

QUANTUM DREAMS

Pilot

"Nobel Gases"

Written by Jeffrey Gold

Writer Awards (partial list):

**Semi-Finalist - 2019 Imagine Impact 3 [Ron Howard and Brian Grazer]
Semi-Finalist - 2019 Imagine Impact 2 [Ron Howard and Brian Grazer]
Finalist - 2017 Writers Guild (WGAw) Foundation Festival Pitch Competition
Top 3 - 2017 Nashville Film Festival Screenwriting Competition (TV Pilot)
Quarter-Finalist - 2016 ScreenCraft Pilot Launch TV Script Contest
Top 5 - 2016 ScreenCraft Screenwriting FastTrack III Fellowship Competition
Semi-Finalist - 2015 Final Draft Big Break Screenwriting Competition
Second Rounder - 2014 Austin Film Festival Screenwriting Competition
Top 20% - 2013 Academy Nicholl Screenwriting Fellowship Competition
Finalist - 2013 Sundance/Sloan Foundation Screenwriting Fellowship Competition
Quarter-Finalist - 2013 Final Draft Big Break Screenwriting Contest
Winner - 2012 SLFS/USP Fellowship (sponsored by the AMPAS [Oscars])
2nd Rounder - 2012 Austin Film Festival Screenwriting Competition
Finalist - 2006 Sundance/Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Screenwriting Fellowship Competition**

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COLD OPEN

EXT. ABERDEEN COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Aerial: Early sunrise over the Aberdeen College campus. The usual stately columns. Daddy's big pocket. Mortgage-sized student loans.

Looks like it's going to be one of those rare, perfect days.

A few people are already strolling on the campus grounds.

From our vantage: a lone figure with disheveled gray hair strides with determination across the open space.

Now at ground level...

Someone passes him.

SOMEONE
Congratulations!

Unfazed, he continues walking.

A short while later, someone who looks like a faculty member deliberately steps into his path. The Figure is forced to briefly stop--the person shaking his hand.

SOMEONE 2
That's quite an achievement!

Not convinced, the Figure continues his confident stride.

Crossing his path, someone calls out to him...

SOMEONE 3
Congratulations, professor.

FIGURE
For what?

SOMEONE 3
(waves him off)
Ah.

A JANITOR makes his way out of the building with a cart loaded for bear.

The Figure, with a spring in his step, and playing along with the strange game unfolding this morning, greets the Janitor...

FIGURE
Congratulations!

The Janitor turns--stupefied--continues. Shakes his head.

The Figure jogs up the steps to the Richard P. Feynman Building.

Come hell or high water, this ball of gray hair is going to have a great day--maybe his best day ever.

INT. MAIN OFFICE (PHYSICS DEPARTMENT)

The Figure makes his way down the hall to the main desk, heading toward the faculty mailboxes.

He ignores another faculty member, GARY GARGARIAN, holding court with those assembled around him.

Gary Gargarian: debonair, ultra-chic, jet-black-haired pretty boy. More politician than physicist, he always wears a blazer and a tie. Picture some self-styled wanker you would love to hate.

GARGARIAN

I know. It was the dumbest thing. This guy wakes me up at three o'clock in the morning. I couldn't understand what the hell the guy was saying. He was talking fast...and worse: he had an accent. I don't think you should talk fast if you have an accent.

The people around him graciously laugh at this.

The Figure grabs his mail, not giving any credence to Gargarian.

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)

The way he was carrying on, I thought they renamed the proton without his permission. He sounded like some kook suffering from birth trauma making a prank call.

The assembled laugh.

The Figure shakes his head, heads out glass doors, up some stairs.

INT. CORRIDOR

He finds himself in a long corridor lined with closed doors, save for one emanating a soft, yellow-orange glow.

He peeks in...

FIGURE
What's going on with Gary?

Now, almost with glee...

FIGURE (CONT'D)
One of his papers get rejected?

Finally we see who he is talking to--and why.

INT. ASSISTANT'S OFFICE

MANDY is a cute, but diffident brunette--unanimously hired by a bunch of socially awkward, and therefore horny, physics professors. (This is our first impression of Mandy, who eventually becomes Axel's metaphorical daughter and later protégé.) Her full potential is still awaiting to be revealed to her, her cable-installer boyfriend, her trailer park managing father--and, of course, everyone else.

