

STATIC

FADE IN:

EXT. OCEAN - 8,000 FEET BELOW SEA LEVEL

A darkness, which might be that of outer space, fills the screen. A light, which at first might be a star, appears in the distance. Steadily, the light grows larger and brighter until we recognize it as the spotlight of a submersible robot moving through dark water. As it passes overhead, the WHINE of its motor rises to a pitch.

The spotlight shows up the flotsam in the water. The robot cruises low over the ocean floor which, after a beat, drops suddenly and dramatically away. The robot slows and begins to descend into

AN UNDERWATER CANYON.

The light plays across the crags and crevices of the canyon wall. The robot moves slowly and methodically, as though looking for something.

A flash of orange scales as something darts into a crevice to escape the light. The robot stops and hovers before the tiny opening.

In the shadow of the rock, a small fish, about the size of a man's hand, is hiding. It has disproportionately large eyes.

Say hello to X. ICTHYCOCCUS PROFUNDIS.

The robot slowly extends a manipulator arm toward the crevice. At the end of the arm a plastic tube is attached, connected by a hose to a specimen tank on the robot's undercarriage. The open end of this tube stops millimeters from the crevice.

A beat. There is a sudden swirl of bubbles and A SOUND OF RUSHING WATER as x. *ichthyococcus profundis* is sucked up and disappears into the tube.

INT. LABORATORY - DISSECTION BENCH - TITLE SEQUENCE

An anonymous pair of rubber-gloved hands dissects out the liver of *x. ichtyococcus profundis* and processes it to extract the DNA.

An incision is made in the fish's belly. The liver is cut out and transferred to a homogenizer, where it is pureed to a fine sludge.

The sludge is poured through a filter, and the filtrate preserved and divided among a set of centrifuge tubes.

A few drops of a chemical detergent are added to each tube. Tiny bits of protein precipitate out of the mixture.

The tubes are loaded into a high-speed centrifuge, which HUMS LOUDLY as it powers up.

A glass rod is heat-sterilized in the blue flame of a Bunsen burner.

The tubes are removed from the centrifuge, their contents now striated into a clear aqueous upper layer and an off-white solid lower layer.

The upper layers are transferred via pipette into a set of fresh test tubes. Ethanol is added, and the glass rod inserted to stir the contents. A stringy off-white protein begins to accumulate around the rod. This is DNA.

END TITLES

INT. LABORATORY - LATER

The hands affix a label-

X. ICTHYOCOCCUS, LIBRARY CULTURE, DNA

-to the side of an Erlenmeyer flask containing a cream-colored agar solution. The flask is then placed into an incubator, which looks like a small refrigerator, for storage.

On the outside of the incubator door, someone has taped up a picture of *x. ichtyococcus profundis* swimming in its

native environment. The fish is staring at the camera with its enormous, bugged-out eyes. A cartoon speech-bubble with the caption "WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?!?!!" has been affixed near its mouth.

EXT. SUBURBAN APARTMENT COMPLEX - PARKING LOT - DUSK

An old woman in houseshoes shuffles back from the mailboxes, looking through her bills. A young man folds clothes in the laundry. Somewhere, a PHONE RINGS. A DOG BARKS in the distance.

As the sun sets, the automatic security lights come on, CLICKING AND BUZZING as they power up. One particular light, high on the side of a building by the mailboxes, seems to be broken: It takes a long time to warm up, and flickers randomly on and off as it does so.

In a darkened patio alcove across the parking lot from the flickering light, a cigarette cherry glows.

IN THE ALCOVE

We discover LEWIS WEST sitting in a lawn chair, smoking a cigarette and intently watching the flickering light. He is in his late 20s and intelligent-looking, with glasses, short brown hair, and a thin build. He wears only a pair of ratty jeans.

A legal pad is on his knee and he takes rapid notes. The page is covered with a string of dots and dashes—he's recording the flickering of the light in Morse code.

In a moment, the light finishes warming up and stops flickering. Lewis watches for a second longer to make sure, then stubs his cigarette and goes

INTO THE APARTMENT.

He turns on a light.

His home is full of *puzzles*. Hundreds of them. There are interlocking solid puzzles, disentanglement puzzles, sequential movement puzzles, impossible object puzzles, folding puzzles, keychain puzzles, and books full of crossword puzzles.

But this is not a collection—no attempt has been made to display the puzzles in an orderly manner. They are just piled up on shelves and in corners and bins and boxes.

And they are all *solved*.

Otherwise, this is a pretty standard one-bedroom apartment. It has a large central living area with dining nook and attached kitchenette. A door in one wall leads to the bedroom and the bath. Besides an heirloom table and chairs in the dining nook, there is little furniture. Notably absent are a TV and a computer.

Lewis sits at the dining table, where an unfinished jigsaw puzzle is spread out. From what's there, we recognize a seascape showing a majestic floe of icebergs.

Lewis sets the legal pad on top of the puzzle and, with his pen, quickly translates the Morse-code sequence into its plaintext equivalent—

JTSSITIEESITISTIJJSSIK.

He dates the page at the top and tears it from the pad.

Tacked to a wall in the living area are three weeks' worth of similar pages. Lewis tacks up tonight's page on the bottom row, then steps back and looks at the wall. He cocks his head to one side and scratches his chin. He is looking for something.

And, in a moment, he sees it: A sequence of letters from tonight's page is identical to a sequence of letters from a page dated two weeks ago. He steps up to the wall and circles the identical sequences with his pen—

TSSITIEESITISTE.

Then he tears the two pages off the wall.

INT. APARTMENT - BY THE FRONT DOOR - 15 MINUTES LATER

Dressed now for work, Lewis stops to gather his things from a small table. He wears a backpack over one shoulder. From a small dish, he grabs wallet, keys, and a plastic clip-on ID badge. Then he opens the door and exits.

Prominently displayed on the table beside the dish is a large photo of an austere-looking 50-something man in the uniform of a US Navy Captain. His most striking feature is a full head of thick, snow-white hair.

MONTAGE - LEWIS DRIVES TO WORK - NIGHT

Behind the wheel of his light truck, Lewis idles at a traffic light, smoking out the window and staring into space. The light turns green.

There is construction on the freeway, and Lewis snarls in traffic as the road squeezes down to one lane. From above, the lights moving on the roadways suggest arteries and veins, circulation. The city is a living organism.

Ahead of him in traffic, a column of brake lights brighten and dim in sequence as the cars creep forward.

To one side, the flashing yellow warning lights on a row of construction barriers phase in and out of sequence with each other.

An ambulance races past in the closed-off lane, its rearward flashers dazzlingly bright.

On the horizon, a constellation of radio towers pulsates gently with red airplane-warning lights.

Lewis's windshield reflects the multi-colored lights of the nocturnal city, seeming to compete with each other in calling for his attention. He pulls on his cigarette, which brightens and dims in the dark interior of the car, seeming to answer.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH PARK - PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Lewis's truck pulls in. The turnpike has already been put up for the night.

EXT. LABORATORY BUILDING - FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Lewis crosses a courtyard to the glass front doors of a low-rise office building. He goes in. A sign beside the door reads

COLDSRING-HARBOR GENETIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE

and features a logotype with a prominent double-helix motif.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - BREAK ROOM

A small office converted for use by the laboratory staff. There is one door, opening to a hallway, a couch, a side table and chairs, and a counter with coffeepot, microwave, and sink. On one wall is a bulletin board with various postings. Among these is a daily log-sheet where the staff sign in and out.

Lewis stands before the bulletin board, clocking in.

A WOMAN sweeps into the room behind him. She is younger than he, attractive, with shoulder-length brown hair. She has a coffee cup in hand, and heads for the pot to fill it.

WOMAN

God I'm beat.

Lewis turns on her, surprised. She smiles at him.

WOMAN

One more for the drive home. Then try to grab a few hours' sleep. Then it's back up here at six in the morning to check my enzymes.

(indicating the coffee)

Want one?

Lewis shakes his head.

WOMAN

Are you the ten-to-six tech?

Lewis nods.

WOMAN

I'm Christine Loughland, MD/Ph. D
candidate. Nice to meet you..

He says nothing, so she checks his ID badge.

CHRISTINE

...Lewis.

LEWIS

Uh, yeah. Hello.

CHRISTINE

You work the graveyard shift by yourself?

LEWIS

Yup.

CHRISTINE

Kinda boring, isn't it?

LEWIS

Ah...yeah. A little.

An awkward beat, and he scurries past her out the door.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - LABORATORY - NIGHT

A state-of-the-art gene sequencing lab. Three long workbenches dominate the center of the room, all covered with glassware and other apparatus. The walls are lined with equipment—computers, gene-sequencers, and at least one Vent-a-Hood forced-air ventilation device.

Lewis drops his backpack on a desk at the rear. He finds safety glasses and a lab coat in a nearby cabinet and puts them on.

INSERT - THE INCUBATOR DOOR

"WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?!?" reads the caption. Lewis opens the door and removes the Erlenmeyer flask containing the *x. ichtyococcus profundis* DNA culture.

BACK TO SCENE

With practiced technique, Lewis prepares a sample of the DNA culture for processing in the lab's PCR machine, which will "amplify" the DNA molecules (reproducing them millions of times) in preparation for sequencing.

He divides fluid from the Erlenmeyer flask among several centrifuge tubes, then loads the tubes into the centrifuge to spin down their contents.

When the centrifuge has powered down, he removes the tubes, transfers the fluid layers to a fresh set, and adds several drops of chemical from a jar labeled LOADING COCKTAIL.

The PCR machine is about the size and shape of a desktop copier. Lewis opens the lid and loads the tubes inside. He programs some numbers into the keypad, then hits the green START button.

The LCD screen reads

CYCLE 1 OF 30: PROCESSING
EST. TIME: 5 HRS. 27 MIN.

The '1' and the word 'PROCESSING' are flashing.

INT. LABORATORY - LATER

A scrambled Rubik's cube is sitting on the desk. Lewis, seated, stares at it for a beat, then grabs and quickly solves it.

He sighs, bored, and tosses the cube aside. He checks his watch, then reaches into his pocket for his cigarettes. He stands up and, passing a prominent NO SMOKING sign on the wall, walks

TO THE VENT-A-HOOD.

There is a SOUND OF RUSHING AIR as he turns the 'hood on. He pulls out a cigarette, lights it, and stands there smoking, exhaling the smoke into the exhaust fan and ashing into an empty petri dish.

A computer with a large monitor sits beside the Vent-a-hood, and as Lewis smokes, he watches the screensaver evolve.

On the front of the computer case, a green hard-drive activity light flickers randomly on and off.

Lewis rests his cigarette in the petri dish and walks back
TO THE DESK.

He rummages in his backpack and retrieves the two legal-pad pages torn from the wall of his apartment.

NEAR THE VENT-A-HOOD

a large dry-erase board is hanging on the wall. Lewis copies the repeated sequence onto it in large, black letters:

TSSITIEESITISTE

He steps back, smoking as he considers the letters. Then he stubs the cigarette and moves toward the dry-erase board, marker in hand.

INT. LABORATORY - NEAR THE VENT-A-HOOD - LATER

The petri dish is full of butts and ashes. One still-lit cigarette, with a long ash, is balanced precariously on its rim.

Lewis sits backward in a chair, resting his chin on his arms on the back of the chair. He faces the dry-erase board, staring motionlessly at it.

INSERT - THE DRY-ERASE BOARD

TSSITIEESITISTE

I TESTS IT SETS TIE	SITE IT TESTS IS IE
I SET IT ITS SET SET	SETI IS TEST SITE I
TEST SITE IT IS SIE	SITE I IS SETI TEST

BACK TO SCENE

The DRONE of the Vent-a-Hood is very calming. Lewis's eyelids flutter, and then gradually close.

The still-lit cigarette continues to burn. Soon, the ash collapses, and the cigarette, now unbalanced, falls out of

the dish, rolls to the edge of the countertop, and falls onto the floor. There it slowly smolders out, leaving an ugly burn mark on the linoleum.

INT. LABORATORY - THE NEXT MORNING

The door opens to admit Christine, looking fresh and carrying a clipboard which she studies closely. She almost trips over Lewis, slumped over the chair and snoring.

CHRISTINE
(clears her throat)

Lewis?

He starts awake.

CHRISTINE
Back to check my enzymes. Remember?

LEWIS
What time is it?

CHRISTINE
A little after six.
(notices the petri dish)
Are you smoking in here?

Lewis is paralyzed: He forgot to empty the dish.

LEWIS
Ah...no?

CHRISTINE
What do you do? Blow the smoke out the Vent-a-Hood? Chow'll kill you if he finds out.

Lewis stands up and grabs the petri dish.

CHRISTINE
I guess I won't tell on you. Just be careful and don't blow yourself up.
(notices the dry-erase board)
What's this?

Lewis empties the dish into a sealed red bin labeled BIOHAZARDOUS WASTE.

LEWIS

Um, it's an anagram. At least I think it's an anagram.

CHRISTINE

An anagram?

Lewis starts packing up his things at the desk.

LEWIS

You know: You unscramble the letters and it makes a word. Or a phrase.

CHRISTINE

Oh yeah. Where'd it come from?

He freezes, his back to her, considering how to answer this. A beat, and he recovers, slinging the backpack over his shoulder and turning to face her.

LEWIS

Somebody sent it to me.

CHRISTINE

Who?

LEWIS

(heads for the door)

I don't know.

CHRISTINE

You have a secret admirer?

LEWIS

I don't think so.

He pushes the door open and is gone. Neither of them notices the stray cigarette butt on the floor beneath the Vent-a-Hood.

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - LIVING AREA - MORNING

Lewis enters, drops his backpack, and empties his pockets onto the table by the door. He peels off clothes as he heads for the bathroom.

IN THE BATHROOM

Lewis lies back in the tub, soaking. A shower-radio is PLAYING A CLASSICAL STATION, but the reception is so bad there's MORE STATIC THAN MUSIC. Lewis does not seem to mind. He closes his eyes, and in a second, he's snoring.

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Lewis has put up blankets over the windows to keep out the daylight.

A RINGING PHONE cuts the darkness. It RINGS TWICE MORE before Lewis, lying inert in bed, rolls over to answer it.

LEWIS

Hello?

(beat)

Hello?

There is no response. He hangs up.

EXT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - PARKING LOT - DUSK

High on the side of a building, the failing security light CLICKS on and begins flickering...randomly?

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - LABORATORY - NIGHT

Lewis loads amplified DNA samples into the automated gene sequencer, which, by a process called "gel electrophoresis," will determine the order of the bases which make up the DNA molecules.

If the PCR machine was a desktop copier, the gene-sequencer is a full-size version. It is connected by a cable to the computer beside the Vent-a-Hood. Lewis opens the loading door and inserts the DNA samples into the machine.

At the adjoined computer, he selects the RUN option. A WHIRRING NOISE comes from the sequencer, and a window appears on the computer screen.

It shows a graph with four colored lines slowly evolving from the origin: The red line is labeled with a letter G, the blue line with a letter A, the yellow line with a letter T, and the green line with a letter C.

INT. LABORATORY - LATER

Lewis has his elbows on the desk, cradling his head in his hands as he stares intently at a legal pad.

Written across the top of the page is the single line

TSSITIEESITISTE.

Just below it on the pad, a pen sits unused.

A LOUD BEEPING sounds from across the lab. Lewis snaps out of his reverie, stands up, and walks

TO THE VENT-A-HOOD

where some chemical reactions are cooking. Lewis picks up a kitchen timer, which is sitting among the apparatus there, and pushes a button. The BEEPING STOPS.

As Lewis works, the screensaver on the monitor of the adjacent computer slowly evolves. Suddenly, it vanishes, as if someone moved the mouse, to be replaced by the window showing the four lines of the gene sequencer output.

Lewis notices this and glances at the computer. Thinking nothing of it at first, he goes back to work.

After a beat, however, he looks back at the screen.

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE COMPUTER SCREEN

- A) The red line is labeled with a letter G.
- B) The blue line is labeled with a letter A.
- C) The yellow line is labeled with a letter T.
- D) The green line is labeled with a letter C.

BACK TO SCENE

Realization hits him. Forgetting his work, Lewis runs for the dry-erase board and feverishly begins writing.

INT. LABORATORY - THE NEXT MORNING

The door opens to admit Christine, carrying her clipboard and looking chipper. She only makes it a few steps before Lewis jumps out at her. He looks crazy.

LEWIS

Christine!

CHRISTINE

(jumps, startled)

Ah! Lewis! You scared me.

LEWIS

I figured it out.

CHRISTINE

You figured what out?

LEWIS

(pointing)

The anagram. Only, it's not an anagram.

INSERT - THE DRY-ERASE BOARD

	<u>TSSITIEESITISTE</u>	
TGGCTCAAGCTCGTA	ACCTATGGCTATCAG	GTTAGACCTAGATGC
CAAGCGTTAGCGACT	AGGCACTTGCACGAT	TCCATAGGCATACTG
GAATGTCCATGTAGC	ATTCACGGTCACTAG	TCCGTGAACGTGCTA
CGGACATTGACAGCT	CTTGCGAATGCGTCA	ATTGAGCCTGAGTAC
TAACCTCGGACTCATG	GCCTGTAACTGTCTGA	AGGTATCCGTATGAC
CTTACAGGTACATCG	GAACGCTTACGCAGT	GTTGCAATCGCTGA
ACCGAGTTCGAGCAT	TGGATACCGATAGTC	CAATCTGGATCTACG
GCCAGATTCAGACGT	TAAGTGCCAGTGATC	CGGTCTAAGTCTGCA

BACK TO SCENE

CHRISTINE

What are you talking about, Lewis?

