

CHALLENGER

by
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EXT. DESERT - EARLY DAWN

A wind catches fluttering bits of white paper, released by an unseen hand. We could be anywhere in time and space. We hear RADIO STATIC mixed with strains of a WALTZ carried on a faraway frequency.

FEYNMAN (V.O.)

The Nobel Prize? Yeah, I tried to turn it down. It was a nice gesture from those fellas at the Swedish Academy, but it doesn't mean anything. The real prize is the pleasure of finding things out, the kick in the discovery.

INT. CAL-TECH PHYSICS X CLASSROOM - EVENING

In a large basement auditorium, RICHARD FEYNMAN stands spotlighted in front of a blackboard covered in equations. With his tan youthful face, deep laugh lines, and a rumpled mop of hair, he seems much younger than his 69 years.

Feynman holds the rapt attention of the audience of adoring young STUDENTS with his warm voice, still carrying its coarser Brooklyn roots.

FEYNMAN

Honors are unreal to me, okay? We're all still just apes trying to figure out how to get the banana that's just outta reach. Most of the time we can't, but sometimes we figure out how to tie two sticks together and we get that banana and it is very exciting - when an idea actually works!

He sits partially on his desk, heavy with intent.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

The important thing as scientists is not to fool yourselves into thinking you've got something when you don't. Because unlike you and me and the fellas at the Swedish Academy-- Mother Nature can't be fooled.

TITLE: CHALLENGER

EXT. CAPE KENNEDY, FLORIDA - NIGHT, JANUARY 27TH, 1986

Super: Cape Kennedy, Florida. January 27th, 1986.

The CHALLENGER SPACE SHUTTLE looms on the 39B launch pad. Twenty stories high, it is lit up with sodium lights--impressive, ominous, dominating the Florida wetlands.

CUT TO:

INT. BOISJOLY'S OFFICE, UTAH - SIMULTANEOUS

We hear the PANTING breath of ROGER BOISJOLY, a bald, large-waisted engineer, as he rushes around his office.

Super: Morton Thiokol Complex (MTI), Utah

Boisjoly sweats through his button-down shirt as he frantically pulls down blueprints from shelves, grabs paperwork and charts, throwing them all into a file box.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. LAUNCH PAD 39 B

There is a HUMMING in the air, the repetitive HISS of pressure building up and releasing from the liquid fuel tanks, the sound of a living, breathing creature. Yet with over two million separate parts, the space shuttle is the most complex piece of technology ever built by man.

MULLOY (O.S.)

This is no time to be getting cold feet, MTI.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

In a conference room at Cape Kennedy sits NASA manager LARRY MULLOY, a bulldog in a suit-- jowly and broad-shouldered. Across from him is a nervous ALLAN MCDONALD-- a reedy man with glasses.

MULLOY

First McDonald says he won't sign the launch directive, now you're all backing out?! I took the heat for you the last three times. I won't do it again.

Behind them is a COUNTDOWN CLOCK, keeping track of the hours before launch. Out their window we can see the launchpad.

BOISJOLY (O.S.)
(out of intercom)
Mr. Mulloy, you saw my damage
reports and burn-through charts--

MULLOY
(interrupting)
My God, when do you want us to
launch, next April?!

INT. MTI TELECONFERENCE ROOM, UTAH - SIMULTANEOUS

Boisjoly stands in front of a group of men, seated around a table. There are several MTI ENGINEERS and two MTI MANAGERS. Technical charts and graphs cover the table in front of Boisjoly-- the proof he was frantically compiling before.

BOISJOLY
We've all looked at the data. And
we all agreed to scrub.

An awkward silence. On the table, the intercom SQUAWKS:

MULLOY (O.S.)
There are other companies out there
who can build us a solid rocket
booster. I suggest you take another
look at your data, MTI.

The two MTI Managers exchange looks.

MANAGER #1
Okay, we'll take a five minute
caucus here. Off-line.

BOISJOLY
I just want to say, we-- we're
moving away from goodness here.

MTI Manager #2 switches off the intercom. Manager #1 is looking at Boisjoly. Looking hard...

EXT. LAUNCH PAD 39 B - SIMULTANEOUS

At the base of the shuttle, an ICE INSPECTION TEAM murmurs with concern, as they huddle around something we can't see.

The ICE TEAM CAPTAIN shakes his head.

ICE TEAM CAPTAIN
Looks like Dr. Zhivago out here.

One by one, they leave, dismissing the flight as obvious no-go, and revealing a fringe of foot-long icicles hanging from the launchpad's railings.

We see that the icicles aren't limited to the railing-- they COVER THE ENTIRE launch pad. It's an unsettling sight.

MULLOY (O.S.)
How did five minutes turn into
forty-five?! We're eight hours to
launch. I need your decision.

INT. MTI CONFERENCE ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Back in the conference room, the room holds its breath. Boisjoly looks beaten down, his shirt sticking to him, the dry erase boards behind him covered in graphs and figures.

MTI MANAGER #1
(into intercom)
Mr. Mulloy, we've reanalyzed our
data.

MULLOY (O.S.)
And?

MTI MANAGER #2
(into intercom)
Let's go for it.

MULLOY (O.S.)
Are you all in agreement?

Boisjoly meets no one's gaze. His hands are shaking.

MTI MANAGER #1
No objections on this end. Right,
gentlemen?

A long silence. No one looks at Boisjoly. He slowly, inconspicuously gathers his charts under his hands and slides them back into the file box.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER CONFERENCE ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Mulloy looks relieved.

MULLOY
I want a launch directive as soon
as possible... And don't forget to
sign it.

EXT. LAUNCH PAD 39 B - SIMULTANEOUS

The shuttle waits, as the sky begins to lighten behind it.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAPE KENNEDY, FLORIDA - NEXT MORNING

From above, we see a NASA carrier van traveling the straight line of the road, leading inevitably to the launchpad.

EXT. NASA OBSERVATION BLEACHERS - SIMULTANEOUS

A giant digital clock inexorably counts down the minutes remaining before launch. SPECTATORS, bundled up against the cold, CHEER as the NASA van zooms past their bleachers.

EXT. CAPE KENNEDY, FLORIDA - LATER

A chipper NEWSCASTER in earmuffs addresses her CAMERAMAN.

NEWSCASTER

The question is, will NASA launch this morning after three failed attempts? In the white room, Christa McAuliffe, America's first Teacher in Space, waits with the rest of us.

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

In the White Room beside the Challenger's entry hatch, the seven excited ASTRONAUTS move towards the catwalk. Someone tosses CHRISTA MCAULIFFE an apple, and she laughs.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - MOMENTS LATER

NASA ENGINEERS watch the pre-launch proceedings on monitors in the massive Mission Control room. McDonald looks ill-at-ease at his console.

ON THE GROUND

We see the news cameras focused on the shuttle from multiple angles. A hundred different versions of this one moment.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

T minus ten, nine, eight, seven--

The crowd is on their feet, holding their breath.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE (CONT'D)
--four, we have main engine start!

LAUNCH PAD - SIMULTANEOUS

And we're engulfed in the overwhelming roar of the engines' fire, which drowns out all other noise.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - SIMULTANEOUS

McDonald nervously watches the digital readout of the rocket's technical data on a console screen.

As the shuttle rises, Mulloy gets up and pumps his fist, then pats McDonald on the back. Macdonald gives him a shaky smile.

INT. MTI CONFERENCE ROOM- SIMULTANEOUS

In Utah, the conference room we saw last night is now so packed that Boisjoly is forced to sit on the floor. The launch is being broadcast on a big screen TV.

As Boisjoly watches, he softly prays under his breath.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE
(on TV)
Lift off! Lift off of the twenty-
fifth space shuttle mission... and
it has cleared the tower...

CLOSE ON video footage on multiple monitors of the Challenger climbing higher and higher in the unbroken blue.... The roar of the flame and static, as the shuttle accelerates towards its fate.

Challenger suddenly EXPLODES in a huge rolling fireball, splitting off into twin trails of smoke, frozen in the sky. We hear the horrified GASPS and WAILS of the spectators on the ground, as flaming debris trails towards the sea.

FADE OUT.

INT. CHAIRMAN ROGERS' OFFICE, WASHINGTON DC - DAY

SUPER:.. Washington DC. Three days later

ROGERS (O.S.)
 If we lose control of this
 investigation, NASA could lose its
 Congressional funding.

NASA's Chief Administrator BILL GRAHAM, 40's, listens to
 WILLIAM ROGERS, 73, former Secretary of State during the
 Nixon administration, now the newly appointed Chairman of the
 Presidential Commission to investigate the shuttle disaster.

Rogers gestures to a LIST OF NAMES, some of which have been
 crossed off.

ROGERS (CONT'D)
 Your Mr. Wizard is a loose cannon,
 a publicity hound. He's exactly the
 kind of trouble-maker we don't
 want.

We see that sitting off in the background is ALTON KEEL,
 40's, a thin jackknife of a man who looks like he was born
 into his suit. Keel SPINS a red pen deftly around his thumb
 and forefinger, not missing a word of what's being said.

GRAHAM
 Feynman's a genius. And he's famous
 throughout the scientific
 community.

ROGERS
 Famous for pulling stunts, and for
 flouting authority. We've already
 got Neil Armstrong, Chuck Yeager,
 Sally Ride--

GRAHAM
 (dismissive)
 --who are all tied to NASA.

ROGERS
 How many celebrities do we need?!

GRAHAM
 Just one, who's untouchable.

Rogers glances at Keel, with a sour twist to his mouth. Keel
 shrugs, as if to say, "can't win this one."

EXT. CAL-TECH CAMPUS - DAY

Super: Pasadena, California.

Establishing shot of California Institute of Technology, an idyllic campus teeming with students on their way to class.

INT. PHYSICS X CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Graham slips into the back of the auditorium. Taped to the door is a piece of paper with "Physics X" scrawled across it. Feynman stands at the front of the room, writing a complicated set of equations across the board.

FEYNMAN
(his back still turned)
Grossbart, third row. What can
science teach us?

The young SIMON GROSSBART, caught off guard, looks nervously around. His friends don't offer any assistance.

GROSSBART
I don't know... maybe to understand
why we exist?

FEYNMAN
You should have stopped after "I
don't know." THAT was the right
answer. "Why" designates some sort
of meaning to it all, like
religion. But religion is a culture
of faith, science is a culture of
doubt.

He taps the blackboard behind him. His students perk up, chewing on their pencils.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
Einstein's Special Theory of
Relativity is just that-- a theory.
It's not infallible, okay? To take
everything I teach you as gospel
would be to doom humanity to the
confines of our limited
imagination.

Feynman sits on the edge of his desk.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
Great progress can only come from
embracing uncertainty. Doubt is not
to be feared, but to be welcomed.
Doubt is in-ter-esting. We owe it
to the future *not to know*.

Grossbart raises his hand. Feynman acknowledges him.

GROSSBART

So does this mean we'll pass this class by being really good at not knowing?

The laugh lines of Feynman's face deepen.

FEYNMAN

I seriously doubt it.

While getting off the desk, Feynman suddenly staggers a little, and has to brace himself.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I think that's it for today.

The students, a little puzzled by the abruptness, gather their things. Graham fights like a salmon against the stream of exiting students. Feynman sits at his desk, exhausted.

GRAHAM

Dr. Feynman!

Graham comes up and shakes his hand vigorously.

FEYNMAN

You'll have to refresh my memory.

GRAHAM

Bill Graham. I was in this same classroom a million years ago.

FEYNMAN

And what are you up to these days?

GRAHAM

I'm head of NASA.

Feynman looks up with a smile.

FEYNMAN

I assume you passed, then.

GRAHAM

I'm here about the Presidential Commission to investigate the Challenger accident...

FEYNMAN

(smile fading)

Don't ask me.

Graham is caught off guard.

GRAHAM

I assure you, it would only take up
a few months of your time--

FEYNMAN

These days, time's my most valuable
commodity.

He carries his briefcase out of the room, followed by Graham.

EXT. CAL-TECH CAMPUS - LATER

They walk together towards the staff parking lot.

FEYNMAN

I've got my own work to do-- work I
find much more interesting than
which bolt of yours shoulda got
tightened and didn't. No offense.

They've reached Feynman's van-- which is covered in hand-
painted spidery Feynman physics diagrams in bright colors.

GRAHAM

I'm sure you understand, it would
be a great service to your country.

FEYNMAN

I did my service back during the
war, at a little place called Los
Alamos.

Graham tries another tack, desperate to break through
Feynman's nonchalance.

GRAHAM

As a man of science, don't you feel
a responsibility to use your
knowledge to benefit society?

FEYNMAN

Sorry, but I'm sort of a super-Jew:
impervious to guilt.

Feynman finishes loading his van, and shakes Graham's hand.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Besides, if scientists worried
about responsibility all the time,
nothing would ever get
accomplished.

Graham is out of ideas.

GRAHAM
(holding onto his hand)
Just-- think about it?

FEYNMAN
It's been nice seein' ya. And hey-

He tucks a theater ticket into Graham's shirt pocket.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
I'm headlining tonight. Check it
out.

As Feynman gets into his van, a puzzled Graham takes the
ticket out and examines it.

STUDENT ACTORS (O.S.)
All hail the Chief! Chief Bali Hai!

CUT TO:

INT. CAL-TECH THEATER - THAT NIGHT

A group of STUDENTS dressed in South Pacific garb, grass
skirts and leis, pound on drums.

In the darkened audience sits Graham, next to Feynman's
British wife GWENETH, 49 and pretty, and Feynman's coltish
daughter MICHELLE, 16.

The drumming intensifies and suddenly a figure rises from a
trap door in the stage, amidst much dry-ice mist. He is
wearing an elaborate feather headdress and grass skirt.

It is Richard Feynman, a pair of bongo drums tucked under one
arm. The audience goes wild, CHEERING and HOOTING. He's a
rock star. Feynman starts drumming, and we see his skill--
he's an expert player. Even Graham is impressed.

INT. FEYNMAN HOUSEHOLD KITCHEN - FOLLOWING MORNING

The kitchen is flooded with yellow morning light. Gweneth
watches coverage of the shuttle disaster.

We see the twin trails of smoke on the TV, the careening
solid rocket boosters shooting off in two directions.

NEWSCASTER (O.S.)

Until the wreckage has been
recovered officials can do little
but speculate as to the cause of
the accident that killed America's
first Teacher In Space-

A photo appears on TV of Christa McAuliffe-- in front of a
classroom of children, wearing her NASA-issue jumpsuit. CLOSE
ON McAuliffe's face, glowing with excitement and hope.

Gweneth is engrossed and doesn't see at first when Feynman
enters the kitchen behind her wearing PJs and bunny slippers.

FEYNMAN

Where do we keep the spoons around
here?

GWENETH

Sorry?

FEYNMAN

The spoons!

GWENETH

Same place they've been for the
last 15 years, sweetheart.

He opens the cutlery drawer, gets two spoons. Opens freezer.

FEYNMAN

How many times can you watch that
thing explode?

He takes out a carton of mint ice cream, then spoons ice
cream into two bowls.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Seven astronauts dead, and for
what? Watching spiders weave webs
in zero g? I'm telling you, we took
a wrong turn after Apollo.

He casually shakes a few pills out of a prescription bottle
and tosses them back.

Suddenly we hear RONALD REAGAN's voice-- it's a sound bite
from his press conference on TV.

REAGAN (O.S.)

We don't hide our space program. We
don't keep secrets and cover things
up. We do it all up front and in
public.

(MORE)

REAGAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
That's the way freedom is, and we
wouldn't change it for a minute.

FEYNMAN
They're gonna bungle this thing, I
can tell.

GWENETH
(exasperated)
Shh! Enough, Richard.

REAGAN
(on TV)
We will never forget them, nor the
last time we saw them, this
morning, as they prepared for their
journey and waved good-bye and
slipped the surly bonds of earth to
touch the face of God.

Gweneth is openly tearful. Feynman can't help but feel a
twinge at this. He slips away quietly.

INT. FEYNMAN'S BASEMENT STUDY - LATER

Feynman, wearing pajamas and bunny slippers, and his daughter
Michelle, are sprawled out on the carpet of his study. He's
skimming through her algebra textbook. Two empty ice cream
bowls lay nearby.

FEYNMAN
This math is all funny-thinking!
Let me show you a short-cut.

He reaches for her homework, but Michelle snatches it away.

MICHELLE
Your tricks cost me points for not
showing my work.

FEYNMAN
But you got the right answers in
half the time!

Michelle closes the book and kisses him on the cheek.

MICHELLE
Only Nobel Prize winners get to use
short-cuts. The rest of us have to
follow the rules. Thanks anyway.

She trots up the stairs. After a moment he calls after her:

FEYNMAN

...They're not tricks if they work!

INT. FEYNMAN'S BASEMENT STUDY - LATER

We hear the sound of Feynman HUMMING to himself as we pan slowly over the walls of his office, on which hang photos of him shaking hands with Einstein, playing bongo drums in Brazilian costume, charcoal drawings of nudes, rubbings of Mayan hieroglyphics. An amazingly diverse life on display.

We linger on one photo in particular: a black and white glossy of himself as a young man in the desert, amidst a group of other scientists. One of the men is recognizable by his broad-brimmed hat to be ROBERT OPPENHEIMER. Behind the group, the first ATOMIC BOMB is being hoisted onto a skeletal steel tower.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

(muttering to self)

Wait Feynman, that's a mistake...

As he scribbles physics equations across scraps of paper, napkins, anything within his grasp. Meanwhile, Gweneth descends the stairs behind him. She reaches the bottom step and sits gingerly on it, waiting.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

(after a moment)

Okay, what?!

GWENETH

Grumpy lately, aren't we?

FEYNMAN

I'M NOT GRUMPY! I'm never grumpy.

She looks at him, eyebrow raised.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

So I'm a little grumpy. I can't see my way into this problem.

GWENETH

You've been thinking about this NASA investigation.

FEYNMAN

I don't want to be on that committee. I hate committees!

She gets up and goes to him, placing her hands lightly on his shoulders, as if she can feel the tension radiating off him.

GWENETH

I know.

FEYNMAN

It's coming at the worst possible time.

GWENETH

I know. But darling, could you find out what went wrong?

FEYNMAN

I don't know, maybe. So what?

Gweneth looks like she's fighting with herself. Reluctantly, she continues.

GWENETH

So, those eleven Commissioners are going to be lead around from place to place, seeing all the same things. But if you're there, then there will be eleven people doing that, and then you, who will be running all over the place, checking out unusual things.

