FADE IN:

BEGINNING LOGO

The familiar logo WARNER BROS. PRESENTS COMES UP.

After a beat, it is consumed by FIRE.

It becomes AN AMERICAN FLAG, BURNING in the street.

EXT. U.S. EMBASSY (TEHRAN) - MORNING


SUPERIMPOSE: TEHRAN - NOVEMBER 4, 1979

YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN -- about 2/3 men and 1/3 women, some with flak jackets; about half the young women wear full chador. Many wear plastic bibs with photographs of Ayatollah Khomeini.

PASTED TO ROOSEVELT GATE: photographs of STUDENTS who were killed under the deposed Shah of Iran’s regime.

Signs in English: “U.S.A. RETURN THE SHAH” -- “JUSTICE FOR MURDER.” A few IRANIAN POLICE attend -- more as bystanders than peacekeepers.

A MAN frantically stabs an EFFIGY of the SHAH.

An IRANIAN STUDENT films the scene with a Super 8 camera.

EXT. EMBASSY GROUNDS - MORNING

From INSIDE THE EMBASSY GATES we can hear the noise of the protest. There are three primary buildings on campus: the CHANCERY, the embassy’s main building, THE AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE, and the CONSULATE.

We can see that the compound is securitized: sand-filled traps and steel bars on the windows of the consulate.

INT. U.S. EMBASSY - CONSULATE OFFICE - MORNING

Now, we see the POV THROUGH those steel bars.

Standing on a chair looking at the protest outside the gate, is BOB ANDERS, late 40s-50s, a consular officer.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:  

BOB ANDERS  
Carnival’s bigger today.

MARK LIJEK, 29, a consular officer, joins Anders at the window.

EXT. ROOSEVELT GATE - MORNING

Then, in a famous piece of archive footage, something simple happens. A YOUNG MAN IN A SWEATER climbs the gate and makes it to the other side.

And now, we see the REVERSE of that famous shot. This isn’t archive footage anymore.

We’re looking at the POV of TOM AHERN, 48, the CIA station chief here.

INT. MARINE GUARD POST - MORNING

From a pillbox on the embassy campus, SGT. ROCKY SICKMANN, a young MARINE, can also see the protestors break across the lawn.

MARINE SGT. SICKMANN  
(into his radio)  
... Fort Apache is breached -- *  
please advise --

EXT. ROOSEVELT GATE - MORNING

The PROTEST in front of the gate is getting rowdier -- its energy and numbers swelling.

A group of STUDENTS -- these more brisk, organized, all bearded and dressed in flak jackets -- push their way to the front of the protest --

WOMEN raise a banner. It’s a signal.

As if on cue, the IRANIAN POLICE move from the gates. A WOMAN removes a large pair of bolt cutters from underneath her chador -- hands them to a BEARDED STUDENT -- who gets to work on the CHAINS holding the gate closed --

When one YOUNG MAN wearing a green military field jacket raises his fist, we can see that he has a concealed PISTOL in his clothes.

More STUDENTS climbing the wall -- dropping the 12 feet to the other side, one after another.
INT. MARINE GUARD POST - MORNING

MARINE SGT. SICKMANN
THEY’RE COMING OVER THE WALLS --

EXT. ROOSEVELT GATE - MORNING

But a moment later no more climbing is required, because the GATE CHAIN IS CUT and protestors FLOOD through the embassy gates, a human dam breaking --

INT. CHANCERY OFFICE - MORNING

Mounting chaos in here, the nerve center of the embassy. Everyone on a different phone. It’s like an emergency room where the patient is the whole building.

ANN SWIFT, 31, Deputy Political Officer, has the phone by her ear -- trying to hear reports from D.C.

ANN SWIFT
There are hundreds of people out there --
(looks out)
No, thousands... There are thousands -- *

IN THE CONSULATE OFFICE - MORNING

Mark Lijek and Bob Anders look out windows, nervous, but not like the Iranian VISA APPLICANTS who are close to panic.

BOB ANDERS
Are these supposed to be bulletproof?

MARK LIJEK
Well, they’ve never been tested.

INT. CHANCERY (MARINE POST ONE) - MORNING

Six MARINES watch images from closed-circuit television cameras on chunky 1970’s monitors. Crowds of protestors from every part of the embassy campus.

AL GOLACINSKI, 30, chief of security for the embassy, shouts into a radio.

(CONTINUED)
PROTESTORS come running, turning the corner to reach the building. They use bats and crowbars to smash the windows of the building.

INT. CONSULATE OFFICE - MORNING

BOB ANDERS
(on the phone)
Can we get some fucking police please?

INT. MARINE POST ONE - MORNING

One by one, the security monitors are going black -- or smashed. The Marines stare.

EXT. TALEGHANI AVE. - MORNING

An IRANIAN POLICE CAPTAIN smokes a cigarette, watching the mayhem, impassive.

INT. MARINE POST ONE - MORNING

MARINES are putting on armor, gas masks, riot gear. AL GOLACINSKI goes down the line reminding them of protocol.

AL GOLACINSKI
Don’t shoot. You don’t want to be the sonofabitch who started a war --

CUT TO:

AL GOLACINSKI
They need an hour to burn the classified -- Hold.
(beat, stern)
You shoot one person, they’ll kill every one of us in here.

EXT. CONSULATE - MORNING

PROTESTORS, now on the embassy grounds, carry banners.

(Continued)
PROTESTORS
La ilaha ilallah --

A WOMAN IN A CHADOR uses her own radio.

Some of them ring around the building, holding hands and chanting. Some carry AUTOMATIC WEAPONS openly.

INT. MARINE POST ONE - MORNING

AL GOLACINSKI
(into walkie)
Tear gas as last resort ONLY -- I repeat, only if your life is under threat!

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Gallegos and Sickmann hear Golacinski’s admonition, but PUMP TEAR GAS out a window onto protestors below despite it. One cannister after another.

INT. CONSULATE OFFICE - MORNING

Now the five in the consulate are joined by LEE SCHATZ, 32, an agricultural attache.

JOE STAFFORD
-- We’re not going out in this --

MARK LIJEK
(interrupting)
We are in the only building with an exit direct to the street. We need to GO --

The SOUNDS OF MARINES barking at one another over the radio.

CONTINUED:
GALLEGOS
Why?
AL GOLACINSKI
To reason with them.

Marines open the Chancery door, with a look --

INT. CHANCERY OFFICE - MORNING

FRED KUPKE, 34, communications officer, is shouting at staffers who pile up documents for the shredders --

KUPKE
Just everything. Don’t sort it --

ANN SWIFT
(on the phone)
-- NONE, there are no police --
ZERO --

EXT. CHANCERY - MORNING

Al Golacinski steps out onto the steps and immediately there is shouting, and a protestor puts a GUN to his head -- blindfolds him -- PUSHING AL’S head to the ground...

INT. CONSULATE OFFICE - MORNING *

CORA LIJEK
-- Second floor -- anyone who can hear this -- we need help --

As we MOVE DOWN the line of desks, JOE STAFFORD is also on a radio repeating the same in Farsi --

Others PACK things.

INT. THE HALLWAY - INTO THE VAULT - MORNING

MARINES and STAFFERS -- including TOM AHERN -- RUN down the hall, pushing a cart of items to secure. They reach the security locker -- code the door -- and enter the locker, heading to the INCINERATOR to begin destroying classified material --

EXT. CHANCERY - MORNING *

Golacinski HELD UP TO THE DOOR -- GUN TO HIS HEAD. He starts to panic.

(CONTINUED)
Let me in! Jesus Christ! Open the fucking door!

The Marines OPEN THE CHANCERY DOOR -- PROTESTERS POUR IN.

INT. CHANCERY OFFICE - MORNING

ANN SWIFT
-- Washington on flash -- Get Ops
-- get a line --

We hear --

The POUNDING of footsteps on the roof. They look up.

EXT. CONSULATE ROOF - MORNING

Protestors RUNNING on the roof of the consulate building. Several stop to try and RIP off a vent cover using CLUBS and PIPES.

EXT. EMBASSY GROUNDS - MORNING

THOUSANDS are now on the grounds of the embassy and they continue to swarm through the gates.

The student with the SUPER 8 continues to film it all. Also filming, a NEWS PHOTOGRAPHER with a 16 mm camera.

Smoking cannisters of TEAR GAS, people hurling them.

A protestor lights a paper on fire to ward off the sting of the gas --

INT. CHANCERY OFFICE - MORNING

STAFFERS using pieces of machines to destroy other machines -- any embassy equipment that might function --

Then... screams. The lights have gone out. The power has been cut.

IN THE VAULT - MORNING

AHERN destroys the cryptography keys -- box-sized hard drives -- while BILL DAUGHERTY, 33, tosses stacks of papers into an electrical furnace.

(CONTINUED)
BILL DAUGHERTY

Well, Tom. You wanted to see the world...

The furnace makes a LOUD CHUNK and stops. They both hold their looks for a beat.

BILL DAUGHERTY

Are you kidding me?

AHERN

Get the shredder.

INT. CHANCERY STAIRWELL LEADING TO 2ND FLOOR - MORNING

BROTHER ALI, 20s, one of the student leaders, shouts as he holds a cloth near his face to protect from tear gas.

INT. CHANCERY OFFICE - MORNING

The mood is now frantic -- people destroying things or shouting everywhere --

ANN SWIFT

No... Hal -- yes -- INSIDE the building, IN --

INT. CONSULATE OFFICE - MORNING

Bob Anders SMASHES AMERICAN VISA PLATES.

The visa-applicant Iranians are now huddled in a group. A couple of the women are wailing.

Improv resuming the debate over leaving.

Lijek on his walkie, but every channel is now speaking Farsi.

MARK LIJEK

Nobody is coming. We need to go.

INT. CONSULATE OFFICE - MORNING

Mark gestures for the other six staffers -- and the twenty IRANIAN VISA SEEKERS in the office -- to head to the stairwell.

(CONTINUED)
BOB ANDERS

Iranians first.
(as no one moves)
Go! Now!

INT. CHANCERY - HALLWAY - MORNING

One STUDENT emerges with a large portrait of KHOMEINI that had been used for dart practice.

STUDENT
(screaming)
Who has made this!!!

Two EMBASSY EMPLOYEES look at the floor.

