

VERVE

73 SECONDS

Based on a true story

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EXT. CAPE CANAVERAL LAUNCH COMPLEX - DAY

On the launch pad aimed toward the heavens is the Space Shuttle *Challenger* piggybacking a massive rust-colored fuel tank. Next to it are two solid rocket boosters (SRBs).

TITLE: Space Shuttle *Challenger*, STS-51-L, January 28, 1986, 11:37 a.m. EST.

MISSION CONTROL (V.O.)
T-minus two minutes, Challenger.

DICK SCOBEE (V.O.)
Copy, two minutes.

A hooded vent attached to a retractable arm capping the external tank starts to rotate away from the shuttle.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - CHALLENGER COCKPIT - DAY

Four members of the shuttle crew are strapped in and ready to go. Up front are COMMANDER FRANCIS "DICK" SCOBEE (46) and PILOT MICHAEL SMITH (40).

DICK SCOBEE
There goes the beanie cap.

Behind Scobee and Smith are mission specialists ELLISON ONIZUKA (39) and JUDY REZNIK (36).

ELLISON ONIZUKA
Doesn't it go the other way?

The crew laughs at the joke.

INT. MID-DECK - CHALLENGER - SAME

Below the flight deck, the three other crew members are strapped in. CHRISTA MCAULIFFE (37) eagerly awaits liftoff, her eyes dancing with anticipation.

JUDY RESNIK (O.S.)
You ready, teacher?

CHRISTA MCAULIFFE (INTO COMM)
I've been ready my whole life.

We stay on McAuliffe's wide-eyed enthusiasm another beat.

INT. MISSION CONTROL ROOM - JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY

Rows of computer terminals littered with binders and the occasional styrofoam coffee cup. NASA ENGINEERS eye several giant screens showing data for trajectories, weather, etc.

A large screen front and center shows a satellite map of Earth with flight patterns curving around the globe.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR JAY GREENE (40s), bushy hair parted on the side and sleeves rolled up, runs the show. He's the picture of calm professionalism.

JAY GREENE
We're a go in T-minus 60 seconds.

DICK SCOBEE (OVER COMM)
Copy T-minus 60.

EXT. GRANDSTAND - LAUNCH COMPLEX - DAY

FRIENDS, FAMILY and other ONLOOKERS pack the grandstand away from the launch pad. Some bounce with excitement, but others shiver and rub their arms.

In fact, everyone wears heavy winter coats, hats, scarves despite the fact they're in Florida. It's *cold*.

EXT. LAUNCH PAD - DAY

The SHUTTLE BOOSTERS spew white smoke.

MISSION CONTROL (V.O.)
And five... four... three... two...

Orange flames shoot out and the shuttle lifts off. A flock of geese flies across, fleeing the massive explosion.

EXT. GRANDSTAND - LAUNCH COMPLEX - SAME

The crowd cheers and waves, as the shuttle clears the tower.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - CHALLENGER COCKPIT - DAY

The entire cabin rumbles and shakes, the G-force pressing the crew against their seats.

MICHAEL SMITH
Looks like we've got a lotta wind.

INT. MID-DECK - CHALLENGER - SAME

The cabin violently shakes. McAuliffe looks worried, not being used to this.

Next to her, GREGORY JARVIS (41), gives McAuliffe a reassuring look and a thumbs up. She gives thumbs up back. RON MCNAIR (35), next to Jarvis, smiles.

MICHAEL SMITH (OVER COMM)
There's Mach one.

DICK SCOBEE (OVER COMM)
Going through nineteen thousand.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - CHALLENGER COCKPIT - SAME

More heavy turbulence and a HARD JOLT. Scobee and Smith share a look.

MISSION CONTROL (OVER COMM)
Challenger, go at throttle up.

DICK SCOBEE
Roger, go at throttle up.

Scobee hits the throttle. The shaking grows more violent.

MICHAEL SMITH
Feel that mother go! Woo-hoo!

Scobee smiles, eyes on his instruments.

INT. MID-DECK - CHALLENGER - SAME

McAuliffe tries peeking out the window. Air vapor and condensation block her vision. She smiles. This is everything she could have hoped for--

Another VIOLENT JOLT. This one harder than the last. And a loud CREAKING SOUND. McAuliffe's eyes widen, as we--

SMASH TO BLACK

PRELAP - BIRDS CHIRPING

EXT. EBELING HOME, BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH - DAY, 2016

A sleepy suburb of Northern Utah. It's a cool, breezy day. A flock of birds flies overhead, heading south for winter.

HEATHER BURNS (30s), national affairs reporter for NPR, exits a rental car parked in front of a tidy two-story home.

Her sound tech, KYLE (20s), opens the trunk and starts pulling out equipment.

KYLE
He gonna talk to us this time?

Turning toward the house, Heather sees someone and gives a quick wave to--

BOB EBELING (80s, frail), standing with the help of a walker. He lets the curtains fall without waving back.

Heather approaches and RINGS the bell. No answer. She looks at Kyle and tries again. Same result. Now she knocks.

HEATHER BURNS
Mr. Ebeling? It's Heather Burns from
NPR. We scheduled an interview for
today. Mr. Ebeling?

INT. LIVING ROOM - EBELING HOME - DAY

Bob sits in his La-Z-Boy ignoring her. He's intelligent,
God-fearing, and, judging from the oxygen tank behind him,
in poor health. Bob is upset, his hands shaking.

His wife, DARLENE (70s), usually supportive, but right now
disappointed, stands in front of him.

DARLENE
You agreed to this.

BOB
I changed my mind.

DARLENE
They came all this way.

BOB
From California. It's not that far.

Darlene sits on the ottoman and takes his hand. She
understands what he's going through.

DARLENE
This could be your last chance to
tell people what happened.

Off Bob, eyes rimmed red--

EXT. EBELING HOME - DAY

Heather and Kyle head back to the car, the opportunity
seemingly lost.

Behind them, Darlene opens the front door. They turn and see
her waving for them to come inside.

INT. EBELING HOME - DAY

Bob fidgets in his La-Z-Boy. Kyle sets up a laptop and
connects a microphone.

BOB
Last time I did one of these, we used
a tape recorder.

KYLE
What's a tape recorder?

Kyle smiles. So does Bob, the ice breaking a little. Behind him, Heather gets a feel of the place. Lots of bird-themed nick-knacks, wood carvings, and family photos.

On the wall, she finds an award for the National Wildlife Refuge Association's 2013 Volunteer of the Year. There's a bright photo of Canadian geese flying.

HEATHER BURNS

Tell me about this.

Bob cranes his neck to see and smiles.

BOB

Proudest day of my life, outside
having children. I really found my
calling at the sanctuary.

Heather moves to the mantel and finds a photo of middle-aged Bob and a TEENAGE BOY in fishing gear by a lake. Bob is smiling, arm around the boy. The boy has a blank expression.

HEATHER BURNS

This your son? My dad used to take me
fishing back in Missouri. Wasn't as
pretty as this.

BOB

I thought you wanted to talk about
Challenger.

Heather turns to Kyle. He gives her the thumbs up.

HEATHER BURNS

I think we're ready.

Heather sits in a chair set up in front of Bob. Darlene watches from the dining room.

HEATHER BURNS

I'm just going to start with a few
basics to get warmed up. Ask about
your career, where you went to
school, that sort of thing.

BOB

I don't want to talk about any of
that. Just get to it.

HEATHER BURNS

Okay. Tell me about what happened on
January 28, 1986.

Bob gathers himself.

BOB
We knew the shuttle wasn't safe. We tried to stop the launch, but we failed.

HEATHER BURNS
You mean you and Roger Boisjoly?

Bob shakes his head.

BOB
Roger. He was an arrogant son of a bitch. Completely full of himself. Don't use that part.
(then)
Roger was a brilliant engineer. He was the one who got us as far as we did. If he were still alive, you'd be talking to him, not me.

HEATHER BURNS
How did you and Roger know the shuttle wasn't safe?

Bob turns away, his mind drifting.

INT. BEDROOM - EBELING HOME - DAY, JANUARY 1985

MATCH CUT: A YOUNGER BOB (50s) gets ready to go to work. He's in front of a mirror putting on a knit tie.

On the dresser are several framed photos. One is the same picture of him and his son Heather just asked about.

Bob looks heavily at the photo a moment and adjusts it before leaving the bedroom.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Bob enters throwing on his Member's Only jacket and finds DARLENE (now 40s) in a nurse's uniform leaving for the day.

There's a plate of Vanilla Wafers and a glass of milk on the counter. Darlene gives him a quick peck.

DARLENE
Happy launch day. What time will you be home?

Bob takes one of the cookies.

BOB
The usual probably. Just be ready for more late nights. NASA's ramping up the launch schedule this year.

Bob drinks the milk. Darlene puts her arms around him.

DARLENE
You trying to avoid me?

BOB
You know, I do have a little time
between launches. Why don't we go
back to--

DARLENE
The Springs. It's been too long.

BOB
Remember that night, when we had the
pool all to ourselves?

DARLENE
Make the arrangements.

She kisses him a little more passionately and leaves.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

A quiet tree-lined street in the middle of the desert. Small
mountains loom over rows of tidy homes.

ROGER BOISJOLY (40s, heavyset, but strong), dressed head-to-
toe in a red Adidas tracksuit, jogs with confidence.

Roger keeps a good pace as he looks at his digital watch,
but realizes he's late and has to turn back around.

INT. BEDROOM - BOISJOLY HOME - DAY

Roger enters and starts stripping off his sweat-soaked hat
and gloves. His wife, ROBERTA BOISJOLY (40s), comes in with
a prescription bottle.

ROBERTA
What's this?

She looks at him upset. Roger's busted, but cops to it.

ROGER
(slight Boston accent)
I don't need those anymore, alright?

ROBERTA
You know what happens to you if you
don't take them.

ROGER
I've been off them six months and I'm fine. And I haven't had a panic attack in years.

ROBERTA
Six months? When were you going to tell me?

ROGER
I said I'm fine. Those things mess with my concentration, and lives depend on me being able to focus at work. I'm better off without them.

Roger heads inside to shower.

EXT. MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Bob drives his Honda past a sign that reads MORTON THIOKOL LTD. A rocket booster angled toward the sky is behind it.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Bob finds his space and parks. Middle of the pack. He grabs his briefcase and gets out.

Roger drives by in his Volvo station wagon and parks nearby. He gets out and sees Bob.

And Bob sees him. But instead of saying hello, Bob closes his door and heads for the main building, like he's trying to avoid him. Roger shakes his head.

INT. BREAK ROOM - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Bob joins his coworkers to watch the launch of *Discovery* on TV, which is tuned to the live countdown on CNN.

Among the group of engineers is BETH MCFARLAND (30s), new hire and resident wunderkind. Roger's also there.

Bob avoids eye contact with Roger and goes to the counter to grab a bran muffin. Roger sees this and calls him out.

ROGER
Hey, you guys think ammonium percholate's unstable, just wait till that muffin goes through Bob.

Everyone laughs. Bob moves away, not wanting to engage.

ROGER
C'mon, it's just a joke.

Bob ignores him and sits next to Beth in back of the room.

BETH

It was funny.

BOB

Roger's a real comedian until you become one of his targets. Then he's just an asshole.

(then)

I don't think we were properly introduced your first day. Bob Ebeling. Elizabeth, right?

BETH

Beth. Good to meet you, Bob.

Beth chews her finger nails.

BOB

You're not nervous, are you?

BETH

My first launch. So maybe a little.

BOB

I remember my first launch. Project Mercury. I worked for Convair, which built the Atlas rocket. I'll never forget when John Glenn was on the launch pad getting ready to go up--

ROGER

Jesus, Bob, you're boring the shit out of her.

Roger sits next to them with coffee. Bob shuts down.

ROGER

Look, it's okay to be nervous. We're sending men and women up there on the back of a 66,000 pound tank filled with over a million pounds of liquid hydrogen burning at 4,000 degrees. The potential for disaster is always there. So my advice, don't relax too much, because when you do that's when bad shit happens.

Roger smiles and turns back to CNN's coverage, leaving Beth confused.

ON TV, Mission Control goes into FINAL COUNTDOWN. The room quiets, all eyes on the screen, as *Discovery* launches--

CNN REPORTER (O.S.)
We have liftoff, and Discovery has
cleared the tower. The 15th Space
Shuttle mission is on its way.

The engineers clap and cheer. Even Bob joins in. Everyone is
happy except Roger, who looks more relieved than anything.

EXT. UPPER ATMOSPHERE - DAY

Discovery rumbles through the atmosphere on its way into
space. Reaching the stratosphere, the rocket boosters DETACH
and continue upwards until arcing back down toward Earth.

INT. PRODUCTION BAY - DAY

Set up for a makeshift celebration. A sign reads: *A Banner
Year 1985*. On a table underneath is a space shuttle cake,
cups and a punch bowl.

A crowd of Thiokol engineers is gathered in the open hangar.
They all look obligated to be there. Roger, Bob and Beth are
among them, but not together.

HENRY "HANK" LUND (50s), a former athlete turned paunchy
middle manager, addresses the team on a raised platform.

LUND
Great job on our first launch of the
year. It's been a pleasure leading
this group of engineers. Without you,
our success wouldn't be possible.
1985 is going to be a *banner* year,
with an increased launch schedule and
new contract in the works. As they
say, the sky's the limit!

The crowd politely laughs. Roger rolls his eyes.

LUND (CONT'D)
So keep up the great work, and have
some cake.

Smattering of applause. Lund makes his way into the crowd
lining up for Space Shuttle cake.

Roger has found Beth and is talking with her alone. Lund
sees them and comes over. Roger is not thrilled.

LUND
Roger. You trying to corrupt the mind
of our new hire?

ROGER
I was just telling her to watch out
for you, so yeah, guess I am.

Roger heads over for some cake, leaving Lund and Beth alone.

LUND
Don't mind him. What Roger lacks in
social etiquette he makes up for with
his engineering skills.

Lund puts a hand on Beth's shoulder.

LUND
So, you adjusting okay? How was the
move from back east?

Uneasy, Beth takes a step back to disengage. Lund pretends
not to notice.

BETH
Not bad. My husband is still getting
used to all the open space. He's a
New Yorker through and through.

LUND
Well, he's a lucky man. But you'll
find we're a very welcoming bunch out
here. And if there's anything you
need, just let me know.

BETH
I appreciate that.

LUND
Especially if Roger's giving you
trouble. He's the one you have to
watch out for.

Lund puts another hand on her shoulder and walks away.

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - DAY

A rubber DINGHY motors across the waves. Aboard are TWO
DIVERS in wet suits and a CREW MEMBER manning the outboard
engine. Anchored behind them is a NASA RECOVERY SHIP.

Several CREW MEMBERS aboard the recovery ship push the Diver
Operated Plug (DOP), a large water pump attached to cables,
over the side and into the ocean.

The Dinghy stops at a giant white tube bobbing in the ocean.
One of the SOLID ROCKET BOOSTERS.

The divers get their gear ready, as the crew member hits the switch of a motorized wench that pulls the DOP toward them.

INT. PRODUCTION BAY - A WEEK LATER

Separated into sections, the rocket boosters have been brought into the large bay and staged. Other ENGINEERS prepare for a routine inspection.

In a white lab coat and surgical mask, Roger enters with a camera and clipboard. He waves to the engineers.

Roger starts taking photos of the SRB. He leans in, snapping a few more, but something odd catches his eye.

He lowers his camera and takes out a pen knife from his pocket protector. He digs into the groove on the outside of the booster, pulling out black putty on the pen's blade.

He examines the dark soot. Then starts to carefully pull on the inner rubber O-ring that goes around the booster.

Looking closer, he sees the O-ring is partially frayed, like something was eating away at it.

Roger pulls the O-ring out of the joint, looking closely at it as he makes his way around the booster, and lays the massive ring on the floor--

He stops and looks at the O-ring up close, stunned. Roger raises his camera and SNAPS several photos.

INT. DARK ROOM - DAY

Roger develops the photos of the rocket booster. Dozens are pinned to the line drying.

Roger examines one that shows a close-up of the badly damaged O-ring. His concern deepens.

INT. LABORATORY - DAYS LATER

Roger is with a LAB CHEMIST, who hands him a file folder.

LAB CHEMIST

Heavy amounts of aluminum oxide and other combustion debris mixed in with the epoxy.

ROGER

Jesus Christ.

Roger looks up from the report.

ROGER
Not a word of this to anyone.

LAB CHEMIST
I have to file my report.

ROGER
I need to figure why this happened
first, then I'll roll your report
into mine. Give me a few days.

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE - EVENING

It's late and employees are leaving for the day. But not Roger. He's at his desk poring over calculations and reams of data. Roger gets stuck on something and grows frustrated.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

With briefcase in hand, Bob puts on his jacket to leave. As he passes Roger's office--

ROGER (O.S.)
Bob! Get in here!