She is wearing one of those macaroon cream, super-soft rabbit hair sweaters--the closest thing to taking a bunny to work. Maybe it's subconscious.

She gets up, the Figure having already brushed past her door.

INT. CORRIDOR

She stands in the hallway, cheerleader-turned-secretary.

In a hushed tone, earnest, as if someone had died...

MANDY
Haven't you heard?

Proceeding to his office...

FIGURE
Heard what?

MANDY
Oh my God.

This stops him cold.

FIGURE
Please don't mention God.

He slowly turns around--we now see him for the first time.

HOLY SHIT! IT'S ALBERT EINSTEIN!

Except it isn't. SOMETHING'S SEVERELY WRONG: Oh, it's Axel Heidelberg with Einstein hair. We like him immediately.

MANDY
Didn't they tell you?

AXEL
Tell me what?

MANDY
Doctor Gargarian just won the Nobel
Prize.

Turning ashen...

AXEL
What?

MANDY
They called him this morning.

AXEL
Who?

MANDY
Doctor Gargarian.

AXEL
No, who called him this morning?

MANDY
Somebody from the stock room.

AXEL
You mean Stockholm?

Mandy looks confused--as if someone just blew a dog whistle.

AXEL (CONT'D)
They called him? Gary?

MANDY
(coy)
I'm sure they called him Doctor
Gargarian.

AXEL
I think we're having two different
conversations.

Mandy tries to process that.

Trying to save her...

AXEL (CONT'D)
It's okay to call him Gary.

Impressed, or just now getting the previous conversation...

MANDY

Wow!

Without judgment of how bubblegum confused she is...

AXEL

May I go into my office now?

Mandy clearly a deer in the headlights. Slack-jawed, she shakes her head--it's not clear if that is a yes or no.

A door slams.

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. AXEL'S OFFICE

Inside his office Axel braces himself against his door to take a breather.

His face red, he looks angry as all hell.

His eyes dart around.

On the wall is an array of photographs of famous physicists looking back at him in great disappointment.

Upon closer inspection (and we could swear it wasn't there the first time) there is one...one unfortunate face that stands out: a glossy photo of Albert Einstein sticking his tongue out at him.

In a fit of anger he lunges forward, rips the picture off the wall and push-feeds it into his paper shredder as if driving a plank into a machine shop planer.

The machine can't shred fast enough.

The shredder makes an unbelievable racket...sharp, snapping, popping, and grinding noises as glass and wood are agonizingly devoured by the overloaded machine.

The machine looks like it is trying to barf and eat at the same time.

INT. CORRIDOR

The perplexing sound resonates throughout the empty hallway.

Mandy looks out of her office: no idea what is going on.

The strange noise clearly above her paygrade, she goes back inside: total ditz.

INT. MAIN OFFICE (PHYSICS DEPARTMENT)

Gary Gargarian and his entourage head through the glass doors and up the stairs.

GARGARIAN
We should tell Axel.

Adding...

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)
It'll piss him off.

He stops at the top of the stairs, stopping the train...

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)
You know, George told me this story.
He was working at Los Alamos as the
lead chemist on the shaped charge...

ENTOURAGE 1
George who?

He stops in his tracks.

GARGARIAN
Kistiakowski.
(incredulous)
Who else would it be?

He continues walking; the rest follow.

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)
Here was this chemist getting really
ribbed by the physicists on site, so
one day he went up to Oppie and
said...

ENTOURAGE 2
Oppie?

Stopping briefly to answer...

GARGARIAN
Oppie.
(obviously)
Oppenheimer.

A mild shake of his head in disbelief. Walking...

ENTOURAGE 2
Oh.

GARGARIAN

So he went up to Oppie and said,
"The other physicists are giving me
a really hard time because I'm a
chemist."

Stops.

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)

And Oppie says to George--get this--
"We love you, George. We think you're
a third-rate physicist."

By this time they are making their way down the corridor
with the strange noise.

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)

Axel must know what that feels like.

ENTOURAGE 3

Being loved?

They stop in front of Axel's door.

Staring at the entourage...

GARGARIAN

Being a third-rate physicist.

Gargarian knocks.

Nothing.

He looks at the entourage.

He knocks again.

The strange sound stops.

They wait with bated breath in front of the door.

Nothing happening.

Dumbfounded.

They head back.

The sound starts up again.

They all stop.

The sound stops.

They head out this time in earnest.