LEWIS

It's a gene sequence. See? There are only four letters in the anagram: S, E, T, and I. There are four DNA bases: Guanine, Adenine, Thiamine, Cytosine. Each letter represents one of the DNA bases!

CHRISTINE

Um. Okay.

(beat)

How do you know which letter stands for which base?

LEWIS

I don't. But there can only be twenty-four possibilities: Four times three times two times one. I've already worked them all out. It has to be one of these sequences!

CHRISTINE

What has to be one of these sequences?

LEWIS

The one I'm supposed to find!

CHRISTINE

What, did you get this off a box of Cap'n Crunch? Did you lose the encoder ring? What the hell is this, Lewis?

LEWIS

I...

(beat)

Never mind.

He turns away. She looks amused: He's an odd one.

CHRISTINE

I think you're staying up here too late at night, man. You've got DNA on the brain.

He's looking at the computer:

On the front of the case, the green hard-drive activity light flickers randomly on and off.

A beat. Lewis turns back to her.

LEWIS

(urgently)

Do you have access to the laboratory nucleotide database? To the *x. ichtyococcus* genome?

CHRISTINE
(beat)

Yes.

LEWIS
Let me use it? Just for a minute?

She looks at him, considers the look in his eyes. She's not sure what she's getting into.

CHRISTINE
Yeah. Okay.

INT. LABORATORY - AT THE COMPUTER

Christine sits at the keyboard and Lewis rides shotgun. She types the last of Lewis's 24 sequences into a dialogue box labeled ENTER SEARCH STRING(S):

LEWIS
That's the last one.

CHRISTINE
We can run them as a batch. Here.

She clicks on a button labeled START SEARCH.

A box pops up with the message SEARCHING..

A beat, and a window opens titled SEARCH RESULTS.

INSERT - THE WINDOW

TGGCTCAAGCTCGTA 0	ACCTATGGCTATCAG 0	GTTAGACCTAGATGC 0
CAAGCGTTAGCGACT 0	AGGCACTTGACGAT 0	TCCATAGGCATACTG 0
GAATGTCCATGTAGC 0	ATTCACGGTCACTAG 0	TCCGTGAACGTGCTA 0
CGGACATTGACAGCT 3	CTTGCGAATGCGTCA 0	ATTGAGCCTGAGTAC 0
TAACTCGGACTCATG 0	GCCTGTAACTGTCTGA 0	AGGTATCCGTATGAC 0
CTTACAGGTACATCG 0	GAACGCTTACGCAGT 0	GTTTCGCAATCGCTGA 0
ACCGAGTTCGAGCAT 0	TGGATACCGATAGTC 0	CAATCTGGATCTACG 0
GCCAGATTCAGACGT 0	TAAGTGCCAGTGATC 0	CGGTCTAAGTCTGCA 0

BACK TO SCENE

CHRISTINE
Look at that. You actually got some hits.

She clicks on the link, and three large blocks of text appear in a new window, each a long string of the DNA base letters G, A, T, and C.

CHRISTINE

That's kind of interesting: All three hits are in intragenous regions of the genome.

LEWIS

(beat)

I...uh, don't know what that means.

CHRISTINE

An intron is a region of DNA that doesn't code for protein production. Nobody knows exactly where they come from—they may be bits of old viruses, or mutations, or the results of copying errors. There are special marker sequences that identify their edges so the cell knows to ignore them during protein production. But they get copied and passed on from generation to generation just like the rest of the genome.

LEWIS

You mean, it's in a part of the genome that doesn't serve any biological function at all?

CHRISTINE

Not that we know of. Introns are just random noise in the DNA signal. Like genetic static. Now...hold on a sec.

(beat)

Look at this. It looks like all three of these introns are identical. And they're almost five-hundred bases long.

LEWIS

Is that unusual?

CHRISTINE

I think so. Yes.

(beat)

Lewis: Where did this sequence come from?

LEWIS

(beat)

Can you get me a printout of all this?

INT. LABORATORY - ON THE PRINTER - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

The last of three pages containing the text of the three introns slides into the output tray.

IN THE HALLWAY

Lewis comes out of the lab with the printouts and walks down the hall to an open office door. The placard reads

DANIEL CHOW, M.D., Ph.D.
HEAD OF RESEARCH

INSIDE THE OFFICE

DR. CHOW, a trim, professional-looking Asian in his mid-40s, has just arrived at work for the day. He is unpacking his briefcase on the desk when Lewis knocks softly on the door. He looks up.

CHOW

(beat)

Lewis, right?

LEWIS

Can I talk to you for a minute?

CHOW

Come in.

Lewis steps into the office and approaches the desk.

CHOW

What's on your mind?

LEWIS

I think I've found something.

He holds out the stack of printouts. Chow takes it and quickly sheaves through them.

CHOW

What am I supposed to be seeing?

LEWIS

They're introns, sir, from x. ichtycoccus.
There's three of them there, identical
across nearly five-hundred bases.

Chow looks at the printouts more carefully. A long beat,
and he restacks them and hands them back to Lewis.

CHOW

Lewis, what is your job here?

Lewis, unbalanced by this question, does not respond.

CHOW

You're a tech, aren't you? Running PCR and
so forth on the night shift?

He nods hesitantly.

CHOW

Is there anything in your job description
about conducting independent research on
our time and equipment? Anything about
snooping around in our proprietary
databases?

Cowed, Lewis says nothing.

CHOW

Then please don't. Our budget is stretched
as it is, and we can't afford to be wasting
time or money on unsanctioned research.

Red-faced, Lewis tries to duck quickly out the door.

CHOW

Wait a minute, Lewis.

He stops. Chow reaches into his desk drawer and pulls out
a cigarette butt. He holds it up so Lewis can get a good
look at it.

CHOW

Is this yours?

Lewis only stares in horror.

CHOW

If I ever catch you smoking in my lab,
I'll have you out on your ass faster than
you can think.

(beat)

Are we clear?

IN THE HALLWAY

Looking shaken, Lewis slinks out of Chow's office and bumps into Christine coming the other way.

CHRISTINE

Lewis! What happened?

He avoids eye contact and skirts around her. She looks after him with concern.

In a moment, Chow appears in the door of his office.

CHOW

Christine. May I see you in here, please?

He goes back in. She follows.

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MORNING

Lewis is drawn up in a little ball in the middle of the tub. His hand shakes as he smokes. The shower radio is playing LOUD STATIC, with occasional fragments of what might be MUSIC. Lewis rocks back and forth on his haunches, staring into the distance.

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - LIVING AREA - LATER

Lewis enters with his hair still wet, wearing only a towel. He tears the remaining legal-pad pages off the wall and throws them away. Then he tacks the three intron-printouts up in their place.

He steps back from the wall and lights a cigarette. He stares hard at the three printouts.

MONTAGE - LEWIS'S OBSESSION

The cigarette burns down in Lewis's hand and a long dollop of ash falls to the carpet. He's still staring.

In the blank space at the bottom of one of the pages, he writes out the intron sequence in reverse order.

On another page, he writes out the sequence in a spiral shape, starting in the middle and working outward. When he runs out of room on the page, he continues onto the wall.

He stands back to examine his work. His hair has dried into a frenzied mess.

He digs through a drawer in the kitchen, pulling out empty pill bottles and other junk. At the bottom, he unearths a box of crayons.

In large letters on the bare wall beneath the printouts, he writes out the intron sequence in crayon, using a different color for each base.

He kneels on the carpet in the Japanese *seiza* position, staring at the colored letters. For a long time he does not move.

He paces circles in the middle of the room, smoking and muttering to himself. Outside, night is falling, and through the window he sees the security light flickering.

Outside on the porch, he records the flickering of the light in Morse code again.

He sits at the dining room table staring at the page of translated Morse code. Suddenly, he tears the page out of the pad, crumples it up, and hurls it across the room. Then he hides his face in his hands.

BACK TO SCENE

All that work, and Lewis is right back where he started: Standing in the middle of the room, smoking a cigarette and staring at the wall, which is now covered with writing—the intron sequence marked up and reorganized in a dozen ways. At some point, Lewis has lost his towel and is now completely naked. There are dark circles under his eyes.

The PHONE RINGS. Transfixed, Lewis does not move. It RINGS THREE TIMES MORE, and the answering machine picks up. When Christine's voice comes over the speaker, he looks over sharply.

CHRISTINE (O.S.)

Lewis, hi. It's Christine. I'm sorry to bother you at home, but I didn't see you at the lab tonight, and...well, I know you were upset this morning, and I just wanted to call and see if you were okay. I'm at home, now. You can call me here at 555-8969.

(beat)

Again, sorry to bother you. 'Bye.

The machine cuts off. Lewis reaches for the phone and begins to dial, but stops halfway and hangs it up again.

He shakes his head, as if to clear it, and turns back to the wall. He approaches

CLOSE TO THE WALL

and stares at the sequence with a hateful look. He puts out his cigarette by grinding it into one printout, leaving a black smudge on the page.

Then he reaches up and rotates the printout on its thumbtack so that it is upside-down. He leans against the wall with his arms holding it in that position, and stares at the inverted letters.

A beat, and he sighs and puts his head down on his arms. His shoulders start to quiver. He is crying.

LEWIS

(agonized)

What...the fuck...IS IT?!?!?

He slams his open palm against the wall and then claws it, crumpling one of the pages. Then he slides down the wall, tearing the printout as he goes. He collapses at the baseboard, sobbing, and curls into a fetal ball.

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - LIVING AREA - EARLY MORNING

Lewis is asleep, curled at the base of the wall. Through the window, we see the security light outside start flickering. Lewis continues sleeping.

In a few moments, it stops.

The PHONE RINGS. Lewis's eyes snap open, and he scrambles to answer it.

LEWIS

Hello?

(beat)

Hello?!?

(beat)

Who is this?!?

He slams down the phone. Looking at the wall makes him wince. He shakes his head and stumbles...

INTO THE KITCHEN

He gets a glass out of the sink and opens the refrigerator. Reaching for the orange juice, he notices a plastic baggy wadded up on the shelf beside it.

He puts the orange juice down and grabs the baggy instead.

He empties its contents into his palm—a pile of flat $\frac{1}{4}$ " squares of translucent green material. Windowpane LSD.

He counts out three hits and pops them into his mouth with a blank expression.

MONTAGE - LEWIS PREPARES FOR THE TRIP

The bathtub faucet SQUEAKS as Lewis turns on the water.

Outside on the patio, Lewis rummages in his utility closet and produces two items: An extension cord, and a board about 1' wide and 3' long.

In the living room, Lewis pulls the three printouts off the wall and tacks them to the board.

In the bedroom, Lewis plugs the extension cord into the wall. He plugs the other end into a small lamp beside his bed.

In the bathroom, Lewis puts the board down across the tub, and sets the lamp on one corner.

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Lewis enters with a pack of cigarettes, an ashtray, and a lighter, and sets them down within reach of the tub, which is now full. He turns off the water and shuts the door, plunging the bathroom into

DARKNESS

The SOUND OF SPLASHING WATER as Lewis gets in the tub.

MONTAGE - LEWIS TRIPS BALLS

CLICK. Lewis turns on the lamp, revealing the scene: He sits in the tub with the board across his knees and the lamp shining over his shoulder on the printouts.

CLICK. Lewis reaches over and turns on the shower radio. CLASSICAL MUSIC, thickly cut with STATIC, fills the air.

FLICK. Lewis lights a cigarette and takes a drag. The LSD is beginning to hit—he waves the cigarette back and forth in his field of vision, watching tracers follow the cherry.

From Lewis's POV, the walls of the bathroom seem to breathe. He looks down at the printout. The letters G, A, T, and C wiggle and boogie, forming new shapes, warring with each other, suggesting possibilities.

With a wet finger, Lewis touches the cigarette burn on the one printout. The ash and water swirl together and bleed through the paper in slow motion, impossibly intricate.

Suddenly, the word "LEWIS" seems to materialize out of the RADIO-STATIC. It sounds faint at first, and the voice is distinctly malevolent, but as Lewis listens, it becomes clearer and more...fatherly.

Unnerved, Lewis reaches and turns off the radio. The MOIST SOUNDS of the bathtub crowd in to fill the silence. Trying to relax, Lewis leans his head back and closes his eyes.

In his mind's eye, Lewis sees the failing security light flickering again, only now he can hear a CLICKING as it flashes. In a moment, the security light gives way to the blinking lights on the construction barriers on the freeway, and then to the brake lights of cars, the siren lights of the ambulance, and the gently swelling and ebbing glow of the radio towers. Next comes the flickering hard drive light on the computer, and then the gene-sequencer readout screen, with its multicolored lines and letters. The CLICKING continues throughout.

These flashing-light images barrage Lewis's mind in a recurring sequence, gradually escalating in tempo. As the montage speeds up, new material creeps in, but only for fractions of a second: The fish-photo with its caption—WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?!?!? The photo of the uniformed man from Lewis's table. As the speed becomes frantic, the CLICKING escalates into a BUZZING and then into a TONE.

There is a sudden silence. Back in the tub, Lewis's eyes are wide open and fixed at infinity, the pupils dilated maximally. The cigarette falls from his fingers and lands in the water with a HISS.

Green-phosphor ASCII 1s and 0s stream across a blank computer screen. The screen gradually fills with these BINARY NUMBERS, then fades to black.

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - THE MORNING AFTER

Lewis sits up suddenly in bed, as if waking from a nightmare. A beat, and he throws the covers off and goes

TO THE SINK

He turns on the light and looks in the mirror. He looks rather the worse for wear. He runs a hand through his hair and notices something strange. He plucks a hair out and raises it to the light.

It is white as snow.

IN THE BATHROOM

Lewis stumbles in and surveys the destruction. The tub is still full of water, and there are several cigarette butts floating in it, as well as one of the printouts. The other two are crumpled up on the floor. The board has somehow ended up in the toilet bowl.

EXT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - PATIO - MORNING

Lewis emerges carrying the board and the surviving two printouts. He tosses the board into the utility closet, then plops down in his lawn chair and lights a cigarette.

He uncrumples the printouts on the table and examines them.

A forest of doodles and numbers and letters covers every inch of both pages. Lewis shakes his head and turns a page over. The backside is in just as much confusion.

Then, his attention catches on something separated off in a box in one corner of the page.

INSERT - THE BOX

```
10/101/1011/1101/10001/10011/10111/11101/11111/
100111/101011/101111/110101/111011/111101/1000011/
1000111/1001111/1010111/1011001
```

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis sits forward. He parks his cigarette in an ashtray and strokes his chin as something from the night before starts to come back to him. We can almost see the gears turning in his head.

In a moment, he leaps to his feet, page in hand, and runs inside. His forgotten cigarette is still burning in the ashtray.

INT. LEWIS'S TRUCK - MORNING

Lewis, dressed now (albeit sloppily), races down the freeway. The crumpled page is crushed in his hand as he grips the wheel, swerving through traffic like a madman.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - HALLWAY - MORNING

Lewis beats frantically on Dr. Chow's office door.

LEWIS

Chow?? Chow! Are you in there?

There is no response. Christine appears behind him.

CHRISTINE

Lewis?

He turns on her, looking frantic.

LEWIS

Have you seen Chow?

CHRISTINE

He's not here. It's Saturday.

LEWIS

Is it?

CHRISTINE

What's the matter, Lewis?

LEWIS

C'mon. I've gotta show you something.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - BREAK ROOM - MORNING

Lewis tears a flyer off the bulletin board and turns it over on the table for scratch paper. He lays the printout next to it. Christine leans over beside him.

LEWIS

This is the intron we found in x. ichtyococcus. Now, because there are four DNA bases, it takes two bits to represent a single base as a binary number, right? Now...

CHRISTINE

Hold on a second. What?

LEWIS

Zero-zero. Zero-one. One-zero. One-one.
Four unique possibilities with two binary
digits.

CHRISTINE

Binary digits? What are you talking about?

LEWIS

Look...

He grabs the pencil and writes on the scratch page:

G = 00
A = 01
T = 11
C = 10

LEWIS

See?

CHRISTINE

You're trying to convert this DNA sequence
into binary numbers?

LEWIS

Right!

(holds out the pencil)

You do it.

CHRISTINE

Do what?

LEWIS

Using this key, translate our intron
sequence into binary numbers.

CHRISTINE

(beat)

Lewis, it's five-hundred bases long.

LEWIS

Just the first twenty bases or so.

She looks at him hesitantly, then takes the pencil and
writes out

101101101111011000110011101111110111111

on the scratch page. Lewis grabs the pencil back.

LEWIS

Now, we just divide it up like this..

He goes through making vertical marks between the digits to divide them into groups—

10/11/101/1011/1101/10001/10011/10111/11101/11111

—then thrusts the pencil back at her.

LEWIS

Now, go through and convert each one of those groups into a decimal number.

CHRISTINE

Lewis, what's the point?

LEWIS

If you just do it, you'll see.

She glares, then takes the pencil and starts writing.

CHRISTINE

The first one's two.

(beat)

The next one...three.

(beat)

The next one...five.

(beat)

...Seven...

(beat)

...Eleven...

(beat)

...Thirteen...

(beat)

...Sevent—

She stops and looks up at him in amazement.