Bob stops in his tracks. He doesn't want to deal with this.

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE - SAME

Bob pokes his head in, reluctant to confront Roger.

BOB
I'm going home, so whatever it is,
can it wait until tomorrow?

ROGER
You have to see this. Please.

Roger hands him a folder. As Bob flips through--

BOB
This is *Discovery*?

ROGER
Yeah. That's the center field joint
on the right booster.

Roger gives him another photo. Bob examines it more closely.

ROGER
And that's the primary O-ring.

BOB
Almost a third gone? What about
damage to the secondary?

ROGER
Surface only.

Bob flips through more. Then he looks up.

BOB
Why are you showing me this? Take it to Lund.

ROGER
Lund's an asshole. I bring it to him, he'll ignore it.

BOB
I don't know what you want from me. Advice? Write your report and hand it off upstairs.

ROGER
There's something wrong. I don't want it getting bogged down in meetings and paperwork and all that bullshit.

BOB
Honestly, there's not that much here.

Bob tries to hand back Roger's report, but he won't take it.

ROGER
Look at it again. Tell me what would've happened if the secondary ring failed.

BOB
I don't know.

ROGER
Yeah, neither do I. And that's what scares me.

BOB
But it didn't fail, right?

ROGER
Hot gas blew by the primary and almost did the same with the backup. There's soot between the rings. It didn't seal properly. We need to look into this, form a task force or something.

BOB
There's your answer. Write a memo and get one started. Good night, Roger.

Bob hands the file back and walks out.

INT. STUDY - BOISJOLY HOME - NIGHT

Roger is at his desk. Roberta enters. He looks up and gives her a quick smile before turning back to his work.

ROBERTA

You know how I feel about bringing work home with you.

ROGER

Something important came up I gotta deal with. I won't be long. What's for dinner?

ROBERTA

I just spent hours in parent-teacher meetings. You should be making me dinner.

(notices Roger)

What's wrong? You look weighed down.

ROGER

Nothing. I'll be along.

She starts to leave.

ROGER

How do you get people to listen?

(Roberta turns back)

It's not something that comes easy for me. I mean, I know I can be off-putting at times.

ROBERTA

Abrasive is the word I'd use.

ROGER

I gotta get this right the first time or they'll bring up the motor mount thing again. They still bust my balls about that.

Roberta looks at Roger, understanding.

ROBERTA

You need to learn how to be diplomatic. Find a way around instead of charging straight through.

ROGER

But the data is all that matters. Politics shouldn't have anything to do with it.

ROBERTA
 You're working with NASA. There's
 always going to be politics.
 (then)
 I'll put a Hungry Man in the
 microwave for you.

Roberta leaves. Roger leans back to think. Then he opens the top drawer of his desk. Finds a folded article under the organizer and opens it.

INSERT ARTICLE

The front page of the *Daily News*, March 4, 1974. A headline blares in large letters: *346 Die In Paris Jetliner Crash, Worst Air Disaster in History.*

Below the headline is a photo of several FIREMEN sifting through the wreckage of a downed DC-10 in the woods.

ROGER suddenly feels his breathing turn shallow and his heart race, taking him by surprise. His hands tremble, his mind reels--

Roger jumps up and starts calming himself with strong, quick breaths. A practiced technique.

The attack passes almost as fast as it began. Roger sits back down, and hands still shaking, continues to type, pretending like nothing happened.

INT. PRODUCTION BAY - MORTON THIOKOL - TWO WEEKS LATER

A group of ENGINEERS are gathered to watch the assembly of a solid rocket booster. Bob is the one leading the team. All wear white scrubs, masks, and beanie caps.

On a walkway above there's a CROWD of spectators, mainly SCHOOL KIDS and TEACHERS.

Roger makes his way onto the floor, badge on his lapel, and finds Lund with other executives. Lund barely glances at him. In Roger's hand is a memo.

ROGER
 I need to talk to you.

LUND
 Make it quick.

Roger hands him a memo. Lund barely looks at it.

ROGER
 I sent this two weeks ago.

LUND

See that group of kids up there? They came all the way from Salt Lake to watch us build one of our boosters.

ROGER

Did you read this? Look at my report? The photos? Anything?

LUND

Yes, and we don't need a task force. We'll address the issue through our standard process.

Lund hands the memo back to Roger.

ROGER

Our process is burying problems in a mountain of bureaucracy.

LUND

There hasn't been a launch since January. Two missions were scrubbed this month because Boeing can't get their act together on the IUS. They might lose their contract with NASA. You want us to be like Boeing?

ROGER

There's a readiness review with NASA in a couple days. Let me bring it up with them, see what they say.

LUND

Roger, you're a brilliant engineer, but we've been down this road before. You spent months on the motor mount, and turned out it was nothing. We have your report, and if we decide it's important enough to raise with NASA, we will. Focus on the next one.

Lund turns back to watch the assembly crew. Roger can barely contain his anger.

ROGER

I *am* focused on the next one.

Lund ignores him. Roger storms off. From the platform, Bob eyes Roger as he leaves.

EXT. LAUNCH PAD - KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - DAY

TITLE: Space Shuttle *Challenger*, STS-51-B, April 29, 1985

Smoke billows from the rocket boosters. And *Challenger* BLASTS OFF, clearing the tower in a massive display of fire.

INT. TESTING BAY - DAY

Roger performs his routine inspection. He takes pictures of the inside of the recovered rocket booster sections.

FLASH! A photo of thick black soot caking the inside of the tang, a deep groove that fits a wide clevis.

FLASH! Now a photo of the primary ring showing heavy damage.

FLASH! A photo of the other ring, which is partially singed.

ROGER lowers his camera, eyes intense.

INT. BOB'S OFFICE - EVENING

A neat and orderly work space with schematics pinned to the wall and a desk that contains only what's necessary.

Bob is packing his briefcase when Roger crashes inside, startling him.

BOB

Jesus, Roger.

ROGER

It happened again.

Roger hands Bob a folder containing photos and his report. Bob goes through the file. Roger paces in front of him, running his hand over his bald head. Bob grows uneasy.

BOB

I can't focus. Please, sit.

Roger sits on a nearby sofa, unable to sit still. His starts shaking his leg. Bob turns away from him.

Roger watches intently. Bob can feel his eyes boring into him, as he flips through the pages. Finally, he looks up.

ROGER

You agree with me. I can see it.

BOB

There's a problem-- *potentially*.

ROGER

We gotta do something.

BOB

What happened to your memo?

ROGER
In a black hole, like I thought.
(then)
What if the shuttle is more dangerous
than we realize? Those astronauts up
there have no fucking idea.

BOB
We don't know what this means or
what's causing it. But you're right,
we need to do something.

Bob stands and leaves, taking the report with him.

HALLWAY

Bob moves down the hall with purpose. Roger charges out of
his office and catches up.

ROGER
Where the hell you going?

INT. BETH'S CUBICLE - EVENING

Beth wears headphones and listens to Bruce Springsteen on
her Discman. She's more *Born to Run* than *Born in the USA*.

Bob shows up with Roger. He tries getting Beth's attention,
but the music is too loud. Bob takes off her headphones.

BETH
What the hell?

BOB
Sorry. You mind looking at this?

He hands her Roger's report. Beth goes through it.

BETH
What am I looking at?

BOB
Roger's findings from Challenger.
What do you see?

Beth flips through.

BETH
Significant primary O-ring erosion,
soot in the joint-- is this right?

ROGER
Yeah. It happened on Discovery, too.

BETH
What would cause this?

BOB
We don't know. What do you think?

Beth is surprised to be put on the spot, but dives in.

BETH
Okay, so the rings are synthetic rubber made of ethylene dichloride and sodium polysulfide, right? It's supposed to be resistant to anything and seal under any conditions.

ROGER
That we know of.

BETH
Right. But 4,000 degree gases should seal the rubber almost instantly.

BOB
Unless there's some kind of delay.

Roger turns to Bob. He's onto something. Roger's mind starts to race and comes to some realization. He runs out of the cubicle farm. Bob and Beth bolt up and follow--

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Roger is digging through stacks of papers, as Bob and Beth run in. Bob is completely out of breath--

BOB
What is it?

ROGER
You just said it. There's a delay.

Roger finally finds a computer printout and scans it.

ROGER
This is it!

BETH
What?

ROGER
What's the one thing that would cause synthetic rubber to not seal right away under extreme heat?

Blank stares from Beth and Bob. Roger holds up the printout.

ROGER

Cold. Discovery launched in January
when it was 53 degrees.

BOB

That doesn't make sense. The rings
are supposed to seal in temperatures
colder than that.

ROGER

Theoretically, yes.

Roger goes to a blackboard, erases what's on it and starts
scribbling an equation. Bob and Beth watch as Roger finishes
and circles a fraction: *3/10ths*.

Roger puts down the chalk. Everyone stares at the number.
Beth knows what she's looking at.

BETH

Wow, three-tenths of a second. That's
how close the gases came to blowing
past the back-up ring.

ROGER

That's because the rings were
hardened by the cold. If that number
increases, who knows what'll happen.

(then)

This is what we need to take to Lund.

Roger grabs a Polaroid camera and SNAPS a photo of the
blackboard. He snatches the printouts and hurries into the
hallway with Bob.

HALLWAY

Beth runs out of Roger's office, but Roger turns--

ROGER

We can handle it from here.

Beth stops in her tracks, gut punched, as Roger and Bob
disappear around the corner.

INT. LUND'S OFFICE - EVENING

Roger and Bob charge in, but see Lund has left for the day.

ROGER

I know where he lives.

INT. BOB'S ACCORD, KAYSVILLE UTAH - NIGHT

Bob and Roger drive through a sedate suburb. Tree-lined streets, large homes glowing with warm light, expensive cars in the driveway. People here live a good life.

EXT. LUND'S HOME - NIGHT

Bob parks out front. Roger get right out. Roger beelines for the front door. Bob follows, wary about being here.

INT. LUND'S HOME, FOYER - NIGHT

Roger and Bob are waiting in the foyer when Lund comes in from the garage wiping engine grease off his hands. His Cal Poly shirt is also smudged.

LUND

What are you two doing here?

ROGER

Surprised to see you still get your hands dirty, Hank.

BOB

Cold temperatures are causing blowby.

Bob hands Lund their findings. Lund reads through the pages, glances at photos, including the Polaroid of the equation. Finally, he hands it back.

LUND

It's inconclusive.

Roger and Bob are flabbergasted.

BOB

Look again. That's the coldest day on record for a launch.

LUND

Now he's got you roped into this?

ROGER

There's something wrong with the booster, Hank.

Lund goes through it again. A little more carefully this time. His wheels are spinning. Then he finds something.

LUND

Here, look. The January launch showed erosion on only one-third the radius of the primary O-ring, while the secondary is intact.

(MORE)

LUND (cont'd)

The April launch shows less erosion on the primary. So what's the problem?

ROGER

The problem is more blowby occurs the colder it gets. Have you been in management that long you forgot how to be an engineer?

LUND

I don't see data here that would give anyone that impression. You're the sealing expert. Did the primary O-ring seal properly?

ROGER

No, it didn't. That's why there's black soot in the joint.

LUND

But the secondary ring did seal, which acts as a safety in case the primary fails. The system worked.

Lund hands Roger back his report.

LUND

The booster is safe.

ROGER

What if it's not? Shouldn't we at least find out for sure?

LUND

What do you want me to do, call up NASA and delay the launch schedule?

ROGER

Yes!

LUND

Goodnight, Roger. Bob.

Lund turns around and heads back to the garage.

ROGER

At least let us have a task force. Me and Bob will run it.

Lund stops a moment, like he's thinking about it.

LUND

We have more launches to prepare for.

EXT. LUND'S HOME, KAYSVILLE - MOMENTS LATER

Roger and Bob head back to the car. Bob is perplexed. Roger is steaming mad.

ROGER

That son of a bitch. It's right in front of his face and he's pretending there's nothing there.

BOB

To be fair, it took me a while to believe you.

ROGER

Do you? Because your half-assed back-up in there makes me think you don't.

Bob opens the driver's side door, but doesn't go inside.

BOB

I'm not like you, Roger. I don't go charging full steam ahead. I like to win people over to my side. Maybe you should try it.

ROGER

Maybe you should try having a little more fucking urgency.

Roger rips open his door and gets in.

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE, MORTON-THIOKOL - DAY

Roger sits at his desk frantically typing a memo. His mind laser-focused on the task at hand.

CLOSE ON THE LETTER

Typebars fly across the screen and land on the page with thunderous impact, like a press punching holes in metal.

On the page reads: *The result would be a catastrophe of the highest order -- loss of human life.*

ROGER finishes the page and rips it from the carriage. He loads another page and continues without skipping a beat.

INT. BOB'S OFFICE, MORTON-THIOKOL - DAY

Roger looms over Bob, who reads the memo in his hand.

BOB

"It is my honest and very real fear that if we do not take immediate action to dedicate a team to solve the problem with the field joint having the number one priority, then we stand in jeopardy of losing a flight along with all the launch pad facilities."

Bob stops reading and looks up at Roger.

BOB

Don't you think it's a bit overboard?

ROGER

Jesus Christ.

BOB

We're going over Lund's head straight to Mason. Let's not exaggerate.

ROGER

Do you know for sure that blowby won't cause a catastrophic failure?

BOB

No--

ROGER

Then sign the fucking memo, Bob, so we can get this goddamn task force.

Feeling the pressure, Bob grabs a pen and signs.

INT. KITCHEN - BETH'S HOME - MORNING

A modest single-level home. Beth grabs toast and coffee. Her husband, DALE (30s), watches a TV on the counter showing the finalists for the Teacher in Space program. He's in a T-shirt and shorts, like he's on summer vacation.

BETH

What're you up to today?

Dale shrugs, but says nothing. He's too preoccupied by the television.

ON TV: At a podium, Christa McAuliffe has just been selected to go up in the Space Shuttle. She's overcome by emotion.

CHRISTA MCAULIFFE (ON TV)

I've made nine wonderful friends over the last few weeks.

(MORE)

CHRISTA MCAULIFFE (ON TV) (cont'd)
 When that shuttle goes, there might
 be one body... but there's gonna be
 ten souls I'm taking with me.

Christa steps away from the podium wiping tears. VICE
 PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH gives her comfort.

DALE is dismayed. Beth puts an arm around him.

BETH
 You can try again next time.

DALE
 And go through being a semi-finalist
 again? No thanks.
 (then)
 She deserves it, though. I liked her.
 Everybody did.

BETH
 (kisses him)
 See you tonight.

He watches her go and turns back to the TV.

INT. BEDROOM - EBELING HOME - MORNING

Bob is in front of the mirror putting on a tie. Once again,
 he looks at the photo of him and his son.

Bob adjusts the photo, solemn. His daily ritual, and a
 reminder of something deeply painful.

INT. HALLWAY - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Roger walks down the hall toward his office, briefcase in
 hand. He reaches his office unaware that--

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE - SAME

--inside are Bob, Lund, and two of Thiokol's top executives,
 JERALD MASON (50s, boy scout), and JOE KILMINSTER (50s,
 stiff bureaucrat). Nobody looks happy, least of all Roger.

ROGER
 What is this, an intervention?

MASON
 Have a seat, Roger.

ROGER
 I'll stand.

Kilminster holds up the memo Roger and Bob signed.

KILMINSTER

It has both your signatures, but I'm guessing you actually wrote it.

Roger says nothing. He doesn't need to answer.

KILMINSTER

You know this comes at a sensitive time for us. NASA is 60 percent of our revenue.

ROGER

How does that help us figure out what's wrong with our product?

MASON

Settle down, Roger. Joe and I looked over your findings, and we agree there's a problem.

ROGER

You do?

MASON

Bob walked us through everything. If what you're saying is true, then that's something we need to bring up with NASA. When the time is right.

ROGER

We need to tell them right away. There's a launch scheduled in a few weeks, we need to delay--

MASON

There won't be any delays.

ROGER

You said you agree with my findings.

KILMINSTER

We need to exercise caution here.

ROGER

I was clear in the memo. There's a serious risk of catastrophic blowby.

KILMINSTER

Nobody's arguing your data, but your conclusions are overwrought. There's no risk of catastrophic failure. And you're going to lead a task force to make sure that's the case.

Roger turns to Bob for help. Bob is torn between both sides.

BOB

We got the task force, Roger.

Roger deflates.

MASON

What did you expect, NASA would stop the shuttle because of how you feel? They have an ambitious schedule. Five more going up this year, 13 in 86. The president is gung-ho on showing the world we're a leader in space again. There's too much at stake. If we argue to delay without proof and turns out we're wrong, heads will roll all over the place.

KILMINSTER

So you better make damn sure your data's right before we take it to them. Feel free to back out now if you're not confident.

ROGER

(looking at Bob)

I'm a hundred percent.