The sound starts up again.

That registers with Gargarian.

EXT. (DREAM IN BLACK & WHITE) NEWTON'S GARDEN - DAY

Isaac Newton is sitting against a young apple tree.

NEWTON

You think you've got problems?

Axel is walking around picking up rotten apples, inspecting them, and letting them drop back to the ground.

NEWTON (CONT'D)

I'm dealing with Leibniz on one hand,
trying to lay claim to the calculus
I invented, and then I'm still dealing
with Bob Hooke.

AXEL

You mean Robert Hooke?

NEWTON

He hates it when I call him Bob.

Axel picks up another apple, rotates it...about to take a bite, realizes it too is rotten, lets it drop.

Changing strategies Axel jumps, trying to swipe a low-hanging apple with his hand...failing...

AXEL

Yeah, but didn't you say, "If I've
seen farther than others, it is
because I've stood on the shoulders
of giants."

Axel stops, winded.

NEWTON

I was being ironic.

Axel shakes the tree.

AXEL

Or sarcastic?

NEWTON

Both. I was talking about Hooke.

AXEL

Shoulders of giants?

NEWTON

Didn't you know? Hooke is a hunchback.

Axel gives the tree another jolt.

This time, a single apple falls out of the tree, right in front of Newton, who observes the whole spectacle.

Axel walks over, picks it up, and immediately sinks his teeth into it--taking a juicy, cracking bite of the apple.

He abruptly stops chewing when he spies Newton intensely staring at him.

AXEL

What?!

Newton diverts his gaze to the apple in Axel's hand.

Axel "gets it."

Newton knocks his head with his closed hand. It sounds wooden...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT, AXEL'S OFFICE

MAX BERTELMAN is knocking on Axel's open door.

He leans against the frame.

Max is lanky and wily. Probably the smartest guy in the room right now. No ego. No politics. Just mismatched socks.

Axel sits at his desk: pathetic. He looks up, clearly a beaten man.

They look at each other knowingly.

BERTELMAN

Coffee?

Axel gets up.

Whiffing something...

BERTELMAN (CONT'D)

What's with the ozone? Somebody burn out a transformer?

AXEL

I don't want to talk about it.

EXT. CAMPUS CAFE PATIO - LATER

Axel and Bertelman are sitting outside at a table shaded by an umbrella. A few other patrons scattered about.

BERTELMAN

Cheer up. You're in good company.

Axel waves off his comment. Re-engaging...

AXEL

Yeah? Like who?

BERTELMAN

Me.

AXEL

Do you realize people were congratulating me this morning?

Indulging him...

BERTELMAN

Terrible.

(beat)

Listen, they never gave a Nobel to Nicola Tesla. Nor to Dmitri Mendeleev.

AXEL

True.

BERTELMAN

Then there's the ladies: Lise Meitner. And Chien-Shiung Wu. Both screwed.

A restaurant patron looks over: mortified.

AXEL

Or Fred Hoyle.

BERTELMAN

Should have insisted on Frederick. They're never going to give a Nobel Prize to someone named Fred.

AXEL

What about Copernicus?

BERTELMAN

Surely would have gotten one on his name alone.

AXEL

Isaac. Galileo. Tycho. All those guys.

BERTELMAN

Or the guy who invented the wheel.
Lots of folks didn't get it. Like I
said, you're in good company.

(beat)

Feel better now?

AXEL

No.

BERTELMAN

Come on. I'm running out of names.

AXEL

Do they award it posthumously?

Playing along, but earnest...

BERTELMAN

I think you have to die first.

EXT. GARGARIAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Mandy approaches Gargarian's office.

She's got a sprightly air about her.

She knocks on his door.

GARGARIAN (O.S.)

Enter!

With trepidation, she glides in...

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)

Yes?

MANDY

Gary?

GARGARIAN

(as if he's never
heard this before)

Gary?

MANDY

Gary, I just wanted to say...

GARGARIAN

And you are...?

MANDY

Congratulations! I'm Mandy.

GARGARIAN

I don't care what your name is, doll.
I was attempting to ascertain your
relative importance in the scheme of
things.

MANDY

I don't understand.