INT. CONSULATE STAIRWELL - MORNING

The twenty VISA-SEEKING IRANIANS pass our guys and run down the stairs out onto the street and disperse outside. Behind them, the FIVE CONSULATE EMPLOYEES we saw head down the stairs.

So the group of SIX is: MARK AND CORA LIJEK, JOE AND KATHY STAFFORD, and BOB ANDERS. They get to the bottom of the stairs.

INT. CHANCERY OFFICE - MORNING

The students, guns drawn, burst into the Chancery Office, shouting at Ann Swift and the others. The mood among the staffers is now almost peaceful.

ANN SWIFT
(into the phone)
It’s done. They’re in.

She puts down the phone.

EXT. BIST METRI STREET - MORNING

The It’s quiet -- the sound of the protest on the other side of the roof and the embassy campus is distant. Just the empty street.

On the ground: discarded banners from the protest, fliers and newspapers.

We see something that looks like BLOOD on the street.

(CONTINUED)
They walk west. They’re hurrying but taking care not to run. The five can hear the gunfire and shouting in Farsi. They walk up the street, away from the sounds of the protest, instinctively grouping together. Cora looks back.

BOB ANDERS

Keep going.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT HALL - SEVENTH FLOOR - NIGHT

Halfway around the world, hell has broken loose here, too. BATES and MALICK, 30s, State Department mid-level aides. A cascade of voices and energy -- a reverberation from the embassy siege -- the building exploding into a crisis center.

BATES

These fucks can hit us, we can’t hit back? Mossadeq. We did it to them first.

MALICK

You think the Russians would put up with this? They’d fucking invade --

ROBERT PENDER, 40s, joins them heading down the hall. They’ve all gotten the same call to get to the Secretary’s office. PETER GENCO, late 20s, behind.

MALICK

What did you expect? We helped a guy torture and de-ball an entire population --

PENDER

(turning behind him)

Schafer! Schafer!

BRICE

At least 60. Could be a hundred.

GENCO

(catching up to them)

You still haven’t found Schafer?

PENDER

(to Genco)

No, I was screaming his name ‘cause I was fucking him.

HAL SAUNDERS, late 40s, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, perpetually stressed, coming out of his office, out of breath --

(CONTINUED)
SAUNDERS
Six got out!

OMITTED

INT. SECRETARY OF STATE’S OFFICE - NIGHT

STAPLED PAGES with PHOTOGRAPHS. In the hands of SECRETARY OF STATE CYRUS VANCE, 62, a former Navy man who is used to telling important people what to do.

EVERYONE FROM THE PREVIOUS HALLWAY SCENE is here in attendance as well.

VANCE
I was told five.

BATES
Apparently it’s six now.

VANCE
What happened?

PENDER
Not clear. We know they escaped the embassy.

VANCE
Where are they?

SAUNDERS
The Canadian Ambassador’s house.

BATES
Are we attempting rescue?

BRICE
Hold for the Secretary --

VANCE
(handed another phone)
-- there’s no one -- this is he...
(to an aide)
Can we get Ottawa patched? Five phones and none of them work.

Coming back -- on phone --

VANCE
Is White House joining?
INT. WHITE HOUSE - WEST WING - NIGHT

HAMILTON JORDAN, 40s, Carter’s White House Chief of Staff, comes up stairs, trailed by AIDES. Jordan is forty, Southern.

BUTLER (O.S.)
They’re claiming the embassy was a ‘den of -- ’

JORDAN
We wish it was the fucking Den of Espionage. C.I. had three people there, didn’t see a revolution coming? I’d call that something other than intelligence --

INT. CHIEF OF STAFF’S OFFICE - NIGHT

There are already maps of Iran on easels in here. The big three plus foreign networks on silent televisions. LANDON BUTLER, 30s, Jordan’s Deputy Chief of Staff, is on the phone.

SECRETARY
(into a phone)
Hold for the Chief of Staff --
(holds out the phone to Jordan)
Hodding --

JORDAN (to Secretary)
I’ll call him back.

BUTLER
They’re sticking to it. No release till we expel the shah.

Jordan sinks into his chair, putting his feet up on the desk.

JON TITTERTON, 30s, an aide to Jordan --

TITTERTON
Put him on a plane. Fuck him.

JORDAN
He’s half dead and he’s in chemo.

BUTLER
We took him in. He’s ours now.

TITTERTON
So we’ll take in any prick as long as he’s got cancer?

(CONTINUED)
JORDAN
No. Just the pricks on our side.
So all our other pricks on their
prick thrones know, when they get
run out on a rail, they won’t be
getting their spleens out by a
camel vet in the Sinai.

TITTERTON
The six with the Canadians.

Now Jordan is looking at a monitor showing footage of a
BLINDFOLDED HOSTAGE in front of the Embassy. AL
GOLACINSKI being prodded and led down the front stairs of
the embassy.

JORDAN
We’ve got 60 in the embassy with
guns to their heads right now --

TITTERTON
The eyes of the world are on the
embassy. That makes them safer
than the six on the street.

ANALYST
(coming to the door)
Bani-Sadr’s saying it’ll be over
in 24 hours.

JORDAN
Leave the six where they are.
I’ll go brief the president.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. OLD DOMINION DRIVE (VIRGINIA) - AFTERNOON

A LONE ribbon sags in the f.g. -- the CAPITOL BUILDING
behind.

Yellow ribbons tied to lampposts. A Catholic church with
a sign on the lawn that says PRAY FOR OUR HOSTAGES. A
dry cleaner with a large American flag in the window and
yellow ribbons drawn by kids around it.

The exterior of a neighborhood bar, O’Tooles. More
ribbons.

SUPERIMPOSE: McLEAN, VIRGINIA - 69 DAYS LATER
INT. MENDEZ APARTMENT - BEFORE DAWN

A television connected to a faraway wall with an extension cord sits on a coffee table. The t.v. shows color test patterns.

We move over the coffee table, a mess of Chinese food containers and beer bottles, to find TONY MENDEZ, 40, asleep in his clothes from the day before.

The phone rings. He answers it, half awake.

MENDEZ

Yeah.

He listens for a moment, then sits up, suddenly wide-awake.

EXT. CANAL ROAD - MORNING

Mendez’s car speeds by yellow ribbons along trees on Canal Road.

EXT. CIA - PARKING LOT - EARLY MORNING

Mendez gets out of his car and hurries toward a white building that looks like a college campus.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
Prime Minister Bani-Sadr today restated demands for the hostages’ release...

INT. CIA DIRECTORATE OF OPERATIONS - MORNING

As we watch him hurry out of his car and into the CIA, we start to pick up TVs as we go by them -- all tuned to some version of the same story.

He enters the front doors and crosses the famous EMBLEM on the ground.

He moves past the STARS ON THE WALL, signifying fallen CIA officers (and there were fewer stars then than now).

He passes the SECURITY GUARD at the desk, holds up his badge. The guard nods.

(CONTINUED)
A young Tom Brokaw in a yellow, sleeveless sweater and teal tie plays on the television, intoning on the “Today Show.” ANGELA BELK, young wife of hostage WILLIAM BELK, has a soft Southern voice and fights back tears. (*ABC, 11/23/79)

BROKAW (V.O.)

Week ten of a hostage crisis that seems without end. A glimmer of hope after the release of some women and Afro-Americans but little activity in the weeks since, and the images of bound Americans under armed guard have many losing hope --

Under these images we hear an undulating drone -- the constant accompaniment of life then -- coverage of the hostage crisis.

PRESIDENT CARTER (V.O.)
The United States shall not purchase oil from Iran. Iranian assets shall be frozen and the U.S. shall engage in a forceful campaign of international diplomacy against the Iranians...

MENDEZ (V.O.)
Ten weeks State’s sitting on this?

ARGO - Final

52 CONTINUED:

52

53-55 OMITTED

56 INT. D.O. FLOOR - HALLWAY - LANGLEY - AFTERNOON

O’Donnell, frantically grabbing documents and tossing them into an accordion folder.

O’DONNELL
The six of them went out a back exit. Brits turned them away, Kiwis turned them away. The Canadians took them in. They’ve been there since.

O’Donnell hands Mendez pages with STAFF PHOTOGRAPHS of SIX PEOPLE -- the escaped embassy employees -- as he continues to toss stuff into his folder.

(CONTINUED)
ARO - Final

56 CONTINUED:

O’DONNELL
Traffic calls them The
Houseguests. Haven’t left the
Canadian ambassador’s house since
it happened.

MENDEZ
Compromised?

O’DONNELL
(shakes his head)
Just a matter of time. We’ve got
Revolutionary Guards going door-to-
door like Jehovah’s Witnesses,
looking for escapees. They’re out
for blood, Tony. Half of them
think Khomeini’s been too lenient
with the ones in the embassy.

Walking out of his office, Mendez following.

MENDEZ
White House?

56A INT. CIA - THE PIT - CONTINUOUS ACTION

They walk through an open floor of cubicles lined with
offices, we get a look at the 1979 CIA headquarters:
nothing sleek or sexy about the interior. An open area
desks where Woodward and Bernstein might be spilling
coffee on their thick ’70s ties. Papers and files
everywhere. Trash emptying happens only once a week.
Cigarette and cigar butts in ashtrays. Everything is
perpetually a mess. And typewriters. The constant
percussive sound of telexes and typing is the metronome
that beats out the day here.

O’DONNELL
Carter’s shitting enough bricks to
build the pyramids. He wants the
six of them out.

MENDEZ
Who else knows?

O’DONNELL
Just the families. Meanwhile,
some genius in the embassy was
keeping a mug book of everybody
who worked there.

MENDEZ
Jesus Christ.

(CONTINUED)
We think it got shredded before they got in, but the fuckers have sweat-shop kids in there re-assembling the shreds.

They’re gonna make an example of the ones who escaped. Standing-room-only for beheadings in the square.

Who’s handling?

They walk through a door and out of the Pit.

-- into a HALLWAY WITH POP ART on the walls. People with laminated badges and folders with red stripes walk with purpose.

State’s coordinating in-house.

They don’t do exfils.

They do now. They want to run it by us, strictly as consultants.

Off his look.

Engell’s saying it’s lose-lose. These people die, they die badly. Publicly. ‘State wants the blame, he’ll give it to them.