Mason and Kilminster share a look.

MASON

Then we wish you good luck.

They leave. Lund trails, giving Roger a look on his way out.

INT. BUILDING 53 - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Roger, Bob, and two other engineers, ARNIE (40s), a bookish mechanical engineer, and BILL (60s), a longtime employee nearing retirement, enter.

The room is being used as storage. Boxed files, old equipment covered by dusty sheets, and boxes stuffed with glass jars and old Bunsen burners.

ARNIE

Could be worse. Could be in Siberia.

Roger looks around, his disappointment obvious. Then the door opens and Beth enters. Heads turn.

ROGER

What're you doing here?

BETH

This is the task force, right?

ROGER
I think we have enough help.

BETH
I see a sealing expert, SRB
production, mechanical engineering,
and an imminent retiree. What I don't
see is an expert on fluid mechanics,
which you're definitely gonna need to
help prove your case.

BOB
She's right.

Roger stares him down, but relents.

ROGER
Arnie, take inventory. Bill, map out
the launch schedule. Bob and Beth,
you're on clean up.

CLEAN UP MONTAGE:

In a series of quick cuts, we see:

- Roger pulls back the dust cover on a large generator that has seen better days. He looks disappointed.
- Beth sweeps the floor. Behind her, Bob wipes down a counter top.
- Bill uses a whiteboard to map out shuttle launches over the next year, starting with one going up in July 1985.
- Roger digs through a box of lab equipment, throwing away some of the broken glass jars. He finds a paper bag with someone's old rotted lunch at the bottom.
- Arnie wheels in equipment that they managed to scrounge from elsewhere.
- Beth is mopping the floor. Roger and Bob discuss the launch schedule. Arnie and Bill take five.

EXT. BUILDING 53 - DAY

Roger carries a box of junk out to the dumpster. He looks across the campus at the MAIN BUILDING nearly a half mile away across the desert. They really are in Siberia.

Roger lifts the dumpster lid and tosses the junk inside, letting it fall back with a loud thud.

INT. BUILDING 53 - DAY

Roger is at the whiteboard. We see there's at least one launch for every month of the year.

Using a red marker, Roger circles two launches scheduled for January 1986. He turns to everyone gathered around.

ROGER

Five launches left for this year.
Challenger goes up next week,
Discovery in August. And thanks to
Bob, we figured out cold temperatures
are causing the primary rings to not
seal properly.

Beth shifts in her seat, annoyed. Roger points to January.

ROGER (CONT'D)

But these two are the ones that
concern me most. No matter where you
are in the U.S., January is always
the coldest month.

Arnie raises his hands.

ROGER

This isn't a classroom, Arnie.

ARNIE

Didn't April show blowby? Your report
says it was warm that day.

BETH

Around 73 degrees at launch.

ARNIE

If you're saying cold weather's
causing it, why's it happening in 73
degrees?

ROGER

We don't know. But that's why we're
here. But so far, the January launch
was colder and showed more blowby.

BILL

January is when Challenger goes up
with that teacher-- what's her name?

BOB

Christa McAuliffe.

ROGER

We're gonna figure it out before then. But we have to run experiments and give them a mountain of evidence. Then we present it to NASA and get them to delay the launches.

ARNIE

The equipment we have is shit. How're we supposed to run experiments?

ROGER

I've got recs in for new stuff. Generators, refrigeration units, we'll be up and running soon enough. And when we do, I want answers fast. Before the August launch.

He circles that in blue.

BILL

That's less than a month away.

ROGER

Nothing's impossible if you have the conviction you're right.

BILL

I've been around a long time, and if you think you're gonna stop NASA from doing what it wants, you're crazy.

ROGER

When they see the case we're going to build, they won't have a choice.

BILL

Well, good luck with that. Because I don't think it'll matter one bit.

ROGER

I think we're done.

Roger turns away toward the whiteboard, jaw clenched. The team breaks to leave, murmuring as they go.

ROGER

Not you, Bill.

Bill comes over, hands in pocket.

BILL

Look, I get what you're trying to do here. Really, I do.

ROGER
You're off the task force.

BILL
What?

ROGER
I have enough roadblocks in front of me, I don't need one on my team.

BILL
This is outrageous. We just started.

ROGER
You're six months away from spending the rest of your days fly fishing in Wyoming. Why are you even here?

BILL
Hank asked me.

ROGER
So you can keep tabs and tell him what's going on behind my back?

BILL
Now you're out of line.

ROGER
I don't think I am, Bill.

BILL
You were always a son of a bitch, but I never thought you were crazy.

Bill grabs his coat and leaves. Roger watches him go.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EBELING HOME - NIGHT

Bob is on the sofa watching an evening magazine show. A story about Christa McAuliffe comes on.

Bob perks up and grabs the remote, turning up the volume.

A REPORTER does a voiceover while we see images of a jubilant McAuliffe becoming Teacher of the Year, the Space Shuttle lifting off, astronauts training--

TV REPORTER (V.O.)
When it was announced that Christa McAuliffe, the high school teacher from Concord, New Hampshire, would be the first private citizen to ride the Space Shuttle, it propelled her into the national spotlight.

Now a clip of McAuliffe somewhere outside talking directly to the camera. She's a natural.

CHRISTA MCAULIFFE (ON TV)
Even now I still can't believe that
I'm going to get in the shuttle and
it's going to blast off.

Something about her pulls Bob in. He looks at a photo of his son on the mantel. There's a striking similarity between them. Same hair and eyes. They could be brother and sister.

Bob turns back to McAuliffe, now completely transfixed.

INT. LUND'S OFFICE - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Lund is on the phone. Roger barges in with Bob. Roger holds a sheet of pink paper in hand.

ROGER
What the hell is this?

Lund is unnerved by Roger's dramatic entrance.

LUND
(into phone)
Let me call you back.
(hangs up)
That was my wife.

ROGER
You rejected our request for the
generators. We need them to cool down
the room and test the rings.

LUND
They cost tens of thousands of
dollars each. We don't have that kind
of money to throw around.

ROGER
We need to do this experiment, Hank.
It's vital to our case.

LUND
Find another way.

Lund picks up the phone, his decision final.

LUND
Now can I get back to my wife?

Roger glares at Bob and storms out.

HALLWAY

Roger moves away from Lund's office like a boxer approaching the ring. Bob falls into stride next to him.

BOB

We'll figure out another way to do the temperature experiment.

Roger stops and turns to Bob.

ROGER

Are you ever gonna be more than just a fly on the wall watching me go up against these guys?

BOB

A fly?

ROGER

I'm out on a limb in there and you're just staring at your damn shoes.

Bob is unsettled, but won't let Roger intimidate him.

BOB

I don't want to give them an excuse to pull the plug. And you know that's what they're looking for. This is too important. And I'll be damned if I'm going to stand here and let you question my commitment.

Bob and Roger glare at each other. It's a standoff. Finally, Roger breaks it off and walks away.

EXT. MCFARLAND HOME - DAY

Bob is at the front door and rings the bell. He waits, looking over at the PICKUP TRUCK in the driveway.

Bob takes a peek through the front window, but pulls away when someone unlocks the door. It's Beth.

BETH

Hey, what's going on?

BOB

Sorry to bother you on a Sunday.

BETH

No, it's alright.

Bob sees a cute FOUR-YEAR-OLD GIRL behind Beth holding a model space shuttle. Her daughter, KATIE. Bob waves hello. Katie just stares back.

BOB

Hi. That's a nice shuttle. Where'd you get it?

Silence from Katie.

BETH

Sorry, she's being four. We built it ourselves. It's almost an exact replica, right down to the boosters.

BOB

(to Katie)

Very impressive. You'll be an engineer just like your mommy.

(to Beth)

Listen, I need your help.

Beth folds her arms. She doesn't seem willing.

BETH

I don't know. Dale's not here, and I don't get time with Katie as it is.

BOB

It's for the task force.

BETH

Where's Roger?

BOB

He-- I need your truck. It won't take long, I promise.

BETH

Is that all I'm good for?

BOB

No. Why would you ask that?

BETH

Nothing. It's fine. But Katie has to come with us.

BOB

Sure, it'll be fun.

She opens the door for Bob to come in.

EXT. SALVAGE YARD - DAY

Bob and Beth watch as a forklift loads an old INDUSTRIAL REFRIGERATION UNIT onto the back of her truck. The unit has seen better days.

BETH
Does that thing even work?

BOB
No, but it's cheap, and I used to be able to fix things like this in my younger days.

The back of Beth's truck sags heavily when the forklift lets go of the unit. Bob goes to the OWNER and pays him cash, then rejoins Beth.

BETH
What's the point of a task force if you have to use your own money?

Katie leans out the window.

KATIE
Can we go home, Mommy?

BOB
Sounds like we're ready.

BETH
(to Katie)
In a minute, cupcake.
(to Bob)
I didn't want to say anything in front of Katie, but I've been meaning to talk to you.

BOB
What about?

KATIE
Mommy!

BETH
In a *minute*.

BETH (CONT'D)
Why am I being pushed to the margins by you and Roger?

BOB
What? When did we do that?

BETH

I had to fight my way onto this task force, and that's only after pretending not to notice my help connecting cold to blowby.

Bob is taken aback.

BOB

I'm sorry, I didn't realize.

BETH

You don't know how hard I've worked just to get here in this field.

BOB

No, I didn't-- of course, we'll make sure you get proper credit.

BETH

I need more than that. You know I'm just as good at what I do as you or Roger. I want to help lead the team.

Bob sees Katie leaning out the window, almost like she's heard them. He turns back to Beth, deadly serious.

BOB

You're smart and ambitious, and that's a good thing. But you're also new. This task force isn't a step up, it's likely a step out. So be careful what you wish for.

Bob heads for the truck. Off Beth, a trace of uncertainty.

INT. BOISJOLY HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Roger drags himself in after a long day. He sees his daughter, LISA (14), digging through the fridge.

ROGER

Hey, sweetie.

Lisa ignores him. She pulls out an apple pie and a knife.

ROGER

Mind carving me out a slice?

Again, she ignores him and puts the pie back in the fridge, closing it harder than one normally would before leaving.

ROGER

Lisa.

ROBERTA (O.S.)
You missed her swim meet.

Roberta enters from the back porch with an empty wine glass.

ROGER
I completely forgot. I'm sorry.

ROBERTA
Don't apologize to me.

ROGER
Look, I told you this task force is
going to consume everything.

ROBERTA
Including us?

ROGER
C'mon, 'Berta. This is critical work
we're doing.

ROBERTA
You're under enormous pressure. I get
it. But that doesn't mean this family
has to suffer for it.

ROGER
I've made decisions that cost
hundreds of lives... have you? So
what if I miss a few swim meets or
Sunday dinners, I'm not making that
mistake again.

ROBERTA
Go be an absent father and husband if
that means saving lives, but you
don't be an ass about it.

Roberta moves away.

EXT. EBELING HOME - NIGHT

Darlene exits the back door and heads to the garage with a
cup of steaming coffee. A light glows inside the garage.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Bob kneels on the ground working on the unit with a socket
wrench. He struggles to twist off a stuck bolt, sweat
soaking his T-shirt.

Bob puts his weight into it and finally pries the bolt
loose. He stands up and wipes the sweat from his brow.

Then he looks over to the workbench, where the photo of him and his son rests. Bob looks at it a moment, before getting back to work.

At the door, Darlene is inside, having witnessed the scene. She puts down the coffee on a table and quietly leaves.

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Roger is at a blackboard scribbling calculations, exhausted, but focused on the task at hand. Someone KNOCKS on his door.

ROGER

What?!

Roger turns to see his SECRETARY in the doorway.

SECRETARY

You need to do these sign-offs.

(off Roger)

For Discovery on Monday.

ROGER

Just leave them.

The secretary puts them on his desk. As she leaves--

SECRETARY

You should get some sleep.

ROGER

I'll sleep when I'm dead.

Roger turns back to the board. His hand quivers as he starts to write. Frustrated, Roger takes in a few powerful breaths and starts writing again.

INT. BETH'S CUBICLE - DAY

Headphones on, Beth is busy with paperwork when she sees Lund make his way into the cube farm. She keeps her head down, not wanting to attract his attention.

But it doesn't matter, because Lund beelines for her anyway. He leans against the side of her cubicle.

LUND

Got a second? I have some good news.

BETH

Sure. What's up?

LUND

I'm moving you to the guided missile program, starting immediately.

BETH

Wait, the H.A.R.M.? Why? My experience is in the shuttle.

LUND

We need somebody in fluid mechanics over there and I thought of you.

(off Beth)

Don't thank me too much.

BETH

No, it's just unexpected.

LUND

This could be a career maker. You'll be on the ground floor of something that'll be a major part of our business down the road.

BETH

What about the task force?

LUND

The H.A.R.M. is your priority now. I'll get your clearances right away.

Lund squeezes her shoulder as he leaves. A cold chill goes through Beth.

ARCHIVE TELEVISION NEWS FOOTAGE

On screen is ABC's TED KOPPEL at the anchor desk.

TITLE: August 27, 1985

TED KOPPEL

Despite delays, and denials from officials that NASA violated launch guidelines, Space Shuttle Discovery went into orbit today, the 20th successful mission of the program.

Next we see BOB SCHIEFFER of CBS talking to camera...

BOB SCHIEFFER

Two previous launches were scrubbed this week, one due to bad weather and the other because the backup orbiter computer needed to be replaced.

And now ROGER MUDD on NBC...

ROGER MUDD

With a storm front moving in,
Discovery was on the verge of being
delayed a third time. But NASA
decided to go ahead, leading to
accusations they put the lives of the
astronauts at unnecessary risk.

INT. PRODUCTION BAY - DAY

Once again Roger does his post-launch inspection. Taking
photos and copious notes.

And again, he finds black soot between the O-rings. Only now
he's more resigned. This is becoming routine.

INT. BUILDING 53 - EVENING

Roger and Arnie perform a resilience test on a fresh piece
O-ring that Roger removes from the freezer.

Roger clamps the piece into a pendulum block stand, lets the
hammer drop. Arnie records the needle movement.

ARNIE

Twenty three percent. That's the
highest yet.

ROGER

This doesn't prove anything. We
need to know how long it's taking the
rings to seal.

ARNIE

Then we need to add heat.

ROGER

You got a way to apply 4,000 degrees
to this, I'm all ears.

Bob enters looking flustered. Roger is annoyed.

ROGER

You're late.

BOB

I have a half dozen other projects
I'm working on.

Bob lets his briefcase drop and removes his jacket. He's not
in the mood to battle Roger.

ROGER

Where's Beth? I haven't seen her in
almost a week.

BOB
You didn't hear? She was reassigned
to the guided missile program.

ROGER
What? When?

BOB
Last week. I thought you knew.

Roger grabs his jacket to leave, but Bob stops him.

BOB
Don't you see what he's doing? He's
itching for a reason to pull the
plug. Don't give it to him.

ROGER
We've been at this for weeks and have
nothing to show. We have no
equipment, no time, no support from
management. We just spin our wheels
doing bullshit resilience tests like
we're in high school physics!

Bob holds up his hands trying to placate Roger.

BOB
I have a plan.

ROGER
Does it involve punching Lund in the
face?

BOB
Just listen. I bought a refrigeration
unit. It's old and broken down, but I
can get it to work. We can use it to
cool down a section of the booster
and test fire it under proper
conditions. I just need more time.

ROGER
You did that all on your own without
telling me?

BOB
Yes, I did.

Roger smiles and pats him on the back. He puts down his coat
and gets back to work.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Several ENGINEERS are at the table, including Bob. Lund is at the end waiting to start the meeting. There's tension in the air. Concerned looks and hushed conversation.

Impatient, he checks his watch right as Roger enters. Lund gives him a look. As Roger sits--

LUND

Now we can get started. I'll make this quick. And none of this leaves this room. The rumors you've been hearing are true. NASA has opened bidding to to see if our competitors can build an SRB cheaper.

Murmurs and worried looks around the table.

LUND

But that doesn't mean we're losing the contract. They're playing hardball to drive down our bid, because everyone knows we have no competition for our SRB.

ROGER

That's not true. Hercules makes a damn good product. And from what I hear, they've already underbid us.

Heads turn toward Roger. Lund glares.

LUND

Perhaps you'd like to work for them instead?

ROGER

Excuse me?

BOB

Let's get back to what you were saying, Hank.

LUND

It's okay, Bob. Roger's a big boy. Seems to me he has Hercules' interests more at heart than ours. That right, Roger?

ROGER

I've given eleven years of my life to this company.

BOB
(glaring at Roger)
Hank, please.

LUND
I was saying NASA is 60 percent of
our revenue and Roger would love
nothing more than to see Thiokol lose
out to our competition.

Roger bolts up from the table.

ROGER
I'm trying to save this company from
disaster, goddammit!

