

Fantastic Four

by

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based on the Marvel comic book by  
Stan Lee and Jack Kirby

Shooting Script

FADE IN:

CLOSE ON A MASSIVE STEEL HEAD

Our first thought: DR. DOOM? But it's not moving. A welder's torch sparks into frame in the hands of a sculptor on scaffolding. This is art, an epic 20 foot statue going up

of a business mogul (VICTOR VON DOOM) in whose generously extended hands sit two intertwined columns of DNA. His face is chiseled, angular, perfect (too perfect). Past sparks, we MOVE down to pick up...

EXT. STREET/VON DOOM INDUSTRIES TOWER - DAY

REED RICHARDS and BEN GRIMM head toward the soaring glass-box atrium of VDI Headquarters. Designed to inspire awe, it does.

REED

High open space, exposed structural elements. Obviously aimed at first time visitors to create feelings of... smallness, inadequacy.

Ben glances at Reed, who looks a little nervous.

BEN

Good thing it ain't workin... Reed, what are we doing here? This guy's fast-food, strip-mall science --

REED

This wasn't our first stop, in case you forgot NASA. And Victor's not that bad. He's just a little...  
(seeing the statue)  
Larger than life.

INT. VON DOOM INDUSTRIES TOWER - DAY

They move past the statue, into the sprawling atrium.

REED

He's financed some of the biggest breakthroughs of this century.

BEN

You'd never know it.

He motions to a high-tech ORB, showing FOOTAGE of VDI's accomplishments: a safe and clean nuclear facility, the first private Space Station.

All images have VICTOR front and center, glad-handling George Bush, Tony Blair, shady International Leaders. The last image is Victor holding the AMERICA'S CUP.

BEN (CONT'D)

Jesus. That too?

They reach three stern RECEPTIONISTS.

REED

Reed Richards and Ben Grimm to see --

A receptionist cuts him off, handing them each a pass.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST  
Executive elevator, top floor.

BEN  
What's the price for a smile round here?

They head for the elevator. Reed carries a small, black box. As they enter the elevator, steel doors shut and we CUT TO --

INT. VON DOOM INDUSTRIES TOWER - OFFICE - DAY

A large, dark office. Ben in the corner. He yawns, watches...

BRIGHT HOLOGRAMS: Stars. Planets. They hover in the air, making the room feel like a majestic portal into outer space.

REED (O.S.)  
My research suggests that exposure to a high-energy cosmic storm born on solar winds might have triggered the evolution of early planetary life.

REED stands among the holograms, speaking to a MYSTERIOUS FIGURE in shadow behind a desk. An ominous, PULSATING RED CLOUD covers the stars. It washes over a hologram of EARTH.

REED (CONT'D)  
In six weeks another cloud with the same elemental profile will pass Earth's orbit. A study in space could advance our knowledge about the structure of the human genome, and help cure countless diseases, extend human life --

The SHADOW clears his throat. Reed speeds up, emotional.

REED (CONT'D)  
Give kids the chance to be stronger, healthier, less prone to --

SHADOWED FIGURE  
Turn it off. Please.

The figure's DEEP VOICE pierces the darkness.

REED  
But I haven't fully explained my --

SHADOWED FIGURE  
Yes you have... Imagination. Creativity. Passion. Those were always your trademarks.

Lights brighten, revealing the face behind the voice: VICTOR VON DOOM. 35, handsome, commanding. He looks almost... airbrushed. He drops a WIRED magazine to the desk. REED is on the cover over the words: RICHARDS BANKRUPT, GRANT CUTBACKS.

VICTOR

But dreams don't pay the bills, do they?

(a condescending smile)

Same old Reed, the hopeless optimist. Still reaching for the stars, with the world on your back.

REED

You remember in school we talked about working together. That's what I was about to explain...

Reed presses the remote. Another hologram appears: A SHUTTLE slowly approaching AN ORBITING SPACE STATION. Both bear the VON DOOM INDUSTRIES logo. Victor smiles, more intrigued.

VICTOR

So it's not my money you want. It's my toys... Tell me: if NASA doesn't trust you, why should I?

Victor is a step ahead. Reed pauses, thrown for a beat. Ben wakes up, suspicious. Victor notices. He notices everything.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

That's my job. To stay a step ahead. To know what other men don't.

Ben gets close to Reed, turning toward the door.

BEN

I can't take this.

REED

(low, quiet)

Ben. This is business. Just work.

A beat. Victor cracks a smile, enjoying the tension. And...

SUE (O.S.)

He's right, Ben.

They turn to see...SUE STORM (demure, stunning) standing in a corner...possibly for the whole presentation. A little cold:

SUE (CONT'D)

It's just business.

VICTOR

I think you both know my Director of Genetic Research, Susan Storm.

BEN

Heya Susie.

(under breath, to Reed)

One more thing he's got.

Sue gracefully walks into the office, only taking her eyes off of Reed to give Ben a warm hug.

SUE

Ben, it's been too long.

She gives Reed a polite handshake. Victor watches carefully. Reed looks uncomfortable in her gaze. A little tongue-tied.

REED

You're, you've, I mean, how have you bee--

SUE

Never better.

Victor sizes them up. He puts a hand on Sue's shoulder.

VICTOR

This isn't going to be a problem, is it?

REED

Not at all.

SUE

Ancient history.

Victor smiles, eyeing Sue.

VICTOR

Good. Then you're just in time to hear the great Reed Richards ask me for help.

(to Reed)

You know, you made a lot of folks at MIT feel like a junior high science fair. So you'll excuse me if I savor the moment.

Ben tightens. A hard beat. Reed sucks it up.

REED

You back this mission, and I'll sign over a fair percentage of any applications or --

VICTOR

The number's seventy-five. And it's applications and patents.

BEN

What about his first born?

REED

(quiet)

Ben, the money's not important. We could save lives.

Sue gives a thin smile -- a flicker of old feelings.

VICTOR

Twenty-five percent of a billion is enough to keep the lights on, isn't it? Maybe even pay off your fourth mortgage on the Baxter Building.

They look at Victor. How does he know all this...?

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Deal...?

Reed looks at Ben, who shakes his head softly no. But Reed...drops a nod. Done. Victor smiles, offers a handshake.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Well then, to our future. Together.

Victor squeezes. Hard. His other hand on Sue's shoulder.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Funny how things turn out, isn't it?

REED

Hilarious.

As Reed and Sue lock eyes, Ben watches Victor. Wary.

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Director of Communications LEONARD enters, checking files.

VICTOR

If Reed's right, then this little trip will double our stock offering.

LEONARD

And if he's not...?

VICTOR

Reed's always right. Good thing he doesn't always know what he's got...

INT. VON DOOM INDUSTRIES TOWER - ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

Reed and Ben step into the elevator.

BEN

He knew about NASA. What if he made the call to shut us down --

REED

Ben, think about all the people we can help if this works --

BEN

Maybe you should think about yourself for once. You always let this guy push you round --

REED

We got what we wanted. That's enough.

BEN

I know, I know. I'm just worried about what he wants... Speaking of which...

Reed follows Ben's eyes to...SUE. She joins them. Doors shut.

INT. VON DOOM INDUSTRIES STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

SUE

You sure about this, Reed?

He nods, head down. He doesn't want eye contact.

REED

Those solar winds are flaring, but I factored them into my coordinates and --

SUE

I was talking about us. Working together.

Sue holds her eyes on Reed. He is clearly uncomfortable in her gaze. Did the elevator just get smaller?

REED

(thinking, talking fast)  
Well, uh, based on our history...you can handle the biogenetics, and I'll focus on the molecular physics. Or, uhm, maybe I should take the biotech, you work the microscopes, since you have some background in electropho--

SUE

(droll, a little annoyed)

Right. That's exactly what I meant.

She shakes her head -- same old Reed. He looks at her -- what did he say wrong? Ben smiles, patting Reed on the shoulder.

BEN

Way to not overthink it.  
(to Sue)  
So when do we leave?

SUE

I'll schedule the launch. Call me in the morning to talk about resources and crew.

She offers a business card. Reed doesn't take it.

REED

I, uh, think I remember the number.

SUE

It's been changed.

Beat. Ben grimaces. Reed takes the card, his eyes down.

REED

As far as crew, I was hoping Ben could pilot the mission --

SUE

Well, he's welcome to ride shotgun, but we already have a pilot on our payroll. You remember my brother Johnny...

Off Ben's curdling smile, we DISSOLVE TO --

EXT. LAKE LAUNCH FACILITY - DAY

A helicopter shot through trees. We soar over timberland, and find something massive looming on the horizon:

A SPACECRAFT. A sleek take on a space shuttle. Modern tech combined with industrial design that NASA could never afford. The craft's nose is pointed straight up, ready for launch. WORKERS IN JUMPSUITS are scattered around the two-hundred foot tall scaffolding, performing routine checks.

EXT. GANTRY OVERLOOK - DAY

Ben stares up at the craft. A sneer on his face.

BEN

Can't do it. I cannot do it.

REED

External SRBs, orbital system engines.  
Its just like the shuttles you flew  
in --

BEN

No. I cannot take orders from that  
underwear model. That wingnut washed  
out of NASA for sneaking two Victoria  
Secret wannabes into a flight  
simulator.

REED

Youthful high spirits.

They walk toward the base of the scaffolding.

BEN

They crashed it into a wall. A flight  
*simulator*.

REED

I'm sure he's matured since then.

CLOSE on JOHNNY STORM, leaning over to kiss a hot redhead.  
PULL BACK TO REVEAL he's riding a MOTORCYCLE, and she's  
driving a red CORVETTE with license plate: FRANKIE. PICK UP  
Reed and Ben, watching through binoculars.

REED (CONT'D)

When have I asked you to do something  
you absolutely said you could not do?

BEN

Five times.

REED

I had it at four.

BEN

This makes five.

INT. LAKE LAUNCH FACILITY LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Reed and Ben unpack gear into lockers. Suddenly --

JOHNNY (O.S.)

Captain on the bridge!

Ben goes to attention on reflex: Johnny snaps a picture with  
a digital camera. Then advances, as Ben realizes who it  
is...

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Digital camera: \$254. Memory stick:  
\$59. The look on your hard-ass former  
CO's grill when he finds out he's your  
junior officer: priceless.

Ben eyeballs Johnny, suddenly reaches up as if to grab him. Johnny flinches. But Ben just reaches for Johnny's zipper, adjusts his uniform.

BEN

I can handle the ship. I can even handle Mr. Blonde Ambition. But I don't know if I should be flying or playing Vegas in these suits. Who the hell came up with them?

SUE

Victor did.

Sue enters, wearing her blue, wetsuit-like uniform, carrying a stack of flightsuits. She hands them out to the guys.

SUE (CONT'D)

The synthetics act as a second skin, adapting to your individual needs to --

JOHNNY

Keep the hot side hot, and the cool side cool!

REED

Wow. Fantastic.

Reed stares at Sue in the skintight outfit. She wonders, maybe hopes -- is he *actually* checking her out?

REED (CONT'D)

Material made from self-regulating unstable molecules. I've been working on a formula for this.

SUE

Great minds think alike.

VICTOR (O.S.)

Guess some think faster than others.

Victor enters, wearing his custom-tailored flightsuit.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

I hired Armani to design the pattern. These colors will look great on camera.

A DOOR OPENS. Leonard enters, in a sharp suit.

LEONARD

They're ready for you, sir.

VICTOR

Showtime.

EXT. LAKE LAUNCH FACILITY - HALLS - NIGHT

Leonard leads Victor through the halls. Victor checks himself in mirrors as he walks, fixing his hair, his uniform.

LEONARD

Our numbers are through the roof. The IPO's tracking at fifty, sixty a share. The bank's five times oversubscribed --

VICTOR

It's not just the money. I could make money in my sleep.

LEONARD

Then what is it?

VICTOR

History, Leonard. History.  
Everything else is conversation...  
(a beat)  
How's the other matter?

Leonard pulls out a BOX. Opens it: a TEN KARAT DIAMOND RING.

LEONARD

Harry Winston sends his regards.

They hit a set of big doors. Victor stops and looks into the reflective, metallic surface on the wall. He fixes one last strand of hair. Perfect. Then he opens the door to...

SNAP!SNAP!SNAP! WHIP-PAN a row of CAMERAS snapping shots of --

EXT. LAKE LAUNCH FACILITY - NIGHT

Retrofitted into a makeshift press area. Victor sits on a platform, with reporters stretched out below him.

VICTOR

Today we stand on the edge of a new frontier. In the furthest depths of outer space...we will find the secrets to inner space. The final key to unlocking our genetic code lies in a cosmic storm...

BEHIND THE ACTION: Reed, Sue, Johnny and Ben walk past. News crews barely notice, passing without even taking a picture. Our "Fantastic Four" are not exactly big news. Not yet.

BEN

Isn't that your speech?

REED

He's made a few changes.

BEN

This is your dream, Reed. You should be the one up there.

REED

Victor's better at these things.

Just past the press area, they see...one woman standing, waiting. This is DEBBIE, Ben's fiancée. And for the first time in the entire film...Ben SMILES. They hug, kissing.

Johnny and Reed watch. Reed glances at Sue, who walks ahead. Debbie slips a photo into Ben's flightsuit. A tender beat.

BEN

I'll be watching over you.

DEBBIE

Just get back soon, or I start looking for a new groom.

Ben looks at the little ENGAGEMENT RING on her finger.

BEN

Soon as I'm back, I'm gonna trade that in for a bigger rock.

DEBBIE

I don't care about rocks, I care about you.

(to Reed)

You bring him back in one piece, or you can forget being Best Man.

Reed nods, smiles. Debbie gives Ben a last kiss. Ben turns to Johnny, who gives a cocky smile.

BEN

What the hell you smiling at? Just keep your mouth shut, and your mind on those SMBs --

JOHNNY

Actually, the engines are SMEs. Hydrogenbase, carbon propellant. Couple generations past your last ride.

(at the threshold)

I'm not as dumb as you look.

Ben just glares at Reed. This is going to be a long trip. As they follow after Sue, we CUT BACK TO --

VICTOR ON STAGE

Mid-speech. Playing behind him is REED'S HOLOGRAM: stars give way to a pulsating red cloud...

VICTOR

Think of a world without genetic flaws  
-- no asthma, allergies, baldness,  
breast cancer...

Ben and Reed hear the speech. Ben bristles.

BEN

What's wrong with being bald...?

Victor smiles at the crowd, commanding. A true leader.

VICTOR

Darwin discovered evolution. Now we --  
I -- will define it. Only in America  
could...

The red cloud of cosmic rays wash over the Earth.

VICTOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...a little country boy from Latveria  
build one of the biggest companies in  
the world, and truly reach the stars.  
Now if you'll excuse me, history  
awaits...

On those words, the HOLOGRAM TRANSFORMS TO...Von Doom's SHUTTLE on the launch pad. BOOM! THRUSTERS FIRE WHITE HOT. Smoke billows across the pad. Ready for take off.

Victor walks past the hologram and exits. His departure perfectly timed with the shuttle LIFTING OFF.

We push in on the shuttle, and follow the ship as it leaves Earth's atmosphere. BOOM -- booster rockets fall away and the shuttle fires its thrusters. The hologram transitions to...

A shot of the SPACE STATION high above the Earth. The shuttle enters from the top, lighting up the hologram with engines afire. As the shuttle approaches the station we CUT TO --

EXT. DEEP SPACE - SAME

THE SPACE STATION in the distance, rotating in orbit above Earth. THE SHUTTLE eases in and docks.

INT. SPACE STATION - COMMAND CENTER - SAME

Victor and Sue lead the others into the command center.

JOHNNY

(a "dad voice": to Ben)

If you behave, maybe next time  
daddy'll let you drive.

BEN

Keep talking, there won't be a next  
time.

Reed is focused on THE EARTH.

SUE

Long way from the projection booth at  
the Hayden Planetarium, isn't it?

Reed turns towards her -- a little stunned that she would  
bring that up. *It's the first time she's been nice to him so  
far.* He smiles, gently, hesitantly, always hesitant with  
Sue.

REED

Yes. Yes it is.

Johnny and Ben exchange a look. Reed keeps looking at the  
stars, eyes wide, like a little kid.

INT. SPACE STATION - COMMAND CENTER/OBSERVATION DECK - SAME

They enter the nerve center of the space station. Victor  
goes to a computer console on the observation deck below.  
The windows are closed, so there's nothing to observe.

VICTOR

(to ground; via comm-link)  
Leonard, how's the feed?

LEONARD (V.O.)

Recording, sir. We see you perfectly.

Victor glances at a camera mounted into the console.

SUE

We can monitor the cloud's approach  
and observe the tests from here.

BEN

Is it safe?

REED

The shields on the station should  
protect us.

BEN

Should?

VICTOR

What's wrong, Ben? Eighty-million  
dollars worth of equipment not enough  
for you?

Ben turns to Victor. A little tension. Reed cuts it:

REED

Let's start loading those samples.  
Get your suit ready, Ben.

Victor keeps his eyes on Ben.

VICTOR

So you still do all the heavy lifting?

Victor gives a friendly smile, patting Reed.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Maybe you should have stayed back in  
the lab. Field work never suited you.

Reed doesn't defend himself. Ben steps up.

BEN

He does the talking. I do the  
walking. Got it?

Victor holds tight to his smile. He nods, condescending.

VICTOR

Got it. So take a walk, Ben...I'm  
going to borrow Susan for a second.

REED

Sure.

Ben and Johnny read his eyes, as we CUT TO --

INT. SPACE STATION - AIR LOCK - LATER

Ben preps for a space walk, putting on a helmet and boots.  
Johnny unloads a set of clear sample boxes off of a cart,  
each containing a variety of plants.

JOHNNY

Please tell me your dawg's not trying  
to rekindle things with my sister.

BEN

'Course not. Strictly business.

JOHNNY

Yeah, well, his eyes say different.

BEN

Hey, two hearts got busted last time.  
Maybe she's not over it either.

JOHNNY

Let's see: you got Victor, stud of the

year, more coin than God? Or Reed, the world's dumbest smart guy worth less than a postage stamp. Hmmm, it's a toss-up.

BEN

Put your tiny little mind at ease.

JOHNNY

Don't you wander off, boy.

Johnny steps out of the air-lock and shuts the door. He looks through a small window to see Ben give the thumbs up. THE AIRLOCK DOOR opens, and Ben gracefully steps into space.

INT. SPACE STATION - OBSERVATION DECK - SAME TIME

Sue descends the stairs at Victor's behest. Joins him.

VICTOR

Surprised I agreed to Reed's proposal?

SUE

I understand the *business* reasons.

VICTOR

Well, when you're looking at your future, it never hurts to find closure about the past.

Sue's eyes narrow. What is this about...?

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Susan, every man dreams that he'll meet some woman he can give the world to.

He presses a button and the observation deck's outer windows open up, revealing a spectacular, romantic view of the EARTH.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

In my case, it's not just a metaphor.

While she stares out the window, Victor reaches into a pocket, revealing a RING BOX. Sue looks unsettled.

INT. SPACE STATION - NEARBY CORRIDOR - SAME TIME

Reed checks data on a work station, set on a wall. The results of his calculations are not what he expected... He sees WIND VELOCITY digits rise. He does a double-take when he sees the readout: EVENT THRESHOLD, T-MINUS 10:00.

REED

No...no...impossible. It's...too fast.

INT. SPACE STATION - OBSERVATION DECK - SAME TIME

Behind his back, Victor holds the ring box in hand.

VICTOR

You've been with me two years now.

Sue doesn't know where this is going. She treads lightly.

SUE

It's been a good two years, Victor...  
The company's accomplished so much.

VICTOR

Right, of course, the company... But  
you see, I've come to realize all the  
accomplishments in the world mean  
nothing without someone to share them  
with --

SUE

Uh, Victor, I hope I haven't done  
something to make you think...