GARGARIAN

Already ahead of you. I was asking
what your position is here...
(nodding, as if
prompting)
...in the department. Wondering what
misinterpreted authority would give
you the false impression that you
can disturb me with some mind-numbing
approbation that is both irrelevant
to me and of no strategic advantage
to you. In fact, did you get an okay
from the department chair to knock
on my door?
(not waiting for a
response)
No? I bet not.
(stern)
Ergo, I would like you to report
yourself for this violation, and be
so kind as to close the door on your
way out.
(pointing)

It takes a second to register.

When it does, Mandy slowly retreats and closes the door.

EXT. RESTAURANT ROW - LATER

Axel is walking with Tarantella, a curvaceous, beautiful,
black-haired woman. Total knockout and totally out of his
league.

Perhaps he's figured out how to exchange brains for sexual
favors.

They are holding hands. Very cute.

TARANTELLA

Don't you need to get back?

AXEL

I've got to stay away from the
department.

(MORE)

AXEL (CONT'D)

Mau is gonna try to assign me Gary's classes while he's off doing rubber chicken banquets.

TARANTELLA

I doubt it.

AXEL

Mark my words.

Unlocking hands, he slows as she continues. Looking back...

TARANTELLA

What are you doing?

AXEL

Just keep on walking.

TARANTELLA

Axel?

AXEL

If I walk beside you, I'm forced to look at other women...

TARANTELLA

No one is forcing you to do anything.

AXEL

...But if I walk behind you, I get to watch your magnificent figure.

TARANTELLA

You mean my big butt?

EXT. RESTAURANT PATIO - LATER

Axel and Tarantella are seated.

TARANTELLA

You need anything while I'm gone?

Eyeing the waiter who is ogling Tarantella.

AXEL

Just don't fall in love with a stranger.

Tarantella points at her menu.

TARANTELLA

No chance of that happening.

(MORE)

TARANTELLA (CONT'D)
 (handing the menu
 back)
 It's Dayton, for crying out loud.
 (beat)
 Is Gary rubbing it in?

AXEL
 Like total internal reflection.

She gives Axel a quizzical look.

AXEL (CONT'D)
 Zero attenuation.

TARANTELLA
 Maybe people can't understand your
 work. Half the time I don't understand
 what you're saying.

AXEL
 Erica!

Looking through her purse...

TARANTELLA
 You'll need to give her a lift. Which
 reminds me: you can use my car for
 the rest of the week if you want.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER

Tarantella and Axel are standing next to her shiny, black
 Jaguar. Close and tender...

AXEL
 My consolation prize?

TARANTELLA
 That you don't get until I get back.

She kisses him.

AXEL
 Have a safe flight.

She gets in, immediately rolling down the window. He walks
 off.

Privately...

TARANTELLA
 Nice ass.

Perturbed to the point of embarrassment...

AXEL
Hey, don't do that!

TARANTELLA
Double standard?

AXEL
(subtly referring to
his butt)
They are.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

EXT. RIVER BANK (MAGICAL REALISM) - LATER

[Wistful, child-like music (prototype: Alexander Desplat's "Marilyn's Theme") plays over this MOS sequence of magical realism.]

Axel walks along the banks of a river feeling sorry for himself.

A wind smacks a piece of neon-orange paper against his leg.

He struggles to pry it off.

No matter what he does, he can't seem to create any distance between him and the playful, puppy-like, magnetic paper...

On his leg...

Then on his arm...

Now on his groin...

He tries running, but the enthusiastic paper catches back up to him, smacking him in the face the minute he looks back.

EXT. CAMPUS - LATER

Axel is walking on the campus grounds with the rolled-up neon-orange paper.

FRESHMAN (O.S.)
Doctor Heidelberg?

Axel turns around.

AXEL
Yes.

FRESHMAN
Can you help me with some Calculus?

AXEL
I wasn't planning on it.

FRESHMAN
What?

AXEL
I wasn't planning on returning to
the department today.

FRESHMAN
Oh.

AXEL
Too much ozone.

FRESHMAN
I really need help.

AXEL
Can't anybody in the math department
help? What about Doctor Bertelman?

FRESHMAN
You mean the guy who snacks on dog
food?

AXEL
Calculus is kinda his thing.

FRESHMAN
Too smart. You're the only one who
can explain things, professor.

He likes the flattery.

FRESHMAN (CONT'D)
I heard you never turn down students.

Looking around, he recognizes someone, and quickly pulls her
aside.

AXEL
We're gonna have to sneak in
separately.

FRESHMAN
Why?