Then why’s he want me?

So he can tell State he ran it by his best exfil guy.

They stop in front of a conference room. Jack looks at him.

Tony. This isn’t the kind of meeting where you talk.
They enter to find: ADAM ENGELL, 40s or 50s, Deputy Chief of Operations, hosting visitors from the State Department: PENDER and BATES from State. The State guys are both dressed better than the CIA guys, except for Engell.

Other CIA Operations OFFICERS and ANALYSTS sit in audience.

ENGELL
Okay. This is Bob Pender from State O.S. He’s been talking to Morgan at ExtAff.

GENCO, a State Department Assistant, removes a drape from the photographs of SIX FACES, State Department I.D. photos. Pender indicates the first two photos -- and during this, we may flash to scenes of the Houseguests in the Canadian ambassador’s residence --

PENDER
Mark and Cora Lijek, 29 and 25. He’s a consular officer and she’s an assistant. Newlyweds. They just got there a couple of months ago. No language skills or in-country knowledge. (re: the next photo) Henry Lee Schatz. Agricultural attache from Idaho. He was there to sell U.S. tractors to Iranian agro. Hid out with the Swedes during the takeover then made his way to join the others with the Canadians. (re: next photo) Joe Stafford. Late twenties. He’s smart and a climber. Speaks Farsi. Arranged the hire of his wife Kathy --

BATES
Understaffed so the faculty wives were the typing pool.

That goes without comment in this room of men.

PENDER (then, finally) Bob Anders. Senior consular officer, oldest of the group. Most likely to be group leader. So.

(MORE)
(now, shifting gears)

What we like for this are bicycles. We’ve identified backroads from the Shemiran district -- a couple of rat lines through the mountains to the crossing at Tabriz. Cars are off the table because of the roadblocks.

Pender nods to Bates, who goes to a map, indicating the north of Iran.

BATES
We wait till the weather clears up then we deliver six bikes and provide maps to the Turkish border.

PENDER
We have intelligence they can ride bicycles. Or we’re prepared to send in somebody to teach them.

The professional spies shifting at the stupidity of it. But nobody speaks up. And then --

MENDEZ
You can send in training wheels and wait at the border with Gatorade.


MENDEZ
It’s 300 miles to the Turkish crossings. They’d need a support crew behind them with a tire pump.

ENGELL
(directed at Mendez)

Who is --

PENDER
We’ve only been asked to sharpshoot this, State’s handling the op.

O’DONNELL
Tony’s an exfil spesh. He got a lot of the shah’s people out after the fall.
MENDEZ
(to Pender)
If these people can read OR add, any minute they’re gonna figure out they’re six short of a full deck. It’s winter. You wanna wait around for a nice spring day for bike rides?
(a beat)
The only way out’s through the airport. You build them new identities, a Moses goes in, takes them out on a commercial flight.

BATES
They would pose as reporters. The government issued 70-something --

MALINOV
And the Revolutionary Guards keep them on 74 leashes.

MENDEZ
They get caught with journalist creds, you’ve got Peter Jennings with a noose around his neck in an hour.

PAUL LAMONT, late 20s, a Master’s from the Woodrow Wilson School before he joined CIA --

LAMONT
World Noose Tonight.

BATES
North American accents give us limited options. So we get the Canadians to issue them passports...
GENCO
English teachers from the international school. Tested model. It’s worked before.

MENDEZ
The school was shut eight months ago.

Bates, meanwhile, removing a binder from his accordion folder: in the binder, a photograph of an emaciated kid in Namibia.

BATES
So do-gooders. They’re six Canadians who’ve been over there inspecting crops. Making sure the kids get enough to eat. Get them creds for an AG NGO --

But he’s already lost Mendez, who is going through a newspaper on the table.

BATES
A Feed the Children thing -- These kids are black. O.S. can make binders with starving kids --

MALINOV
These are African kids.

LAMONT
Are there starving kids in Iran?

GENCO
We can get ethnically appropriate kids.

PENDER
I’m sure there’s skinny kids...

ROSSI
A logo with... seeds. ‘Seeds of Hope’...

Mendez holds a page from the newspaper up to Pender.

MENDEZ
What do you see in the picture, sir?

A beat. Pender doesn’t like this, but he’ll play.

PENDER
Tehran.

MENDEZ
What’s on the ground?

PENDER
Snow.

(CONTINUED)
MENDEZ

So what crops are the do-gooders inspecting under Frosty?

Pender shifts.

MENDEZ

Exfils are like abortions. You don’t wanna need one, but when you do, you don’t do it yourself.

The meeting is breaking up. Pender, followed by Bates, leaves the room. Engell, who has just been made to look bad and inherited a problem, stops by Tony.

ENGELL
(to Mendez)
You have a better plan?

Mendez doesn’t respond.

ENGELL
Get one.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

At dinner around a dining room table: the SIX HOUSEGUESTS; KEN TAYLOR, 40s, Canadian ambassador. He does much to support the myth that Canadians are always in a good mood. Next to him is PAT TAYLOR, Filipino, 40s. We’re joining various conversations, including one with LEE SCHATZ, 29, an American agricultural attache, the sixth escapee we heard about.

TAYLOR
-- Martin was the worst one.
Martin the Maximo King --

PAT TAYLOR
(to Lee Schatz)
-- he looked like a cartoon witch doctor, bone through his nose, so she asked to take her picture with him --

Joe Stafford, keeping to himself.

KATHY STAFFORD
(to Joe Stafford)
You okay?

(CONTINUED)
CORA LIJEK
-- if your family’s hungry, you
don’t want to hear about
international law --

MARK LIJEK
And she’s off! Defending
them again -- Stockholm
Syndrome --

CORA LIJEK
Not defending. Explaining.

MARK LIJEK
Same thing.

The sound of a fork on a glass. Ken Taylor is standing up.

TAYLOR
I read today that Tehran was voted the second most desirable city in the world to live in. Everywhere else tied for first.
(toast)
To getting through ten weeks. To our guests.

LEE SCHATZ
(raising his glass)
Our hosts. Mr. Ambassador...

BOB ANDERS
Hear, hear... And Mrs.

But the liquid in their wine glasses is beginning to shake. The noise of a HELICOPTER. Taylor tries to be pleasant.

TAYLOR
You should get into the crawl space.

INT. MENDEZ’S CAR – NIGHT
Mendez listens to the radio as he drives home along the bridge, the Jefferson Memorial beyond.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
The White House Christmas tree was taken down today after never having been lit, as the cruel stalemate in Iran continues.
This is a --

MONTAGE

that jumps around the world -- scenes of our principals and overlapping news accounts play.

FRANK REYNOLDS (V.O.)
Today, a clear threat to place the remaining 50 Americans on trial as spies.*

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE (TEHRAN) – NIGHT

The Houseguests getting up from dinner. Kathy Stafford hesitates.

JOE STAFFORD
(to Pat Taylor)
Kathy doesn’t want to go down again.

BOB ANDERS
Jesus Christ --
JOE STAFFORD
She’s claustrophobic.

CUT TO:

FOOTAGE OF NILOFUR EKTEBAR – AKA TEHRAN MARY

The Penn-educated Tokyo Rose of the hostage crisis. She’s reading a statement to the camera.

TEHRAN MARY (V.O.)
(perfect American English)
Those who remain here are spies.
They will be treated as spies who have interfered with the sovereignty of the people of Iran.

INT. MENDEZ’ CAR – NIGHT

Mendez driving -- thinking --

MARK LIJEK
You’re putting us all at risk --
JOE STAFFORD
They’re not going to come into the house.

(CONTINUED)
LEE SCHATZ
It’s her choice. Leave her be.

BOB ANDERS
(angry)
G’head. Put flowers in their gun barrels --

SAHAR, housekeeper, is visible here cleaning up after their meal.

INT. MUSHROOM INN - DAY
A dark room where hostages are kept in groups of two.

A 21-year-old with an automatic weapon --

CROSS-CUTTING WITH --

INTERVIEW FOOTAGE OF AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI

KHOMEINI (V.O.)
(subtitled)
If Carter does not send back the Shah, it is possible that they will be tried and if they are tried, who knows what will happen.

INT. SMALL-TOWN BAR - DAY

RON MILLER (V.O.)
So, like the government in Washington, the people in Pecatonica are grappling for solutions.

JACK STROUP, Vietnam vet, red beard, a cap with the Kenworth trucks logo, a denim jacket.

STROUP (V.O.)
Even in our little community here, people are drawn up, they’re tense.
INT. CARPET FACTORY - DAY

ANGLE - A SMALL HAND

pieces shreds together to form the words: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE -- TEHRAN -- CLASSIFIED.

He is working on reassembling the seized EMBASSY PAPERS -- a giant pile of shredded documents -- with the skill of a blindfolded child Mozart at the harpsichord.

We see the unmistakable image of a FACE being formed from the shredded material.

ANGLE - CLOSEUP OF AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI

(Footage from a Mike Wallace interview. *"60 Minutes" 11/18/79.)

KHOMEINI (V.O.)
(Farsi)
Our young people have taken over this nest of corruption. America can’t do a damn thing about it --

OMITTED

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE

Rage at an anti-Iran protest in front of the White House. Signs: "DEPORT ALL IRANIANS"/"CAMEL JOCKEYS GO HOME."

An IRANIAN-AMERICAN MAN is kicked as he crouches on the ground. A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN looks murderous as she waves an American flag at the camera.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL-TOWN BAR - DAY

Back to the ABC News report, the bar in Pecatonica.

STROUP (V.O.)
I’m like that guy screamin’ in that movie-program Network, y’know? I’ve had it. And if need be, I’ll bear arms again.
INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE (TEHRAN) - NIGHT

The Houseguests descend into the crawlspace, a darkened, cramped area -- first the Lijeks, then Anders and Schatz... then Joe and Kathy Stafford.

The trapdoor closes and the crawlspace goes COMPLETELY BLACK.

CUT TO:

INT. MENDEZ APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

WALTER CRONKITE (V.O.)
(on TV)
And that’s the way it is, on this, the 70th day of captivity for the American hostages in Iran.

Mendez is watching Cronkite on a small television in his kitchen. In front of him, a folder with Xeroxed photographs of the HOUSEGUESTS.