FEYNMAN

You heard the news, it could've been anything--

GWENETH

Or just one thing, Dick. One thing that no one else sees, no one else COULD see, except for you. Because you're you.

Feynman looks up and notices the bereft look on her face.

FEYNMAN

(upset)

Ah, damn it to hell.

She pulls him into an embrace, her eyes creasing with worry. He holds her tight.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC STREETS - NEXT MORNING

In a stark contrast to sunny California, Washington DC is gripped by February's chill. The marble monuments glow deceptively warm in the pink light of morning.

INT. CHAIRMAN ROGERS' OFFICE, DC - MORNING

A jet-lagged Feynman hurries down the hall to his first meeting, towing his wheeled suitcase behind him. The wheels SQUEAK, echoing in the grandiose marble hallways.

INT. CHAIRMAN ROGERS' OFFICE BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman opens the door on the first Commission conference, catching Rogers in mid-sentence. He looks at his watch, pointedly.

ROGERS

Dr. Feynman, I presume?

Pencils stop their writing. Eleven heads swivel to take in this newcomer.

FEYNMAN

That's right. Looks like I'm the twelfth disciple.

All of the others wear name tags. Included in this illustrious group of astronauts, journalists, and scientists are NEIL ARMSTRONG, CHUCK YEAGER, SALLY RIDE, and a handsome man who wears his uniform with quiet dignity, GENERAL KUTYNA.

ROGERS

I'm William Rogers. There are name tags on the sideboard. We'll, ah, do the introductions again later.

A continental breakfast set up next to the pile of name tags.

FEYNMAN

Is this spread over here for us?

Rogers nods. Feynman pours himself some granola, oblivious to the fact that no one else is eating. He grabs a name tag and sits beside Neil Armstrong, taking note of his name tag.

CLOSE ON ARMSTRONG'S NAME TAG: The pre-printed label reads "Hello, my name is:" followed by the handwritten, "Neil Armstrong."

Armstrong glances at Feynman's name tag, on which is written "Chief Bali Hai." Armstrong looks away, not amused.

ROGERS

Now tomorrow is the public swearing-in ceremony, and there will be questions from the press. It is--

Feynman CHOMPS granola. Rogers loses his train of thought and glares at Feynman. Feynman stops chewing.

ROGERS (CONT'D)

It's imperative that we speak with one voice, as a unified body. We will now cover the parameters for press interaction--

Feynman raises his hand, is stiffly acknowledged.

FEYNMAN

Excuse me, but this being the first meeting and all, I'm just wondering when we're going to get the technical information.

ROGERS

We have briefings scheduled for next week.

FEYNMAN

Shouldn't we get that information first? All the nuts and bolts stuff on how the shuttle works?

ROGERS

Our report isn't expected to be a technical investigation. We may never find out what really happened--

FEYNMAN

Whaddya mean we won't find out what happened? Isn't that the whole point?

Feynman sees that most of the other Commissioners are annoyed by his interruptions. Kutyna alone, covers a gentle smile.

ROGERS

I don't think you understand--

FEYNMAN

I think I'm beginning to.

EXT. BUILDING - LATER

Feynman exits the building after the meeting, visibly disgruntled. He struggles to carry several large and unwieldy binders, along with his suitcase. Kutyna catches up to him.

KUTYNA

Need a hand, Professor?

Feynman again eyes the uniform.

FEYNMAN

Let me guess-- Eagle scout.

Kutyna smiles as he takes the stack of binders from Feynman.

KUTYNA

Airforce, actually. You missed the introductions. I'm Don Kutyna.

They shake hands. Feynman is leery.

FEYNMAN

So, General. Which one of these monsters is yours?

He gestures to the line of LIMOUSINES at the curb. Rogers disappears into one.

KUTYNA

A two star general doesn't get a limo in Washington. I take the subway.

INT. METRO STOP - LATER

Kutyna walks Feynman to his subway platform and hands him back his binders.

FEYNMAN

Thanks. DC's a labyrinth to me.

KUTYNA

You'll get the hang of this place. All you need is a map... and a warmer coat. It gets cold here.

FEYNMAN

I don't need a coat. What I need is to go back to California.

The General looks surprised and saddened.

KUTYNA

You're leaving?

FEYNMAN

On the first flight I can get. This whole thing was a mistake. PR and luncheons aren't what I signed up for.

(MORE)

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I want technical manuals and blueprints, rocket models. You know, the fun stuff!

KUTYNA

I hope you'll reconsider, Professor. I think the Commission could use a man like you.

Feynman's train pulls up, before Feynman can respond properly.

FEYNMAN

I guess any General who takes the subway can't be all bad.

Kutyna smiles. Through the glass, Feynman grins back.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC MALL - LATER

There's a fierce wind blowing, and Feynman leans into it, tugging his wheelie suitcase through the icy streets. He's inadequately dressed, and lost to boot. First one way... Then the other... The Professor is helpless in a sea of strangers.

At last, the shivering Feynman pauses to blow warm air into his bare hands, when he realizes where he is: before him climb the imposing white steps to the NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM. Feynman pauses, considering...

INT. NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM ATRIUM - LATER THAT DAY

In the massive atrium, we see planes and space capsules suspended from the ceiling. Feynman ENTERS the doors, huffing and puffing from dragging his suitcase all the way up here.

As Feynman walks through the galleries, he does a double-take of a wax figure of Sally Ride in flight uniform, holding her astronaut's helmet.

Above her is a sign that reads "Now Playing: 'The Dream Is Alive' with an arrow pointing to the Imax theater entrance.

INT. IMAX MUSEUM THEATER - LATER

On screen plays "The Dream is Alive," a documentary about the Shuttle Program. We see the eerie image of the Challenger astronauts on an earlier mission, sleeping in zero gravity, arms floating as if their bodies were underwater. Next we see gorgeous imagery of the earth accompanied by inspirational music.

Feynman is illuminated by light cast by the film. In spite of himself, he is moved by it.

INT. MUSEUM GIFT SHOP - LATER

Feynman smirks at all the crass commercialization of the space program, the key chains and T-shirts. But even as he does so, he pays for a toy model of a shuttle.

INT. NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM ATRIUM - LATER

Feynman is waist-high in a sea of elementary SCHOOLCHILDREN on a field trip. He trails along with them as their teacher points out the important aircraft suspended from the atrium's ceiling. Strangely, he does not look out of place among them.

TEACHER

There's the Spirit of St. Louis,
which carried Charles Lindbergh
across the Atlantic ocean. And next
to it is the first working
airplane, invented by the Wright
Brothers!

The kids' mouths hang open as they stare at the marvels high above their heads. A little BOY raises his hand.

BOY

What's the shiny plane over there?

The whole class, including Feynman, pivots to see where he's pointing...

...and Feynman stops dead in his tracks as the rest of the kids move in the plane's direction. The plane looms high above them, silver and streamlined.

TEACHER (O.S.)

That's the Enola Gay. It was the
plane that dropped the atomic bomb
on Hiroshima. Does anyone know what
an atomic bomb is?

FLASH:

A SEARING WHITE LIGHT-- which dims into the DESERT SUN.

BACK ON:

Feynman staggers a little, and leans on a railing, shielding his eyes from an imaginary glare above him. He is getting lost in his memories.

FLASHBACK TO LOS ALAMOS, 1945:

As he lowers his hands, and we see now a he's staring up at a metallic ball covered in wires that's being hoisted up a skeletal tower. It is the first ATOMIC BOMB-- the image is right out of the black and white photograph in Feynman's study.

He stands among the scientists, including ROBERT OPPENHEIMER in his famous broad-brimmed hat. Everyone smiles as they watch the bomb being hoisted, excitement in the air.

BACK ON:

Feynman in the museum, breathing heavily. He suddenly seems a weakened man. He watches the children being taught about the Atomic Bomb, and the sight goes straight to his heart.

CUT TO:

INT. BOISJOLY'S OFFICE, MTI - DAY

Back in Utah, Boisjoly is packing up things from his office, stripping it of the framed photos of his family, his various engineering diplomas, etc.

Lastly, he furtively picks up a heavy FILE BOX full of folders that we recognize from the night of the launch.

INT. MTI HALLWAYS - MOMENTS LATER

It's Sunday and MTI is deserted. Boisjoly carries his file box down the long hallway, his footsteps echoing. He seems jumpy, and clutches the box to his chest like a baby.

EXT. MTI PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

We see the front of Boisjoly from inside the trunk of his car as he places the box inside. SLAM. He closes the trunk.

MTI MANAGER #1 (O.S.)
You're only taking personal
objects, I assume.

Boisjoly jumps, seeing that the two MTI Managers from the night of the teleconference call are behind him.

We see that Boisjoly's car is practically the only one in the lot, parked far out-- a boat in a sea of concrete.

Boisjoly takes a step back, placing himself between the managers and the trunk of his car.

BOISJOLY

Of course. That's what I came in for... Why are you here on a weekend?

MTI MANAGER #2

We came to wish you luck. Though we're still not sure why you're leaving us.

BOISJOLY

I- I just want to go somewhere I can forget about this for a while.

MTI MANAGER #1

That's a good idea, this whole town is reeling right now.

MTI MANAGER #2

We just want to make sure you don't do anything stupid. People wouldn't understand.

MTI MANAGER #1

No one who wasn't in that room will understand the way we do.

Boisjoly drops his eyes and hurries into his car.

INT. BOISJOLY'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Boisjoly casts a look over his shoulder as he pulls out of the parking lot. The two men in suits still stand there, watching him go, their shadows long in the afternoon sun.

EXT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE - MORNING

Establishing shot of the impressive building. Limos are pulling up in front, letting out Rogers and Neil Armstrong.

INT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AUDITORIUM - MORNING

Kutyna and the other members of the committee stand in a row on a dais in front of a sea of REPORTERS. A large American flag hangs behind them. We pan across until we arrive at Feynman's seat, which is empty, marked by his nameplate.

Kutyna is preoccupied-- glances at the clock and at the door.

Suddenly the door opens and Feynman strides in purposefully. His hair is windblown, he carries a thick wool coat with him. Relieved, Kutyna waves him over to the seat beside him.

Feynman opens his Cal-Tech composition book, ready to start taking notes on the meeting.

KUTYNA
Copilot to pilot, comb your hair.

FEYNMAN
(sarcastic)
Got a comb, General?

Kutyna whips a comb from his pocket and slides it to Feynman, who, humbled, combs his hair as Graham reads aloud:

GRAHAM
Please repeat after me: "I do
solemnly swear that I will
faithfully perform the duties of
Investigator General--"

INT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AUDITORIUM - LATER

Sitting in a row at a table are the several nervous-looking NASA MANAGERS there to brief the Commission.

NASA MANAGER #1 references frames of video footage on a screen showing the disintegration of the shuttle frame by frame. In the first frame, the shuttle appears to be fine.

NASA MANAGER #1
Here the shuttle is rising normally-
(he points out the parts)
- you can see the solid rocket
boosters, the external tank, the
shuttle main engines here, and
lastly the crew compartment, here--

In the second frame, a white plume of flame seeps out of the right-hand rocket. His tone changes, becoming more clinical.

NASA MANAGER #1 (CONT'D)
There appears to be some fire here,
coming out at 59.8 seconds.

He switches to the third frame. There is a white circle imposed around the problem area.

NASA MANAGER #1 (CONT'D)
Here that fire has grown and merged
into the tail. We're at 73 seconds,
just milliseconds from the breakup.

He progresses to the final frame-- post-explosion. Amidst the ball of fire, pieces of the shuttle plummet towards the ocean. The difference between the before and after frames is vast, and incredibly vague.

In the meantime we see a pale McDonald, (the reedy man who we recognize from the night before the launch,) enter the room from a side security door. No one notices him.

KUTYNA
Now, in that second photo it
appears to me that flame might be
coming from the side of the right-
hand solid rocket booster.

The press jots this down. Rogers looks displeased at this.

NASA MANAGER #1
(thrown off)
We don't know for sure it is the
SRB. It might've been the SRMs,
SSMEs, the ET, the ATCS, even the
EPS that caused the in flight
anomaly.

Feynman looks around to see if anyone else is as lost as he is. No one is showing any confusion, so he raises his hand.

FEYNMAN
Sorry, I'm just a theoretical
physicist, not a rocket scientist,
and I'm drowning in the alphabet
soup. Can't one of you explain the
whole system to me in simple terms?

The older southern man, NASA MANAGER #2, fields this one.

NASA MANAGER #2
I think it's important for the
Commission to understand that the
shuttle is the most complex piece
of machinery ever built by man. No
single individual can possibly
understand the entire system, it is
beyond understanding.

FEYNMAN
But surely someone--

Chairman Rogers is impatient.

ROGERS

Professor, you don't need to understand all the technical details at this time, and General, you shouldn't speculate on the cause of the accident until we have more information, which we'll get during our visit to the Cape.

Nodding, Kutyna displays no irritation at being shot down.

RIDE

(to NASA Managers)

Do you have any additional, more detailed photos of the break-up?

NASA MANAGER #1

Many photos didn't turn out.

NASA MANAGER #2

Some cameras jammed in the cold.

NASA MANAGER #3

The quality of these is not ideal, and for that we apologize. But this is all that we have at this time.

Feynman struggles not to get impatient with their bumbling.

INT. GRAHAM'S OFFICE - LATER

We see a SECRETARY's hand knocking on a door marked MR. GRAHAM, CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR. It looks like until recently, another, larger nameplate hung in the same spot.

GRAHAM (O.S.)

Yes?

SECRETARY

Professor Feynman is on the phone for you, Sir.

Through the plate glass of his office wall, we see him pick up. We follow the Secretary back to her desk, hearing the conversation, only slightly muffled through the thin walls.

GRAHAM

Dick! What can I do you for?

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
Can you get me into NASA HQ to talk
to some engineers? I'm getting
nowhere with these managers.

GRAHAM
(nervously)
Now, Chairman Rogers doesn't want
anyone going off on their own.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
Come on, who's the head of NASA,
you or Rogers? I just want to talk
to some engineers.

GRAHAM
(considering)
You know what? Rogers doesn't even
have to know. I'll arrange a
special briefing, just for you.

The secretary leans forward slightly, listening. She quietly
reaches for the phone.

INT. CAPITOL HILL CLUB - EVENING

HEARTY LAUGHTER leads us through a wood paneled good old
boys' club, gluttoned with fatcat POLITICOS and clouds of cigar
smoke.

Sitting around a table with several SOUTHERN CONGRESSMEN, is
Al Keel, red pen tucked in his front suit pocket.

They're nursing scotches, having a merry time, when a SUITED
WAITER approaches and whispers in the ear of the oldest
Senator. The Senator rises, using an ivory-tipped cane.

The Senator follows the waiter to the bar, where a BLACK
PHONE is waiting. He speaks quietly.

Off Al Keel, his eyes never leaving the Senator's face. His
pen is out of his pocket and spinning between his fingers...

INT. NASA HEADQUARTERS CAFETERIA - SATURDAY MORNING

The NASA cafeteria is empty on this Saturday. Around the
table are seated several NASA ENGINEERS from various
branches. One of the engineers studiously constructs a paper
clip chain. Feynman sits across from them.

FEYNMAN

Okay look. I'm in a complete fuzdazzle here, with all these different systems. I need your help.

ENGINEER

We were told we wouldn't have to testify.

FEYNMAN

This isn't testimony, it's just us technical guys sitting around shooting the breeze.

A couple engineers are mildly gratified by this.

ENGINEER

Are you sure you don't want to be talking to our managing directors?

FEYNMAN

You guys built the shuttle, didn't you? Why would I want to talk to anyone else?

And like that, they're won over.

ENGINEER #2

Where do you want to start?

FEYNMAN

My General friend mentioned something about the right-hand SRB...

The engineers settle in, ready to put in a long day.

INT. NASA HEADQUARTERS CAFETERIA - LATER

Feynman is grilling a NASA ROCKET SEALS EXPERT for information. They've obviously been at work a long time, as there are charts and blueprints littered about.

Feynman has his Cal-Tech composition book open, and we see that it's filled with handwritten facts and figures. Unscrolled in front of him is a blueprint showing the whole shuttle, as well as the SRBs, how they're created in pieces.

FEYNMAN

So these solid rocket boosters are made in sections right?

(MORE)

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
Because one whole rocket is too big
to transport by itself?

The expert nods. Feynman picks a strange piece of metal. It's a cross-section of a BOOSTER JOINT, with black rubber o-ring seals sandwiched in the joint.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
And this is the joint that connects
the booster segments?

ROCKET SEALS EXPERT
Right. It connects them here...
Here, and uh, here.

He circles the joints with a red pen on the blueprint. Feynman quickly sketches the field joint in his notebook.

Meanwhile, we see Al Keel unobtrusively enter the cafeteria. He goes to a vending machine, taking his time to find change.

As the rest of the scene plays out, Keel gets a Coke, opens it, without attracting anyone's attention. Listening to every word they say.

FEYNMAN
So these rubber o-ring seals here
are all that's keeping the hot
gases in the boosters from
escaping?

He points to the rubber sticking out of the joint model.

ROCKET SEALS EXPERT
That's right. They're actually
about 27 feet around.

FEYNMAN
Why are there two of them?

ROCKET SEALS EXPERT
Well sometimes there's erosion on
the first one.

FEYNMAN
You mean it gets burned?

The expert nods, shifting in his seat.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
What about the second one?

ROCKET SEALS EXPERT

There was secondary seal erosion on a few occasions. Caused by blow-by-- that is, hot gas leaking out from around the first seal.

FEYNMAN

And how hot is that gas in there?

ROCKET SEALS EXPERT

Around... 5600 degrees.

FEYNMAN

Gas that hot boils steel! So it's more like "blow-torch" rather than "blow-by," isn't it?

No one notices as Keel quietly leaves, having heard it all.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

You don't happen to have any DATA on this "blow by" from past flights, do you?

ROCKET SEALS EXPERT

I can get you that information.

FEYNMAN

Or just put me in touch with your top o-ring guy.

ROCKET SEALS EXPERT

That would be Roger Boisjoly over at MTI.

(off Feynman's clueless look)

They're the independent contractor who builds NASA's solid rockets.

Feynman writes Boisjoly's name in his notebook.

FEYNMAN

So how can I reach this Boisjoly?

ROCKET SEALS EXPERT

You can't.