VICTOR

Sue, I've lived my life unafraid of  
taking big steps. And this is the  
biggest step yet. If it helps, think  
of this as a promotion. A merger of  
sorts...

(getting closer)

Four little words that can change our  
lives...

He is about to spring the ring on her. She looks like a deer  
in headlights. She opens her mouth, and...WHAM! Doors slam  
open. REED RUSHES INTO THE ROOM.

REED

The cloud is accelerating!

Victor quickly puts the ring back in his pocket.

REED (CONT'D)

I don't know what happened.

Sue quickly moves to a nearby control panel to verify Reed's  
claim. Starts punching buttons. Confirms Reed's findings  
with a nod. Victor hardens, in control.

REED (CONT'D)

We've got minutes until it hits, not  
hours...Victor, that storm's deadly --  
the radiation's lethal. We need to  
abort.

VICTOR

Get a grip. Reed. We didn't come all this way to lose our nerve at the first little glitch. Just close the shields...

REED

Ben's still out there --

VICTOR

So reel him in. But we came here to do a job. So let's do it. Quickly.

EXT. SPACE STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Ben is carefully arranging SAMPLE BOXES OF PLANTS.

REED (ON RADIO)

Ben, we need you back inside.

Ben turns to see Reed and Johnny staring from a window.

BEN (INTO RADIO)

I ain't done arranging your flowers, egghead.

REED (ON RADIO)

Ben. This is serious. Turn around.

Ben sees Johnny motioning for Ben to look behind him. Ben turns and sees: THE COSMIC STORM, rumbling toward the station. Not close, but not far. That gets Ben's attention.

BEN (INTO RADIO)

Roger that, on my way.

He turns back towards the ship. BEHIND HIM, the storm grows.

INT. SPACE STATION - COMMAND CENTER - SAME TIME

Victor rushes into the room, looks at the monitors. Sees the others near the airlock on one screen, and the approaching cloud on another. Anxiety creeps across his face.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Event threshold in two minutes.

INT. SPACE STATION - AIRLOCK DOOR - SAME TIME

Reed and Johnny stand by the airlock, waiting for Ben. They heard the automated voice. It panics Reed.

REED

Come on, Ben, come on...

VICTOR (ON RADIO)

Reed, we're running out of time.

EXT. OUTER SPACE - MOMENTS LATER

A wake of turbulence from the cloud hits Ben, making it harder to maneuver. The cloud's tendrils snake toward him.

INT. SPACE STATION - AIRLOCK DOOR - SAME TIME

They can see Ben outside the window, still twenty yards away. The entire corridor rumbles. Lights flicker and spark. They watch helplessly.

INT. SPACE STATION - COMMAND CENTER/OBSERVATION DECK - SAME

Sue watches the monitor, also helpless.

SUE

Johnny... Reed...

Victor, annoyed by the indecisiveness, marches right up to Sue. Practically shoves her aside as he hits the INTERCOM.

VICTOR

Reed, you need to get up here so we can close the shields! Now!

Sue glares at Victor. His lack of compassion shocks her.

REED (ON RADIO)

Not until Ben is back inside!

VICTOR

It's too late for him, and soon it'll be too late for all of us.

Victor doesn't bother to wait for a response. He takes over the console, punching keys.

SUE

What are you doing?

VICTOR

Raising the shields.

SUE

You can't leave them out there.

Sue glares with as much contempt as her face can muster.

VICTOR

Watch me. Reed had his chance. You can't help them any more than I can.

Beat. She takes a step toward the door. Not sure what to do.

SUE

I can try.

With one final glare, she bolts from the room.

INT. SPACE STATION - AIRLOCK DOOR - SAME TIME

Reed bites his lip. Thinks. He decides.

REED

Victor's right. Johnny, get to the  
command center. Close the shields.

JOHNNY

What about you?

One look from Reed tells Johnny, he won't leave without Ben.  
Johnny eyes Ben, steels his courage. He's not going either.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

(to Ben)

Come on big guy, you can do it!

INT. SPACE STATION COMMAND CENTER - DAY

Victor watches the shields slide down. Alone. An island.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Event threshold in thirty seconds.

INT. SPACE STATION - CORRIDOR - SAME TIME

Sue races down the hall. Not panicked. With determination.

EXT. SPACE STATION AIR LOCK - DAY

The exterior air lock door slides open. In agonizing,  
weightless slow motion Ben reaches to haul himself inside.

The leading edge of the cloud hits: Ben is pelted by a  
hissing mass of space dust, splattering his suit with orange  
stains. Larger particles, small pellets, pepper him. Ben  
hauls himself in the last few feet by pulling on his tether.

INT. SPACE STATION AIR LOCK/COMMAND CENTER - DAY

AUTOMATED VOICE

Event threshold in ten seconds.

TEN...

Johnny punches controls to close the exterior airlock door...

Reed opens a first aid kit, grabs a thermo-elastic blanket...

INT. SPACE STATION - COMMAND CENTER/OBSERVATION DECK - SAME

Clutching the diamond ring, Victor stands defiantly. Showing  
absolutely no concern for the others. Interested only in the  
event itself. Lights and equipment FALL, CRASHING around

him.

A control panel EXPLODES in Victor's face. He jumps back, and into the falling equipment. Collapses under the weight.

INT. SPACE STATION - AIR LOCK - SAME TIME

Sue rounds a corner, sees Reed and Johnny.

SUE  
Johnny! Reed!

AUTOMATED VOICE  
FIVE...FOOOOUUR...

SLOW MOTION: Everyone frozen in position as:

-- JOHNNY is hit with sparks of flame from a control panel.  
-- REED REACHES out for Ben and the airlock door.  
-- VAPOR STREAM pours down on Sue from a blown gasket.  
-- THE SPACE DUST burns into Ben's skin.

SLOW MOTION: Just BEFORE the exterior air-lock door closes, a SINGLE PARTICLE zips through the narrowing gap and hits Ben in the back, ripping through his suit. The exterior door shuts and seals. The station loses all power. DARKNESS.

EXT. SPACE STATION - DAY

As quickly as it came, the cloud passes on and whirls away, leaving the space station intact. Power quietly flickers on.

Silence. Time resumes. All four pick up exactly where they left off, unaware of anything that just happened to them.

INT. SPACE STATION COMMAND CENTER - DAY

Victor emerges from the rubble. He stands, checks his body. A few scrapes, nothing serious. A thin, throbbing CUT on his head. He touches the wound, but it is not bleeding.

INT. SPACE STATION AIR LOCK - DAY

Reed and Johnny scramble to open the interior air lock door. Sue joins them, as they pull Ben in. They try to remove his helmet. We don't see his face, but he's clearly unconscious.

REED  
He's not responsive --

JOHNNY  
Ben! Ben!

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A BLACK SCREEN:

JOHNNY'S VOICE

Ben, wake up! Wake up!

SUBJECTIVE CAMERA, BEN'S POV: The blurry image of Johnny comes slowly into focus, standing beside a hospital bed.

BEN (O.S.)

Where...where am I?

JOHNNY

Back on Earth. Victor's medical facility... We're in quarantine.

BEN (O.S.)

Reed? ... Sue?

JOHNNY

They're fine. Everybody else...is fine.

Johnny looks away, as if he can't bear to lay eyes on him.

BEN (O.S.)

What's wrong with me?

JOHNNY

I swear to you they've done everything humanly possible. The best plastic surgeons in the world, Ben. You had the best --

BEN (O.S.)

Give me a mirror...

Johnny picks up a hand mirror on the bed table before Ben can reach it, reluctant to give it to him.

JOHNNY

They said that's not such a good idea, the shock alone could --

BEN (O.S.)

Give me the god damn mirror!

Ben grabs it from him. Then slowly raises it to look and see that...except for some serious stubble, Ben's totally normal.

JOHNNY

Unfortunately, the doctors just couldn't do anything to fix your face!

He cackles as he heads for the door. Ben heaves the mirror at him, breaking it into hundreds of pieces. He turns to the side-table, and grabs that picture of DEBBIE. It calms him.

EXT. VON DOOM COMPOUND - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A modern facility of glass and stone, nestled in the forest.  
In stark contrast to the lush greenery surrounding it.

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND HOSPITAL CORRIDOR/SUE'S ROOM - DAY

Reed walks down the hall. His hair is GRAYING at the temples. He passes Johnny, who is smiling, still enjoying his joke on Ben. Johnny slows, looking at Reed's hair.

JOHNNY

Nice 'do. Going for the "grandpa"  
look?

Reed passes a mirror, slowing, seeing his gray hairs. He keeps going. He passes a partially open door. He stops when he catches a glimpse of Sue asleep in bed. He sees a vase of flowers. He grabs a couple lilies, and enters.

But Reed sees...the room is already FILLED with expensive flowers. All from VICTOR. Reed is trumped once again.

A DOCTOR writes on Sue's chart. A wall TV plays a press conference with Victor, outside the FACILITY. He looks worse for wear. A few hairs out of place, and a small BANDAGE on his face. We PUSH INTO the press conference --

REPORTER #1

You've been accused in the past of  
moving science a little too fast --

VICTOR

Accused by who? My competitors?

REPORTER #2

But surely this accident gives you  
pause --

VICTOR

Danger is always part of discovery.  
What would have happened if Ben  
Franklin never went out in a storm?  
Without risk, there's no reward.

REPORTER #3

So where's the reward? You promised a  
cure-all.

Victor pauses. For the first time. Just a flicker.

VICTOR

And you'll have it. I've never come  
up short. And I'm not going to start  
now.

REPORTER #2

So you're still taking VDI public --

VICTOR

Yes, of course. I've never been more confident in the compan--

Reed mutes the television.

REED

How's she doing?

DOCTOR

Stable. Vitals are strong.

Reed takes the clipboard, looks for himself.

REED

Blood panels show no irradiation. Good. You'll step up this protocol, every --

DOCTOR

Four hours. We know what we're doing... One more day of observation, then you're all cleared.

The Doctor takes his clipboard, and walks out. Reed steps to Sue, with the drooping flowers in his hand. Quiet:

REED

Sue...I want to tell you...I'm...

WHOOSH. A NURSE rolls in with a tray bearing ten more extravagant bouquets. Reed looks resigned. He walks out.

REED (CONT'D)

She's allergic to orchids. Put that *Amaryllis Apapathos* by her bed. The African lilies? They're her favorites.

Reed exits, dropping his two wilted lilies into the trash.

Sue opens one eye, as the big lilies land by the bed.

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A SEXY NURSE wheels a testing station into Johnny's room. He's stripped down to Calvins, changing into a ski outfit.

SEXY NURSE

And where do we think we're going?

JOHNNY

I don't know if "we've" noticed, but the sickest runs this side of the Alps are *right outside that window* --

NURSE

I've noticed... But doctor's orders,  
you're not allowed to leave until we --

JOHNNY

Finish the tests, I know -- could you  
give me a hand with this zipper?

NURSE

You know this is not a ski resort.

JOHNNY

Not yet.

Johnny opens the cardboard box, revealing a colorful  
fiberglass object the size of a briefcase. In the blink of  
an eye, he unfolds it into a LONG SNOWBOARD.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Luckily grandma still sends care  
packages.

The nurse pops a thermometer in his mouth to shut him up.

NURSE

You are trouble.

JOHNNY

(thermometer in his mouth)  
Brubbles my Triddle Name.

They both pay more attention to his zipper than the digital  
read-out: it runs right up past 98.6, then accelerates fast.

SEXY NURSE

You're hot!

JOHNNY

So are you!

SEXY NURSE

I mean, you feel a little feverish.

JOHNNY

I've never felt better in my life.  
When do you get off work?

SEXY NURSE

My shift ends at four, but I couldn't --

JOHNNY

Meet me at 4:01, top of the run.  
That'll give you a minute to freshen  
up.

He hands her the thermometer, a quick kiss and he's out the  
door. The machine beeps: Johnny's temperature is 209  
DEGREES.

EXT. VON DOOM COMPOUND HOSPITAL PATIO - DAY

Ben finds Reed on a patio with a panoramic view. Reed works at a laptop computer.

BEN  
How long was I out?

REED  
Three days. I was worried about you.  
How are you feeling?

BEN  
Solid.

Ben can see Reed doesn't look too solid.

BEN (CONT'D)  
How you doing?

Reed shakes his head, looking back at his screen.

REED  
I don't know. I just keep going over  
and over the numbers.

BEN  
Reed. Even you can't compute every  
little thing.

REED  
I should have done more, run more  
tests --

Ben gets closer, pushing down Reed's computer screen.

BEN  
It was a freak of nature. Last I  
checked, you don't have a crystal  
ball. Let it go.

Reed considers. But he can't let it go. He opens his computer back up, returning to work. Ben shakes his head, looks out at the view. His eyes catch on something, wheels turning.

BEN (CONT'D)  
You go through something like this,  
makes you appreciate having the right  
woman in your life.

REED  
Yeah, you and Debbie and perfect --

BEN  
Reed, I'm not talking about Debbie.

Reed follows Ben's eyes to a lower level patio: SUE.

REED

What? Come on. She's got a good thing with Victor --

BEN

I'm sorry, did that cosmic-bath loosen your screws?

REED

He's smart, powerful, successful --

BEN

Well maybe you should date him.

Reed looks at Ben, resigned.

REED

Ben. He'll give her the life she deserves. She ended up with the right guy. Things worked out for the best.

Reed steps away. Ben stands alone, an idea sparking.

BEN

Do I have to do everything myself?

INT. HELICOPTER/EXT. MOUNTAIN SUMMIT - DAY

The chopper hovers over this pristine peak. JOHNNY and his NURSE sit in the chopper-bay, prepping their ski gear. Johnny's customized snowboard has wild, acrylic patterns.

His Nurse wears a hot pink cat-suit, her skis dangling out. Their bodies are close: a sexy, competitive flirtation. They look down at a death-defying black diamond run.

JOHNNY

Me like-y.

SEXY NURSE

Stay right. Left is trouble.

JOHNNY

I though we went over this.

SEXY NURSE

Last one down springs for room service.

She pulls down her goggles, jumps out. Johnny drops out after her, hitting the snow. He smolders: literally. The snow bank behind him sizzles and starts to melt.

He takes off after her and the chase is on:

EXT. BLACK DIAMOND RUN - DAY

The Nurse knows every inch of the trail, slicing expertly in and out of the trees through deep powder. Johnny's a speed freak, maximizing velocity, closing the gap between them.

Ghostly FLAMES shoot off his hair: his ski cap catches fire, flies off. Jets of fire knife through the back of his jacket.

The Nurse looks back: In a burst of speed, Johnny draws even. She looks over and sees the flames shooting out behind him...

SEXY NURSE

You're on fire!

JOHNNY

Not this again --

SEXY NURSE

No: You're ON FIRE!

Johnny sees his gloves are burning, flicks them off in alarm. His body SHUDDERS: the back of his ski suit catches on fire. A burst of flame launches him down the slope like a rocket.

Nurse loses concentration, falls. Johnny races away like a missile, screaming in exhilaration. He looks back -- no nurse.

He tries to put out his flaming clothes, and accidentally VEERS to the LEFT. He fails to notice the giant CHASM in front of him. He faces forward and...

SCREEAAMMS! LAUNCHING off the cliff, LEGS FLAILING, trying to catch ground. FLAMES begin to TRAIL his body as he FALLS towards the rocks below. He tries to will his body away.

Instead, his body becomes engulfed in flame. He is a HUMAN TORCH! And for a moment he HOLDS THE AIR -- the fire giving him some kind of...*LIFT*. He maneuvers just over the rocks, almost making a 90 degree turn.

He looks back at the rocks in disbelief. But the lift doesn't last long. He quickly CRASHES, landing HARD into a snowbank.

He opens his eyes; tries to move but can't. He's trapped under snow and ice. With all his strength, he tries to move, NO DICE. Panic sets in. His eyes go wide as the snow around quickly begins to melt. Johnny is on fire, and within seconds he's sitting in a small POND, steam rising from the water.

The nurse races toward the steam. Scared, panicked. She finds Johnny...smiling, sitting naked in an impromptu hot tub, staring at his hands. His body. Exhilarated.

JOHNNY  
Care to join me?

She smiles and unzips. The FLAMES DISSOLVE TO...CANDLES IN --  
EXT. VON DOOM COMPOUND - VICTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

On an expansive parapet with a billion-dollar view, Victor prepares a romantic dinner-setting as his staff scurry about. He checks every fork and knife, with a slightly manic energy.

VICTOR  
How's the IPO?

LEONARD  
Stable. We're looking at low twenties. It's a good number, considering the fallout from --

VICTOR  
Reed's disaster. You know, I half-think he did this to me on purpose.

LEONARD  
Sir, I'm sure he wouldn't put himself --

But Victor is on to the next thought, always strategizing.

VICTOR  
Get me on the AM shows, Larry King, cover of the Journal...  
(staring into silver tray)  
I've got to do something about this scar. Make sure they only shoot my right side.

LEONARD  
Actually, uh, people seem to think the scar "humanizes" you.

VICTOR  
And that's a good thing?

Victor looks at the scar, enraged by this defect. It glistens in the silver tray. His eyes are bloodshot, sleepless.

LEONARD  
You know, maybe you should get some rest --

VICTOR  
Later. First, I've got some unfinished business. A deal that needs closing...

Leonard looks at the table, the lavish spread. A beat.

LEONARD

Sir, I've always wondered... Why Sue?  
You could have any woman in the world  
but --

VICTOR

That's why. Because I could have  
any other woman... You know, when  
they asked Caesar "why England," he  
said, "because it's not mine."

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND DINING HALL - LATE AFTERNOON

Two dozen EMPLOYEES sit and eat. Others serve themselves at  
the buffet. Ben and Sue walking into the dining hall --

SUE

I can only stay for one drink, Ben.  
I've got to meet with Victor.

BEN

Wouldn't want to keep Vic waiting.

They turn a corner and find Reed, entering by another door.

BEN (CONT'D)

Hey Reed, what are you doing here?  
(before he can answer)  
Great, why don't you join us?

He quickly shepherds the two of them toward a quiet table.  
Ben's stomach GROWLS; so loud that they all can hear it.

BEN (CONT'D)

God, I'm starving. Gonna hit the  
buffet.

Ben's stomach growls again, even louder this time.

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND DINING HALL - EVENING

The sun is long gone, and so are most of the diners. The  
room is darker, more romantic. Ben finishes the last shrimp  
on his plate, pushes it away, belches prodigiously.

BEN

Pardon me...

Sue and Reed stare at him. Ben's stomach growls *again*.

REED

Are you alright?

BEN

I think I need to lie down. Bad

shrimp.

This was Ben's plan, but he *really* isn't feeling well, unsteady when he walks away. He looks down at his stomach.

BEN (CONT'D)

Really bad shrimp.

ANGLE: Fireplace. Sue looks gorgeous in the light. A beat. A long beat. Reed doesn't know where to start with this woman.

REED

Feeling better?

SUE

Yes, thanks.

REED

That's good. That's uh...good.

SUE

You always had a way with words.

(an awkward beat)

I should be getting back.

Sue gets up to leave. Exasperated, Reed tries to think of something, anything, to say.

REED

I'm really happy for you and Victor.

She slows down, looking at him. She was hoping for more.

SUE

You're happy for me and Victor.

REED

I can tell you guys are enjoying what was the best part of our relationship --

SUE

Which was?

REED

Passion.

We see surprise on Sue's face, and...

REED (CONT'D)

For science.

SUE

(frustrated)

You are such a dork, Reed... You never got it and never will unless it's explained to you in quantum physics.

As if triggered by her emotion, the fireplace light around her BENDS. The flames flicker in a ghostly breeze.

REED

What? What did I say?

She looks more disappointed than angry.

SUE

It's never what you say. It's what you don't say. What you don't do...

She lets that hang. A lot of history here. Quiet, hurt -- she wants Reed to fight for her, to show some emotion.