He changes the channel and finds a GOOFY SEVENTIES COMMERCIAL -- He picks up the phone.

INT. CHRISTINE’S HOUSE - CROSS-CUTTING - NIGHT

IAN MENDEZ, 7 and about to turn 8, is watching a movie on his bed. He picks up on the second ring.

IAN
Hello.

MENDEZ (V.O.)
Buddy-man.

IAN
Mom’s asleep.

MENDEZ
You do homework tonight?

IAN
Yeah.

MENDEZ
What was it?

But Tony can hear a television soundtrack with ominous electronic music.

(CONTINUED)
MENDEZ
What do I hear?

IAN
(coming clean)
‘Battle for Planet of the Apes.’
Am I in trouble?

A beat.

MENDEZ
What channel?

IAN
Nine.

Mendez turns on his living room television to the three-hour “BATTLE FOR PLANET OF THE APES.”

MENDEZ
Catch me up.

Tony listens, staring ahead at the TV. A desert landscape dotted with technological garbage. An ape played by Roddy MacDowell walks across the landscape. He’s staring at the television, but now really paying attention.

The apes walk into the ruins of what was once a great city.

RODDY MacDOWELL (V.O.)
(on TV, as Caesar)
This is the hell my forefathers used to speak about. (Etc.)

ON TONY

staring at the movie. Wheels turning in his head.

CUT TO:

OMITTED

INT. SCI-FI LAB - A MINOTAUR - DAY

A bull/human experiment in a SCI-FI lab, coming to bovine life. A SEXY SPACE NURSE is administering some kind of shot to him. A SECOND NURSE stands by.

SPACE NURSE
My creation... My creation...

(CONTINUED)
The Minotaur lifts his head, KNOCKS into the Nurse.

SPACE NURSE
(breaking character)
What the fuck, Brian?

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Cut!

A.D. (O.S.)
WE’RE CUTTING!

A bell. WIDER REVEALS that we’re on a...

INT. WARNER BROS. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

A DIRECTOR, 40s, whispers something to an A.D., mid-thirties.

A.D.
(inquiring into a walkie)
John Chambers. John Chambers make-up...

CUT TO:

INT. WARNER BROS. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

JOHN CHAMBERS, Hollywood’s first Oscar winner for makeup, walks onto set carrying a fishing tackle box of supplies.

SUPERIMPOSE: BURBANK, CALIFORNIA - JANUARY 19, 1980

The A.D. joins Chambers, walking him onto the set.

A.D.
He says the Minotaur’s prosthetic is too tight so he can’t act.

CHAMBERS
If he could act he wouldn’t be playing the Minotaur.

He smiles and waves at the Minotaur and begins to work on his prosthetic with a brush and solvent.

CUT TO:
INT. NEAR CRAFT SERVICES TABLE - DAY

Chambers is foraging through ’70s SNACKS. At the craft service table. A guy in his SPACE ARMOR PANTS without the top is eating as well.

A P.A. approaches, carrying a PHONE on a long cord.

P.A.
Mr. Chambers.

CHAMBERS
(still foraging)
Who is it?

P.A.
Kevin Harkins?

Chambers gives the kid a look, takes the phone from him and puts it to his ear.

CHAMBERS
Hey, Tony.

INT. CIA - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Pender and Engell sit at the table; O’Donnell hovers. A few State Department and CIA ANALYSTS here, including Malinov and Lamont; and DAVID MARMOR, early 30s, Engell’s guy.

O’DONNELL
(quiet, to Malinov)
Is he coming?

Engell nods for the door to be shut.

ENGELL
(to Pender)
Okay. Our N.E. put together a work-up. David.

MARMOR
They would pose as teachers from the international school.

PENDER
We went through all that -- it’s boarded up --

O’Donnell looking at the clock.

(CONTINUED)
MARMOR
Suppose the airport guards don’t know that --

PENDER
Suppose. Suppose Heckle and Jeckle go over and save them --

The door swings open.

MENDEZ
Hi. Sorry. Hi.

O’DONNELL
Have a seat, Tony.

He doesn’t. There’s an energy in him we haven’t seen before.

MENDEZ
They’re a Canadian film crew on a location scout for a science fiction movie --

A shift in the room.

MENDEZ
Star Wars, Star Trek. They need an exotic place to shoot. We put it out -- the Canadian producers put it out -- that they’re looking at Turkey, Egypt, whatever. Then we go to the consulate and say we wanna look at Iran. I fly in there and we fly out together as a film crew. Done.

MARMOR
(dry)
‘In an exfiltration, flamboyant cover identities should be avoided, as it increases operational’ --

MENDEZ
This is more plausible than foreigners who want to go to school in Iran --

ENGELL
So you’re going to wake up tomorrow in the movie business? We have credentials for --
MENDEZ
I’ve got a contact in L.A.

ENGELL
(catching on)
Chambers.

MENDEZ
(to Pender)
John Chambers. He’s a Hollywood prosthetics guy, does contracting work for us on the side. If I go see him, he’ll set us up. A couple days to make it look real.

Mendez and O’Donnell turn their eyes on Pender, who is the decision-maker here.

PENDER
(after a beat, to Mendez)
Remind me who you are again?

INT. CIA - THE PIT - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Tony stands in small messy KITCHEN AREA, pouring coffee. On the coffeepot somebody’s pinned a note: CHANGE FILTER IF YOU USE! DO UNTO OTHERS.

O’Donnell approaches, quietly stands behind him, smoking quietly. Mendez turns around.

O’DONNELL
We want you to go to L.A. If you can make the movie thing credible, we’ll take it to the Director.
(a beat; a cigarette drag)
Don’t fuck up. The whole country’s watching you. They just don’t know it.

INT. T.W.A. FLIGHT - MORNING

Mendez sits in an aisle seat. The PASSENGER next to him is looking at the headline of The New York Times: “NEW THREATS FOR HOSTAGE TRIBUNALS.”

Mendez is reading THE FIVE C’S OF CINEMATOGRAPHY.
INT. MIDDLE-CLASS TEHRAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Six KOMITEH force their way into a house.

    KOMITEH SOLDIER
    SAVAK! SAVAK!

A Komiteh drags away a MAN in his forties while the man’s wife cries. Automatic weapons are aimed at him, point-blank.

From ACROSS THE STREET, an IRANIAN WOMAN, 20s, watches.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lee Schatz and Bob Anders play poker in a room decorated with Persian carpets and mosaics. The gunfire audible here too. Staring at their cards.

    LEE SCHATZ
    50 caliber?

    BOB ANDERS
    Mmm. 50, 35.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Pat Taylor helps THE SAME WOMAN we just saw, SAHAR, 20s, clear the table. She is their housekeeper.

    SAHAR
    Your friends from Canada, ma’am.
    All this time. They never go out.

A significant moment of eye contact. Then Sahar goes back to clearing the table.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - LATER

Kathy Stafford is roughly washing wine glasses at the sink.

    JOE STAFFORD
    You’ve washed them three times.

He puts his arm on her shoulder. She keeps scrubbing.
INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - BATHROOM - NIGHT
Ken Taylor is brushing his teeth in the mirror. Pat comes in.

PAT TAYLOR
Sahar knows.

EXT. BURBANK - AFTERNOON
The water tower on Warner Bros. studio -- which in 1980 read, “Burbank Studios.”

INT. CHAMBERS’ STUDIO - AFTERNOON
Chambers leads Mendez into his makeup studio and starts to open windows. Around the studio: stunt double-masks, deformed monster foreheads, dental implants on shelves. Planet of the Apes prosthetics. Mr. Spock ears on Styrofoam stands. (Chambers created all these -- really.)

MENDEZ
What are you shooting?

CHAMBERS
A monster movie.

MENDEZ
Any good?

CHAMBERS
The target audience will hate it.

MENDEZ
Who’s the target audience?

CHAMBERS
People with eyes. Talk to me.

MENDEZ
It’s an exfil.

CHAMBERS
From where?

MENDEZ
Worst place you can think of.

CHAMBERS
Universal City.

(CONTINUED)
Mendez picks up a *Newsweek* magazine under a can of Tab on a makeup table: blindfolded Iran hostages on the cover. Chambers takes it in for a moment -- the gravity of it.

CHAMBERS
How you getting in the embassy?

MENDEZ
Six got away. They’re hiding in the city. I’m going over to get them.

CHAMBERS
What am I making?

MENDEZ
I need you to help me make a fake movie.

CHAMBERS
You’ve come to the right place. *

MENDEZ
I need to set up a production company and build a cover around making a movie.

CHAMBERS
That we’re not going to make.

MENDEZ
No.

CHAMBERS
You want to go around Hollywood acting like you’re an important person in the movie business.

MENDEZ
That’s right.

CHAMBERS
But you don’t want to actually do anything.

MENDEZ
No.

CHAMBERS
You’ll fit right in. *
INT. SMOKE HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A couple of empty highball glasses on the table. Chambers is looking at PHOTOGRAPHS of the SIX. Mendez is taking notes. On a photo of Cora Lijek.

CHAMBERS
This one’s got an M.A. in English. She should be your screenwriter. Sometimes they go on scouts ‘cause they want the free meals.
(re: Bob Anders)
This guy’s the director.

MENDEZ
Can you teach a guy how to be a director in a day?

CHAMBERS
You can teach a rhesus monkey to be a director in a day. Look, if you’re gonna do it, you’ve got to do it. The Khomaniacs are fruit loops, but they have cousins selling eight tracks and prayer rugs on La Brea. You can’t build cover stories around a movie that doesn’t exist. You need a script. You need a producer.

MENDEZ
I’m the producer.

CHAMBERS
No, you’re not. ‘Associate’ at best. If it’s a twenty-million dollar Star Wars rip-off, you need somebody who’s a somebody to put his name on it.

Here we see some AUTOGRAPHED ’70s CELEBRITY 8X10s hanging on the wall.

The waiter brings a bill.

CHAMBERS
Somebody respectable. With credits. Who we can trust with classified information. Who’ll produce a fake movie. For free.

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS - EVENING

They walk up the driveway of a ‘70s Bel Air home.

(CONTINUED)
SIEGEL (V.O.)
Yeah, come in.