(beat)

He took a leave of absence from MTI last week.

Off Feynman gazing at the expert over his glasses.

INT. BOISJOLY'S BEDROOM, UTAH - MIDNIGHT

The sound of GLASS BREAKING wakes up Roger Boisjoly. His wife sleeps beside him. Uneasy, he waits to hear something more, but all is silent. He gets out of bed.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Boisjoly approaches the bedroom of his sleeping teenage daughter. He peers in-- she sleeps peacefully. Suddenly he hears MUFFLED CURSING and the sudden SCREECHING of tires from outside.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Boisjoly quickly pads down the stairs into his living room.

Pulling aside his curtains, he sees the flickering light of FIRE outside. His trash can has been pulled into the center of his yard, and is burning.

He THROWS OPEN the front door--

EXT. BOISJOLY HOME - CONTINUOUS

As Boisjoly's screen door bangs shut, he turns around and sees in red paint scrawled across the front of his house:

"MURDERER"

In the firelight the words appear a nightmarish condemnation. Off Boisjoly's expression, torn between anger and fear.

CUT TO:

INT. CHAIRMAN ROGERS' OFFICE - DAY

Rogers looks out the window of his office onto the Capitol building. He has the phone cradled to his ear.

ROGERS
(into phone)
General, I have an assignment for
you: I want you to take the
Professor under your wing.

INT. GENERAL KUTYNA'S BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Kutyna is meticulously putting on his uniform as he listens.

ROGERS (O.S.)
Apparently he's been taking
independent briefings at NASA over
the weekend. I'm sure you
understand why that's unacceptable.

KUTYNA
I'll talk to him.

ROGERS (O.S.)
Do. And I'll put in a good word at
the Pentagon about getting you that
third star.

Kutyna listens, looking a little uneasy as he views himself
in the mirror, in full regalia.

INT. CHAIRMAN ROGERS' OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

As Rogers hangs up the phone, a copy of the Sunday New York
Times is placed directly under his nose. It's headline is
circled in red pen, and screams: "NASA Accountant Says: NASA
Had Multiple Warnings of a Disaster Risk Posed by Booster."

Thin-lipped with anger, Rogers looks up at the man who
brought it to him: Al Keel. Wordlessly, Keel turns on his
heel and leaves Rogers to digest the leak to the press.

INT. CONCERT HALL - THAT EVENING

Kutyna sits in the front row of a Military Band Concert next
to his pretty wife LUCY, listening to the brass band. After a
moment, Kutyna gets up, circumspectly excusing himself.

INT. CONCERT HALL LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Kutyna is on the phone at the concert hall's front desk.
Everything around him is draped with patriotic bunting, and
we can hear the strains of the music coming through clearly.

We hear Feynman pick up on the other end.

KUTYNA
Hi Professor-- it's Don Kutyna.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Feynman is at his desk, on which is perched the toy shuttle
model. He has marked it up with a sharpie, with various
arrows pointing to possible burn-through points.

He's wearing just his boxer shorts, and we see that his abdomen is crisscrossed with surgery scars. He fans himself with his Cal-Tech composition book.

FEYNMAN
(genuinely pleased)
General!

KUTYNA (O.S.)
How you holding up?

FEYNMAN
Well my room's thermostat only has
two settings: Sahara and Arctic,
but otherwise I'm swell.

Feynman opens the book: inside we see that he's written list of strange numbers, such as "STS launch 51-c, 53 degrees" and "STS launch 41-B, 56 degrees" into a hand-drawn graph.

INT. CONCERT HALL LOBBY - SIMULTANEOUS

Kutyna speaks over the wave of APPLAUSE coming from the hall.

KUTYNA
Listen, I was wondering if you
might be free to join my wife and
me for dinner at our house tomorrow-

He's suddenly drowned out by the sound of the National Anthem being played at full volume. Automatically, Kutyna stands at attention, forced to drop the phone as he salutes the flag.

The phone receiver dangles, as Feynman's voice emanates:

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
Hello? General?! ...What's that
racket?

Kutyna grimaces at the awkwardness of the situation.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Perplexed, Feynman lays the receiver on his desk, and continues to work on his list of statistics. Out of the phone comes the tinny RENDITION of the Star Spangled Banner.

INT. KUTYNA'S LIVING ROOM - NEXT EVENING

On a mantle, Feynman examines framed photos of Kutyna in the military: a young flyboy grinning in front of a fighter jet, shaking hands with famous Generals. There are framed medals of honor, and plaques with pictures of rockets on them.

Lastly Feynman picks up a silver model plane on a stand, with a little plaque that reads "The Polish Glider."

KUTYNA (O.S.)
Beauty, isn't she? Flew her in
Vietnam. 120 missions.

Feynman starts, a little abashed. Kutyna has entered the room with drinks in hand.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)
Darned thing would try and kill you
every time you got in it. You like
models?

FEYNMAN
Sure do, but not this kind.

He grins. Kutyna laughs.

INT. KUTYNA'S LIVINGROOM - LATER

Feynman and Kutyna sit next to each other on the couch. Feynman has his toy shuttle in his hands to demonstrate.

FEYNMAN
I think your idea about the rocket
boosters was dead-on, and that New
York Times article confirms it. I
talked to a guy over at NASA this
weekend, and it turns out they've
been having all sorts of problems
with something called blow-by on
the o-rings. Burning through 'em
like Reagan did the budget. ...Now
look at this.

He rotates the shuttle so that we can see where he's drawn the lines of the rocket joints.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
Seems awful close to where we saw
that fire, doesn't it?

KUTYNA

True. But that's not enough to prove anything.

FEYNMAN

That's why I made this list.

He opens his notebook to the handwritten list we saw earlier.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

These are all the flights that had erosion on the back-up seal. The numbers next to them are the outside air temperatures from that day of the launch.

KUTYNA

(impressed)

So you're drawing a correlation between cold weather and o-ring malfunction?

Feynman nods.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

...You know, Commission protocol suggests we turn in all relevant findings...

Feynman scrutinizes Kutyna, trying to decide if he can be trusted. After a pause:

FEYNMAN

You know, you're not what I was expecting, General.

Kutyna looks up, surprised by this non-sequitur.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

My father was a uniform salesman, and he always said "a man in uniform is no different from a man out of uniform, he just thinks he's different."

KUTYNA

I'm not just some polished brass. I'm on this Commission because I managed the Department of Defense Space Shuttle and Rocket Programs.

(with a smile)

Sure I went to West Point, but it was MIT after that.

FEYNMAN

So you're a nerd in uniform! Well then General, I gotta tell ya... I've been taking some secret meetings Chairman Rogers wouldn't approve of.

Kutyna looks uncomfortable, which Feynman reads as disapproval.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I know, I know it's not Kosher, but if I hand in my findings now he'll just slap me on the wrist! I figure, I'll keep my illicit investigation secret and hand it in right before the end of the investigation, when there's no denying I'm right.

KUTYNA

(with a smile)

And what if you're wrong?

FEYNMAN

Then I'll toss out my notebook and still look like a genius!

They laugh. At that moment, a feminine voice calls out from the kitchen.

LUCY (O.S.)

Dinner's on, fellas!

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

They've finished their meal. Feynman and Kutyna are in the midst of an intense discussion.

KUTYNA

The shuttle is a multi-billion dollar industry. MTI's contract alone is worth two billion dollars.

Feynman whistles, impressed.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

And NASA employs forty thousand people, mostly in Southern states.

FEYNMAN

So if our investigation cries foul,
you can bet there will be a serious
outcry from the mint julep boys on
Capitol Hill.

Kutyna's wife Lucy gets up and starts clearing away plates.

LUCY

Now Don, you two have been talking
shop all night. Can't I have the
Professor's ear for a few minutes?

KUTYNA

(with a grin)

She wants to know what you won the
Nobel Prize for.

She blushes, a little embarrassed. Feynman smiles.

FEYNMAN

If I could explain it in a few
minutes, it wouldn't be worth the
Nobel Prize, now would it?

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Kutyna is drying the dishes, a dish towel slung over one
shoulder, as Feynman animatedly explains his work to Lucy. He
has a floral-print plate in one hand.

FEYNMAN

So it's just after the war, and I'm
in my university's cafeteria, going
crazy trying to solve these quantum
equations, when all of a sudden I
notice some smart alec doing this:

Feynman throws the plate in the air like a pizza-dough
thrower and catches it when it lands. Lucy laughs.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

And I notice that the little design
on the rim is going around faster
than the wobbling. So I decide to
figure out the motion of the
rotating plate, and I discover that
when the angle is slight, the
design on the rim rotates twice as
fast as the wobble rate!

He demonstrates. Kutyna watches over his shoulder at how
engaging Feynman's brilliance is.

LUCY

Okay, so...?

FEYNMAN

So it made me wonder if this applied to the orbits of electrons moving around the atomic nucleus. It was just me fooling around, but I went on to prove that the electron doesn't just go around the nucleus in a simple orbit, it actually does all sorts of crazy things, zooming around all over the place, taking every possible path simultaneously!

LUCY

Even paths that move backwards and forwards in time?

FEYNMAN

You got it! I know it sounds nutty, but some fellas went out and did some hands-on experiments and proved my nutty idea was right.

We see that Kutyna has stopped mid-way in his dishes. He has a thoughtful look on his face, as if something has just occurred to him. He puts down the dish towel.

KUTYNA

Come on, Professor. I want to show you my baby.

FEYNMAN

Your baby?

INT. GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman looks around, disinterested in all the cars. There is a beautiful white vintage Opel parked inside, with the hood up. Kutyna lays his hands on it lovingly.

FEYNMAN

A car? That's your baby?

KUTYNA

Opel GT. She's beautiful, ain't she?

FEYNMAN

I think you're getting your car mixed up with your wife.

Feynman walks over to Kutyna's tool bench, where several carburetors are laid out in various stages of assembly.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
(impressed)
You do your own auto work?

KUTYNA
Sure.

Feynman picks up half the carburetor, examining it.

FEYNMAN
Everything *I* take apart stays
apart. You're a genius, Kutyna!

KUTYNA
(patting the Opel)
This girl here, she's my favorite,
though she's only a summer car.

Kutyna picks up the rubber carburetor gasket and squeezes the rubber between his fingers.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)
Got to keep replacing the
carburetor seals in winter. Darned
things leak when they're cold-- no
resiliency.

Feynman takes the seal in his hands, sure enough, it's stiff.

FEYNMAN
Only leak when they're cold...?

He slowly looks up to meet Kutyna's meaningful gaze.

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOT, DC SKYLINE - DAWN

The next morning dawns over the city. It's a cold winter's day; the rising sun paints the marble of the city's monuments a deceivingly warm pink.

EXT. CAB - LATER

Feynman pays the cab driver and leaps out the door.

In front of him is a humble Mom and Pop hardware store. It's PROPRIETOR is just turning the "closed" sign to "open."

Feynman follows the proprietor inside, close on his heels.

INT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AUDITORIUM - SIMULTANEOUS

The large auditorium is empty except for the morning CLERKS, who are busy readying the room for a large media event.

We see water glasses being filled and placed with precision before empty seats, each marked a Commissioners' name plate.

Individual microphones at each seat are being switched on.

INT. HARDWARE STORE - SIMULTANEOUS

With a CLATTER, Feynman dumps a collection of various C-clamps and pliers on the counter in front of the PROPRIETOR.

Feynman's obviously in a rush, and tries not to hurry the proprietor as he rings up his purchase.

INT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AUDITORIUM - LATER

The PRESS begins to file into the room, taking their designated seats towards the front. Video crews set up their equipment, focusing their cameras on the still-empty stage.

INT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AUDITORIUM - LATER

Again, the Commissioners are now seated at tiered desks in front of press. The same long table is in front of them, and beyond that, the audience.

Feynman looks uncharacteristically nervous. Kutyna glances over at him, curious.

Rogers clears his throat at the podium. Graham sits nearby.

ROGERS

Now, the New York Times has created an unpleasant situation with this speculative talk of scandal. We're here today to show that no one's trying to brush anything under the rug. Right, Bill?

GRAHAM

Absolutely. However if any misleading statements are accidentally made by NASA officials, they can always amend their testimony later.

This comment makes Feynman choke on the water he's drinking. Feynman waves over a CLERK, who comes by with the pitcher.

FEYNMAN
(in whisper, to clerk)
I need ICE water. Cold.

The clerk nods, leaves. Kutyna notices this.

Meanwhile, McDonald again slips into the back of the room. He looks poorly rested, unshaven. This time Feynman notices, recognizes him from the last briefing.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
(to Kutyna)
That guy again?

Kutyna shrugs.

Suddenly the doors swing open. Mulloy, from the opening sequence strides down the aisle, carrying a briefcase.

When McDonald sees Mulloy about to pass by him, he turns his shoulder so Mulloy won't see him.

ROGERS
I would like to introduce Mr. Larry
Mulloy, who is NASA's project
manager of these solid rocket
boosters at the Marshall Space
Flight Center.

The clerk refills Feynman's glass. Eagerly, Feynman puts his finger in, then scowls at the clerk.

FEYNMAN
This isn't cold enough! Where's the
ice I asked for?

Feynman looks like he wants scream with frustration.

Meanwhile, Mulloy lays his briefcase down at the long table-- the only man there. He raises his hand to be sworn in.

INT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AUDITORIUM - LATER

Sally Ride leans in to her microphone to ask Mulloy a question.

SALLY RIDE

Mr. Mulloy, I have a fistful of messages from reporters saying rumors are flying about some last minute conference call between NASA and its contractors. What was that about?

MULLOY

It's standard protocol to go over flight readiness the night before the launch.

Meanwhile, the booster joint we've seen before at NASA HQ is being passed around for the Commissioners to inspect.

Feynman reaches eagerly for it just before someone grabs it. His fingers itch to get a hold of it.

SALLY RIDE

Who was on that phone call?

MULLOY

Oh, our people at Kennedy, and MTI engineers and management heads.

RIDE

Was there a record of those deliberations?

MULLOY

To my knowledge, there was not.

SALLY RIDE

So what were you discussing?

MULLOY

(breezily)

The usual things.

The Clerk finally shows up with ice cubes, that he petulantly plunks into Feynman's glass. One. Two. Three. Happy?

FEYNMAN

Thank you. For your prompt and professional service.

The clerk huffs off.

SALLY RIDE

(annoyed, to Mulloy)

What I'm asking is, was there any concern about these o-ring seals that night?

MULLOY

It may have come up, but in the end
MTI recommended to proceed with the
launch, so we launched. In fact, I
have the launch directive, signed
by MTI, right here in my hands.

He takes out the faxed LAUNCH DIRECTIVE, shows it to the
room, then hands it to a clerk who gives it to Rogers.

MULLOY (CONT'D)

If there were any unusual concerns,
it was up to MTI to speak up.

GRAHAM

(clearing his throat)
NASA prides itself on giving its
engineers a voice in launch
readiness procedures.

SALLY RIDE

But have you seen any evidence in
the Shuttle's past performance that
the o-rings were a serious cause
for concern?

MULLOY

Our design analysis task force has
not concluded that the o-rings had
anything to do with the failure of
the Shuttle.

Suddenly, there's a disturbance in the back of the room.
McDonald has leapt to his feet, and is shouting.

Commissioners look up and take notice. Rogers frowns and
motions to the SECURITY GUARDS.

McDonald makes his way down the aisle towards the front,
murmurs from the audience abound.

MCDONALD

What about flight STS 51-C, Larry?

ROGERS

Who the hell are you?! You can't
just storm in here!

Security guards GRAB him, and he struggles.

MCDONALD

What about the erosion on flights
41-B and C and 61-C?! Why aren't
you telling them about THOSE?!

ROGERS

Do you know this man, Mr. Mulloy?

MULLOY

Yes, his name is Allan McDonald.
He's in MTI's engineering
department, which signed off on
Challenger's launch. Understandably
he's devastated, as are we all.

Rogers nods at the guards to take McDonald out.

ROGERS

Would you please escort Mr.
McDonald out of the room? If he has
any issues to voice he can do so
when we visit MTI next month.

They take him out. He kicks the door so hard it rattles. The
room murmurs with concern, as Rogers brings it back to order.

Feynman uses this opportunity, when everyone's attention is
focused elsewhere, to reach down past the bosom of Sally Ride
who is seated below him, and grab the booster joint. She
gasps and glares as his arm brushes her shirt.

FEYNMAN

(whisper)

Oops, sorry Doll!

Using his pliers, he quickly tugs out the rubber o-ring bits
out of the booster joint under his desk.

ROGERS

Will Mr. MacDonald's outburst
please be stricken from the
meeting's transcript?

Feynman clears his throat.

FEYNMAN

Excuse me, those flights he
mentioned all had something in
common: they were all conducted at
temperatures below 53 degrees. And
all showed evidence of o-ring
erosion.

Some of the Commissioners turn to Feynman, surprised that
he's become so well-versed in the shuttle specs.

MULLOY

That data is far from conclusive.
We had erosion in all sorts of
weather, even on days as warm as 75
degrees.

Kutyna watches Feynman take an O-RING and CLAMP it tightly
with a small C-CLAMP VISE. He then DROPS IT IN THE ICE WATER.
Kutyna realizes what Feynman's up to.

Another member of the Commission, presses the button on his
microphone that allows him to ask a question.

COMMISSION MEMBER

There's erosion on cold days and
warm days?! So what's the big deal?

FEYNMAN

So you're going on record saying
that cold does not affect o-ring
performance?

CHUCK YEAGER

Hell, give me a nice day and I'll
go fly that son of a bitch!

There is laughter from the press. They are bored, confused by
Mulloy's presentation-- they aren't really paying attention.

Feynman is ready for action. He reaches again for the
microphone, readying his materials-- when he is blocked by
Kutyna laying a hand on the button.

KUTYNA

(whisper)
Not now.

FEYNMAN

(whisper)
Why not?!

KUTYNA

(low voice)
Wait til the cameras are on you.

A slow grin takes over Feynman's face.

ROGERS

(condescending)
I think Mr. Mulloy has exhausted
this subject. Shall we move on?

Mulloy projects a complex blueprint on the screen.

MULLOY

Certainly. You can see here how the leak test ports are assembled, with zinc chromate putty laid up in strips--

FEYNMAN

Sorry, just one more question. The purpose of these seals is to keep the hot gas from leaking out during the bumpy lift-off maneuver?

MULLOY

(peevied)

That is correct.