LUND
You're jeopardizing this company's
future. What do you think is gonna
happen if we lose NASA?

ROGER
There won't be a future if you keep
sending people up there on the back
of a time bomb!

LUND
It's a bomb now. Don't you think
that's a bit of an exaggeration,
Roger? What exactly have you proven
these past six weeks? Because I
haven't seen a goddamn thing!

Roger has had enough and storms out. Bob stares at the
table, as the tension starts to dissipate.

LUND
Now, as I was saying...

Bob gathers his things and gets. Heads turn in his
direction, everyone surprised.

LUND
That's right, Bob. Follow him out.
It's only your career.

Bob ignores him and leaves the conference room.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Bob looks both ways for Roger and finds him turning a
corner. He hustles after him and takes the same turn--

BOB
Roger!

Roger ignores him and shoves through the front doors--

EXT. FRONT ENTRANCE - MORTON THIOKOL - SAME

Roger heads for the parking lot, but suddenly stops, clutching his chest, breathing out of control.

Roger does his breathing trick and calms down, but now looks deeply worried. The attacks are getting worse.

INT. BOISJOLY HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Wearing his track suit, Roger is alone eating apple pie straight from the tin when the phone RINGS. He ignores it and the answering machine picks up.

BOB (ON MACHINE)
Roger, it's Bob. You there?

ROGER
(mouth full)
Go fuck yourself, Bob.

BOB (ON MACHINE)
Call me when you get this-- better yet, just come over. You need to see this. Tonight. What I have to show you will change everything. I promise, we're finally gonna get them to listen. Just come over right away.
(then)
And I'm sorry.

Bob hangs up. Roger puts the pie down, thinking about it.

INT. GARAGE - EBELING HOME - NIGHT

Bob is busy at work on the refrigeration unit.

ROGER (O.S.)
You don't have that piece of shit working yet?

Bob startles and turns around.

BOB
You scared the hell out of me.

ROGER
I have that effect.

Bob grabs a rag to wipe his hands, exuding excitement.

BOB

I'm glad you came. Because you are about to witness a true miracle in modern times. Ready?

Roger gestures-- *Get on with it*. Bob plugs the unit into an outlet and flips a switch. With a cough and flickering of the garage lights-- the unit turns on!

Bob whoops and claps. Even Roger is impressed. The unit makes a hell of a noise.

BOB

That's it!

ROGER

Very good, Bob. Now can you shut it off so I can hear myself think?

Bob flips the switch and the unit sputters off.

BOB

All we have to do is find a way to use this thing.

ROGER

There is no 'we' right now.

Bob loses his excitement, knowing Roger has bad news.

BOB

Did they fire you?

ROGER

No, but if Lund keeps up this bullshit, I'm gonna quit.

BOB

Don't, okay? We need to keep trying.

Roger's mood darkens and looks at Bob.

ROGER

Why did you follow me out?

BOB

I wanted Lund to know you weren't in this alone.

ROGER

But then you went back in, right?

Bob doesn't answer. Roger nods and looks at the unit.

ROGER
There's no way in hell this thing's
cooling down a booster. We have to
test something smaller.

Roger leaves.

EXT. TEST-FIRE RANGE - DAY

A group of hard hat engineers are gathered around to watch the test firing of a mounted GUIDED MISSILE. Beth is among them, clipboard in hand. Everyone stands far back.

Roger and Bob show up and grab hard hats off a table. They approach Beth, taking space on either side of her.

ROGER
Long time, no see.

BETH
I'm sorry about the task force. I
really didn't have a choice.

ROGER
We're not here about that.

BETH
Then what do you want?

Roger and Bob exchange a look.

BOB
We need to borrow a missile.

EXT. TEST-FIRE FACILITY - NIGHT

Bob uses a forklift to unload the refrigeration unit off Beth's truck. Nearby is a 20x20 testing bay. A large canopy with the tail end of a guided missile sticking out.

He puts the unit down next to the testing bay and climbs down. Arnie comes over.

ARNIE
Why aren't we using this on one of
the SRBs?

BOB
Because the unit won't cool a room
big enough to house one. The H.A.R.M.
has the exact same O-ring design.

ARNIE
But it doesn't use the same fuel.

BOB
We're testing whether or not the O-rings seal properly, that's all.

They begin hooking the unit up to the testing bay, as Roger and Beth emerge from inside.

BETH
You have no idea how much trouble I'll get into for this.

ROGER
We'll take the hit, I promise.
(to Bob)
We ready?

Bob attaches a wide hose, cranks up a gasoline generator and turns on the unit. It starts pumping cool air inside. The temperature gauge outside reads 62 degrees.

BOB
All set.

ARNIE
Now what?

Roger rolls out a sleeping bag on the back of the truck.

ROGER
Wake me when it gets down to 40.

Roger climbs in and crashes.

HOURS LATER

A gorgeous purple and orange dawn breaks out across the desert horizon.

Roger SNORES. Someone off-screen shakes him. He wakes up with a snort and looks up to see Bob, almost angelic in the soft light.

BOB
It's time.

Roger shakes off the cobwebs and gets up.

TEST FACILITY

Bob emerges from the facility and reads the gauge.

BOB
Gauge reads forty degrees.

Roger writes it down and they join the others near the control panel a hundred yards away. Beth is ready to hit the switch. Arnie keeps a nervous eye on the road behind them.

BOB
Whenever you're ready.

BETH
Goggles on, please.

Everyone puts on plastic goggles and braces themselves. Beth takes a breath and hits a red button--

The missile IGNITES. Bright orange flame and thick smoke erupt from the back of the testing bay--

Which EXPLODES in massive ball of flame and smoke!

Everyone drops to the ground and covers their heads, as debris rains all around them.

Beth reaches up and turns off the control panel. Doesn't matter, the unit and generator both go up in flames.

Roger gets to his feet, stunned.

ROGER
Holy shit!

Bob is still in shock, shaking his head as he watches the smoke rise from the decimated testing bay.

BOB
I'll be damned.

Beth steps forward and runs toward the wreckage.

ROGER
Where you going?

BETH
My truck!

Beth reaches her truck, sees the windows shattered, windshield cracked, and charred paint on the left side. She's distraught. The others run up to join her.

BETH
You asshole!

ROGER
This is fantastic!

ARNIE
Why are you so happy?

ROGER
We just showed what'll happen if the
O-rings freeze on a booster!

BOB
(realizing)
What did we just do?

The wail of approaching FIRE ENGINES can be heard in the distance. Everyone freezes, knowing they're fucked.

EXT. TEST-FIRING FACILITY - LATER

FIREFIGHTERS finish putting out the fire. All that's left are charred remains. And Beth's battered truck.

Roger and Bob stand before Mason and Lund like scolded children. Nearby, Kilminster reams Beth and Arnie.

ROGER
I take full responsibility.

MASON
Jesus Christ, Roger. What on Earth
made you think this was okay?

ROGER	MASON
I know it was foolish--	It was <i>moronic</i> .

ROGER
If you would just look at the
results, you'll find we did prove
cold temperatures prevent the rings
from sealing properly inside a test-
firing environment.

LUND
It doesn't have the same mechanics
and fuel properties as the SRB. It's
not the *same thing*.

ROGER
They have the same O-ring
configuration in the joints.

MASON
(to Bob)
You're supposed to be the sensible
one. What the hell do you have to say
for yourself?

BOB
Roger's right, our system might not
work in cold temperatures. At least
this shows we need more testing.

MASON

You've been at this two months and all you've done is waste a hundred thousand dollar missile and burn down a test bay.

BOB

You've handcuffed us the whole time! Budget, equipment, manpower... we couldn't get the job done. Are you really that shocked we did this?!

Mason is taken aback by Bob's anger. So is Roger. Bob calms down, as Mason who looks to Lund.

LUND

We're pulling the plug.

ROGER

Why? We just showed you--

LUND

You didn't prove anything, Roger.

MASON

Enough. We'll reconvene on Monday. Both of you, go home.

Mason goes to join Kilminster. Roger glares at Lund.

ROGER

You used to be one of us. What happened?

Lund says nothing and follows Mason. Roger and Bob look at Beth, who's giving them a withering look.

INT. OUTLAW BAR & GRILL - NIGHT

A country dive. Wood paneling, heavy smoke, BARFLIES drinking by themselves, Conway Twitty on the jukebox.

Bob and Roger are at the bar. Roger downs a Scotch and waves at the BARTENDER for another.

BOB

Don't you think you've had enough?

ROGER

Who're you, my mother?

Bob looks away, as the bartender pours. Roger notices a GRUFF BARFLY across the way and eyes him a minute.

BOB
(to bartender)
I'll have coffee.

ROGER
(holds up drink)
A toast. To that guy across the bar.

The Barfly gives him a confused look, but holds up his drink anyway. Roger downs his Scotch.

BOB		ROGER
Let me take you home--		Drink with me.

BOB
You've had enough.

ROGER
Siddown, I'm juz getting started.

BOB
I am sitting.

Roger looks at Bob, then holds up his glass for another. The bartender obliges.

ROGER
I ever tell you why?

BOB
Why what? What are you talking about?

ROGER
Grief. You know what it's like to
live with grief?

Bob turns away, not wanting to answer.

ROGER

Wouldn't wish it on anybody. Not even Lund. The regret of knowing you could'a stopped something terrible from happening, but you didn't. The constant anguish you're forced to live with after you fail to stop people from dying. That's grief.

Bob stares at his coffee.

BOB
I know what grief is.

Bob looks over with something to say, but seeing Roger's about to fall off his stool, he changes his mind.

BOB
We should go.

ROGER
Fine. But one more toast...
(loud, to Barfly)
To that fucking guy.

The Barfly, now pissed, gets off his stool and approaches them in a hurry. Bob holds up his hands.

BARFLY
What's his problem?

BOB
He's drunk, and we're
leaving.

ROGER
What, you don't like toasts?

BARFLY
You don't wanna do this, pal.

ROGER
What kind'a asshole don't like
toasts?

The Barfly pushes Roger off his stool, but Roger grabs his shirt and pulls the Barfly toward him--

Both are on their feet, pushing and falling into each other in a sloppy old-man fight more pathetic than exciting--

Bob tries to wedge between them, but gets pushed to the ground. The rest of the bar watches with mild interest. Bartender doesn't bother to intervene.

The Barfly manages to pull Roger's shirt over his head, causing him to stumble to the ground. Bob is back on his feet and stops the barfly from doing anything else--

BOB
Please, that's enough. I'll get him
out of here.

BARFLY
You better before I kick his ass some
more.

Bob reaches down to help Roger up, but Roger throws his arm out, not wanting it. He gets up and staggers out of the bar on his own power.

INT. BEDROOM - ROGER'S HOME - MORNING

Roberta enters the dark room and pulls open the curtains, forcing harsh sunlight to pour in.

A hungover Roger pries his eyes open and recoils at the rude awakening.

ROGER
What time d'I get home?

ROBERTA
Bob dragged you in after one. He told me everything.

ROGER
Mind filling me in?

ROBERTA
(sits next to him)
I know you think you're the only one who can fight this. You have all the answers and everyone else is just in your way. But it's not about you, Roger. Put your ego aside and let others help you.

ROGER
Can I get a glass of water?

Roberta reaches over to the nightstand and hands one already waiting for him. Roger drinks, appreciative.

INT. KITCHEN - EBELING HOME - MORNING

The small TV on the counter is tuned to a weekend morning show, where the host interviews Christa McAuliffe.

Darlene enters and notices Bob's fixation on McAuliffe.

DARLENE
I know she's attractive, Bob, but you don't have to be so obvious.

Darlene smiles at him as she makes coffee.

BOB
That's not what I'm thinking.

DARLENE
Then what is it? Every time she's on TV, you're off somewhere else.

BOB
I don't know why but every time I see her I think about Luke.

She darkens, and sits next to him.

DARLENE

Don't do this to yourself. It wasn't your fault. Nobody blames you, least of all me. There's nothing anyone could have done.

BOB

What if it happens again? What if she goes up in that Shuttle and something happens because I didn't do enough?

DARLENE

That's not going to happen.

BOB

(snaps)

The shuttle's not safe.

(realizing)

I'm sorry.

DARLENE

You're under a lot of stress. But I know you'll do the right thing. You always do.

INT. BOB'S GARAGE - DAY

Bob is at his workbench carving a bird from a block of wood. So far he has the head and beak of a humming bird. Nearby is what's left of the unit covered by a tarp.

Bob, lost in the thought, cuts too close to the beak and cuts it off. He throws down his carving knife, frustrated, then looks over at the unit. An idea forms.

EXT. FRONT LAWN - BOISJOLY HOME - MORNING

Still looking rough, Roger sweats buckets as he mows the lawn. A CAR pulls up and parks in front. It's Bob. Roger shuts off the mower, as Bob approaches.

BOB

You look better than I thought.

ROGER

Thanks for bringing me home in one piece. Roberta thanks you, too. I'm just glad I don't remember much.

BOB

Listen, I came here to apologize.

ROGER

Apologize for what?

BOB
I should've believed you right away.
I'm sorry. Maybe if I backed you
sooner, we'd be in a different boat.

ROGER
You did what you thought was right. I
respect that. Not like it matters.
We're both gonna get fired Monday.

BOB
I'm not going to let that happen.
(then)
I need you to bring me copies of
everything you have and come by my
office first thing.

ROGER
What for?

BOB
Just do it. I'll see you Monday.

Bob turns back to his car.

ROGER
What did you mean when you said you
know about grief?

Bob stops and takes a long moment.

BOB
I had a son.

ROGER
I'm sorry. I didn't know.

Bob forces a smile and gets in his car.

INT. BOB'S OFFICE - THIOKOL - DAY

Bob is on the phone when Roger enters with file in hand.

BOB
(on phone)
Yeah, I've got it right now. You near
a fax machine?

Bob holds out a hand. Roger gives him a file and an
inquiring look. Bob intuits the question.

BOB
(cups receiver)
Friend at NASA.

Roger nods.

ROGER
You alright?

BOB
Yeah, fine.
(into phone)
You ready? I'm sending it now.

Bob turns around and starts loading pages into the fax.

INT. MASON'S OFFICE - THIOKOL - DAY

There's a KNOCK on the door. Lund pokes his head in and finds Kilminster with Mason. Both are on edge.

LUND
You wanted to see me?

MASON
We just got a call from NASA. They
got Roger's memos and reports.

LUND
Son of a bitch.

INT. MASON'S OFFICE - DAY

Bob and Roger sit in front of Mason and Kilminster. Lund looms behind. Kilminster is mid-tirade--

KILMINSTER
This makes us look like we're hiding
something, when truth is we have no
idea why it's happening!

ROGER
Just go ahead and fire us.

Mason looks at Lund. Lund swallows his pride.

LUND
You're not getting fired.

Bob and Roger are stunned.

LUND
NASA wants you to go to the Cape and
help them figure out the problem.

MASON
Congratulations, you got them to
listen after all.

KILMINSTER

Now leave before we find a way to
change their minds.

Roger and Bob get up, ignoring Lund on the way out. But Bob
stops before they leave. Roger gets nervous.

BOB

We do have one request.

INT. KITCHEN - MCFARLAND HOME - NIGHT

Dale, wearing an apron, makes dinner. Beth has just gotten
home from work and looks tired.

BETH

It's just for a few weeks. That okay?

DALE

Yeah, fine.

BETH

You don't seem fine.

DALE

It's great. I'm happy for you.

The timer RINGS. A little on edge, Dale shoves on mitts and
takes a pot roast out of the oven. Juice splatters all over
the stove.

DALE

Dammit!

BETH

What's wrong?

DALE

Nothing.

(beat)

That's not true. This isn't what I
want.

BETH

What's not?

DALE

(gesturing to apron)

This... *Mr. Mom* crap. I can't do it
anymore. I want to go back to work.

BETH

What do you want me to say? You can't
find a job and there's nobody to take
care of Katie.

Angry, Dale throws off his mitts and leaves the kitchen.
Beth knows right away she screwed up.

A pot on the stove boils over. Beth jumps into action and turns off the burner. Then she spots Katie on the stairwell. Katie runs up to her room.

BETH
(to herself)
Shit.

EXT. ORLANDO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

A bright sunny day in central Florida. Palm trees and a warm breeze. A TWA flight land on the runway.

INT. CAB - DRIVING - DAY

Roger, Bob and Beth arrive by cab to Cape Canaveral, moving past the launch pads and Vehicle Assembly Building (VAB).

Beth stares, mouth agape. She's never see the buildings in person before and is in complete awe.

Roger doesn't bother to look. He's too busy going over paperwork. Bob is lost in thought.

Beth catches a glimpse inside the VAB and leans forward--

BETH'S POV: The Space Shuttle *Atlantis* stands upright on a platform with the fuel tank and two SRBs.

BETH
Amazing.

ROGER
Forgot, it's your first time. Just remember we got a job to do.