INT. SIEGEL HOUSE - HALLWAY - EVENING

And there’s LESTER SIEGEL, a semi-legendary producer in his semi-legendary seventies. He’s equal parts bookie and rabbi. His father sold perfume on the Lower East Side. Lester is halfway to dressed in a tuxedo.

SIEGEL
(shakes hands)
I only got a couple minutes. I’m getting a lifetime achievement award tonight.

CHAMBERS
Mazel tov, Lester.

SIEGEL
Aaah, I’d rather stay home and count the wrinkles on my dog’s balls. These fuckin’ things are like getting measured for your coffin. ‘He don’t look so good. Let’s give him an honorary award.’

TIME CUT TO:

INT. SIEGEL’S DEN - ANGLE ON TV - TED KOPPEL - EVENING

Reporting on Iran.

SIEGEL (O.S.)
A little experiment. You be me hearing you.

The TV we’re watching sits in a room with a couple of Golden Globes and pictures of a younger Lester.

ANOTHER ANGLE

SIEGEL
Six people in the middle of a city of, what, four million --

ON TV, a wild-eyed woman in the crowd (in one of the most widely-played clips of the hostage crisis) makes an ax-falling gesture with her arm repeatedly.

(CONTINUED)
SIEGEL
-- who chant ‘Death to America’
all the livelong day.  You wanna
set up a picture in a week.  Lie
to a whole town of people who lie
for a living.  Have Double-O-Seven
here sneak into a country that
wants CIA blood with their
breakfast cereal.  Duck Iranian
intelligence.  Then walk the Brady
Bunch out of the most watched city
in the world...

MENDEZ
... and past a hundred Komiteh at
the airport.

SIEGEL
Look, I wanna help you but... In
the Army, we did suicide missions
that had better odds.  So lemme
hit it again for the cheap seats:
NO.

Chambers gives Mendez a look.

CHAMBERS
(to Lester, as he
gets up)
Enjoy your fish dinner tonight.

Chambers stops at the muted television.  More images of
angry crowds.

CHAMBERS
You ever think, Lester, how it’s
all for the cameras?

SIEGEL
They’re getting the ratings, I’ll
give ‘em that --

Siegel looks at the TV:  at that moment, a HOSTAGE TAKER
holding up photos of hostages for CAMERAS in front of
him.  He takes a beat.

SIEGEL
We’re gonna need a script.

A beat of silence.  A LOOK from Siegel to Chambers.

CHAMBERS (V.O.)
(pre-lap)
How ‘bout The Horses of Achilles?
Chambers, on hold on the phone, walks to Siegel holding up *The Horses of Achilles* script in a William Morris binder. Stacks of scripts on a table outside. Siegel’s new A.F.I. award is being used as a coaster.

**SIEGEL**
Nobody makes Westerns anymore.

**CHAMBERS**
(looking through it)
It’s ancient Troy.

**SIEGEL**
If it’s got horses in the title, it’s a Western.

**CHAMBERS**
(into the phone)
Yeah, Kenny, please. It’s John Chambers, about the office space.
(then)
It doesn’t matter. It’s a fake movie.

**SIEGEL**
If I’m doing a fake movie, it’s gonna be a fake hit.

**CHAMBERS**
(to phone)
Is A006 still open on the lot?

**INT. SIEGEL’S LIVING ROOM – DAY**
Mendez, on the PHONE near a fully stocked bar.

**O’DONNELL (V.O.)**
The Canadians are done. Say they’re bearing too much risk.

**INT. O’DONNELL’S OFFICE – CROSS-CUTTING – DAY**

**O’DONNELL**
Foreign Secretary cornered Vance in Brussels and told him she’s serving eviction papers. The Cardinal wants all cover options on his desk Friday morning.

**MENDEZ**
That’s too soon.

(CONTINUED)
O’DONNELL
Engell’s prepping the Bikes Option and the Teachers Option. You’ve got 72 hours to make yours better...

INT. SIEGEL’S LIVING ROOM – DAY

Mendez is looking down at the SCRIPT in front of him. He opens to the first page.

ANGLE ON HIM
reading, thinking.

EXT. LESTER’S POOL – DAY

Mendez walks up to the table where Siegel and Chambers are already eating.

MENDEZ
(entering, reading)
‘Fade in on starship landing. An exotic, Middle Eastern vibe. Women gather, offering ecstatic libations to the sky gods.’
(looks up)
‘ARGO. A science-fantasy adventure.’

Mendez throws down the script.

SIEGEL
It’s in turnaround. It’s dog shit.

MENDEZ
It’s a space movie in the Middle East. Does it matter?

Chambers looks at the BULLSEYE logo on the cover page. Reacts.

CHAMBERS
(to Lester) Can we get the option?

MENDEZ
Why do we need the option?

(CONTINUED)
SIEGEL
You’re worried about the Ayatollah? Try the WGA.

EXT. CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD (HOLLYWOOD) - DAY
Tony and Lester turn off Sunset Blvd. and into the office complex.

SIEGEL
He’s only a prick if you catch him on the wrong day.

MENDEZ
Is it the wrong day?

SIEGEL
It’s always the wrong day.

They’ve arrived at a door with a sign: “MAX KLEIN PRODUCTIONS/BULLSEYE FILMS.”

INT. MAX KLEIN’S OFFICE - A FEW MINUTES LATER
We see all kinds of MOVIE POSTERS AND MEMORABILIA ALL OVER THE OFFICE.

KLEIN
You’re gonna get this into production in one month?

MENDEZ
One month.

KLEIN
Who are you again?

MENDEZ
Kevin Harkins. Studio Six Films.

SIEGEL
He’s the money.

KLEIN
I thought you were retired, Lester.

(CONTINUED)
SIEGEL
-- Till I read the Argo. Look, how 'bout we say fifteen thou and close on this?

KLEIN
You want me to be honest with you, Les?

SIEGEL
Naah, bullshit me, Max.

KLEIN
Okay. Because I enjoyed your films, the early ones. I took this meeting out of respect because I wanted to tell you 'no' to your face.

SIEGEL
Thank you. Very respectful.

KLEIN
You’re done, Lester. You’ve gotta get your cataracts fixed and read the trades. MGM just capitalized for six new films and they’re desperate for Sci-Fi. They’ve already offered me four times what you are.

SIEGEL
(a beat)
What can I say? Congratulations. (shrugs to Mendez)
He’s got me.

A beat. Mendez ready to go --

SIEGEL
But see -- it worries me, what you said, and I’ll tell you why. A couple weeks back I was sitting in Trader Vic’s enjoying a Mai Tai when my pal Warren Beatty came to wish me well and we had a little chat. Seems he was attached to star in Zulu Empire -- which was gonna anchor that MGM slate -- but Warren confided in me that the picture’s gone over-budget ‘cause the Zulu extras wanna unionize.

(MORE)
They may be cannibals swallowing each other up but they want health and dental, so the movie’s kaput -- which means that MGM deal ain’t gonna happen and your script ain’t worth the buffalo-shit on a nickel. So.

Lester takes some documents out of a folder.

SIEGEL
The way this looks to me -- through the cataracts, I grant you -- is that you can either sign here and take ten thousand for your toilet-paper script -- or you can go fuck yourself.

Siegel smiles kindly and holds a pen and the contracts out to Klein. Klein takes them.

EXT. STREET - A FEW MINUTES LATER

MENDEZ
You know Warren Beatty?

SIEGEL
I took a leak next to him at the Golden Globes.

(beat)
Taco?

EXT. WARNER BROS. LOT - LATE DAY

Lester and Tony eat tacos at a picnic table on the lot.

MENDEZ
You got kids, Lester?

SIEGEL
Two daughters.

MENDEZ
You see them much?

SIEGEL
I talk to them once a year, maybe.

MENDEZ
Why’s that?

(CONTINUED)
SIEGEL
I was a terrible father.
(beat)
The bullshit business is like coal mining. You can’t wash it off before you kiss your wife and kids... You?

MENDEZ
A son. Lives with his mother in Virginia.

SIEGEL
You’re divorced?

MENDEZ
Taking time off.
(then, quiet) He’s gotta... stay where he is.

SIEGEL
(beat)
Kids need the mother.

EXT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE (LOT - NY STREET) - MORNING
Chambers and a GRAPHIC ARTIST walk through the set. We REVEAL a couple of CYLON RAIDERS, helmets off, taking a break from shooting and leaning against the wall.

INT. O’DONNELL’S OFFICE - DAY
O’DONNELL reads from the EYES ONLY document.

O’DONNELL
They caught the shah’s chief of security trying to get on a plane to Paris.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE - MORNING
WIDER REVEALS that the production office is being set up. A couple of FURNITURE GUYS move chairs in.

Mendez is looking at a POSTER. It reads: “Studio Six Productions presents: ARGO. A COSMIC WAR.”

(CONTINUED)
MENDEZ
(to a graphic artist)
'War' sounds like Star Wars.
Let's use a different word.

Mendez closes the door to his private office.

O'DONNELL
'Since the incident, the number of guards at the airport has doubled. Thorough background examinations should be expected.'

MENDEZ
I need another week.

O'DONNELL
You don't have it.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - NIGHT

Mendez goes out into the main part of the office -- it's Tony, Siegel, and Chambers now.

They have hung up all their ARGO MATERIALS on the wall and are reviewing them.

MENDEZ
We've got a script. We've got business cards. We've got a poster. If I'm them? It's nothing we couldn't make at home.

CHAMBERS
I did a movie with Rock Hudson once. (a beat) 'You need to sell a lie, you get the press to sell it for you.'

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY

Now it's noisy in here now -- a PUBLICIST, ASSISTANTS and controlled chaos --

SIEGEL
(on the phone) -- press event and reading... No, I promised Variety exclusive on that one...

Mendez is making a list with a PUBLICIST.

(CONTINUED)
MENDEZ

‘Biggest Canadian production in history.’ Canadian Gone With The Wind --

PUBLICIST

Canadian Sci-Fi Gone With The Wind.

ASSISTANT #2

Studio Six Films.

As Chambers pulls Mendez --

SIEGEL

(on the phone)
I gotta get back to you, Phil. I can’t get my own mother a ticket. I had to tell her it was cancelled.

MENDEZ

Are you turning people away?

SIEGEL

(covering the phone)
You know what gets more suckers than a sign that says ‘Brooklyn Bridge For Sale’? ‘Brooklyn Bridge: Approved Buyers Only.’