FEYNMAN

So it is important that the rubber is soft enough that it can handle jolts and vibration. I think you call that "resiliency," right?

Mulloy speaks slowly to Feynman, as if to a child.

MULLOY

Correct. That is why we use rubber.

Mulloy looks to Rogers as if to say 'is this guy for real?'

ROGERS

(through gritted teeth)

Dr. Feynman, can we move on to subjects with more significance to the purpose of our meeting today?

Checking to make sure the cameras are in fact on him, Feynman clears his throat and pushes the his glass of ice water to the front of his desk. One c-clamp is submerged.

FEYNMAN

Well it's just that, I took this piece of o-ring that I got out of your joint and I put it in ice water, and I discovered that when you put some pressure on the rubber and then undo it, it doesn't bounce back for quite some time.

As he talks he removes the rubber from the clamp and holds it up for the world to see: it is mangled and cramped.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

So I think it's safe to say there is no resiliency in these o-rings when they're at a temperature below 32 degrees.

(beat)

Now Mr. Mulloy, remind me of the temperature when the Challenger launched?

MULLOY

(pale)

It was-- I believe it was 23 degrees Fahrenheit.

FEYNMAN

Then I believe this has some significance to our problem.

The press realizes the importance of this demonstration. They go nuts, starting to clamor and stand up in their seats, shouting questions to Mulloy and Rogers.

ROGERS

Will the room please come to order!

No one pays any attention to him.

ROGERS (CONT'D)

I'd like to call a recess-- we will reconvene tomorrow.

And the press is up and out of their seats, forging their way towards the front of the room. Kutyna pats Feynman on the shoulder as he gets up, leaving Feynman to the hungry crowd.

He smiles-- leans back in his chair and lets them come.

CUT TO:

MEDIA CIRCUS SEQUENCE:

-- The Press camps out outside the Holiday Inn, clamoring to get a photo of Feynman as he exits a cab.

-- We see grainy television footage of Feynman and his ice water demonstration being replayed endlessly on network news.

NEWSCASTER (O.S.)

Dr. Richard Feynman, using merely
ice water and a c-clamp,
demonstrated to the world exactly
what went wrong with the Challenger
two weeks ago--

-- An irate Rogers makes a statement on the Capitol Steps:

ROGERS

We are not ruling anything out.
Professor Feynman's demonstration
merely illustrates one potential
factor in the accident...

-- In the old Washington club we see Keel crossing the room,
striding towards a hallway on the other side. We follow Keel
to a door being guarded by a SECRET SERVICE AGENT.

The agent nods when he sees Keel, and steps aside, opening
the door for him.

We glimpse a room with no windows. There are six unhappy
SENATORS waiting for Keel around a table. The GENTLEMAN
SENATOR is there with his ivory-tipped cane.

GENTLEMAN SENATOR

Take a seat, Mr. Keel.

KEEL

Yes, Senator.

GENTLEMAN SENATOR

We're finding the antics of your
rogue scientist deeply troubling.

The door closes, blocking our view.

-- Three NEWS PUNDITS around a news desk argue on TV.

PUNDIT #1

So for all intents and purposes, is
the investigation over now?

PUNDIT #2

Well it's pretty obvious what the
problem was, isn't it?

PUNDIT #3

But who's to blame? I think this
should become a criminal
investigation!

They then talk over each other, as pundits often do.

END MEDIA CIRCUS SEQUENCE.

INT. LIMO - EVENING

Mulloy opens the door to a limo and sits down, laying his briefcase on his lap. Sitting opposite, sandwiched between two heavy-set SECURITY GUARDS, is Allan McDonald.

MCDONALD

(defensive)

This is really unnecessary. I didn't tell the Commission anything they couldn't find by looking at Boisjoly's reports--

MULLOY

(matter of fact)

Reports? I don't know what you're talking about.

He lets this sink in with McDonald. McDonald tries to hold his gaze, but after a moment drops it, intimidated.

MULLOY (CONT'D)

Allan, if we go down, you go down with us.

EXT. DC STREET - THAT NIGHT

Tracking with Feynman walking down a street, his collar turned up against the sleet and cold.

Feynman approaches a building on which hangs a neon sign proclaiming "Copacabana Club" and "Live Dancing Girls!!" As he opens the club's door, ENERGETIC MUSIC fills the air.

Only when a windshield wiper crosses the view do we realize that Feynman is being watched from a car across the street. We hear the sound of a camera SHUTTER CLICK.

INT. BLACK TOWN CAR

The PHOTOGRAPHER rapid-fires frames of Feynman disappearing into the club. The photographer looks over his shoulder in the dark back seat. All we can see is a red pen dancing through long fingers.

After a moment, the hand GESTURES with the pen. "Follow him." The photographer exits the car, disappearing into the club.

INT. COPACABANA CLUB - LATER

The room is steamy-- orange light and tropical drinks abound. DANCING GIRLS gyrate on stage wearing feather headdresses.

Feynman is surrounded by new friends; two long-legged BLONDES in particular hang on his every word.

Meanwhile the dancers on stage part ways for a group of MUSICIANS carrying BONGO DRUMS. They start a choreographed RIFF as the dancers shimmy in time in the background.

Feynman leaps to his feet with the vitality of a young man.

FEYNMAN

(shouting)

All right!

(using Brazilian slang)

Un Batucada! Pe De Boi!

The musicians nod encouragingly. Feynman takes an outstretched hand and jumps up to join them on stage. He grabs a bongo and starts playing expertly, upping the rhythm, and impressing even the professionals.

The crowd cheers him on-- he's a rock star with wild gray hair, his shirt now plastered to him with sweat.

INT. COPACABANA CLUB - LATE AT NIGHT

It's last call, and Feynman is talking to the two blondes. He looks exhausted, but is still a charmer.

FEYNMAN

I'd love to ladies, but really, I
can't...

One of them leans over, writing something on a napkin.

BLONDE

Well, in case you reconsider...

Feynman looks at it-- a phone number written in lipstick. He pockets it, then hurriedly slaps some bills on the table.

FEYNMAN

It's been a pleasure, but I'm
afraid it's past my bedtime.

He kisses them on the cheek, winks, and saunters towards the exit. However as soon as he's out of the blondes' view, he makes a dash for the bathroom.

INT. COPACABANA CLUB BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman staggers into the bathroom, clutching his abdomen in agony. He struggles to open a pill bottle, and tosses back a pill. He turns on the faucet to chase it with water.

Leaning heavily on the counter, he inhales, exhales, trying to breathe through the pain, letting the water run...

FADE OUT.

INT. FEYNMAN'S HOTEL ROOM - EARLY AFTERNOON

It's dark, the curtains drawn. A glowing digital clock on Feynman's bed reads 11:15 am.

There's a persistent KNOCKING on the door. Feynman wakes up, groggy and disoriented. The KNOCKING continues.

FEYNMAN
(half awake)
Alright, alright, gimme a second.

EXT. FEYNMAN'S HOTEL ROOM DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Kutyna, impeccably dressed in his uniform, reaches forward to knock again just as the door swings open to reveal a rumpled Feynman. He's still in his clothes from the previous night.

FEYNMAN
General.

KUTYNA
Professor...

Kutyna is taken aback by Feynman's haggard appearance.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)
(concerned pause)
I take it you had a late night?

FEYNMAN
(dismissive)
Gotta enjoy my fifteen minutes. May I ask...?

KUTYNA
I've got a field trip planned. You interested?

FEYNMAN

(dry)

Don't I need Rogers to sign my
permission slip?

Kutyna hands Feynman a Pentagon SECURITY BADGE.

KUTYNA

Not this time.

EXT. THE PENTAGON - AFTERNOON

Establishing shot of the building, against a sleet-gray sky.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

You know, I didn't think civilians
were allowed to get so deep into
this place.

INT. PENTAGON, 4TH LEVEL OF SECURITY- SIMULTANEOUS

Feynman and Kutyna go through security.

KUTYNA

They're not.

He doesn't elaborate, but looks nervous as he ushers Feynman
into the depths of the Pentagon.

INT. PENTAGON HALLWAY - LATER

Kutyna takes Feynman down a long hallway with many turns and
no windows. They travel deep into the complex.

Feynman looks a little intimidated by the fact that everyone
they're passing in the hallways is in military uniform.

KUTYNA

(grim)

There are some things I have to
tell you. Things I shouldn't be
telling you.

FEYNMAN

So then don't tell me! I don't want
to know any military secrets, I
figured out what went wrong with
the shuttle, now it's time to go
home.

Kutyna at last stops in front of a door.

KUTYNA

The issue is a lot bigger than o-rings. If we want to solve what went wrong up there, you have to understand how big the problem is down here.

Kutyna swipes his pass card and enters a room, followed by a reluctantly curious Feynman.

INT. PENTAGON BRIEFING ROOM

They enter a darkened media room, where monitors line the walls. Taking up the center of the room is a large oblong Lucite table, on which is engraved a detailed map of the world. Feynman runs his hands along it, impressed.

Kutyna flips a switch, and the semi-transparent table lights up, illuminating their faces from underneath.

KUTYNA

Tell me Professor, how do we deploy our spy satellites?

FEYNMAN

You mean besides the shuttle?

KUTYNA

There is no "besides the shuttle."
It's our only access to space.

Kutyna touches another button and suddenly various circles of light appear on the map, some stationary, others slowly moving across the table.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

These circles represent the extent of our global surveillance capability. If we can't reach space, this whole map will slowly go dark, and we'll be playing Blind Man's Bluff with Russia, who is sending up Soyuz rockets sixty times a year. Losing the shuttle means we fall dangerously behind.

FEYNMAN

But the Space Race is over!

KUTYNA

Guess Russia didn't get the memo.

Feynman looks deeply disturbed by this.

FEYNMAN

How can we only have one channel to space when so much is on the line?

KUTYNA

Well, NASA sold everyone on the idea the shuttle was going to provide cheaper, safer, more reliable access to space. You know what they said was the probability for failure?

Feynman shakes his head.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

One in a hundred thousand.

Feynman does some quick calculations in his head.

FEYNMAN

That would mean you could launch the shuttle every day for three hundred years without a problem!

KUTYNA

Safer than an airliner.

FEYNMAN

Safer than driving your car to work! It's ridiculous.

KUTYNA

Sure, but the aerospace industry wants the jobs, Congress wants the money for their states, and the military wants the access. Everyone's clamoring for more launches, but the unspoken cost is the safety of the astronauts. So NASA lied. They lied to Congress and the American people. Just like they lied to their own damned astronauts.

Kutyna takes a seat near Feynman, leaning in with intensity.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

In Vietnam, I depended on the men who flew chase for me, the guys who tested my tires, the engine mechanics and the traffic control team. If even one person had lied to me about the safety of my vehicle, I'd be toast.

(MORE)

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

The Air Force taught me how to trust my company with my life. So when NASA sends their own astronauts up without bothering to tell them their spacecraft was a time bomb... it's the ultimate betrayal.

For once Feynman is silent.

EXT. PENTAGON PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

It has started to snow. Feynman and Kutyna walk in silence to Kutyna's car. Feynman looks deep in thought.

FEYNMAN

I'm a college professor, I don't belong in Washington. I'm the last guy you should be asking for help.

KUTYNA

You're the only person on the Commission who's free of government influence. Everyone else has ties to NASA-- even me. But you can say and do whatever you want. The American people deserve to have someone expose the truth of what happened to the Challenger, so it won't happen again.

Feynman looks pained, but nods. Kutyna shakes his hand.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

Let's get out of here, it's freezing.

FEYNMAN

I think I'm going to walk back.

KUTYNA

You sure?

FEYNMAN

I don't see snow much. Makes me feel alive.

Kutyna waves Feynman off as he sets out into the snow.

KUTYNA

(calling out)

Watch your footing, Professor.
It'll be slippery getting home.

EXT. DC STREETS - LATER

Feynman is the only one out on the street. He treks across virgin snow, passing DC monuments, their marble as white as the sky.

A bitter wind blows the naked and frail saplings planted alongside the road, prompting a--

FLASH

--of grainy archival footage, showing TREES in slow motion, bending and swaying from the force of the atomic blast.

IN THE SNOW

Feynman staggers, suddenly hit with pain. He presses his hand to his abdomen and leans against a nearby newspaper machine, staring up at the sky, catching his breath.

The fat flakes fluttering in the wind remind him of something... As he loses his sense of place and time, we FADE TO WHITE.

BEGIN FLASHBACK SEQUENCE: LOS ALAMOS, 1945

WIND ripples across desert sand, everything illuminated by a strange white light.

BACK ON

Feynman in the snow, who closes his eyes as the flakes gather on his lashes. A strain of TCHAIKOVSKY fights its way through the incongruent sound of RADIO STATIC.

EXT. LOS ALAMOS DESERT, 1945 - EVENING

A YOUNG FEYNMAN, 27, fiddles with an army radio in the desert. Try as he might, he only hears the music and the static. After a painfully tense moment, Feynman gets a COUNTDOWN, faint but coming through clear.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

Nine, eight, seven, six...

The young Feynman has ducked behind the window of a nearby Jeep, protecting his eyes from the UV rays.

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

A MUSHROOM CLOUD blooms in front of them.

FEYNMAN'S POV: Color is washed out of the landscape, everything silent. Nearby, OPPENHEIMER wears his signature broad-brimmed hat, and is silhouetted by white light.

OPPENHEIMER (O.S.)
 "Now I am become Death, the
 Destroyer of worlds."

Gradually, as the white light of the atomic blast becomes less blinding, we see a hand releasing the bits of paper in the unnatural wind, to measure the force of the blast.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON DC STREETS - SIMULTANEOUS

Snowflakes flutter past Feynman in the snow.

Suddenly, a DARK FIGURE emerges from the swirling flakes in front of him, wearing a broad-brimmed hat. Feynman squints, spooked-- but isn't able to see the man's face.

The dark figure passes him by, his collar turned up against the snow. Feynman, pale and shaken, turns on his heel, and sees the man glancing back at him over his shoulder. The figure continues on until he is swallowed up by the snow.

Overwhelmed with pain and fear, Feynman COLLAPSES in the snow. PULL OUT on his prone figure in a sea of white.

INT. IDLE ISLE CAFE, BRIGHAM CITY UTAH - SAME EVENING

Boisjoly and McDonald sit at the counter of a small town diner. Shadows fill the empty corners.

Boisjoly speaks in a low voice to McDonald.

BOISJOLY
 Can't you feel it?

MCDONALD
 What?

BOISJOLY
 (re: other diners)
 How much they hate us.

McDonald darts a glance around, and sees the glares from the few silent customers. They are definitely not welcome here.

MCDONALD

This will all blow over eventually.
Brigham City needs MTI-- without us
this town would dry up and blow
away. Just lay low for a while.

BOISJOLY

"Lay low?!" Allan, you saw how
Mulloy tried to cover everything
up! You were there!

MCDONALD

Not for long. I got hustled onto a
plane and demoted, remember?

Boisjoly doesn't say anything.

MCDONALD (CONT'D)

Look, we tried to blow the whistle,
and it didn't work. Now it's time
to heal, like everyone else.

BOISJOLY

How can I heal, when every night
when I close my eyes, all I see are
the faces of those astronauts.
Christa especially... We gotta do
the right thing, Allan.

MCDONALD

Sometimes, there is no right thing.

They ponder this as the WAITRESS slaps down their check.

WAITRESS

(rude)
You done?

EXT. IDLE ISLE CAFE PARKING LOT - LATER

The two men stop walking in the parking lot. It's late --
there are only a couple cars left.

MCDONALD

You sure you want to walk home
alone?

BOISJOLY

It's only a few blocks. The day I
stop being able to walk in my own
neighborhood is the day I move out.
...But thanks.

McDonald pats him on the shoulder and gets into his car.

The neon lights outside the cafe flicker off, and the waitress locks the door. Boisjoly waits for McDonald to pull away, before he gets into a PHONE BOOTH near the parking lot.

INT. PHONE BOOTH

With shaking hands, Boisjoly dials a phone number.

BOISJOLY
(into phone)
Dr. Feynman's room, please.

INT. FEYNMAN'S HOTEL ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Feynman's hotel phone RINGS and RINGS, unanswered. His bed is neatly made, and obviously has not been slept in.

EXT. PHONE BOOTH, BRIGHAM CITY UTAH - MOMENTS LATER

A long shot of the weakly-lit phone booth, from the far side of the deserted parking lot. Boisjoly's leaving a message. Suddenly, a pair of blinding HEADLIGHTS SWITCH ON, starkly illuminating the booth. Boisjoly looks up, exposed.

Spooked, Boisjoly immediately HANGS UP, walking away fast.

EXT. BRIGHAM CITY ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Boisjoly hurries away from the parking lot. Ominously, a beat-up PICK-UP TRUCK slowly pulls out behind him. REVVING ITS ENGINE, it starts to accelerate, headed right for him.

Boisjoly starts to RUN. The car is almost upon him, when he JUMPS off the side of the road into a ditch.

The truck SWERVES towards him as if to hit him, but misses. It takes off into the night.

Boisjoly, wide-eyed with shock, trembles in the ditch, breathing hard.

INT. HOSPITAL, WASHINGTON DC - NEXT MORNING

We see the X-Rays of Feynman's convoluted abdomen, as a DOCTOR examines them on a light box.

Feynman sits up in a hospital bed, his thin arms sticking out from his paper patient's dress.

FEYNMAN

But you agree with Dr. Morton? That I only have six months to a year?

DOCTOR

Less, if you don't slow down.

He lowers the x-rays and looks at Feynman.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

You know, these kinds of cancer are incredibly rare. To have both at once is unheard of. I can't help thinking there's a connection between your cancers and the atomic radiation you were exposed to.

FEYNMAN

(dismissive)

That was forty years ago. You're leaping to conclusions.

DOCTOR

It's a medical likelihood.

FEYNMAN

Is it? You know what's funny? I'm feeling like my blood pressure has risen about four-- no, *five* points since last night. Am I right?

The Doctor checks the nurse's charts. His eyes widen.

DOCTOR

Why, that's incredible! How on earth could you tell?

FEYNMAN

(dry)

I looked at the charts before you came in. You get my point? It's human nature to leap to the most sensational conclusions before the most logical.

(beat, then softer)

People die of cancer all the time, Doc.

Suddenly a NURSE pokes her head in.

NURSE

Dr. Feynman? Your wife is here to see you.