CHRISTINE

Lewis, is this right?

LEWIS

(nodding)

They're all prime. In sequence.

She gapes. He grabs the pencil out of her hand.

LEWIS

And look-it keeps going: Here's nineteen.
Twenty-three. Twenty-nine. I have no idea
how far...

(beat)

Thirty-one. Thirty seven.

CHRISTINE

Lewis, are you pulling my leg? Is this
some kind of joke?

LEWIS

It's not a joke.

(still writing)

Forty-one. Forty-three.

She sits down heavily. He stops writing and looks at her.

CHRISTINE

This has to be a mistake.

LEWIS

It's not a mistake.

CHRISTINE

How far does it go...?

LEWIS

I'm up to...thirty-two bases so far.

CHRISTINE

Jesus. The odds that would happen
accidentally are...

LEWIS

Completely nil.

(beat)

Do you want me to keep going? Here:
Forty-seven. Fifty-one. Fifty-three.

CHRISTINE

Lewis, you've got to tell me:
Where did this sequence come from?

LEWIS

It's in the fish's genome!

CHRISTINE

That's not what I meant. How did you
figure this out? Who sent this to you?

LEWIS

(grows irate)

You don't believe me? Check the database
again, if you want! I'll wait! I'm not
making this up!

CHRISTINE

I believe you, Lewis. It's just that...this
almost has to have been done deliberately.

LEWIS

Of course! There's no way a natural
process is going to just accidentally
encode a long sequence of prime numbers in
fish DNA! That's the point!

CHRISTINE

For chrissakes, Lewis! Six months ago,
this fish was in the water! Six months
before that, this was an undiscovered
species! There's no biochemistry
laboratory in the world that could encode
something like this in a DNA molecule,
splice that DNA molecule into the genome of
a living organism, then reintroduce that
organism into the wild and have the
alterations spread throughout the entire
species in six months! It's impossible!

LEWIS

Well maybe it wasn't done on this world.

CHRISTINE

Oh please, Lewis...

LEWIS

You just said yourself it couldn't have been done by human science, and that it couldn't be a natural phenomenon!

(beat)

So...what else?

She rubs her eyes wearily.

CHRISTINE

Well, wherever it came from, Dr. Chow's gonna wanna know about it. I think I've got his home number around here somewhere.

LEWIS

Well, I suggest we use it.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - LABORATORY - LATER

The door opens to admit Dr. Chow, with Christine following close behind. At the computer, Lewis has the x. *ichthyococcus* database open and is searching through it.

CHRISTINE

...and we don't know how far it goes yet but it's way over the threshold of complexity so there's no way it could be an acc-

CHOW

Just wait a minute, all right? I want to hear this whole thing over again, from the top, but you've got to calm down first because right now you're not making any sen-

He notices Lewis at the computer and stops.

CHOW

What's he doing here?

CHRISTINE

He's the one who found it, Dr. Chow.

CHOW

(approaching Lewis)

Is that the x. *ichthyococcus* database?

Lewis says nothing.

CHOW

(wagging his finger)

What did I tell you about that database?

CHRISTINE

I let him use it.

CHOW

I know. And I talked to you about it, too, didn't I?

(beat)

I don't know what's happening here, but whatever it is, we stick to protocol. That's what makes us scientists. And that means that Lewis does not have special dispensation to access our proprietary database unless I say so.

(beat)

Is that entirely clear to both of you?

(beat, to Lewis)

Now, you're going to log off that workstation and come with us into my office. And then somebody is going to explain to me just what the hell is going on.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - CHOW'S OFFICE - LATER

Chow sits behind his desk, with Lewis and Christine in chairs opposite. Chow is sheaving through their scratch pages and notes, scowling at every page.

Christine and Lewis exchange a nervous glance.

Chow drops the papers and fixes Lewis with a glare.

CHOW

Explain something to me, Lewis: How is it that you just happened to stumble upon a thing like this?

LEWIS

(beat)

I don't know what you mean.

CHOW

It's a straightforward question: How did you find this?

LEWIS

It, ah...it just sort of came to me.

CHOW

In a dream, you mean? Something like that?

LEWIS

Not a dream. More like...an intuition.

CHOW

I see.

(beat)

Would you leave us alone, please?

LEWIS

I don't understand.

CHOW

I want to speak to Christine alone.

Lewis exchanges a look with her, then rises and stalks out of the room.

CHOW

So...are you and Lewis involved?

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry?

CHOW

Are you seeing each other? Are you friends? Is there anything more to your relationship than the purely professional?

CHRISTINE

I don't see what that has to do with anything.

CHOW

It could turn out to be very important to you. And to your career.

CHRISTINE

I just met him last week when you put me on the project!

(beat)

What are you getting at?

He holds up the stack of papers.

CHOW

This...

(drops them again)

...is almost certainly a hoax. And if you are involved, it'll mean the end of your career as a scientist.

CHRISTINE

Wait...you think Lewis faked these data somehow? He doesn't even have access to the computer where they're kept!

CHOW

He didn't, you mean. Until you gave it to him.

CHRISTINE

The first time I let him use that database was when we found these introns! And he never even touched the keyboard!

CHOW

All right. I believe you.

(beat)

But Lewis...I don't trust him. Did you know he used to be in the military? Doing intelligence work. Cryptography. Computers. He's got all the skills he'd need to hack into our database and plant something like this.

CHRISTINE

He's not the sort of person who would do something like that.

CHOW

And how do you know that?

She has no response.

EXT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - PATIO - NIGHT

Lewis stands at the railing, smoking. In the B.G., the security light burns brightly, without flickering, and Lewis is not interested in it. Instead, his attention is focused on the patio alcove across the parking lot, where an ultraviolet bug-zapper light buzzes and snaps as moths fly around and into it.

INSERT - THE BUG-LIGHT

A smoldering moth crawls up the inside of the wire cage, struggling toward the light even as it burns.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis exhales a puff of smoke as he contemplates the fate of the moth.

From inside the apartment, the PHONE RINGS. Lewis looks around, then flicks his cigarette away and goes

INTO THE LIVING ROOM.

He walks to the phone and is about to pick it up, but something stops him. It RINGS AGAIN.

He looks out the window at the security light, then out the sliding-glass door at the bug-light, then back at the phone.

It RINGS AGAIN.

He reaches down and unplugs it from the wall.

INT. COLDSRING-HABROR BUILDING - BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Christine stands with the phone to her ear, listening as it rings on and on. She sighs, frustrated, and hangs up.

She chews her nail for a beat, thinking, then moves purposefully away from the phone.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - CHOW'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The *x. ichtyococcus* database is open on Chow's computer screen. He makes a comparison with the data on Lewis's printout. He clucks his tongue, drops the printout, and sits back in his chair to think.

A beat, and he reaches for his phone and dials a number.

CHOW

(into phone)

Hi. Who am I speaking to, please?

(beat)

Hello, Debbie. This is Daniel Chow calling from Coldspring-Harbor. Is Dr. Souberg around?

(beat)

Well, maybe you can help me. I may have found something over here in *x. ichtyococcus*, and I want to verify with your data. I'm going to read you some nucleotide sequences and I want you to run them in your database and fax me any hits that you get. They're not very long, about forty BP ap-

(beat)

What did you say?

(beat)

No, you misunderstood me. I need you to run a search for me in your database.

(beat)

I understand that the database is proprietary, but my lab is part of the partnership that owns it, so I'd appreciate it if you'd...

(beat, icily)

Listen, do you have any idea who I am?

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - DINING NOOK - NIGHT

Lewis has papers spread all over the table. In places, the unfinished iceberg puzzle is visible beneath them.

He writes quickly on a legal pad.

INSERT - THE LEGAL PAD

At the top of the page are several columns listing the first 59 prime numbers up to 271. Beneath that, Lewis writes out the base sequence

AAAGGGTTTCCCCCTTTGGGAAA

and circles it emphatically.

BACK TO SCENE

A SOFT KNOCKING at the door. Lewis jumps up, skittishly, and turns off the light before tiptoeing over

TO THE DOOR.

He looks out the peephole.

INSERT - THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE

Christine is standing there, looking around nervously.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis turns on the light, unlocks and opens the door.

LEWIS

Good. I'm glad you're here.

She steps inside.

LEWIS

C'mere. You gotta see this.

He leads the way

TO THE DINING TABLE.

She follows cautiously, glancing around his apartment and noting the absence of furniture, the piles of puzzles everywhere, and the DNA letters all over the bare wall in pencil and in crayon.

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry to just drop by like this.
I tried to call but I got no answer.

LEWIS

Here. Take a look at this.

He points to the legal pad. She examines it.

LEWIS

The intron encodes the first fifty-nine primes, up to two-seventy-one. But the really interesting part is here, at the end. There are twenty-three bases between the end of the prime sequence and the end of the intron, that don't appear to encode any numbers.

He points to the circled sequence AAAGGGTTTCCCCCTTTGGGAAA.

LEWIS

Notice anything unusual about this sequence?

CHRISTINE

(beat)

Yeah. It's the same forwards and backwards. What do you call it...?

LEWIS

A palindrome.

CHRISTINE

So? What do you think it means?

LEWIS

I'm not sure. But I think it may be...a marker of some sort.

CHRISTINE

A marker for what?

LEWIS

For the rest of the message.

CHRISTINE

So you think there's more.

LEWIS

There has to be! I mean, why go to the trouble of encoding all these prime numbers

LEWIS (CON'T.)

and then stop? The prime sequence is just a flag to get our attention and lead us to this marker, which will then lead us to the real heart of the message!

(beat)

We've got to get back up to the lab, so we can run this marker sequence through the database!

CHRISTINE

Lewis...

LEWIS

You'll have to be the one to do it, so we don't piss Chow off any more, but...

CHRISTINE

Lewis, listen to me: That's what I came here to talk to you about it: Chow thinks this whole thing is a fake.

LEWIS

A fake?

She sits down heavily at the table.

CHRISTINE

He thinks you did it, you know, as a hoax. A publicity stunt.

This strikes him. He sits down in the chair next to her.

LEWIS

(beat)

That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

CHRISTINE

He thinks you hacked into the database and planted this information.

LEWIS

Well, there's nothing I can do about that, if he wants to be an idiot. We don't really need him, anyway...

CHRISTINE

Yes we do. That database belongs to him.

LEWIS

Yeah, but you've got access and you can...

He cuts off abruptly, realizing what this is really about.

LEWIS

You don't believe me, do you?

CHRISTINE

It's not that I think you're lying, Lewis, it's just that...this whole thing seems so crazy, I-

LEWIS

(on his feet)

Fuck you. I don't have to take this shit from you, or from that asshole up at the lab. The contents of that database will be published sooner or later, and I'll-

Suddenly he stops, grabs a double-handful of papers off the table, and flings them across the room with a scream.

LEWIS

GODDAMMIT!!!

Instinctively, Christine is on her feet and backing toward the door. Lewis glares at her, red-faced and breathing hard, and realizes he's frightened her.

This seems to take all the wind out of his sails, and he falls wearily back into the chair, holding his head in his hands.

Silence for a long beat, now, while Christine watches him warily, trying to decide whether to head for the door and not ever look back.

When he finally speaks, Lewis does not lift his head.

LEWIS

(hoarse)

Go ahead and go if you want.

She does not. Instead, she eases back over to the table and sits down across from him.

CHRISTINE

Lewis, you've got to try to see things from Dr. Chow's point of view...

LEWIS

Fuck him.

CHRISTINE

Lewis, these things you say you've found...are things that no serious scientist is looking for in DNA, or even thinking about looking for in DNA, and when you come to us and say you've found them because you had an intuition...well, there's just no way he can take you seriously.

Lewis lifts his head and looks at her.

LEWIS

Honestly, Christine, do I strike you as the kind of person who's looking for publicity?

CHRISTINE

Lewis, do you remember that day in the lab, when you were working on your anagram?

LEWIS

No.

CHRISTINE

Do you remember what you said to me? That somebody sent it to you?

LEWIS

No.

CHRISTINE

What were you talking about? Who sent it to you?

LEWIS

No. I don't know. You'd never believe me.

CHRISTINE

Why shouldn't I?

LEWIS

Because you don't believe me now! While the evidence is right in front of you! There's no way you're going to believe me if I...

(beat)

No. Alright? Just forget about it.

A beat, and she stands up and heads for the door.

LEWIS

Christine?

She turns.

LEWIS

Do me a favor?

He tears the page off the pad and holds it out to her.

LEWIS

Just take this, will you? Run that sequence through the database. See what's there. What harm can it do?

She considers it for a beat, then snatches the page from his outstretched hand.

She opens the door and leaves him sitting at the table.

EXT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Christine walks to her car by the mailboxes. She unlocks the door and gets

IN THE CAR.

She digs in her purse for a bottle of aspirin. She opens it and dry-swallows two pills. Then she examines the page Lewis gave her in the light coming through the car window.

As she looks at it, the light illuminating the page begins to flicker, making it hard to read.

Christine casts an annoyed glance out the window at the flickering security light, then folds the page into her purse. She meets her own gaze in the rearview mirror, shakes her head as though dismissing a crazy idea, and starts the engine.

As she drives away, the security light stops flickering.

MONTAGE - THE NEXT MORNING ARRIVES

As the dawn light rises in the parking lot, the security light switches off with a CLICK.

Inside his apartment, Lewis has fallen asleep across the iceberg puzzle (which is much closer to completion), and is twitching and muttering as he dreams.

As the sky brightens, cars zoom along the elevated freeway.

A cluster of radio towers stands out against the horizon, their warning lights inactive during the daylight hours.

Outside the Coldspring-Harbor building, the morning sun casts shadows across the courtyard.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - LABORATORY - MORNING

Looking rested, Christine tends to some reactions cooking under the Vent-a-Hood. She wears safety goggles, gloves, and a lab coat.

A LOUD BEEP sounds from across the lab. She looks over to see pages sliding out of the fax machine by the door.

She finishes pouring, then crosses

TO THE FAX MACHINE.

A total of 5 pages are lying in the hopper. The top four sheets are covered with DNA sequence data. Christine flips through these, without really seeing them, and arrives at the fifth, bottom, page, which is a cover sheet.

INSERT - THE COVER SHEET

ATTN: DR. DANIEL CHOW, HEAD OF RESEARCH
FROM: DEBBIE SOLOMON @ WOODS HOLE OGI

DR. CHOW-

SORRY IT TOOK SO LONG TO GET BACK TO YOU. WE FOUND
FOUR HITS FOR YOUR SEQUENCE, BUT AS YOU CAN SEE ALL
ARE INTROGENOUS. SORRY TO DISAPPOINT.

-DEBBIE

BACK TO SCENE

Christine flips back to examine the first 4 pages.

IN THE HALLWAY

Christine exits the lab, perusing the pages with mounting
interest. She walks quickly to Chow's office and knocks on
the door.

There is no answer.

A beat, while she stands there looking over the sequence
data. Then she strides back down the hall

INTO THE LAB.

One of her reactions is bubbling over under the Vent-a-
Hood. She walks right past it

TO THE DESK

where her purse is sitting. She opens it and fishes out
the page from Lewis's legal pad, which she opens on the
desktop.

She compares the sequence on Lewis's page to the last 23
bases of the sequence on the faxed pages.

They are identical.

AT THE COMPUTER

Christine clicks on the icon to open the *x. ichtyococcus* database.

A dialog box appears with a prompt—ENTER SEARCH STRING(S):

She types in the text of the 'marker' sequence—

AAAGGGTTTCCCCCTTTGGGAA

—and hits ENTER. A message appears:

SEARCHING..

From O.S., the SOUND OF THE DOOR OPENING. Christine looks up to see Dr. Chow enter the lab. He notices her immediately and seems surprised to see her.

CHOW

Oh. Hello Christine. You're here early.

CHRISTINE

I had some enzymes I needed to get started.

She notices that her reactions, forgotten under the Vent-a-Hood, are bubbling over. She looks back nervously to see if Chow has noticed also, but, preoccupied, he has not.

He steps over to the fax machine and checks the hopper. Finding it empty, he nods curtly at Christine and exits.

She looks down at the faxed pages sitting on the desk beside her, then back at the screen, where a message box titled SEARCH RESULTS is waiting.

INSERT - THE COMPUTER SCREEN

FOUND **33** HITS FOR SEARCH STRING
AAAGGGTTTCCCCCTTTGGGAAA IN DATABASE
 X. ICTHYCOCCUS PROFUNDIS - MASTER GENOME

BACK TO SCENE

CHRISTINE

(softly)

I don't believe it.

INT. COLDSRING HARBOR - BUILDING - HALLWAY

Christine approaches Chow's office with a stack of papers in hand.

IN THE OFFICE

Chow is engaged in an animated telephone conversation. Christine stops in the doorway and waits.

CHOW

...well don't you brief your people on these things?!?

(beat)

No, I still haven't got the damn thing.

(beat)

I don't know. Debbie something-or-other.

(beat)

I'd appreciate that.

(beat)

Of course. Yes. As quick as you can.

(beat)

All right. Goodbye.

He hangs up and begins writing quickly on a piece of paper on his desk.

Christine knocks softly on the open door. He looks up.

CHRISTINE

Do you have a minute?

CHOW

A minute. What is it?

She enters and sits. Chow nonchalantly moves a book to cover the piece of paper he was writing on.

CHRISTINE

I wanted to talk to you about Lewis.