Beth leans back, her view of *Atlantis* now gone.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - CAPE CANAVERAL - DAY

Roger, Bob and Beth exit the cab outside the administrative offices near the assembly building.

There to greet them is their NASA counterpart, ALLEN COBB (30s), a bookish engineer with a buzz cut.

Allen greets them with a pleasant smile and firm handshake.

ALLEN
Welcome to the Cape. I'm Allen Cobb, chief engineer on the shuttle.

BOB

Bob Ebeling.

BETH

Beth McFarland.

Roger just glares. Allen smiles through it.

ALLEN

I know you guys are eager to dive right in. Let me introduce you around and we'll get to work.

Allen heads inside. They follow him in.

INT. HALLWAY - CAPE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES - DAY

The four head down the hallway. Framed photos line the walls, including Kennedy inspecting the Apollo in '63.

ALLEN

There's nothing more important than the safety of our astronauts, which is why we want you to get to the bottom of this as quickly as possible. You'll have everything you need. Manpower, equipment, full access to facilities. Just ask.

Roger doesn't look convinced, but keeps his powder dry.

ALLEN

We have a pre-flight meeting for Thursday's launch in a couple hours.

BOB

Then we better get started.

EXT. GRANDSTAND - LAUNCH COMPLEX PRESS SITE - DAY

TITLE: Space Shuttle *Atlantis*, STS-51-J, October 3, 1985

Roger, Bob and Beth are among a smattering of REPORTERS in the press seats observing the launch. The seats are quarter filled at best. The Reporters look bored and uninterested.

On the field is a giant digital COUNTDOWN CLOCK that ticks down the final minutes to the launch of *Atlantis*.

BETH

Look at this. Nobody cares.

She's right. The countdown clock hits 60 seconds and the press basically ignores it. There's zero excitement.

ROGER
Now you know why they're putting that
teacher into space.

Roger's hand shakes in his lap. Bob notices, but doesn't say anything.

Smoke starts to billow as the countdown clock goes from 10 to 5...4...3...2... and the Shuttle lifts off in a thunderous display of white smoke.

Roger breathes a sigh of relief when the shuttle clears the tower. The Reporters start to file out right away. Roger, Bob and Beth stay to watch the shuttle disappear into space.

INT. TESTING BAY - CAPE CANAVERAL - DAY

Roger does an inspection on the dissembled rocket boosters. This time, Allen and a team of ENGINEERS hover over him.

Roger feels them breathing down his neck, his brow beading with sweat as he goes through his process of inspecting the inside of the joint.

But as he does, Roger notices that the epoxy between the two O-rings is a healthy beige. There's no black soot.

Now examining the rings, he sees that there is barely any erosion on the primary ring. And the secondary ring is in good condition.

Roger looks up at Allen. He takes off his hard hat.

ROGER
That's all eight. No blowby.

ALLEN
That's good.

Roger nods, but looks conflicted.

INT. EQUIPMENT FACILITY - DAYS LATER

Roger, Bob and Beth inspect several large modern AIR REFRIGERATION UNITS.

ROGER
These make that hunk of shit you
bought look even sadder.

Bob shakes his head. Beth smiles.

INT. TEST-FIRING FACILITY - DAY

A large open-air hangar where NASA regularly test fires rocket engines. Roger, Bob and Beth inspect the area, with Allen looking on.

BETH
Can you close the bay door?

ALLEN
We need to keep it open so the exhaust can escape.

Bob looks around some more, then he turns to Roger and Beth.

BOB
It'll work with a few adjustments.

ALLEN
Just know if you scrap the test we're not doing it again. It costs a lot of money and our budget is already stretched thin.

BETH
You said we'd have everything we need.

ALLEN
Within reason.

DAYS LATER

Another booster is mounted inside the facility. On a platform, Bob and Beth inspect both sides of an insulated casing surrounding the rocket.

On the ground, Roger and Allen watch. Allen looks on with growing apprehension.

ALLEN
When does blowby supposed to occur?

ROGER
Point six-three seconds.

Allen turns away. Bob nods to Beth, who nods back, and leans over the rail and gives a thumbs up.

Roger turns to a WORKER manning the refrigeration units with hoses attached to the casing. He gives him a thumbs up.

The worker POWERS ON the units. A large metallic HUM reverberates through the facility.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - DAYS LATER

A separate facility connected to the test-firing bay via closed circuit TV.

Roger, Bob and Beth look on away from Allen and his team. A temperature gauge reads 40-degrees. Bob turns to Roger.

BOB

Same temperature as the H.A.R.M.

Roger nods. Bob turns to the IGNITION ENGINEER and gives her the okay. The rocket booster ignites, sending flame and smoke out the sides of the building.

But again, the rocket burns itself out. No smoke or gas gets released from the joint.

Roger throws down his clipboard. Allen talks with other ENGINEERS. Head shakes and growing disappointment.

INT. TEST-FIRING FACILITY - LATER

Roger inspects the separated sections of the booster wearing his disappointment on his sleeve. That can only mean one thing: no blowby.

Roger steps away past Allen, who turns and watches him go.

EXT. BEACH - EVENING

Roger gets his miles in on the beach, a gorgeous sun setting to his left.

Unlike when we saw him running in Utah, Roger struggles to keep stride and pace.

Roger WHEEZES and COUGHS, and finally stops to catch his breath. He looks off down the beach and sees the silhouette of the Vehicle Assembly Building in the distance.

Determined, Roger takes several sharp, angry breaths and starts running again.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

Bob nurses a beer alone at the end of the bar, lost in his thoughts. He sees something on the TV above the bar and becomes instantly transfixed.

A NEWS REPORT ON TV

Christa McAuliffe is in a blue NASA flight suit doing zero-gravity training aboard an aircraft in parabolic flight. She floats, arms out, having the time of her life.

The BARTENDER grabs the remote to turn the station.

BOB
Don't turn that!

The bartender gives him a look before putting down the remote and going about her business.

Bob watches intently, almost frozen, hand gripping his beer.

INT. PRODUCTION BAY - CAPE CANAVERAL - DAY

Bob joins NASA engineers in observing the assembly of the rocket boosters and the mounting them on the shuttle.

The EXTERNAL TANK is loaded with fuel, as the rocket boosters are mounted beside it.

Finally the Space Shuttle *Challenger* is wheeled in on a flat bed that slowly raises it to a ninety-degree angle and pushes it toward the tank and boosters.

Bob watches as the Shuttle clamps in and engineers on the scaffolding lock it into place.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

TITLE: Space Shuttle *Challenger*, STS-61-A, October 30, 1985

This time Roger, Bob and Beth observe the launch from inside the old mission control room, where *Challenger* lifts off on a large screen dominating the front of the room.

The room is crowded with ENGINEERS and other NASA EMPLOYEES, who clap and cheer when *Challenger* clears the tower.

But not Roger. He keeps his arms crossed watching the black and white video of *Challenger* going into space.

INT. PRODUCTION BAY - CAPE CANAVERAL - DAY

Roger does another inspection. Allen and team look on. Frustration mounts, as Roger again finds no evidence of soot or O-ring erosion.

Roger is baffled. Allen writes something on his clipboard, unreadable.

INT. PRESS BRIEFING ROOM - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

As seen in C-SPAN coverage on TV. Reagan addresses the White House PRESS CORP.

PRESIDENT REAGAN (ON TV)
A quick word about the shuttle, which continues to be a shining example of American exceptionalism. We flew eight successful missions in 1985 and we're sending more in the coming year. And in January our Teacher in Space Christa McAuliffe will be teaching class while orbiting Earth. We're all eager to hear her lesson, which I'm sure will have something to enlighten everyone. Especially me.

The press LAUGHS, as Reagan gives them that folksy smile.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Bob is on the phone with Darlene.

BOB
They don't believe us. Just like back home. I honestly don't know what we're even doing here.

INT. EBELING HOME - NIGHT

Darlene sits up in bed. It's late and she's tired.

DARLENE
You there because you're trying to do the right thing.

BOB (O.S.)
What if we're wrong?

DARLENE
But you're not. Otherwise you wouldn't be trying. But instead of waiting for something to happen, why don't you *show* them?

BOB
We've done that.

DARLENE
With a missile, not a booster.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, ORLANDO - DAY

Bob is taken aback for a second. Is she saying what he thinks she's saying?

BOB

That's crazy... and *exactly* what we should do. I knew there was a reason I married you.

DARLENE (O.S.)

I thought it was because I was pregnant with Kathy.

Bob smiles at that.

INT. ALLEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Roger and Bob are with Allen. Beth is not there.

ALLEN

Two flights, one experiment and no evidence the shuttle's in danger.

BOB

One more, that's all we need. I have an idea to get the temperature down below our baseline of 40 degrees.

ALLEN

You're trying to blow up the booster.

Bob shifts, uncomfortable.

ROGER

What? Of course not. That's insane.

ALLEN

I heard about what you did in Utah. You're not doing that here.

ROGER

All we want is to show that cold can cause gas to escape through the joints, that's all.

BOB

We can stop it the millisecond any gas leaks out of the booster. Set up sensors at the joints that will trigger an automatic shut-off.

ALLEN

I want guarantees no damage will be caused by this. That means a sworn statements under penalty of law.

ROGER

This is gonna be our last test. If it doesn't work, we go home.

ALLEN

I want a detailed plan, including a
list of all safety precautions.

INT. ARCADE - NIGHT

A darkly-lit arcade with all the classic coin-op games and a
cheesy outer space-themed carpet. BLEEPs and BOOMS permeate
the room.

MISSILE COMMAND

Bob spins the ball, desperately trying to knock down
invading missiles. Next to him, Roger leans his arm against
the cabinet.

ROGER

You know the booster's gonna explode
tomorrow, right?

That throws Bob, as he his last two cities are destroyed and
his game ends. Bob gives him a look as Roger steps in and
takes over for his turn.

BOB

Theoretically. But then I'm not a
pessimist like you.

Roger doesn't respond, too busy playing. Bob looks across
the way and sees Beth on a pay phone in heated conversation.

Upset, Beth hangs up the phone and heads over.

BOB

Everything okay? How's the family?

BETH

They're fine. Everything's fine.

(then)

So we sure about tomorrow or what?

ROGER

(still playing)

Booster's gonna blow.

BOB

It won't. We have a good plan in
place. We'll be fine.

Now Roger's loses his cities. Game over.

BETH

You both stink at this.

(then)

I think it's gonna blow, too.

Roger looks at Bob, as Beth takes her quarter off the machine and starts her game.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY

ON CCTV: Grainy closed-circuit video of a booster mounted inside insulation. Hoses connected to several large REFRIGERATION UNITS cool the rocket.

Roger, Bob and Beth stand in back, as Allen leads the team of engineers to test the booster. On the wall, a digital temperature gauge shows 35-degrees. Roger leans into Bob.

ROGER

Lowest temp yet. Get ready.

Bob looks tense, but says nothing. Allen turns to him.

ALLEN

We're all clear. Ready for your call.

All eyes on Bob, as he straps on a headset.

BOB

Okay, last checks. Everyone out of the facility? And... we're go for ignition.

IGNITION ENGINEER (OVER COMM)

Roger, go for ignition.

ON SCREEN the rocket booster FIRES and continues to burn steadily. But like the last time, nothing happens.

Roger and Beth exchanged perplexed looks. Bob is relieved.

INT. ALLEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Allen is at his desk, when Roger and Bob burst in. Beth trails, reluctant. Roger hands Allen their report.

ROGER

Significant blowby coupled with serious erosion of the back up ring.

Allen takes the folder and flips through, unreadable. Finally he looks up.

ALLEN

In other words, you recreated the January launch. Sorry, this isn't enough to delay the program.

BOB

You got to be kidding me. We've clearly established the erosion gets worse the colder it gets. It's all here. What more do you need?

Allen looks frustrated, as Beth jumps in--

BETH

The issue isn't whether or not the O-rings aren't sealing properly because of the cold. We know this. What we're not thinking about is thermal conductivity.

Beth grabs a dry erase marker and talks as she scribbles equations on the whiteboard. All eyes on her.

BETH

Everyone knows metal, especially steel, is a good thermal conductor. Even though outside it might be 40 or even 50 degrees, the steel booster feels like it's colder.

ALLEN

But the temperatures of the steel and outside air are the same.

BETH

Yes, but the transfer of heat is the issue, not the temperature itself. Specifically between the galvanized rubber O-rings and the booster joint.

Roger folds his arms, watching Beth write out her equation. He allows himself a small smile of satisfaction.

BETH

Even with 4,000 degrees of heat being forced through the booster, the rubber remains more rigid because the steel feels like it's colder than it really is.

Beth finishes her equation and circles a number: 32.

BETH

Thirty two degrees, gentlemen. That's all it takes for blowby to cause catastrophic failure.

ALLEN

That's impressive. Except, Florida rarely hits 32 degrees. And even then your numbers are wrong. You have exit temperature and total temperature flipped around. That should be *negative* 32 degrees.

BETH

Wait a second--

Allen hands Roger's report back.

ALLEN

We appreciate you bringing this matter to our attention. I'll make sure to kick it upstairs.

He leaves. Everyone else is stunned.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY

Bob wheels out his suitcase and knocks on the door next to him. Roger opens the door, ready to go.

ROGER

You fucking believe what he did?
Whose fucking side is he on?

BOB

I don't know. Let's just go home.

Beth exits her room and heads for the elevator, head down.

ROGER

You did good, kid.

Beth just keeps going.

INT. EBELING HOME - NIGHT

The front door unlocks and Bob comes in looking defeated. Darlene is there to greet him with a hug. He trudges upstairs. Darlene watches him go.

INT. BOISJOLY HOME - NIGHT

Roberta comes home to find Roger sitting in the dark alone. He has a drink.

ROBERTA

When did you get back?

ROGER

Couple hours ago.

ROBERTA
And you've been sitting here ever
since.

ROGER
What else am I supposed to do?

Roberta sits across from him.

ROBERTA
You're supposed to fight for what you
believe in.

ROGER
All this time I thought we were
right. That all I needed to do was
show them what was possible, and they
would see what I see.

Roberta takes his hand. He squeezes it.

ROGER
Instead they're just gonna ignore it.

Roger lets go of her hand. He has something else to say.

ROGER
I haven't been feeling good lately. I
might need to see Dr. Kinney again.

Roberta sinks. This is not what she wanted to hear. Now it's
Roger's turn to take her hand.

ROGER
It'll be okay.

Roberta smile, but doesn't seem so sure.

INT. HALLWAY - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Roger moves past other employees, briefcase in hand. Nobody
says a word to him. The best that he gets is the occasional
sideways glance.

INT. OFFICE - BUILDING 53 - DAY

The old task force building. Roger enters with his briefcase
and drops it on the desk.

BOB (O.S.)
Roger!

Roger turns and sees Bob rushing in with a folder in hand.

BOB
You have to see this.

He hands the file to Roger.

BOB
Remember when Lund told us that NASA was opening up the bidding? Turns out that Congress cut NASA's funding. They're trying to force them to find another company to build the booster.

ROGER
Why would they do that?

BOB
I did some digging. Thiokol won the contract in '73 even though it cost more. Lockheed, United, Boeing-- they all outbid us with a product that was better designed and shipped faster.

ROGER
What are you saying?

BOB
Somebody had their finger on the scale and tipped it in our favor.

Roger hands the folder back to Bob.

ROGER
What's the point? They're gonna sign a new contract, shuttles will keep flying and we're gonna spend the rest of our careers in fucking Siberia.

Roger turns away. Bob sees it's no use, and leaves.

INT. PRODUCTION BAY - MORTON THIOKOL - EVENING

The annual Christmas party. A booster nozzle decorated with lights and garland serves as a mock Christmas tree.

Employees drink punch and champagne. It's also a celebration for the signing of Thiokol's new contract with NASA, as evidenced by a large banner hanging from two SRBs.

While most employees laugh and drink, Bob is by himself in the corner sipping punch. Roger is nowhere to be found.

Bob stares absently at the crowd, but catches Beth looking over at him. She's dressed up, hair down, and looking a bit uncomfortable about it.

They look at each other a moment. Then Bob raises his glass. Beth raises hers, and smiles. Bob gets up and leaves.

Beth turns away and spots Lund staring at her from across the way. He starts to come over. Beth stands her ground.

LUND
(tipsy)
Enjoying the party?

BETH
I was just about to leave.

LUND
No, stick around. I was going to call you out in my speech.

BETH
Why?

LUND
(leaning in)
Because I want people to know how special you are to us.

Beth fumes, having had enough.

BETH
Be careful, Hank. If something happens, people are going to know things about you too.

Beth moves away, leaving Lund a bit shaken.

EXT. PARKING LOT - THIOKOL - DAY

Bob's Accord pulls into the lot, slicing through melting slush and snow. He parks and gets out to make the long trudge to the office.