REED

I...I...I just wanted to --

As Sue's emotions swirl, she slowly...*disappears*.

SUE

It's been two years, and all you can say is you're happy for me and some other guy...

(standing up, hurt)

You know, Victor may be a lot of things, but at least he's not afraid to fight for what he wants...

(Reed looks down)

And it's nice to be wanted sometimes. To be heard...seen... Reed, look at me.

He looks up...but all that's left of her is the blush on her cheek and her bewitching eyes. He drops his fork, shocked.

REED

Uh, Sue...? I can't.

SUE

What? What do you mean you --

REED

Sue...*look at your hands*.

She raises her hands, but we don't see them. We only see a medical waistband...floating. Her watch...floating. Her clothes appear to be suspended in mid-air.

Sue is invisible. She shrieks and gets up -- knocking a GLASS off the table...

SLOW MOTION: The glass flies off the table, tumbling... Reed instinctively reaches for the bottle: his arm stretches two feet out of his sleeve -- grabs it just before it hits --

Then snaps back into place. Reed stares at his arm in disbelief. Sue's eyes widen as well. The rest of Sue reappears. They look at each other: mutual alarm.

JOHNNY (O.S.)

You guys will not believe what just happened!

They look up to see JOHNNY in the doorway, NAKED except for the nurse's PINK PARKA wrapped around his midsection.

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND - VICTOR'S OFFICE - EARLY EVENING

CLUNK. The candles burn low on the table. Victor strides out, heading for the door. He runs his hand through his hair to comb some strays. A CLUMP comes off in his fingers. He PAUSES. He steps to a mirror, stares at his hair. His SCAR.

It is longer than the bandage now (as if it SPREAD). Victor peels back the bandage, and sees the scar is bluish-gray. Deep, unhealthy, maybe infected...

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND - HALLWAY - EARLY EVENING

DOUBLE DOORS burst open. Reed, Sue, and Johnny urgently walk.

SUE

It has to be the cloud. It's fundamentally altered our DNA.

REED

Let's not jump to conclusions, we need a *massive amount of evidence* before making that leap.

Reed glances over his shoulder. He stares. Sue follows his gaze to see: Johnny's FINGERTIPS are on fire. He SNAPS his fingers. They GO OUT. He's totally unharmed.

JOHNNY

Now what is up with *that*?

REED

(deadpan)

The cloud has fundamentally altered our DNA.

JOHNNY

Cool. What'd it do to you guys?

SUE

Apparently I can disappear.

JOHNNY

Please tell me you go silent too.

Only one thing on Reed's mind --

REED

We have to find Ben.

EXT. VON DOOM COMPOUND - OUTSIDE BEN'S ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Johnny snaps his fingers -- which generate small explosive bursts of flame. He turns it on and off, like the "CLAPPER."

JOHNNY

Flame on, flame off. Flame on, flame off --

SUE

Johnny.

He does it again. Flame on, flame off.

SUE (CONT'D)

Stop it.

JOHNNY

Okay, "mom."

Reed's about to knock on Ben's door when he hears the banging, moaning and pleading inside. Johnny smiles.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Oh, you dawg you. Better not be my nurse!

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND - BEN'S ROOM - EARLY EVENING

REED (O.S.)

Ben, are you there?

A creepy rippling movement begins beneath the sheet and gradually intensifies, reflected in the fabric's surface: the contours of Ben's body are changing, inflating, growing rough and craggy. SOUND of grinding heavy rocks.

SUE (O.S.)

Open up Ben, we need to talk.

It all stops. A beat, then all four legs of the bed give way and it crashes to the floor. Under the covers, he groans in pain, and his voice is DEEPER, GRAVELY, but definitely CLEAR:

BEN

LEAVE ME ALONE!!!

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND - OUTSIDE BEN'S ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Reed decides they can't wait any longer. He kneels to the floor. He concentrates, not sure if it will work... Suddenly, his arm STRETCHES, THIN ENOUGH TO CREEP UNDER THE

DOORJAMB.

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND - BEN'S ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Reed's arm wriggles under the door. It bends upward, swiping clumsily, until it finally grabs the knob. Rubbery fingers find the latch and unlock the door.

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND - OUTSIDE BEN'S ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Reed focuses, and pulls. His arm snakes out from under the door and snaps back into place. His flesh and bones reforming before their eyes. Johnny stares at Reed.

JOHNNY

Ewwwwwww. That is disgusting.

They hear a tremendous SMASH from inside the room.

INT. VON DOOM COMPOUND - BEN'S ROOM - EARLY EVENING

They open the door. The room is trashed. Every stick of furniture smashed to splinters.

REED

...Ben?

Their eyes adjust; there's a huge hole where the window used to be. They rush to it. Looking out they see SOMETHING LARGE in the distance, running away.

JOHNNY

What is that *thing*?

SUE

I think that thing is Ben.

Reed looks out, emotions roiling. Is that his best friend...? Suddenly, Victor comes around the corner (bandage bigger).

VICTOR

What's going on?

SUE

Victor, are you feeling alright?

He considers, but never shows weakness. He nods.

VICTOR

Just a little banged up. A couple scrapes. Why?

REED

Ben did this.

VICTOR

Ben did this?

REED

He's had some kind of...reaction to exposure from the cloud. And he's not the only one.

SUE

We need to find him.

Victor redirects his attention to Sue.

SUE (CONT'D)

Victor, I'm sorry I --

VICTOR

(cold)

Just find him.

Victor strides off, leaving the others.

JOHNNY

Anybody know where the big guy's going?

We PUSH IN on a picture of Debbie lying on the floor, Reed knows exactly where Ben is going.

REED

He's going home.

EXT. TRAIN YARD - NIGHT

A view from Brooklyn: Manhattan glistens in the distance. CAMERA MOVES down to A TRAIN YARD, where we find empty cargo trains. We PUSH IN on the main track, where...

A CARGO TRAIN has just stopped. We hear a cargo DOOR slide open, then WHUMP! Big FEET hit the ground. Someone, or something barrels into the night.

EXT. BIG & TALL SHOP - NIGHT

A locked storefront on Flatbush Ave. SOUND of breaking glass.

INT. BIG & TALL SHOP - NIGHT

SERIES OF SHOTS: Ben tries on clothes, shoes. Jackets rip, shoes split. He needs an extra extra extra large.

EXT. PAY PHONE - NIGHT

A HUGE FIGURE is huddled in shadow. It's Ben.

CLOSE ON: The dial pad. Big fingers try to push keys but they're too large. Ben tries for a few seconds, getting more

and more frustrated. He manages to press "0" with his pinky.

BEN

Hello, Operator?

Ben looks up the street, into the 2nd story window of a modest, working-class home. His eyes go soft when he sees Debbie grab the phone.

BEN (CONT'D)

Deb... It's me. I need you to step out front.

DEBBIE

Out front? You home, baby? I got a surprise for you.

He blinks hard. Sad, dark.

BEN

I got a surprise for you too.

EXT. BROOKLYN HOUSE - NIGHT

Debbie steps out. There is "WELCOME HOME" sign over the door. She looks out. The wind blows softly. Something shifts in the darkness. Debbie pulls her robe tighter.

DEBBIE

Ben?

BEN (O.S.)

Don't come any closer for a sec. This is gonna be kind of a shock... You remember when we said "together forever no matter what"?

DEBBIE

Baby, you're scaring me.

A hanging beat. And Ben...steps into the light, where we SEE HIM FOR THE FIRST TIME: he's HUGE, easily twice the size he once was, and AN ORANGY ROCKY SURFACE COVERS HIS ENTIRE BODY.

Debbie sees him. Fear washes over her, not sure what to think. He reaches out, a little tentative. She flinches back.

DEBBIE

Oh my G-g-g. What did you...do to Ben?

BEN

Deb, it's me. It's still me.

He reaches out. She recoils. It's too much for her. Tears swell in her eyes. Covering her mouth, she backs away.

He takes a step closer. She backs away faster, tripping over her robe, falling into the street. A car screeches to a halt. Ben instinctively steps out to help, but she scurries back.

DEBBIE

Don't...don't...DON'T TOUCH ME!

Her shout wakes NEIGHBORS. Lights flicker on. Ben knows he has to go. He looks at Debbie, sensing this is the last time he'll see her. She trembles, terrified. His eyes go moist.

BEN

I love you, Deb.

With that, he turns away. The "WELCOME HOME" sign flutters, falls to the ground. A tragic tableau. As more lights go on around him, Ben picks up his pace, speeding into the dawn.

INT. VICTOR'S COMPOUND OFFICE - DAY

Victor packs a monogrammed Armani briefcase: "VDM" emblazoned on a gold plate. Leonard waits not-so-patiently.

VICTOR

Make sure you find Ben, bring him back here. And keep it quiet. I don't need this to hit the press.

LEONARD

Yes sir. You've got the Mayor at eight, then a nine-thirty interview with the Journal --

VICTOR

Front page?

LEONARD

Top left, like you asked.

(a smile)

Today Wall Street. Tomorrow, who knows...maybe Washington.

Victor turns to Leonard, disappointed with him.

VICTOR

Leonard. Think bigger.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - DAY

We swoop toward this epic monument. On a steel girder above the road, we see...a STATUE. BEN. He sits on the edge of the beams, staring down at the river below, brooding, muttering.

BEN

A few days in space, it'll be great,  
what's the worst that could happen?

A PIGEON flutters past him, and drops a white gooey gift on his shoulder. Ben just glares up at the heavens.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Perfect. Thanks.

He hears the sound of someone SOBBING. He turns to see...a distraught BUSINESSMAN with a briefcase. The man drops his case, which PLUMMETS hundreds-of-feet into the RIVER.

The Businessman looks out, ready to jump. He doesn't see Ben (or doesn't realize Ben is not a statue).

BEN (CONT'D)  
You think you got trouble? Take a good look, pal, how bad could it be?

The Businessman looks at Ben, terrified. Ben steps forward.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Okay, easy there, buddy.

Backpedaling, the man SLIPS, FALLING toward the ROADWAY! His arms flail, grabbing a narrow beam -- his fingers hold tight while his legs thrash over speeding traffic. Cars and trucks SKIM right underfoot. Ben shakes his head.

BEN (CONT'D)  
You had to choose my spot, didn't you?

Ben steps out to help, but...his WEIGHT BENDS the beam! The Businessman LOSES HIS GRIP! He FALLS TO THE ROAD, landing hard on the highway! A few PEDESTRIANS see Ben. They point.

Ben looks up, deer in headlights. He sees a massive TRUCK bearing down on the Businessman.

BEN (CONT'D)  
This is really not my day.

Ben DROPS to the street. WHOOMP! He lands in front of the Businessman, SWEEPS him out of the way with one arm, and turns to the oncoming 18 WHEELER CAB.

The DRIVER slams his brakes, eyes wide. The truck SWERVES, but cannot stop! Time slows to syrup, as Ben looks a little scared. He shuts his eyes, and...

SHOULDER-BLOCKS the INCOMING TRUCK! A football move. The truck BUCKLES, POPPING a WHEELIE, CRUMPLING all the way to the windshield! It looks like a metal car-compactor.

The truck SWERVES hard, its tail SMASHING into steel girders. CARS SCREECH, SWERVE, SLAMMING INTO EACH OTHER, CAUSING A

FOUR-LANE TRAFFIC ACCIDENT! Windows shatter, fires flicker. One of the cars in an NYPD CRUISER. COPS clamber out.

EXT. CAB ON HIGHWAY - DAY

Reed, Johnny, and Sue sit in the back. They see the action on the bridge. Reed and Sue lock eyes, sensing the worst.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - DAY

Ben stands in the middle of the chaos, staring at the destruction. He sees the tow-truck DRIVER bleeding, trapped in his cab. Ben moves to this burning hunk of steel.

He SWIPES through the shattered window, and PUNCHES the airbag, POPPING it like a kid's balloon. He tries to grab the seat-belt, but his fingers are TOO BIG. He struggles.

BEN

A little help here?! You wanna hit that button, sir?

The driver is too woozy. Ben can't get to the button. Frustrated, he simply TEARS OFF THE DOOR, and RIPS THE DRIVER'S SEAT right out of the cab! COPS round the corner. They see Ben holding onto the Driver. They raise their guns.

COP

FREEZE! PUT THE MAN AND THE SEAT DOWN!

Ben looks at the cops. PEDESTRIANS stare, point. He realizes how this must look -- a monster holding a bloody man in hand.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - APPROACH - DAY

At the back of the traffic jam, cars SCREECH to stops. The whole bridge is FULL of bumper-to-bumper traffic. We PUSH TOWARD one car: three doors pop open, and out come...

REED, JOHNNY, SUE. They look through smoke and mayhem to see...their first full look at Ben. Reed stands gutpunched.

JOHNNY

Not even Ben deserves that.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - DAY

Ben puts the seat down, with the Driver on it. He lunges behind a truck. The cops try to follow, but FLAMES push them back. Ben lurches away, head down, self-conscious.

He tries to hide from ONLOOKERS around him and PEDESTRIANS on walkways overhead. He wants to escape, but hears SCREAMING MOTORISTS. He grits his teeth, and moves to help them.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - GRIDLOCK - DAY

Reed, Sue, and Johnny race toward the flames. All other people head in the OPPOSITE DIRECTION. BRIDGE POLICE herd the crowd away from the accident.

BRIDGE COP

Back! We're evac-ing the bridge.

Reed, Sue, and Johnny slow down, swap glances.

SUE

What now? Reed...? What do we do?

MOVE IN ON REED. A first test of leadership. But he is not a leader. Not yet. Sue gets closer to him.

SUE (CONT'D)

Ben's out there. Let's go get him.

BRIDGE COP

Maybe you didn't hear me. Those cars are gonna blow sky high, any second.

REED

Look, we've got a friend out there in trouble. We need to get to him before --

BRIDGE COP #2

Nobody gets past this point.

A hard beat. Reed signals Sue with a look, a nod.

SUE

What?

REED

(mutters)

We need to get past them.

He motions to her body. She understands. She concentrates, and starts to turn invisible.

BRIDGE COP #1

What the hell is this? A magic show?

But her clothes don't go invisible. Beat. Reed mutters:

REED

Sue. Your clothes. Lose them.

SUE

What...?

(realizes)

Oh.

She unbuttons her blouse. Not thrilled with the idea. She

wiggles out of her pants. Down to her skivvies. She reaches back to undo her bra...momentarily loses concentration and becomes visible. The sight of Sue in her undies grabs the COPS' attention. Everyone watches, stunned.

The realization that she's visible hits her like a ton of bricks. Cops are transfixed. So is Reed.

JOHNNY

This is wrong in so many ways.

REED

You've been working out.

SUE

Shut up.

Sue takes a deep breath. Closes her eyes. Focuses. Nothing happens. She's embarrassed and furious.

SUE (CONT'D)

Any more ideas, Reed? Maybe you should strip down next, see how it feels to have fifty people staring --

...and she DISAPPEARS. Entirely. Undies float. Jaws drop.

REED

Uh, Sue?

She stops ranting. Realizes she's gone invisible.

SUE (INVISIBLE)

Oh. Well then...

The undies drop. The cops stare open-mouthed. They turn to look at Reed, astonished. He sheepishly shrugs his shoulders.

JOHNNY

I'm gonna need serious therapy.

A beat. She walks away. The cops watch her, gaping. By the time they turn back around, Reed and Johnny are gone, disappearing into the clouds of smoke.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - DAY

A news CHOPPER flies around the bridge, fighting for the best angle on the action.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - ACCIDENT - DAY

Reed races through wreckage. He tries to see over a big TRUCK, and his neck STREEETCHES!

He finally sees...BEN. Reed wraps around a car, and...BOO!

His face snakes right in front of Ben. Ben jumps.

BEN

What the --!

REED

Ben. Are you okay?

BEN

Am I okay?! You wanna explain that?!

He motions to Reed's neck. Then to his own body:

BEN (CONT'D)

Or this?! What the hell am I? 'Cause I sure ain't Ben anymore.

Reed opens his mouth, but he has no answer. Not yet.

SUE (O.S.)

REED! BEN! LOOK OUT!

Ben spins, looking for Sue. He can't see her. But he does see...A CAR INCHES AWAY, WITH GAS TANK FLAMING!

BOOOOM! The first car BLOWS! BOOOM!BOOOOM!BOOOOOM! Empty cars BLOW in a chain-reaction. The flames are mushrooming!

Reed SWIPES his ARMS OUT, holding people back. His arms FLATTEN to form a barricade -- FACES INDENT his skin.

FLAMES lash out. A pack of attractive YOUNG WOMEN scream. Johnny LEAPS toward them. His feet LEAVE THE GROUND, giving him extra lift. He SPINS, lands, and embraces the women, SHIELDING them from flames which burn up his back. He looks the ladies up and down, and gives a cheesy smile.

Sue SCREAMS. She puts her hands up (a normal reflex). The air seems to RIPPLE around her hands, like FORCE-FIELDS.

She looks at them, surprised, confused. Her invisible fields SPIRAL OUT, partially CONTAINING the blast. But the flames hurtle closer. She fights the pressure. Blood trickles from her nose. Just as the white hot blast is about to hit her...

Sue is dressed again. Visible. She SCREAMS, and PUSHES THE FORCE DOWN INTO THE ROAD! She collapses, as the blast deflects off the street and into...

An oncoming FIRETRUCK! BOOOOM! The firetruck is KNOCKED OFF THE GROUND, SLEWING SIDEWAYS. Brakes scream. Its tail slashes out, PUNCHING through the guard-rail.

THE BACK OF THE TRUCK DANGLES OUT, HUNDREDS OF FEET ABOVE THE WATER! FIREMEN hang off the back and sides. The truck TEETERS, falling! Ben wastes no time. He GRABS onto the front of the truck, just as it goes off the side!

He DIGS his heels into the ground, but his feet DRAG across the concrete, digging grooves into the street.

ON THE DANGLING FIRETRUCK: FIREMEN climb out, clawing toward the bridge. Their truck SWINGS. Bits and pieces tumble down at them -- a hose, an axe, a helmet. All deadly now. The HANGING LADDER swoops down, with men RIDING ON IT!

Ben SCREAMS! STRAINING with all his might. Ben SCREAMS! His muscles ripple, and...he takes his first step...back. Another scream. Another step. Another. Another. Epic, painful.

He is pulling the truck back onto the bridge, inch by inch. His footsteps THUD. With monumental effort, he levels the truck. Firemen scurry over hoses and ladders, some climbing over Ben.

Reed tends to Sue who has fainted from her effort. Ben steps back from the truck and slumps to the street exhausted. Wary cops close in to cover him with weapons, but...

The FIREMEN slowly begin to APPLAUD. The crowd of onlookers joins in as well. Sue, Reed, and Johnny seem surprised, touched by the reaction. But Ben seems uncomfortable.

Firemen step forward to offer Reed a couple of their coats; he hands one to Johnny and uses the other to cover Sue.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - DAY

Ben sees a familiar face in the masses: DEBBIE. Ben steps toward her, but she stops him with a look. She places something on the ground and runs off into the crowd.

Ben sees something GLISTENING on the ground. He stoops over to pick up...her ENGAGEMENT RING. His big fingers can't grip it. He tries in vain. Hopeless, pathetic. A beat. And...

A hand grabs the ring. It's Reed. Quiet, close.

REED

I swear to you, I will do everything  
in my power until there is not a  
breath left in me: you are going to be  
Ben again.

Off the wounded look in Ben's eyes, wanting to believe him...

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Victor sits with remote in hand, staring at his plasma TV. ON THE TV: he sees a crowd of firemen applauding the new Fantastic Four. For the first time they strike a heroic pose. Leonard enters, with a phone in his hand.

LEONARD

Uh, sir...Larry King called, to cancel.

(seeing the TV, a beat)

Apparently, there's a bigger story.

Victor sees Reed put his arms around Sue as he covers her with the jacket. And the penny drops: he's FURIOUS. As it hits him, he feels something odd. He looks down at his hand...at glints of gleaming METAL poking through flesh.

EXT./INT. EMERGENCY HOLDING AREA - DAY

An impromptu command center -- a series of police tents, surrounded by EMERGENCY VEHICLES, NEWS VANS, FIRETRUCKS.

INT. EMERGENCY HOLDING AREA - TENT - DAY

Reed, Sue, Ben and Johnny sit together, getting changed. They get ready to go, but the CHIEF FIREMAN enters, stopping them.

CHIEF FIREMAN

There's some folks outside, want to talk to you.

REED

We're not going public with this.  
We're scientists, not celebrities.

CHIEF FIREMAN

Too late, son.

He turns on a little TV MONITOR in the corner. NEWS FOOTAGE plays on all stations, with the tagline: FANTASTIC FOUR.

CHIEF FIREMAN (CONT'D)

That's what they're calling you. The Fantastic Four.

JOHNNY

Nice.

Johnny heads for the exit.

SUE

Johnny, slow down. Let's think this through, a second.

Johnny pauses. Rubs his chin once. And...

JOHNNY

Okay. Done thinking.

He runs out. Sue, Ben, and Reed swap glances, knowing Johnny cannot be their spokesman. They take off after him, out to --

EXT. EMERGENCY HOLDING AREA - PRESS FIELD - DAY

CLICKCLICKCLICK! Fifty cameras flash. The field is full of press. Our heroes freeze, shocked by the crowd.

Johnny eats up the attention. Ben turns, self-conscious. Reed notices. The Chief Fireman turns to them.

CHIEF FIREMAN

So which one of you's the leader?

Johnny does not hesitate.

JOHNNY

That'd be me.

CHIEF FIREMAN

No seriously.

A beat. Sue and Ben turn to Reed. The Chief hands him a mic.

CHIEF FIREMAN (CONT'D)

You're on, son. They all want a statement.

All eyes go on Reed. He looks out, gulps hard. A long beat.

REED

Uh, during our recent mission to the Von Doom space station, we were exposed to as yet-unidentified radioactive energy, most likely some kind of nucleotide compound--

Nobody came for a science class. A crush of questions overwhelms Reed:

VARIOUS REPORTERS

What happened on the bridge? Does it hurt to stretch? Were you really on fire? Is it true that one of you can fly?

JOHNNY

Working on it. And it's a lot harder --

SUE

We don't know much more than you do, at this point. Which is why we will be going directly to the lab, where we can diagnose our symptoms and --

REPORTER #2

Symptoms? So it's like a disease?

Reed looks at Ben's face, feeling the guilt. Ben is lost in

thought, looking at Deb's ENGAGEMENT RING. Johnny leaps in.

JOHNNY

Symptoms? Please. If having powers is a disease, then yeah we got it. And we are gonna blow your minds. There's a new day dawning. The day of the Fantastic Four.

REPORTER #3

That thing doesn't look too fantastic.

The Reporter nods toward Ben. Ben's fists tighten, the sound of rocks crushing together. Reed feels the pain.

REED

Ben Grimm is a genuine American hero who's been through a terrible orde--

JOHNNY

What he's trying to say is: every team needs a mascot...

Reporters laugh. Ben turns his head away. Reed burns.

REED

Look, we went up to space to find a way to understand DNA, to cure disease, save lives. Well, now it's our DNA, our disease, our lives on the line...

(a beat)

Thank you. No more questions.

Reed, Sue, and Ben get up to go. The press waits a beat, then surges. Ben spins, holding up one finger. A giant.

BEN

Be nice.

The press step back, intimidated. Flashbulbs POP, and Ben's FACE FREEZES. It goes BLACK-AND-WHITE on a NEW YORK POST in --

EXT. BANK - DAY

Establishing shot of a historic New York building.

INT. BANK - CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

BANKERS sit around a table. LAPTOPS hum. The lead banker is power-broker NED CECIL. The men keep their eyes on Victor.

NED CECIL

Well, Victor, the bank would like to congratulate you. On the fastest freefall since the Depression. We can't even give your stock away.

VICTOR

Ned, you know I can turn this around.

Ned motions to the paper, the picture of BEN.

NED CECIL

You promised a cure-all, and came back with this. Who the hell's going to invest in a biotech company that turns its workers into circus freaks?

Victor's grip tightens around the table, and...the LAPTOPS FLICKER, losing feeds.

Victor looks down at his hands -- a private beat (did I do that?) He lets go of the table; screens go back to normal.

VICTOR

(pointed)

I really appreciate all your support.

NED CECIL

You've got a week, Victor. One week to turn this around. Or we pull out...

(a beat)

This meeting is over.

Victor looks at him, blood boiling, and we CUT HARD TO --

INT. BANK - HALLWAY - DAY

Victor and Leonard stride out. Victor is writhing.

VICTOR

Goddamn book-keeper doesn't know preferred stock from livestock.

Leonard is thinking all business.

LEONARD

Sir. Reed's comments at that press conference killed us. How are we going to turn this around?

Victor considers. His mind races, eyes narrow.

VICTOR

Very simple. I cure them. If I can cure these freaks, then I can cure anyone. What better way to restore my reputation?

Leonard nods, impressed. Victor is a man in motion. As they step into sunlight, we cut to...CLICKCLICKCLICK in --

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING - DAY

REPORTERS snap pictures. A POLICE CONVOY drives up, stopping in front of a towering HIGH-RISE. Sue, Reed, and Johnny and get out of a police-car. Ben steps out of a BIG PADDY-WAGON, which immediately bounces back up to the normal axle position.

COPS hold back the surging press. Ben keeps his head down, self-conscious. He passes Johnny, smiling for the cameras.

JOHNNY

Smile, Ben. They want to like you.  
Give 'em your good side. Or your less  
bad side.

Ben turns to a group of LITTLE KIDS. Stiff, tentative:

BEN

Uh...don't do drugs.

The kids FLINCH. Ben trudges on. Johnny smiles bright, doing hand-signs for F4. Sue pulls him toward --

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY

The Fantastic Four enter. They are greeted by JIMMY O'HOOLIHAN, an old-time doorman with a kind smile.

O'HOOLIHAN

Welcome back to the Baxter, Dr.  
Richards. All that for you?

He motions to the flashing cameras outside.

REED

I'm afraid so...

He searches for the name. Sue steps up.

SUE

Jimmy. Good to see you again.

He smiles at Sue, then at Reed.

O'HOOLIHAN

Good to see you too... Don't worry,  
sir. I know how crowded that head of  
yours is.

REED

Any visitors while I was away?

O'HOOLIHAN

Just the usual. Told 'em you were  
circling round outer space.

He opens a drawer full of LETTERS from the BANK. Reed looks sheepish. He shuts the drawer, looks to Johnny and Sue.

REED

We had a tough year.

BEN

Yeah, nine years straight.

Reed looks at Ben. Thanks a lot. DING. Elevator doors open.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - ELEVATOR - DAY

They enter. Reed hits the top button, for the 20TH FLOOR.

JOHNNY

Twenty? From outside the place looks a lot taller.

REED

Oh, it is.

The doors close, but...the ELEVATOR does not move. A beat.

JOHNNY

Either we're moving really fast...or not at all.

A digital readout on the panel: EXCEED MAXIMUM WEIGHT. A sign reads: MAXIMUM CAPACITY: 2000 pounds. They turn to Ben.

BEN

I'll take the stairs.

Doors open. He lumbers out. As the doors close behind him, he looks back over his shoulder, locking eyes with Reed.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - ELEVATOR - DAY

The elevator rises. Reed roils with guilt.

SUE

How come Ben can't turn it on and off like us?

REED

That's what we're here to find out.

SUE

If it happened to him, then it could...

Happen to all of them. Reed nods softly.

JOHNNY

Wait. You mean there's chance we

could be full-on-24-7-fantastic?

SUE

Grow up, Johnny. You want to run around on fire for the rest of your life?

JOHNNY

Is that a trick question? C'mon, I can't be the only one who thinks this is cool.

Reed considers. But Sue cuts him short with a look.

DING! The elevator stops.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - ATRIUM - MOMENTS LATER

The elevator opens. They step out. They might be on the 20th floor, but Reed owns the building from here to floor sixty. It's a massive atrium, lit by skylights far above --

Reed leads them into another area filled with separate "apartments" and all the amenities of home.

REED

We should stay here until we can define the extent of our changes...

JOHNNY

This place is deluxe. You got cable?

REED

(hearing Ben's FOOTSTEPS)  
...and figure out how to reverse them.  
Let me show you to your rooms.

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING - DAY

The press has died down, but there are still plenty of cameras. A MAYBACH SEDAN rolls up. Victor emerges, wearing sunglasses. This time, the press pay no attention to him. No cameras flash. Victor tightens, and enters the building.

INT. SUE'S ROOM - DAY

Sue walks out of the bathroom in a robe, drying her hair. She notices a familiar book on a shelf: a SCRAPBOOK.

She flips through it. It's filled with pictures of Reed and his inventions -- a lot less fancy than Victor's multimedia globe. She stops at a picture of her and Reed in COLLEGE.

A noise, and she turns, flinching slightly, surprised to see...VICTOR. He smiles, standing at the door, watching her.

VICTOR

God, I've been so worried about you.

She notices the scar on his head.

SUE

Victor, your scar --

VICTOR

I told you, I'm fine. It's you I'm worried about.

SUE

I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to --

VICTOR

Please, no apologies. I've arranged for your things to be moved to one of my condos. You'll have round-the-clock care.

He goes for her bag. But she stops him. A half beat.

SUE

Thank you, that's generous, but I think I should stay here. With my brother. Until we get a handle on this.

Victor is not used to being rebuffed. He gives a thin smile.

VICTOR

Sue. I think you should let my doctors have a look at you.

A tense beat. Standoff. Made more tense by --

REED (O.S.)

Victor! What are you doing here?

They turn to see Reed approaching, with files in hand.

VICTOR

I'm starting to wonder the same thing... How much do you know about what happened to you?

REED

Not much. We need to run tests to see the extent of the damage.

Victor pauses. He looks at Sue, knowing she's here to stay.

VICTOR

Well, let me know if there is anything I can do. We're all in this together now.

Victor shakes Reed's hand. His GRIP is so tight that Reed's fingers STRETCH. Victor lets go, and turns to Sue, who puts her hand out. He smiles, and shakes. He heads off.

Reed looks at his hand. Shakes his wrist. He looks at Victor.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - HALL - DAY

Victor moves fast, holds tight to his anger. Reed catches up.

REED

Victor wait... I just wanted to say, I'm sorry the mission didn't go as planned --

Victor suddenly WHEELS on Reed. Lights flicker.

VICTOR

Didn't go as planned? It was a catastrophe. You ruined the lives of four people --

REED

I ruined? With all due respect, I told you to abort --

VICTOR

Abort? Reed, I put my company, my name, billions of dollars on the line, and I will not let you make me look like a fool --

REED

Victor, if we could understand what happened to us --

VICTOR

I don't want to understand it. This isn't one of your science projects. I just want to fix it. Fast!

Reed sees Victor's SCAR maybe growing. Lights dim.

VOICE (O.S.)

There a problem, Vic?

They turn to see...BEN down the hall, leaning in a doorway. Victor tightens, looking at Ben's massive rock-hewn body.

VICTOR

No problem, Ben.

He turns back to Reed. Close, quiet. Lights flicker.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Just pay your goddamn electric bill,  
and get to work on a cure.

Victor steps away, toward the elevator. He passes Ben, who just smiles and waves "goodbye." Before Victor's finger taps the down-button, the button lights up (as if the circuit responded to him). Reed exhales, shaken. Victor steps into --

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - ELEVATOR - DAY

The doors close, and Victor really LETS LOOSE. He SLAMS his fist into a STEEL WALL. The wall BUCKLES, steel DENTING.

Victor shakes out his hand, and sees...a rippling METALLIC SHELL under the skin. He stares at it in horror. The dark surface pulsates with electric energy. What is he becoming...?

INT. BAXTER BUILDING LABS - DAY

Sue works the controls. Reed approaches Ben with an ELECTRODE NEEDLE. He tries to stick the needle into Ben, but it SNAPS.

BEN

You got a chisel round here?

REED

If we're going to identify the source of the mutation, we need to isolate your recombinant DNA so we can activate positional genomes.

Ben looks to Sue for translation.

SUE

We need to give you a physical, so we know what got zapped.

BEN

Well why didn't you say so? You want me to lift some weights or something?

Reed shakes his head. He approaches with an X-RAY MACHINE.

REED

No, just sit back. We have a good sense of your strength from the firetruck. We need to find the source of your strength.

He turns on the X-ray machine. The graph shows SOLID ROCK. The rays don't penetrate. Sue and Reed look confused.

BEN

How bad is it? You know I used to smoke.

Reed grabs a BLOOD PRESSURE MACHINE, but the strap is way too short to wrap around Ben's arm. Reed stands stumped. He looks at his tray full of instruments. He picks up the little rubber REFLEX-HAMMER. But it looks miniscule compared to Ben.

Reed has an idea. He opens a drawer full of HARDWARE TOOLS. He pulls of a real HAMMER. He approaches Ben.

REED

Okay, this might smart a little.

He taps Ben's knee lightly, and BEN'S LEG KICKS! SLAMMING UP! RIGHT BETWEEN REED'S LEGS! The ultimate kick in the crotch. Reed STRETCHES UP a few feet, then SNAPS BACK, wincing.

REED (CONT'D)

(high-pitched voice)

We'll...continue this later.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING LABS - DAY

From their second level control room, Reed and Sue observe Johnny in an enclosed fire-proof chamber. Flames escape through the vents of the chamber...he's fully torched!

Reed watches the read-out: it climbs from 2000 to 4000 degrees Kelvin. They are essentially taking his temperature.

INSIDE THE CHAMBER: Johnny turns white hot, blinding to look at: the chamber walls begin to glow red. Machines go haywire.

His feet even start to LIFT OFF THE GROUND, LEVITATING a foot or two. He looks down, excited, burning hotter and hotter.

REED

Back it down, Johnny!

JOHNNY

I can go hotter!

He won't stop. Reed pulls a switch on the wall. FOAM sprays out of nozzles, dousing Johnny's flames. He stands there, covered in thick FOAM. His body steams. So does his temper.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You're really cramping my style here.

SUE

You were at 4000 Kelvin. Any hotter, you're approaching supernova --

JOHNNY

Sweet.

SUE

That's the temperature of the sun.

REED

Not only could you kill yourself, but you could set fire to Earth's atmosphere and destroy all human life as we know it.

JOHNNY

Gotcha. Okay. Supernova bad.

Reed looks at the control panels.

SUE

He cooked the equipment.

Frustrated, Reed looks at the smoking system. And we CUT TO --

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - LAB - DAY

Reed and Ben sit in chairs, facing each other. A beat passes. Ben taps his fingers on the chair, making small DENTS. Reed looks down at his clipboard. A little awkward.

REED

Okay. I've uh, got some questions, from Sue. That she thought might be better coming from me... Can you, you know, go to the bathroom...like normal...

BEN

Yeah.

(a beat)

You don't wanna know the details.

REED

Ben, I'm afraid I've got to ask --

BEN

Not unless you want that clipboard stretched up your --

REED

O-kay. We'll skip that question.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - LAB - DAY

Reed and Johnny now. Johnny exercises. Reed stands nearby. Clipboard in hand.

REED

Is there something about flames?  
About flaming, that you --

JOHNNY

What are you trying to say? Just  
because I dress well and like to dance --

REED

(confused)

What? No. I'm trying to figure out  
why we each ended up with different  
symptoms.

JOHNNY

Oh, well that's easy: I'm hot.  
You're...well, you're a little limp.  
Sue's easy to see through. And Ben's  
always been a hardass.

(a beat)

Why aren't you writing this down?

Reed sighs. It's going to be a long process.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING LAB - DAY

Reed and Sue, tables turned: Reed observes her through a  
prismatic device measuring light refraction. He "sees" her  
through the device: lit up like some heavenly creature. He's  
having a hard time concentrating. He focuses on his work.

REED

It's not "invisibility" per se.  
You're bending the light around you  
with some kind of malleable force  
field. That's what you projected on  
the Bridge.

SUE

What about you? You haven't eaten in  
days. How come you're never on this  
side of the microscope?

He tightens, uncomfortable with being center of attention.  
She reaches for his arm, like a specimen. He pulls away, but  
she sees a glimpse of BRUISES on his ARMS. She slows down.

SUE (CONT'D)

Bruises...from the bridge?

He nods, rolls down his sleeves.

REED

Have you had any side-effects, from  
your powers?

She considers. A little vulnerable.

SUE

I've had some headaches. Migraines.

A beat. Reed drops his eyes, makes a note, back to work.

REED

You should be able to bend light  
around other objects, even people, if  
you could control your emotional state  
better --

SUE

Excuse me?

She is annoyed. Reed is oblivious.

REED

I'm saying, if you had a little more  
self control, you could locate the  
trigger. Can you remember the exact  
emotions when --

SUE

Anger. Rage. Frustration.

REED

Okay. Is there any way to duplicate  
that feeling? Some memory or...

SUE

(staring right at him)  
I'm sure I can come up with something.

She looks at Reed, eyes narrow. She becomes invisible. As she focuses on Reed -- and gets angry -- a small, clear FORCE FIELD forms around her body. The force-field BENDS LIGHT around a MICROSCOPE, which goes INVISIBLE. Reed steps out to ask...

REED

How's that coming -- whoa --

The FORCE-FIELD shoots in all directions, knocking everything over in a fifteen foot radius. Reed is thrown from his chair.

SUE

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to  
do that... You must think that was  
some kind of latent hostility or --

REED

What in the world would give me that  
idea?

An awkward beat.

REED (CONT'D)

I mean, you broke up with me, right?

SUE  
Are you kidding?

REED  
No, I distinctly remember: you walked  
out my door. Ergo...

She didn't want to get into this. She looks down,  
vulnerable.

SUE  
Reed. I was ready for the next step,  
you weren't, ergo, I walked.

REED  
I think it was a little more  
complicated than --

SUE  
I just wanted to share an apartment.  
What was so complicated about that?

The question stumps him. A beat. He struggles.

REED  
There were a lot of variables to  
consider --

SUE  
No. There weren't. There was you.  
And me. No variables, no math. It  
was actually the simplest thing in the  
world. But your head got in the way...  
like it always does.

Her words penetrate. He knows she's right. He looks away.

REED  
Sue...I just...I thought...

He struggles for the words.

SUE  
Same old Reed. Too much thinking...

He opens his mouth, but...WHAM! Doors open. Johnny enters,  
wearing a CHARRED SHIRT. He points to the burned scraps of  
his shirt.

JOHNNY  
Okay guys, we have a serious problem.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING LABS - DAY

ANGLES of Reed in the lab, grabbing their space uniforms from  
various closets/containers:

REED (V.O.)

Our uniforms were exposed to the storm like us. So they can transform like us, becoming invisible, changing size on demand or remaining impervious to flame.

REVEAL: Reed, Sue, and Johnny step out to look at themselves in a mirror wearing the uniforms. No boots, no gloves. Not yet. (The uniforms will develop, like our heroes).

BEN

You look like an eighties rock band.

SUE

(to Ben)

The suit will stretch. You should try it --

BEN

I wouldn't be caught dead in that.

JOHNNY

He's right. These costumes are... missing something. I can't put my finger on it --

REED

They're not costumes.

SUE

We're not taking them out. Johnny, we need to stay here till we've stabilized.

Johnny shakes his head, frustrated.

JOHNNY

I'm getting sick of being trapped here. NASA wasn't even this strict!

