

## **The Destroyer of Worlds**

A conscientious scientist risks all to confront Robert Oppenheimer in the moments before the Manhattan Project's Trinity Test.

1 EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAWN 1

An ocean of desert stretches out as far as the eye will allow, bleached milky white beneath a pale, receding moon. Dawn swells behind fat, grey clouds.

SUPER: 16th July, 1945, 3:39am. New Mexico.

A pinprick of manufactured light moves across a road that splits the desert surface like an asphalt river; a CAR.

2 INT. CAR - DAWN 2

A wiry man in a lab coat and thick, black-rimmed glasses yawns his exhaustion as ELLA FITZGERALD'S 'I'M BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT' PLAYS on the car radio. With white-knuckled hands stationed at 10 and 2, he watches the road with pained, unmoving eyes. This is DR. MAYNARD, 37.

3 EXT. ROAD BLOCK - DAWN 3

Four armed men STEP into the road as Maynard HALTS HIS LINCOLN ZEPHYR at a hastily erected barrier. The song, still mid-flow, OOZES OUT into the pre-dawn air as Maynard ROLLS DOWN THE WINDOW.

ARMED MAN 1  
Cutting it fine aren't we?

MAYNARD  
I'm Sorry... I...

ARMED MAN 1  
Hey, no need to apologise to the grunts. I wouldn't want you to miss the fireworks is all.

Maynard SQUIRMS, averts his gaze, awkward, distressed.

ARMED MAN 1 (CONT'D)  
Is everything all right Dr. Maynard?

MAYNARD  
I'm fine. It's... it's just something I ate not quite sitting right.

ARMED MAN 1  
Okay. Go ahead. Good luck today.

Maynard forces a weak smile as he MOVES OFF past the barrier.

4 EXT. BUNKER - DAY

4

In the far distance a dusty little ghost town stands, as it always has, against the desert elements.

A THRONG OF SOLDIERS AND SCIENTISTS settle into collapsible seats or huddle in groups and CHATTER, excited, as though awaiting a show, the stage: the ghost town, and the mountain-studded desert horizon surrounding it.

Just off to their right a squat stone bunker sits half submerged in the brown earth; a single gray tooth in a long dead mouth.

Maynard's car is the last in a long line of parked vehicles at the far right of this bizarre picture. Still in the cockpit, he stares into his lap; at the silver snub-nosed revolver glinting in his clammy left hand. Cold. Final.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

To the first homo-sapiens, a simple stone axe equalled the destructive force of any bomb, atomic or otherwise. Simply because imagining something beyond it was impossible.

5 INT. BUNKER - DAY

5

A suited man, his pointed features half bathed in shadow, MASSAGES HIS TEMPLE and stares off into the middle-distance. This is ROBERT OPPENHEIMER, 41.

OPPENHEIMER

But the leap we're making today defies imagination. We're talking about the destructive force to level a city. In our possession. If this test works, everything after will be... exponential.

White-coated scientists operate computers and debate spools of data behind a balding, thick-set man who shares the bunker's single work surface with Oppenheimer. He FOLDS HIS ARMS with an IMPATIENT SIGH. This is ENRICO FERMI, 44.

FERMI

Robert. You're rambling. Do yourself a favour. Calculate something.

Oppenheimer scowls and LIGHTS A CIGARETTE, FLICKING into an ashtray already filled to mountainousness.

FERMI (CONT'D)

You and I are going to finally end  
this war. We're going to be heroes.

OPPENHEIMER

To some we will. But to others...

The bunker door SPLITS OPEN, a weak shaft of light causing  
the men to squint at the new entrant. Dr. Maynard blinks back  
at them, pallid and breathless.

OPPENHEIMER (CONT'D)

Dr. Maynard. What's the matter?

With a jittery glance around the room, Maynard WITHDRAWS THE  
REVOLVER and levels it at Oppenheimer with a shaking hand.

All eyes widen at the gleam of the thing; a COLLECTIVE GASP  
marks the sudden change in atmosphere. But Oppenheimer RISES  
SLOWLY, as though to face fate with dignity.