EXT. FRONT ENTRANCE - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Several LOCAL TV CREWS set up outside. Lund, Mason and Kilminster, along with other TOP EXECUTIVES, are there. There's a buzz of excitement.

A BUS appears on the road and turns down the access road, stopping in front of the crowd. Cameras turn on. News REPORTERS jostle for position.

The bus doors open and the Challenger crew steps out, including CHRISTA MCAULIFFE, the star of the show.

McAuliffe radiates down-to-earth charm. She greets everyone with genuine warmth and enthusiasm before being led inside.

INT. PRODUCTION BAY - DAY

THIOKOL ENGINEERS are lined up to greet the astronauts. Beth waits as the astronauts shake hands.

Bob moves through the crowd and spots Beth. He squeezes his way through and stands next to her. Beth looks at him.

BETH

Can't believe they're here. Do they
do this a lot?

BOB

Sometimes, but not lately.

Beth eagerly waits her turn, as Christa McAuliffe leads the way with Scobee next to her. Everyone treats McAuliffe like a major celebrity.

Bob watches as she draws near, completely fixated. His anticipation mounts the closer she gets. Finally, McAuliffe reaches Bob first and extends her hand.

CHRISTA MCAULIFFE

Hi, I'm Christa.

Bob hesitates to answer. McAuliffe's smile never wavers.

BOB

Sorry, Bob Ebeling. I helped design
the booster.

McAuliffe smiles. Then she leans in and kisses Bob on the cheek, leaving him stunned as she pulls away.

CHRISTA MCAULIFFE

Thank you for keeping us safe.

She moves down the line to Beth. Bob's heart skips a thousand beats. He feels like he's on the verge of losing it and squeezes through the crowd.

EXT. PRODUCTION BAY - SIDE EXIT - MOMENTS LATER

Bob crashes out, hyperventilating. He collapses against the side of the building and looks up at the sky. A FLOCK OF GEESE flies south.

Bob watches the birds and somehow finds calms in them.

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE - BUILDING 53 - EVENING

TITLE: January 27, 1986

Roger is on the phone with the TV tuned to shuttle coverage on CNN, volume off.

ROGER
Send me the latest. Thanks.

He hangs up.

ON SCREEN: Technicians struggle to fix the outer hatch access door. One brings in a hacksaw and starts cutting.

There's frustration and confusion among them. Then the access door opens and the Space Shuttle crew disembarks looking annoyed and disappointed.

Behind him, his fax machine BEEPS to life. Roger turns and grabs the sheet. He stares at it in a moment and quickly grabs a pen, and starts writing--

INT. BOB'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Roger bursts into Bob's office waving the fax in his hand.

ROGER
You need to see this.

Bob takes the page and reads.

ROGER
It's gonna be 30 degrees tomorrow,
and teens overnight.
(then)
Something's been bugging me since
Florida, so I ran through Beth's
numbers again. She was right, Allen
was wrong. Catastrophic failure is
going to occur at 32 degrees.

BOB
Okay, so what if you're right? Why
would they listen to us now?

ROGER
Are you paying attention? They
delayed the launch again... fifth
time this week-- for a goddamn *access*
hatch. This is it, Roger. This is
what we've been fighting for.

Off Bob, realization setting in--

EXT. THIOKOL CAMPUS - EVENING

Roger and Bob race as fast as they can, wearing dress shoes in three inches of snow.

INT. HALLWAY - MORTON THIOKOL - EVENING

Roger and Bob slip on the smooth floor in wet shoes, getting what-the-fuck looks from coworkers.

But nothing is going to slow them down, as they slip-run down the hall and into--

AN OUTER OFFICE

They go right past MASON'S SECRETARY--

MASON'S SECRETARY
He's on a call--

Roger and Bob burst into--

MASON'S OFFICE

Out of breath, Roger holds out the fax. Bob is also winded. Both fight for breath, unable to speak. Mason glares.

MASON
(into phone)
Hang on a minute.

He hits mute and takes the fax.

ROGER
It's gonna be 30 degrees at launch.

Mason looks frustrated.

MASON
I warned you about this. The O-ring matter is closed.

BOB
It's going to be in the teens overnight. In *Florida*. This is what we've been trying to tell you--

MASON
You never showed what would happen to the shuttle if the outer ring is breached.

ROGER
We blew up a missile!

MASON
Missiles are supposed to blow up!

BOB

This is a death sentence. We have to stop the launch-- not all of them, just this one!

MASON

You still haven't gotten the message.

ROGER

I think we have. Thiokol doesn't give a shit about the astronauts' lives.

MASON

You're way out of line. I've given you a lot of rope these past few months, but my patience is gone.

ROGER

Thiokol gave thousands of dollars to Senator Garn to win the contract back in '73. I wonder if campaign contributions were all Thiokol did for him? I'm sure the FBI would love to get to the bottom of that.

Mason glares at Bob and stands up from behind his desk.

MASON

Are you threatening me?

ROGER

No, I'm threatening this company.

Mason glares. Bob senses the moment slipping away...

BOB

Let us to talk to NASA again. Put the ball in their court. If they say no, we're on record objecting to the launch. And then we just have to hope nothing happens.

MASON

Wait outside.

INT. OUTER OFFICE - NIGHT

Roger and Bob wait on a sofa. Mason's Secretary keeps an eye on them. The office door opens and Mason exits.

MASON

You have 45 minutes to get your acts together and meet us in conference room B.

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE - BUILDING 53 - NIGHT

Roger scrambles to get his paperwork ready, digging through piles on his desk. Bob pokes his head in--

BOB

You ready?

Roger takes one last file and hurries out.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM B - NIGHT

Roger and Bob push their way in. Already waiting are Lund, Mason, and Kilminster. They sit across from them.

MASON

Lawrence Mulloy from Kennedy Space Center and George Hardy from Marshall are on the line.

Lund clicks off the mute button and leans into the phone.

LUND

Larry, George. We have Roger Boisjoly and Bob Ebeling with us. They're the engineers who first noticed the O-ring issue in January.

GEORGE HARDY (ON SPEAKER)

(gruff)

So what's the problem, Thiokol?

Mason looks to Roger and Bob. Roger takes the ball and runs.

ROGER

We're calling about the serious threat to the Shuttle tomorrow. We strongly urge you to delay the mission until temperatures warm up.

LAWRENCE MULLOY (ON SPEAKER)

(Alabama accent)

This is Larry. Why would we delay the mission because of the cold?

BOB

Because the O-rings won't seal properly. Which means that compressed hydrogen will shoot out of the joint and possibly put the shuttle at risk for catastrophic failure.

A long pause.

LAWRENCE MULLOY (ON SPEAKER)
Why haven't we been made aware of
this before?

Roger is gobsmacked. Bob steps in.

BOB
Me and Roger were out in October
discussing this issue with Allen. He
said he'd kick it upstairs.

LAWRENCE MULLOY (ON SPEAKER)
Allen Cobb? He's no longer with us.

Roger and Bob look at each other. Mason grows impatient.

LAWRENCE MULLOY (ON SPEAKER)
You know, the night before a launch
is a hell of a time to change the
command criteria.

ROGER
The criteria states the O-rings are
safe between 40 and 90 degrees, but
we've seen blowby as high as 58.
Tomorrow it'll be under 40... *outside*
our recommended criteria.

GEORGE HARDY (ON SPEAKER)
Frankly, I'm appalled by what I'm
hearing.

Confused looks around the room. Even Mason didn't like that.

GEORGE HARDY (ON SPEAKER)
I just got off with the White House.
The president wants to talk up the
shuttle in his state of the union
tomorrow. You want me to call them
back and say, "Sorry, Mr. President,
we're a no-go 'cause some engineer
two thousand miles away is worried
it's gonna be a little chilly?"

ROGER
We have the data. Blowby is going to
happen tomorrow and will cause the
shuttle to explode on liftoff!

More silence on the line. Roger is frustrated. So is Bob.
Mason finally leans in.

MASON

Guys, it's Jerry. Give us a minute to talk about this offline. Okay?

GEORGE HARDY (ON SPEAKER)

Five minutes.

Mason hits mute, and huddles with Lund and Kilminster at the other end of the table.

TIME CUT: 30 MINUTES LATER

Lund, Mason and Kilminster are in quiet, but heated conversation. The clock on the wall reads 8:45.

Roger keeps an intense eye on Lund, looking like he's ready to pounce any second.

Kilminster is animated, putting pressure on Lund and Mason. Tempers fray.

Lund for once looks uneasy. Kilminster looks at Mason, who nods. Then at Lund, who takes a moment, but also nods.

Roger senses a fateful decision has been made. He grabs a file filled with photographs and goes over to the huddle.

KILMINSTER

What're you doing?

Roger lays out photos of blowby from the January and April launches. Mason folds his arms.

MASON

We know all this.

ROGER

Just look one last time.

Roger jabs a finger at the O-ring erosion from January.

ROGER

Fifty three degrees caused this.

He digs for another photo and finds one from April.

ROGER

That's 58 degrees.

And another photo, this time from the experiments he and Bob ran at NASA.

ROGER

Forty degrees. What they have in common?

(MORE)

ROGER (cont'd)
(off Kilminster)
Look, goddamn it!

KILMINSTER
The decision is made, Roger.

Roger's hands shake. He's on the verge of losing it. Bob gets up and leads Roger back. Roger sits, eyes staring blankly ahead. Kilminster turns to the others.

KILMINSTER
We're all in agreement?

BOB
There are icicles hanging from the launch platform right now. Icicles. In *Florida*. We cannot recommend launch under those conditions.

KILMINSTER
They're getting cleared off as we speak. Gentlemen, are we agreed?

Lund nods.

BOB
Just a couple more days until it warms up. Just two fucking days.

Mason ignores him and nods. Kilminster hits the mute button.

KILMINSTER
Everyone still here?

LAWRENCE MULLOY (ON SPEAKER)
We're here, Thiokol.

GEORGE HARDY (ON SPEAKER)
What's the verdict?

KILMINSTER
We're all in agreement. We launch tomorrow morning.

The air gets sucked out of the room. Bob buries his face in his hands. Roger seethes.

LAWRENCE MULLOY (ON SPEAKER)
Are there any objections?

Roger doesn't move, knowing he's defeated. Bob looks across the table, but says nothing. His silence speaks volumes.

LAWRENCE MULLOY (ON SPEAKER)
Good, we're a go for launch.

Kilminster hangs up the call. Roger gets up and storms out of the room in disgust.

Bob gets to his feet and glowers at Lund.

BOB

You just killed seven astronauts.

Bob storms out. Lund watches after him, the first cracks of uncertainty starting to show.

INT. BOISJOLY HOME - NIGHT

Roger enters, trying not to be loud. It's late. He puts down his briefcase and jacket, and heads straight for the liquor cabinet and pours a drink.

A light goes on upstairs. Roberta comes down, closing up her robe. Roger doesn't seem to notice.

ROBERTA

It's late.

ROGER

Go back to bed.

ROBERTA

What's wrong?

Roger braces himself against the cabinet, refusing to face her. Roberta comes over and puts a hand on his shoulder.

Roger turns around, tears streaming down his face. Roberta is surprised to see him cry. He buries his head into her shoulder and lets it all out.

INT. BEDROOM - EBELING HOME - NIGHT

Bob lies awake in bed, unable to sleep and staring at the ceiling. He hears something HIT the window. And AGAIN.

Bob slips out of bed and opens the window. Outside, Roger is on his lawn holding a bottle of Jim Beam. Bob acknowledges him with a nod.

INT. BOB'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Roger pours whiskey into Bob's coffee mug and does the same for himself. They sit quietly for a moment, then Roger looks over at the unit, now covered by a dusty tarp.

ROGER

I never told you how impressed I was
you got that hunk of shit running.

BOB

Yeah. Thanks.

They drink. Roger downs his and pours another.

ROGER

You know, I didn't think much of you when I first started Thiokol. You kept your head down, did what you were told. Nothing like me.

Bob downs his and holds out his cup for more. Roger obliges.

BOB

And now?

Roger smiles and drinks.

BOB

We have time, Roger. Not a lot, but we can still stop this thing.

ROGER

Bob--

BOB

I can't let it happen again.

(off Roger)

His name was Luke. My son. I found him in his room unconscious, took him in my arms... and he died. I was too late. And I just sat there thinking how I could've done something, said a few words, spent more time. I wish I had more time.

(drinks)

A few weeks ago the crew showed up to meet everybody. I looked into that teacher's eyes, McAuliffe, and I wanted to scream at her not to step foot on that shuttle. But it didn't. And you know what she said to me?

Roger shakes his head.

BOB (CONT'D)

"Thank you for keeping us safe."

(then)

I was in a fog after Luke. Nothing felt real. But with this I had purpose. Everything was real again.

A beat.

ROGER

At McDonnell Douglas, we built a DC-10 that crashed outside Paris in '74. Killed 346 people. And it was because a faulty cargo door I helped design. For years I thought it was my fault, but then I realized I wasn't the only one. There were literally hundreds of people involved, and any one of them could be responsible.

(then)

Same here. NASA, Thiokol, the White House, the media. Even the public wanting to see one of their own go into space. If something goes wrong tomorrow, it's gonna be on everybody.

(another beat)

We've done everything we can. It's on them now.

Roger drinks. Off Bob, not so sure about that--

INT. ROGER'S CAR - DAY

Tired from no sleep and too much whiskey, Roger drives into work and parks in the lot. He's hesitant to go inside.

INT. KITCHEN - EBELING HOME - DAY

Bob enters and sees the plate of vanilla wafers with a note that reads: *Happy launch day - D.* Instead of eating one, Bob throws the cookies away and leaves.

INT. BREAK ROOM - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Engineers have gathered to watch the Challenger launch on CNN. Roger enters and takes a seat in back. There's a buzz in the room. Barely anyone notices him.

Except Beth. She looks over, noticing something the matter. She goes over and joins him. They sit in silence a moment.

BETH

My numbers were right, you know.

ROGER

Yeah, I know.

(then)

I'm glad you were on the team.

BETH

Thanks. That means a lot.

Roger folds his arms. Beth bites her fingernails like she did for her first launch months ago.

Lund enters the room and gets right behind Beth to watch, putting her more on edge. Roger notices.

ROGER

After .63 seconds, it'll be okay.

Beth turns away.

ON TV: CNN coverage of the launch, the famous moment where the crew boards the shuttle bus, smiling and waving.

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Bob sits alone, trying to keep it together. Nobody knows he's there, and that's the way he wants it.

EXT. LAUNCH COMPLEX PRESS SITE - DAY

The same press box where Roger, Bob and Beth sat months ago. Only now it's crammed with REPORTERS paying close attention.

EXT. GRANDSTAND - LAUNCH COMPLEX - DAY

Also packed with people waiting for the launch in winter jackets, breath visible in the freezing air. Everyone's cold, but no one cares. Their excitement is infectious.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - DAY

Back at the beginning. Flight Director Jay Greene mans his position at the main console.

Next to him are the FLIGHT DYNAMICS OFFICER (FIDO), BRIAN PERRY (40s), and DICK COVEY (40s, mustache), the CAPCOM.

JAY GREENE

For a minute I thought we were gonna be delayed again.

(then)

Begin launch sequence.

INT. BREAK ROOM - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Everyone watches with bated breath. But there's more of an excited feeling for this one because of McAuliffe.

CNN REPORTER (ON TV)

And we've just confirmed Mission Control has initiated the final launch countdown. Liftoff will be in T-minus 60 seconds.

Beth reaches out and takes Roger's hand. He's surprised for a moment by the gesture, but then squeezes her hand a little tighter, glad for the mutual comfort.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - DAY

Greene and his crew operate their consoles with calm and efficiency. All eyes on the monitors.

JUDY RESNIK (OVER COMM)
Cabin pressure is probably going to
give us an alarm.

DICK SCOBEE (OVER COMM)
Copy cabin pressure.

MICHAEL SMITH (OVER COMM)
Right engine helium tank is just a
little bit low.

DICK SCOBEE (OVER COMM)
It was yesterday, too.

JAY GREENE
Fifteen seconds till launch.

On screen, we see the boosters start to ignite. Ignition has begun. Orange flames shoot out, intensifying. White smoke explodes out from the launch pad.

DICK SCOBEE (OVER COMM)
Three at three hundred.

Now both boosters and the shuttle engines are at full thrust. The Shuttle starts to move from the tower.

MICHAEL SMITH (OVER COMM)
Here we go!

INT. BREAK ROOM - MORTON THIOKOL - SAME

Everyone watches as Challenger lifts off the platform. Roger squeezes Beth's hand more.

CNN REPORTER (OVER COMM)
We have liftoff of the 25th space
shuttle mission... and it has cleared
the tower.

Roger watches as the shuttle makes its way upwards. He breathes a heavy sigh of relief and looks at Beth.

BETH
Point six-three seconds.

