

ECKMANN

SPACECRAFT LAUNCH FACILITY/SPACESHIP

(At the top of the show the curtain is closed. A microphone on a stand is in front of it. DR. JOHN ECKMANN, a dignified scientist, steps to the mic and addresses the audience. The countdown continues)

ECKMANN (CONT'D)

Friends, welcome tonight to the culmination of 5 years of hard work on an enterprise whose secrecy has rivaled the Manhattan Project. It's so fitting that you, the scientists and technicians, my collaborators and conspirators on this -- some would say, crazy -- endeavor, that you be here tonight. Some of you still don't know the full story. And before I go on, let me remind you that whatever happens tonight, never happened. Not until the powers that be say so.

COUNTDOWN (V.O.)

X-minus 15 minutes.

ECKMANN

I'll be brief. As you know, we astronomers started receiving strange radio signals from the planet Mars shortly after the end of the war, at the dawn of the atomic age. At first, we thought them to be natural and random, but then a pattern emerged that led us to conclude they were of intelligent origin. We believe them to be distress signals. Long story short, as a result, tonight, in exactly...

(looks at his watch)

COUNTDOWN (V.O.)

X-minus 10 minutes.

ECKMANN

Ten minutes...We will launch the very first manned rocket into space. 35 million miles into space. To Mars.