AXEL
I don't want anybody to think we're
dating.

FRESHMAN

But we're not.

AXEL

Take the main entrance. I'll take the back way. Close the door behind you if you get to my office before I do.

FRESHMAN

Aren't we supposed to keep the door open.

AXEL

Not today. It wouldn't look good.

INT. STAIRWELL (PHYSICS DEPARTMENT) - LATER

Axel, still holding the rolled-up neon-orange paper in his hand, walks up the stairs and is surprised to find Mandy in the stairwell, crying.

AXEL

Tears?

MANDY

I went to Doctor Gargarian's office.

AXEL

Why?

MANDY

To congratulate him. I called him "Gary."

Axel whips his head back: Woah.

AXEL

I said you could call him "Gary" around me, but it shouldn't have prompted you to go to his office.

MANDY

I know. I'm stupid. Dad says I'm stupid. B.F. says I'm stupid.

AXEL

B.F.?

MANDY

My boyfriend.

AXEL

Better than dumb.

(MORE)

AXEL (CONT'D)

(beat)
Stupid sounds temporary. Dumb sounds
really permanent.

MANDY

My mom calls me dumb...A dumb bland...
(as if he wouldn't
get it)
...You know, because...
(indicating her hair)

AXEL

That's enough self-pity.

Extends his hand and heaves her up...

AXEL (CONT'D)

Here.

Gaining composure, she notices the rolled-up paper in his
hand...

MANDY

Are you putting up the flyers?

AXEL

What flyers?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. PHYSICS HALLWAY - LATER

Axel confronts an army of neon flyers plastered all over the
department.

He looks at the neon paper in his hand. Same color. No text.

He walks up to one of the flyers on the wall:

DEPARTMENTAL MEETING 3:14 PM

CAKE AND CHAMPAGNE

CONGRATULATING DR. GARY GARGARIAN

ON HIS NOBEL PRICE

Axel tightens his grip on the neon paper.

Walking, he crunches it up.

Spying a trash can framed by an open door, he throws it.

Looks like it's going to make it...

...Until it hits AARON PYGGS right in the face when he exits his door.

Aaron Pyggs, rail-thin, is an unconfident, embattled mathematical physicist who thinks the world is against him. He may have owned a pair of shoes once that fit him really well, but that would be the extent of his pleasure in this world.

PYGGS
What the hell?

Pyggs eyes Axel as the guilty party...

AXEL
(pointing)
Looks like someone attached a flyer
above your door.

Inspecting the space above his door.

PYGGS
It looked like it was coming from
your direction.

AXEL
I think I would have noticed.

PYGGS
Besides, it's compacted.

AXEL
Inelastic collision.

Looking up...

PYGGS
Not enough energy. Doesn't pass the
entropy test.

AXEL
Perhaps it tunneled from the third
floor. They're starting to see
macroscopic quantum effects. Didn't
you read the September issue of
Science?

PYGGS
No.

AXEL
Maybe you should keep up with the
latest advances.

PYGGGS
In this department?

Upset, Pyggs immediately returns to his office, closing the door behind him.

EXT, AXEL'S OFFICE - LATER

Axel is at the blackboard with the cute female FRESHMAN. On the board Axel has written integral e to the power of x (looks like the word "Sex" with an oversized S) equals e to the power of x + C.

AXEL
See, the integral of e to the x is equal to e to the x plus Charlene.

FRESHMAN
Who is Charlene?

AXEL
Ah. That's a good question. Charlene is always a constant.

She looks lost...

AXEL (CONT'D)
Essentially this equation says that the ex and Charlene are constantly having sex.

FRESHMAN
Is that really true, Professor?

AXEL
No, but you'll never forget it. It happens in real life too.

FRESHMAN
Is Charlene always there?

AXEL
No, sometimes it is some other girl.

FRESHMAN
What if the constant is zero?

AXEL
Easy...with Charlene out of the picture...

Axel erases the plus sign and the C.

AXEL (CONT'D)

...You just end up having sex with
your ex.

FRESHMAN

Cool.

Mandy opens the door and peeks her head in.

MANDY

Axel?

AXEL

Got it?

FRESHMAN

Got it.

They fist-bump. She starts packing up her things.

MANDY

The chairman wants to see you.

AXEL

I'm not here.

MANDY

What do you mean you're not here? I
can see you.