Roger smiles as he releases her hand, the worst now seemingly over.

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - SAME

Bob is still by himself. He can hear upbeat conversation and laughter from the other room. But something still doesn't sit right with him and he doesn't move.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - DAY

Jay Greene and his team are all business.

DICK SCOBEE (OVER COMM)
Roll program.

DICK COVEY
Roger roll, Challenger.

ON SCREEN: Challenger "rolls over" and turns its position.

MICHAEL SMITH (OVER COMM)
Looks like we've got a lotta wind today.

DICK SCOBEE (OVER COMM)
Yeah. It's a little hard to see out my window here.

Jay Greene keeps watch on the monitor.

JAY GREENE
Throttle down to 94.

EXT. SPACE SHUTTLE CHALLENGER - SAME

Throttling through the atmosphere toward space. Engines and boosters shoot fire. Everything rumbles and shakes with unpredictable violence.

Then on the right booster, just below the shuttle wing, a small FLASH erupts and disappears.

Seconds later, another FLASH erupts from the same spot.

That's followed by a third FLASH that turns into a brilliant orange ball of flame that emerges under the right wing and quickly merges with the plume from the solid rocket booster.

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A COWORKER finds Bob alone, his face buried in his hands.

CO-WORKER
You coming in or what?

Bob says nothing. He's a bundle of nerves. Co-worker shrugs, getting the hint to leave him be.

INT. BREAK ROOM - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

ON TV, the shuttle continues its upward trajectory. Everyone, even Roger, talk easily among themselves. Some leave to go back to work.

INT. MID-DECK - CHALLENGER - DAY

McAuliffe, eyes filled with innocent wonder, struggles to look outside, her body violently shaking. Over the comm link, we hear--

DICK COVEY (OVER COMM)
Velocity 2,257 feet per second,
altitude 4.3 nautical miles.

DICK SCOBEE (OVER COMM)
Throttling up.

MICHAEL SMITH (OVER COMM)
Throttle up.

McAuliffe braces as the G-force pushes her down more.

EXT. SPACE SHUTTLE CHALLENGER - SAME

Continuous flame shoots out of the right SRB and becomes well-defined going in a downward direction.

MICHAEL SMITH (OVER COMM)
Feel that mother go!

Challenger rolls again, as the plume of flame grows bigger and starts to burn the external tank--

MICHAEL SMITH (OVER COMM)
Thirty five thousand going through
one point five.

The plume brightens as it burns through the SRB into the external tank. It's almost indistinguishable from the flames shooting out the bottom of the booster--

CAPCOM (OVER COMM)
Challenger, go at throttle up.

DICK SCOBEE (OVER COMM)
Roger, go at throttle up.

Flame now burns through the lower attachment strut on the right rocket booster. If we look closely, we can see the SRB start to MOVE AWAY from the external tank.

MICHAEL SMITH (OVER COMM)

Uh-oh.

Now the flames consume Challenger, and eerily quiet, the shuttle disintegrates.

A huge plume of WHITE SMOKE expands. Both SRBs continue their upward trajectory, but now they're disengaged from shuttle and form a Y-shaped pattern of flight.

Bits of debris break apart and fall back down. And if we look closely, we see the main cabin, still fully intact, arcing and falling to the ocean below.

The Challenger is gone.

INT. BREAK ROOM - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Everyone is still engaged in random conversation, but it starts to grow quiet as some begin to realize something has gone terrible wrong.

Roger is one of the first to notice and looks up at the TV. He sees the infamous cloud of Y-shaped smoke and small trails following the falling debris.

ROGER

Oh my God.

Now the room goes silent. Everyone struggling to grasp what just happened. GASPS and murmurs of confusion. Beth stares wide-eyed at the screen. Roger is at a loss.

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

And then Bob, still sitting by himself. Though he's not watching, he knows what happened. The silence, followed by growing panic in the other room, confirms it.

The moment hits Bob hard, as he buries his face in his hands. But he's not crying. He's angry.

INT. CHALLENGER CABIN - SAME

Red alarms FLASH, as the cabin, still intact, plummets to the ocean and starts to depressurize. The crew is still strapped in their harnesses and in one piece.

Smith has his mask up and breathes normally. He's frantically trying to steer the cabin, but it's hopeless.

He looks over to Scobee, slumped unconscious. Behind him, Reznik and Onizuka are alive, aware, and bracing for impact.

As wind and vapor rushes by the cabin window, nose pointed straight down and the big blue Atlantic Ocean rushing toward them, we CUT TO:

INT. MID-DECK - CHALLENGER - SAME

And Christa McAuliffe, unconscious, her shallow breathing fogging her mask. She's alive. And despite the tragic calamity, somehow she looks peaceful--

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - SAME

The cabin CRASHES into the water at over 200 miles per hour. A violent plume of water shoots out, as other debris pelts the ocean around the impact zone.

A moment later, the water settles into calm as more debris quietly lands on the surface.

INT. BATHROOM - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Bob pushes inside and punches the shit out of an aluminum towel dispenser, leaving behind a dent and some blood.

Bob collapses onto the floor, overcome by emotion, and now he starts to cry.

INT. BREAK ROOM - MORTON THIOKOL - DAY

Shock, tears, displays of emotion. Beth turns and finds Lund, in total shock, still behind her.

Beth's rage builds. She gets up fast and glares right at Lund. Her eyes say it all: *this is your fault*. Lund feels the heat and quickly exits.

Once he's gone, Beth reels, overcome with emotion. She turns back and sees Roger still at the table, frozen in shock.

INT. MASON'S OFFICE - DAY

Mason is on the phone. Kilminster comes in with STAN RUSSELL (40s, buttoned up), Thiokol's chief counsel. Mason waves them in. Door is closed. Everyone is panicked.

MASON

I'll tell them. They're here now.

He hangs up.

MASON

That was Garrison. He wants a lid on this right away. No leaks to the press. No comment across the board.

KILMINSTER

We have a problem.

(off Mason)

Roger and Bob. If it gets out that they knew about this, we'll get sued into oblivion.

Mason looks at Russell.

STAN RUSSELL

Civil suits from wrongful death from the families are to be expected. But from what I'm hearing, these engineers of yours knew about some problem with the booster.

MASON

If that's what caused it. We don't know that yet! Goddamn it!

KILMINSTER

Rest assured, they're going to find out what caused it, and if NASA can shift blame over to us, that's what they're going to do.

MASON

(to Russell)

You need to talk to Roger and Bob.

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE - BUILDING 53 - DAY

Roger hurries to load boxes with files and paperwork, trying to get every last scrap of information regarding their research into one place.

Roger thinks he's got everything and races out of the room--

INT. BOB'S OFFICE - BUILDING 53 - DAY

Roger bursts in and finds Bob staring out the window.

ROGER

Did you get everything?

Bob doesn't answer, doesn't even move. His right hand drips blood on the floor.

ROGER

Bob!

Bob turns around, his eyes haunted.

BOB
You were wrong. It took 73 seconds,
not point-63.

Outside, Roger sees MEN IN SUITS coming their way.

ROGER
Jesus, Bob. Snap out of it!

Bob won't budge. Roger grabs Bob's box and races out.

EXT. BUILDING 53 - MOMENTS LATER

Roger runs out the back of the building, but *slips on a patch of ice* and does a face-plant, dropping the boxes. Papers scatter.

Roger jumps to his feet and gathers the papers. Then he pops open the trunk and throws the boxes inside, slamming it closed, out of breath.

INT. BOB'S OFFICE - BUILDING 53 - DAY

Roger comes back inside and finds Lund, Mason and Stan Russell with Bob.

LUND
Bob, this is Stan Russell, our chief counsel.

ROGER
I have nothing to say.

MASON
We're not here to point fingers.

ROGER
I'm pointing fingers. We spent months telling you this was gonna happen!

MASON
We don't know if this is an O-ring issue. We don't even know if this is a Thiokol issue.

ROGER
But you're here just in case, right?

STAN RUSSELL
The president is going to announce a commission to find out what went wrong. It's likely everyone in this room will get called to testify.

ROGER

I hope so.

MASON

We're all on the same team, Roger.

ROGER

You should've listened to us a long time ago. Instead you stalled our task force and now you're trying to intimidate us. But that's not gonna happen. I'm gonna tell them everything I know. And there's nothing you can do to stop me.

STAN RUSSELL

Actually, there's a lot we can do, starting with the NDA you signed when you were hired. That means you can't testify, you can't talk to the press, you can't even talk to your wife.

ROGER

One way or another, people are gonna know what went on here. I don't care what I have to do, they're gonna find out you kept the launches going knowing damn well the shuttle was a fucking death trap.

LUND

Good luck with that, Roger.

Roger turns to Lund.

ROGER

Be smart, Hank, and resign before it's too late.

Roger storms out of the room.

INT. MCFARLAND HOME - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Beth sits on the couch with Katie nestled in her arm, that same look of shock she had in the break room.

On TV, PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN is in the Oval Office behind the Resolute desk addressing the nation. He looks solemn, his eyes projecting the pain and sorrow of a nation.

PRESIDENT REAGAN (ON TV)
I've always had great faith in and respect for our space program, and what happened today does nothing to diminish it. 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. That's the way freedom is, and we wouldn't change it for a minute.

Dale watches from a nearby doorway, paying more attention to Beth and her state of mind than Reagan.

He goes over to her and puts a hand on her shoulder, letting her know he's there. But he gets no response. Beth continues staring at the TV.

Dale leaves her alone and heads back to the kitchen, where he dons his apron and gets ready to make dinner.

INT. BOB'S OFFICE - DAYS LATER

Bob is at his desk still in shock and unable to work, just staring at nothing.

Outside he hears the sound of GEESE flying over. He gets up and goes to the window to look.

EXT. MORTON THIOKOL - MOMENTS LATER

It's a beautiful day. Bob exits the main building just as the bulk of the geese move past.

He looks up at the the birds flying across the bright blue sky. A sense of calm comes over him.

Bob watches another moment before looking down at his work badge clipped to his pocket protector.

He rips off the badge, letting it fall to the ground, and walks away.

INT. EBELING HOME - NIGHT

Bob comes home late. Darlene is waiting for him.

DARLENE
Where have you been? I've been worried sick. Are you okay? Why didn't you call?

Bob is distraught. There's no hiding it.

BOB
I didn't do enough.

DARLENE
Don't do this to yourself.

BOB
I had a chance to stop it, but I failed. I have to live with this the rest of my life.

Darlene tries to comfort him, but Bob doesn't want it.

DARLENE
It's not your fault. Others made the decision, not you. You did everything you could.

BOB
I'm not going back. There's nothing left for me there.

DARLENE
I know there's some way you can still make a difference.

Bob looks at her, uncertain whether or not that's true.

BOB
What can I possibly do?

DARLENE
You can tell the truth.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

Roger runs on the treadmill, strong and determined. He hits five miles and slows to a stop.

Roger grabs a towel and wipes sweat off the machine. But then he starts breathing heavier and grabs his chest, dropping to the ground.

Audible gasps and shouts from nearby member. A GYM EMPLOYEE rushes over.

GYM EMPLOYEE
Call 9-1-1!
(to Roger)
You're gonna be okay, pal.

Roger slows his breathing and rolls over on his back, the world in and out of focus.

For some reason he looks at the TV. There's a news report on the newly appointed Rogers Commission, which shows NEIL ARMSTRONG, SALLY RIDE and CHUCK YEAGER.

Also onscreen is DR. RICHARD FEYMAN (60s), who's shown in a file footage interview with a graphic identifying him.

Something comes over Roger and he forces himself to sit up.

GYM EMPLOYEE
Slow down. Ambulance is on the way.

ROGER
No ambulance. I'm fine.

Roger tries to get up, but feels dizzy and passes out.

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta finds Roger sitting up on a bed. An ER DOCTOR goes over his vitals. Roger gets to his feet, ready to go.

ER DOCTOR
Take it easy.

ROBERTA
What happened?

ER DOCTOR
Panic attack.

ROGER
I'm fine. I wanna go home.

ER DOCTOR
He's free to go. But he should go see his regular doctor.

The ER Doctor steps away. Roger gathers his things. He's ready to leave and moves past Roberta without a word.

EXT. EBELING HOME - NEXT DAY

Roger is at the front door still frazzled, but looking better. Bob opens the door. Bob hasn't shaved in days or slept for a week.

BOB
I can't, Roger. Please.

He tries to close the door, but Roger stops him--

ROGER
We still have a chance to do something.

BOB
People are dead. What part of that
don't you understand?

ROGER
Just hear me out! We both know NASA
will try to fly that thing again as
soon as they can. And if they do
anywhere close to the condition it's
in now, more people are going to die.

Bob is listening now. But doubt remains.

BOB
They won't let us testify.

ROGER
Listen, what if the commission
subpoenaed us instead?

Bob looks at Roger a moment and shakes his head.

BOB
I'm sorry.

Bob closes the door again, and again Roger won't let him.

ROGER
I can't do this alone, Bob. I need
you there with me. You're the only
one I can count on.

Bob says nothing, but there's a glimmer of recognition.

INT. COMMITTEE HEARING ROOM - DAY

A small room with two rows of tables covered in plain cloth.
COMMISSION MEMBERS sit with name cards identifying who's
who. Armstrong, Ride, and Feynman are prominent.

Front and center is WILLIAM P. ROGERS (66), former Secretary
of State under Nixon. He has a steady, commanding presence.

WILLIAM ROGERS
We'll begin hearing testimony from
our witnesses shortly, but I believe
Dr. Feynman would like to say
something at the outset. Given his
stature in the world of physics, I
believe we would benefit from what he
has to say. Any objections?

Nobody on the committee raises an objection.

WILLIAM ROGERS
The floor is yours for five minutes,
Dr. Feynman.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
(Brooklyn accent)
Thank you, Chairman Rogers. I'll be
brief. Now, after going through the
witness list, especially those from
Morton Thiokol, I was struck by the
lack of rank and file engineers. Far
as I can tell, they're sending only
senior management and their lawyers.

Feynman looks at Lund and Mason in the front row with Stan
Russell. Kilminster is behind them. All look uneasy.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
I don't know about anyone else, but
as a scientist I'd rather hear from
other scientists, not muckety-mucks
who make financial decisions.

The crowd CHUCKLES.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
Which is why I was happy that two of
Thiokol's engineers reached out to me
and offered their testimony. But
that's only because, if they're to be
believed, the company is blocking
them from appearing before us.

Murmurs among the crowd. Some of the Commission Members
shift uncomfortably.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
So I move that the chairman compel
these two gentlemen--
(checks a sheet)
Roger Boisjoly and Bob Ebeling, to
come here and talk to us.

WILLIAM ROGERS
If there's no objection.

Stan Russell stands up.

STAN RUSSELL
If I may?

WILLIAM ROGERS
And you are?

STAN RUSSELL

Stan Russell, chief counsel for Morton Thiokol. Mr. Chairman, I ask the committee to reject Mr. Feynman's request. Bob Ebeling is no longer an employee, and Roger Boisjoly has been demoted for disciplinary reasons. We have other engineers with knowledge of the issue who can testify, if that pleases the chair.

WILLIAM ROGERS

I have no problem with that.

RICHARD FEYNMAN

I do.

Heads turn. Feynman glares at Russell, as he holds up his sheet of paper.

RICHARD FEYNMAN

These two were the primary engineers on SRB production and recovery. Are any of these engineers you just mentioned the primaries on SRB production and recovery?

STAN RUSSELL

No, sir, they're not. But--

RICHARD FEYNMAN

Then why would we want to hear from them?

STAN RUSSELL

Roger Boisjoly and Bob Ebeling are bound by an NDA they signed when they were first hired.

RICHARD FEYNMAN

I'm no legal expert, but even I know an NDA won't protect the company if it turns out you're trying to hide something. So unless Thiokol wants to engage in a losing fight, Mr. Boisjoly and Mr. Ebeling will testify before this committee.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - WASHINGTON, DC - DAYS LATER

Roger sits on the edge of the bed in a suit. The box of papers he took from his office sits behind him.

In Roger's hand is a prescription bottle. The label says it's Prozac. Reluctantly, Roger opens the bottle and takes one of the green and white pills with water.

The phone RINGS. Roger turns and picks up the receiver.

ROGER
(answering)
Yeah? Okay.

He hangs up. Roger gets to his feet and heads out the door, but realizes he forgot the box and turns back to get it.

INT. HALLWAY - NEAR THE ELEVATORS - DAY

Roger waits for the elevator to arrive. Bob shows up in an ill-fitting suit. He's still shaken and looks like he hasn't slept. Roger notices.

ROGER
You look like shit.

BOB
I haven't slept in weeks.

ROGER
They have me on this new drug,
Prozac. Makes me feel like shit all
the time. Worse than the other pills.

Bob doesn't answer. The elevator arrives. Rogers steps on, but Bob hesitates.