CHOW

What about him?

CHRISTINE

I think he may be telling the truth.

Chow just looks at her.

CHRISTINE

At any rate, it couldn't hurt
us to investigate further.

(beat)

We are scientists, aren't we?

CHOW

(softly)

Just what do you propose we do?

CHRISTINE

If I understand the project structure
correctly, we aren't the only lab
sequencing the x. ichtyococcus genome.
Correct?

Chow nods hesitantly.

CHRISTINE

Then I propose we contact one of the other
labs, and ask them to search for Lewis's
intron in their database. And if they
find it, well...

Chow sits forward and clears his throat.

CHOW

Of course that had occurred to me. The
problem is that the partner labs have a
strict protocol prohibiting us from
comparing data until all the sequencing is
complete. After all, the point of multiple
redundant sequencing is to insure accuracy
of the finished genome. If we start
comparing notes before all the final drafts
are ready, there's a definite risk of
contamination.

Christine glares at him: Why is he being evasive?

Chow averts his eyes.

CHOW

Ah, now. Is there anything else I can do
for you?

She looks down. The faxed pages are in her hand.

CHRISTINE
(stands)

No.

She walks briskly out the door.

Chow watches her go with a suspicious look.

Once she's gone, he moves the book aside and begins writing on his notes again.

INSERT - CHOW'S NOTES

It looks almost exactly like the page from Lewis's legal pad. At the top is the list of prime numbers, and at the bottom is the marker sequence

AAAGGGTTTCCCCCTTTGGGAAA

which Chow underlines emphatically.

INT. SUBMARINE - SOMEWHERE IN THE OCEAN

What light there is comes from a bank of radio equipment covering one wall, before which sits a row of young, short-haired MALE RADIO OPERATORS dressed in U.S. Navy uniforms and wearing headsets.

The one furthest to the left is Lewis.

His eyes are glazed. He is only listening to the sounds coming through the headphones--VOICES SPEAKING IN RUSSIAN. Every second, the VOICES CHANGE as the scanner chirps among various frequencies.

Lewis's hand is poised over a large blue button.

He hears something interesting. His finger snaps down on the button, and at exactly the same moment, a blue light activates on the instrument panel of the man seated to Lewis's right, who begins taking rapid notes.

A long beat. Lewis is listening again.

In a moment, he hears something else and presses the button again. This time, the man two seats to his right gets the signal, and begins taking notes.

Once more, Lewis is listening.

This time, what he hears sounds like ENGLISH coming through the RUSSIAN VOICES.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Fucking BITCH!!!

At the SOUND OF A SLAP which follows, Lewis's finger snaps down on the blue button. He leans in over the console, listening intently to the strange voice on the radio.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Here's how it works: I take fucking orders from them, you take fucking orders from me. They tell me where to go, I say "Yessir" and do what the fuck they say..

Lewis looks around in confusion. The interior of the submarine is gone. Instead we find ourselves...

INSIDE A SUBURBAN HOME. - DINING ROOM - DUSK

From a low angle, around the edge of a doorframe, we discover LEWIS'S FATHER and MOTHER engaged in a heated argument. The dining table, which is covered with letters and bills, is the same one in Lewis's apartment. Lewis's father wears the uniform of a U.S. Navy Captain, and has a full head of thick, snow-white hair. His mother is small, well dressed, very pretty, and very frightened.

Her left eye is black.

LEWIS'S FATHER (CON'T.)

...I tell you where to go, you say "Yessir" and do what the fuck I say without giving me any FUCKING BACKTALK!!

On the words FUCKING BACKTALK, he grabs a double-handful of papers off the table and flings them across the room.

Lewis's mother, crying, takes another step back and bumps into a wall. She is nearly at her wit's end.

LEWIS'S MOTHER

(sobbing)

But this is third time we've moved in six months...I've lost all my friends...I don't even...

He is on her in three large steps.

LEWIS'S FATHER

WHAT THE FUCK DID I JUST SAY TO YOU?!?!

He backhands her in the face. She cries out, slides down the wall, and curls herself into a ball, sobbing. He stands over her, red-faced and breathing hard. He lifts a foot as if to kick her...

And stops. He lowers his foot, turns, and takes a few steps away, rubbing the back of his hand. When next he speaks, his tone is reasonable. Compassionate, even.

LEWIS'S FATHER

I wish I could tell you, Macy. If you just understood the importance of the work we're engaged in, it wouldn't seem so hard. But I can't. You have to trust me.

She makes a sound like a bleating goat.

Just then, Lewis's father notices us watching and looks right at the camera. The living room vanishes as we pull back behind the doorframe into

A DARKENED BEDROOM.

Light streams in around the halfway-open door. Our POV is from the bed. The SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS, some ominous shadows, and Lewis's father appears in the door, looking in on us in silhouette.

LEWIS'S FATHER

I'm sorry you had to see that. I love your mother, son, and I hate it when she makes me hurt her. But we have to keep our discipline. We have to be strong. Someday, when you're older, you'll understand, Lewis.

A beat, and he steps into the room and approaches the bed.

LEWIS'S FATHER

Lewis. My beautiful boy...

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - AT THE DINING TABLE - DAY

Lewis is sprawled out across the iceberg puzzle, twitching as he dreams.

With an inarticulate shout of fear, he jolts awake.

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - AT THE SINK

Lewis turns on the light and examines himself in the mirror. This time, he doesn't have to lean in to see the white hairs streaking away from his temples. He turns his head slowly left and right, examining them.

From the other room, the SOUND OF KNOCKING on the door.

IN THE LIVING AREA

Lewis tiptoes to the door and checks the peephole.

A beat, and he steps back, unlocks and opens the door.

Christine pushes into the apartment, still wearing her lab coat. She has a stack of papers in hand.

CHRISTINE

Thank god you're here.

LEWIS

What's the matter?

CHRISTINE

Can we sit down?

AT THE TABLE

Her hands shake as she fumbles with the stack of papers, separating the faxed pages from the rest of it.

CHRISTINE
(holds out the fax to him)
I'm sorry I doubted you.

He takes it.

LEWIS
What is this?

CHRISTINE
It's a fax from Woods Hole Oceanographic
Institute. They're also sequencing the x.
ichthyococcus genome. It's an exact match
with the intron you've found. So there's
no way you could have faked it.

LEWIS
Did you do this?

CHRISTINE
No. Chow did it. Then he tried to hide it
from me.

(beat)
I think he may be trying to steal this
discovery from you.

Lewis only nods at this, unsurprised.

LEWIS
Did you run the marker sequence?

She hands the rest of the stack of papers to him.

CHRISTINE
Yes. I got thirty-three hits, all of them
introns. They're all there.

Lewis drops the fax and dives into the stack of printouts,
carefully examining each one.

CHRISTINE
We can't let him get away with this.
We've got to do something.

LEWIS
Such as what?

CHRISTINE

I don't know! Call the papers! We could take all this stuff up to the university and show it to...

LEWIS

What good would that do?

CHRISTINE

It would prove we found it first!

Lewis finds a pen on the table and starts writing frantic notes on the various printout pages.

LEWIS

No it wouldn't.

(beat)

Don't you get it? Chow could just turn around and say that we stole it from him, that he's been working on it for a while now, that we found some of his notes lying around at the lab and tried to hijack it from him...

CHRISTINE

But that's not true!

LEWIS

Who are they going to believe—us or him? He's got a chair with the National Science Foundation, for chrissakes...

CHRISTINE

That fucking bastard!!

Her tone cuts through to him. He stops fiddling with the printouts and looks up at her.

LEWIS

It doesn't matter who gets credit for it, Christine. All that matters is that we've found it.

(beat)

Nothing is going to be the same after this. Do you understand? Nothing!

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - CHOW'S OFFICE - DAY

Chow has the *x. ichtyococcus* database open. He references his notes as he enters the text of the marker sequence

AAAGGGTTTCCCCCTTTGGGAAA

into the search engine.

A beat, and the screen fills up with information.

CHOW
(excited)
Son of a bitch.

The TELEPHONE RINGS. Chow rolls his chair across the floor and grabs it.

CHOW
(into phone)
Hello?
(beat)
Yeah, Lou. Yeah.
(beat)
She said what?!?
(beat)
Well, she might have sent it this morning, but I didn't get it this morning. Maybe she sent it to the wrong number.
(beat)
Look, I don't have time to fuck around with this anymore. I need you to run the search again, personally, and fax me the results, personally.
(beat)
I know you're busy, Lou, but this is maximally important. I'll owe you a favor.
(beat)
All right. Fifteen minutes? I'll be waiting by the machine.

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - AT THE DINING TABLE - DAY

Lewis is working frantically on the pages of intron printouts. Christine sits silently, a distant, angry look on her face.

LEWIS

I think I've got it.

She is unresponsive.

LEWIS

Christine!

She looks at him.

LEWIS

I think I've got it.

CHRISTINE

Show me.

They lean over the table to examine his work.

LEWIS

In each of these introns, the marker sequence occurs just a few bases in from the beginning...see?

He flips through the printouts, pointing out the underlined marker sequence in each.

LEWIS

Another way of looking at it is that the marker sequence divides each intron into two pieces—a little piece that comes before, and a big piece that comes after. Now, if we go through and convert the little piece at the beginning of each intron into a decimal number, using the same scheme as before, look what we get...

He flips through several pages, showing her the conversions he's already made—5, 23, 59.

CHRISTINE

Prime numbers again.

LEWIS

Right. The same prime numbers as in the original sequence.

CHRISTINE

So you think if we put them together in order...

LEWIS

We'll have the complete text of the message. But there's a problem.

CHRISTINE

What?

LEWIS

They're not all here.

CHRISTINE

They're not?

LEWIS

No, look. Here's five, and here's eleven, but we don't have seven. There were fifty-nine primes in the original sequence, but we've only got thirty-three introns here.

CHRISTINE

I was afraid something like that might happen. The others must be in parts of the genome that haven't been sequenced yet!

A beat, as the implications sink in.

LEWIS

Christ. How long 'til it's finished?

CHRISTINE

Six months by the schedule. Probably closer to seven or eight.

LEWIS

Dammit!

(beat)

Wait! What about the other labs?

CHRISTINE

Yeah! That's possible. They might very well have sequenced parts of the genome that we haven't. But...

LEWIS

But what?

CHRISTINE

We'll never get to them without going through Chow.

LEWIS

(stands up)

Then we go through Chow.

CHRISTINE

You don't seriously expect him to help you?

LEWIS

No, but I don't see any other choice at this point.

A beat. She rises beside him and they head for the door.

INT. COLDSRING HARBOR BUILDING - LABORATORY - DAY

Chow stands at the fax machine, punching buttons on its control console.

INSERT - THE FAX MACHINE MENU DISPLAY

TIMER	POLLING
LISTING	OPTIONS
RESOLUTION	LOGS

BACK TO SCENE

Chow presses the down arrow six times to highlight LOGS and presses ENTER.

INSERT - THE FAX MACHINE MENU DISPLAY

INCOMING
OUTGOING

BACK TO SCENE

Chow presses ENTER to select INCOMING.

INSERT - THE FAX MACHINE DISPLAY

1. 5 pp. Received at 8:13 AM Mon 7/17

BACK TO SCENE

CHOW
(shaking his head)
Christine.

Just then, there is a LOUD BEEP from the fax machine,
followed by the SOUND OF PAPER FEEDING into the mechanism.

The display reads INCOMING FAX..

The first page out of the feeder is a cover sheet. Chow
grabs it, scans it, and tosses it aside.

The next page is covered with DNA sequence data. Chow
grabs it and quickly compares it to Lewis's original
intron-printout, which he has with him.

CHOW
(exultant)
You little bastard. Looks like you were
right.

He spins on his heel and heads for the door. He pulls it
open and steps out

INTO THE HALLWAY

where he almost collides with Christine and Lewis, coming
the other way.

Everyone freezes.

A long, awkward beat.

CHOW
(clears his throat)
Excuse me.

He steps around them and continues toward his office.

CHRISTINE
We know what you're up to, Chow!

CHOW

(over his shoulder)

I'm sorry I really haven't got time to talk right now. I've got an important call to make.

LEWIS

You can have the credit, Chow. I don't want it.

Chow stops, but does not turn. Christine looks nervously at Lewis.

LEWIS

I promise not to make any noise about...what really happened here. As far as I'm concerned, it was your idea from the beginning.

Chow turns, and fixes him with an even stare.

CHOW

Assuming, just for the sake of argument, that I have any idea what you're talking about...What are you after in return?

LEWIS

I just don't wanna be cut out of the loop, that's all. Take me on as your research assistant. Her too. Wherever this thing is going, we wanna be along for the ride.

Chow pauses, considering this. Lewis holds up the stack of printouts.

LEWIS

We've already got it figured out. We'll share with you.

Chow steps toward them and lowers his voice.

CHOW

For that offer to have any weight...

(looks at Christine)

It has to be from both of you.

She hesitates, unwilling or unsure how to answer.

LEWIS

It's better this way, Christine. Really.
I don't want to be in the spotlight.

After a long beat, she nods reluctantly.

Lewis looks back to Chow, who smiles broadly.

CHOW

All right. Show me what you've got.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - BREAK ROOM - DAY

The 33 printouts with the marked introns are spread out on the table. Chow and Lewis lean over them, together. Christine stands slightly apart, her arms folded across her chest, looking unhappy.

LEWIS

(straightening up)

...and that's it. The other labs may have some or all of the pieces we're missing. We should get on the phone to them right now and find out.

CHOW

So, we get all the marked introns together, strip off the headers, and assemble them in numeric order to get...what?

LEWIS

We already have a scheme for representing DNA as binary numbers left over from the prime-number sequence introns. My hunch is that the ultimate form of the message will be an image encoded in binary form.

CHRISTINE

(intrigued in spite of herself)

An image?

CHOW

(nodding)

We convert the message sequence into a long binary number using the same scheme as before. Each binary digit represents either a light or a dark pixel in a two dimensional array: An image. A black-and-white image.

LEWIS

But these kinds of speculations are fruitless until we have all the pieces of the message together. We need to get on the phone, right now, and contact-

CHOW

I'm not going to do that until we've had a press conference, and formally announced this discovery in the media.

CHRISTINE

(laughs bitterly)

Afraid someone's going to steal your hard-won credit?

He glares daggers at her.

CHOW

(softly)

If at any time our arrangement becomes unacceptable to you, Ms. Loughland..

LEWIS

She didn't mean anything about it.

Chow's glare shifts to Lewis. So does Christine's.

CHRISTINE

I didn't?

There is a long, tense, silence.

Chow glances at his watch and starts to gather up the papers spread on the table.

CHOW

I'm going to try to set up the press conference for tomorrow afternoon. All this stuff is locked up in my office for the night. I'll want both of you back up here at eight o'clock in the morning so we can work on our statements.

(beat)

Not a word of this, to anyone, under any circumstances.

CHRISTINE

No shit.

He glares at her again, then gathers the papers under his arm.

CHOW

Good evening.

He walks briskly out of the room.

Christine stares at Lewis, who nervously averts his eyes.

INT. CHRISTINE'S CAR - FREEWAY - 5:00 RUSH HOUR

They are snarled in heavy traffic. Christine drives, Lewis rides shotgun. The tension between them is thick.

Lewis escapes by staring out the window.

In the distance, a cluster of radio towers—unilluminated in the daylight hours—reaches up from the horizon.

Absentmindedly, Lewis pulls a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket, draws one to his mouth, and starts to roll down the window.

CHRISTINE

Don't you even think about lighting that thing in here.

Lewis snaps back to reality, seems surprised to find the cigarette in his mouth. Sheepishly, he slides it back into the pack, the pack back into his pocket.

Silence in the car again, as they creep forward in traffic.

CHRISTINE

I can't believe you're going to let that bastard get away with this.

Lewis's jaw tightens, but he says nothing.

CHRISTINE

He's fucking you, Lewis. He's fucking you out of what might be the most important scientific discovery...well, ever! And you're lying down for it!

LEWIS

You know, it's really not any of your business.

CHRISTINE

None of my business?!? Lewis, I'm a scientist! My business is to find out the truth!

LEWIS

Scientific truth exists independently of the man who discovers it.

CHRISTINE

Or the woman, Lewis.

LEWIS

Or the woman, sure.

CHRISTINE

If I had known you intended to barter away our integrity when we went to talk to Chow, I never would have agreed to it in the first place.

LEWIS

I know that.

CHRISTINE

Oh, yeah? Well maybe I still don't agree to it! Maybe I should drive us to the newspaper office right now and explain what's going on!

LEWIS

Please don't.

CHRISTINE

Why shouldn't I?

LEWIS

Like I told you before: They'll believe Chow a hundred times before they'll believe you and me. And then I won't be able to see this thing through to the end. And I need to, Christine. I need to very much.

CHRISTINE

Do you have any other tricks, Lewis? Besides needing, I mean?

Lewis is stung. He turns away to the window, looking hurt.

They drive on in silence.

EXT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

A maintenance van is parked by the mailboxes as Christine pulls in. Lewis gets out of the car and shuts the door without saying a word. She drives away immediately.

Lewis shuffles toward his door. THE SOUND OF A CAR DOOR CLOSING makes him look toward the mailboxes, where a uniformed maintenance man is walking around the side of the van and opening the rear door.

Lewis reaches his front door, fumbles for the key, and opens it. Over his shoulder, he sees the maintenance man taking a ladder from the rear of the van.