(as they go)
Philip? You there?

Chambers leads us into the main room, leading Tony to a table where JACK KIRBY, 62, comics artist, fusses with large COMIC PANELS of ARGONAUT CONCEPT DRAWINGS spread over a table.

Kirby starts to distribute storyboards. Some hold on to them and an ASSISTANT begins putting them up on the board.

Mendez looks at them. Impressed. He picks up a drawing of some futuristic-looking vehicles.

MENDEZ

Any way to make the chariots look more -- Middle-Eastern -- ?

KIRBY

Mesopotamia... Egypt...

MENDEZ

Iran.

Kirby takes out a marker and starts to sketch a futuristic-looking desert glider.
EXT./INT. BEVERLY HILTON - LATE DAY

A black sedan pulls up to the hotel. A driver opens the back door. Mendez, Siegel, and Chambers get out of the car. They’re wearing suits.

They walk past a sign that reads: PRESS EVENT and READING FOR ARGO. A couple of posters with the explosion-in-space ARGO: A COSMIC CONFLAGRATION logo.

INT. BEVERLY HILTON - STARDUST LOUNGE - DUSK

Tony is on a balcony outside the ballroom. He passes the bar on his way in.

Inside he sees Chambers, Lester and a PUBLICIST who promptly moves Tony into a conversation with a REPORTER.

PUBLICIST
Janet from the Times -- You know Johnny Chambers and Lester Siegel. This is Kevin Harkins. He’ll tell you a bit about the film --

We leave Mendez with the L.A. Times --

FOLLOWING Siegel --

Jack Kirby’s storyboard drawings throughout the room. Four or five ACTORS IN SCI-FI COSTUMES.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Lester.

He turns around. NINA, a woman in her early sixties, made up to look younger.

SIEGEL
You’re gorgeous. You’re in the reading?

(CONTINUED)
NINA
I’m playing Serksi, the Galactic Witch.

BACK TO: Mendez. A Publicist is guiding Mendez toward an anemic-looking man --

PUBLICIST
(to Mendez, introducing)
Rodd from Variety. Kevin Harkins.

BACK TO Siegel and Chambers, walking away from NINA.

SIEGEL
Keep that fucking space witch away from me.

CHAMBERS
You know her?

SIEGEL
I was married to her.

Mendez, now talking to RODD, from VARIETY.

RODD
(to Mendez)
You said shooting in Iran with an N?

MENDEZ
Tehran.

RODD
You ever watch the news?

Publicist hands Mendez a LASER GUN and a photographer snaps his picture. Siegel walks by, downing one from the bar.

BACK TO SIEGEL AND CHAMBERS

A Hollywood Reporter writer talking to Siegel. The publicist stands by --

REPORTER
So the title refers to...

SIEGEL
The Argo, it’s the, y’know, the thing --

(CONTINUED)
Siegel takes a couple of canapés from a passing Waiter, starts eating.

REPORTER
... Jason and the Golden Fleece, or...?

SIEGEL
(chewing)
-- the spaceship, it flies around space, alllll over space --

REPORTER
Is it the Argonaut?

Siegel doesn’t know what he’s talking about.

SIEGEL
No.

REPORTER
Then what does ‘Argo’ mean?

And finally Lester’s had it -- with his mouth full --

SIEGEL
It means Argo fuck yourself.

PUBLICIST
Let’s all take our places for the reading.

And we SETTLE ON MENDEZ. He takes a glass of wine from a passing waiter’s tray, downs it, and puts it on another WAITER’S tray. We FOLLOW that waiter THROUGH a swinging door, INTO the kitchen and prep area, where a small black and white TV plays...

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE

Tehran Mary speaks into a microphone.

TEHRAN MARY (V.O.)
(on TV)
As the Imam Khomeini said, we have found no evidence that proves that these people are diplomats.

INT. O’DONNELL’S OFFICE - NIGHT

O’Donnell, watching the same footage on the News.

(CONTINUED)
TEHRAN MARY (V.O.)
(on TV)
All evidence proves that these
people are spies.

The ARRAY OF VIDEO CAMERAS on tripods recording her.

NINA (V.O.)
(as Serksi)
Our world has changed.

INT. BEVERLY HILTON HOTEL - STARDUST LOUNGE - DUSK

The reading of Argo is happening around a table.

PRINCESS ALEPPA
The fire of hope stopped burning
in this galaxy long ago.

A HANDSOME LEAD, ACHILLES CRUX, says his line.

ACHILLES CRUX
Fire the thrusters!!

INT. AROUND THE CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE (TEHRAN) - NIGHT

MARK LIJEK
-- fifty-seven -- fifty-eight --
Mark counts out as Lee Schatz does push-ups. Bob Anders
watches a television in the b.g., subtitled in Farsi.

JIMMY CARTER (V.O.)
(on TV)
We will not yield to international
terror or to blackmail.

INT. MUSHROOM INN (AMERICAN EMBASSY, TEHRAN) - NIGHT

Five of the EMBASSY HOSTAGES -- men from their 20s to
their 50s -- are roused from their sleeping mats by
Komiteh. Hoods are put over their heads.

PRINCESS ALEPPA (V.O.)
The old ways are lost, but there
is still hope.
TEHRAN MARY (V.O.)
We will begin the trials and will
carry out the sentences.

This MONTAGE: Voice upon voice, image upon image, landing
on television sets.

OMITTED

INT. AMERICAN EMBASSY (TEHRAN) - BASEMENT - NIGHT

The four hostages, hoods on their heads, placed against
the wall. HOSTAGE TAKERS raise their guns at the men.

GREEN JACKET
(Farsi)
Fire!

PRINCESS ALEPPA (V.O.)
If we find his ship, we
will find our chance.
Aboard the Argo lies my
hope. My hero. My
husband.

They pull their triggers. But nothing happens. It’s a
mock execution (actually occurred -- February 5, 1980).
The five hostages, after a beat, either scream or
collapse.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Joe Stafford, watching Khomeini on TV, to Bob Anders --

JOE STAFFORD
(realizing the
gravity of it)
He’s marginalized the moderates
now.

MARK LIJEK
A hundred and twelve --

INT. BEVERLY HILTON - DUSK

NESTOR THE DROID
We’re hit. We’ll never clear the
Perseus Range!

We see the ROW OF PRESS PEOPLE. Not unlike the ones
watching Tehran Mary.
Lee Schatz collapses from his push-ups. Breathing heavily.

MARK LIJEK
And we have a new champion.

Bob Anders looks up from Khomeini, who keeps talking in the b.g., and applauds.

SAHAR quietly cleans a table. She’s watching the Houseguests.

CHAMBERS (V.O.)
‘Crane down over the battlefield and hold there...’

Chambers, at the table, sitting next to Siegel. Mendez sits off to the side.

CHAMBERS
(reading stage directions)
‘... on a single red flower growing from the ruins of the starship in the desert. Fade to black. The End.’

APPLAUSE.

Mendez, lying on his bed with the phone. Near him, a copy of VARIETY turned to a full-page ad. (*This is real -- Variety): STUDIO SIX PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS: ARGO: A COSMIC CONFLAGRATION.
INT. NEAR O’DONNELL’S OFFICE - MORNING

O’Donnell comes from the kitchen to find ENGELL waiting. He hands O’Donnell a copy of Variety. “ARGO TO BEGIN SHOOTING IN MARCH. Oscar-winner Chambers, Siegel Among Producers.”

And there is a photo of Mendez from the press event. Smiling and holding a laser gun.

INT. TONY’S HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Mendez, seeing red, pacing --

MENDEZ
Why’d he do it?

O’DONNELL (V.O.)
He did it ‘cause he did it.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. O’DONNELL’S OFFICE - MORNING

O’DONNELL
He saw a covert intelligence officer saying ‘cheese’ with R2-D2. They’re going with the teachers.

MENDEZ
It’s a death sentence, Jack.

O’DONNELL
Well then it’s on Engell.
(a beat)
It’s done, Tony. Wash your hands.

He hangs up. Mendez, looking out the hotel window at L.A.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - MORNING

While Tony packs a bag of papers from his desk.

SIEGEL
I made thirty pictures. Half of them the pricks upstairs tried to shut me down.

Mendez finishes packing, zips up the bag.

(CONTINUED)
SIEGEL
My ass is staying right here and
running a movie company.

Mendez stops zipping as Siegel takes a bottle of Jack and
three shot glasses from a drawer.

SIEGEL
(pours)
Ey. The first shot of the
picture.

Lester gives glasses to each of them. Chambers holds up
his glass.

CHAMBERS
Argo fuck yourself.

They raise to that.

MENDEZ AND SIEGEL
Argo fuck yourself.

They each do a shot. Then Tony picks up his bag and
heads out. Before he goes --

MENDEZ
How’d you always get around the
pricks upstairs?

SIEGEL
There’s always another prick one
floor higher up.

EXT. STATE DEPARTMENT - DAY
Mendez approaches the iconic building.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT LOBBY - DAY
Mendez catches up with Jack on the second level of the
lobby, opposite the row of flags.

O’DONNELL
What did you do to get the
meeting?

MENDEZ
I used your name.

Jack looks to Tony.
MENDEZ
You can forget about that time-share in Ocean City, Jack.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - SEVENTH FLOOR - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

Tony and O’Donnell sit in the waiting area, across from a secretary. They look down the hall to see:

CIA DIRECTOR ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER, 50s, and SECRETARY OF STATE CYRUS VANCE walk down the hall together, discussing something in hushed tones.

O’DONNELL
(under his breath)
Brace yourself. It’s like talking to those two old fucks on ‘The Muppets.’

Vance and Turner enter the room without recognizing them. Mendez and O’Donnell stand up.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - SEVENTH FLOOR OFFICE - ANGLE - DAY

A concept drawing from Argo.

TURNER (O.S.)
Aliens and robots.

MENDEZ (O.S.)
Yes, sir.

ANOTHER ANGLE

The four men are gathered in the back of Vance’s office, around a table. Over them we see the STATE DEPARTMENT EMBLEM.

TURNER is looking at the storyboard.

TURNER
You’re telling me there’s a movie office in Hollywood right now that’s funded by the Central Intelligence Agency.

MENDEZ
Yes, sir.