BOB
What if the commission doesn't listen
to us, either?

Roger stops the door from closing.

ROGER
Do you think they'd have us come all
this way just to ignore us?
(off Bob)
If there's any good that can come of
this, somebody from Thiokol will pay.
We can be the ones to make them.

BOB
This isn't about revenge.

ROGER
Then do it for the greater good. Do
it to prevent another disaster.
Doesn't matter. But I'm gonna make
sure somebody takes the fall.
(MORE)

ROGER (cont'd)
Because I guarantee you those
assholes are looking to do the same
to us.

(then)
If anything, do it for the families.
Because right now they're feeling
like you did once. Hopeless and
alone. They need you too Bob.

The elevator BUZZES, the door having been open too long. Bob
steps inside, as Roger lets the door go.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Bob is waiting his turn to testify. He's conflicted and on
edge, his eyes intently focused on the HOTEL ENTRANCE where
PEOPLE constantly come and go.

Through the door, we see a RADIO SHACK across the street. We
realize Bob isn't people watching, he's eyeing the store.
Bob makes a decision and gets up to leave.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MINUTES LATER

Lund is pacing outside, waiting his turn to come in. Bob
comes over, hands in his pockets. Lund looks at him coldly.
Bob is antsy and on edge.

BOB
I need to talk to you.

LUND
Then talk.

BOB
In private.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Bob pushes his way inside, with Lund following him. There's
no one else in there at the moment.

LUND
I'm up in a few minutes, so make it
quick.

BOB
This won't take long. I wanted you to
know that I'm sorry.

Lund is taken aback.

LUND
Sorry for what?

BOB

For what's about to happen. Roger is going to throw you under the bus in there. He's going to lay the blame right at your door step.

LUND

I expect that. Real question is, what're you going to do?

BOB

I don't know.

Lund matches eyes with Bob. Intense, but calm.

LUND

Can I offer a suggestion?

(off Bob, nodding)

Don't tell them anything. Don't talk about the task force or the memos or your trip to the Cape.

BOB

You think they don't already know about all that stuff?

LUND

Just keep it general. Yes or no answers. Impress upon them Thiokol isn't responsible. Let them know we did all we could to prevent this heartbreaking disaster.

Bob steels himself.

BOB

And if I don't?

LUND

I'm sure that won't be the case. You were always the sensible one, Bob. I doubt you'll be stupid and put yourself at risk.

BOB

Risk? Are you threatening me?

LUND

I'm looking out for you, Bob. You know what can happen if you stick your neck out like this. Press starts digging around.

(MORE)

LUND (cont'd)
Maybe they ask questions about your son, your relationship with him, things like that. Then there's the lawsuits Thiokol and NASA are sure to file. That's going to put you in serious financial jeopardy. But like I said, you're the sensible one. I'm sure you'll do the right thing.

Lund leaves the bathroom. Bob takes a breath and pulls out a SMALL TAPE RECORDER. He hits stop, his hands shaking.

INT. MCFARLAND HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Beth is home building a futuristic model car with Katie. It almost looks like it could be a Tesla.

Dale comes in from the kitchen with a plate of cookies.

DALE
You watching the hearings?

BETH
In a minute.

Dale puts the cookies down and sits.

DALE
I think you should change your mind and go. You need to do this, if not for them, then for yourself.

Beth smiles, appreciating him. She looks at Katie, who's focused on assembling one of the wheels.

BETH
No, I'm fine here.

Dale kisses her forehead and leaves.

INT. COMMITTEE HEARING ROOM - DAY

The commission is in session. Standing at a podium is Lund delivering testimony next to a monitor showing a schematic of a rocket booster. The committee members look bored.

LUND
(pointing)
And then we have the pressurization line that runs the length of the booster all the way to the nose. Now in this section is the igniter, which, as the name implies, ignites the solid propellant.

The doors open and Roger walks in with his ATTORNEY.

Lund stops, as heads turn. Richard Feynman eyes them with interest. Roger sits in the front row, eyes on Lund.

LUND

So... the gas from the propellant flows through the insulated cable tunnel and out the rear nozzle extension. Now you'll also notice here the aft separation motor--

RICHARD FEYNMAN

Thank you, Mr. Lund, for your compelling testimony. You can submit the rest in writing.

Lund is surprised to be cut off.

LUND

I think it would be better that I explain for those who don't have a technical understanding--

WILLIAM ROGERS

Duly noted. Dr. Feynman?

RICHARD FEYNMAN

Thank you. I'd like the chair to call Roger Boisjoly to testify.

WILLIAM ROGERS

You can step down, Mr. Lund.

TIME CUT TO:

ROGER, right hand raised, as he's finished being sworn in.

ROGER

I do.

Roger sits. His attorney says something to him. Roger nods and leans into the microphone.

ROGER

Before we begin, I want to offer the commission my personal notes and memos pertaining to my work on the shuttle's rocket boosters.

STAN RUSSELL

(standing)

Objection.

WILLIAM ROGERS
This isn't Matlock, Mr... what was
your name again?

STAN RUSSELL
Stan Russell.

WILLIAM ROGERS
We don't blurt out objections. The
subpoena clearly asks for all
documents pertaining to Mr.
Boisjoly's involvement with the SRB.

STAN RUSSELL
That box contains property belonging
to Morton Thiokol and by law he can't
release it.

WILLIAM ROGERS
You've already argued that in court
and lost.

Russell sits down, defeated.

ROGER
If you don't mind, I'd like to bring
the commission's attention to one
memo in particular. It's only a
couple of pages.

WILLIAM ROGERS
Without objection.

Roger brings the box over to the committee and reaches
inside, pulling out a memo and handing it to Rogers. Russell
sits next to Mason, arms crossed.

WILLIAM ROGERS
What am I looking at here?

ROGER
That's a memo I wrote back in July of
1985 to Hank Lund, where I described
the dangers of O-ring erosion in the
SRM, or solid rocket motor.

NEIL ARMSTRONG (55) looks at Roger, perplexed.

NEIL ARMSTRONG
You're saying that you were aware of
the O-ring problem back in July of
last year?

ROGER
No, sir. I knew as far back as
January.

An audible gasp from some in the audience. Kilminster and
Mason eye Roger with contempt. Lund grows uncomfortable.

WILLIAM ROGERS
(reading)
"It is my honest and very real fear
that if we do not take immediate
action to dedicate a team to solve
the problem with the field joint
having the number one priority, then
we stand in jeopardy of losing a
flight along with the launch pad
facilities."

Rogers glares at Lund.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
I seem to recall Thiokol testifying
that they didn't know about the O-
ring problem.

Rogers nods. SALLY RIDE (34) leans into her microphone.

SALLY RIDE
Is it possible that they didn't
receive the memo?

ROGER
No, we had numerous discussions about
the issue both before and after the
memo. We even went to the Cape to
prove our case.

SALLY RIDE
So NASA knew about this as well?

ROGER
Yes, ma'am.

Ride sits back, visibly annoyed.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
And were you able to prove your case?

ROGER
No, we weren't able to recreate the
appropriate conditions. But we had
enough evidence of O-ring erosion and
knew that it posed a serious risk to
the shuttle crew.
(MORE)

ROGER (cont'd)
We recommended suspending shuttle missions on numerous occasions, including the night before Challenger launched.

More MURMURING from the audience. Various commission members turn and talk to among themselves.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
Tell me, Mr. Boisjoly, why weren't your arguments taken more seriously?

ROGER
There were obstacles.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
Like what?

Roger turns to the Thiokol behind him. He matches eyes with Lund, who turns away, knowing what comes next.

ROGER
Certain members of senior management felt our data was inconclusive.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
Who specifically?

ROGER
Hank Lund. Gerald Mason. Joe Kilminster.

Feynman nods. Rogers folds his arms across his chest. DONALD KUTYNA (52), an Air Force general, leans in.

DONALD KUTYNA
Are there are others who can corroborate your story?

ROGER
Yes, sir. Bob Ebeling.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
(to Chairman Rogers)
I think it's time we hear from Mr. Ebeling.

WILLIAM ROGERS
I agree.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Outside the hearing room. Bob sits by himself waiting his turn. He's holding a picture of Luke.

The door opens and a COMMISSION STAFFER exits.

COMMISSION STAFFER
They're ready for you.

Bob puts the photo inside his coat pocket and gets up.

INT. COMMITTEE HEARING ROOM - DAY

Bob makes his way to the witness table, moving past Roger, now in the audience. Roger nods. Bob, without an attorney, is sworn in by Rogers.

WILLIAM ROGERS
(standing)
Please raise your right hand.
(Bob does)
Do you solemnly swear the testimony
you're about to give will be the
truth, the whole truth and nothing
but the truth, so help you God?

BOB
Yes.

WILLIAM ROGERS
Let the record show that the witness
has answered in the affirmative.

Bob sits down and gets ready for a grilling. Richard Feynman gets to start this round.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
Thank you. Mr. Ebeling, we heard
earlier some rather explicit
testimony from your colleague, Mr.
Boisjoly. He accused your former
manager, Mr. Lund, and others of
obstructing your investigation into
the O-ring matter. Is that true?

BOB
I wouldn't use the word obstruct.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
Well, how would you describe it?

BOB
I don't know.

Feynman waits a moment.

RICHARD FEYNMAN
Is that all? You don't know?

BOB

What do you want me to say?

RICHARD FEYNMAN

We want you to tell the truth. It's okay, nothing's going to happen. But we need you to corroborate or refute Mr. Boisjoly's story. Keep in mind the families of the astronauts want to hear what you have to say.

Bob turns to at Mason and Kilminster. Neither looks back at him. But Lund does. He eyes Bob intensely.

BOB

I'm a cautious man, Dr. Feynman, as anyone who knows me will say. I don't make decisions lightly, and I don't declare things to be true without sufficient evidence.

Bob reaches into his pocket and pulls out the tape recorder.

BOB

That's why I can tell you with confidence that Thiokol management tried to suppress our testimony today, and Hank Lund personally threatened me.

All eyes on Bob, as he puts the recorder in front of the microphone and hits play. Everyone listens.

LUND (ON TAPE RECORDER)

Just keep it general. Yes or no answers. Impress upon them Thiokol isn't responsible. Let them know we did all we could to prevent this heartbreaking disaster.

BOB (ON TAPE RECORDER)

And if I don't?

LUND (ON TAPE RECORDER)

I'm sure that won't be the case. You were always the sensible one, Bob. I doubt you'll be stupid and put yourself at risk.

Bob stops the tape. Rogers glares at Lund. Others on the commission shake their heads, turn to each other, write notes. Feynman oddly smiles, like he's enjoying this.

RICHARD FEYNMAN

Seems clear Mr. Lund stopped you from doing your job. Maybe he was worried about the contract with NASA, or he was acting under orders from senior management. Maybe he really believed there wasn't a problem. But he wasn't the only one. Thiokol, NASA, even members of the administration played a role in a tragedy that should have been prevented.

There's a growing buzz in the room. Rogers calls for order.

WILLIAM ROGERS

Quiet please, quiet.

(to Feynman)

Let's not speculate about who's to blame. Certainly Thiokol should have responded differently. A lot of people should have. But what Mr. Ebeling has told us today is important, and in light of Mr. Boisjoly's testimony, we hope it leads to some real change.

Bob thinks on that.

BOB

No, that's not good enough. Someone needs to be responsible. It's true a lot of people were involved. But it takes only one person to make a difference... and I tried to be the one to do something about it, and I failed. This is my fault.

The room quiets. Bob glances back to Darlene.

WILLIAM ROGERS

We all failed, Mr. Ebeling.

BOB

No, not like me.

(then)

I have nothing else to say. May I go?

Rogers nods. Bob gets up. Darlene helps him out.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

The commission is on break. Lund paces the lobby, as Mason and Kilminster, both wearing serious looks, come over.

LUND
Can you believe what they said? The
nerve of those two.

MASON
Hank, you're fired.

Mason and Kilminster depart, leaving Lund gut-punched.

EXT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING - DAY

Bob and Darlene exit the building, and see Roger waiting for them. Darlene puts a hand on Bob's arm.

DARLENE
I'll give you two a minute.

She leaves them. Roger and Bob look at each other a moment.

ROGER
You did good in there. You really
stuck it to Lund.

BOB
I meant what I said. All of it.

ROGER
We did our job. We found the problem
and argued for months till we were
blue in the face. Their job was to
listen and do something about it.
They're the ones who should walk
around feeling guilty, not you.

BOB
I don't think I can let this go,
Roger. How can I? How can you?

Roger sees there's no getting through right now.

ROGER
What're you gonna do now?

BOB
I've always wanted to work with
birds.

Roger nods. Then he holds out a hand.

ROGER
Good luck, Bob.

Bob looks at Roger's hand, then takes it and shakes. Roger turns and leaves. Off Bob watching him go--

INT. EBELING HOME - DAY, 2016

And we MATCH CUT to older Bob pausing his interview with NPR. He still carries that same guilt he had 30 years ago. It's never left him, and over time has worn him down.

BOB

I have nothing else to say.

Heather looks to her sound tech. They have enough.

INT. NPR STUDIO - DAY, 2016

Heather records her VOICEOVER for the story.

HEATHER BURNS

And for 30 years, Bob Ebeling has carried the guilt of not being able to stop the Challenger launch.

INT. LUND HOME - DAY, 2016

Lund, now in his 80s, but still fit, is listening to the radio on his porch overlooking a lawn in New Hampshire.

BOB (V.O.)

And I think that was one of the mistakes God made. He shouldn't have picked me for that job. I don't know... next time I talk to him, I'm gonna ask him, why me?

Lund feels the weight of Bob's words, his own guilt over the events suddenly consuming him.

INT. EBELING HOME - DAY, 2016

Bob is in his easy chair wearing the oxygen tube in his nose. He looks frail, his health rapidly declining.

The phone RINGS. Darlene answers in the kitchen. Bob pays the call no mind. Darlene comes over with the cordless and hands it to Bob.

DARLENE

It's Hank Lund.

Bob stares at Darlene a moment, then looks at the phone. We don't know whether or not he's going to take it. And at the moment, neither does Bob.

INT. LUND HOME - SAME

Lund waits with the phone to his ear. Then he hears Bob's creaky voice on the other end.

BOB (O.S.)

Hello?

Lund takes a breath, and a long beat. He's unsure what to say after so many years. As he finds the courage to speak, we CUT BACK TO:

INT. EBELING HOME - SAME

And Bob, unreadable as he listens, frail hands shaking. At first, he gives no visible response. But slowly the granite starts to shake loose and his face trembles, as Bob weeps.

Darlene watches from the doorway, a tear falling past a relieved smile.

INT. EBELING HOME - WEEKS LATER

There's activity in Bob's house. His TWO DAUGHTERS are there with Darlene. Everyone is smiling and looking their best.

Bob is in his easy chair wearing a suit. Next to him is NASA's DEPUTY DIRECTOR putting a gold medal with NASA's emblem in blue around his neck.

NASA DEPUTY DIRECTOR

It's our honor to give you NASA's
Distinguished Service Medal for your
efforts in trying to avert the
Challenger disaster.

Bob's family looks on, proud as can be. Though sick, Bob is upbeat and happy. He shakes the Deputy Director's hand. A PHOTOGRAPHER snaps pictures next to a LOCAL REPORTER.

LOCAL REPORTER

How do you feel, Bob?

Smiling, Bob turns to the table next to him and looks at the photo of Luke. He reaches over and adjusts it, and--

FADE OUT.

POSTSCRIPT:

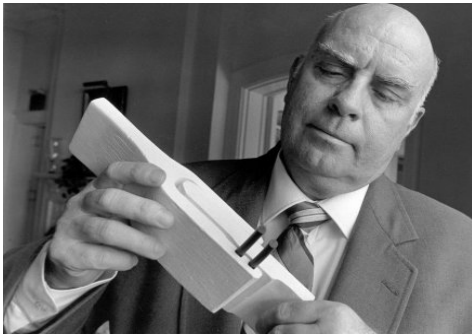
The Rogers Commission concluded that the faulty design of the O-rings and cold weather were to blame for the disaster.

Dr. Feynman insisted his conclusions be added to the report. He put the blame on NASA's refusal to recognize the O-ring problem. No one at NASA was ever held accountable.

Roger became a speaker on workplace ethics. He was given an award for his honesty and integrity before the commission. Roger died in 2012.

Because of their testimony, NASA made design changes to the shuttle. An escape system was developed and they fixed the O-ring problem, which saved astronaut lives.

Bob Ebeling died in March 2016, just two months after his NPR interview aired. He was 89.



Roger Boisjoly



Bob Ebeling



Space Shuttle *Challenger* crew

Back row: Ellison Onizuka, Christa McAuliffe, Gregory Jarvis, Judy Reznik.

Front row: Michael Smith, Dick Scobee, Ronald McNair.