AXEL

It's a figure of...never mind. What
is it about, do you know? I don't
want to take over Gary's classes.

MANDY

It's not about that.

AXEL

How do you know?

MANDY

I don't.

AXEL

Then why did you say you did?

Looking as if she just broke a nail...

MANDY

I felt some pressure to say something.

The Freshman stops in front of her, gawks, and seeing she
isn't moving out of her way, awkwardly slides past her to
get out.

INT. MAIN OFFICE (PHYSICS DEPARTMENT) - LATER

AXEL
Olga, is Linus in?

OLGA
No.

AXEL
He asked me to come down.

OLGA
Let me check.

She opens the door, walks in, not closing the door entirely...

OLGA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Are you in?

CHAIRMAN MAU (O.S.)
Who is it?

OLGA (O.S.)
Axel.

Olga tries closing the door behind her, but Axel catches it before it closes...

EXT. CHAIRMAN'S OFFICE

Peeking in...

AXEL (O.S.)
Chairman Mau?

CHAIRMAN MAU (O.S.)
Close the door.

The door closes in our face...not all the way. Inside, out of focus...

CHAIRMAN MAU (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Grab a seat. And stop calling me
Chairman Mau.

Olga walks past the door.

CHAIRMAN MAU (O.S.) (CONT'D)
About this morning's TV interview...

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPUS GROUNDS (IMAGINED INTERVIEW) - DAY

A REPORTER and CAMERAMAN have Axel in the spotlight.

REPORTER

What do you think about Doctor
Gargarian's Nobel Prize?

AXEL

What Ga-Ga-Gargarian knows about
physics could fit inside the asshole
of a neutrino.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. CHAIRMAN MAU'S OFFICE

CHAIRMAN MAU (O.S.)

I've got the dean making inquiries.
Luckily Olga helped me duck that
call.

(beat)

Any additional outbursts could again
threaten your ability to make tenure.

(beat)

What do we need around here, media
training?

(beat)

What exactly did you say to them?

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPUS GROUNDS (REAL INTERVIEW) - DAY

The same Reporter and Cameraman with Axel in the spotlight.

REPORTER

Isn't Dr. Gargarian's Nobel Prize-
winning work a great achievement?

AXEL

Yes. All the work he did to get the
award is a great achievement.

Not registering...

AXEL (CONT'D)

Given the wide range of qualified
candidates this year, for him to
have won at all is a great
achievement.

Waiting for more...

REPORTER

Okay.

She does a Werner Herzog on him, trying to draw more out of him with an uncomfortable silence. He continues...

AXEL

Nobel Prizes are only nominated by other Nobel Prize winners. The nominations don't come from the entire population of physicists.

REPORTER

But, in the world of physics his work is considered an enormous achievement, isn't it?

AXEL

There are only about five people in the world who understand what Gary did, so the award hinges entirely on all five of those folks being correct.

REPORTER

What kind of physics do you do?

AXEL

Particle physics.

REPORTER

Protons and electrons?

AXEL

Smaller.

REPORTER

Isn't it true nobody cares about the smaller particles anymore ever since they found the Higgs boson?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CHAIRMAN MAU'S OFFICE

CHAIRMAN MAU

A lot of veiled threats in there.

AXEL

About replacing our new secretary...

CHAIRMAN MAU

Oh, and Axel, can you take over Gary's class?

AXEL

Damnit! Can you find somebody else?

CHAIRMAN MAU

I think you owe me this favor. Could look good with the tenure committee.

AXEL

Next term?

CHAIRMAN MAU

Today.

AXEL

What???

CHAIRMAN MAU

Three p.m.

AXEL

That's short notice.

CHAIRMAN MAU

Gary tried to stop by earlier. Said some hellish racket was emanating from your office.

AXEL

Sharpening pencils. Perhaps he suffers from *hyperacusicus*.

CHAIRMAN MAU

I doubt it.

AXEL

Could be from the stress of winning.

CHAIRMAN MAU

How would that be stressful?

AXEL

Knowing he stole the prize from one of his graduate students.

CHAIRMAN MAU

That's just an allegation. Completely unfounded.

AXEL

What time did you say?

CHAIRMAN MAU

Three o'clock. Sorry you won't be able to make the celebration.

AXEL

Strawberry shortcake? No thank you.

CHAIRMAN MAU

Hey! Who told you that? That wasn't supposed to be leaked.