MAYNARD

I'm sorry, Professor Oppenheimer.

OPPENHEIMER

Stop apologising. You do it too  
often.

FERMI

Maynard, this is madness.

One of the white-coated men SIDLES TOWARD A CONSOLE, reaches  
for a red button. Maynard swings the pistol around.

MAYNARD

Don't. I swear... I swear to God...

The scientist SCUFFLES BACK, hands up in submission.

OPPENHEIMER

God has no place here. Science is  
the arena of men.

MAYNARD

Men? Or monsters? If the Trinity  
Test succeeds, thousands of  
innocents will die in Hiroshima and  
Nagasaki. How can we possibly  
justify that?!

FERMI

We are just scientists! If not us  
it would have been someone else.

MAYNARD

(suddenly angry)

It wasn't someone else! It was us!  
We will be responsible!

Fermi COWERS BENEATH THE TABLE as Maynard LEVELS THE TREMBLING REVOLVER in his direction.

OPPENHEIMER

The machine turns. War makes  
monsters of us. And it will never  
stop, unless the consequences...  
become cataclysmic.

Tears fill Maynard's eyes.

OPPENHEIMER (CONT'D)

You are an important man, Maynard.  
You have the power in your hand to  
decide if a new era comes to pass;  
or if it's snubbed out before its  
birth. If only we had that power at  
the birth of this conflict. We can  
make war an ugly footnote in  
history. Peace, Maynard. Can you  
even imagine? And all it will cost  
is one extreme moment of barbarity.  
Can you pay that price now? Can you  
make yourself a monster? Tell me.  
Who will stop you?

The revolver quivers. And then it falls, to a COLLECTIVE CHORUS OF RELIEF from everyone present. Except Oppenheimer.

Maynard REACHES into his trouser pocket, WITHDRAWS AN AGED LEATHER WALLET, FLIPS IT OPEN and becomes transfixed with its contents. A small, sad smile spreads.

Beside him, the white-coated scientist MOVES AT THE ALARM but this time Maynard ignores him. KLAXONS RING OUT.

The bunker door FLIES OPEN on its hinges and an armed soldier assesses the situation, clocks the revolver.

MAYNARD

Do you ever think about the  
children, Robert? What will their  
world be like?

OPPENHEIMER

(to the Soldier)

Wait!

MAYNARD

I'm sorry...

Muzzle flash twinkles in Oppenheimer's eyes and blood SPATTERS HIS FACE as A GUNSHOT CRACKS the silence. Maynard FALLS, limp, the wallet SPILLING OPEN at Oppenheimer's feet.

INSERT: A bloodied photograph. Upside-down from Oppenheimer's perspective, it's of a young woman cradling a new born child.

6

EXT. BUNKER - DAY

6

A PORTABLE RADIO TALKS of allied exploits in the Pacific as Oppenheimer, surrounded by cigarette ends but still SMOKING, sits propped against the bunker, gaze fixed upon the horizon. Squinting, he can make out a tiny speck in the centre of the distant ghost town. The bomb. His bomb. Cold. Final.

FERMI (O.C.)

We're ready.

OPPENHEIMER

What time is it?

FERMI

5.30. An hour and a half behind schedule. The... incident with Maynard obviously caused a delay.

OPPENHEIMER

(standing)

Have you ever read the Bhagavad-Gita? "Now I am become death. The destroyer of Worlds". I can't get that passage out of my head.

FERMI

Religious doctrine has no place in the minds of rational men.

For a heavy moment, Oppenheimer remains fixated on his bomb.

OPPENHEIMER

No. Perhaps not.

Oppenheimer and Fermi disappear inside as that familiar song begins to OOZE FROM THE RADIO: ELLA FITZGERALD'S "I'M BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT".

A long beat passes. Then suddenly, a DISTANT EXPLOSION mushrooms toward the sky as though issued from the Earth itself. A cacophonous cheer rings out across the desert, then comes a WARM WIND of change that ROCKS THE LANDSCAPE.