He marches out. Sue turns to Reed, who says nothing. Sue heads out, leaving Ben and Reed. A beat. Ben looks at Reed.

BEN

(looking at uniform)

Maybe it's missing a utility belt.

Off Reed's dark look, we hear:

VICTOR (V.O.)

So what's the prognosis?

INT. VON DOOM INDUSTRIES - VICTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON: an X-RAY. Victor's ARM. The metallic transformation is higher now. PULL BACK TO REVEAL: Victor and his DOCTOR. In the wall behind them: ancient armor

(maybe we noticed it before, maybe not). It adds a little menace to the room.

DOCTOR

Your tissue, your organs, your entire biophysical structure is changing. Every system is still functioning, somehow --

VICTOR

And they're changing into...

DOCTOR

I don't really know. A compound organic-metallic alloy. Stronger than titanium or carbon steel. Harder than diamonds --

VICTOR

Like the shields Reed said would protect us.

(cold fury, deadly focus)

How long?

DOCTOR

At this rate, the infection should be complete in two, maybe three weeks --

VICTOR

What do you mean "complete"?

DOCTOR

I wish I could tell you. I can't pretend to know what we're dealing with here. I'll notify the CDC and --

Victor hardens, razor sharp.

VICTOR

What?

DOCTOR

The Center for Disease Control. If this thing is contagious --

WHHM! Victor GRABS the Doctor by the throat.

VICTOR

Look at me. I have a life. I'm the face of a billion-dollar-company... We need to keep this confidential, understand?

Victor's grip TIGHTENS around the man's throat.

DOCTOR

But...this disease...is progressive...

degenerative...

VICTOR

That's terrible news...

With one cobra-swift move, Victor thrusts his metallic arm into the doctor, killing him instantly. Victor retracts his arm, and looks at it, shocked by his own strength.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

...but I think I'll get a second opinion.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - REED'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A SERIES OF TIME-LAPSE SHOTS: REED works around the Baxter Building, spending hours searching for the cure. He checks charts, writes equations, paces, frustrated.

Finally, he sits at his long desk, looking at a wall where Ben's CHARTS are projected (both Ben and Thing's anatomies). Reed wears the uniform under his labcoat. He checks his equations over and over, making notes upon notes.

REED

Nothing...nothing...nothing...

He hits the end of the slides. The wall fills with white light. Frustrated, Reed SLAMS his head into his desk, CRASH! Something FALLS off the end of the desk.

Reed raises his head, revealing his flattened face. He steps over to see...a PLANT SAMPLE from space, glass box shattered. Red sparks swirl around the plant, like the cosmic storm --

REED (CONT'D)

Of course...of course...the cloud...

THE COSMIC STORM swirls, terrifying. We slowly PULL BACK TO --

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN LAB - NIGHT

The STORM is a computer-image on screen now. Behind the screen are six chalkboards full of Reed's calculations and the scribbled beginnings of a MACHINE.

We PULL BACK to see his arm stretched across the room writing on the end of another chalkboard.

He's moving fast, excited, almost a little manic. He hears...a CREAK. He slows down, but doesn't look up to see SUE enter.

SUE

What are you doing?

REED

(fast, charged)  
The plants, from space. Their particles are still charged. With the right amount of energy, those ions could create the elemental profile of the cosmic storm.

He rifles through a desk drawer, then heads out. Sue stands there, looking at the storm. Concerned. Then we CUT TO --

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sue follows Reed. He flips through a file, excited.

REED  
If we can build a machine to re-create the storm, we can reverse the polarity --

SUE  
(realizing)  
And reverse the mutations --

REED  
(talking more to himself)  
Curing countless diseases, not just ours.

She looks at him.

SUE  
But we're the focus, right Reed?  
Reed...?

REED  
Of course. Of course.

SUE  
And you sure you can control this thing? Last time didn't work out so well.

REED  
(preoccupied, mind spinning)  
With the right energy, we can stabilize the storm. Maybe tie into the city grid...

He keeps his head down, making notes, entering --

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - STOREROOM - NIGHT

Reed and Sue enter. Reed is looking for something. Sue slows down, staring at this sprawling space, jam-packed with GEAR, GADGETS, BLUEPRINTS, INVENTIONS. Awe-inspiring, overflowing.

SUE

You really need to get a janitor.

She stares at shelves upon shelves of overcrowded clutter.

SUE (CONT'D)

This must be what it looks like inside  
your head.

Reed finds his electron microscope. He turns to Sue,  
defensive:

REED

There's a system to it.

She starts to pull out a MODEL of the FANTASTICAR.

REED (CONT'D)

Wait! Sue, don't touch tha--

The little car sets the whole shelf off balance. A WAVE OF  
INVENTIONS COME CLATTERING DOWN! Reed moves fast:

He LUNGES toward Sue, STREETCHING his ARMS AROUND the SHELF,  
pushing Sue away, just as the INVENTIONS SMASH TO THE GROUND!

Reed and Sue hit the floor. A close call. Now more  
closeness: Sue and Reed lay face-to-face, with Reed's wrapped  
around her. A heated beat. Their first real intimate  
moment.

SUE

Sorry. My fault. I won't...touch  
anything.

As if suddenly made aware of their vulnerability, Sue and  
Reed stand, backing off. As they part, we see:

BEN watching from the doorway. Melancholy. He disappears.  
We slowly MOVE TO...A SURVEILLANCE CAMERA in a VENT GRATE.

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Victor watches a bank of videoscreens. He has the Baxter  
Building under surveillance. He sees Reed and Sue on  
monitors. He toys with Sue's diamond ring in his gloved  
hand.

A door opens. Leonard enters. He sees the screens.

LEONARD

Is Reed any closer to a cure?

Victor looks at that image of Reed and Sue on the screen.

VICTOR

The only thing he's closer to is

Sue...

But Victor sees something between Reed and Sue on the wall. He leans closer, and the camera ZOOMS IN, as if responding to his will. He ZOOMS all the way to a CLOSE UP of:

REED'S BLUEPRINTS FOR THE TRANSFORMATION CHAMBER. Victor's eyes narrow, mind ticking, a plan forming.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Make me a reservation for two at  
Cipriani tonight.

Victor opens a drawer, pulls out an old VIDEOTAPE.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

And get this over to Ben Grimm.

Victor leans forward, fixated on that machine. As he gets closer, his screens go STATICKY. He absentmindedly picks at his SCAR. In shadows, we see skin peeling off.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Close your eyes, baby. Keep 'em  
closed.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MEDIA ROOM - NIGHT

BEN GRIMM stands front and center. Not the Thing. But BEN GRIMM. A normal man. He smiles wide, shaking his head.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

You surprised?

Now we PULL BACK to reveal DEBBIE and BEN on a SCREEN. The Thing watches the old videotape. He smiles sadly at his old life. He mouths the words -- he knows this tape by heart.

BEN (ON SCREEN)

Yeah I'm surprised. Surprised the  
fire department didn't shut this down.

ON SCREEN: the handheld camera whips around, revealing...a SURPRISE PARTY. Full of people. Ben Grimm is a popular guy. On screen: Reed hugs Ben. They pose for pictures together.

THE THING

God. I was good looking.

We hear the party sing "HAPPY BIRTHDAY." Debbie kisses Ben. Thing's eyes start to mist. On screen: Ben blows out candles.

DEBBIE (ON SCREEN)

What did you wish for, honey?

BEN (ON SCREEN)

I already got it. Everything I want.

As they kiss, a tear runs down Thing's cheek. The tape ends, and he sits in darkness for a beat. A long, lonely beat.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - HALLS - NIGHT

Ben stalks the halls, slipping into his ragged trenchcoat. As he passes a crossroads, he sees a strange sight:

REED'S HAND is TIED to a latch in the wall. His ARM is STREEETCHED THIN, spanning around the corner. Ben just shakes his head, keeps moving. And we FOLLOW REED'S ARM...

UP THE HALL...ROUND A CORNER...DOWN ANOTHER HALL. The muscles and tissue STRETCH, going taut. Finally, we reach...

REED. He steps slowly. He holds a digital TAPE-MEASURE in his other hand, measuring distance. His skin STREEETCHES. His face tightens, pained. We hear the faint SQUEAK of his skin.

VOICE (O.S.)

Damn, Stretch!

Reed turns his head around, seeing JOHNNY come down the hall.

JOHNNY

How far's that rubber bend?

Reed keeps moving, slowly. His muscles and tendons laboring.

REED

That's what I'm trying to calculate.  
And it's not rubber. It's muscle,  
tendon. I seem to have the ability to  
manipulate the malleability of my  
molecular structure and redistribute  
my density to --

JOHNNY

Right, whatever, have fun.

And Johnny is GONE, ducking under Reed's arm into --

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Johnny opens a cupboard, pulls out some JIFFY POP. It starts to POP in his hand, the bag swelling. He casually turns on a TV, flipping to...the X- GAMES. The Jiffy Pop swells, ready to blow. He rips it open, eats popcorn, and watches the games:

Cool stunts, hot girls. Johnny's brow furrows, a thought forming, a mischievous smile on his lips.

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING - SIDE EXIT - NIGHT

A FIGURE exits, wearing that ragged trenchcoat and fedora. Ben disappears into the dark night, and we CUT TO --

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET - NIGHT

Dark. Lights flicker. Steam rises through the grates. A shadow emerges. Ben. He heads toward O'DONNEL'S PUB, a classic Brooklyn tavern. Neon sign. Music, life inside. Ben pulls his hat low, turns up his collar, and squeezes through the door into --

INT. O'DONNEL'S PUB - NIGHT

A big photo of Ben Grimm in his astronaut heyday occupies a place over the bar. Ben enters, and the bar goes SILENT. He moves through the crowd. People clear out of the way.

Ben reaches the bar. He sits on a stool, and CRUNCH! SMASH! The stool SNAPS like a toothpick. He hits the ground hard. Glasses shake. A few PATRONS smile, laugh softly.

BEN

That's not funny!

They go silent. They drop bills onto tables, filing out, scared of this monster. ERNIE works the bar.

ERNIE

Hey, that's Ben Grimm there, the first mook from Brooklyn to go to outer space, so pay him some respect!

But the patrons keep filing out. Ben looks down, weary.

BEN

Ernie. Sorry for killing your business. I'll take the usual, then I'm out... Better make it a double.

Ernie heads for the booze. Ben gives a sad shake of his head. Then he notices...one lone patron at the end of the bar. A beautiful young woman nursing a drink. Meet ALICIA MASTERS.

ALICIA

Who killed the party?

She turns to him, unafraid. He notices her blank stare, lack of focus, and white cane. Alicia is blind.

ERNIE (O.S.)

Make it a triple. On the house, Benny.

Ben takes his drink, but SMASH! His grip shatters the glass, spilling all over himself. He smiles ruefully.

BEN

If there's a God, she hates me.

He grabs a bar-rag to dry off.

ALICIA

I don't think She's real big on hate.

BEN

You wouldn't say that, if you could  
see me.

She knocks back her drink, grabs her cane, steps toward Ben.

ALICIA

Can I...? See you...?

Ben doesn't say anything. A little unnerved by this woman.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

It's okay, I won't bite...  
(feeling his arm)  
...not that I could.

She puts a hand on his face -- something in her tone and gentle touch allows Ben to let her. She smiles softly.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

Such a sad face... You know, sometimes  
being different isn't a bad thing.

BEN

Trust me, this ain't one of those  
times.

She smiles softly, takes her cane, and starts to head out.

ALICIA

See you round, Benny...

Right as she hits the door, over her shoulder --

ALICIA (CONT'D)

I'm Alicia, by the way.

Ben watches her disappear. He sees a few people staring. He lowers his head, turns back to the bar, and finds a new drink, in a steel MARTINI SHAKER. He knocks it back.

EXT./INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Lights twinkle. A MAITRE D' leads us through fancy digs. Heads turn, whispers flutter. SUE steps out, joining... Victor at a prime table. He pulls out her chair, wearing gloves.

VICTOR

Thank you for coming out to see me.

She nods, a little self-conscious.

SUE

You said it was urgent.

VICTOR

It is. There's something we need to talk about. Something I need to ask you...

Sue senses where this is going, and she cuts it short.

SUE

(slow, careful)

Victor, wait, slow down a second. I want you to know I appreciate everything you've done for me, but I just don't --

VICTOR

Susan. What are you doing?

He is cold as ice. If he's hurt, he'll never show it.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

You think I brought you here to talk about us? Please. This is business.  
(leaning forward, intense)  
I need to know: how close is Reed to finding to a cure?

She pauses. Then:

SUE

He's working round the clock. But the data needs to be tested, analyzed before --

VICTOR

Same old Reed. All analysis, no action. Wasn't that the problem with you two?

She holds tight, keeping cool.

SUE

If these molecules aren't stable, they could make us worse, maybe even kill us.

VICTOR

Then why is Reed dragging his feet? Maybe he likes having his prize specimen under glass...

(closer, cruel)  
It's ironic, isn't it? You're finally  
the perfect woman for him...because  
you're his science project.

The words sting. She can't help but hear some truth in them.

SUE  
Please don't make this personal --

VICTOR  
Oh, I think you already have.

SUE  
Victor, we can't do anything until the  
research is ready.

Victor's fist CLENCHES -- metal SFX.

VICTOR  
"We," huh?

Victor SCREECHES his chair back, PUSHING the table so hard  
that he SPILLS water. Heads turn, all eyes on Sue. Victor  
gets close to her, too close, a hand on her shoulder.

VICTOR (CONT'D)  
Don't forget who you work for, Susan.  
So get to work. And do your job.

He walks out. As he goes, he slips the engagement ring out  
of his pocket. He crushes the diamond to dust, leaves the  
dust in an ashtray, and disappears into the night.

Sue sits embarrassed. She slowly...disappears. People gasp.  
She walks out, invisible, save for her clothes, which DRIFT  
through the air. At a TABLE FULL OF BUSINESSMEN --

BUSINESSMAN  
I wish my wife would disappear.

The other men laugh, but WHHM! The man's wine SPILLS into  
his LAP! Sue walks out. The restaurant is left buzzing.  
Lights twinkle. And we FADE OUT. A beat. Then we CRASH  
INTO --

EXT. NYC ARENA - ESPN MOTO X GAMES - DAY

The X games in full effect: A maze of mountainous dirt hills  
and ramps...where MOTO-BIKES launch into the air to the  
delight of 20,000 fans. The Riders spin and flip, performing  
aerial acrobatics on their 250CC motor bikes.

X GAMES ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
And now, ladies and gentlemen, we have  
a special guest for you... Johnny  
Storm of the Fantastic Four!

JOHNNY emerges, wearing his blue uniform, waving to the crowd. He steps up to the pit where RIDERS prep. He beelines to RONNIE RENNER.

JOHNNY

Hey, Ronnie Renner! I'm a big fan.

Ronnie gives a tight nod. He doesn't like being upstaged by this circus freak.

The other bikers approach.

KENNY BARTRAM

Heard you like to ride. Wanna take her for a spin?

He motions to his BIKE. Johnny eyes this mean machine.

RONNIE RENNER

Come on, bro. I'll teach you some tricks...if you can keep up.

We PUSH IN on Johnny, his ego getting stoked, as we CUT TO --

INT. NYC ARENA - TRACK - DAY

Ronnie jams down the track, kicking dirt back at Johnny. Johnny now wears a MOTOCROSS OUTFIT over his uniform, with the number "004" on the back and a small 4 over his heart. Ronnie hits the first hill, and CATCHES AIR, FLIPPING HIGH!

X GAMES ANNOUNCER

A rock-solid double-flip!

The CROWD goes wild. Now it's Johnny's turn. He hits the hill and pulls the exact same move. With even more height!

X GAMES ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Look at that lift, ladies and gentlemen!

Johnny sticks the landing. The crowd swells. Ronnie tightens, pulls his throttle harder, taking the next jump, and...MAKING AN INSANE MOVE, CORKSCREWING IN THE AIR!

X GAMES ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Frontside 360! He's totally flat and whipped!

He lands clean. The crowd is ready to explode. Johnny REVS his engine, his body starting to STEAM, adrenaline burning. He hits the hill, and pulls an even gnarlier SPIN!

X GAMES ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Whoa! That's a...what is that? A 720?

Johnny lands. The crowd roars. Ronnie bears down on the last hill. He leans over his handlebars.

X GAMES ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)  
He's going for a Kiss of Death!

Ronnie hits the hill, pulls this JAW-DROPPING DEATH-DEFYING STUNT! The crowd is deafening! Ronnie smiles. And...

JOHNNY SPEEDS FASTER, FASTER. Trails of FLAME start to streak off his back! He RACES LIKE A ROCKET UP THE HILL! LAUNCHING TO IMPOSSIBLE HEIGHTS! SPINNING LIKE A TOP! A FLAMING BLUR!

And now for the really impressive part: Johnny's bike starts to drop, but JOHNNY KEEPS RISING! He FLAMES ON, spiraling upward! For a few seconds, he's actually...almost...flying.

X GAMES ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)  
(hand over mic)  
Is he.....flying?

A beat. Time suspended. And...WHHM! He PLUMMETS back down! LANDS on his bike in mid-air! And sticks a perfect landing, maybe even kicking a little dirt up at Ronnie. Johnny swerves to a stop, with a "holy shit" look on his face. What the hell just happened??

X GAMES ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)  
Unbelievable, ladies and gentlemen!  
You've just seen the first...the first...TORCHFLIGHT! The McTORCH!

A new name is born. The crowd goes berserk. Standing ovation. Riders rush up to Johnny. Kenny sees his bike:

THE SEAT MELTED, WHEELS BURNED OFF. Johnny smiles.

JOHNNY  
My bad. Sorry about that.  
(a glance to Ronnie)  
Thanks for the lesson, bro.

HOT GIRLS swarm. As Johnny gets swallowed by fans, we see a scary thing flicker in his eyes: the birth of a star.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - KITCHEN - MORNING

Sue stands alone, sifting through piles of mail. She focuses on one piece of mail that she's holding. Her hand begins to disappear and then the envelope slowly begins to disappear as well. Sue smiles at the success. Intrigued. Quiet:

SUE  
That's new...

Reed enters -- overworked, unshaved. He keeps his head down, preoccupied. Sue shifts focus.

SUE (CONT'D)

Have you read these...? From all over. People want us to fight crimes... save their kids...solve their problems...  
(no response from Reed)  
...when we can't even solve our own.

She puts the letters down, steps closer to Reed.

SUE (CONT'D)

Reed. How close are we to a cure?

REED

No way to know. Without more tests, experiments.

She considers. Victor's words echo in her head.

SUE

We're not specimens, we're patients. This isn't just another science project to you, is it...?

Reed looks up, a little surprised. He opens his mouth, but --

BEN (O.S.)

NO...NO...NO FREAKIN' WAY!!

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MEDIA ROOM - DAY

CRASH! BANG! Ben stalks around the room, furious. Reed and Sue rush in.

REED

BEN! What? What's going on!?

Ben points to the wall-sized TV: the ESPN MOTO X GAMES.

X GAMES REPORTER (ON TV)

So what can you tell us about the outfit?

REVEAL: JOHNNY standing next to an X GAMES REPORTER. He is peeling off the burned remains of his motocross outfit, revealing his FF UNIFORM, with a "4" STITCHED ONTO THE CHEST.

Behind them, STEP UP RIDERS launch their MOTO-BIKES off huge 18' high mountains of dirt, thirty feet in the air.

JOHNNY (ON TV)

Not too much, but I will say that it's all weather and no leather. Kind of Armani meets Astronaut.

Ben, Sue, and Reed stare at the wall-sized TV. Mouths agape.

SUE

He didn't.

BEN

Oh, he did.

SUE

What did he do to the uniform?!

She turns to Reed, who gives a sheepish shrug, and peels back his labcoat revealing a "4" stitched onto his chest too.

REED

He talked me into it.