AXEL

Well, it did. Not a big deal--it's just cake, Linus.

CHAIRMAN MAU

Operation Salad Basket. I was using that to figure out who is leaking stuff in our department.

AXEL

I thought his highness would have opted for red velvet.

CHAIRMAN MAU

Shortcake is what he requested.

AXEL

Also appropriate.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Holding half a ream of paper...

AXEL

Let's start today with a short quiz.

Groaning.

Handing the stack of papers to a student...

AXEL (CONT'D)

Hand these out, will you?

He walks to the back door...

AXEL (CONT'D)

I'll be right back. No cheating.

Students look at each other, dumbfounded.

INT. FACULTY LOUNGE

Faculty members are talking in clumps, holding glasses of champagne.

Pyggs is seen in the crowd obviously demonstrating his run-in with the balled-up piece of paper. To another faculty member, he gesticulates showing two scenarios: the paper dropping from the sky, or the alternate route straight at him (in the manner Axel threw it at him). Another faculty member takes the ball of paper and tries to recreate the situation, dropping the paper on Pyggs from above his head-- hitting him square in the face (again) to his great annoyance.

Overheard over all this:

FACULTY 1

Are we finally going to see the chairman?

FACULTY 2

(to Faculty 3)

You've seen the chairman?

FACULTY 3

No.

FACULTY 4

Maybe he's a quark.

FACULTY WIFE

What does that mean?

FACULTY 2

No one has ever seen a quark before.

FACULTY 3

(explaining to faculty wife)

No one has ever seen the chairman outside his office before.

FACULTY 4

Maybe he's not part of the standard model.

Gargarian enters the lounge.

FACULTY 1

Maybe he is the standard model.

(beat)

Oh, here's Gary.

Gary enters, and the mood moves from anticipatory to reverential to applause.

EXT. FACULTY LOUNGE

Axel is skulking in the hallway, peering in through a side window, trying not to be noticed by anyone inside. Even here, the applause is deafening. Inside...

INT. FACULTY LOUNGE

...Pyggs hands the balled-up paper to another faculty member-- but they don't understand why. After the applause finally dies down...

PYGGS

I'm taking the place of the chairman, who sends his regrets he can't join us this afternoon. Although I was one of the last people to learn of Gary's Nobel Prize, I believe I was one of the very first to be hit by the news of this impromptu faculty gathering. Similarly, few of you have been able to walk down the hall without being visually assaulted by the garish colored announcements of this soiree celebrating Gary's Nobel "Price"...according to the flyer. Congratulations.

Loud applause.

PYGGS (CONT'D)

Gary?

GARGARIAN

Aaron. In the words of Yogi Berra, "Thank you for making this day necessary." I can't help but think of all the great men who never received a Nobel Prize. And although I wish more of them had received a Nobel Prize, on this occasion I wish I didn't have to share it with those two clowns from Caltech.

Laughter.

EXT. FACULTY LOUNGE

Axel continues to witness the spectacle.

GARGARIAN (V.O.)

It's not that I mind sharing the million dollars three ways, I just
(MORE)

GARGARIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 hope we don't have to share the same
 hotel room in Sweden.

Laughter seeps into the hallway. Damn, this guy is funny too?

INT. FACULTY LOUNGE

GARGARIAN
 A hotel room with two queens is not
 a problem...and I'm not even talking
 about the co-winners. I just hope
 they have a rollaway.

Laughter.

EXT. FACULTY LOUNGE

GARGARIAN (V.O.)
 Those Caltech guys are real jokers.
 Kip Thorne called me this morning.
 They said the third position was
 merely an alternate in case one of
 the other two croaked.

Laughter.

Discouraged, Axel walks off.

These words follow him on his walk of shame through the hallway:

GARGARIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I was talking to poet Mark Strand
 the other day, and I guess we're
 lucky in Physics. Whereas he is now
 introduced as a former Poet Laureate,
 this award appears to be a little
 more robust.

INT. FACULTY LOUNGE

GARGARIAN
 I'd like to dedicate this award to
 two people. One you will have to
 guess, but the other is Nero Hagan,
 Lucasian professor of Classical
 Electrodynamics I had at Cambridge,
 who said my odds of remaining in
 physics were zero point zero times
 ten to the tenth.

(MORE)

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)

What amazes me is not that he was wrong, but that he was wrong with such formidable precision.

Laughter and an eruption of applause that spills into...