The doctor takes his leave as Gwen hurries into the room, throwing her arms around Feynman's neck. Seeing him so frail visibly breaks her heart.

GWENETH

Oh, Dick...

FEYNMAN

Hey, beautiful.

GWENETH

I spoke to the doctors, and they say you're ready to be discharged. You can come home with me tonight.

FEYNMAN

No can do, doll. Tomorrow night the Commission is flying down to Kennedy Space Center.

GWENETH

To Florida?? You can barely walk--

FEYNMAN

So I'll hobble. I can't leave now, not when I'm starting to smell certain rats. You know I just love the smell of rats, it's the spoor of exciting adventure.

His charm doesn't work on her, not now.

GWENETH

Look what this "adventure" has done to you. God, I wish I'd never pushed you into this...

FEYNMAN

You saw the press conference-- if it wasn't for me, the whole thing would have been swept under the rug!

GWENETH

You saved the day. You got your photo in the paper. Now come home. You have so little time left--

She gets up and turns away, her arms clasped around her chest.

FEYNMAN

Exactly. And I can do so much good
with that time.

When she spins to face him, we see she's fighting back tears.

GWENETH

And what about me? Michelle and
Carl?

He doesn't respond.

GWENETH (CONT'D)

Please, Dick. Will you please come
home, and let other people, healthy
people, finish what you started?

EXT. HOLIDAY INN HOTEL - LATER THAT DAY

Feynman gets out of a taxi. Gwen sits inside, her packed bag
beside her. Feynman waves goodbye as the taxi pulls away. She
stares straight ahead, dazed. Feynman sadly watches the taxi
disappear around the corner.

INT. FEYNMAN'S HOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman shakily enters his hotel room to see a BLINKING RED
MESSAGE LIGHT on his phone. Feynman picks up the phone,
checking his message.

BOISJOLY'S VOICE

(urgent)

Dr. Feynman, my name is Roger
Boisjoly. --You were right-- the
night before the launch, we knew
about the o-rings. Everyone knew.
But we went ahead anyway because--

CLICK. Feynman looks puzzled, but also intrigued. He hits a
button on the phone to replay the message, simultaneously
taking out his Cal-tech notebook, flipping back through the
pages to where he had written Boisjoly's name previously.

BOISJOLY'S VOICE (CONT'D)

(as before)

Dr. Feynman, my name is Roger
Boisjoly. --You were right--

CUT TO:

INT. BOISJOLY'S OFFICE, UTAH - LATER

A phone RINGS, unanswered, in Roger Boisjoly's former office.

INT. ROGER BOISJOLY'S HOUSE - LATER

Then the phone RINGS in Boisjoly's living room, where we see that his windows are boarded up, broken glass on the carpet. No one lives here now.

INT. ALLAN MCDONALD'S HOME - NEXT MORNING

Lastly, a phone RINGS and is picked up by Allan McDonald. He listens.

MCDONALD

Yes Dr. Feynman, I know who you are. ...I'm sorry, I don't know where Roger went.

INT. WASHINGTON DC AIRPORT - SIMULTANEOUS

Feynman is on a pay-phone, his suitcase at his feet. He looks profoundly frustrated. In the background, the rest of the Commission is boarding a plane.

FEYNMAN

Alright, well if you get any leads on where to find him, you know how to contact me.

ANNOUNCER

Final boarding call for flight 705 to Orlando, Florida.

Chairman Rogers, annoyed, comes storming towards Feynman.

INT. ALLAN MCDONALD'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Allan peers around the corner of his home-office.

MCDONALD

Roger doesn't want to be found. I'm sure if he changes his mind he'll be in touch.

He hangs up, and we see that he's looking at Boisjoly, curled up asleep on the couch, wrapped in a quilt. McDonald looks worried for his friend.

INT. BUS, CAPE KENNEDY - MORNING

Feynman and Kutyna sit next to each other towards the back of the bus. None of the other eleven Commissioners look at them.

Feynman stares out the window at the ghost town the Cape has become; the litter blowing around the abandoned bleachers, the huge NASA crawlers frozen by the side of the road.

EXT. KENNEDY CENTER HANGAR - MOMENTS LATER

The bus zooms towards the gaping mouth of an enormous hangar.

In front of it we see the first signs of life-- a crowd of reporters and cameramen await the bus's arrival.

INT. BUS - DAY

The bus slows as the throng presses against the windows. Feynman's name is shouted over and over, as note pads wave. Camera crews struggle to get a good shot.

Gradually, the annoyed Commissioners turn to peer back at Feynman, glaring at the ruckus he has caused.

KUTYNA

You know, there's a phrase you should learn.

FEYNMAN

Oh yeah? What's that?

KUTYNA

"This is not for attribution."

FEYNMAN

(scowling)

When are you going to stop telling me what to do, General?

The Press clamors outside, knocking on their windows, until the bus is swallowed up by the darkness of the hangar.

INT. KENNEDY CENTER HANGAR 39 - LATER

The Commissioners dressed in white "bunny suits," enter a vast, cavernous hangar-- so large that it almost makes the concept of "indoors" moot.

Forklifts and cranes arrange salvaged pieces of CHALLENGER onto the grid, like a crime scene investigation.

The wreckage looms large around the Commissioners as they explore the post-apocalyptic jumble of twisted metal.

Over this scene we hear the staticky FINAL TRANSMISSION of the shuttle-- the VOICES of the astronauts haunting the room. Their voices are excited, completely ignorant of their fate.

RESNIK (O.S.)
All right.

SCOBEE (O.S.)
Three at a hundred.

RESNIK (O.S.)
Aaall riiight.

SMITH (O.S.)
Here we go.

Nearby, a crane lowers a piece of the crew capsule onto its designated quadrant. Charred safety belts dangle. Wires spill out of its side like guts. Feynman sees that the capsule still carries the insignia of the American flag on its side-- burned and blistered from the heat of the explosion.

SCOBEE (O.S.)
Houston, Challenger roll program.

SMITH (O.S.)
Go you Mother.

RESNIK (O.S.)
Fucking hot.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

The entire Commission sits around a table in a conference room, with a NASA MEDIA TECHNICIAN. On the table in front of them is a little black box recorder, playing the transmission. Everyone is very still.

SMITH (O.S.)
Throttle up.

SCOBEE (O.S.)
Roger.

SMITH (O.S.)
Feel that mother go.

CREW'S VOICES
Wooooohoooo!!

Their familiar joy at launching resonates with Sally Ride.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. WRECKAGE HANGAR - EARLIER

Sally Ride approaches the area of the crew capsule wreckage.

MISSION CONTROL (O.S.)
Challenger, you are go for throttle
up.

She sees something, and looks to make sure she's not spotted before she clambers deeper into the segment of the capsule.

Sally's looking at a cylindrical tank stamped RESNIK. She toes it over. What she sees there makes her face go ashen.

SCOBEE (O.S.)
Roger, go at throttle up.

There is a long silence in the transmission. Then:

SMITH (O.S.)
...Uh oh.

There suddenly are a series of CLICKS, ghostly and empty. They echo over the wide shot of the wreckage in the hangar.

CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Click. Click. Click. The NASA MEDIA TECHNICIAN reaches over and abruptly shuts off the recording.

The Commissioners and Rogers all look pale and affected, especially Sally Ride, who is white with sadness.

Kutyna's only betrayal of emotion is the way he ducks his chin into his chest, fingers steepled to his lips.

ARMSTRONG
Did they survive the break-up?

TECHNICIAN
It's not certain. The cabin most
likely depressurized immediately--

SALLY RIDE

They were alive while they fell.
Judy activated her emergency oxygen tank.

The room reacts.

NASA TECHNICIAN

Three tanks were activated. The others weren't. That's all we can say for sure.

Sally Ride looks away from him, disgusted. Kutyna looks deeply unsettled, as do many of the Commissioners.

NEIL ARMSTRONG

How long did it take them to fall?

NASA TECHNICIAN

They were at 65,000 feet so it would have taken about three minutes to reach the ocean.

ARMSTRONG

They were falling for three minutes?

SALLY RIDE

Is there a recording?

Beat.

NASA TECHNICIAN

Only the families are going to hear it. Then it will be destroyed.

Sally gets up to leave, upset.

ROGERS

Sally, please--

She spins and addresses the technician.

SALLY RIDE

It should have been test pilots up there, not teachers.

She leaves. No one looks at each other.

EXT. KENNEDY PARKING LOT - LATER

Rogers hands his luggage to a CHAUFFEUR beside a town car.

ROGERS

You didn't find the briefings NASA prepared for us thorough enough?

FEYNMAN

Sure they were thorough, on the subjects they wanted to show us! It's like when the Czar visits the Shtetl. The peasants put on a nice little show for him, and hide their starving children in the cellar! And I'm telling you, NASA's hiding something--

ROGERS

(cynical)

--According to a former MTI employee with a chip on his shoulder, who you can't even reach on the phone.

FEYNMAN

He wasn't some nut job with an agenda! Something scared Roger Boisjoly enough to leave town!

ROGERS

Maybe he needed a vacation. You might too-- it sounds like you might be catching a bit of this Boisjoly's paranoia.

Feynman angrily gestures to Rogers with his notebook.

FEYNMAN

I've been gathering testimony and information for weeks about engineers getting pressured, memos getting shredded, and you're telling me I'm being paranoid??

Rogers has reached the end of his patience.

ROGERS

For the last time, you will return to DC tonight along with everyone else. I'll turn in your notebook to Keel so he can assimilate it--

Rogers takes hold of the notebook, but Feynman pulls it back, protectively. They have a little tug of war over it.

FEYNMAN

You'll get it when I'm finished.

ROGERS

(through gritted teeth)
We must gather testimony as a
single body and make
recommendations with one voice, in
unison.

FEYNMAN

Well that's a great way to get
absolutely nowhere, in unison.
These are my notes and they'll be
included when I'm good and ready!

With that, he TUGS it out of Rogers' hands. White-lipped with
anger, Rogers gets into the car.

ROGERS

Lest you forget, this is the
"Rogers Commission." Not the
"Feynman Commission." No one will
read your findings unless they're
included in my report.

With that, Rogers slams his car door closed.

INT. GRAHAM'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

Graham is nervous. His door is open, and out in the hallway
we see his secretary buffing her nails as she eavesdrops.

GRAHAM

I'm sorry Dr. Feynman, I can't help
you anymore. You'll have to take up
your concerns with Chairman Rogers.

He glances up and makes eye contact with the GENTLEMAN
SENATOR we've seen at the club, who's leaning on the
Secretary's desk, ivory tipped cane by the door. The
secretary and the Senator look over and smile at Graham.

EXT. KENNEDY ROCKET GARDEN - SUNSET

Feynman finds Kutyna in the Rocket Garden. The last of the
great rockets are propped up, mere husks now. Kutyna looks as
melancholy as we've yet seen him. As Feynman approaches,
Kutyna smiles and looks up at the Titan rocket.

KUTYNA

These Titans launched ten
successful manned missions for
Gemini. Beautiful, aren't they?

Feynman casts a dubious glance at the rocket.

FEYNMAN

Sure, it's a nice rocket.

KUTYNA

My instructions are to make sure
you get on that bus. I take it
you're staying behind.

FEYNMAN

Yes. I've got a rat trap to set.

KUTYNA

(eyes still upwards)
Rogers is gonna wax my tail for
this, so make it count.

The bus HONKS. Kutyna claps Feynman on the shoulder, and
starts walking towards the waiting bus.

FEYNMAN

When will I see you again?

KUTYNA

You're on my accident analysis team
for Marshall and MTI. Until then
you're going to want to 'check
six.'

FEYNMAN

(calling after him)
Whaddya mean "check six?"

Kutyna mimes "shooting" a gun over his shoulder.

KUTYNA

Six o'clock-- airforce term. It
means "watch your back." That's
where they get you-- your blind
spot.

Feynman waves a hand in parting, then looks at the Titan,
trying to see the beauty that Kutyna saw.

BEGIN KENNEDY MONTAGE:

--Feynman, now completely on his own, walks the Kennedy
Center grounds, talking to people and writing in his Cal-Tech
notebook. We see him:

--On the launchpad, talking to the Ice Team Captain. The
Captain points out where the icicles were.

Feynman hands him a slip of paper, and the Captain scribbles something on it. Hands it back. We don't see what it is.

--Feynman talks to a TELECOM ENGINEER who is repairing a satellite dish on a radio tower. As he speaks, the engineer hands him a slip of paper he's just written something on.

TELECOM ENGINEER

Sure, we musta checked the uplink
ten times the night before launch.
We couldn't have the President
talking to a bunch of static.

FEYNMAN

The President?!

TELECOM ENGINEER

Sure, that night was the State of
the Union address, remember? Reagan
was gonna chat with Ms. McAuliffe,
broadcast live from space orbit.

FEYNMAN

No kidding? That would've been--

TELECOM ENGINEER

...Quite the show-stopper.

-- Feynman speaks to an ENGINEER, who's leaning up against a massive CRAWLER. Feynman gives him a piece of paper, but this engineer crumples it up, throws it away before he storms off.

-- Feynman speaks to a female ASSEMBLY SPECIALIST high on the catwalk, in the cavernous Vertical Assembly Building.

She hands Feynman a slip of paper, then suddenly hugs him. He's startled by the familiarity, but doesn't pull away.

--In an empty Launch Mission Control room, with all its monitors dark, Feynman sits beside a young LAUNCH SPECIALIST. The specialist reluctantly hands him a slip of paper. Then:

LAUNCH SPECIALIST

People don't understand how hard we
work. The Press ridicules us when
we drop a wrench or spill some
fuel. During Apollo we were
respected for attempting the
impossible. Now the impossible
better happen, or else!

Feynman listens, sympathetically.

END MONTAGE.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Feynman is in the middle of a discussion with two ENGINEERS.

FEYNMAN

It's an important tool for the Commission, and I ought to have a copy.

ENGINEER #1

Trust me, no one reads the PAS list.

ENGINEER #2

It's where people send their problems when they want to make them disappear.

FEYNMAN

No one reads the list of problems with the shuttle? I find that hard to believe.

The engineers exchange looks, as if to say "suit yourself."

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Feynman sits impatiently at his desk. At last, a CLERK enters the room pushing an office cart heaped with binders.

FEYNMAN

(heart sinking)

That whole thing's the list?

Suddenly five more trolley carts are noisily pushed into the room, one after the other, each one heaped with binders.

CLERK

THAT whole thing's the list.

FEYNMAN

Not exactly bathroom reading, is it. I want to see your bosses.

CLERK

I'm sorry- which bosses?

FEYNMAN

All of them.

CLERK

You're going to need a bigger room.

INT. KENNEDY CENTER AUDITORIUM - LATER

A crowd of managers and engineers are gathered in front of Feynman. They're nervous, unsure why they're there.

FEYNMAN

Are you an engineer, Sir?

Feynman calls on the nearest man to him. The man nods.

ENGINEER

Yes. I work in solid rocket motors.

FEYNMAN

Okay. Here's what I want to know.
Let's say you found a problem. Who
would you report it to?

ENGINEER

Uh-- I'd report it to my program
manager.

FEYNMAN

Well, where's that guy?

An elegant older woman steps forward, the PROGRAM MANAGER.

PROGRAM MANAGER

(defiant)

I'm that guy.

FEYNMAN

My apologies. What would you do
with that information, Ma'am?

PROGRAM MANAGER

I'd report it to the Director of
Shuttle Solid Rocket Motors at
Marshall Space Center.

FEYNMAN

OK. So who would he or she talk to?

PROGRAM MANAGER

Is this really necessary?

FEYNMAN

I'm trying to understand where the
line of responsibility ends.

PROGRAM MANAGER

It doesn't end. Responsibility goes from us, to Marshall Space Center, to DC, and back again. It's like musical chairs.

FEYNMAN

(he thinks)

OK. How about this: everyone line up and put your hand on the shoulder of the person you need to talk to when you see a big gaping hole in the side of your rocket.

People hesitate.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Come on-- chop, chop!

INT. AUDITORIUM - LATER

The NASA employees now stand in a snaking line, everyone with their hands on another person's shoulder.

FEYNMAN

Now who here in this conga line actually has the power to stop a launch?

No one raises their hand.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

What about to designate funds and manpower to fix a problem?

Again, no hands. Feynman thinks for a second.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Well, here's an easy one: who here was surprised when Challenger launched that day?

A dreadful second. Nearly EVERYONE raises their hands, but many lower their eyes.

INT. CAPITOL HILL CLUB - AFTERNOON

Chairman Rogers sits in the windowless wood-paneled back room along with the same group of five Senators we've seen before. The Gentleman Senator nurses a scotch and watches Rogers like a hawk. Beside him sits a wormy-looking BALD SENATOR.

BALD SENATOR

Yes but *which* facts are you allowing to come to light?

ROGERS

All relevant findings will be included in the Rogers Commission Presidential report this spring.

GENTLEMAN SENATOR

I suppose what my colleague from Utah here wants to know is, whose side are you on?

The Gentleman Senator gestures to the Bald Senator with his ivory-tipped cane.

ROGERS

This is an independent investigation. I'm not here to choose sides.

BALD SENATOR

Chairman, we all have to choose sides. And it seems your rogue Commissioner certainly isn't on the side of American jobs.

ROGERS

I'm doing my best to keep him in line.

SENATOR #1

DC has a long memory. Your "best" wasn't good enough for Nixon, and it's not good enough now.

Rogers looks at the Senators, white-lipped.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER OFFICES - DAY

Exiting the building, Feynman walks right into the middle of the press that has been lying in wait for him.

REPORTERS

Doctor Feynman! Any leads on who was responsible for the accident?

FEYNMAN

Who said it was an accident?

Music to their ears. They scribble, crowding around Feynman.

REPORTER #2
So whose fault was it, then?

FEYNMAN
It's a very complex system. It's like asking whose fault it is you got cancer. Is it your DNA? Or that power plant you live near, or the type of food you eat? It could be all these things or none of them.

This is not making a good soundbite. The reporters try again.

REPORTER #3
Could you clarify that for us, Sir?

FEYNMAN
(irritable)
Clarify your questions, first. Ask an unclear question, you get an unclear answer.

He tries to push past them.

REPORTER #2
Could you tell us who might have had the power and motivation to push the launch?

FEYNMAN
Now that's a good question. Everyone had the motivation. It could've the Department of Defense, or the Congressmen whose states depend on the space industry. Hell, even the President had a reason to get that shuttle launched on time.

