

IT'S COMING

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FADE IN:

INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT

CHAD WICKWIRE and DENISE SANTOS walk alongside railroad tracks that run down the 20-foot-diameter tunnel. A dusty haze drifts through the tunnel. Lights on stands at wide intervals provide a dim illumination.

Chad is 60, of medium build, and his beard has started going gray. Denise is 30, slim and tall. Both wear hard hats and fluorescent vests.

CHAD

Sorry the loco is down, Ms Santos.

DENISE

I don't mind, but Mala isn't going to like the hike in her high heels.

CHAD

That's the reporter gal?

DENISE

Yep. She's late as usual. The cameraman is with her. Hope it doesn't throw you off schedule.

CHAD

Not a chance. Astrid moves slower than a snail.

DENISE

Astrid?

CHAD

All TBMs are named before a project starts. And before you ask, yes, they're always given female names.

DENISE

In this day and age?

CHAD

This day and age has nothing to do with it. Back in the 14th century, miners revered Saint Barbara, their patron saint.

DENISE

If we mention any kind of a saint on TV, management will come down on us like a bat out of hell.

Chad chuckles, points up ahead at the back end of the tunnel boring machine that's blocking the tunnel.

CHAD

Meet Astrid. 300-feet long, weighs 2,000 tons, and costs 18 million dollars.

It's a mass of gantries, stairways, cables, pipes, and barrels of grease.

DENISE

Wow. And you have to take it apart after you're done digging?

CHAD

Nope. There's no way to get it out, so we're going to dig a side tunnel and abandon it there.

DENISE

Do the tax payers know that?

CHAD

It's not a secret. This is your chance to let everyone know.

DENISE

Not me. I'm just the producer. And there's one or two things I'd like to bury in a side tunnel.

She takes a picture with her smart phone.

INT. GEAR SECTION

Chad steps up to a platform at the end of the gear section, then helps Denise up.

DENISE

Don't you guys ever worry about the tunnel collapsing on you?

Chad indicates the bands of concrete that ring the tunnel.

CHAD

Astrid digs for 20 minutes, then stops for 20 and puts up a ring of those concrete segments so that a collapse can't happen. That's what we're doing now--ring-building.

He turns around and works his way past the numerous machines mounted inside the latticework of steel beams. Some surfaces are coated with some variant of muck, grease or oil.

Denise follows cautiously, takes a picture--through the perforated steel floor--of the wheels that rest on the curved surface of the tunnel.

DENISE

Mala is going to love this tour!

Chad sees her flinging gunk off her hands.

CHAD

Think we should clean it up a little?

DENISE

Oh, hell no!

They both laugh.

WITH CHAD AND DENISE

As they scramble around, over, and under the machinery and pipes that clutter this section. Denise bangs her head on an obstruction and loses her hard hat.

DENISE (CONT'D)

This is crazy!

Chad hands her the hat back.

CHAD

Yeah, crazy fun!

They exchange greetings and waves with briefly-seen MEN who are scattered along the length of the machine, lodged in interesting positions around--and in--the equipment.

The lighting is too broken up to get a clear idea of what exactly they're doing, but the WHIRRING, POUNDING, and HAMMERING that results is deafening.

OVER LOUD SPEAKER

MARCOS (V.O.)

Okay, Jack, ring's done.

JACK (V.O.)

Looks good. Let's rattle the cages.

A HIGH-PITCH WHIRR starts up, along with the SOUND of motors driving hydraulic jacks against the tunnel wall.

INT. OPERATOR'S CAB

Room is long and narrow. Along one wall are video monitors, computer terminals, and an endless array of switches, dials, toggles, and buttons lit red or green.

The three men turn as Chad and Denise enter. The operator, JACK GARNER, is 45 and still has the build developed while a rock driller 20 years before.

The two engineers are BILL TRAVIS and PATRICK LEE. Both are in their 20s, trim and fit.

CHAD

Ms Santos, I'd like you to meet Jack Garner, Bill Travis and Patrick Lee. Guys, this is Denise Santos, the producer for that TV news show.

The men greet her with "hi's." She takes their picture.

DENISE

Call me Denise.

CHAD

Jack's the driver. Bill and Patrick are engineers.

BILL

Glorified moles with computers.

PATRICK

He's more moley than I am.

Chad points to a group of monitors across the top of the walls. They show a confusing kaleidoscope of color-coded rock and dirt surfaces. The images change by the milli-second.

BILL

Those show the surface we're cutting into.

Denise nods, but the ever-shifting color patterns make no sense. After a few seconds, Jack's eyes go wide.

JACK

What?!

The monitors now show a black surface.

CHAD & PATRICK & BILL

Kill it!