INSIDE THE APARTMENT

Lewis stands there for a beat, thinking.

Then he walks

TO THE WINDOW

where he parts the blinds with his fingertips and looks out.

INSERT - THROUGH THE BLINDS

The maintenance man has positioned his ladder against the side of the building, climbed it, and is carefully unscrewing the bulb from the failing security light.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis is riveted now. He parts the blinds wider.

INSERT - THROUGH THE BLINDS

Having replaced the bulb, the maintenance man climbs down the ladder. He casually tosses the old bulb into a large trash can beside the mailboxes. Then he folds his ladder and starts putting it back in the van.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis comes away from the window with a fevered look in his eyes.

He walks briskly to the front door.

IN THE PARKING LOT

Lewis comes out of his apartment and makes a bee-line for the trashcan.

He tears the lid off it, oblivious to the stares of the old woman standing at her mailbox, and rummages around inside.

He finds the light bulb, undamaged, on top of a newspaper, and pulls it out like a solid-gold trophy.

On the way back to his unit, Lewis turns the bulb over and over in his hands, fascinated to see that it is, really, just a normal lightbulb.

He's so preoccupied that he doesn't notice when the front door fails to close all the way behind him. It hangs ajar by half-an-inch.

INSIDE THE APARTMENT - BATHROOM

The lamp is still poised on the edge of the tub.

Lewis enters, unscrews the bulb from it, and replaces it with the bulb from the trash.

He reaches down and turns on the switch.

There is a BUZZING NOISE, and a FAINT CLICKING as the bulb flickers.

Lewis is mesmerized. He flips the lid down on the toilet and sits, staring at the flickering light.

As he watches it, his manner grows more and more distraught, until finally tears roll down his cheeks and he begins crying into his hands.

LEWIS

(sobbing)

Why me...?

If there is an answer in the flickering of the failing bulb, we in the audience are not privy to it.

MONTAGE - NIGHT PASSES

Dusk outside Lewis's apartment. The new security light CLICKS on and burns brightly. There is no flicker.

Looking back at Lewis's window, we see light flickering out around the drawn blinds.

Down the street, the streetlights come on in a staggered line that flows from one end of the street to the other.

From above, the flow of headlights on the freeway, among the streetlights and construction lights, suggests an organic process.

An ambulance, with flashers going, threads its way through and around the traffic.

City lights outline the horizon. In the distance, a constellation of radio towers pulses with red airplane-warning lights.

From high above the city, only the lights are visible, like stars against the backdrop of space.

From low orbit, the concentration of lights in urban areas suggests colonies of microorganisms growing on the surface of a petri dish. There is an OMINOUS SOUND, here, which has been growing throughout the montage—a sound like VERY SLOW, VERY LOW, METALLIC BREATHING. Hold here for a long beat.

At dawn, back in the parking lot of Lewis's apartment complex, the security light CLICKS off again.

Looking back at his window, we see that the flickering inside has stopped.

EXT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - PARKING LOT - MORNING

Christine's car pulls up and parks. Looking freshly groomed, she gets out and walks to Lewis's front door.

She knocks lightly.

After several seconds, there is no response. She looks at her watch.

It reads 7:45 AM.

She knocks harder, pounding on the door with the palm of her hand.

CHRISTINE
(calling)
LEWIS??

The door drifts open under the pressure of her knocking.

She stares at it, unsure how to proceed.

CHRISTINE
(softer)
Lewis?

There is no answer.

She pushes the door open and steps

INSIDE THE APARTMENT.

From the bedroom comes the SOUND OF RUNNING WATER.

CHRISTINE

Lewis? It's Christine! Your door was open!

Again, there is no answer. Christine walks across the living area and

INTO THE BEDROOM

SQUISH. Her foot sinks into the carpet, which is soaking wet. She looks down and sees that most of the room is flooded.

The water is coming under the bathroom door.

Realization hits her. She runs to the door and tries to open it, finds it locked. She beats on it frantically with her palm.

CHRISTINE

Lewis! LEWIS!!!

She looks around, panicked.

On the counter by the sink, she spies a pair of nail clippers. She grabs them, extends the file, and fumbles around with it in the safety-keyhole of the bathroom doorknob.

A SOFT CLICK as the latch releases. She throws the door open, casting a column of light

INTO THE DARKENED BATHROOM

Lewis sits in the tub, curled into a ball, hugging his knees to his chest. He is still wearing his clothes from the night before. The water is RUNNING LOUDLY, overflowing the tub and spilling everywhere onto the floor.

Lewis has a blank, lobotomized expression. His eyes are open but see nothing. His teeth are chattering slightly, and at intervals shudders run through his whole body.

His hair has gotten noticeably whiter.

CHRISTINE

Lewis!

He is unresponsive. She runs to the tub, squats down, and turns off the water. The shower radio is on, also, playing nothing but LOUD STATIC. She turns it off as well. Then she moves to Lewis.

CHRISTINE

(reaching to touch his hair)

Lewis?

He jumps, startled, and seems to notice her for the first time. He draws back, at first, frightened, but then he recognizes her.

A tear of relief rolls down his cheek and he falls into her arms, shaking.

CHRISTINE

Lewis. What's the matter?

LEWIS

Something...is...happening to me..

(beat, crying now)

Christine. Christine I'm so afraid.

She's holding him now, rocking.

Still crying, he looks over her shoulder at the far corner of the bathroom, where the desk lamp is lying on its side in a puddle of water, the bulb shattered into pieces on the floor.

INT. LEWIS'S APARTMENT - AT THE DINING TABLE - LATER

Lewis sits, wrapped in a blanket, smoking a cigarette and staring blankly at the iceberg puzzle.

Christine enters from the kitchen, carrying a steaming mug, which she sets in front of him.

CHRISTINE

Coffee.

He ignores it. She sits down beside him.

CHRISTINE
What happened in there, Lewis?

LEWIS
(distantly)
I don't...
(beat)
I...
(beat)
What time is it?

CHRISTINE
It's morning. We were supposed to meet
Chow about forty-five minutes ago.

Lewis nods, remembering, but says nothing.

CHRISTINE
(beat)
I came by because I wanted to apologize for
what I said last night.
(beat)
I don't approve of what's happening, but
I'm sorry that I said what I did.

Lewis is still not back to Earth. He shakes his head slightly, as if to say, No, that's OK, forget about it, but doesn't quite manage to get the words out.

CHRISTINE
(beat)
Are you going to drink that coffee?

He pushes it toward her.

CHRISTINE
Thanks.

She takes a sip.

CHRISTINE
Something's been bothering me, Lewis.
About the message.

Talk of the message piques his interest. He looks at her.

CHRISTINE

Why this fish, in particular? I mean, of all the organisms on the planet, why pick x. ichtycoccus profundis to be the vehicle for this...signal?

LEWIS

(beat)

Survivability.

She blinks.

CHRISTINE

What?

LEWIS

I'd want an organism that was well adapted, genetically stable, in a stable physical environment. X. ichtycoccus has all that: an old species, living in the deepest parts of the central oceans. Probably the most stable environment on the planet.

CHRISTINE

I get it. You want to pick the most stable organisms to minimize the danger that your message is going to die out, go extinct with the carrier species.

LEWIS

But it also has to have a long individual lifespan, not like a bacteria or an insect, because with every generation there's a risk of mutation corrupting the signal itself.

CHRISTINE

X. ichtycoccus fits the bill there, too.

LEWIS

(nodding, excited now)

But I could never be sure what long term-climactic changes were going to take place, so I'd want to hedge my bets by having a redundant signal, by putting the same message in the DNA of several different species in diverse env-

He stops suddenly, a look of dumbstruck realization on his face.

He stands up, shedding the blanket, and looks at her. His mouth moves slightly, trying to form words.

It doesn't work.

Then he turns and bolts for the door.

CHRISTINE

Lewis? Lewis!

We hear the DOOR OPEN. She abandons her coffee and goes after him.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - LABORATORY - DAY

Chow stands at the copy machine, wearing an annoyed scowl as he works.

The door opens, and Lewis and Christine enter, both looking serious and very determined.

CHOW

You're late! The press conference is scheduled for two o'clock this afternoon, and now we've only got...

(checks watch)

...five hours to get our stories straight!

Lewis, still sopping wet, brushes past him. He next tries to intercept Christine, but she steps around.

CHRISTINE

Not now.

He looks after them, flabbergasted, then follows.

CHOW

Not now?!? What the hell do you mean, not now?!?

Lewis is already seated

AT THE COMPUTER

and has the web-browser open. Christine leans over his shoulder.

CHRISTINE

The National Institute of Health maintains a public database online...

Lewis nods. He knows about it, already has the page open.

INSERT - THE SCREEN

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH
HUMAN GENOME PROJECT
 PUBLIC SEARCH ENGINE

ENTER SEARCH STRING(S):

BACK TO SCENE

Chow steps up, furious. Lewis is typing.

CHOW

What are you—
 (beat, sees screen)
 You don't really think that—
 (beat, softly)
 It didn't even occur to me.

Lewis enters the marker sequence AAAGGGTTTCCCCCTTTGGGAAA.

A message appears: SEARCHING...

The tensest silence imaginable as the three wait five, ten, fifteen seconds for the results.

And then their faces as the data spills across the screen: Lewis's eyes are obscured by the reflection of the monitor in his glasses. His expression is hard to read.

Christine, though, has a look as though she were about to weep.

Chow falls into the nearest chair and stares at the screen stupidly.

INSERT - THE SCREEN

FOUND 59 HITS FOR SEARCH STRING
AAAGGGTTTCCCCCTTTGGGAAA IN DATABASE
H. SAPIENS - HUMAN GENOME MASTER LIBRARY

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis is typing now, furiously, his fingers CLATTERING on the keyboard.

On the computer screen, windows open and close, lines of code spew across the page, big chunks of DNA-data are highlighted for cut-and-paste. Lewis is burning.

CHRISTINE

What are you doing?

LEWIS

Writing a batch file to strip out the headers and make the conversion to binary numbers.

(beat)

There. Let's see if it works.

He punches ENTER.

A new window opens onscreen, filling rapidly with line after line of ones and zeros, and then scrolling down as the window overflows its capacity.

It hits bottom, finally, and prints out a simple report:

FINISHED LENGTH: 65536

Lewis nods to himself, and starts typing again.

LEWIS

Sixty-five thousand, five-hundred and thirty-six.

CHRISTINE

Does that mean something to you?

LEWIS

It's the perfect square of two-fifty-six.

(beat)

It means the image is a square,
two-hundred-fifty-six pixels on a side.

Chow has recovered slightly. He nods at this.

CHOW

There'll be many different ways of filling
in the square...

LEWIS

I know. But first we try the conventional:
Rows from left to right, starting at the
top and ending at the bottom.

He types for a beat longer, then punches ENTER.

A new window appears, and a square image about 3 inches on
a side quickly fills it, the cursor moving just slowly
enough for us to see the pattern: Rows from left to right,
starting at the top and ending at the bottom.

The finished image looks like nothing so much as the static
on a dead TV channel.

CHRISTINE

That's not it.

Lewis is already typing in the next program.

LEWIS

Columns. From left to right, alternating
top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top.

He punches ENTER. Again, a window appears, and an image
forms within: Columns, this time, from left to right,
zigzagging top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top.

It's only static.

A beat. Lewis drums his fingers on the desk, thinking.

CHOW

The rule could be anything. Maybe it alternates from one side of the image to the other...

Lewis is still thinking, drumming his fingers as though typing. Then he notices something:

On the front of the computer case, the green hard-drive-activity light flickers randomly on and off.

Lewis starts typing again.

LEWIS

It's a spiral. Starting at the outside and turning in.

Chow looks at him suspiciously: How does he know that?

Lewis punches ENTER...

And we don't have to see the screen to know he's found it.

Chow and Christine gape, unbelieving.

CHRISTINE

Holy God. What is that?

Lewis's eyes are obscured by the reflection of the image spiraling onscreen. He seems to be feeling nothing...

And then a single tear rolls down each of his cheeks.

INT. COLDSRING-HARBOR BUILDING - LOBBY - 2:00 PM

THROUGH THE LENS OF A TV CAMERA

we see the stage set for Chow's press conference: A small raised dais, with some curtains behind, and a lectern bearing the Coldspring-Harbor double-helix logotype. Immediately beside the lectern, on the speaker's left, is a veiled easel. To the speaker's right, and slightly backstage, Christine and Lewis are already seated.

Christine looks calm and collected, but Lewis is white-knuckled, gripping the sides of the chair and sweating.

Before the dais are several rows of folding chairs, mostly filled with REPORTERS. A GENERAL MURMUR rises as they talk amongst themselves.

With practiced magnanimity, Chow steps onto the stage and approaches the lectern. The MURMUR DIES DOWN as he clears his throat and addresses the microphone.

CHOW

Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Daniel Chow. I am head of research at this facility. I will read a short prepared statement, first, and then field a limited number of questions.

(beat)

Last Friday, graduate students and affiliated research staff, working under my direction, uncovered the first evidence of the existence of a signal..

And on the word SIGNAL, we find ourselves

LIVE IN THE ROOM.

The lights are hot. Lewis is trembling.

CHOW

...of clearly intelligent origin, encoded in the DNA of *x. ichtyococcus profundis*, a marine vertebrate of the genus *actinopterygii*. Further investigation into the structure and content of this signal led us to an hypothesis, subsequently confirmed by DNA regression analysis, that the inclusion of the signal in the organism's genome predates the rise of tool-using human civilization on this planet.

The crowd of reporters is teeming, now. They're looking back and forth at each other: Is this for real?

CHOW

These data were, as of this morning, confirmed by the additional discovery of an identical signal in the genome of a second organism.

CHOW (CON'T.)

I am referring to the human genome.

A beat. There is utter silence for two, three seconds.

Then, A CLAMOR OF VOICES, MURMURING, and a barrage of flashbulbs exploding like machine-gun fire.

Lewis grimaces.

Chow looks up from his statement and waits for the MURMURING TO DIE DOWN.

A long beat, and it does.

CHOW

The content of these signals was found to be a long binary number representing a black-and-white image, two-hundred fifty-six units on a side.

He dramatically lifts the veil from the easel..

And there it is: The Message revealed, on a piece of 3' square posterboard. The image is divided into 4 quadrants, each containing a separate ideogram. One contains an apparently random smattering of dots, the most central of which is indicated by a small crosshair. Another contains a row of 10 spheres of varying sizes, the first of which is largest and the fourth of which is indicated, again, by a small crosshair. A third quadrant contains what appears to be an outline-map of an island, with a point inside the outline indicated by a crosshair. The final quadrant contains a strange, mandala-like symbol consisting of a complex arrangement of circumscribing diamonds, circles, and squares.

Another wave of flashbulbs greets the unveiling of The Message.

Lewis averts his eyes, looking down at the floor.

Chow produces a laser-pointer and trains it on the posterboard.

CHOW

The four part structure of the image is clearly apparent. This first section, we hypothesize, may represent a portion of the night sky as it looks from our planet. Note that a particular star has been clearly indicated.

A constant shimmering of flashbulbs now. Lewis looks up from the floor. He is pale and wan.

INSERT - LEWIS'S POV

The explosions of flashbulbs seem to come in slow-motion, and the sound of Chow's voice over the PA is far, far away.

BACK TO SCENE

CHOW

(lasing)

These ten circles seem proportioned to represent our solar system. Note the sun here, on the end, and the crosshair here, on the third from the sun, which, of course, would be the Earth.

Lewis looks really terrible, his mouth and eyes hanging half-open in a daze.

There is a particularly bright flash of light, at which Lewis's eyes refocus slightly. He seems to notice something out in the crowd, something he must strain to see through the blinding lights of the TV cameras...

INSERT - LEWIS'S POV

At the very back of the room, behind the TV crews and the throng of reporters and lookers-on, a figure is standing. He is almost impossible to make out, standing there, but a brief lull in the flashbulb activity gives us a glimpse of strong, broad shoulders, and the silhouette of what might be an officer's cap...

BACK TO SCENE

CHOW

(on the third quadrant)

And this section, perhaps most intriguing of all, appears to represent a geographic outline of the continent of Antarctica. Here, a point within that outline has been clearly indicated with crosshairs, a point corresponding to a physical location on the Antarctic land mass of approximately one-hundred forty-five degrees east longitude by eight-seven degrees south latitude.

(beat)

We believe there may be something buried there.

An UPROAR from the audience at this. The reporters are on their feet, now, surging toward the stage to get a better angle for their shots.

Chow stops, looking around nervously at the crowd growing out of control. He does not notice Lewis, who has risen from his seat, squinting with his hand across his eyes to block out the light, and staggered across the stage toward the audience.

He makes it to the edge of the stage and stops, trying to see past the lights into the heart of the crowd. Chow notices him, then, and so does Christine. She stands up and moves toward him.

INSERT - LEWIS'S POV

Everything is incredibly slow, the sounds of the crowd impossibly distant. The figure is coming forward through the crowd, now, and although we still can't make out his features, a flashbulb going off behind his head shows up a nimbus of thick, snow-white hair..

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis's eyes roll back in his head and he falls forward into the crowd, knocking over the easel holding the Message posterboard as he goes. Christine runs to catch him but she is not fast enough. SOMEONE SCREAMS, and the situation rapidly deteriorates into pandemonium..