There's a dead silence. For a moment, the reporters can't believe their luck. Feynman stops in his tracks, realizing what he's just said. After a beat:

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
This is not for attribution, okay?

EXT. DC STREETS - PRE-DAWN THE NEXT MORNING

In the lavender morning we see newspaper trucks being loaded up and driven through the streets around Capitol Hill.

A truck lumbers past the Capitol Building, and a NEWSPAPER MAN dumps a bale of newspapers on the sidewalk, where we can read the headline in bold:

INSERT: "NOBEL LAUREATE PONDER'S, "POLITICOS TO BLAME?"

A rough set of hands passes the stack to the doorman inside.

INT. CAPITOL HILL OFFICES - LATER

A mail clerk pushes a cart down a long hallway, tossing the newspapers in front of one senatorial office after another.

INT. CHAIRMAN ROGERS' OFFICE - LATER

Rogers stands by the window looking out at the Capitol building. Keel sits at the desk reading the paper. In one hand, he casually twirls his red pen.

KEEL

(reading out loud)

"From a Nobel Laureate who wishes
to remain anonymous."

ROGERS

There's our anthill, and our
professor just took a stick to it.

Rogers's phone starts to ring, as does another down the hall. Rogers flinches. Keel smiles cryptically.

KEEL

If there's one thing a physicist
should know, it's that every action
has an equal and opposite
reaction...

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOT, HUNTSVILLE OFFICERS QUARTERS - NIGHT

A whitewashed building with an American Flag out front. We hear the sound of repetitive DRUMMING coming from inside.

INT. OFFICERS QUARTERS BEDROOM- SIMULTANEOUS

Neil Armstrong lies on his back on an army-issue bed, staring up at the ceiling in what looks like utter exasperation.

After a moment, we hear the DRUMMING again, much louder now. It's coming from the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Feynman sits on the closed lid of the toilet, playing drums on an upended trash can. The acoustics are phenomenal.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Neil Armstrong seems to be developing a nervous twitch.

INT. KUTYNA'S ASSIGNED ROOM - LATER

Kutyna opens the door in response to a loud KNOCKING to reveal a sheepish Feynman with his bag tucked under his arm.

FEYNMAN

Sorry, General. It was this or sleep in the hall.

Kutyna lets him in.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I asked Ride if she wanted to bunk up, but she didn't seem interested.

INT. BATHROOM - EVENING

Kutyna and Feynman, in their undershirts, brush their teeth.

INT. KUTYNA'S ASSIGNED ROOM - NIGHT

Feynman and Kutyna each lie in separate beds in the dark. Neither one can sleep. Feynman begins to speak, quietly.

FEYNMAN

Her name was Arline. We were just kids, but I was crazy for her. When she got Tuberculosis, my parents tried to get me to call off the engagement. But I didn't. I figured even a couple years married to Arline was worth a lifetime missing her.

KUTYNA

Was it?

FEYNMAN

If you've ever been in love, you wouldn't have to ask.

Kutyna thinks on this.

KUTYNA

For me it was a high society blonde. There I was, a second generation Polack from Chicago. Talk about reaching above my station.

FEYNMAN

So what happened?

KUTYNA

Well I had two things going for me: I had guts, and I had a great car. '51 Ford Deluxe. I polished that baby til it shone--

FEYNMAN

Get back to the blonde.

KUTYNA

We started dating. I was over the moon for her-- to the point that my grades went south and I lost the Ford, and then the blonde, and my folks sent me off to West Point to straighten up and fly right.

FEYNMAN

(musing)

So that's how you got your stripes. ...You ever see her again?

KUTYNA

Every day of my life. I married that girl the day I graduated.

Feynman smiles at this in the darkness, then changes the subject.

FEYNMAN

Do you think Mulloy knew how risky that flight was going to be?

KUTYNA

It's possible, but he'd never admit it. No one's willing to talk about what really happened in that last minute call.

FEYNMAN

Except for Boisjoly.

KUTYNA

Too bad he's gone into hiding.

FEYNMAN

We've got to get to him... before
someone else does.

EXT. MARSHALL SPACE CENTER, ALABAMA - DAY

Establishing shot of the modern glass offices of Marshall.

Super: Marshall Space Center, Huntsville Alabama.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

What do you want me to do?

INT. KEEL'S OFFICE, DC - SIMULTANEOUS

Keel has his feet up on his desk, spinning his red pen in his hand.

KEEL

(on phone)

Just show the old man a good time.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAYS OF MARSHALL SPACE CENTER, ALABAMA - LATER

We see a pair of gorgeous LEGS in heels striding down the hallway. Attached to the legs is a well-stacked torso of a REDHEADED SECRETARY, who carries a tray with coffee mugs.

She knocks softly on a door marked "Lawrence Mulloy, Project Manager" and enters.

INT. MULLOY'S OFFICE, MARSHALL - SIMULTANEOUS

She quietly enters Mulloy's office, and we see Feynman, Sally Ride, General Kutyna and Neil Armstrong seated on couches across from Mulloy, taking notes as he talks.

MULLOY

MTI held a private caucus to
analyze their data. When they came
back online, they supported the
launch.

FEYNMAN

So they gave you the green light,
when it was completely within their
power to scrub it.

MULLOY

Sure, MTI scrubs all the time. They
had scrubbed this particular launch
three times already.

FEYNMAN

Didn't it seem odd to you that just
when they were about to delay the
Challenger for a fourth time, MTI
went ahead and changed their minds?

MULLOY

I can't tell you what happened
during those 45 minutes MTI went
offline. I was put on hold.

Meanwhile, Kutyna examines the wall of Mulloy's office, which
is covered in framed, self-congratulatory photos. Kutyna
spots a photo of MULLOY flanked by the GENTLEMAN SENATOR and
the BALD SENATOR-- all of them in formal dress and laughing.

A framed, yellowing NEWSPAPER ARTICLE hangs beside it.

CLOSE ON the HEADLINE: "UTAH WINS BIG: NASA AWARDS ONE
COMPANY EXCLUSIVE ROCKET CONTRACT"

ARMSTRONG

(to Mulloy)

The New York Times referenced a
history of memos and reports
listing O-rings as a matter of
prime importance. Where are they?

MULLOY

The Commission has been given all
existing paperwork.

Feynman looks the redheaded secretary up and down
appreciatively. She smiles at him as she pours coffee.

FEYNMAN

(with a wink)

Thanks, doll.

SALLY RIDE

(to Mulloy)

All the engineering reports? You're
sure?

MULLOY

(with expansive gesture)

You're welcome to talk to anyone at Huntsville, and have full access to our files.

Feynman dismisses this with an impatient wave of his hand. He stands up imperiously, perhaps for the secretary's benefit.

FEYNMAN

Mr. Mulloy, is it or is it not true that NASA was under enormous political pressure to get Challenger launched on time?

Mulloy chortles, coldly.

MULLOY

Does that come as a surprise to you, Dr. Feynman? That an underfunded government agency would be under pressure to perform?

Feynman flushes. Now he means business.

FEYNMAN

Those MTI engineers must have been forced to go against their better judgement--

MULLOY

There was nothing wrong with their judgement. Their launch decision process was not flawed.

FEYNMAN

Not flawed??

Feynman looks to the other Commissioners to see if they're as flabbergasted by this statement as he is.

MULLOY

No one could have predicted this accident. How could we? MTI and NASA were in complete agreement regarding the safety of that flight.

FEYNMAN

Fine. Do me a favor. Write down for me what you all thought was the likelihood of losing a shuttle. Before you actually LOST the shuttle, I mean.

He tosses Mulloy a pad of paper. After a moment, Mulloy reluctantly jots a number down.

Feynman takes out the stack of PAPER SLIPS we saw him collect at Kennedy, and starts to lay them face down on the table in a line in front of Mulloy, like a casino dealer.

Kutyna shoots Feynman a warning glance, Feynman wordlessly assures him there's a point to this.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
Mr. Mulloy, would you read what's
written on these papers for us?

Mulloy, with a heavy sigh, gets up and starts flipping them over and reads what's written on them.

MULLOY
"1/100," 1/300," "1/200..."

He stops suddenly, realizing what they are. He's red-faced.

MULLOY (CONT'D)
Who gave you these numbers?

FEYNMAN
Your top engineers at Kennedy.
Those numbers are what they thought
the chances were of disaster.

Sally Ride flips over the remaining slips of paper on the table.

MULLOY
(furious)
I want those engineers' names.

FEYNMAN
You don't GET their names, Sir.
Now, will you read what you wrote
out loud to the Commission?

Mulloy holds the pad of paper to his chest.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
(with an edge)
Unless you'd like to change your
answer?

Mulloy slowly lowers the pad of paper and reads.

MULLOY

(tightly)

Probability of losing a flight is
widely agreed to be --one in a
hundred thousand.

Sally Ride's gaze shoots daggers, Armstrong looks down in
disgust. Even Kutyna is seething.

RIDE

None of us astronauts had any idea
of this.

FEYNMAN

No one did.

The Secretary chooses this inopportune moment to poke her
head back in, coffee thermos in hand.

REDHEADED SECRETARY

Can I warm anyone up?

EXT. MARSHALL SPACE CENTER, ALABAMA - LATER THAT DAY

Kutyna, Feynman and Armstrong exit the offices.

ARMSTRONG

Some show you put on back there.

FEYNMAN

I was trying to prove a point, and
I proved it.

ARMSTRONG

You can't prove anything without a
paper trail, and I've checked out
all the official documents.
Mulloy's clean.

Suddenly Mulloy's Redheaded Secretary appears, taking
Feynman's arm.

REDHEAD SECRETARY

Let's take my car.

KUTYNA

You're not joining us for dinner?

FEYNMAN

Sorry, got plans.

He winks at the General in farewell and walks to her car.
Neil Armstrong shakes his head in disgust.

EXT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Feynman and the redhead are seated near the large front window, on the same side of the booth, like lovers.

PULL BACK to reveal a black TOWN CAR across the street, watching.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Feynman sketches the redhead on the back of his paper menu. She poses for him.

FEYNMAN

Angle your head a bit-- that's it.

REDHEAD SECRETARY

What you did today-- that was really something. But you shouldn't be so hard on Larry.

FEYNMAN

(focused on his sketch)

No? Why not?

REDHEAD SECRETARY

When a launch gets scrubbed, for whatever reason, NASA blames Marshall Space Center, and Marshall Space Center blames Larry. He was already three in the hole, and a fourth could've cost him his job.

FEYNMAN

(intrigued)

I see...

(immediately covering)

--Uh, I see, how much you care about him. He's lucky to have such a lovely woman working for him.

He finishes the sketch and presents it to her-- we see that he has some skill.

REDHEAD SECRETARY

Wow, that's good. ...You really think I could model?

Feynman just smiles.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

We see them through the plate glass window, drinking wine. Leaning towards each other, enjoying each other's company. She feeds him a bit cake on her fork.

EXT. RESTAURANT - LATE THAT NIGHT

He walks her to her car.

FEYNMAN

I'm going to catch a cab, doll.

REDHEADED SECRETARY

You... don't want to come see my place?

FEYNMAN

I'd love to see it... if I didn't love my wife so much.

She nods. Then throws her arms around his neck in a showy hug, and plants a KISS on his cheek, which he accepts. She holds onto him for a long moment.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Good night. It's been a swell evening.

He walks back towards the street, passing the black town car which is parked nearby.

CUT TO:

INT. CHAIRMAN ROGERS' OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

A SLAP of papers landing on Rogers' desk. He doesn't look up.

ROGERS

(tightly)

If Feynman's in that paper, I don't want to see it.

We see a reverse shot of Keel, beaming.

KEEL

You want to see THIS.

He pushes a manila folder towards Rogers, who opens it.

It's filled with SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS of Feynman and the Redhead. Eating dinner. Laughing provocatively. Her kissing him. Also Feynman with the two blondes at the Brazilian club.

EXT. AIRSTRIP AT MARSHALL - FOLLOWING DAY

A group of antsy REPORTERS keep their eyes peeled for the approach of the Commissioners' two town cars.

INT. LIMO ON THE MOVE - SIMULTANEOUS

Kutyna has a legal pad, where he's sketched out an escape scenario. Armstrong, Ride, and Feynman lean over it.

We see Kutyna's hand expertly sketching a tactical plan. He delegates with the authority of a man who's seen combat.

KUTYNA

Chairman, you go left, Sally, you go right. I'll stay in the car and block their approach until you're safely aboard.

Armstrong nods in approval.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

Professor-- just follow Sally and don't say anything to anyone, okay?

FEYNMAN

When are you going to stop telling me what to do, General?

KUTYNA

Get ready to move.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - CONTINUOUS

The limo lets out Ride, Armstrong, and Feynman, then swerves around with a SCREECH to act as a barrier between them and the press. It's a straight shot to the jet's stairway.

Armstrong and Sally stride quickly towards it, ignoring the Press. Feynman makes as if to follow them...

...Then instead feints to the left and runs STRAIGHT TO THE PRESS, who welcome him with SHOUTS of recognition.

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

Kutyna watches this from inside the limo, in total exasperation.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - CONTINUOUS

Feynman is surrounded by reporters.

JOURNALIST

Sir, what can you tell us about your experiences this past week?

FEYNMAN

NASA's been living in a fantasy world, exaggerating their safety margins--

JOURNALIST

No, we mean your experiences with your lady friend. Haven't you seen the papers?

He holds up the front page of that day's paper.

INSERT: A black and white photo of Feynman being kissed by the redhead, outside the restaurant.

Speechless, Feynman forcibly SNATCHES the paper from the journalist's hand.

REPORTER #2

How will this scandal affect your investigation? Are you planning to withdraw?

Feynman backs away from their questions. He bumps into Kutyna, who is suddenly there at his side.

KUTYNA

The Professor has a plane to catch.

Taking Feynman's arm, Kutyna guides him onboard the plane.

INT. CHARTERED JET - MOMENTS LATER

A severely rattled Feynman grabs some more copies of the complimentary newspapers stocked on board the galley, and sits heavily in his seat beside Kutyna.

We see headlines like "STRIP CLUB PROFESSOR" and "NOBEL WINNER NOT SO NOBLE?"

KUTYNA

I TOLD you to "check six!"

FEYNMAN

I was set up! Oh my God, what's
Gwen gonna think...

KUTYNA

All your press-mongering about
Congress being to blame... You sure
know how to pick your enemies.

FEYNMAN

What do you mean?

KUTYNA

I don't suppose you caught those
photos of Mulloy getting chummy
with the Senators from Alabama and
Utah... Two states that feed from
NASA's trough.

The jet starts to taxi down the runway.

FEYNMAN

(skimming articles)

It's a blatant smear campaign. The
press even interrogated the
strippers down at my local club!
I can't let these bastards get away
with this. I gotta, you know, make
a statement, refute this--

KUTYNA

No, Professor-- you can't say a
word to the press.

FEYNMAN

I gotta clear my name--

KUTYNA

They'll skew everything you say. In
their eyes the story isn't the
Challenger anymore-- it's YOU.

Feynman covers his face in his hands, humiliated and
helplessly enraged.

INT. SALT LAKE CITY AIRPORT - LATER

Feynman talks to Gweneth on a public payphone in the airport.

Nearby, we see PASSERSBY notice him and smile and whisper to each other. He's become a different kind of celebrity now.

FEYNMAN
(on phone)
I feel so violated...

GWENETH (O.S.)
Can you imagine how we're feeling?

Feynman closes his eyes, feeling terrible.

FEYNMAN
You KNOW nothing happened. I told you, they're trying to discredit me-

GWENETH (O.S.)
(icy fury)
And you certainly make it easy for them, Richard.

FEYNMAN
(helplessly)
I'm sorry.

GWENETH (O.S.)
Don't apologize to me, apologize to your children.

INT. FEYNMAN KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Overcome, Gweneth thrusts the phone at Michelle, who's sitting beside her. Michelle takes the receiver.

MICHELLE
Hi Dad...

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
Hi Sweetheart. How you holding up?

MICHELLE
Better than Mom. When are you coming home?

Gweneth is dabbing her eyes with a tissue.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
Soon. There's someone I gotta find, first...

EXT. BRIGHAM CITY, UT - EARLY MORNING

The Commissioners drive into Brigham City-- a small company town in the arid beauty of the red desert. Snow-covered mountains ring the valley.

They pass by the same "Welcome to Brigham, Birthplace of the Shuttle!" billboard we saw earlier. Only now it has been spray-painted with the words: "MTI = Killers."

CUT TO:

EXT. MTI CAMPUS, TESTING FACILITY - AFTERNOON

We see a small ROCKET MODEL on the ground, spitting sparks from its lit fuse. Feynman, Kutyna, Armstrong and Ride are gathered around it, at the MTI rocket testing facility. They stand alongside the MTI Managers we recognize from the teleconference.

MTI MANAGER #1
We're already testing out new
escape mechanisms in case of future
in-flight malfunctions.

Like a bottle rocket, the rocket SHOOTS UP into the sky. We follow it a couple hundred feet up, until a small parachute POOFS out, bringing the orbiter segment back to the ground.

As it returns to the ground, Feynman is no longer among them.

EXT. MTI CAMPUS - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman turns a corner between buildings and notices a JANITOR tossing white plastic bags into the back of a truck. They are light enough to be lifted easily, two in each hand.

The truck takes off, leaving strange debris fluttering in the dust by his feet. He picks it up.

CLOSE ON: Strands of professionally-shredded paper.

He hops up on the loading dock and slips inside.

INT. MTI HALLWAY - SIMULTANEOUS

He walks down the hallway, reading the names on the doors.

INT. MTI HALLWAYS - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman stops at a door marked "R. Boisjoly: Structural Engineering." Feynman opens the door, revealing a stripped office.

Suddenly he hears a CLANK. The door's hit something inside.

INT. BOISJOLY'S OFFICE

Behind the door is a cardboard box filled with desk swag and refuse. Feynman roots through it, and pulls out a MUG.

CLOSE ON: A cheery cartoon waitress smiles big, and the words "Diner of the Month" scrolled across it. He turns it around and sees in small print: "Idle Isle Cafe" and an address.

CUT TO:

INT. IDLE ISLE CAFE- THAT EVENING

An aging WAITRESS who looks like a much more sour version of the cartoon faces Feynman from behind the diner's counter.

WAITRESS
(suspicious)
Why you wanna know about Roger?

A couple CAFE PATRONS sitting at the counter notice her tone, and peer around the corners of the booths.