Jack lunges for a button but it's too late: the monitors die just as a deafening EXPLOSION rocks the TBM, knocking everyone into the wall behind them. The LIGHTS GO OUT.

SEVERAL ALARMS kick in and EMERGENCY LAMPS come to life. After a few seconds, the REGULAR LIGHTS come back on.

CHAD

What the hell? Turn the alarms off.
Patrick, check on the crew. Jack?

Jack holds up a hand while he studies the data. Patrick exits the cab. Bill turns the alarms off.

JACK

We've lost pressure behind the
cutterhead.
(beat)
Shit, looks like we no longer have
a cutterhead.

The men are stunned. Denise looks at them, confused.

CHAD

We must've breached a cavern.

JACK

That black rock wasn't natural.

BILL

None of the scans showed anything
unusual.

CHAD

Check it out, Bill. Jack, let the
super chief know what happened.

Bill exits the cab. Jack types a message on a laptop.

The SPEAKER squawks to life.

MARCOS (V.O.)

Hey, control--what the hell?

Chad picks up the phone.

CHAD

I think we breached a cavern. Is
anyone hurt, Marcos?

MARCOS (V.O.)

Still checking, but we definitely
have some guys with broken bones or
concussions.

CHAD

Get 'em out. What about the tunnel?

MARCOS (V.O.)

Looks like there's a collapse
around the shield section around
you. The trailing gear looks good.
Oh, here comes Patrick. Talk later.

Chad hangs up the phone, looks at Denise.

CHAD

You okay?

She gingerly runs a hand down a hip.

DENISE

Well, I may get a bruise that's
going to be difficult to explain to
my boyfriend, but yeah, I'm fine.

Chad nods.

CHAD

Sorry about the excitement. You can
evac with the boys back there.

DENISE

I'd rather hang around and do this
story. If you don't mind.

CHAD

Why not? Just tell it true.

DENISE

Thank you.

JACK

Bill's going into the hyperbaric.

He gestures to the monitor showing Bill, in a hard hat and
full-face mask, climbing into a tubular chamber. There's an
oxygen cylinder on his back.

Chad picks up a microphone.

CHAD

Where's the pressure suit?

BILL (V.O.)

No pressure, remember?

CHAD

Right. Give us video. Good luck.

Bill gives them a thumbs up, turns on the camera on the side of the face mask, then shuts the door behind him.

DENISE

Is that an oxygen tank?

CHAD

Yep. In case of methane gas or other bad air. Never can tell what you'll run into down here.

INT. HYPERBARIC CHAMBER - BILL'S CAMERA POV

Bill crosses to another door and opens it.

INT. WORKING CHAMBER - BILL'S CAMERA POV

Bill closes the door behind him, steps to yet another door, and opens it. Beyond is BLACKNESS. He sticks his head through the door and turns on the HELMET LIGHT. It's powerful beam only illuminates a swirling veil of dust.

BILL

Yeah, it's gone.

(beat)

A hundred tons of cutterhead gone.

JACK (V.O.)

If the cavern held a complete vacuum, coupled with the five atmospheres' pressure we had behind the cutterhead...

Bill nods, goes through the door, and starts descending.

INT. BLACK ROOM

Bill gingerly works his way down the twisted remains of the frame that held the cutterhead in place.

CHAD (V.O.)

We already wrecked an 18-million-dollar machine; we can't afford to lose a lowly mining engineer, too.

BILL

And my kids think you're such a good guy...

INT. OPERATOR'S CAB

The door opens and Patrick enters.

PATRICK

We got five guys being pulled out
with injuries. Nothing serious.
Marcos is shutting things down.
(notices monitor)
Hey, how come Bill gets to go in?

CHAD

Get a portable light into the
working chamber door, and shine it
into that cavern, Patrick.

Patrick nods and exits cab.

INT. BLACK ROOM

Bill jumps the last several feet to the floor and makes a splash in the muck that had collected behind the cutterhead and spewed out when it exploded.

He turns around and his light picks up the ghostly remnants of the cutterhead and pieces of black wall on the floor.

BILL

Company's buying me some new boots.

CHAD (V.O.)

Get rubber boots. We'll all need
them in our new job digging sewers.

Bill takes a few steps, then bends down to pick up something: it's a band of steel several feet long, six inches wide, three inches deep, and with ragged edges.

BILL

This didn't come from Astrid.

He looks around, wondering what else is out there in the blackness. He finds out when -

A BEAM OF LIGHT

- stabs into the darkness from the working chamber door. Bill turns into the light and covers his eyes.

BILL (CONT'D)

I'll take a beer with the light,
please.

PATRICK (V.O.)
There's a lot of nasty shit down
there, man.