INT. LARGE CLASSROOM - LATER

Axel is standing in front of the hundred students.

On the board is the word "Gravity" and the equation $F = G m_1 m_2 / r^2$.

STUDENT 1

So, where does the r squared come from?

STUDENT 2

Why inverse square? Why not just r...the distance between the two masses?

AXEL

Good question. Why not r cubed? It could have been, right? Anybody have any ideas?

A bunch of murmurs from the audience.

AXEL (CONT'D)

What else do you know has r squared in it?

STUDENT 2

The area of a circle is pi r squared.

AXEL

Let's try that. Let's put pi in the denominator and in the numerator, but let's absorb the top one into the gravitational constant G by modifying it and calling it G prime.

He adds pi to the denominator, and puts a single apostrophe on the G.

STUDENT 3

But where would that pi come from?

AXEL

From any midtown bakery. \$4.95 plus tax.

Laughs. The students are eating this up. Others now waking.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Let's have the guys answer too.
 (waits)
 Nobody? Come on.

STUDENT 4

It could be the cross-sectional area
 of the mass.

AXEL

Could be.

STUDENT 5

But that assumes the body is circular
 or spherical, or that the cross
 sectional area just happens to be
 numerically equivalent to πr
 squared.

AXEL

Right!
 (to Student 4)
 Sorry.
 (to class)
 So are we on the right track?
 (waits)
 Anything else with r squared in it?
 (waits)
 Nobody?
 (goes to the board)
 What if I add 4 to the denominator,
 and modify G prime and now call that
 G double prime? Anybody recognize
 the denominator now?
 (waits)
 $4 \pi r$ squared?
 (beat)
 The surface area of a sphere, dummies!

Awww. If an audience could slap its collective forehead,
 this would be it.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Because the force originating from
 mass m_1 goes out in all directions,
 the force distributed over an entire
 sphere of radius r is G double prime
 $m_1 m_2$, but...

(turns to address the
 whiteboard)

...At this single point on the sphere
 the force will be G double prime m_1
 m_2 divided by the total surface area
 of a sphere of radius r , or $4 \pi r$
 squared. See?

Groans from the audience for not figuring it out themselves.

All of a sudden, groans turn into applause. Erasing the board...

AXEL (CONT'D)
Alright, who's next?

...As a door bursts open in the back of the classroom.

Axel turns around to witness Gargarian emerge with a paper plate of strawberry shortcake.

Students rise to their feet as Gargarian makes his grand entrance and descends toward center stage, where he takes a bow to a crescendo of howls and applause.

He turns to Axel during the continuous applause, handing the poor schmuck the paper plate with strawberry shortcake...

GARGARIAN
Hold this for me.

He glances at the blackboard.

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)
(to Axel)
Looks like I saved you.
(pointing)
That doesn't even look correct.

Turns to absorb the adulation. Back again...

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)
What the hell are you teaching my students? LeSage's obsolete shielding theory? Christ, what were you going to teach them next? The aether model?

Gargarian turns back to the students.

Axel's left eye twitches.

Gargarian whips his head around, almost an aside...

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)
See, this is what it's like to win a Nobel Prize. But you've got to do valid physics first.

Gargarian turns back to the deafening approval.

Axel puts down the paper plate, then clutches his chest.

While Gargarian is high-fiving the crowd, Axel stumbles his way to the classroom's utility closet.

Out of desperation, he pulls the fire alarm and escapes inside a utility closet.

The applause not abating...

EXT. UTILITY CLOSET

Through the wire glass window we see Axel's convulsions are intensifying.

INT. CLASSROOM

Fire alarm blaring, Gargarian leaves the classroom--the pied piper surrounded by his students.

EXT. UTILITY CLOSET

We see Axel seized by an uncontrollable force.

Alarming.

INT. HALLWAY

Gargarian and the students are rushing through the hallway.

GARGARIAN

Anyone see Axel?

(to a student)

Probably the first one to rush out.

Bet he finished my strawberry shortcake too, that son of a bitch!

EXT. UTILITY CLOSET

Our view starts pulling us back and rising, abandoning Axel in his pitiful state...

...eventually rising out of the building to...

EXT. CLASSROOM BUILDING

A panoramic view of students pouring out of the building and scattering over the campus lawn...

...as end title music fades in and takes over.

END OF ACT THREE

FADE OUT: