to BEEP a warning. Baker swings to it.

TANNER
We're not alone.

BAKER
Titans?

TANNER
That'd be my bet.

SIMON
Peashooters.

MONASH
At least they're trying.

SPACE

The comets from the point of view of the missiles.

AND FROM THE MISSILES POV

The comets are immense, and from this angle we finally understand the futility of what is about to happen.

One by one the tiny missiles STRIKE the surface. Pebbles smashing into two very large ponds.

MSNBC – NIGHT

Across the monitors, the faces of people watching; in Beijing, and Nairobi, London and Rio. Eric, Beth, Caitlin, Worth, Stuart, Ira, Marianne, Bobby. On Jenny's monitor, a graphic representation of the missiles striking the comet surface.

JENNY
Here's what you're looking at: all the Titans have hit their targets, but we still don't know if they've made a difference. Comets have to travel for awhile before the radar tracking stations can see if they have been pushed to a safe course that'll bypass the earth. So, one more time, we have to wait.
Entrekin, the President, and Bekey.

BECK
You're sure?

IVAN BEKEY
Plus or minus a few hundred miles.

The President nods, crosses the hallway and into -

250 OVAL OFFICE

The cameras already in place. He heads for his desk.

251 RICHMOND PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

The camera TRACKS through the underground village to find Sarah and her family watching with everyone else on the communal TV. Beck sits behind his desk in the Oval Office. Takes a moment.

BECK (ON TV)
The Titan missiles have failed. The comets are still headed for earth and there's nothing we can do to stop them.

251A INT. MSNBC - NIGHT

People gasp, cry, try to hold back their emotions.

BECK (ON TV)
We have now been able to calculate the comets' final trajectories and we have determined where they're going to strike. So this is it. If the world does go on, it will not go on for everyone.
(takes a moment)
The smaller of the two comets, Biederman, will hit first.

252 IN THE BACK OF THE EASTBOUND TRUCK - NIGHT

The truck's stopped, everyone crowded around a tiny portable set getting crappy reception. Leo stands to one side.

BECK (ON TV)
Somewhere in Eastern Canada, probably in the waters off the coast of Nova Scotia. In just under twelve hours at 4:35 PM, Eastern Daylight time.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
BECK (ON TV) (CONT'D)

(sudden impatience)
Can we get a map? Can somebody get me a map right now?

IN THE OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

Entrekin and Bekey grab a big office globe from over by the fireplace. Haul it on camera.

BECK

The impact of the comet is going to be disastrous. There will be a very large tidal wave moving quickly through the Atlantic Ocean. It'll be 1200 feet high traveling at eleven hundred miles an hour, faster than the speed of sound...

MSNBC NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Everyone stands around watching; terrified. Eric moves to the anchor desk, takes Jenny's hand.

(CONTINUED)
As the wave reaches shallow water, it's going to slow down, but the wave height, depending on the depth of the shelf off the coast, will be anywhere from a half mile to two miles high. Where the land is flat, the wave will wash inland six hundred to seven hundred miles.

The wave will hit New York City forty minutes after impact. Boston, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Washington, all will be destroyed... If you have any means of getting away from the path of this wave, leave now.

They don't have to be told twice, everybody is getting the hell out of the garage, and fast. Sarah and her family leap into the Astro Minivan. People SCREAM, run, a few small children are left crying. The TV still on.

The larger comet, Wolf, will be far more catastrophic. It will strike land in Western Canada three hours after Biederman. Within a week, the skies will be dark with dust from the impact and they will stay dark for two years. All plant life will be dead within four weeks, animal life within a few months.

The President continues, looks directly into camera.

Good luck.
The truck's turning around to head west. Everyone's jumping back on frantically, except Leo who's standing in the road. The last few people hop on or are dragged up by others. The truck completes its turn. A large HISPANIC MAN leans out, offers Leo his hand.

HISPANIC MAN
Come on...!

But Leo doesn't move. The people in the back of the truck stare at him. The truck barrels off west. Leo turns, begins to run east, toward the lightening horizon.

Simon's under the radio panel, working with his one good hand on a jumble of wires. Other wires now criss-cross the ceiling of the cabin in a crazy tennis racket grid of colors. Through the cracked windshield, the Earth.

SIMON
Try that...

TANNER
I'm getting something.

A single GUY sits in the crammed comm room, watching MSNBC on a small set. Hears a SCRATCHY sound. Sits up. What?

TANNER
Houston...is...Messiah. Houston, this... the Messiah...

NASA GUY
Messiah, this is Houston, go ahead...

Another man sticks his head in from the hallway.

NASA GUY (CONT'D)
Get Hefter, quick!

The astronauts let off a WHOOP, elated to be back on line.

HEFTER
Nice of you to call Messiah, we were starting to wonder what the hell you were doing up there.

Tanner motions for everyone to shut up.
257C CONTINUED:

TANNER  
Admiring the view, Houston.

HEFTER  
Fish, that you?

TANNER  
Yep. Sorry we don't have time to talk Houston, we need the arming codes for the last four nukes.

HEFTER  
What the hell for?

TANNER  
Mitch, we can do, or we can teach, what's your pleasure?

257D JSC COMM ROOM

More and more NASA folks jam into the room.

HEFTER  
Get the arming codes! Get the goddamn codes!

WOLF BIEDERMAN IMPACT: 19 HOURS 12 MINUTES 22 SECONDS
Worth's running a mini meeting, it's somber, quiet, a circle. Beer and wine containers litter the table, everyone smokes. A few younger, staffers, Jenny, Eric, Beth with Caitlin, Ira, Tim, Bobby, Marianne.

WORTH
We have one helicopter. It holds seven people. We can ferry six people to high ground in West Virginia and take Jenny to the ark.

They look around, there are thirteen of them, not counting Jenny and Eric. They aren't all going to make it. Worth reaches behind him for coffee stirrers, counts out thirteen, breaks the ends off six. Everyone watches, it's very quiet.

WORTH (CONT'D)
Short sticks go.

TIM
I always thought it was, "women and children first."

WORTH
If you pick short, you can give up your seat.


Beth looks at Worth, at Caitlin beside her. Takes a deep breath. Picks one. It's long. Worth opens his hand, the one remaining stick, short. There's a long silent beat.

JENNY
Oh my God, Beth... What are you going to do?

BETH
There's always the road. I'll be all right.

IRA
(making the best of a worst situation)
Well...I...I'm going to learn French.

(CONTINUED)
Beth gets up and leaves. They all watch her go.

WORTH
All right, let's get moving!

WOLF BIEDERMAN IMPACT: 6 HOURS 54 MINUTES 37 SECONDS

Wolf and Biederman tumble towards Earth.
Tanner, Baker and Tulchinsky are working on the last bomb. Parts float around, tools. Simon's at the comm board. Monash is strapped to his seat.

**SIMON**

The code transfer is going too slow, I can't get a clear signal.

**TANNER**

They'll come or they won't, worrying about it won't help.

Tanner struggles to detach the nuke from its cumbersome MOLE mounting capsule. He's whistling. Baker looks down at him. Among the others.

**BAKER**

Are you whistling?

**TANNER**

Yep...

Baker grins, shakes his head.

**BAKER**

You're happy aren't you, Fish...?

Tanner doesn't answer for moment, then:

**TANNER**

During the middle ages, a Swedish Knight, returning home from the crusades, got caught by the plague. The Angel of Death came to take him away, he was on a beach and there was no place to hide.

Baker and Simon trade looks, here he goes again.

**TANNER (CONT'D)**

Death said, "It's time to go." The Knight took a look at him and said, "I've heard you're a chess player." Death said, "That's true." The Knight said, "Death, why don't we play a game of chess? As long as I hold you off, you don't claim my soul. And if I win, I live forever." Death smiled and said, "Let's play."

(CONTINUED)
Tanner gets the nuke out, takes it to the table where Simon's fashioned straps out of scrap to hold the nukes in place.

TANNER (CONT'D)
The Knight held him off for a long time, until one day, the Knight stopped in a church for confession. And in the dark of that confessional, he told the priest about the chess game, and how Death had overlooked a move, and how he, the Knight, was just one jump away from a checkmate. And the priest pulled back the screen, and it was Death himself. The Knight had given away his game.

Everyone's listening now, lost in their own emotions.

TANNER (CONT'D)
There was no chance to recover. He was going to lose. The Knight went outside, and he looked at his hands, and he could see the blood still flowing in his veins, and he said, "There it is, I'm still alive, and I, Antonius Block - that was his name - I, Antonius Block, am playing Chess with Death!"

Tanner finishes screwing the final nuke in place, slips on a control lead, the nukes LED's BLINK on. He smiles.

TANNER (CONT'D)
It's been a hell of a game.

FREEWAY - DAY

A freeway sign: "RICHMOND BEACHES 6 MILES." The CAMERA BOOMS DOWN to find bumper to bumper traffic on both sides of the road heading west. Cars are HONKING, RADIOS are on, tempers FLARE. News CHOPPERS overhead.

WE MOVE DOWN TO FIND Leo, on a bike heading the opposite direction -- east, into town.

HOTCHNER VAN - DAY

Sarah and her family in the red Astro Minivan, stuck in horrible traffic. Sarah sneaks a look up front, ON THE DIGITAL SPEEDOMETER: 4 miles an hour. Chuck sees his daughter looking. They're in trouble. And they know it.
The COMETS' POV: Earth fills the horizon.

LEO'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

The street's deserted, weeds choke lawns, trash is piled up everywhere, broken windows, doors ripped off hinges. Leo pedals up the street, hard. Passes abandoned cars, dogs roaming free eating garbage. Dumps the bike on Sarah's dead lawn, rushes into --

SARAH'S HOUSE - DAY

The front door bars have been pried off, wood hanging from the jam. It's oddly quiet, family photos missing, leaves blowing around, the place has been looted.

(CONTINUED)
269 CONTINUED:

LEO
Sarah! Sarah...!

No answer, he's near panic.

LEO (CONT'D)
SARAH...

270 BACK ON THE STREET - DAY

A metal toolshed door RATTLES in the breeze. A front door SLAPS back and forth.

LEO
Sarah...!

A cat scoots across the street. A car wreck sits under the streetlight. He checks both cars for keys, nothing. Runs along the houses, all deserted. Nobody.

LEO (CONT'D)
Hello! Hello...!

Nothing. Just the empty street.

LEO (CONT'D)
SARAH...?!

It's getting creepy now, Leo's spooked. He runs up to his own garage, pulls the partially destroyed garage door up.

The garage has been looted, too. Old toys strewn around, dolls, baby clothing. But sitting against the wall, still chained in place. His Dad's dirt bike, its heavy duty chain and massive lock still in there, showing the evidence of several attempts to break it.

Leo digs among the scattered paint cans. Finds the right one. The keys still in their hiding place. Unlocks it. Climbs on, turns it over with a ROAR. FLIES down the driveway and out into the street, barely hanging on.

271 OMIT 271
THRU
273

274 THE MESSIAH

The astronauts watch Biederman entering the atmosphere.

(CONTINUED)
TANNER

We ready?

Everyone's strapped in, Tanner and Baker up front with Simon. Tulchinsky and Monash next to the nukes. All nod.

TANNER (CONT'D)

Houston, this is Messiah. We're ready to begin our run. Our families there yet?

HEFTER (ON COM)

They're on their way, Messiah. Good luck.

Kenny takes the yoke, begins a turn.

TANNER

Disengage autopath. Here we go...

275 SPACE

The Messiah sling shots around the Earth, heading for the massive Wolf. We SWING BACK TO Biederman's view of the earth as it approaches the atmosphere and begins to heat up. SCREAMS past a satellite, starts to glow.

275A THE FREEWAY - DAY

Leo ROARS along the shoulder, up and down the grass embankments trying to miss abandoned cars. Surfing the sea of slow moving traffic. Searching for the Astrovan.

275E INT. MSNBC - DAY

Jenny and Eric are running through the building. They have to cross the studio. Jenny runs to her desk.

ERIC

What are you doing?

(CONTINUED)
JENNY
I have to get something.

She grabs the envelope her Father gave her.

ERIC
Jenny! Let's go!

She runs with him. They pass the day care center. There are Beth and Caitlin, playing. Jenny stops.

JENNY
(surprised)
Beth!

ERIC
Jenny!

He's already at the door to the roof. The others are pushing past him. When the door opens we can hear the noise of the helicopter on the roof.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Jenny! We have to go!

BETH
The roads were so crowded, it was obvious that we weren't going to make it. If the wave is going to come, I thought, well, she likes it here. It's the fifteenth floor, who knows, maybe we'll be alright.

JENNY
Caitlin. Come here.

Caitlin comes to her. Jenny picks her up.

BETH
Say goodbye to Jenny, Caitlin.

ERIC
Jenny! There's no time left!

JENNY
Let's go.

BETH
Where?

Jenny starts running with Caitlin. Caitlin drops her doll.

JENNY
Let's go.

They all start running up the stairs together.
They come to the roof. A helicopter is waiting for them, and another chopper has just left. The sky is filled with helicopters and small planes, all heading west.

ERIC
We're going to make it, we're going to make it, let's go, let's go, now, now, now...

BETH
Where are you going with my Caitlin?

Jenny seems to have an aura around her, something is holding her back from the fear and tension that everyone else is showing on their faces. She's actually calm.

JENNY
You're taking Caitlin and you're taking my seat.

BETH
Why?

A few people are already in the chopper.

JENNY
Get inside!

Beth rushes in.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Caitlin, I love you.

Jenny hands Caitlin to her mother. Eric is about to get on.

ERIC
What are you doing?

The Pilot looks doubtfully at the number of people he's supposed to carry.

PILOT
That's too many.

ERIC
We can make it.

JENNY
I'm not going. Goodbye, Eric.

ERIC
What?

(CONTINUED)
BETH
Thank you, thank you, thank you.

PILOT
We gotta go!

And he starts to lift off.

ERIC
No!

JENNY
Goodbye, Eric.

Eric is holding Jenny's hand as the helicopter rises.

ERIC
But I love you.

Jenny hears this, and smiles. She kisses his hand.

JENNY
Next time!

ERIC
Next time!

And then their hands separate, and the helicopter flies off the roof, and joins the swarm of planes going west.

275H OMIT

275I EXT. ROAD - DAY

We are looking east on the freeway, at the miles of cars, filling both sides of the road and all heading west. They are stopped, or moving at a mile an hour.

We are on the westbound lanes, looking at the back of a sign over the freeway. We cross to the eastbound lane and a sign saying BEACHES... We continue across the highway and over the embankment to an access road, where one car is heading towards the water. We find the driver: Jenny.

(CONTINUED)
Leo on his motorbike, wearing a helmet, through the traffic. Cars everywhere, impossible to get through.

An Astrovan... he goes up to it: the wrong family.

Another Astrovan... the wrong people.

Leo drives up onto the center median. Other motorcyclists are using the same road.

HE PASSES THE HOTCHNER FAMILY.

Vicky sees him.

INSIDE THE VAN

Vicky sees Leo.

CHUCK HOTCHNER
Look... Sarah... Look...

Sarah and Chuck see Leo.

SARAH
Leo!

She throws herself over her Father to hit the horn. But all the cars are honking.

ON LEO

Leo is ahead of the Hotchners.

ON SARAH

She gets out of the car and climbs up on the roof.

SARAH (CONT'D)
LEO! LEO BIEDERMAN! LEO!

Leo doesn't hear her.

ON LEO (FROM HIS REAR VIEW MIRROR)

A girl on a van.

BACK TO SCENE

He stops. He turns around. He sees Sarah.

She is off the van, and running to him through the stopped traffic.

He rides back to her.
They kiss.

Vicky, carrying the Baby, and Chuck, are out of the van, coming to them.

CHUCK HOTCHNER
You don't have any time, you have to go now.

VICKY
Here...

She gives Sarah the Baby.

SARAH
Mom...

VICKY
Make a life.

LEO
I'll take care of them, I promise...

CHUCK HOTCHNER
I know you will. Go, please go...

Sarah nods, crying. Leaps on the back of his bike.

VICKY
We love you, we always loved you, now get out of here, now, now, now. Go!

Leo and Sarah, holding the Baby, get on the motorbike, and get out of there as fast as they can, leaving Chuck and Vicky on the road.
276A EXT. SKY - DAY

The comet's POV, low in the atmosphere, streaking over the earth.

277 OMIT
THRU
278B

279 FREEWAY - DAY

Chuck and Vicky Hotchner lean against their stopped van. He has his arm around her. She lets him hold her. He looks up... Everyone is looking up, she looks up... there's the comet.

CHUCK HOTCHNER

Biederman.

People get out of their cars, slowly. WE BOOM UP, to see miles of jammed road, all traffic has stopped as a million people make peace with the end of their lives.
Leo and Sarah ROAR off the freeway, FLY past an endless line of cars crawling slowly into the green hills. Sarah sees the comet first.

SARAH

Oh no...

Streaking overhead. Leo yells over the NOISE of the bike.

LEO

Fifteen minutes after it hits we'll feel the shock wave! Hold on...!

He LAYS on the gas, Sarah holding onto Leo and the baby for dear life.

Stuart walks calmly along the street in a suit and tie. People run past, cars JAMMED bumper to bumper in the street, HONKING, trying desperately to get out of the city. But Stuart's calm, relaxed. Finds a --

Curbside Starbucks coffee cart, umbrella, it's deserted. Makes himself a cup of espresso. The portable TV on the cart now only STATIC. Grabs a New York Times from an abandoned news stand. The NY tabloids hanging from it's sides scream "COMET TO CITY: DROP DEAD!" And "THE FAT LADY SINGS!", the Times simply states, "Wolf, Biederman Impact Imminent" and in smaller type, "Scientists Disagree On Extent Of Destruction".

He walks through the chaos and out into Washington Square among the pigeons. Sits on the steps near the Arch, sets his coffee to one side, lights a cigarette, opens his paper.

The comet is coming to ground. Forest and fields on shore IGNITE, the ocean BOILS as the comet SPLASHES into the sea a few miles off the coast.

The white hot tip of the comet breaks the surface. The hole in the ocean begins to spread. Merges with the earth, and FROM ABOVE, the circle of the impact spreads. On shore, the earth RIPPLES away in harmony with the water. And then the shock wave catches up with the fires, BLOWING them out as it KNOCKS the forests flat.
Farms and towns are thrown into the air, then roads and cars SHOCKED into vapor by the impact. The ocean wave begins to form, TOWERING above. WE'RE MOVING fast... Down the East Coast... Faster than the speed of sound... Cities COLLAPSE, forests, bridges. Everything in its path.

Jenny drives down the deserted country road, heading east, when SUDDENLY the ground RIPPLES towards her, as if the highway were a rug and God was shaking out the dust. Trees FALL, telephone poles SNAP. The car FLIES over the sudden three foot speed bump. SLAMS back to the road, with a metal GRINDING THUMP, Jenny keeps going.

Leo and Sarah. The RIPPLING earth catches up to them from behind, moving fast. Sarah sees, SCREAMS to Leo.

SARAH
Oh God...!

It catches them. The motorcycle JUMPS, bounces up over the rolling ground. They land HARD, Leo struggles to keep the bike upright, Sarah clutching the bundled Baby.

The wave is a thousand feet high and moves across the ocean in a line that stretches past the horizon. OIL RIGS are simply swallowed whole.

Jenny arrives at the beach colony, with beautiful weathered old ramshackle cottages behind fences on the dunes. She has the photographs that Jason gave her at MSNBC.

She has found the cottage in the background.

Ahead of her, through a break in the houses, a path to the sea. A dog barks. The birds wheel overhead. She walks to the sand. She takes off her shoes. She's carrying a bag and she flings it away.

No more than a hundred or so people are on the beach, families, old people, children, and dogs. A little girl has a cockatiel in a birdcage. She lets it go. The bird flies away. There's a boy in a wheelchair. His parents set him on the sand, near the water's edge. Couples are kissing, families are hugging each other. A man alone plays frisbee with his black lab.
Someone is playing the guitar.

There's Jason, standing alone, looking out at the sea. He comes to her.

JASON
Jenny...

JENNY
When I was eleven, I stole money from your wallet.

JASON
When you were a baby, I dropped you on your head.

JENNY
When you came to the studio, and you showed me the pictures, I lied when I told you that I didn't remember. I was so mad at you, because I remembered everything. I remember the day, it was a perfect happy day. We were right over here... We were all alone on the beach, and Mom was really upset because she'd left her tripod in the house. I'm here because I wanted you to know.

They walk to the water's edge.

JASON
Thank you. I miss her, too.

Jenny stares at her Father.

JASON (CONT'D)
I wish I could make up all that lost time for you.

JENNY
(no irony, she means this)
We have the rest of our lives.

And then a terrible sound, not the wave, something else:

The sky is filled with SQUAWKING sea birds flying inland, a dense cloud of gulls, terns, and pelicans. Everyone on the beach begins to join hands in a line at the water's edge, gently, without the need to talk. The DOGS run away from them, away from the water.

And then the sea before them is SUCKED away in a massive rip tide, exposing fish and an old wreck. Something foams on the horizon. Here it comes. Imagine the Santa Monica mountains rolling toward you, faster than the speed of sound.

(CONTINUED)
Jenny grabs her father.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Daddeee!

Father holds daughter. The sound is DEAFENING. And they're gone.
The wave sweeps down the freeway, gathering thousands of cars in its foam. The Hotchners wait, holding each other.

Vicky looks up at her husband, smiles. And they disappear as the tidal wave sucks up fifty thousand cars.

The wave sweeps over lower Manhattan, around and between and over the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

It tears through Soho.

From Times Square, you can see it coming up Broadway and Seventh Avenue.

The rushing crowds around Stuart, stop. Climb out of their cars, look eastward. A tremendous NOISE. Stuart looks up from his paper. Takes a final deep drag of his cigarette, and he's gone.

Looking up at the Chrysler building we see an ocean liner tossed by the wave into the skyscraper's top floors.

FROM ABOVE: looking down at the Empire State Building as the wave surges through mid-town.

FROM BELOW: As the Statue of Liberty floats face down above the drowned city.
292H EXT. WORLD TRADE CENTER - DAY

FROM THE SURFACE OF THE WATER: the wave has passed, leaving one tower of the World Trade Center leaning against the other, water draining from the shattered windows.

293 OMIT

294 VIRGINIA HILLS - DAY

Leo and Sarah ROAR over a hill to see a mountain road rising above, traffic JAMMED all the way up. Sedans have tried to negotiate the shoulder and gotten stuck. There's nowhere to go. Leo idles for a moment. Looks around desperately, Steve McQueen in The Great Escape. Behind them, in the far distance, something is COMING. He REVS the engine.

    LEO

    Hold on!

FLIES off into the brush, looking for a trail, anything. The bushes and branches SLAP at their faces, SCRATCH and TEAR.

A deer trail. Not much but they'll take it. It's steep, not meant for motorcycles. The wrong move and they'll FLY off into the woods. Dirt SAILS off the tires as they SKID and SLAM over branches and decomposing leaves.

They come around a bend, a huge TREE down ahead. Leo brakes to try to stop, but the bike SKIDS underneath them. They go down. Leo and Sarah falling, SLIDING behind it.

(CONTINUED)
The cycle SMASHES into the tree, SLAMS up and over it in a twisting somersault of metal and paint.

And suddenly, it's silent. Leo sits up, clothes torn, covered in mud and dirt. Crawls back to Sarah.

LEO (CONT'D)
Sarah...? Sarah...?!

She's a few feet behind him, face scrapped, more concerned about the baby still strapped to her chest.

SARAH
I think he's okay...

CRYING like hell, but alright. Leo pulls her up.

LEO
We have to keep going, can you run?

She nods. He drags her behind him over the tree, the bike a mangled mess, the back wheel still spinning.

THE WAVE – DAY

It covers the countryside, the crest of the beast eating everything in its way, devouring entire states.

FOREST – DAY

Leo and Sarah running. People behind them, above them.

THE WAVE – DAY

It reaches the base of the hills. An immense force, the water piling up on the mountain as easily as water in a bathtub surges over the side if you give it a push.

EXT SPACE

The United States coastline has changed. Cape Cod is gone. New York City and Long Island. No Chesapeake Bay. No Carolinas or Florida. The ocean reaches inland from the White Mountains of New Hampshire to the Poconos, to the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Appalachians.

INT MESSIAH

The bombs are strapped to the cabin table, their LEDs blinking 0:00:20. Ready to be started.

BAKER
We're at perigee. Wolf contact in three minutes, forty-five seconds.

Wolf dead ahead, heading for earth.

(CONTINUED)
TANNER
We'll never be closer to home then we are right now.

They watch the earth below them.

HEFTER (ON COM)
Messiah, we've got some people down here who want to talk to you...

299 MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY
Leo and Sarah CRASH out of the woods onto the road, out of breath. HEAR the thing behind them. Look back --

White foam, DEAFENING noise, planes overhead. People run out of the forest, the water rising behind them, ROARING up out of the woods. The Atlantic Ocean now two hundred miles west of where it was this morning.

300 JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY
The families of the astronauts, monitors set up in front of them, Simon's scratchy image. His fiancee, Wendy, crying.

SIMON (ON MONITOR)
Wendy, if you let this ruin your life, I'm going to come back to haunt you.

WENDY
Please, come back and haunt me.

301 ON THE MESSIAH
It's Baker's turn, her husband and two daughters.

BAKER
Take care of Daddy for me, okay? (the little girls nod) David, you know what I want to say.

DAVID BAKER (ON MONITOR)
I know.

302 JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY
Next up is Tulchinsky. He starts in English, switches to Russian and then a SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATOR takes over.

TULCHINSKY (ON MONITOR)
I was in love with three women in my life. You know who you are. (in Russian, translated) I was stupid, I couldn't decide. (MORE)
TULCHINSKY (ON MONITOR) (CONT'D)

Each of you is beautiful and unique
and I didn't want to give that up.
But I loved you, don't ever doubt
that, I loved you all...

303 MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Leo and Sarah are trying to make it to higher ground but
the wave CRESTS over the road. CATCHES them.

LEO
Sarah!

SARAH
Leo!

LIFTS them up as they're carried by the water, TURNED and
TOSSED, ROLLED and BUMPED together.

304 THE MESSIAH

Wolf looms very large, dead ahead. Tulchinsky helps Monash
get in place for the camera. Baker's counting down.

BAKER
Wolf contact in two minutes, thirty
seconds.

Hefter's face appears in the Houston monitor, distressed.

HEFTER (ON MONITOR)
Oren, Mariette was up at your folks
place in Utah, we sent a plane for
her, but she isn't here yet.