(CONTINUED)
VANCE
What’s wrong with the bikes again?

Vance, with a copy of *Comics Week*. THE NEXT STAR WARS? Next to it, a photograph from the press event: Mendez holding a laser gun. CANADIAN EPIC WILL BE FILMED IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

TURNER
... you think this -- We tried to get the message upstairs --

O’DONNELL
-- this is more plausible than teachers?

O’DONNELL
One, there are no foreign teachers in Iran anymore --

MENDEZ
-- two, we think everybody knows Hollywood people. And everybody thinks they would shoot during Stalingrad with Pol Pot directing if it’d sell tickets.

(beat)
There are only bad options. It’s about finding the best one.

TURNER
You don’t have a better bad idea than this?

O’DONNELL
This is the best bad idea we have, sir. By far.

Vance and Turner exchange looks.

TURNER
(to Mendez)
The United States government just sanctioned your science fiction movie.

MENDEZ’S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mendez is packing to go. He packs a passport with his photo and the name KEVIN COSTA HARKINS. He takes off his wedding band and places it with care -- almost with ceremony -- in a spot on his dresser.
INT. O’DONNELL’S CAR - NIGHT

O’Donnell is driving, Mendez in the passenger seat. They just sit there for a moment. In the car.

O’DONNELL
I’m required to remind you that if you’re detained, the agency will not claim you.

MENDEZ
Barely claim me as it is.

O’DONNELL
Your ‘In Case Of’s’ good?

MENDEZ
Just Christine.

They don’t need to look at one another. A shared understanding.

MENDEZ *
Guess I should have brought some books to read in prison.

O’DONNELL
Nah. They’ll kill you long before prison.

Tony gets out of the car, pulls his bags from the back seat, and slams the door. Headed into the airport.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - DUSK

Siegel is standing in the office watching Jimmy Carter speak mournfully on TV, Chambers watching from a desk behind him.

SIEGEL *
Bad news, bad news, even when it’s good news it’s bad news. Christ.
(a phone starts ringing)
John Wayne’s in the ground six months and this is what’s left of America.
CHAMBERS
(picking up the phone)
Studio Six.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DULLES AIRPORT - NIGHT

MENDEZ
We’ve got a green light.

Chambers gives Siegel a thumbs-up.

MENDEZ
Keep the office running till you hear otherwise.
	(this means thank you)
Argo fuck yourself.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - DUSK

CHAMBERS
Argo fuck yourself.

OMITTED

INT. CHRISTINE’S HOUSE - NIGHT

The phone in the living room rings. No one is home.

INT. DULLES AIRPORT - NIGHT

Mendez hangs up the airport pay phone.

CUT TO:

INT. DULLES AIRPORT - LATER

He sits near a mailbox inside the terminal writing on a postcard with the Washington Monument on it.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO THE BUDDY-MAN. NO PHONE FOR A WHILE.
JACK WILL CALL. LOVE YOU BOTH. Then he adds: SO MUCH.

He drops the card in the box and heads toward a gate marked “LUFTHANSA.”
INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE – LIVING ROOM – DAY

The Houseguests are gathered around Bob Anders.

-- it was thirty seconds for 
Christ’s sake. To get some air in 
the yard. I couldn’t breathe --

BOB ANDERS

MARK LIJEK

BOB ANDERS

JOE STAFFORD

You know what the rules are.

All it takes is one second to spot you.

Who saw me go out?

MARK LIJEK

CORA LIJEK

It doesn’t matter. You did I did, actually. I saw you.

go out.

BOB ANDERS

(to Cora Lijek)

Miss Hall Monitor. Creeping around with her notebook --

MARK LIJEK

Don’t talk to her that way.

CORA LIJEK

BOB ANDERS

(to Mark)

Little Laura Ingalls. I’ll defend myself. Okay? Watching every move --

A sound at the door, and they go silent.

LEE SCHATZ

Dad’s home.

Ken carrying his briefcase, cheerfully oblivious to what he’s walked into.

TAYLOR

You’re getting a visitor.
INT. CHIEF OF STAFF OFFICE - MORNING

He finds Jordan sitting on a long table, looking exhausted, silently watching one of the monitors: “The Today Show” on NBC.

JORDAN
A man in Scranton’s putting a flag on his lawn for every day of captivity.
(beat)
When he runs out of lawn, Kennedy wins the primary.

Vance hands him the folder.

LIAISON *
The six with the Canadians are coming out.

Jordan, brought back from Scranton and politics by this, opens the file and looks at it.

JORDAN
(after a moment)
Who signed off on this?

OMITTED

EXT. ISTANBUL - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT. WIDE. OVER the city, featuring the famous domed mosques.

SUPERIMPOSE: ISTANBUL - JANUARY 25

Mendez walks, the BOSPHORUS in the b.g. He reaches the doors of an OFFICIAL-LOOKING BUILDING and goes inside.

INT. IRANIAN CONSULATE (ISTANBUL) - DAY

Mendez sits in a reception room with a few VISA APPLICANTS. Photographs of the Ayatollah Khomeini hang on the wall. Two REVOLUTIONARY GUARD OFFICIALS in ill-fitting suits sit at a desk.
The IRANIAN CONSUL OFFICIAL, late 30s, is smoking.

CONSUL OFFICIAL
What will be the purpose of your visit to Iran?

MENDEZ
Business. Film production.

The Consul Official looks at his Canadian passport.

CONSUL OFFICIAL
Why didn’t you get your visa in Canada?

MENDEZ
My boss waited until I was here to send the telex.
(lightening cigarette)
If he had a thought in his head, it would die of loneliness.

Pointed look from Mendez. The universal condition of boss hatred almost always works for him, and it does now. Consul nods. Stamps the passport. KINGDOM OF IRAN -- He crosses out KINGDOM and writes by hand: ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF.

Tony walks through the doorway revealing the historic mosque, we hear the call to prayer echo through the courtyard. Tony walks through the courtyard. We see some TOURISTS with ‘70s Instamatics. Locals are HEADING IN TO PRAY.

We see the beautiful ceiling of the former cathedral. PULL BACK to reveal Tony stands looking out over the second level balcony. A MAN walks up behind him.

MAN (O.S.)
‘Iran is a hundred percent not in a pre-revolutionary state.’ End quote.

Mendez looks up: a MAN, late 40s-50s with a British accent, is talking to him. PETER NICHOLLS, an Oxbridge type and a very good spy.

((CONTINUED)
MENDEZ
Can’t be right all the time.

NICHOLLS
Mr. Harkins.

MENDEZ
When’d you get back?

CUT TO: *

INT. HAGIA SOPHIA - LOWER LEVEL - DAY

FIND Mendez and Nicholls.

MENDEZ
Were you metal detecting?

NICHOLLS
None left to find. Shah escaped with a 747 so laden with gold bars it nearly didn’t make it off the runway.

MENDEZ
But you kept busy.

NICHOLLS
Ferrying out the torture apparatus of our friend’s fallen dictatorship.

Both these men do this work and share an unspoken understanding. They stop and look up at a MOSAIC on the wall. An ancient rendition of Christ, fashioned before the Muslims took the city and converted this church to a mosque.

Nicholls has WHITE AND YELLOW SLIPS OF PAPER with Farsi writing on them in hand. He gives them to Tony.

NICHOLLS
It’s getting worse. Everybody who lands at Mehrabad now fills out one of these.

(a WHITE one)
That slip makes a copy to this one underneath.

(a YELLOW one)
Passenger keeps Yellow, Airport keeps White.

(MORE)
When you leave the country, they match them up to verify you came into the country when you said you did.

MENDEZ
So if they look, they’ll know six people didn’t come in with me.

NICHOLLS
If they look.

Nicholls and Tony turn away from the mosaic, surreptitious work now done, and meander toward the middle of the great room.

INT. HAGIA SOPHIA - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Nicholls and Tony walk towards the inner courtyard.

NICHOLLS
When you land, you should go straight to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to kiss the ring. Get on record as having applied for a film permit. If they catch you later, at least they’ll be confused while they’re torturing you... Your biggest problem may be convincing the six of them to go with you. They’re foreign service. They’re willful.

Nicholls takes a picture.

MENDEZ
How’s June?

NICHOLLS
Left.

MENDEZ
I’m sorry.

NICHOLLS
She picked out a ring and gave me a choice. She’s a Chinese national. If I married her, I’d have to resign, so. You and Christine?

MENDEZ
Good. Yeah.
He said that without hesitation. Maybe here we realize that Mendez is a very good liar.

Lester is BOUNCING A RUBBER BALL. The PRODUCER from later in the movie walks by.

PRODUCER
You’re working late.

SIEGEL
‘Til the dawn’s early light.

PRODUCER
You got stamina, Lester. I wanna be you.

SIEGEL
You wouldn’t be me for long. I’m 80.

Producer walks away and Lester looks into the ‘Argo’ office as he squeezes the ball.

FROM INSIDE THE OFFICE -- In the foreground, we see what Lester is looking at: a phone. Stubbornly silent.

Mendez sits in a window seat. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT speaks with a pleasant British accent.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (V.O.)
The Captain has informed us that we have entered Iranian airspace. Members of our cabin crew will be coming through to collect any remaining alcoholic beverages at this time.
Mendez walks through the terminal of a crowded 1960s-era airport. Newly-hung portraits of the Ayatollah Khomeini watch over the duty-free shops.

SUPERIMPOSE: TEHRAN - JANUARY 26

The MOBS OF PEOPLE WITH BOXES OF THEIR WORLDLY BELONGINGS puts in high relief that Tony is going into a place that everyone else is desperately fleeing.

Tony fills out a white form. It makes an impression on a YELLOW form.

Tony presents his passport to a REVOLUTIONARY GUARD IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL. Official looks at it, Tony hears the sound of a woman screaming in Farsi.

Three lanes away, at the outgoing immigration station, a Revolutionary Guard is dragging away the woman’s HUSBAND.

The Immigration Official stamps Tony’s passport -- takes the white form, gives Tony the yellow one -- and waves him through.

Archive footage may be mixed with new footage. Normal city life mixed with men with automatic weapons. The contradictions of Tehran at this moment.

A Massive HELICOPTER SHOT OF TEHRAN. We TILT DOWN to see a traffic jam SPRAWLS AROUND THE AZADI MONUMENT. Bikes, mopeds, pedestrians, peddlers and old, patched together cars compete for space. No one gets anywhere.