EXT. OCEAN - ANTARCTIC CONVERGENCE - 3 MONTHS LATER - DAY

Ice breaks under the prow of the mammoth *USS Nathaniel B. Palmer*. Standing at the railing on the foredeck is Lewis. He is clad in a safety-orange parka, smoking a cigarette and staring into the distance.

All around and in every direction from the ship is ice-growlers, bergs, pack ice. A universe of white and blue to the four horizons.

Lewis's hair, but for a streak of brown remaining in his forelock, is as white as the ice that surrounds him.

And as he stands there, looking out, he seems to notice something. He raises his hands to shield his eyes from the sun, and squints across the ice at...whatever it is.

The SOUND OF A HELICOPTER approaching from the opposite direction distracts him. He turns and looks up at it—a Marine Sikorsky twin-rotor tilting down out of the sky toward the helipad amidships.

BESIDE THE HELIPAD

Christine is waiting, dressed also in safety-orange. She waves as the helicopter comes in for a landing. The door slides open, and Chow, wearing a heavy trench coat over an expensive suit, steps onto the deck and shuffles toward her carrying a briefcase.

BACK ON THE FOREDECK

Lewis grinds out his cigarette, pockets the butt, and starts walking aftwards.

INT. BRIDGE - USS NATHANIEL B. PALMER - DAY

A wide, shallow room with large windows on all sides. Instrument stations for navigation and steerage line the forward wall, and various CREWMEMBERS are milling about.

Lewis enters from a forward door, his cheeks flushed from the cold.

Christine and Chow stand near the door to the helipad, at the rear. Chow's briefcase is open on a nearby table, and he holds a hand-sized velvet case, of the kind normally used for expensive jewelry, out for her inspection.

He opens the case to reveal a palm-sized gold medallion bearing the likeness of Alfred, Lord Nobel, and the inscription INVENTAS VITAM JUVANT EXCOLUISSE PER ARTES.

CHRISTINE

Jesus. I can't believe you brought it with you.

CHOW

I haven't been able to let it out of my sight since I left Stockholm.

They share a moment of wonder before this, the ultimate prize of human achievement. Then Lewis approaches, and Chow self-consciously closes the case.

CHOW

Hello, Lewis.

LEWIS

Congratulations.

CHOW

Thank you.

He puts the prize back into his briefcase, and closes it.

INT. CABIN - USS NATHANIEL B. PALMER - DAY

A windowless stateroom about the size of a large closet. The door is closed and locked, and Christine, Chow, and Lewis are gathered around a fold-down table.

Chow unrolls a scroll of plotter-paper, showing a topographic map with a fine gridwork overlaid by intricate swirling contour lines.

CHOW

This is a readout from a device known as an M.A.D. probe. It stands for-

LEWIS
Magnetic Anomaly Detector.

CHOW
You know about it?

LEWIS
I know about it.

CHRISTINE
What is it?

CHOW
Basically a very big, very powerful metal detector mounted on an airplane. The Navy uses them to find submarines beneath the polar icecap. This is a scan from an overflight of the area indicated in the Message. Now look at this.

A point on the map shows a dense swirl of contour lines, indicating a strong reading.

CHOW
There's clearly something here. Whether it's...an artifact of some kind, we don't know. It could just be a meteorite. What we do know is that it's big—between twenty and twenty-five tons. And metallic.

LEWIS
How deep is it?

CHOW
I can't tell you.

CHRISTINE
Why not?

CHOW
The technology is sensitive. The Navy still uses M.A.D. probes to find enemy submarines and they don't want the exact capabilities of the device leaking into the media.

CHRISTINE

More cloak and dagger bullshit.

CHOW

Be that as it may, I'm taking you into my confidence by showing you this. You could get me in a lot of trouble if you mention it to the wrong people.

CHRISTINE

Who are we going to mention it to? The guy who drives the ship?

CHOW

They'll be reporters waiting when we land at McMurdo tomorrow, and more when we get to the site itself. Antarctica doesn't really belong to anyone, legally, and anyone who can get down there can pretty much go where they please. They're already having big problems with the media, running all over the place without any formal survival training. Two Belgian reporters were killed just last week when their snowmobile fell into a crevasse.

CHRISTINE

Um, I hate to bring this up now, but we don't exactly have any formal survival training, either.

CHOW

Don't worry. It'll all be taken care of.

EXT. DECK - USS NATHANIEL B. PALMER - ANTARCTICA - "NIGHT"

At this latitude, at this time of year, there is no night to speak of. There is a daily period, of about 4 hours, when the sun skirts the horizon, throwing the icescape into twilight. This scene takes place during that time.

Christine and Lewis stand at the railing on the foredeck, looking out at the sun slanting across the ice. It is numbingly beautiful.

Lewis, of course, is smoking.

CHRISTINE

It's so cold here.

LEWIS

It's only going to get colder.

CHRISTINE

Chow's like a kid with that damn Nobel Prize medallion. I hope he drops it overboard, sometime, whipping it out to show everyone.

LEWIS

(shrugs)

He deserves it.

CHRISTINE

I don't know how you figure that.

LEWIS

It was his lab, his database. Without his research we never would have found anything.

CHRISTINE

The message was in human DNA all along. We never really needed Chow, his lab, or his stupid database. And now he's going to go down in history.

LEWIS

It's easier this way.

CHRISTINE

Easier for you, you mean.

Just then, Lewis sees something off near the starboard horizon. He squints at it.

INSERT - LEWIS'S POV

In the far distance, just at the limit of our ability to discern detail, a black iota is standing upright on a floe of ice—a black iota that just might be a man.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis straightens up, excited.

CHRISTINE

What is it?

Lewis looks again. The iota is gone.

LEWIS

I thought I saw something.

CHRISTINE

What?

LEWIS

(beat)

It's nothing.

She looks at him curiously.

EXT. PIER - MCMURDO STATION - ANTARCTICA - DAY

A heavy crane on board the *Nathaniel B. Palmer* slowly lifts an enormous half-track tractor-trailer, laden with crated gear, out of the ship's hold, over the side, and down onto the ice.

Several TRACTOR DRIVERS, beefy-looking men with short hair and sunglasses, look on from the ground. One directs the crane operator with hand signals.

AT THE BOW OF THE SHIP

Lewis, Christine, and Chow descend via a long retractable gangway onto an ice-pier. Chow is in the lead.

BACK ON THE ICE

TWO TRACTOR DRIVERS detach themselves from the group and head toward the bow to meet them.

AT THE END OF THE PIER

A CAMERA CREW, consisting of a FEMALE REPORTER, a CAMERA MAN, and a SOUND MAN are milling around, waiting.

The reporter spies Chow coming off the ship and springs into action.

REPORTER

It's them! I knew it. Come on!

The three of them take off up the pier.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GANGWAY

Chow steps off onto the pier, with Christine and Lewis following, just as the camera crew arrives. The reporter is already sticking her microphone in Chow's face.

REPORTER

Doctor Chow? Is it true the Navy has detected a large metallic object buried at the site indicated in the Message?

He holds out a hand to ward her off.

CHOW

No interviews at this time.

They brush past, but the camera crew follows, nipping at their heels. Christine and Lewis try to ignore them.

REPORTER

Doctor Chow, why the secrecy surrounding this project? Don't you think the Message was intended for everybody?

The two tractor drivers—SCOTT and DICK—are coming up the pier in the opposite direction. As they approach, Dick makes a little sign to Scott, indicating the camera crew. Scott nods and moves to intercept them, while Dick extends his hand to greet Chow.

DICK

Doctor Chow? I'm Dick Bujalski. I'm responsible for your party and your equipment until we reach Ground Zero.

Scott steps out in front of the reporter. He is not a big guy, but very well-muscled and self-confident. He is intimidating without trying to be.

REPORTER
(bumping into him)

Hey!

She glares up at him.

REPORTER
What are you the, fucking goon...

Scott takes off his sunglasses and looks at her, but it is not a threatening glare. It is reasonable. Compassionate. Tender, even. He is very, very good-looking.

REPORTER
(softly)
...squad?

They lock eyes. Scott smiles at her with gentle good humor. She melts.

A beat. The cameraman clears his throat loudly.

UP THE PIER

Chow, Lewis, Christine, and Dick continue on their way.

DICK
It's an honor to meet you, sir.

CHOW
Thank you. These are my assistants Lewis West and Christine Loughland.

DICK
(shaking hands)
Lewis. Christine.

CHOW
So, are you with the United States Antarctic Program, or...?

DICK
No. We work for a subcontractor that does earthmoving and heavy equipment work for Raytheon, but we're on loan to the NSF for the duration of the expedition.

CHOW

I see.

They step off the pier and head into McMurdo proper. It's a small town, capable of supporting about 2,000 during the summer. The headquarters of the United States Antarctic Program are located in some large pier-and-beam structures beside the harbor. Dick leads the way toward these.

DICK

We've arranged for some rooms for you to relax awhile before we take off. These buildings are property of the National Science Foundation, so we can control access, but if you go outside you're fair game for reporters. There's quite a few of them buzzing around.

CHOW

Thank you.

DICK

One more thing: I understand that none of you has had the Basic Antarctic Survival course?

CHOW

That's correct.

DICK

That is a major oversight. But we'll see what we can do. We have to leave here as soon as all this equipment is loaded and secured on the cee-one-thirty, but that'll take several hours. It's not enough time for a full course, but I'll send Scott in to go over the basics with you.

They arrive

AT THE HEADQUARTERS BUILDING.

Dick holds the front door open and they file past him into the structure.

DICK

(cheerily)

After all, if the plane crashes, we can't have you running around on the open ice without any training at all, can we?

Chow and Christine share a horrified look: Was that a joke?

DICK

Stay warm.

He closes the door before they have a chance to ask.

INT. HEADQUARTERS BUILDING - LOUNGE - DAY

A cramped-but-cozy room in a cramped-but-cozy building. Travel posters of tropical islands and good-natured, clever graffiti cover the walls.

Scott, the handsome tractor-driver, stands before a table and addresses Chow, Lewis, and Christine, who are seated. Scott wields an ice ax in nimble demonstration of a survival technique called 'self-arresting.' Christine watches him admiringly.

SCOTT

...then as you're falling on your back, whack your ice ax into the snow at your side and twist over. Now pivot around the ax until you're lying face down with your head upslope. Keep your knees in and your butt in the air. It may look ridiculous, but if it keeps you from falling down a hill or into a crevasse, it's worth it.

CHOW

Is there any way to recognize a crevasse from a distance?

SCOTT

No. They get covered with a layer of snow and look just like solid ice. The only way you'll know you've found one is by falling into it. Your best defense is to stay with the group. Don't wander off by yourself,

SCOTT (CON'T.)

and especially not without telling someone where you're going. Stay close to me and the others at all times. We'll take good care of you.

Christine looks as if she'll have no problem staying close.

EXT. ANTARCTIC - ICE RUNWAY - DAY

Amid great billowing clouds of snow, a ski-equipped C-130 Hercules transport plane ROARS across the ice and lifts into the sky.

INSIDE THE PLANE

almost all the space is filled by the line of equipment-laden tractors. Chow, Lewis, Christine, and the eight tractor drivers sit strapped into webbing seats facing inward, with their legs drawn up close. The ROAR OF THE ENGINES is quite loud, and anyone who speaks must shout to be heard.

Scott and Christine have found seats next to each other.

CHRISTINE

What is all this stuff?

SCOTT

Portable shelters. Drilling equipment. Scientific instruments. Food and other provisions. The beakers are planning to set up a small town down there, almost.

CHRISTINE

Beakers?

SCOTT

(good-naturedly)

You know, scientists. Egg-heads.

(points to Lewis)

Like snow white over there.

Lewis, who's sitting too far away to hear, is absorbed in a piece of paper which he holds in his lap.

CHRISTINE

We're not all eggheads, you know.

SCOTT

I can see that.

Now we see the piece of paper that so preoccupies Lewis. It's a blown-up rendering of the strange mandala-like symbol from the fourth quadrant of the Message.

EXT. ANTARCTIC - TRANSFER POINT - DAY

The day is clear and calm, but it's still extremely cold.

A LOUD BEEPING sounds as the last of the heavy tractors backs out of the C-130 onto the ice. One of the tractor drivers gives hand signals; the others are standing around jawing. They're all sporting identical, nondescript black duffels for their personal gear.

Dick approaches Chow, Lewis, Christine, and Scott, who are huddled together.

DICK

It's about eight hours' drive from here to Ground Zero. If you need to go to the can, best do it here because we won't stop along the way unless there's a real emergency. The cabs hold two apiece—one driver and one passenger. Dr. Chow, I'd like you to ride with me.

SCOTT

I'll take Christine, here.

DICK

Capital. That leaves Lewis.

Dick shouts to one of the drivers milling around by the rear of the aircraft.

DICK

Hey, Ruiz!

RUIZ

Yo!

DICK

You got Lewis here, awright?

RUIZ

Aye aye, skip!

Dick glares at Ruiz for a moment, then moves off toward the lead tractor, with Chow on his heels. Christine and Scott head off together, also. Lewis watches them go with a blank expression.

INT. TRACTOR CAB - DAY

Lewis is waiting in the passenger seat, passing time staring at the piece of paper with the mandala-symbol, when Ruiz—a wiry little Hispanic dude of about 20—swings into the cab, tosses his duffel on the seat between them, and slaps the shifter into first.

RUIZ

Hey, Lewis! What's up, man?

LEWIS

How do you do.

RUIZ

"How do you do?" Jesus, man, you're gonna hafta lighten up if we're gonna be stuck in here for eight hours together. I'll go crazy.

Lewis smiles. Ruiz unzips his duffel and digs in it to produce a cassette tape.

RUIZ

You like music, Lewis?

LEWIS

Sure.

Ruiz pops the tape into the stereo on the dash, then starts fiddling with the controls to make it play. His duffel is open on the seat, and Lewis casually glances down at it.

INSERT - ON THE DUFFLE

Inside the bag, the short, black barrel of a submachinegun protrudes from beneath piles of neatly-folded laundry.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis looks up at Ruiz, who is still absorbed in the stereo. A beat, and Ruiz finds the right button. The opening strains of a SLOW, TORTURED BLUES fill the cab.

RUIZ

Cool, hey?

Lewis nods stiffly, and turns to look out the window.

RUIZ

Awright.

MONTAGE - CROSSING THE ICE

The MUSIC CONTINUES THROUGHOUT.

The tractors' heavy tracks CRUNCH over the snow.

The convoy trails out into the distance, a small black line dwarfed by the immense desolation of the ice plain.

On the horizon, the Transantarctic Mountain Range jags up into the sky, like the jawbone of an enormous wolf.

Out Lewis's window, the ice thrusts upward in fantastic shapes-towers, palaces of ice.

As the convoy ascends, strong katabatic winds blow in. The convoy is barely visible through the thick and driving snow.

INT. TRACTOR CAB - DAY - LOW VISIBILITY

The wipers SLAP back and forth to clear the snow. The music has changed to a SLOWER, JAZZIER BLUES. Lewis has nodded off, with his arms folded on his chest. Ruiz rubs his eyes wearily and peers out into the swirling snow.

The tractor hits a rough spot and jostles Lewis awake.

RUIZ
You doin' awright?

Lewis nods, still sleepy.

RUIZ
Hit a storm, man. May be rough going for
awhile.

Lewis looks out the window.

INSERT - LEWIS'S POV

A gust of wind parts the curtain of snow for an instant, revealing a dark outline that might be a man, standing motionless on an outcropping a few meters from the cab.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis sits up, flattening his face against the window.

RUIZ
What's up?

Lewis looks again. The figure is gone.

LEWIS
(beat)
Nothing.

He folds his arms across his chest and closes his eyes again.

Ruiz shakes his head wearily, and drives on.

EXT. ANTARCTIC - ICE FIELD - DAY

The weather is clearer here. An AMERICAN GRAD STUDENT, clad in the ubiquitous orange parka, clips a detonator lead to a bundle of explosives and slides it down a hole in the ice. This is HASMIR.

He jumps up and runs along the wire, following it toward an embankment about 100 yards away.

BEHIND THE EMBANKMENT

Hasmir leaps over and lands beside BEARDED JIM, another grad student, who is equipped with a detonator. Jim clips a wire lead to the detonator's terminal.

JIM
(calling)
Fire in the hole!

He squeezes the lever.

BACK AT THE HOLE

A SOUND LIKE THUNDER as a cloud of ice and snow shoots 100 feet up into the air.

INT. TRACTOR CAB - DAY

Lewis starts awake at the SOUND OF THE EXPLOSION. Through the windshield, a column of ice and snow is visible, rising from behind the slope of the mountain. Ruiz eyes it expertly.

RUIZ
Seismic survey charge. I'd say about eighty pounds TNT.

Lewis blinks at the blast-column, then at Ruiz.

RUIZ
Good morning, sunshine. We're here.

EXT. BASE CAMP - ANTARCTICAA - DAY

A sprawling tent city has grown up here, in the shadow of the Transantarctic Mountains, which are about half a kilometer away. Scientists and media from most major countries are represented. In addition to the tents, there are several portable buildings, with attendant outhouses and power-generation facilities.

In the distance, the convoy of tractors appears, rounding a bend in the foothills, snaking its way toward camp.

EXT. JAMESWAY - ANTARCTIC BASE CAMP - DAY

The American presence at Base Camp is represented by a portable structure called a 'Jamesway' (imagine a Quonset Hut made of plywood) flying the stars and stripes.