And Fish, your sons are both on
active duty, we couldn't get them
back here in time. I'm sorry. We
tried. Spurgeon, I was wrong.
You were the best man for the job.

Tanner nods, not surprised.

TANNER
Mitch? I want to say good-bye to
Mary. I want to tell her I love
her, and that, ever since we've
been apart, every day, I think
about her.
(then)
I'm coming home, Mary.
BAKER
Coming up on target 126 miles,
RDOT .3, 1 degree X, 15 degrees
Y...

Tanner looks away from the monitor, takes the controls.

BAKER (CONT'D)
115 miles, .3, 2 degrees X, 13
Y...

Wolf rolls slowly, the vent clearly ahead of them. The Messiah heads into the mass of coma and rocks.

JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY
Mariette, with the baby, runs into the building, military escorts struggling to keep up.

MARIETTE
Wait...oh god...wait...!

The comet is nearing the earth's atmosphere.

THE MESSIAH
They're BANGING around, the worst, downhill four-wheel drive off road experience you can imagine. Tanner tries to hold it on target.

BAKER
76 miles. Wolf impact in forty-five seconds...

MARIETTE (ON MONITOR)
Oren?... Oren, are you there?!

Monash turns to his wife's voice. Her picture breaking up as they FIGHT their way through the dense coma.

MONASH
Mariette? I'm here, I can hear you.

The terrifyingly jumpy interior of the ship and Monash on the static filled monitor. Mariette holds up their child.

MARIETTE
Baby... This is your father.

(CONTINUED)
Monash

Mariette!

Mariette

His name is Oren, I named him after you.

Oren Jr.

Dadda!

Honash

Oren.

Oren Jr. holds up to the camera a rocket toy he has been clutching.

(Continued)
We see the image of the baby and the rocket on the Messiah's monitor.

MONASH
What happened?

OREN JR.
Look!

SIMON
(helping out Monash)
He's holding up a little rocket.

MONASH
Oh, what a powerful rocket you have.

The Baby coos and giggles.

SIMON
He's laughing.

MONASH
I can hear him. Mariette...

BAKER
In 40 miles...25 seconds...

She keeps counting. Tanner yells back to Tulchinsky.

TANNER
Prepare to synchronize the nukes.

MONASH
...I'm hugging you both right now...
I'm holding you...

MARIETTE
We're holding you!

Tulchinsky has a makeshift button, wires run from it to the nukes. 0:00:20 frozen on their LEDs.

BAKER
...23...22...21...20...

Tulchinsky hits the button and the nukes begin to count down in perfect unison...19...18...

BAKER (CONT'D)
It's been a pleasure serving with you, Commander.

Tanner doesn't take his eyes off the vent.
TANNER
The honor's all mine, Andy...

MARIETTE
We love you, Oren...

311  JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY

Mariette's crying, hell, everybody's crying. Monash's face, his hand touching the camera. And then, he's gone. The monitor suddenly filled with STATIC. The baby leans forward trying to touch the screen, mystified.

BABY
...dada...?
Wolf begins heating up as the Messiah ROARS into the vent, swallowed whole.

Nothing. Didn't it work? And then, a BLINDING light SHOOTS out... and BOOM. Everything goes WHITE.

Leo and Sarah sit up in the middle of the flooded road. The water draining away as the wave recedes. Sarah still has the CRYING baby in her arms.

LEO

...look...

THE SKY: overhead, far away, Wolf and a brilliant light followed by a massive rolling wave of THUNDER that shakes the earth. They walk to the edge of the road, look out over the valley, the ocean slowly receding below.

SARAH

It's going away.

And then all the pieces from the explosion begin HITTING the atmosphere. The greatest meteor shower in history, FIREWORKS in the day brighter than at night. The entire sky filled with color and light, STREAKING, BURNING.

Leo can't speak. Sarah holds Leo, the baby. The baby stares at the sky, the ocean, mesmerized. Begins to LAUGH...

THE END