FEYNMAN
I'm on the Commission investigating
Challenger. Do you know where we
might find him?

Suddenly she looks torn between fear and anger. A mean, heavy-set DINER, wearing a jacket embroidered with a picture of the shuttle and a MTI logo, pipes up.

DINER
You don't have to tell him
anything, Betty.

FEYNMAN
Excuse me?

DINER
We know what you're up to. You're
helping NASA put the blame on MTI.
It's all over the news.

FEYNMAN

I understand you're worried about
your jobs after the accident--

DINER

Hell, our jobs were at risk even
before that.

Feynman is confused.

FEYNMAN

What do you mean? You guys have had
a monopoly on the shuttle boosters
for the last twelve years.

DINER

Some investigator. Doesn't know
we're about to lose that contract.
Congress just opened up the bid to
outside competition. Said our
rocket parts contract violated US
anti-monopoly laws.

FEYNMAN

(stunned)

When did this happen?

The cafe becomes very still.

DINER

A week before the accident.

Feynman's mind races, connecting the dots. In the awkward
silence another diner, an older woman this time, pipes up
with a quavering voice.

WOMAN

If that plant shuts down, this
town's as good as dead! Put that in
your report.

Feynman looks to the waitress for another cup of coffee, but
she takes his mug and replaces it with the bill. Get out.

INT. TELEPHONE BOOTH OUTSIDE CAFE - LATER

Feynman flips through the phone directory until he gets to
Allan McDonald's listing. Feynman tries to write down the
address, but his pen is dry. He rips out the page instead.

EXT. MCDONALD'S HOME - LATER THAT NIGHT

McDonald opens the door, immediately wary when he sees Feynman and Kutyna on his stoop.

MCDONALD

Dr. Feynman. General Kutyna. What can I do for you?

He doesn't let them in. Feynman takes this in stride.

FEYNMAN

Sorry to bother you so late at night--

MCDONALD

I can't help you. Were I to testify, I could lose more than my job.

KUTYNA

We could protect you.

FEYNMAN

Look, you don't have to say a thing. All we want you to do is listen.

Off McDonald, wavering.

EXT. MCDONALD'S PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

McDonald, Kutyna and Feynman sit on his front porch steps.

KUTYNA

Mulloy was under even more pressure than usual from his bosses to make sure Challenger launched on time.

FEYNMAN

Reagan's State of the Union address that night depended on Christa McAuliffe being in space. So when it looked like you guys were going to delay another launch, Mulloy had to use every bit of leverage he had to prevent a scrub.

KUTYNA

But why cave in now, after your company refused to launch three times before?

McDonald says nothing. Feynman clears his throat.

FEYNMAN

I can answer that. Without your monopoly, MTI now stood to lose their two-billion dollar contract to outside competition. They couldn't risk alienating Mulloy any further.

Kutyna digests this new bit of information. McDonald's eyes sharpen. Impressed with how much Feynman knows.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

On one hand, you've got Mulloy with all the weight of Washington and NASA coming down on him. On the other hand, you've got an aerospace giant, vulnerable for the first time.

MCDONALD

So you heard about the green ball theory.

Feynman's intrigued.

FEYNMAN

The what?

MCDONALD

If you have a green ball in your left hand and a green ball in your right hand, what does that give you?

Off of Feynman's blank look.

MCDONALD (CONT'D)

(deadpan)

Complete and absolute control of the Jolly Green Giant.

A moment of grim humor.

FEYNMAN

I know you want to protect your friend. But don't you think it's time he got to tell his side of the story?

Off McDonald's wary expression.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Kutyna sits beside McDonald in the front seat, who is driving through mountain forest. Feynman sits in the back.

MCDONALD
It's not much farther.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

McDonald turns the car off the road onto a dirt-packed drive. He takes it up into the forest, to a tiny hunting cabin tucked away from the road.

Boisjoly is waiting for them, sitting on the steps in the dark. As their headlights wash over him, he stands and approaches the car, a ghost in their headlights. He looks much worse for wear since we last saw him-- pale, poorly-rested-- a haunted man.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

McDonald rolls down the window.

BOISJOLY
Don't park. We're not staying here.

He opens the door and slides in next to Feynman in the back seat.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

The car pulls out of the driveway, turns around. Disappears back into the darkness.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - LATER

They wind their way up a craggy mountain. Below them lies the glittering patch of Brigham City, surrounded by darkness. A little ways off is a massive complex, lit up with sodium lights-- MTI.

They park at a deserted trail head parking lot.

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK - NIGHT

The four men sit on a bench that looks out over the valley. They listen to Boisjoly as if in a confessional, all of them staring straight ahead, silent and respectful.

BOISJOLY (V.O.)
When I heard they were still
considering a launch, I couldn't
believe it.

BEGIN FLASHBACK SEQUENCE:

INT. MTI CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT BEFORE LAUNCH

The MTI managers sit on one side of a large table, Boisjoly on the other, his file box on the floor next to his feet.

BOISJOLY
But I convinced them to scrub the
launch until it was warmer.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Mulloy is at Kennedy. We recognize the room from before.
Allan McDonald is there beside him, looking miserable.

MULLOY
This is no time to be getting cold
feet, MTI.

BOISJOLY (V.O.)
Meanwhile at Kennedy, Mulloy was
pressuring Allan to override my
recommendation, but he refused.

MULLOY
There are other companies out there
who can build us a solid rocket
booster.

Allan McDonald looks up sharply at this-- stunned at the
threat.

INT. MTI CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MULLOY (O.S.)
I suggest you take another look at
your data, MTI.

The two MTI Managers exchange looks.

BOISJOLY (V.O.)
They took us offline, fully aware
what he was threatening to do.

INT. MTI CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

We watch Boisjoly getting increasingly upset as, without sound, he gestures furiously to various charts, memos, and reports, all of which he pulls from his box of documents.

BOISJOLY (V.O.)

It was the most important
presentation of my life.

He writes quickly on the dry erase boards a series of dates and shuttle numbers similar to Feynman's hand drawn list.

His attitude goes from outraged to fearful to pleading, and yet the managers remain unmoved.

INT. KENNEDY CONFERENCE ROOM - 45 MINUTES LATER

Mulloy's eyes are on the digital clock counting down until the launch. McDonald is leaning his forehead against the window which overlooks the shuttle.

His patience at an end, Mulloy's finger stabs at the intercom.

MULLOY

We're eight hours to launch. I need
your decision.

INT. MTI CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Boisjoly is hunched over his paperwork, exhausted.

MTI MANAGER #1

(grim)

Lockheed and United Technologies
have been waiting for this day for
12 years.

MTI MANAGER #1 (CONT'D)

(to Boisjoly)

Boisjoly, Mulloy's right. Your
research on cold weather affecting
o-rings does seem inconclusive--

BOISJOLY

It was conclusive enough for you an
hour ago! And yesterday! And last
week!

MTI MANAGER #2

Last week, we had a monopoly on making NASA's rocket boosters.

(slowly, to Boisjoly)

Now. Can you prove -beyond a doubt- that the Challenger will fail tomorrow?

All the heads swing to look at Boisjoly.

BOISJOLY

You know protocol dictates we prove the shuttle will survive before we can recommend a launch...

MTI MANAGER #2

(waving this off)

Can you prove it won't survive?

Long pause. Their gazes weigh heavily upon Boisjoly.

BOISJOLY

(helpless whisper)

...No. I can't prove that.

MTI MANAGER #1

Then I think it's time to take off our engineering hats and put on our managers' hats.

The Managers look around the room, making sure this is sinking in. After a long moment, Manager #1 presses the intercom button.

MTI MANAGER #1 (CONT'D)

(into intercom)

Mr. Mulloy, we've reanalyzed our data.

MULLOY (O.S.)

And?

MTI MANAGER #2

(into intercom)

Let's go for it.

MULLOY (O.S.)

Are you all in agreement?

Boisjoly meets no one's gaze. His hands are shaking.

MTI MANAGER #1

No objections on this end. Right, gentlemen?

A long silence. No one looks at Boisjoly.

MULLOY (O.S.)
I want a launch directive as soon
as possible.

Boisjoly slowly, inconspicuously gathers his charts under his hands, as MTI Manager #2 begins to sign the launch paperwork.

BOISJOLY (V.O.)
I could have called up the Launch
Director at Kennedy. Or threatened
to call the Press. Hell, I could
have called the President. But I
kept quiet.

INT. MTI HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

MTI Manager #2 carries the launch directive down a long, dark hallway, where a fax machine waits.

Feeding the paper in. Pausing for a beat-- second thoughts?

He presses the button. The paper disappears into the machine.

BOISJOLY (V.O.)
We killed them. In the banality of
that boardroom.

We see a long shot of the manager from behind, stooped over the fax.

END FLASHBACK SEQUENCE.

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK - NIGHT

Boisjoly rises from his bench, raw with emotion.

BOISJOLY
I could have stopped it.

McDonald speaks up, needing to believe his own words.

MCDONALD
Those men had an agenda that was
bigger than any of us. Nothing we
could have said would have changed
that.

BOISJOLY
But my conscience would have been
clean, Allan.
(MORE)

BOISJOLY (CONT'D)

In the moment I figured I'd let other men think about the consequences, more important men than me... But they're not the ones falling apart over this. I can't stop thinking about it.

MCDONALD

You're being too hard on yourself.

BOISJOLY

There is so much in this world that is grey and unclear, but once in a while you are lucky enough to know, to truly KNOW, what is right and what is wrong. And if you don't listen to that one voice that's telling you the truth...

His voice trails off.

BOISJOLY (CONT'D)

Then you're lost.

Feynman is deeply affected. Gazing out on the moonlit snow, the cold desert below them resembles sunlit sand.

KUTYNA

You telling us this will help us change the Space Program. Because of you, the voices of engineers won't get strangled by red tape again. You can go home, and go back to aerospace again.

BOISJOLY

I think it's too late for me, Sir.

FEYNMAN

(with emotion)

It's not too late.

Boisjoly sees how Feynman's eyes are bright with emotion. A kindred spirit, with a shared reason to believe it will all be okay.

BOISJOLY

Wait here...

Boisjoly goes to his sedan, unlocks the trunk and lifts out the heavy box filled with files. He carries it to Feynman, placing it in his arms, transferring the burden.

BOISJOLY (CONT'D)

It's all in there. Every correspondence, every screw-up, every name. All my research. That's probably the only copy of those documents left anywhere.

Kutyna opens the box and takes out the topmost sheet of paper. Kutyna read it by the light of the full moon.

KUTYNA

(reading aloud)

"Sirs, it is my honest and very real fear that if we do not take immediate action to solve the o-ring problem as our number one priority, then we stand in jeopardy of losing a flight. The result would be a catastrophe of the highest order-- loss of human life."

Kutyna lowers the memo, feeling the weight of responsibility in what he's holding in his hand. Feynman takes it from him.

FEYNMAN

(skimming it)

This memo pre-dates the launch by a year. And it was sent to the heads of NASA and MTI.

Boisjoly shakes hands with Kutyna and Feynman in the drive.

KUTYNA

Thank you, Doctor Boisjoly.

BOISJOLY

"Mr." I don't have a Ph.D.

Feynman bows his head in respectful farewell.

FEYNMAN

Well you do as far as I'm concerned... Doctor.

And for the first time, we see Boisjoly smile.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AIRPLANE - EVENING

Kutyna sleeps peacefully in the aisle seat. Feynman, by contrast, is contemplative and sad by the window. On the seat between them sits Boisjoly's box of papers.

Feynman leans his head against the window, bathing his face in the red light of sunset, disturbed.

FEYNMAN'S POV: the dome of the setting sun seems to boil like an atom bomb on the desert horizon, filling the frame completely.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. CANTINA, 1945 - NIGHT

The Los Alamos scientists are celebrating at picnic benches in the back of a local Cantina. Local HISPANIC BEAUTIES serve cocktails and dance with the slap-happy young men.

CUT TO:

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE:

The ENOLA GAY flies above Hiroshima. Approaching its target.

A moment of silence, then the ATOM BOMB EXPLODES, lighting up the sky with white light. A wave of fire and death.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. CANTINA, 1945 - NIGHT

The SCREAMS of delighted girls as they are dipped and spun by the dancing scientists. They are in the midst of an orgiastic, energetic celebration.

The only one not celebrating is ROBERT OPPENHEIMER in his broad-brimmed hat. He stares towards us with haunted eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIROSHIMA SKYLINE

The white hush of the aftermath. The sky is an angry wound, as a MUSHROOM CLOUD blooms over the decimated city.

DISSOLVE TO:

NASA ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE:

The white light of the flame that builds, in slow motion, behind the Challenger's right-hand solid rocket booster.

The flames eat away at the metal, and into the external fuel tank. The footage slowly burns to white as the shuttle disintegrates. It's devastating... And strangely beautiful.

KUTYNA (O.S.)

Professor?

INT. AIRPLANE - SIMULTANEOUS

Feynman is jerked out of his reverie, his face etched in grief and regret. Kutyna is now awake, and looks at him with some concern.

KUTYNA

You okay?

FEYNMAN

Yeah. Just thinking about the things Boisjoly said.

(lays his hand on the box)

We've got a lot of work to do.

And he summons a smile for his friend's benefit.

BEGIN WASHINGTON DC REPORT-WRITING SEQUENCE:

...Feynman works in his hotel room, a typewriter in front of him. Hunt-and-pecking his words. Impatient, he rips the paper out and turns it over, handwriting his words instead.

INSERT: We see his line: "NASA Management is playing Russian Roulette..."

...Feynman goes over Boisjoly's reports and charts, in the cavernous Executive Building library. He absently swallows a pain pill and keeps going, late into the night.

...Feynman in an office dictates to a SECRETARY, as he paces around the room.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

"Obvious weaknesses are accepted again and again, without a sufficiently serious attempt to remedy them."

...Feynman lies awake at night, racked with stomach pains that have him curled up into fetal position.

FEYNMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
"For a successful technology,
reality must take precedence over
PR. Mother nature cannot be
fooled."

...Page after page of his report is placed carefully into a three ring binder, topped off with the title page "Personal Recommendations on the Reliability of the Shuttle, by Richard P. Feynman." Feynman closes the binder's rings-- it's done.

END SEQUENCE.

INT. ROGERS' OFFICE - MORNING

Feynman KNOCKS on the open door to Rogers' office, his report in hand. He enters and is surprised to see Al Keel sitting behind Rogers' desk, working on something.

Keel smiles warmly as Feynman double-checks to make sure he has the right office.

KEEL
Ah, Dr. Feynman! Alton Keel. So
good to finally meet you formally.

Feynman recognizes him as Keel shakes his hand with both hands.

FEYNMAN
Sure, you're a friend of the
General's. Military?

KEEL
(sitting down)
Ah, no. I came from the White
House's Office of Management and
Budget. I'm the Executive Officer
on the Commission, helping the
Chairman keep things on track.

He notices the binder tucked under Feynman's arm.

KEEL (CONT'D)
Are those your report findings?

FEYNMAN

Yeah, some personal observations of mine I'd like included in the report. Will the Chairman be back soon?

KEEL

Don't worry, I'll make sure he gets it. I'll give it to him personally.

He takes the binder from Feynman and flips through it.

KEEL (CONT'D)

Very impressive, Professor.

FEYNMAN

You don't think it's too much?

KEEL

No no-- this kind of extra-curricular sleuthing deserves a special place in the final report.

Keel stands up and pats Feynman on the back, steering him towards the door. Feynman looks relieved and content.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC PARK - DAY

The cherry blossoms are in bloom, and shower pink petals on Feynman and Kutyna as they stroll through the park.

FEYNMAN

I'm really glad I did this, General. I'm glad you convinced me to stay.

KUTYNA

Me too. I think we made a difference.

FEYNMAN

I KNOW we did.

They reach the corner of the park where the CHESS BUMS sit, engaged in timed chess matches. When they see Feynman, they recognize him and wave him over.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

You play?

KUTYNA

Not well enough to play these guys. I'd lose my wallet.

FEYNMAN

Ah, it's not so tough. Here, just watch.

He takes a seat beside one of them.

TIME CUT TO:

EXT. CHESS CORNER OF PARK - LATER

Feynman and the Bum are deep in the game. Kutyna perches nearby, watching their every move.

FEYNMAN

When you're trying to understand natural laws, a fun analogy is to imagine the Gods are playing a great game like Chess. Only we don't know the rules, and we're only allowed to look at a little corner of the board, and from just that we're trying to figure out the rules of the whole game.

The Bum pays no attention to him, and moves his Bishop, hitting the timer.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

See-- right there! You might see that and think, "okay, so Bishops always move on the diagonal and maintain their color. It's a fact."

Feynman mulls his move.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

But then one day, after this has been accepted for eons as truth, you see something strange: that when a Bishop is captured--

He captures the Bum's Bishop.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

--a Pawn can go all the way down to the Queen's end and it can produce a new Bishop. And you've just discovered a new rule!

The clock is ticking. The bum thinks he's nuts, keeps shooting Kutyna looks. Feynman holds onto the Bishop.

BUM
...Is that your move?

FEYNMAN
No. However, unlike in chess, where rules get more complicated as you go along, in physics when you discover new things, the rules seem simpler. Elegant.

He moves his piece back on the board, setting up a new play.

BUM
Is THAT your move?

FEYNMAN
No. Now, if the Bishop were to evade capture--

The clock times out. Kutyna hides a smile behind his hand.
The Bum makes a move.

BUM
Checkmate. You owe me twenty.

Feynman is caught off guard. He fishes out his wallet.

FEYNMAN
(grumpy)
I've got a Nobel Prize, you know.

BUM
Yeah and I've got a Pulitzer.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

POP! Keel opens a bottle of champagne for the entire COMMISSION, reassembled and celebrating their final meeting.

Super: One month later

They all take a glass, and laugh. The mood is light, like the last day of school.

ARMSTRONG
Alright, settle down everyone. We have one last important order of business, which is the touchstone of the entire investigation.

Commissioners exchange confused, slightly worried looks.

ARMSTRONG (CONT'D)

(deadpan)

We need to choose the color for the cover.

(holding up two options)

Indigo blue? Or pomegranate red?

They laugh.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Feynman chats with Neil Armstrong and Sally Ride.

FEYNMAN

So did you agree with my recommendations?

SALLY RIDE

(puzzled)

Recommendations?