The door opens, and a MAN IN HIS EARLY 50S exits. He has salt-and-pepper hair, glasses, and a distinguished look. The name velcroed on his lapel reads VANCE. He carries a walkie-talkie, which SQUAWKS as he raises it to his mouth.

VANCE

(into radio)

I copy that. I'm on my way out.

AT THE LEAD TRACTOR

Which is parked about 30 feet from the Jamesway entrance, a little knot of reporters has gathered. Dick gets out of the cab first, and walks around to the passenger side, to clear a path for Chow.

Further back along the convoy, Scott and Ruiz are escorting Christine and Lewis to the front.

As Chow steps down from the cab, the reporters crowd in and bombard him with questions, some of which aren't even in English. Dick extends his arms to keep them at bay, but they push past him and he loses his temper, grabbing the nearest cameraman and pushing him back into the crowd.

DICK

(enraged)

GET BACK!!!

This outburst has the desired effect: The crowd recoils a little, and the CLAMOR OF VOICES DIES DOWN.

At that moment, Vance pushes his way into the middle of the circle and raises his arms for quiet.

VANCE

Ladies and gentlemen. Ladies and gentlemen, please. Nothing that happens here is going to be kept from you. But Doctor Chow and his associates have had a long trip to be here, by sea, air, and

VANCE (CON'T.)

land. Let them get settled and comfortable first, and then I'm sure they'll be happy to answer any questions you might have. After all, none of us are going anywhere, are we?

Some laughter at this.

By now, Scott and Dick have arrived with Christine and Lewis. Vance nods to Dick, and the seven of them move off

TOWARD THE JAMESWAY.

They arrive with a gaggle of reporters still on their heels. Vance, Chow, Lewis, and Christine climb the steps to the door and go inside, while Dick, Scott, and Ruiz fend off the media.

INT. JAMESWAY - ANTARCTIC BASE CAMP - DAY

Vance peels off his gloves, and extends a hand to Chow.

VANCE

Good to see you again, Dan.

CHOW

How are you, Jack?

The two men shake hands warmly.

VANCE

The Nobel Prize, you bastard.
Congratulations.

CHOW

Thanks. I brought it with me in case you wanted to rub it for good luck!

They laugh.

VANCE

And you must be Christine and Lewis. I've heard good things about you.

Christine and Lewis shake Vance's hand.

CHOW

This is Doctor Jack Vance, head of the U.S. Antarctic Program, and an old friend of mine. We were on the faculty at Cornell together.

Christine nods politely.

LEWIS

How do you do.

VANCE

Well, take off your coats and stay awhile. I've got cocoa brewing in the other room, and, ah...something else I think you'll be interested in.

INT. JAMESWAY - VANCE'S OFFICE - DAY

A small but serviceable room at the rear of the building. There are two small windows in the back wall. A percolator is going in one corner.

Chow, Christine, and Lewis stand around Vance's desk, sipping hot cocoa. Vance sits at the computer, typing.

VANCE

These results came in two days ago. Those coordinates you sent us were right on the money.

CHOW

You found it?!

INSERT - THE COMPUTER SCREEN

A map of the area around the base camp. At a point nearby, it shows a light circle surrounded by a darker, jagged, amorphous form—like a photonegative of a frying egg.

BACK TO SCENE

VANCE

It appears to be spherical, about ten meters in diameter, sitting in the middle

VANCE (CON'T.)

of a rock basin of about twice that.
Almost a thousand meters down.

CHRISTINE

(beat)

So how do we get it out?

VANCE

We can't. At least, not for a long time.
You're talking about a hole thirty feet
wide and almost a kilometer deep. It'll
take months, maybe years.

(beat)

We do have a plan, though, for the short
term: We're going to drill a hole down to
it, about a foot in diameter, about here.
Then we'll lower an R.O.V. with a camera to
investigate.

LEWIS

How long will that take, to drill the hole?

VANCE

With the new drilling equipment that came
in with you, no more than four days.

CHOW

This information hasn't been released to
the public yet, has it?

VANCE

No. We were waiting for drill to arrive.

CHOW

Don't you think it's time we clued them in?

VANCE

I do. I do indeed.

EXT. ANTARCTIC - DRILL SITE - DAY

Hot water, under high pressure, sprays out of the drill
head onto the ice, melting the beginnings of a hole. The
drill head, which looks like nothing so much as an enormous
shower-nozzle, hangs from a heavy tripod by a length of

hose, feeding from a large reel attached to an electric winch. A gas-powered pump makes a LOUD CHUGGING NOISE as it moves hot water from a spa-sized reservoir tank. Vance, Hasmir, and Jim tend the drilling equipment, while Christine and Lewis observe.

A safety cordon has been strung up around the drill site, and reporters, scientists, and lookers-on from many countries crowd around it to get a peek at the operation.

TV CAMERA FOOTAGE

Chow stands just inside the cordon, talking into the microphone of the female reporter from the pier at McMurdo.

REPORTER

Dr. Chow, do you have any speculations for us on just what this object might be?

CHOW

Well, speaking purely speculatively, I expect something like a time capsule. We know that the artifact is spherical and probably hollow. I think it'll turn out to be nothing more complex than a large container, with some kind of recording media inside to tell us more about, ah, whatever intelligence or culture encoded the Message in the first place.

REPORTER

After your receipt of the Nobel Prize, a lot of people have started referring to all these amazing discoveries as "the Chow findings." What do you think about that?

CHOW

Well, I'm honored of course. It is traditional, in the scientific literature, at least, for important findings to bear the names of their discoverers. But I don't really think...

OFF CAMERA

Christine watches Chow preen. She shakes her head in disgust and turns away, approaching Lewis, who stands

A FEW METERS AWAY

among the scientists watching over the drilling operation. However, he has a pair of binoculars raised to his face and is looking past the drill site toward the center of camp.

INSERT - THROUGH THE BINOCULARS

Scott, Ruiz, Dick, and the other tractor drivers are assembling another Jamesway. Scott looks up from his work, toward the drill site, and sees Lewis watching.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis lowers the binoculars, trying to be inconspicuous.

Christine steps up beside him.

CHRISTINE

Doesn't it bother you?

LEWIS

What?

CHRISTINE

Chow. Look at the way they're hanging on every word he says. And he doesn't deserve any of it. Doesn't it bother you at all?

LEWIS

No. But I'll tell you what does...

AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE

Scott looks over toward the drill site, where he sees Lewis and Christine engaged in an animated conversation. They appear to be arguing. Lewis points in his direction.

A beat, and Scott heads over

TO THE DRILL SITE

CHRISTINE

Are you sure it was a gun?

LEWIS

I know a gun when I see one, Christine.

CHRISTINE

I think you're being paranoid, Lewis.

LEWIS

Christine, you've got to-

Just then Scott walks up.

SCOTT

Hey guys. What's doing?

Christine smiles. Lewis, interrupted in mid-sentence, shakes his head and stalks off. Scott glares after him.

SCOTT

What's his problem?

CHRISTINE

He doesn't have very good people skills.

SCOTT

No joke.

CHRISTINE

(beat)

What are you guys doing over there?

SCOTT

Putting together buildings for sleeping, medical and food services, repair facilities—all that stuff that was loaded on the tractors. There's big things going on here, Christine. We're lucky to be a part of it.

MONTAGE - BIG THINGS GOING ON

The unsetting sun skirts the horizon, throwing the goings-on in camp into a brief twilight.

The spool of drill-tube beside the borehole has shrunk considerably. The CHUGGING SOUND CONTINUES as steam rises from the hole.

Around camp, reporters of all nationalities talk into their cameras.

The tractor-drivers have made considerable progress setting up the gear from the tractor-train: There are now half-a-dozen buildings flying the stars and stripes, and the crew is at work on another, close to the drill site.

Christine and Scott walk close together through the camp, talking quietly.

Lewis wanders on the outskirts with his binoculars, smoking and surreptitiously watching the tractor drivers work.

INT. JAMESWAY - VANCE'S OFFICE - 2 DAYS LATER - DAY

Chow stands at the tiny window, looking out on the scene as the team of tractor drivers, with practiced efficiency, hoists a section of Jamesway-wall into place. Vance sits at his desk, typing on the computer keyboard.

CHOW

So tell me about your hired muscle, here?

Vance looks up.

VANCE

What?

CHOW

Your tractor-drivers. Who are they, really?

VANCE

(beat)

They're subcontractors, actually. Doing earthmoving work for Raythe-

CHOW

I know the cover story. I heard it already. What I want to know is, who are they, really?

(beat)

Navy SEALS?

A beat. Vance nods almost imperceptibly.

CHOW

Why?

Vance rises and approaches Chow, pitching his voice low.

VANCE

You can't tell a soul. Not a living soul.

CHOW

If there's one thing I'm good at, Jack, it's keeping a secret.

VANCE

They're calling it the Trojan Horse Contingency. The President is concerned that...

A NOISE from elsewhere in the Jamesway. Vance looks around nervously, then lowers his voice even more.

VANCE

The President is concerned that this artifact might be some kind of booby trap.

CHOW

I don't believe I'm hearing this.

VANCE

Like a cosmic land mine. Maybe they don't want us messing around with DNA. Maybe they seed planets that might support intelligent life with these things, then life evolves, finds the message in its DNA, digs up this land mine and BOOM! No more competition in the universe.

CHOW

That's the most ridiculous, paranoid...

VANCE

Look at history, Dan. First contacts between cultures typically begin with aggression. War. We'd be stupid not to be prepared.

VANCE

Are they armed?

CHOW

Of course they're armed.

CHOW

You know better than anybody that's a violation of the nineteen sixty-nine Antarctica treaty—"for peaceful purposes only." What happens if the Russians find out? Or the Chinese? We could have our own little war, right here on this planet, about who gets to control the thing!

VANCE

Look, we're not coming out guns blazing, all right? But there is a protocol: If the artifact turns out to be a weapon of some sort, there are certain warning signs we'll know to look for.

CHOW

Such as what?

VANCE

Such as the presence of an energy source. If it's just an inert container, no problem. But if it has a reactor, or a big load of radioisotopes, or it exhibits some kind of aggressive behavior, then we may have to take steps.

CHOW

Steps?

Vance says nothing.

CHOW

So tell me, Jack, what are eight men supposed to do against an intelligence that mastered recombinant DNA and space travel before we mastered fire?

VANCE

Let's just say they've got an ace up their sleeve.

CHOW

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

Vance will say no more.

EXT. BASE CAMP - ANTARCTICA - DAY

The SEALs have formed a protective ring around the rear of the last tractor, which has one, final crate securely bolted to the bed.

Scott pries off the side of the crate with a crowbar.

Moving very carefully, the SEALs extract an olive-drab steel container about 3' cubed, unmarked but for a small, black spade (as in Ace of) on each vertical face.

IN THE DISTANCE, BEHIND A SNOWBANK

Lewis watches through his binoculars.

INSERT - THROUGH THE BINOCULARS

The container is clearly heavy. It takes all but two of the SEALs to carry it toward the newest Jamesway—the one closest the borehole. Scott, walking alongside, looks over toward the place where Lewis is watching.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis ducks quickly behind the snowbank. With shaking hands, he lights a cigarette and smokes it nervously, rocking back and forth as he looks into the distance..

And stops.

There, on an outcropping of rock at the foot of the mountains, a tiny figure is standing, motionless, at attention.

Lewis grabs his binoculars and looks again.

INSERT - THROUGH THE BINOCULARS

It is Lewis's father. He is dressed, as always, in the uniform of a US Navy Captain. He is looking right at Lewis, his expression blank and stony.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis drops the binoculars, jumps up, and runs into the mountains, toward the outcropping.

EXT. DRILL SITE - ANTARCTICA - DAY

Hasmir and Jim tend the drill, looking bored. Hasmir sits beside the heater, flipping through a magazine. Jim is naked, lounging in the spa-temperature water of the drill's reservoir tank. His parka and underclothes are draped across the heater, to keep them from freezing.

HASMIR

Sure, it's cozy now. But wait 'til you have to get out of there.

JIM

Are you kidding? I'm never getting out.

Suddenly, there is a SOUND LIKE AN EARTHQUAKE, a ROAR which grows louder and louder, until it culminates in a THUNDEROUS EXPLOSION of steam, ice, snow, and water blasting up out of the borehole.

The drill head, trailing hundreds of meters of tubing, shoots into the sky, and, fortunately, angles out away from camp, where it lands in an ice field amid a flurry of snow.

JIM

FUCK!!!

HASMIR

(on his feet)

That's it. We've hit bottom. We've broken through.

He turns and yells at the top of his lungs. Others are already running toward him.

HASMIR

WE'VE BROKEN THROUGH!!!

Jim jumps out of the tank, cursing, and starts pulling on clothes. The SEALs materialize from the crowd, positioning themselves around the drill site, just inside the cordon.

Christine, Chow, and Vance run up.

CHRISTINE

What happened?

CHOW

The atmosphere in that cavern must've been under tremendous pressure!

VANCE

Of course. All that ice pressing down on it for all those millennia...

CHOW

Do you think it might have collapsed?

VANCE

Only one way to find out.

(to Hasmir)

Break out the R.O.V!

EXT. OUTCROPPING - TRANSANTARCTIC MOUNTAINS - DAY

Out of breath and puffing steam, Lewis scrambles up to where his father was standing. Now there is nothing there but the wind. He looks further up the mountain.

INSERT - LEWIS'S POV

His father stands motionless at the top of a large snowhill, looking down at him.

BACK TO SCENE

Setting his jaw, Lewis hops off the outcropping and begins resolutely to climb.

EXT. DRILL SITE - ANTARCTICA - DAY

Hasmir opens a large metal case beside the borehole, and removes a small robot, the R.O.V., which looks essentially like a radio-controlled model car. It has four large tires, a video camera, a floodlight, a microphone, and other sensors.

A control cord runs out the rear to a spool, which Jim attaches to the electric winch.

Hasmir plugs the cord into an instrument panel built into the case, which has controls for motion, a video screen, a speaker, and other readouts.

HASMIR

We're set to go!

Vance takes the R.O.V. from him and lowers it front-down into the hole, which is just wide enough to admit it. Jim operates the winch, which makes an ELECTRIC WHIRRING NOISE as it lowers the R.O.V.

Hasmir turns on the video display, and the screen fills with an image: The white tunnel of the borehole, illuminated by the R.O.V.'s flood, streaming past as it descends.

CHRISTINE

I've gotta find Lewis! He needs to see this!

She hurries off through the crowd.

EXT. SNOWHILL - TRANSANTARCTIC MOUNTAINS - DAY

Lewis struggles up the hill, breathing hard. It is getting very steep, and the wind is getting stronger. Snow gusts and flurries around him.

Suddenly, his footing slips, and he goes over backwards. He falls, sliding on his back down the hill toward an overhang with a drop-off of at least sixty feet. He has no ice ax, but he claws with his hand at the snow to his side, slowing himself slightly. Then he rolls over onto his belly. He begins to slide again, but slower this time. He digs his gloved fingers into the snow with all his might, but the gloves don't have enough traction and he continues to slide. Hastily, Lewis pulls off the gloves and throws them away. They slide with him. He digs his naked fingers into the snow and hardened ice of the hill, straining terribly, and finally he grinds to a halt. His gloves keep on sliding and fall off the overhang, which is now only inches below his feet.

Lewis collapses against the side of the hill, panting. For a long beat, he just lays there, breathing, and then ventures a glimpse up the slope of the hill.

INSERT - LEWIS'S POV

At the top, amid swirling gusts of snow, his father is standing, looking down at him with the same stony gaze.

BACK TO SCENE

Lewis's face hardens and he begins slowly, agonizingly, to claw his way back up.

EXT. DRILL SITE - ANTARCTICA - DAY

Everyone watches the video feed from the R.O.V.

VANCE

How deep are we now?

JIM

Eight-fifty meters...eight-sixty...eight seventy...

On the video monitor, the walls of the borehole fall away, and the ROV plunges into empty, black space.

HASMIR

That's it! We're through!

DOWN IN THE CAVERN

The R.O.V.'s flood puts only a tiny dent in the darkness here. It lowers, like a star falling through space, then comes to rest on the rocky floor of the cavern. Off to one side a shadow of something large and spherical looms.

BACK ON THE SURFACE

HASMIR

Touchdown!

The screen shows the cavern's rock wall, obviously artificial in its smoothness.

CHOW

The cavern seems to be intact.

VANCE

Look at how smooth the wall is. There's no way that's a natural process.

(to Hasmir)

Play the camera around a bit, will you?

Hasmir pushes on the control stick.

INSERT - R.O.V. POV

As the R.O.V. rotates, the cavern wall comes closer, then falls away, eventually revealing the central area of the cavern. A large, dark, spherical object is center-frame.

BACK TO SCENE

VANCE

Whoa.

HASMIR

That's it. That's gotta be it.

CHOW

Get closer.

EXT. TOP OF SNOWHILL - TRANSANTARCTIC MOUNTAINS - DAY

Lewis struggles over the top of the hill, rolls his body onto the ledge, and lies still, panting.

After a beat, he stands creakily and looks around, rubbing his naked hands together for warmth.

On a ledge a few feet above him, behind a boulder, a large vertical fissure cuts into the ice. A cave.

Buffeted by the wind, Lewis staggers toward the opening.