X-GAMES REPORTER (ON TV)

So what are your superhero names?

JOHNNY (ON TV)

I go by the Human Torch. The ladies call me Torch.

X-GAMES REPORTER (ON TV)

What about the rest of the team?

Johnny hadn't really thought about them. He spitballs:

JOHNNY (ON TV)

Uh, we call my sister the invisible girl...the Invisible Girl.

SUE

Girl...?!

X-GAMES REPORTER (ON TV)

That's easy to remember. And Reed Richards? He's the leader. So what's he? Mr. Fantastic?

JOHNNY

Well, I wouldn't say he's the leader.

Reed shrugs. He doesn't hate the name.

BEN

Could be worse.

Case in point: a photo of Ben fills the TV.

X-GAMES REPORTER (ON TV)

What about this one? What do you call this Thing?

Johnny smiles, looking right into camera.

JOHNNY

That's it. Just The Thing. We would have gone with The Rock, but it was taken. And "Thing" pretty much sums it up.

A LAUGH from the studio audience.

BEN

(matter-of-fact)

Okay. I'm gonna go kill him now.

He turns to go. Reed wraps an arm around Ben.

REED

Ben! Slow down a second and --

He sees a photo of himself on screen.

X-GAMES REPORTER (ON TV)

Is it true what they say? That he can expand any part of his anatomy?

JOHNNY (ON TV)

Actually, between us, I think he's got some problems staying rigid.

REED

(finishing his thought to Ben)

...wait for me...

X-GAMES REPORTER (ON TV)

Which may explain why *this* woman's not smiling.

They put up a shot of Susan.

SUE

I'm driving.

JOHNNY (ON TV)

Dude. That's my sister.

EXT. NYC ARENA - DAY

The Thing rounds the corner. Sees a crowd of girls lined up near a red PORSCHE parked out front...with "TORCHED" on the plates. Ben slows down, smiles.

EXT. NYC ARENA - A LITTLE LATER

Johnny and the Hot Babe exit, signing autographs for girls in the line. Sue and Reed approach, glare like angry parents.

Johnny finds the Valet, who looks ill...his car is gone.

JOHNNY  
(looking around)  
Where's my ride?

The Valet blows his whistle...and a 4 X 4 solid cube of RED JUNK METAL slides down the street and stops at the curb in front of Johnny. The Valet timidly holds out the keys...

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
What the?! Is that my --

Before he can finish, Johnny gets PELTED IN THE HEAD with the license plate. It rattles to the ground, face up.

Johnny rubs the sting out of his head. Looks up and sees Ben in the distance, dusting off his hands.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
(shouting: to Ben)  
You're gonna pay for that, Pebbles.  
(seeing Sue)  
What?!

SUE  
You gave us names? What are you, the "face" of the Fantastic Four now?

Ben marches up. Hands balled into fists.

BEN  
It's about to be a broken face.

REED  
This isn't permanent, Johnny. We need to be careful until we're normal again.

JOHNNY  
What if some of us don't want to be "normal" again? We didn't all turn into monsters like --

Ben reels back a FIST the size of an anvil. Stops himself. Instead of attacking, he starts to walk off.

Johnny hurls a FIREBALL that SMACKS Ben in the back of the head. Ben stops. Turns around more shocked than hurt.

BEN  
Did you just --

Ben gets hit with ANOTHER FIREBALL. This time in the face.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Okay, that's it, tinkerbell! You want to fly? Fly.

Ben charges like a bull, fist cocked back, and...Reed steps in the way! Too late! WHAMM! Ben's fist PUNCHES INTO REED'S CHEST, which INDENTS. Reed's BACK EXPANDS with Ben's fist, PUNCHING into Johnny, launching Johnny off his feet.

BAM! Johnny SLAMS into a moving ADVERTISING TRUCK, with a BURGER KING flame-broiled WHOPPER on the side. WHOOSH! He leaves a flaming imprint on the all-beef patty.

The crowd stands stunned. So do Reed and Sue. Cameras pop.

Johnny slowly pulls himself up. The paint on the truck begins to bubble around his hand. Beaten, bruised, he stands. Heating up. Both his hands are now flaming fists of fury.

JOHNNY

Let's see if we can get blood from a stone.

He and Ben lock eyes, with a block of sidewalk between them. High Noon. They start to RUN toward each other...

When they are almost within range, Sue STEPS BETWEEN THEM, stops them both in their tracks with just a look. Like a mom:

SUE

You two need a time-out.

JOHNNY

Blockhead started it!

Ben just stalks off. The crowd clears, scared. A PAPARAZZI snaps a picture. Ben GRABS his camera, and flicks the lens.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Sue looks at Johnny, more disappointed than angry.

SUE

Damn it, Johnny.

She goes after Ben, leaving Reed and Johnny on the sidewalk.

REED

You need to control yourself and think before you --

JOHNNY

Act. Here we go again. Reed, what if we got these gifts for a reason? What if we have some, you know...like, calling?

REED

A higher calling like getting girls

and making money?

Johnny nods, totally missing the sarcasm.

JOHNNY

Is there any higher?

Reed looks at him, disgusted. Johnny waves to the crowd, hand flaming. People SHRIEK, snap pictures. Johnny smiles at Reed.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

This is who we are Reed. Accept it.  
Or better yet: enjoy it.

Johnny steps into the sea of fans. Reed stands alone.

EXT. STREET/ALLEY - DAY

Sue wades through the throng of New Yorkers. Tries to catch up with Ben...whose presence parts the crowd like Moses.

SUE

Ben! Slow down...

Ben glances sideways at her, doesn't stop. She catches up.

SUE (CONT'D)

He didn't mean it. You know Johnny.  
He's always been a hothead --

BEN

It's not him. It's them.  
(pointing to crowd)  
I can't live like this.

SUE

Just give Reed a little more time.  
You know how he works -- analyzing  
every little step before he takes  
one --

BEN

It's easy for you to be patient.

SUE

No, it's not. I thought I was done  
waiting for Reed... We're all in this  
together now, Ben.

He slows down, gets closer, intense.

BEN

Together? Look at me, Susie. You got  
no idea what I'd give...to be  
invisible. Your nightmare...is my  
dream.

She opens her mouth, but has no response. She doesn't know his depth of pain. As he disappears into the alley, we CUT TO --

INT. INVESTMENT BANK - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The news plays on the TV. Head Banker Ned Cecil freezes the screen on an image of...THE THING. He turns to Victor, who sits with the rest of the bankers. Cold, sterile environment.

NED CECIL

This is how you "turn things around"?  
These freaks are on the front page and  
your company's in the obituaries.

Victor has a larger bandage on his face now.

VICTOR

I have a plan to use their publicity  
for --

NED CECIL

Victor, stop. The bank's lost enough  
already. This isn't a negotiation.  
It's a notification. We're pulling  
out.

A cold, silent beat. Victor leans forward.

VICTOR

You need to look long-term here.  
Without risk, there's no --

NED CECIL

Reward. We all know the sales  
pitch, Vic. And frankly, we're  
done buying... Gentlemen.

He motions to his men. They all stand. Victor is the lone man sitting. PUSH IN on Victor's face, his inner rage palpable. A few quick surges of electricity emanate from his body. This man is getting stronger, more electric.

INT. BANK - UNDERGROUND PARKING GARAGE - DAY

After hours. The floor is slick with water -- puddles in every direction. Ned Cecil comes out of the elevator, heading for his car. As he goes, the structure lights start to flicker. Ned looks up, watches the lights go out one by one, furthest to closest. He looks around. Unnerved by the darkness.

NED CECIL

Hello...?

A hanging beat. Victor steps out from shadows.

NED CECIL (CONT'D)

(relieved, almost)

Von Doom? Gave me a little shock. No hard feelings, right? Nothing personal.

Victor says nothing. Ned keeps going.

NED CECIL (CONT'D)

You know, you could always move back to Latvura, start fresh.

He mispronounces Latveria, dripping condescension.

NED CECIL (CONT'D)

Maybe that's where you belong, back in the "old country."

That does it. A surge of electricity courses through Victor. His eyes narrow, and the electricity crackles down his leg to THE GROUND. The electric spark hits the water and...

ELECTRIC CURRENTS RACE ACROSS THE GROUND, SLITHERING LIGHTNING-FAST ACROSS THE WATER (like deadly electric snakes), heading straight for Ned. His eyes go wide. And...

NED IS ELECTROCUTED! His body spasms. THUD! He slumps, dead. Smoke rises from his body. Victor stands, power swelling.

For the first time, his SCAR SPLITS OPEN, revealing a METAL GLOW beneath the skin. He remains scary calm.

VICTOR

It's pronounced Latveria.

(looking down at the dead body)

This meeting's over, Ned.

Victor walks away, the final lights going to DARKNESS.

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Victor enters, still adrenalized. He turns to the light switch, and the lights come on. He approaches his screens, and the monitors flicker to life. His powers are growing.

One MONITOR rolls the news. IMAGES of the FANTASTIC FOUR. Victor leans closer, and the VOLUME automatically goes up.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)

...the Fantastic Four put on quite a show last night. They landed in every major headline in the northern hemisphere. In related news...

An IMAGE of VICTOR on screen.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV) (CONT'D)  
Reports have surfaced that Von Doom Industries may be filing for bankruptcy. You may remember that it was Victor Von Doom who...

Victor turns away from the screen. The volume goes down. He focuses his eyes on REED.

Leonard enters, stepping closer, seeing the faint flicker of VICTOR'S METALLIC SCAR. His eyes narrow, concerned.

LEONARD  
Sir, is everything okay? What happened to your...?

Victor keeps his eyes on the screen, totally engrossed.

VICTOR  
(under breath, seething)  
Reed... He got what he wanted...  
(looking at Sue)  
Everything he wanted...he took from me.

He leans ever closer, so the static starts to swallow Reed. A hard, deadly beat. Victor's eyes narrow, zooming into...REED'S RESEARCH: SLIDES on the wall. He zooms into key words:

DANGER, UNSTABLE IONS, MUTATION, OVERLOAD. And Victor gives a slow, thin smile. A new plan forming.

VICTOR (CONT'D)  
Now I'm going to take it back. Piece by bloody piece...

His fist clenches. We hear METALLIC SFX.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSFORMATION LAB - DAY

Reed enters the room carrying a stack of boxes that no normal man could balance. But he is not normal. His arms are wrapped around the boxes five times over -- like human twine. He stops short, and drops the boxes when he sees...

VICTOR overseeing a group of TECHNICIANS. They are boxing up Reed's work -- all of his equipment, research. Victor wears a bandage, covering his scar. Reed eyes a glint of METAL.

REED  
Victor, are you...are you okay?

Victor turns away.

VICTOR

Don't worry about me. Worry about yourself.

Reed looks around, seeing his lab turned inside out.

REED

What are you doing here?

VICTOR

What I should have done a long time ago. Applications and patents, Reed. This all belongs to me.

Reed reaches out, grabbing a folder from a box.

REED

But I'm not done with the machine --

VICTOR

Which is precisely the point. Analysis is over. It's time for action. My men could have mass-produced this by now.

Reed shakes his head, defending himself.

REED

Mass-produced? This isn't a toaster. You have no idea how it works.

Victor pulls the folder from Reed's hand, and whips out the intricate DIAGRAM of the MACHINE. He points to parts:

VICTOR

Re-create the storm, invert the polarity here, reverse the mutation there. Don't talk to me like I'm some schoolboy. I've got the same Phd you do.

Reed is a little surprised that Victor is so familiar with his machine. He points to a SECURE CHAMBER on the blueprint.

REED

The storm needs to be handled exactly right, or it could make our mutations worse, much worse, maybe even kill us...

Victor slows. Is Reed getting to him? Or giving him ideas?

REED (CONT'D)

Victor, please. We need time to verify the data... We can't afford any mistakes -- there's only enough ions for two or three attempts.

Victor considers. He seems to enjoy watching Reed dangle.

VICTOR

Reed. I'm not asking permission.  
(a final verdict)  
We'll build it, while you check the  
specs.

Victor walks out. Reed looks unsure, as we CUT TO --

INT. BAXTER BUILDING TRANSFORMATION LAB - DAY

The SHIELDS slowly rise. FIVE TECHNICIANS go to work. They wear the VDI jackets. Reed watches, worried.

Sue enters. She sees the shields, the technicians, the VDI logo. And she is deeply worried. She steps over to Reed. Sparks fly behind them. Drills scream.

SUE

Can I talk to you?

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - REED'S OFFICE - DAY

Sue steps into the office, followed by Reed. Quiet, urgent:

SUE

Don't let Victor push you into making  
a mistake --

REED

He was going to take away all my data,  
equipment --

SUE

Better than your life. Victor's not  
the one who has to get into that  
thing. We are.

Reed starts to snap, losing his studied cool.

REED

Which is why I'm working twenty hours  
a day, checking every variable --

SUE

Every variable but yourself. You  
don't eat, sleep. You can't live in  
your head like --

REED

(finally losing it)  
I'm not the only one in there. I got  
you, Vic, Ben, Johnny, all rattling  
around in there.

Sue stands there, shocked by his outburst. A beat.

SUE

So clear it out. Get out of your head. Get out of here...

He looks at her, knowing what she means. Where she means.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREETS - DAY

Ben nearly knocks people over as he stomps down the street, mind tossing and turning. People stare, point. A LITTLE GIRL and FRIEND run up to him.

LITTLE GIRL

Mister, Mister! Please help me! My kitty is stuck in a tree.

She gestures to a tree next to Ben. Looks up.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)

Please save Miss Lucy.

Ben rolls his eyes. Looks up. Considers climbing the tree, but thinks better of it. He has another idea...

Ben grabs the tree with one hand, and starts shaking the crap out of it. MEEEEEEEOOOOOOOWWWRRRRRRR!!!!

The cat falls into frame. At the last instant, Ben sticks out his hand and the cat lands safely in his palm. He hands the cat to the girl. Barely acknowledges her profuse thanks. He just moves on.

EXT. ANOTHER BROOKLYN STREET - NIGHT

Ben passes a window in a gallery, and almost misses A LARGE SCULPTURE of his bust.

He stops, steps back to take a look. It's exquisitely rendered, capturing not just brute physicality, but the haunting anguish in his eyes. Ben is amazed, and touched, but...

BEN

(under breath)

Eyebrows are a little big...

A beat. He stares at these images of himself.

VOICE (O.S.)

I figured the only way to get you here was to stick that in the window.

He turns to see...ALICIA in the doorway.

BEN

How'd you know it was me?

ALICIA

I'm blind, not deaf. Wanna come in?

He steps toward her. But he sees...a PARTY in the back part of the gallery. Ben pauses, a little insecure.

BEN

I'm not really dressed for a party.

ALICIA

Relax, it's casual.

BEN

No, I mean...I'm a little...dusty...

She smiles, a thought forming, as we CUT TO --

INT. GALLERY - STUDIO - NIGHT

WHOOSH! A SCULPTOR'S HOSE sprays a thin stream of water at BEN. Alicia cleans Ben with her hands, using thin CARVING CHISELS for his cracks. Intricate, intimate work.

Ben enjoys every moment. He eyes a couple, large PUPPETS in the corner.

BEN

Those yours too?

ALICIA

My step-dad's. I'm strictly into stone. I was wondering when you'd walk by.

THE THING

You know, you could'a run an ad in the personals.

ALICIA

"Sensual blind chick seeks three-ton, rock-hard he-man for deep spiritual relationship."

THE THING

This ain't permanent. My friend Reed's working on a cure...I think.

She gets closer, running her hands across his arm.

ALICIA

Bennie. You feel pretty good as is.

Ben bristles. He doesn't want to stay this way.

THE THING

You don't know what it's like out there. Walking around like some kind of circus freak. People staring, whispering --

ALICIA

I wouldn't know anything about that.

THE THING

I mean...

ALICIA

Tell me. When you grew up in Brooklyn, how many astronauts did you know?

(a beat)

You went your own way then. You didn't listen to people. So why start now...?

As he ponders that, we hear a CROWD SWELLING on the CUT TO --

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Fans swarm JOHNNY. He signs autographs, poses for pictures. Then his eyes move to...an incredibly long stretch LIMO. A tinted window rolls down. Victor's face emerges.

VICTOR

Need a ride, Johnny?

EXT./INT. LIMO - NIGHT

Johnny climbs in, sees...three impossibly gorgeous MODELS.

VICTOR

A few fans. Hope you don't mind.

JOHNNY

Gotta take care of the fans, right?

He smiles, sitting down in the middle of them.

VICTOR

Look, I built my business knowing what people want. And right now, the people want you.

Johnny eyes the models, all lusting.

JOHNNY

And we don't want to let the people down now, do we?

VICTOR

No we don't. Which is why we need to strike while the iron's hot.

I'm talking action figures,  
videogames, sponsors --

JOHNNY

Videogames? You serious?

Victor nods, knowing he has Johnny on the hook.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You talk to Reed and Sue about this?

VICTOR

Johnny. Let's be honest here. Ben,  
Reed, Sue. Good people, all. But  
stars?

(shaking his head, a beat)

I don't want to break up the band, but  
you're the one they want. Don't you  
think it's time to go solo...?

Victor subtly nods to the models. They envelop Johnny.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Take the car for a spin. Think about  
it. Is this the life you want? Or  
would you rather live in Reed's  
lab...?

The car stops. Victor gets out. He stands on the pavement.  
As he shuts the door, we see the women climbing onto Johnny.  
The door shuts, and...

WHHHMMMPF! The windows all suddenly STEAM UP!

INT. HAYDEN PLANETARIUM - NIGHT

STARS on the ceiling. A VOICE drones about the galaxy. In  
the LAST ROW, we find: Reed and Sue. Reed is thinking about  
work.

REED

I could get Ben to tap into the  
Baxter's main power to generate enough  
voltage --

SUE

Reed. Shh. Just be quiet. And look  
up.

He slowly looks up. The stars seem to calm him.

SUE (CONT'D)

Remember our first date here...? God,  
I was so nervous.

REED

You were?

SUE

Of course I was. I'd read all your papers on bioethics. Some of them two times just so I'd have something to say to you.

Reed smiles softly, thinking back.

REED

You know, I bribed the projectionist ten bucks to keep it open late?

SUE

I gave him twenty.

They laugh. Sue looks up to the stars. Quiet:

SUE (CONT'D)

I didn't want that night to end.

Reed looks at her. Wrestles with a decision. Then quietly:

REED

Sue, you were right. It wasn't complicated. I just wasn't ready to be...to become...

(a beat)

You can be a little intimidating.

She knows. He trails off. Sue looks at him.

REED (CONT'D)

You always talked about how you liked the kind of man who could approach you...speak his mind. One who wasn't afraid to tell you what he wanted.

SUE

I did. I did, Reed...but I wanted you to be that man.

Someone SHUSHES them. They slump down further. Closer.

SUE (CONT'D)

When I walked out, I waited ten minutes outside your door. Ten. Waiting for you to come find me.

REED

Why didn't you say something?

SUE

That would have kinda defeated the purpose. And Reed...

(closer, emotional)

I'm saying it now.

Their eyes lock. A heated beat. No more secrets. Their faces are close. A kiss is coming. Closer, closer. Sue disappears.

SUE (CONT'D)  
(quiet, playful)  
Come find me.

Reed tentatively leans into the kiss, and...

SUE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
That's my nose, genius... These are my lips.

Reed's face is SQUEEZED on both sides by Sue's invisible hands. She pulls him into a KISS. Lips touch. Soft, tender. Stars twinkle. And we slowly DISSOLVE TO --

EXT. KIRBY GALLERY - NIGHT

Ben and Alicia step out together. The crowd quiets, turns. A few whispers flutter. Alicia leans close to Ben, and slips her arm into his. The party goes back to normal.

ALICIA  
Look around. I'll get us drinks.  
They always let blind girls cut the line.