The bright light moves off Bill, traverses the area in front of him, revealing pieces of the machine and shards of the black wall, and comes to rest on a -

BLACK CUBE

- that's easily 20 feet to the side, and made of the same black substance that wrecked the cutterhead.

The surface is cracked and big slivers of cutter blades are impaled in it. Pieces of steel bands still cling to it, and the entire surface is coated with a film of dripping muck.

CHAD (V.O.)
That does not look good.

BILL
What do you suppose you'd put in a
thing like that?

DENISE (V.O.)
Mean puppies?

INT. OPERATOR'S CAB

Chad, Denise and Jack are spellbound by the view on the monitor that shows Bill walking around the cube.

JACK
Maybe it didn't register on GPR
because that black rock acts like a
stealth shield.

CHAD
Makes sense. It must bend the radar
signal around and under, so no
anomaly shows up on the scans.

PATRICK (V.O.)
At the risk of stating the obvious:
that thing is not of this earth.

Chad and Jack open their mouths to scoff...but can't.

BILL (V.O.)
Guys...

INT. BLACK ROOM

On the far side of cube, Bill's helmet light reflects off the still-intact vertical and horizontal steel bands--and off a long steel plate embedded in the surface.

Incised into the steel plate are ten short blocks of black text, each in the alphabet of an ancient language. The CAMERA ZOOMS IN on one block of text, then moves on to next one.

CHAD (V.O.)

Will the surprises never end? Jack,
make stills of the text and send
'em to that linguist guy.

PATRICK (V.O.)

Without approval from the suits?

CHAD (V.O.)

No time to follow procedure. That
cube scares the hell out of me.

JACK (V.O.)

Sending now.

Bill moves on, trailing a hand along the cube wall. He stops, puts an ear to the wall. After a beat, his head jerks away.

CHAD (V.O.)

What is it, Bill?

Bill walks around to the other side and repeats the listening procedure. After a few beats, he backs off, totally spooked.

BILL

Something's inside.

He keeps backing away, afraid to take his eyes off the cube.

Now we HEAR a deep, reverberant pounding coming from inside of the cube. The embedded junk and muck slide off it.

INT. OPERATOR'S CAB

Jack's hands are a blur as he flips switches, twists knobs, and punches buttons. A KLAXON starts blaring anew.

Denise helps Chad pack laptops and data drives into hard cases. Chad takes a second to pick up the phone.

INT. WORKING CHAMBER

Patrick hauls Bill into chamber, then slams the hatch closed.

CHAD (V.O.)
Abandon ship! Get the fuck off!

The men scramble for the inner door.

PATRICK
This is the Titanic, now?

BILL
Yeah, and we're the rats!

INT. GEAR SECTION

The remaining Workers dart around, or jump over the machinery in their way, spurred on by the KLAXON and falling equipment.

INT. OPERATOR'S CAB

Denise throws open the door and stacks the computer cases on the perforated steel flooring. Bill and Patrick arrive in time to pick them up.

CHAD
Get out alive and I'll buy the drinks!

Denise turns back to grab her purse. A tremendous BOOMING SOUND is immediately followed by a RINGING CRASH that rocks Astrid backward and knocks everyone off their feet.

The monitors and gauges die and the LIGHT FLICKERS OFF. They turn their HELMET LIGHTS on.

CHAD (CONT'D)
Go, go, go!

He shoves Denise out ahead of him. Jack grabs the final laptop and follows.

INT. GEAR SECTION

Bill and Patrick forge a trail through the bewildering maze of jumbled machinery. Broken pipes douse them with water, while other pipes blow jets of air on them.

Their WILDLY TILTING HEADLAMPS capture the concrete rings outside the TBM buckling, sending dirt and rock cascading onto the dying machine.

INT. TUNNEL

The mud-streaked five leap off the rear of the machine and collapse to the ground, computer cases tumbling away. They gasp for air and stare at the breaking machine.

The KLAXON DIES when a GROUND-SHAKING BLOW sends Astrid skidding backward a foot.

DENISE

Well, she's moving faster than a snail, now.

This elicits a brief round of nervous laughter. They get up, dust themselves off, and gather the cases.

It's quiet enough now for them all to HEAR the DING from Jack's laptop. He flips the lid up.

JACK

That's fast work. The linguist deciphered one of the messages. Says it's in an obscure variant of Latin. Here it comes...

They all gather around him and watch with dread fascination as each word scrolls up on the screen:

DO NOT OPEN

HERE LIES THE DEVIL

They stare at the message in disbelief, then startle when Astrid starts grinding it's way toward them.

They turn and run for their lives.

Around a bend in the tunnel ahead of them appears a group of FIRST-RESPONDERS.

The filthy five frantically wave them back.

CHAD

Go back! It's coming! It's coming!

FADE OUT.