EXT. DRILL SITE - ANTARCTICA - DAY

On the video screen, the large, spherical object looms closer. The camera begins to pick up surface detail.

VANCE

What is that?

HASMIR

It looks like metal, but...

CHOW

It's almost as if it were grown in that shape, somehow...

The surface has a mottled, cellular appearance, with ribs intertwining here and there, like a leaf. As the R.O.V. draws near, a ghost of a pattern appears on the surface just at the edge of the pool of light from the flood.

CHOW

Wait! Back up. There. To the right.

Hasmir manipulates the controls, curving the R.O.V. around to the right of the Artifact and pulling in.

VANCE

Oh my God.

INSERT - R.O.V. POV

There, on the side of the Artifact, is the mandala-like symbol from the fourth quadrant of the message. It fills the screen, illuminated by the R.O.V.'s flood. It is textural, seeming to have been grown into the surface.

INT. ICE CAVE - TRANSANTARCTIC MOUNTAINS - DAY

Walls, floor, and ceiling are a beautiful shade of blue.

Lewis staggers several paces into the cave, and stops.

There, standing not ten feet from him, is his father. Brass gleams on the buttons of his uniform. He stands rigidly at attention, his eyes fixed in the distance.

Lewis moves toward him, hesitantly, until they are standing no more than an arm's length apart. Lewis's breath is steaming in the frigid air. His father's is not.

Then, as Lewis stands before him, there is a flicker of movement in the eyes. They shift, slightly, and look at him. Lewis swallows.

His father extends a congratulatory, white-gloved hand, as though Lewis were about to accept a medal from him.

Lewis hesitates, then reaches out and takes the hand.

EXT. DRILL SITE - ANTARCTIC - DAY

A SOUND comes over the R.O.V.'s microphone pick-up, a sound like LOW, ELECTRICAL HUMMING. It starts softly and grows louder. At the same time, the mandala-symbol onscreen starts glowing—a pale, greenish-yellow light that waxes and wanes with the sound.

HASMIR

What the hell?

The Artifact is PULSING, now, about once every 2 or 3 seconds, with light and sound.

CHOW

What is it doing?

VANCE

It obviously knows we're here.

Vance exchanges an ominous glance with Dick, who has stopped working crowd control to watch the proceedings.

HASMIR

Look!

INSERT - R.O.V. POV

A fluid of some sort is trickling down from the top of the Artifact, flowing into the cracks and crevices in the surface around the mandala-symbol.

BACK TO SCENE

VANCE

What is that?

CHOW

It looks like...water.

Hasmir looks at his instrument panel with alarm.

HASMIR

I'm getting temperature readings here.
Ambient shot up ten degrees in the last
minute or so.

A beat, as realization hits them.

CHOW

My God. It's melting the ice.

DOWN IN THE CAVERN

The pulses of light from within the Artifact come in waves, starting at the bottom of the sphere and ebbing toward the top. The air is thick with steam, and water streams down the sides of the Artifact and the walls of the cavern. It is already an inch deep on the floor.

BACK ON THE SURFACE

Suddenly, the video screen goes dead, and a red malfunction light activates on the R.O.V. instrument panel.

HASMIR

Shit! The R.O.V. shorted out.

DICK

What?! You mean we're blind down there?

HASMIR

It's not designed to be submersible!

VANCE

Pull it out of there. Try to fix it.

Christine runs up, breathless.

CHRISTINE

I can't find Lewis!

CHOW

What do you mean, you can't find Lewis?

CHRISTINE

He's not anywhere in camp. I checked all the buildings. Twice. Nobody knows where he is!

SCOTT

I saw him.

CHRISTINE

Where?

SCOTT

He was walking around the outskirts of camp, a couple hours ago. Maybe he wandered off somewhere...

CHRISTINE

Jesus! I'm going to look for him.

SCOTT

Christine, wait! You're untrained.
(looks to Dick)
I'll go.

A beat. Dick nods curtly.

DICK

Take Ruiz with you. If he's hurt you'll need more than one man.

Ruiz joins Scott and Christine. Dick holds up his radio.

DICK

But stay in touch. I may need you back here double quick.

RUIZ

You got it, Skip.

CHRISTINE

I'm going with you.

SCOTT

No. You'll slow us down.

CHRISTINE

I'm an MD, for Christ's sake—he may be hurt!

SCOTT

(beat)

All right. But stay close to me.

They trot off together toward the edge of camp.

EXT. DRILL SITE - ANTARCTICA - DAY

TV CAMERA FOOTAGE

The female reporter stands facing the camera, the activity at the drill site bustling in the B.G.

REPORTER

An incredible series of events here at the base camp where, just a few minutes ago, scientists broke into what appears to be a...

As she talks, a swelling of STATIC comes on screen. It starts as a flicker and culminates with the image and sound entirely whited-out with snow.

A beat, and everything clears.

REPORTER

...some kind of artifact, of unknown manufacture, which now appears to have been activated in some way..

The swelling of STATIC comes again.

OFF CAMERA

The cameraman WHACKS the side of the camera with his hand.

CAMERAMAN

What the fuck is that?

REPORTER

(exasperated)

What's the problem?

CAMERAMAN

I dunno. There's some kind of interference with the signal.

REPORTER

Well fix it, dammit, I'm going out live!

INT. VANCE'S OFFICE - JAMESWAY - ANTARCTIC BASE CAMP - DAY

Chow, Dick, and Vance are huddled in the tiny room.

DICK

So why is it melting the ice?

CHOW

Look, we know that the Artifact is hollow, right? And if our weight estimate of twenty-five tons is accurate, then it's lighter than water. It should float.

VANCE

I get it: The thing generates heat, which melts the ice, filling the cavern with water, causing the Artifact to float upwards, where it melts more ice, makes more water, and floats even higher. Like a piston, raising it to the surface.

DICK

So it's coming up?

CHOW

Yes. It's coming up.

VANCE

Generating that much heat is going to require a tremendous amount of energy.

Another look passes between Vance and Dick. Chow notices, but before he can say anything Dick's radio SQUAWKS.

SCOTT (O.S.)

Scott here, sir.

DICK
(into radio)
I copy. Go ahead.

SCOTT (O.S.)
We've found him, sir. We're bringing him
into camp now.

DICK
How is he?

SCOTT (O.S.)
Looks pretty bad, sir.

The three of them hurry toward the exit.

EXT. BASE CAMP - ANTARCTICA - DAY

Chow, Lewis, and Dick run out to the edge of camp, where Scott and Ruiz are carrying an unconscious Lewis between them. Christine runs alongside.

Lewis's hair is now completely white, and his skin has a distinct bluish tinge.

CHOW
What happened?

SCOTT
We found him in the mountains!

CHRISTINE
He's unconscious. I think he may have
fallen. Hypothermia's the biggest danger;
his core temperature's way down. We need
to warm him up, fast!

SCOTT
We've gotta get him inside. Move!

As they pass the drill site, Christine stops in her tracks.

CHRISTINE
No, wait! I've got a better idea!

EXT. DRILL SITE - ANTARCTICA - DAY

Lewis is stripped down, submerged up to his neck in the drill's hot-water reservoir. Christine, Chow, Vance, Dick, Ruiz, and Scott are gathered around. Christine massages Lewis's face as she talks to him.

CHRISTINE

Lewis? Lewis? Can you hear me? Lewis?

Lewis makes an inarticulate moaning sound.

Christine produces a thermometer and begins working with Lewis, trying to get him to take it in his mouth.

CHRISTINE

Lewis? Listen to me now: I need you to hold this in your mouth for me. Under your tongue. It's a thermometer.

Christine gets it in there, but he won't hold it.

CHRISTINE

Dammit!

Steam rises from the borehole behind them. Just then, the hole fills up with water and begins to overflow onto the ice. Dick notices it first.

DICK

Vance.

Vance turns. In a moment, the trickle becomes a torrent. Hot water shoots up out of the borehole about 3 feet in the air, like a fountain in the ice. The others notice now, too, and turn to gape.

VANCE

We've got to get him out of there, now.
(to Dick)

Clear the area! Get everybody out of here!

Dick and his team spring into gear.

CHRISTINE

(to Scott and Ruiz)

Help me get him out of here.

DICK

No! I need you two on crowd control, now!
These two can help with him.

A beat, and everyone does as Dick orders: Scott and Ruiz go off with him, while Chow and Vance help Christine wrestle Lewis out of the hot-water tank.

INT. SLEEPING BERTH - JAMESWAY - DAY

A small, curtained-off area just big enough to hold a single bunk and chair.

Vance, Chow, and Christine trundle Lewis, dressed only in a hospital gown, into the bunk. Christine wraps him in blankets and starts trying again to take his temperature. This time he manages to hold the thermometer in his mouth.

CHOW

Is he going to be all right?

CHRISTINE

I don't know. He was out there a long time. Hypoxia could have caused permanent brain damage. Or, he could recover fully in a few hours. We need to get him out of here, to a better facility.

VANCE

I'll call McMurdo, arrange for a medevac.

He disappears through the curtain. Christine sits at Lewis's bedside, stroking his forehead. Chow watches awkwardly.

She looks up at him. Her glare says, quite distinctly:
"Why don't you get out of here, you piece of shit?"

A beat, and Chow vanishes through the curtain.

INT. CHOW'S SLEEPING BERTH - JAMESWAY - DAY

Chow sits on his bunk. His briefcase is open beside him. He has the velvet case open in his hand, staring at the medallion inside.

The inscription, INVENTAS VITAM JUVANT EXCOLUISSE PER ARTES, translates roughly as: "For those who bettered life on earth through new found mastery."

Chow strokes the medal lightly with his finger.

A beat. Vance's head appears through the curtain.

VANCE

Dan. You need to see this.

Chow closes the case, but does not get up immediately.

EXT. DRILL SITE - ANTARCTICA - DAY

The fountain of steaming water is now as tall as a man, glowing with a refracted greenish-yellow light which pulses once every 2 or 3 seconds. The LOW, ELECTRIC PULSING NOISE is audible on the surface, now. Everything within 20 meters of the borehole vibrates in tune with it.

TV CAMERA FOOTAGE

Behind the safety cordon, the female reporter and her cameraman are jostling for position.

REPORTER (O.S.)

Jesus. Are you getting this?

Every 2 or 3 seconds, in tune with the PULSING of the Artifact, a swelling of STATIC whites out the image.

CAMERAMAN (O.S.)

I'm getting it. There's still some kind of intermittent interference.

REPORTER (O.S.)

Just keep the fucking camera rolling, alright?

OFF CAMERA

Vance and Chow slip under the safety cordon.

CHOW

Dear God...

From above, the Artifact is now visible, rising beneath the ice—a dark pool probably 15 meters in diameter with the distorted greenish-yellow glowing form of the Artifact at its center. Hot water flows out from the borehole, forming a spreading pool that flows away downhill in a stream.

The door of the nearest Jamesway flies open, and the 8 SEALs, with Dick in the lead, file out double-time. Openly brandishing their submachineguns, they spread out to form a perimeter around the borehole outside the cordon.

Chow watches, incredulous. Vance just looks resigned.

Shouts of protest in many languages come from the assembled crowd of on-lookers.

Dick approaches Chow and Vance, submachinegun in hand.

DICK

Gentlemen. I need to ask you to get back behind the safety cordon.

CHOW

Jesus Christ, man, what are you doing?! You're in violation of international law! This is an act of aggression!

VANCE

Come on, Dan. We have to follow the protocol.

CHOW

What protocol?!? Nobody ever told me about any fucking protocol!!

DICK

Doctors, please.

CHOW

Are you really going to authorize this decision?!

VANCE

I don't have authority here, Dan. He does.

A LOUD CRACKING NOISE LIKE A GUNSHOT RINGS OUT.

INT. SLEEPING BERTH - JAMESWAY - DAY

Christine looks up at the SOUND OF A SHOT from outside, her face a mask of worry. She puts a hand on Lewis's forehead, then stands up to go check on it.

CHRISTINE

Lewis. I'll be right back.

He murmurs something as she goes, but she does not hear.

EXT. ANTARCTIC - DRILL SITE - DAY

Another GUNSHOT-LIKE SOUND as a huge crack appears in the ice above the emerging Artifact. And then another, and another. Steaming water sprays up between the spreading cracks. The LOW, ELECTRIC HUM that accompanies each PULSE is deafening.

Christine runs up toward the site, weaving her way among reporters and scientists of all nationalities, only to collide, almost bodily, with Scott, who is waving his submachinegun around, trying to push the crowd back.

Christine stops abruptly and stares at him, at the gun in his hands.

CHRISTINE

Scott! What the fuck are you doing!?

SCOTT

Christine, don't-

A LOUD, CREAKING SOUND, followed by a SOUND LIKE A THUNDERBOLT as the ice finally gives way. A spray of hot water and steam and pieces of ice as the Artifact breaks through the surface and shoots into the air, like a submarine doing an emergency ballast-blow.

INT. SLEEPING BERTH - JAMESWAY - DAY

Lewis's eyes snap open in the bunk. They are filled with terrible purpose. He throws off the blankets and stands up. Wearing only the hospital gown, he slowly walks out of the sleeping berth and down the hall toward the front door.

EXT. DRILL SITE - ANTARCTICA - DAY

TV CAMERA FOOTAGE

In the distance, the Artifact is dimly visible through the clouds of steam swirling up around it. Intermittently, in time with the Artifact's pulsing, the image snows up with STATIC.

CAMERAMAN (O.S.)

Fuck this. I'm going in for a better shot.

The image jostles as the cameraman moves in closer, ducking around other reporters and scientists, trying to keep his camera trained on the Artifact at all times. As he gets closer, we see that it seems to be floating, suspended in the air about a meter above the gaping hole in the ice.

Suddenly, Ruiz appears in the picture, reaching out his hand to block the cameraman's advance.

RUIZ

Awright, man! That's far enough!

CAMERAMAN (O.S.)

Fuck you.

He ducks to one side and tries to go around Ruiz. The image jostles again, as they struggle, and then there is a THUMP, as of someone being struck, and the image spins wildly as the cameraman reels.

When the image stabilizes, the camera has discovered a barefoot Lewis, clad only in a billowing hospital gown, pacing slowly toward the Artifact as though mesmerized.

CAMERAMAN (O.S.)

What the hell...?

OFF CAMERA

Everyone has noticed him now, including Christine, who runs after him, shouting.

CHRISTINE

Lewis! You've got to get back in bed right now! Lewis! You shouldn't be out here!

She tugs at his elbow but he does not respond. His eyes are fixed on the Artifact as it PULSES with LIGHT AND SOUND. He keeps going. The air between him and the Artifact seems to crackle with unseen energy.

Dick steps up to bar his path.

DICK

Don't you think you've caused enough trouble for today?

Lewis keeps coming, paying Dick no mind. Dick loses his temper and reaches out a hand to physically restrain him.

DICK

Awright, that's enough! Get ba-

A BOLT OF FORCE leaps across space from the Artifact to Lewis. The impact sends Dick flying back away from him, sprawling out across the ice 5 meters away. His submachinegun goes flying out of his hand.

Laid out on his back, stunned, Dick shakes his head and looks up with an expression that says, "What happened?"

Lewis is standing still, locked in some kind of communion with the Artifact. The air between them really *does* crackle, at this point, infused with little sparkles of greenish-yellow energy. The PULSING is getting faster.

Everyone else looks on, dumbstruck.

Lewis extends his arms at his sides and levitates up, off the ground, just like the Artifact, and floats there, suspended in the stream of energy that connects them.

The PULSING culminates now in an indefinite, sustained ROAR and glow. This is Lewis's moment of apotheosis. His face bears a strained expression that could be agony and could be ecstasy. Tears stream down his cheeks and his mouth twists into a rictus of joy. In his last moments, Lewis's eyes bear a look of infinite release—it is the look of a man who has suffered long and hard, and is finally free.

Then, the SOUND and LIGHT from the Artifact cut off abruptly, and Lewis's limp body crumples to the ice like an

empty suit of clothes. A beat, and the Artifact begins PULSING again.

Christine runs to Lewis, kneeling over him, checking for vital signs, a pulse, anything.

CHRISTINE

(wailing)

He's dead! Jesus Christ, he's dead! It fucking killed him!

She collapses over him, bawling.

Dick sees this, rolls to his feet, and starts resolutely toward the SEALs' Jamesway.

Scott runs to Christine and tries to pull her up by the arm.

SCOTT

(urgently)

Come on, Christine: You've got to get back! Get away from here! He's dead! Leave him!

CHRISTINE

(flings him off)

NO! You fucking bastards! NO!

She has Lewis in her lap now, cradling him like the Pieta. She looks up to Chow with desperation streaming out of her eyes.

CHRISTINE

(screaming)

What do we do now? Huh? What the hell do we do now?

Chow looks at Vance, who looks at Dick, who is climbing up the stairs and going inside the Jamesway. Vance looks helplessly back to Chow.

CHOW

(softly)

I don't know.

TV CAMERA FOOTAGE

A swelling of STATIC dies out just in time to catch Christine, cradling Lewis, yelling to Chow.

CHRISTINE

(screaming)

...What the hell do we do now?!?

The camera swings around to Chow's face. Another wave of STATIC comes and goes.

CHOW

(softly)

I don't know.

(beat)

I-

And then everything is cut off abruptly by a BURST OF STATIC, as though the transmission were suddenly interrupted at the source.

Hold for a long beat, with the screen buzzing full of STATIC, and then...

FADE OUT.