

Dave Sinclair, 23 Aug 2023 – A writing exercise:

Write a two-scene script, one page per scene, with no dialogue (so that the stage directions effectively define the story the audience sees).

AN ACT OF GOD

FADE IN

1: APPREHENSION

INT: OPPENHEIMER'S OFFICE, LOS ALAMOS, 5 A.M. JULY 15, 1945.

A cluttered scientist's office. Shelves are stacked with books, scientific instruments, and documents. Several chalkboards line the office, full of equations and calculations related to nuclear physics. Robert OPPENHEIMER (41) has been sleeping on a camp bed in one corner of the office. He is in his normal clothes – a crumpled shirt and trousers, a tie loosely knotted in the open collar. He wakes, slowly opening his eyes and looking around the office as he comes to full consciousness. His survey stops abruptly when it encounters the calendar on his desk. We see that today is July 15, 1945. An entry at 5.30 a.m. is circled in red and written in capitals: TRINITY TEST. He looks up at the clock on the wall which shows it is now 5 a.m.

OPPENHEIMER rises and opens a filing cabinet, riffles through the folders until he finds one labelled 'Atmospheric Ignition'. He takes it back to his desk and places it on the desktop next to a number of desktop photos. He sits down but does not open the folder.

OPPENHEIMER looks at the photographs on his desk. In sequence, we see photos of the Los Alamos Laboratory, a large group of young-looking scientists smiling optimistically at the camera, and finally a family shot of OPPENHEIMER, his wife KATHERINE (34), son PETER (4) and baby daughter TONI (18 months).

OPPENHEIMER's gaze drifts to a chalkboard covered in formulas and diagrams, depicting the atom's nucleus and potential reactions. Several of the equations are incomplete, with question marks. At the bottom of the chalkboard, an equation ends with an arrow pointing at the words 'exponential nitrogen fusion fire' followed by multiple question marks.

OPPENHEIMER reaches for a cigarette and strikes a match. But his eyes return to the 'exponential nitrogen fusion fire' on the chalkboard. He is completely still for a moment. Then the match, still lit, burns his finger.

The pain spurs OPPENHEIMER into action. He swiftly picks up the 'Atmospheric Ignition' folder, leaps up and throws it into a metal box marked 'Classified – Disposal'. With the unlit cigarette still in his mouth he reaches for his hat and strides out of the door.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

2: REACTION

INT: OPPENHEIMER'S OFFICE, LOS ALAMOS, 7 A.M. JULY 15, 1945.

OPPENHEIMER standing in front of the chalkboard, reworking the equations, trying to fill in the gaps where the question marks are. Periodically he glances at the window. The view seems to reassure him, it appears to be a normal sunny New Mexico morning.

OPPENHEIMER rewrites the equations again but is clearly unhappy with his efforts. On his attempt and third glance at the window, we start to see a blue-grey glow growing on the distant horizon.

OPPENHEIMER throws down his chalk and walks to the window.

The blue-grey glow intensifies, changing slowly from blue to red, casting an eerie light into the room. OPPENHEIMER'S face is a canvas of emotions—fear, regret, and a deep understanding of the magnitude of his creations.

As the glow engulfs the sky outside, the room itself is illuminated in a bright reddish hue. OPPENHEIMER'S gaze turns from the window to inside the room – to focus on the photo of his family on his desk.

As the red light grows more intense, the view of the landscape through the window becomes less distinct and we

FADE INTO INTENSE RED

End