She walks off. He watches her go. The way her hair moves. The lines of her neck. The light on her skin. This woman is the most beautiful thing Ben has ever seen. He's falling hard.

Ben steps through the crowd. The swanky guests give strained smiles, polite. Ben is starting to feel comfortable here. He keeps his eyes on Alicia, who talks to guests.

Ben hangs back, happy to watch her. A few patrons pass him, thinking he's just an inanimate statue.

PATRON  
I don't know about this one. It lacks a certain...realism.

Ben keeps his eyes on Alicia. He overhears two BOHEMIAN GIRLS, who assume he's a statue.

BOHEMIAN GIRL #1  
She's always had a thing for runaways and strays, but this is ridiculous.

BOHEMIAN GIRL #2  
I know. Did she really think these sculptures would sell?

BOHEMIAN GIRL #1

Like anybody would want this thing in their house. That girl's a one-woman charity.

Ben just stands there, frozen. His eyes dart around the room, paranoid now. Aware of people staring, laughing. He glances at Alicia, who giggles at something else. Ten seconds ago, this would have been dreamy. Now it's damning.

We stay with Alicia, who cuts through the crowd, emerging where she left Ben. She has a PITCHER of wine in hand for him. But Ben is gone. She looks disappointed, hearing his heavy FOOTSTEPS get softer and softer in the distance.

THUNDER booms on the CUT TO --

EXT./INT. DINER - NIGHT

A pitstop in Queens. Heavy RAIN swims down windows. BEN sits at the COUNTER, with his hat pulled low, coat tight. Nobody sits within four chairs of him. He sips coffee in a metal bowl. A long beat. Then...

VICTOR (O.S.)

This seat taken?

Ben turns to see...VICTOR.

BEN

What are you doing here?

VICTOR

I'm worried about you.

BEN

About me? How sweet.

VICTOR

Come on. Let me buy you something to eat. Looks like you could use the company.

Ben considers. A man deeply alone. A beat.

INT. DINER - LATER

Victor and Ben sit in a window booth. A waitress sets a foothigh stack of pancakes in front of Ben, removes huge plates he's just cleared. Victor's aware of the other customers in the diner staring at Ben. Ben burps: it rattles the plates.

THE THING

'Scuse me.

VICTOR

I know it can't be easy. Life hasn't changed that much for Reed, Sue and Johnny. At least they can go out in public. But for you? People staring. Whispering behind your back...

THE THING

If you're trying to cheer me up you're doing a helluva job --

VICTOR

I'm just saying, I know what it's like to lose something you love. To see it slip away, and know it's never coming back.

The Thing shoves a huge piece of pie in his mouth.

THE THING

Reed's gonna fix me up --

VICTOR

For your sake I hope you're right. I'm sorry if that sounds a little skeptical.

THE THING

Skeptical...?

Ben doesn't trust him. But Victor is hitting pressure points.

VICTOR

Look, he's a brilliant man, we should trust he's working as hard as he can. You're his best friend. So what possible reason could he have for taking his time?

(a beat)

I mean, other than getting close to Sue?

Off The Thing: a seed of doubt has been planted. He can't help but find truth in the words. And we CUT TO --

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSFORMATION LAB - NIGHT

Reed and Sue return, laughing quietly, bodies close. Reed turns on the lights, and they flinch when they see...BEN. He sits waiting, scowling. They stop laughing immediately.

BEN

Yeah, I have that effect on people.

The construction of the TRANSFORMATION CHAMBER is complete. The Technicians are gone now.

REED

Ben --

BEN

Oh, you remember my name do you? You happen to remember what you swore to do with every breath in your body?

REED

We're working as hard as we can --

BEN

Yeah. I can tell. Victor was right.

He motions to Reed and Sue together.

REED

Come on, this is nothing.

Sue looks a little hurt.

BEN

Glad "nothing" could take you away from your work.

REED

Ben, I don't know if this thing'll change us back or make us worse. I need you to be patient for a little while longer--

He POKES his finger into Reed's chest, which INDENTS around it like the Pillsbury Doughboy. Ben pushes Reed back. Hard.

BEN

Look at me, Reed. Look at me!

He grabs Reed's face, his fingers INDENTING the skin. He THROWS Reed back. Reed slams down to the ground.

REED

I am looking. That's why I can't make a mistake! I've got to get it right, and it's not right yet! We need to test this.

Ben shakes his head, looking down at Reed.

BEN

I spent my whole life protecting you, from the schoolyard to the stars. For what? So you could play Twister with your girlfriend while I'm the freak of the week?

Reed tries to stand, but Ben KNOCKS him back. Reed slams into the wall, and stays down this time.

SUE

Ben! Stop it! Or I'll stop it.

She starts to raise her hands to throw force-fields.

BEN

Stay out of this Susie.

As Ben turns to her, Reed takes this opportunity to WRAP Ben up like a python. They struggle. Ben runs back into a wall to shake Reed. Their faces are close, heated.

BEN (CONT'D)

Good thing you're flexible enough to watch your own back. 'Cause you're on your own now.

Ben seems to relax and Reed lets go. Ben walks out. Sue comes to Reed's side. He's bleeding.

REED

I'm OK. Just go, go after him. Stop him.

She heads out. Reed slowly stands. He looks at the transformation machine. It's not ready. But...Reed steps toward it. As he walks, his image goes grainy in --

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Victor gets closer to his screens, watching Reed's every step. This is what Victor has been waiting for. His screens flicker with static -- he's too close, but he can't pull back. He sees: REED TURNS ON THE MACHINE. Hits a countdown. And he grabs his UNIFORM...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sue hustles down the long hall. Ben turns a corner, passing the elevators, heading toward a FREIGHT ELEVATOR. She gets there too late. Doors close, going down.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - GROUND FLOOR - NIGHT

Ben pounds across the lobby. He sees Johnny coming in.

JOHNNY

Christmas come early! Check it out!

He holds up an ACTION FIGURE of BEN: a horribly bloated body topped by a tiny pinhead. Johnny pushes a button and --

BEN ACTION FIGURE

IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!

WITH ONE ARM, Ben shoves Johnny into a wall. With his other

hand, Ben grabs the toy and SMASHES it into the wall, inches from Johnny's head. The toy lodges into the plaster.

JOHNNY

Hey! That's a prototype!

BEN

Go back to the drawing board.

He strides away.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - GROUND FLOOR - NIGHT

DING. Sue speeds out of the elevator. No sign of Ben. She runs into...JOHNNY who shakes off the encounter.

SUE

Johnny? Did you see Ben?

JOHNNY

Yeah, for the last time, I hope. I'm done with this freak show. I'm moving back to the real world.

SUE

Is that what you call it? "Real"?

JOHNNY

At least it beats living in a lab like somebody's science project.

This hits home. Sue is quiet. Johnny turns to go.

SUE

Johnny, slow down. Think. You know mom didn't raise us to --

JOHNNY

Look around, sis! She's not here. So you can stop talking to me like I'm your little boy --

SUE

As soon as you stop acting like one. Come on, you're smarter than this. You think those people out there care about you? You're just a fad to them.

He pulls away from her, taking a step out the door.

JOHNNY

Let's try something new: you live your life. And I'll live mine.

(beat)

And just for the record: they LOVE me.

He strides into the night, leaving Sue alone. A dark night. The Fantastic Four is no more. The family is split apart.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSFORMATION LAB - NIGHT

The transformation chamber is up and running. Numbers count down. The storm swirls in the chamber. Reed now wears the UNIFORM. He opens the door:

HE'S GOING TO USE IT ON HIMSELF. HE IS FINALLY TAKING ACTION.

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Victor sits enthralled. He leans forward, breathless.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSFORMATION LAB - NIGHT

Reed gets closer. His heart races. So does Victor's. A moment of truth for both of them. REED STEPS INTO THE MACHINE.

Reed looks up at the cosmic storm. He opens his arms, ready to risk his life. And...WHHHM! He JOLTS in JUMP-CUT-MOTION, RECONFIGURING, JERKING out of control, and we CUT TO --

VICTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

His screens GO BLACK. He looks out the window to see...a flash atop the BAXTER BUILDING. The tip of the Baxter glows. The rest of its lights GO OUT, FLICKERING in a power surge.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - GROUND FLOOR - NIGHT

Lights go haywire. Sue knows immediately...

SUE

Oh god, Reed.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSFORMATION LAB - NIGHT

Lights flicker in darkness. The door rips open. Sue lunges inside. She sees through smoke and sparks...REED sways in the chamber. A beat. Did it work? Then...

Reed SLUMPS TO THE GROUND. His eyes flutter back. Dead...? His body is warped, twisted -- one half remains tense, hard, while the other half is loose, soft, almost *melted*.

SUE

What did you do, Reed? What did you do?

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Victor watches every second on his monitors.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSFORMATION LAB - NIGHT

Sue struggles to lift Reed -- half of his body is STRETCHED OUT, devoid of any semblance of bone structure. One side of his face looks like it's MELTING OFF.

REED

I can...make it work.

SUE

Reed, stop, you need to rest your --

REED

The power...I need...more power...to control...the storm --

SUE

You need a doctor.

Reed loses consciousness. Sue carries him out.

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Victor watches, his eyes narrow, looking at his hands.

VICTOR

More power...?

He reaches out for his phone, and...his SPEAKERPHONE AUTOMATICALLY TURNS ON. His powers growing.

VICTOR (TO PHONE) (CONT'D)

Leonard. Bring me our lab rat.

EXT. UNDER THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE - NIGHT

Ben sits alone, looking at city lights. A man without a home. Without a family. A hard beat. HEADLIGHTS slash across Ben. He slowly turns, blinded in the lights of...a LIMO.

LEONARD

Ben! They need you back at the Baxter building. It's...Reed.

Ben considers. Despite it all, he's a good friend. And a good man. As he gets into the car, we hear THROBBING MUSIC IN --

INT. MANHATTAN NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

LOUD MUSIC and PULSATING LIGHTS. A young crowd dances and grinds to the beat. Among the colorful lights, STREAKS OF FLAME swirl around the ceiling. We follow them to:

A BALCONY, where we see JOHNNY sitting in a cozy VIP section. He's surrounded by "groupies" climbing over each other to get

a look at his various parlour tricks.

He leans closer to a YOUNG WOMAN. Closer. Candles around them start to melt. Beads of sweat drip down her face.

JOHNNY

What do you say we get out of here?

She pauses. And...a very LARGE MAN steps up.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

This your boyfriend?

The Boyfriend doesn't look too happy.

BOYFRIEND

Is that all you do? Bar tricks and stealing chicks...

Johnny does one more trick...taps the guy's drink...igniting it into a burst of flame. The Boyfriend drops the glass, which SMASHES on the ground...catches the floor on fire.

The boyfriend quickly moves in and stamps it out.

GIRLFRIEND

What are you doing?! You could have burned somebody!

The boyfriend takes his girlfriend's hand, they start to walk off. She turns back for one last comment...

GIRLFRIEND (CONT'D)

You know, if I had your power I'd be doing something with it, not wasting my time doing cheap bar tricks, hitting on some other guy's girl.

Johnny looks a little embarrassed. The couple leaves. Johnny glances around. His FANS look down, away. He sees how quickly they can turn. The crowd parts slightly. He looks very alone.

INT. TRANSFORMATION CHAMBER - NIGHT

Leonard leads The Thing inside. The ominous chamber sits with its door open. Victor enters from the control station.

VICTOR

Ben, come in.

BEN

What is this? Where's Reed?

VICTOR

Where do you think? With Sue.

Ben looks at the flickering lights. Suspicious. Victor turns to Leonard, who looks a little scared by this dark room.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(quiet)

I'll take it from here, Leonard.

Leonard nods, all too eager to get the hell out of here.

LEONARD

Yes sir.

Leonard disappears fast, as Victor turns back to Ben.

BEN

What do you want, Vic?

VICTOR

To help you. I've run every test known to man. And they all yield the same result: the machine is ready.

Ben shakes his head, wanting to believe, but...

BEN

Reed said it'd be weeks till --

VICTOR

He also said we'd avoid that storm in space. And we know how that turned out.

Ben nods. Reed was wrong before. Ben gets closer to the machine, drawn to it. He wants to believe, so badly.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

He couldn't generate enough power for the machine to reach critical mass. Yet another mistake for "Mr. Fantastic."

BEN

And you can? Power it up?

Victor stands in shadows, but we see the tiniest little SPARK around him. The lights...? Or his skin...?

VICTOR

Yes. I've found a new energy source.

He keeps his arm behind his back -- his fingertips course with ELECTRICITY. It starts to build, sparking up his arm.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Tell me...do you want to be Ben Grimm again?

Ben keeps his eyes on the machine. His dream is alive.

BEN

Let's do it.

INT. TRANSFORMATION CHAMBER - NIGHT

The chamber doors open. Thing enters. He looks around this sterile box. An animal in a cage. Victor pushes a control; the doors of the chamber slowly close and seal. Thing shuts his eyes. He just wants to be Ben again.

FROM THE CONTROLS: Victor initiates the transformation sequence. As lights go on inside the chamber, they dim in the lab. Energy pumps into the chamber. The storm swirls faster. Lights flicker...there's not enough power, until --

-- Victor walks over...grabs hold of the machine with both hands...and WHHHM! A countdown begins in the control panels.

SLOW MOVE IN on the chamber, The Thing's face in the window. The chamber activates. The storm strikes hard.

The Thing opens his mouth, a beat, then he screams in agony. Struggling violently inside. To escape? Extend the moment: Condensation obscures the chamber window: The Thing vanishes.

EXT. MANHATTAN SKYLINE - NIGHT

The city lights fill the sky, and give it a quiet, eerie glow. Suddenly, a BRIGHT FLASH emerges from the window of the Baxter Building. The rest of the city lights dim slightly.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING LIVING QUARTERS - NIGHT

Reed lies in bed, weak, recuperating. When the power surges, we MOVE in on him: he looks up in alarm, knowing that someone's using the chamber. He starts to get out of bed, straining to stand with every muscle left in his body.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MEDICAL SUPPLY ROOM - SAME TIME

Sue sifts through a cabinet full of medications. The lights dim. Power failure. She looks up...

EXT. CLUB - NIGHT

Johnny walks alone. A WAVE OF LIGHT spreads through the sky. He looks up. His eyes adjust to the blast, as he realizes where it's coming from. He starts RUNNING toward the Baxter.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - REVERSION LAB - NIGHT

INSIDE THE MACHINE, the RED CLOUD swirls with debris, crackling with light. The chamber rattles dangerously, as

the power seems to SHAKE the very foundation of the building.

And then it's over. The light dies down...somewhat. It still pulses along with the chamber. The chamber door SLIDES OPEN.

Beat. And...BEN GRIMM steps out. Not The Thing. No more rocks. BEN GRIMM. Naked, tired, but finally A NORMAL MAN.

He slips on his trench-coat -- now way too large. He collapses. He stares at his hands, his arms...it worked.

BEN

Oh my God... Th-thank you. THANK YOU...VIC?!

Ben sees a SPARK in shadows. That spark is...

VICTOR'S ARM. Victor steps forward, and reveals himself to Ben: ELECTRICITY PUMPS THROUGH HIS BODY. His skin is part flesh, part metal. Cheekbone exposed, steel tissue.

HE IS DOOM.

BEN (CONT'D)

Vic... What the...?

DOOM

Everyone thought I was safe behind those shields...

BEN

Victor, the machine worked for me. It can work for you --

DOOM

It did, Ben. It worked perfectly.

Ben starts to realize...

BEN

You planned this...?

Doom smiles, reaches out his hand -- ELECTRICITY builds from his shoulders, coursing down his arms to his fingertips.

DOOM

I've always wanted power. Now I've got an unlimited supply...

BEN

And no Thing to stand in your way.

DOOM smiles, nods, stronger than Ben now.

DOOM

Take a good look, Ben. This is what a

man looks like who embraces his  
destiny.

Doom clenches his fist and BLASTS Ben, sending him flying  
backwards across the room -- knocked unconscious.

DOOM (CONT'D)  
One down, three to go.

Suddenly, WHOOSH! The lab door flies open. Reed enters.  
Doom steps back into the shadows.

DOOM (CONT'D)  
Right on cue.

Reed's eyes go wide. He sees Ben crumpled in the corner.

REED  
Oh god Ben. Are you okay?  
(amazed)  
You did it, you really did it...

DOOM  
No, Reed. I did.

Reed slowly turns to see...DOOM. His body, his face.

REED  
Victor...? What, what happened to  
you? What did you do to your --

DOOM  
Exactly what I said I would: I built a  
better, stronger being. And  
outsmarted the great Reed Richards --

REED  
Victor, this isn't the way to --

DOOM  
(a dark smile)  
You always know best. So tell me.  
What happens when you superheat  
rubber?

Doom BLASTS an electrical BOLT at Reed, KNOCKING Reed through  
the huge window! Reed's body RUBBER-BANDS from the blast.

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING - NIGHT

Reed SLINKIES down the face of the building, skin rippling.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - REVERSION LAB - NIGHT

Doom looks out the window, smiling at his old friend's fall.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - FRONT LOBBY - NIGHT

DING! The elevator opens. Doom strides out. He passes our friend O'HOOLIHAN, who looks scared.

O'HOOLIHAN

Mr. Von Doom? Are you oka--

Doom casually SWIPES, sending him through revolving doors.

DOOM

Never better, Jimmy. And it's Doctor  
Doom now.

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING - NIGHT

Reed MELTS down the sides of an AWNING, like a Salvador Dali watch. He tries to GRAB HOLD of window ledges, but he can't get a grip. His ARM streeetches, and SNAP! He falls like a SLINKY, out of control. Half his body loose, half hard.

He drips to the sidewalk, where...Doom steps out. He catches Reed's face, holds it close.

DOOM

Why the long face?

Doom whips Reed into the night. As Doom turns, people cower, horrified by his face. They clear out, and...

Doom sees his REFLECTION in a window: scarred skin, metallic veins. A monster. Infuriated, he SHATTERS the window with an iron fist, and bounds into the night.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - LATER - NIGHT

Smoke billows, windows are shattered. Sue races inside, seeing Doom's devastation. Silence, deadly silence. Then...she sees a pile of WRECKAGE shift. BEN crawls out.

SUE

Ben?!

She helps him out of the rubble. He is beaten, battered.

JOHNNY (O.S.)

Sue!

Johnny comes running in. He sees the wreckage.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, sis, for leaving you guys --

SUE

No, I'm sorry, for pushing you out.

He nods. A beat between them. He looks around, sees Ben.

JOHNNY

Jesus, Ben!

(eyeing him)

I go away, look what happens. You got a lot of explaining to do.

He motions to the wreckage.

BEN

(struggling, weak)

The machine works. And Vic's gone  
Mister Hyde on us --

JOHNNY

Really? With a name like Von Doom?  
Never saw that one coming.

Sue looks around. Only one question. Dead serious:

SUE

Where is Reed?

BEN

Victor must've taken him.

INT. VON DOOM - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Doom sits at the head of the table in an eerie parallel to the opening scene. Those mysterious CRATES loom in shadows. He wears a green HOOD, and METAL MASK over his scarred face.

Doom's eyes turn toward...the other end of the table.

DOOM

Chemistry 101, Part Two. What  
happens to rubber when it's super-  
cooled?

We now see what he sees: Reed sits in a chair with TUBES INJECTED into his skin FREEZING HIM SOLID! Ultra-cold vapor coats him. Doom steps closer, a sadistic smile.

Reed tries to move but can't even ball his hand into a fist.

DOOM (CONT'D)

Allow me.

He PRESSES DOWN on one of Reed's fingers, which makes a horrific CRACKING SOUND. Reed's face twists with pain.

DOOM (CONT'D)

Painful...?

Doom seems to enjoy every CRACK. He leans closer.

DOOM (CONT'D)

You don't know the meaning of the

word.