FEYNMAN

On how to fix the Space Program;
how to re-organize management--

He sees from her blank look she doesn't know what he's talking about. Feynman turns to Armstrong.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Did you? Read about my findings?

ARMSTRONG

Was it in the publisher's copy?

Without answering, Feynman crosses the room and grabs a copy of the report out of a cardboard box. He pages through it. Increasingly concerned.

Feynman storms over to Keel, who's chatting with Kutyna.

KUTYNA

What's wrong, Professor?

FEYNMAN

(growling)

What happened to my findings,
Keel?? And why doesn't this look
anything like the report I signed
my name to?

KEEL

(to Kutyna)

He must be referring to the
"wordsmithing" I did before it went
to press.

FEYNMAN

I didn't write any of this!

(he reads from the copy)

"The Commission recommends that
NASA continue to receive the
support of the Administration and
the Nation."

KEEL

It doesn't really mean anything.

FEYNMAN

Oh no? How about:

(continuing)

"We applaud NASA's spectacular
achievements of the past and
anticipate impressive achievements
to come?!"

KEEL

It's just motherhood and apple pie
stuff. We have to keep the tone of
our findings positive.

FEYNMAN

Where are all of my recommendations
on how to change NASA? And where
are all of Boisjoly's memos and
charts?!

KEEL

They were too wordy.

KUTYNA

You're out of line, Keel.

Rogers draws near, and we see that the whole room is watching
their confrontation.

FEYNMAN

(to Rogers)

What the hell are you trying to
pull, here, some sort of trick you
learned from Nixon??

ROGERS

(tightly)

(MORE)

ROGERS (CONT'D)

I am trying to protect an honored American institution from your crass attempts to garner publicity. Unlike you, Dr. Feynman, I am not willing to sacrifice anything and anyone for my own vanity--

FEYNMAN

This is a piece of propaganda!

KEEL

The Commission voted to submit that version instead. It was sent to the printers last week.

FEYNMAN

"Voted??" I didn't vote on this!

KUTYNA

(angry)

Neither did I.

KEEL

You two weren't reachable, and we had a tight deadline. Look, your report WILL be published, just as a separate appendix.

FEYNMAN

When will it be published?

KEEL

In about...six months to a year.

For a moment, Feynman is speechless. He knows that this is just about as long as he's got left to live.

ROGERS

Now that we've pinpointed the technical malfunction, the important thing is to get the Shuttle flying again as soon as possible.

FEYNMAN

You're not trying to protect the space program, you're trying to protect the status quo. The public deserves to know why those astronauts died--

Finally, other members of the Commission speak up.

ARMSTRONG

Rogers is right. Inflammatory statements will only hurt NASA's funding, which won't allow them the money they need to fix anything.

SALLY RIDE

It's going to cost billions of dollars to redesign the shuttle. If NASA comes across looking incompetent, Congress could just end manned space altogether.

FEYNMAN

So you all agree with them? That it's better to pretend it was the Shuttle's o-rings, and not its managers, that killed those astronauts?

No one meets his eyes. Feynman, disgusted, throws the report he's holding in the trash and walks out of the room, slamming the door behind him. An awkward silence.

KEEL

Let's move on, shall we?

Kutyna grabs his coat and makes to follow Feynman.

KEEL (CONT'D)

General, you can't leave until we choose a color--

KUTYNA

Screw the colors, Keel.

He exits.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Kutyna catches up to Feynman. Feynman doesn't stop walking.

FEYNMAN

Now the American people will never know what really happened; everything Boisjoly went through, and McDonald-- all the engineers I met who no one would listen to-- who's going to hear their side of it now??

KUTYNA

Maybe in time--

Hearing this, Feynman spins to face Kutyna.

FEYNMAN

"Time?" Don't talk to me about time, General. You don't know what it means, no more than I did at your age. Back then, "time" was purely theoretical. Nanoseconds or eons, it was all the same to me, just units of an inconceivable variant.

(softer)

Now "time" is as tangible to me as-- a few more dinners with my wife. A few more hours to help a student grasp a slippery idea. It's five minutes to complete one last sketch. A year, to see my daughter graduate. Time's more real to me now than ever before, and I'm out of it. In the end, I traded five precious months for-- nothing.

With that, Feynman pushes through the doors, revealing a crowd of hungry press and photographers who CLAMOR the moment they spot him.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

(throwing up his hands)

No comment!

He pushes roughly through them.

INT. FEYNMAN'S HOTEL ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Feynman talks to Gweneth on the phone as he gets ready for bed. He looks sallow and defeated.

FEYNMAN

Choosing the Commission over my family... I'm sorry. It was a mistake.

Feynman shuts the curtains.

INT. GWENETH'S BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

INTERCUT with Gweneth getting ready for bed at the same time, lowering the blinds.

GWENETH

(into phone)

You felt a responsibility to see it through. I can understand that.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

It's a tricky thing, responsibility. I've spent most of my life trying to avoid it, and doing so has made me a very happy man.

She sits on the bed, pulling her hair into a bun.

INT. FEYNMAN'S HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Feynman sits on the bed at the same time, removing his slippers.

FEYNMAN

But something's been bothering me, Gwen. I couldn't put it into words until that Boisjoly guy did it for me.

(a confession)

You know, back at Los Alamos, very few of us scientists were thinking about what would happen AFTER the war, about consequences. I certainly wasn't. All I was thinking was: We'd actually done it! Created fire from equations on paper, split atoms-- the building blocks of the universe! And so there we all were, celebrating our own genius, the night they bombed Hiroshima. At the same time as human beings were getting vaporized into dust. An entire city, all its buildings and works of art-- gone. We were dancing.

He violently tosses the oversized hotel pillows onto the floor.

INT. GWENETH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She removes the decorative pillows in her bed aside too.

GWENETH

There was nothing you could have done to stop it.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
No, but I could have *thought* about
what I was doing. It never even
occurred to me.

GWENETH (O.S.)
By stopping the war, it probably
saved more lives than it took.

INT. FEYNMAN'S HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He gets into the right side of the bed, spooning left.

FEYNMAN
That's not the point. I signed up
to kill the Nazis. The bomb was
used on Japanese civilians. On
ordinary men and women, on children
in schools. ...I was so naive.

GWENETH (O.S.)
You were young. Now you know
better.

FEYNMAN
Do I? I still got bamboozled by
Rogers and his gang. I think that's
why standing up and being heard
matters so much to me this time
around, Gwen. Because last time I
kept silent.

He switches off his lamp.

INT. GWENETH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

On the left side of her bed, she spoons left too, almost as
if she can feel his arms wrapped around her.

GWENETH
Speaking up doesn't mean much,
unless you can find someone willing
to listen.

She turns off her bedside lamp.

INT. FEYNMAN'S HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

What she's said strikes a strong chord in Feynman. He
switches the light BACK ON and grabs his wallet from the
bedside table drawer.

FEYNMAN
(into phone)
You're right...

He takes out the folded up NAPKIN with a PHONE NUMBER WRITTEN ON IT IN LIPSTICK.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
(into phone)
...What would I do without you,
sweetheart?

GWENETH (O.S.)
Probably make a lot more mistakes.

Feynman smiles as he hangs up the phone. Looking thoughtfully at the blonde's phone number, he picks up the phone again and dials.

FEYNMAN
Hi Doll, Dick Feynman here. I never
forgot your offer to shake this
town up a little...

INT. CAPITOL HILL CLUB BACK ROOM - EVENING

Keel stands up from the table where all the Southern Senators sit, happily lighting cigars. The Gentleman Senator is there, as is the Bald Senator.

KEEL
How about a round on me, Gentlemen?

The Senators clap him on the back, grinning. Keel leaves, and we see the Secret Service Agent letting him pass.

INT. CHAIRMAN ROGERS' OFFICE LOBBY - SIMULTANEOUS

Rogers, in an overcoat and carrying his briefcase, strides across the marble lobby on his way out. As he passes the SECURITY GUARD'S DESK, he hears the sound of a TV playing the theme music to the McNeil-Lehrer Newshour.

JIM LEHRER (O.S.)
Welcome, sir. Was this an accident
that did not have to happen?

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
Yes, yes it was.

On hearing the familiar voice, Rogers stops walking. Wide-eyed, Rogers peers over the desk and sees the Guard watching the Newshour on a tiny, black and white portable TV.

ON TV:

We see Richard Feynman, sitting opposite Jim Lehrer.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)
NASA had many, many warnings that
there was something wrong, but the
warnings were disregarded.

We see a reverse shot of JIM LEHRER's serious face.

INT. MACNEIL-LEHRER NEWSHOUR STUDIO BACKSTAGE- SIMULTANEOUS

We see that off stage left on the set are the TWO BLONDES FROM THE BRAZILIAN CLUB, now wearing HEADSETS and t-shirts emblazoned with the McNeil Lehrer Newshour logo. They are producers for the show.

One of the blondes gives Feynman the 'thumbs up.'

JIM LEHRER
Disregarded out of incompetence,
out of a faulty system, out of out
of bad judgement? For what reason?

Feynman winks at them in response over Lehrer's shoulder.

INT. FEYNMAN HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Gweneth and Michelle sit together watching the show.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
(on TV)
Again and again I've heard this
childish attitude at NASA of,
"Nothing bad's happened before, so
these warning signs must be okay
cause it was okay last time."
Sooner or later someone was going
to get hurt.

Gweneth squeezes Michelle's hand.

INT. GRAHAM'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

Graham watches him on TV. A half smile is frozen on his face.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
Is it an accident, then? No, it is
not an accident.

Graham looks around the room, as if for someone to tell him
what to do next.

INT. MACNEIL-LEHRER NEWSHOUR STUDIO - SIMULTANEOUS

Jim Lehrer hones in on Feynman with intensity.

JIM LEHRER
What did Rogers mean when he said
writing the report 'was more
difficult than we thought it would
be?'

INT. KUTYNA'S LIVINGROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Kutyna is on the phone. Lucy is watching TV.

KUTYNA
Hold on-- what channel?

Kutyna hangs up and changes the TV channel.

FEYNMAN
(on TV)
What was difficult was the
discovery of NASA's extensive
illogic about safety. It was hard
for us to find out, in a sort of
emotional way. We had to admit that
the Wizard of Oz that everybody
respects has nothing behind him.

LUCY
Did you know about this?

Kutyna shakes his head no, but grins. Lucy's confused--
Kutyna puts his arm around her and pulls her closer to let
her know everything's okay. They continue watching.

INT. NASA LABORATORY LOUNGE ROOM

Various familiar engineers and scientists are crowded into a
room watching the show.

FEYNMAN

(on TV)

NASA's most dangerous mistake was in setting up a system of communication which squelched the engineers who were screaming "No, we can't make this work!" The people at the top who are talking to Congress don't want to hear this, so they discourage information from moving up.

We see how profoundly this affects them, to have their side of the story told.

INT. CAPITOL HILL CLUB HALLWAY- MOMENTS LATER

Keel, humming happily to himself, carries a tray of scotches back from the bar via the hallway to the private room. As he approaches, the Secret Service Agent doesn't move aside.

KEEL

Excuse me...

The agent doesn't move.

KEEL (CONT'D)

They're waiting for me!

SECRET SERVICE AGENT

Not anymore they're not.

And we hear the faint sound of the SHOW's music coming through the other side of the door.

INT. CHAIRMAN ROGERS'S OFFICE LOBBY - SIMULTANEOUS

The Security Guard's television has been lifted onto the desk so they can both watch. Other passersby have gathered as well.

ON LITTLE TV:

JIM LEHRER

The New York Times this morning reported from an anonymous source that you had a clash with Chairman Rogers over an appendix.

Rogers's face is stony-- he knows what Feynman could say now could ruin him forever.

FEYNMAN

(after a beat)

Well that's terribly exaggerated-it
got into the news somehow and I
have no control over news.

JIM LEHRER

(digging for dirt)

So as far as you're concerned, this
was a unanimous report from the
Commission and you didn't go away
with any scars and neither did
Chairman Rogers?

FEYNMAN

No Sir. I believe Chairman Rogers
is an honorable man. We just have
some differences of opinion.

Surprised, Rogers blinks, seeing Feynman differently for the
first time. The Security Guard smiles at Rogers.

EXT. LAUNCH PAD - SIMULTANEOUS

Meanwhile the Ice Captain oversees repairs on the launch pad.

FEYNMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

What's important here, is that the
crew of the Challenger didn't die
because of rubber joint seals--

INT. IDLE ISLE CAFE, BRIGHAM CITY - SIMULTANEOUS

The patrons eat their dinners in peace, no TV set here.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

--or escaping hydrogen gas, or for
any technical reason.

INT. BOISJOLY'S CABIN - SIMULTANEOUS

Boisjoly sits on his porch swing, looking up at the stars.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

Those astronauts died because NASA
managers were as untruthful to them
as they were to themselves about
the reliability of their product.

INT. MULLOY'S DEN - SIMULTANEOUS

Mulloy watches the show on TV, hollow-eyed.

LEHRER (O.S.)
(on TV)
So the NASA managers are to blame?

INT. STUDIO - SIMULTANEOUS

Back in the studio, Feynman leans back in his chair.

FEYNMAN
At first I thought so, but I've
come to realize that we're ALL to
blame. Because Americans demand
perfection at any cost. We've come
to expect it. No one considers the
consequences that come with
unrealistic expectations, and in
this case the consequences were
human lives. We suffer from a
national epidemic of short-
sightedness, willful naivete, and
NASA suffers as well.

JIM LEHRER
That's a rather heavy statement
you're making.

FEYNMAN
I'm a professor of physics and not
of management and human relations.
It might not be right, but you
asked me for my theory. And there
you have it.

EXT. DC SKYLINE - EVENING

The lights of the city twinkle against a deep-blue sky.

JIM LEHRER (O.S.)
Thank you sir, it's been a pleasure
having you as our guest.

FADE OUT.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NEXT MORNING

We see Feynman's hands buttoning a crisp white shirt. Knotting a perfect tie. Fixing cufflinks-- the uniform of the perfect Commissioner.

Feynman grins, pleased in spite of himself at how well he cleans up. Tucks the comb into his jacket pocket. He's ready.

INT. OVAL OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

APPLAUSE from the audience, as Ronald Reagan finishes pinning a medal on Kutyna, who stands next to Feynman and the others.

Reagan moves on to Feynman, who stands a little straighter.

RONALD REAGAN

I saw you on TV the other night,
Dr. Feynman. My, but that shook
people up.

FEYNMAN

That was the point, Mr. President.

RONALD REAGAN

I'm looking forward to reading your
appendix.

He shakes his hand.

RONALD REAGAN (CONT'D)

We'll fix NASA, I can promise you
that. This will never happen again.

And Reagan moves on to the next person. We see Feynman looks vaguely disquieted by Reagan's surety, but he shakes it off.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE ROSE GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

The Commissioners and Press file out into the Rose Garden reception where there are refreshments and a string quartet.

Rogers catches Feynman's eye from across the way. He begins to make his way towards him.

Feynman braces himself, unsure what to expect. When Rogers is directly in front of him, he hesitates, then stiffly extends his hand. Feynman takes it-- a moment of mutual respect.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC FREEWAY - DAY

Driving like a fighter pilot, cutting in and out of freeway traffic, Kutyna takes Feynman to the airport. They're in Kutyna's newly-restored white Opel-- his "baby."

The summer car rides like a dream, and they laugh as they blast rock and roll out their rolled-down windows.

INT. AIRPORT - LATER

Kutyna walks Feynman to his gate. They are both quiet now, pleased but tired. Feynman is back to his rumpled, windblown self. They arrive at the gate.

FEYNMAN

This has been one of my greatest adventures.

(beat)

I couldn't have done it alone.

They shake hands.

KUTYNA

Glad I could be your co-pilot.

Feynman holds on to his for a moment.

FEYNMAN

Glad you could be my friend.

A beat before he lets go, then:

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

You deserve some more stars on that uniform of yours. That's like the end-all be-all for you guys, right?

KUTYNA

Co-pilot to pilot--

FEYNMAN

Yeah?

Kutyna reaches into his pocket and hands Feynman a comb.

KUTYNA

Comb your hair.

Laughing, Feynman takes it, then puts on a cranky air.

FEYNMAN

When are you gonna stop telling me
what to do?

Feynman combs his hair, offers the comb back to the General.

KUTYNA

Keep it. Until we meet again.

Bittersweet, Feynman nods, fully aware there won't be a next time. He salutes Kutyna, then walks down the jet way without looking back.

LONGSHOT off the silhouette of Kutyna, watching him go.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

I was born not knowing, and I've
only had a little time to change
that, here and there.

INT. PHYSICS X CLASSROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Feynman takes up the front of the darkened auditorium like a stage actor. His posture is softer, his voice, more gentle. We see that the auditorium is PACKED for his last lecture.

FEYNMAN

I can live with doubt and
uncertainty. I think it's much more
interesting to live that way than
to cling to answers that might be
wrong. I don't feel frightened not
having an answer, by being lost in
a dark and mysterious universe. It
doesn't frighten me.

He pauses, then looks over to the back row of the auditorium, where we see Michelle and Gweneth. Sandwiched in between the two women is his son CARL, 20's, wearing a MIT sweatshirt.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

The trick is to be brave enough to
look at something, and see it for
what it really is. And TELL people
what you see, even if they don't
wanna listen. As scientists, you
must be prepared to stand up and be
heard even in the face of willful
ignorance.

We see the faces of his hundreds of STUDENTS, past and present, all held rapt by his words.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I have just one wish for you all--
the good luck to be free to
maintain the kind of integrity I've
just described, where you do not
feel forced by any financial,
social, or political need to give
up that integrity. May you have
that freedom.

He bows his head a little, and with great dignity makes his
way off the stage. We hold on the empty desk and blackboard
as the lights slowly dim.

FADE TO BLACK.

CARD #1

In June 1986, President Reagan directed NASA to adopt the
recommendations in Feynman's appendix. For the first time in
NASA history, personnel were able to report Space Shuttle
safety concerns without fear of reprisal.

CARD #2

Lawrence Mulloy resigned from NASA soon after the report came
out.

Roger Boisjoly received the 1987 NSS Presidential Award for
Professional Integrity and Personal Courage.

General Donald Kutyna went on to head the North American
Aerospace Defense Command and the US Space Command. He
received his third star in 1988, and his fourth in 1990.

CARD #3

Richard Feynman died on February 15th, 1988.

In memory of the courageous crews of the Challenger and
Columbia shuttles.

THE END