Doom lets up on Reed and reaches into a crate, and pulls out a military-issue ROCKET-LAUNCHER. He aims at the city skyline, locking onto his target: JOHNNY STORM.

DOOM (CONT'D)

But you will.

Johnny's HEAT SIGNATURE glows. The screen flashes: TARGET ACQUIRED. Doom looks back at Reed, his launcher aimed casually over his shoulder.

DOOM (CONT'D)

Flame off.

BOOOOM! He fires without looking! A MISSILE blasts into the sky. THE MISSILE LIGHTS UP THE DARK NIGHT beginning its wide turn towards its target.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING

Johnny, Ben, and Sue hear the missile being fired and turn to the window -- it BANKS, coming STRAIGHT for them. They move to --

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING BALCONY - NIGHT

Johnny rushes toward the edge, to get a good look at the missile streaking closer. As he moves, the missile SHIFTS slightly with HIS MOTION! His eyes narrow, thinking.

He FLAMES ON a HAND. He waves his flaming hand, and the MISSILE locks onto the fire! Johnny darkens, realizing...

JOHNNY

Great. Heat-seeker.

His mind races. He makes a decision, and steps up onto the ledge, hundreds of feet above the street.

SUE

What are you doing --

JOHNNY

Sis. Let me take care of you for once.

SUE

But Johnny...you can't fly.

Johnny considers, a half-beat. He looks out. Under breath:

JOHNNY

Well then this'll be one hell of a basejump.

Sue reaches out to stop him, but Johnny DIVES HEROICALLY OFF THE EDGE! He FLAMES ON! The missile follows his arc. As he drops, his clothes BURN OFF, revealing his UNIFORM.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
(under breath)  
Come on...come on...come on...

He falls lower, lower. And...he...BANKS! SWOOPS UP!  
FLYING!

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
FLAME ON.

Sue watches, with fear, and a hint of pride.

BEN  
We need to help Reed --

Sue shakes her head, sympathetic.

SUE  
Ben, you got what we all wanted.  
You need to stay here. It's too  
dangerous.

She heads off. Ben watches her go, helpless.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - REVERSION LAB - NIGHT

Ben steps back into this ravaged room. Through the shattered window, he sees Johnny's FLAMES streaking away. A hard beat.

BEN  
What...what have I done?

EXT. NEW YORK - NIGHT

Johnny zigs and zags, but the missile takes every twist and turn, gaining on him, bearing down. Cars slow, stop. More people look up, scared, pointing at this stunning sight.

INT. VON DOOM CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Eerily silent. Reed tries to move, but he is FROZEN. He hears a footstep. But the room is EMPTY. No sign of Doom even. A beat. He hears a CREAK. Another CREAK, closer. And...

A FREEZING TUBE starts to SHIFT. It goes taut, clearly being manipulated by a hand -- an INVISIBLE HAND. Sue APPEARS next to Reed, tube in hand. She tries to stay calm.

SUE  
What has he done to you?

Reed's eyes shift to see...Doom emerge from the darkness.

DOOM (O.S.)

How romantic.

SUE

Victor, please --

DOOM

It's Doctor Doom to you.

He steps closer. Electrodes course over his metal skin.

SUE

We know the machine works. It worked on Ben, it'll work on you. We can turn you back --

DOOM

Do you really think fate turned us into gods so we could refuse these gifts?

She hardens, a little force field starts to emanate from her.

SUE

Victor. You always thought you were god.

Doom has a hand behind his back, generating an energy blast.

DOOM

Sue please, let's not fight.

SUE

No, Victor... Let's.

She HURLS a force-field at him. It CONNECTS, KNOCKING him back a half-step. But he simply shakes it off, and steps up. Too powerful. He smiles. His arms CRACKLE with electricity.

DOOM

Susan..... You're fired.

BOOM! He FIRES an ELECTRIC SHOCKWAVE that LAUNCHES her back. She spirals through the air, crashing into the wall, THUDDING to the floor. As Doom stalks closer, Sue gathers her strength to...GO INVISIBLE.

DOOM (CONT'D)

Marco...

A hanging beat. We see: a FAINT OUTLINE of Sue behind him.

DOOM (CONT'D)

Polo.

He SPINS, GRABS her! Doom grips her neck, SLAMMING her to

the ground beside Reed. She lays there, beaten, visible.

In the distance behind Doom, city lights BLINK, fading in and out. Lights flutter softly here (like when Ben went through the machine). Reed looks up. Could it be...?

EXT. EAST RIVER - NIGHT

Johnny jets over the water with the missile only twenty feet behind him. He's running out of options, when he spots:

A GARBAGE BARGE floating in the water ahead. Thinking fast, Johnny does a fly-by and HURLS a fireball at the barge. VWOOSH! The flames ignite and spread quickly.

He loops back toward the flaming barge as the missile closes in on him. Fifteen feet...ten... Just as it's about to hit --

JOHNNY FLAMES OFF and falls toward the water. As he tumbles through the air, we CUT BACK TO --

INT. VON DOOM CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

From their vantage point, they see the missile explode. Flames dance. Sue's eyes darken, as Doom grips her neck.

Reed tries desperately to move, but he is FROZEN. It takes every last ounce of strength to lift one finger, which makes a CRACCCKKKKING sound.

DOOM

One more down. Now it's just the scientist and his specimen.

Sue and Reed lock eyes. Reed tries to move his mouth. He has something to tell her, struggling just to move his lips and get the words out.

REED

Sue. The only thing I ever knew  
without thinking was...  
(his lips fully freezing)  
I...love...

He starts to say "you," but his lips FREEZE, mid-word. Sue whispers to him:

SUE

Me too, Reed.

Doom steps toward Sue, about to deliver the final blow.

DOOM

(quiet, cruel)  
And so four became none. It's my time  
now.

BOOOOM! An elevator DOOR FLIES INTO THE ROOM! SMASH!

VOICE (O.S.)

Actually, Vic...

Reed recognizes the voice. So do we. Doom turns to see...

BEN GRIMM, AKA THE THING. Back in rocky, fighting form.

BEN

**IT'S CLOBBERING TIME!**

Doom turns, just as --

BAM! Ben HITS Doom harder than any living thing has ever been hit. The force sends Doom back through the air, toward the far wall, where he SMASHES into the massive "V" sculpture. It SNAPS, crashing onto him. A few sparks. Then nothing.

Nothing at all. No more movement. Doom is dead.

Ben turns to Reed.

BEN (CONT'D)

Damn, I've been wanting to do that.

Reed manages the thinnest smile as Ben starts disconnecting the tubes from Reed.

BEN (CONT'D)

(Reed's words)

Victor's "not that bad," huh? Just "a little larger than life"? Maybe you'll listen to me next time before --

WHMM! The WRECKAGE shifts. They turn to see...Doom EMERGES. He stands, power coursing. And he CHARGES at Ben! Ben charges back. And these two behemoths...

SLAM INTO EACH OTHER, CRASHING THROUGH GLASS, INTO THIN AIR!!

EXT. VON DOOM BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Doom and Ben PLUMMET, wrestling in mid-air. On the ground, PEOPLE scream and duck for cover. Doom and Ben SMASH through the large GLASS roof of a lower building across the street.

INT. HOTEL - INDOOR POOL - CONTINUOUS

BOOOOM! Doom and Ben, locked in combat, drop through the glass, landing in a large HOTEL POOL. People scream, run.

INT. HOTEL - INDOOR POOL - NIGHT

UNDERWATER: Doom and Ben LAND HARD. Their combined weight CRACKS the floor of the pool. A YOUNG BOY watches underwater

through his MASK. Doom and Ben square off, but...

The CRACKS OPEN WIDER! And they're PULLED toward the HOLE! WHOOSH! The water is all sucked out of the hole. The boy holds tight to a ladder, as Ben and Doom crash down to --

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

A HOTEL GUEST sees water FLOOD into the hall. Roaring rapids head straight for him. He jams his key into the lock, turning desperately, just barely leaping out of the way as the wave carrying BEN and DOOM SMASHES through a window to --

EXT. HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

SMASH! Ben and Doom fly out the window, thrashing in the TEN THOUSAND-GALLON WATERFALL TO --

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

CRASH! Water floods the street. Doom and Ben land in a large GARBAGE TRUCK. The truck rocks back and forth, DENTING from the inside. Grunts, growls.

CRASH! The truck suddenly STOPS. COP CARS SPEED CLOSER, sirens screaming. And --

BOOM, A HUGE SHAPE explodes from the truck. SMASH! Ben lands on a CAR filled with two OLD LADIES -- his head cracks the WINDSHIELD. Doom steps out of the garbage truck, water flooding the street around him. COP CARS converge on Doom.

Doom turns his attention to the cops. His limbs SPARK with electricity, ready to fire at the cars.

EXT./INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Ben sees the cops and Doom. He knows the cops are dead meat. He turns to the OLD LADY in the driver's seat.

BEN

Excuse me, Maam. Can I borrow your car?

She nods and quickly gets out, shaking.

OLD LADY

The clutch sticks a little.

BEN

Not gonna be a problem.

Ben LIFTS the car and THROWS it at Doom. WHMM! It FLIES through the air, and WHAM! Hits hard, knocking Doom back twenty feet! As Doom FLIES back, a BUS enters frame, and --

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - NIGHT

BOOM! Doom SMASHES into the OUT OF SERVICE BUS! CRASH! Windows shatter. The bus SLAMS into an ELECTRICITY POLE, snapping the pole. Doom steps out, unharmed.

Ben CHARGES toward him. Doom grabs the broken ELECTRICITY POLE, FLIPS it into his hand, and wields the pole like a giant STUN-GUN! Electric sparks FLY through the air into --

BEN! The BLAST of VOLTS launches him off his feet! He goes FLYING backward, ELECTROCUTED in mid-flight, and --

WHOOMPF! Ben LANDS HARD, face down, CRATERING the street! Water rushes into the crater. Ben lays there, incapacitated.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - SAME TIME

On the street, cars SCREAM to stops, people GASP. Doom strides up to Ben, and raises the ELECTRICITY POLE for the death-blow. Currents surge. Right before he swings down --

VOICE (O.S.)

I can't let you do that.

Simple, strong. Doom turns to see...REED. Alone. Bruised and battered. Slowly stepping toward him. Doom smiles.

DOOM

And you can't stop me.

He turns back to Ben, raises the pole, but...he CAN'T SWING DOWN! Something is HOLDING the pole in mid-air.

Something invisible.

DOOM (CONT'D)

Hello Susan.

She turns VISIBLE, holding back the pole with a FORCEFIELD. Using her power, she FLINGS the pole from Doom's grip. It skids along the street. Reed helps Ben to his feet.

Doom turns to these three wounded soldiers.

DOOM (CONT'D)

What is this? The pitiful three?

Doom steps toward them, but --

VOICE (O.S.)

Four.

WHOOOSH! Johnny SWOOPS DOWN, hurling a FIREBALL like a flamethrower, KNOCKING Doom back.

Johnny takes his place alongside the others. *The four of them stand as one.* Johnny turns to Thing.

JOHNNY

Had a little relapse, huh?

Thing starts to retort, but Johnny gives a warm smile.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Welcome back.

They turn to Doom, who stands with metal skin slightly singed and melted, making him look all the more menacing.

DOOM

This is going to be fun.

Electricity starts to course through his body. He stands at the foot of the crater Ben made. He THRUSTS down, grabbing a thick POWER CABLE, RIPPING it out of the street!

He SNAPS the cable into two snaking, lashing strips. He holds tight, ABSORBING the power. Lights FLICKER and DIM in buildings around him. Windows BLOW! Doom GLOWS, amped up.

He LETS GO of the cables! The two deadly wires SNAKE out of control! PEDESTRIANS scatter, panic. Reed sees the wires SLASHING through the air. He makes a move:

Reed STREEETCHES HIS ARMS, reaching for the deadly cables.

Doom FIRES superpowered ENERGY BOLTS. The electric charges surge through the air toward the Fantastic Four, but --

Sue TOSSES her FORCE-FIELDS, exploding Doom's blasts in mid-flight. She keeps her hands up, BLOCKING blows like a prize fighter. One of Doom's BOLTS glances off her force-field and --

SMASHES into a concrete stanchion of a BUILDING! The pillar starts to crumble, with PEOPLE huddled under the overhang! They're about to be CRUSHED by the falling concrete! But --

Suddenly, the concrete roof HOLDS STEADY...because...BEN is holding it up! He stands beside the stanchion, like Atlas holding the world. People run out, safe.

ON THE STREET: Reed finally grabs both ends of the wire.

REED

JOHNNY! SPOT-WELD!

Johnny FLIES toward him, and uses his flames to WELD the wires back together. Sparks fly. The cables start to FUSE.

Doom keeps FIRING. Sue struggles with her force-fields. The impact is too much. Her nose starts to bleed.

SUE

Can't...hold...on...

Doom smiles. Reed sees her. She is about to drop her hands, vulnerable, but.....REED STRETCHES HIS WHOLE BODY!

He EXPANDS himself across the street, and GRABS a TREE, so he forms a WALL between Sue and Doom.

Doom keeps FIRING his bolts. They SLAM into Reed's body, RUBBERBAND his skin, and DISTEND OUT his back without breaking. He strains, agonizing.

REED

Johnny. SUPERNOVA.

JOHNNY

But all these people...

REED

Now.

Johnny charges toward Doom -- flames on his body starting build to a blinding white intensity, ENGULFING everything. Johnny GRABS DOOM.

THING

(quiet, smiling)

Flame on, kid.

FLASH! Johnny explodes in a PULSE of BRIGHT WHITE LIGHT, which starts to HEAT UP everything surrounding it. Reed doesn't miss a beat. He's in total command now.

REED

Sue, I need some of that anger, rage, frustration --

SUE

(looking at Doom)

I'm sure I can come up with something.

She concentrates. She sees Johnny holding onto Doom -- and the GROWING HEAT and LIGHT.

Sue shuts her eyes. A GIANT FORCE FIELD EXPLODES FROM HER BODY. A massive WAVE OF ENERGY. It SWOOPS past a car, which WARPS, MELTS (half the car is not inside the force-field).

Thing turns to the crowd, extending his arm, blocking them. Sue's force-field ENVELOPS JOHNNY'S SUPERNOVA, containing it in a BRIGHT SPHERE OF ENERGY. The light increases, to the point that it's blinding. People look away.

Finally, Johnny's supernova fades. He collapses to the ground, exhausted, smoking. Sue exhales and falls to her knees. Her force field fades. The light flickers out. As everyone's eyes adjust, we hear...THUD. THUD. And --

DOOM steps through the smoke. Unharmred. His metallic body GLOWS WHITE, TRAILING MOLTEN METAL. Sue, Ben, Johnny look devastated. They can't beat him. He looks at Reed.

DOOM

Is that the best you can do...? A little heat...?

Reed stays perfectly calm. He shakes his head.

REED

Time for your lesson, Vic. Chem 101: what happens when you supercool hot metal...?

(to Ben)

Ben...

BEN

Got it, teach.

He KICKS OPEN the FIRE HYDRANT. The water GEYSERS UP! Ben kicks down with his foot, deflecting the water so it sprays toward Reed, who...TWISTS HIS TORSO so...

The water CURLS around his chest, RACES down his arms, and SHOTS right off his wrists toward Doom!

DOOM

No.

Doom RUSHES TOWARD Reed, but the WATER FLIES OUT, DOUSING DOOM. GIANT CLOUDS OF STEAM fill the air from the cooling metal. DOOM screams. His shrieks finally fade to SILENCE.

The water stops, thick steam clouds roll, completely obscuring Doom from view. A beat. The steam clears to reveal:

DOOM. A true statue now -- a hard, cold solid piece of METAL. Frozen forever. Reed, Sue, Ben, and Johnny -- *The Fantastic Four* -- exhale. They stand as one, in roiling smoke. A beat.

JOHNNY

Damn, I love this job.

Reed and Sue slowly lock eyes, thinking the same thing.

BEN

Job, huh...?

Will they accept their mantle? Reed shrugs.

REED

Well, we do have the suits...

They give weary smiles. A team. Sue gets close to Reed.

SUE

You know, about what we said up there,  
I think maybe --

THHM! He KISSES HER. His neck extending. Strong, powerful. He pulls back slightly, smiles at her. A new strength in him.

BEN

Funny how things turn out, isn't it?

Sue looks at Reed. A long way from that conference room.

SUE

Hilarious.

As they kiss, people emerge, stepping out of hiding. The sun rises around them. The Fantastic Four step into the new dawn of a new day. And we slowly DISSOLVE TO --

INT. CIRCLE LINE BOAT - BANQUET ROOM - DUSK

Reed and Sue kiss on the deck of the Circle Line as it chugs around New York City.

JOHNNY (O.S.)

Dude, that's still my sister.

A PARTY IN PROGRESS. Drinks, food, music. We see in the crowd a familiar faces: O'HOO LIHAN (cast on his arm), bartender ERNIE, others. JOHNNY and BEN stand behind Reed and Sue.

Reed and Sue pull apart. Reed turns to Ben, excited.

REED

Ben, I've been crunching the numbers  
on the machine. I think if we can  
rework the power settings...

BEN

Forget it, egghead. I'm good as is.

ALICIA (O.S.)

That's my Benny.

She hands Ben a big METAL MUG. Ben takes the mug. He CLINKS, but SHATTERS her glass.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

We're going to have to work on your  
touch.

BEN

I like the sound of that.

Alicia gets close. A soft smile. Reed turns to Sue.

REED

Sue, can I talk to you for a second?

Reed leads her out. Ben and Johnny swap a glance.

EXT. CIRCLE LINE BOAT - DECK - DUSK

A romantic view of the city-scape. Reed stands with Sue.

REED

I found a broken gasket, from space --

SUE

A gasket? Reed, we're at a party.

He opens his hand, revealing a circular piece of metal, just about the size of.....a RING. Sue slows down.

REED

If one of us were to wear it...

She sees Johnny and Ben inside, watching -- in on a secret.

Reed looks her square in the eye. Unflinching.

SUE

Reed. What are you doing?

Reed drops to his knees. His head stays eye-level, while his body drops. Sue gapes, so emotional she starts to DISAPPEAR.

REED

No more thinking, no more variables...

Sue Storm...will you...

(she's gone)

Sue? Sue? You there?

Dead silence. And then...

THE RING DISAPPEARS. SUE IS WEARING IT.

SUE (V.O.)

Yes.

Reed goes to kiss her.

SUE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That's my nose, genius... These are my lips.

Reed's face is SQUEEZED on both sides by Sue's invisible hands. She pulls him into a KISS and reappears.

INSIDE: the party applauds. Ben, Johnny, and Alicia move

through the crowd to join Reed and Sue. As they go --

BEN

No more cracks about how I look.

JOHNNY

Hey, I'm Mr. Sensitivity now.

(weaving around bodies)

Clear the way, wide load coming  
through.

Ben glares, fists clenched. Johnny smiles, mischievous, as they hit the balcony. And he FLAMES ON, taking off into the air, blazing the NUMBER "FOUR" enclosed in a circle of flame (their future callsign), over the city skyline. The crowd oohs and aahs. Ben watches, unimpressed.

BEN

Showoff.

People drink, laugh, dance. We slowly PULL BACK from the party, the boat, the city, and...CUT TO --

EXT. HARBOR - DAY

CLOSE ON: the MELTED FACE of DOOM. He is placed in a wooden crate. LEONARD oversees the operation, listening to his cell.

As two workers move the heavy door in place -- a crackle of ELECTRICITY moves over Doom's body. Leonard's CELLPHONE goes STATICKY. His eyes narrow. Could it be...? And --

SLAM. The door closes. We can read the destination through stenciled lettering: LATVERIA. And we pull back to reveal the box is on the deck of:

A FREIGHTER SHIP. The ship pulls away, steaming into the horizon, as we...

FADE OUT.

THE END