Mendez sits in the back of a taxi in the Tehran traffic, some of the worst traffic in the world. We see the AZADI MONUMENT out his window.

ANGLES OUT HIS WINDOWS

The Ayatollah looks down from everywhere.
A MAN IS HANGING FROM A CRANE. People mill underneath.

Women in chadors at Kentucky Fried Chicken.

An ARMED GANG in the back of pickup truck pulls up near his taxi.

We see PROPAGANDA painted on a wall/window.

INT. TAXI/EXT. MINISTRY - DAY

The taxi pulls up to a FORMAL, PINK BUILDING.

The Driver stops. They’ve arrived.

INT. MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND ISLAMIC GUIDANCE - DAY

MEHDI BEHROUZ, 33, is the newly appointed Deputy Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Like many of the stars of the Revolution, he was educated in the U.S. Right now he’s looking at the ARGO script.

BEHROUZ
This film crew is just yourself?

MENDEZ
Six more are joining me today. They’re coming from Canada.

BEHROUZ
You’d like to film at the bazaar?

MENDEZ
The bazaar, maybe the palace.

BEHROUZ
(not particularly friendly)
I see. The exotic Orient. Snake charmers and flying carpets.

(a beat)
You come to us at a complicated time. Before the Revolution, 40 percent of the movie theaters in Tehran were showing pornography. Our function is purification as well as promotion of the arts.

(takes script)
I’ll review for the Minister.
EXT. CANADIAN EMBASSY - DAY

A TAXI pulls away.

Mendez, carrying his luggage, stands at a wrought iron gate with MAPLE LEAVES worked into the iron. Ken Taylor comes out of the building, opens the gate himself.

MENDEZ
Mr. Ambassador.

TAYLOR
Ken Taylor.

He shakes Tony’s hand and they start to walk to Taylor’s car.

TAYLOR
I was expecting more of a G-Man look.

MENDEZ
You’re thinking of FBI, sir.

They get into the car.

INT. TAYLOR’S CAR - OUTSIDE EMBASSY - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Taylor gives Tony SIX BLANK CANADIAN PASSPORTS.

TAYLOR
These are blank, y’know. The stamps?

MENDEZ
I’ll take care of that.

TAYLOR
How long?

MENDEZ
A day to prep them with their cover stories. Two if they need it.

TAYLOR
And you’ll fly out with them?

Tony nods. A distant sound of a crowd outside.
There’s something you should know. We think one of our housekeepers figured out who they are. We don’t know if we can trust her.

Now the noise outside is louder. Taylor turns to the window. Tony joins him.

So sooner is better.

They stand listening to the demonstration sounds, echoing over the rooftops of the city.

He got to the embassy.

O’Donnell closes the door. Pender, wearing an undone tuxedo, as if he’s just been pulled from a formal event. They stay standing.

I can’t tell you more than that ‘cause I don’t know any more.

(cutting to it)

The Times and A.P. found out they’re with the Canadians. Somebody in one of the families talked.

Mother of God.

I just put Vance on a plane to take the editors to Le Cirque. He thinks he can get them to sit on it. For now.

(a beat)

Your guy better get them and get the hell out.
180  EXT. SHEMIRANAT (TEHRAN) - DAY

Ken Taylor drives up to a nice, but not huge, home in the expat/diplomatic neighborhood of Tehran. Automatic gates open.

181  EXT./INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - DAY

Taylor leads Mendez inside. Pat Taylor waits for them in the hall. Takes Tony’s hand.

182  INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE (TEHRAN) - DAY  *

They enter the LIVING ROOM... and here are the SIX HOUSEGUESTS. They’re looking at Mendez like kids waiting to be told the lesson plan.

183  INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Each Houseguest has a copy of the **ARGO** script.

**BOB ANDERS**
It’s theater of the absurd.

**MARK LIJEK**
What are the chances?

**MENDEZ**
The chances are good.

**MARK LIJEK**
What’s the number value of ‘good’?
30 percent chance of success? 80 percent?

**CORA LIJEK**
We just --

**BOB ANDERS**  *
What was the objection to picking normal cover identities?

**MENDEZ**
There are no Canadians in the country for normal reasons.

**KATHY STAFFORD**
They’ll sniff us out regardless.

**MARK LIJEK**
The Swedish consul said they accused him of being an American at the airport and held him for an hour.

(CONTINUED)
BOB ANDERS
We can’t stand up to that. We
don’t know what the hell movie
people do.

MENDEZ
That’s why I’m here. I’ll be with
you. This is what I do.

CORA LIJEK
* Have you gotten people out this
way before?

MENDEZ
This would be a first.

CUT TO:

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

THE HOUSEGUESTS --
minus Joe and Kathy Stafford, go into the living room.
Mendez stays in his seat; Joe approaches him.

JOE STAFFORD
Do you know that every day...

KATHY STAFFORD
... Joe, don’t.

JOE STAFFORD
... every day they catch another
friend of the shah at the airport.
Kangaroo trials then firing
squads. Just for having American
names in their phone books.

He puts the Iranian newspaper in front of Mendez.

JOE STAFFORD
You’ve been here an hour and
you’re asking us to trust you with
our lives, Mr. --

MENDEZ
Harkins.

JOE STAFFORD
Is that your real name?

A beat.

MENDEZ
No.

(CONTINUED)
Joe Stafford nods, as if this has proven a point. He goes back into the living room, followed by Kathy.

**ANGLE ON THE PHOTOGRAPH**

*in the Tehran Times. A MAN IN A SUIT at Mehrabad Airport. Terrified, being led out at gunpoint.*

**EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE – VERANDA – NIGHT**

Mendez comes out and lights a cigarette. Ken Taylor is already there.

**TAYLOR**

We’ve got orders to close the embassy and go back. There’s nowhere for them to stay.

**INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE – LIVING ROOM – NIGHT**

**JOE STAFFORD**

I’m serious, too. This is what?

**BOB ANDERS**

Don’t do this, Joe...

**JOE STAFFORD**

... the part where we say, ‘That’s so crazy it just might work’? C’mon...

**BOB ANDERS**

I saw it in Burma. They get people out. They know how.

**JOE STAFFORD**

Snitches in banana republics. They get them over the border after the coup...

**BOB ANDERS**

That’s your opinion.

**JOE STAFFORD**

... pay the guards at the crossing a hundred bucks to look the other way...

**MARK LIJEK**

His opinion got us out of the embassy in the first place.
EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - VERANDA - NIGHT

MENDEZ
If we go, you need to leave immediately. There’s a danger --

TAYLOR
Pat and I discussed it. If they catch you at the airport, they come here and we go on trial for harboring the enemy. It’s a risk we took.

(after a moment)
Can you pull this off?

MENDEZ
I don’t know.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

JOE STAFFORD
-- even if they do. They find us here, we’re not lying, we’re just hiding. We go out there with fake passports, we’re spies, period, execution.

CORA LIJEK
So how long do we stay? A month? A year?

JOE STAFFORD
That man out there, he’s got bad cards, he’s gonna lose. If he loses, it’s our lives.

KATHY STAFFORD
(after a beat)
And his life too.

Another beat. ANGLES ON the Houseguests.

CUT TO:

OMITTED
MENDEZ
Your cover identities were created specifically for each one of you.

Mendez, now dressed to leave, is handing each Houseguest an envelope.

MENDEZ
What I need you to do is memorize everything inside. Who you are, what you are, where you’ve been.

Cora Lijek looks at a document from inside her envelope. A union card for the Canadian Writers Guild with her picture on it.

MENDEZ
When we’re done, you’ll know these so well that you’ll dream as these people.

Mendez nods at them, and goes. The Houseguests look at what’s inside their envelopes -- all except Joe Stafford, whose envelope remains sealed.

A TELEFAX MACHINE spells out a message, letter by letter: “MR KEVIN HARKINS - CARE OF HOTEL SHERATON.”

Tony is PREPPING the CANADIAN PASSPORTS -- expertly copying Farsi stamps with a small sharpened stick. A KNOCK on the door. Tony hides the passports. Answers the door.

BELLHOP
Sir, a telex arrived for you.

The BELLHOP hands Tony a piece of paper. He reads it.

CUT TO:
193 INT. SHERATON ROOM - NIGHT

Mendez takes a small 1978 model radio out of his suitcase. He unscrews the casing and from inside takes out what looks like a 6-inch transistor board for the radio.

On either side of the board: telephone jacks.

He detaches the cords from the hotel phone and plugs them into the jacks on the transistor board. It’s a phone scrambler.

MENDEZ (V.O.)
‘The Minister of Culture and Guidance has approved your location scout.’

194 INT. SHERATON ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Mendez, on the phone --

MENDEZ
(reading the telefax)
‘He will send a representative to meet you and your crew at the Khayyam entrance to the Grand Bazaar tomorrow at 3 PM.’

INTERCUT WITH:

195 INT. O’DONNELL’S OFFICE - NIGHT

O’Donnell on the phone.

O’DONNELL
They called your bluff.

MENDEZ
Or maybe they’re cooperating.

O’DONNELL
N.E. says absolutely not. Seven Americans walking the bazaar, you’re asking for a riot, it’s the hive --

MENDEZ
Seven Canadians, Jack.

O’DONNELL
Never give them multiple shots at a cover. Are they even ready?

(CONTINUED)
MENDEZ
They’re getting there.

O’DONNELL
Terrific. There’s no prize for ‘Most Improved.’

MENDEZ
(escalating)
I don’t have a choice. We say no, they come to the residence and pull everyone out at gunpoint. How do you think the covers hold up with their fingernails pulled out?

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mark Lijek is studying pages from the envelope Tony gave him. Joe Stafford is sitting near him, having a drink, watching Iranian State Television footage of the Ayatollah. Joe Stafford translates out loud.

JOE STAFFORD
‘We are a nation of 35 million and... many of these people are looking forward to martyrdom.’

Kathy Stafford looks into the room. Joe stops talking, looks up.

JOE STAFFORD
(to Kathy)
Five minutes?

He smiles at her. Kathy, who looks like she hasn’t been sleeping, nods and leaves. Joe takes a drink. After a moment --

JOE STAFFORD
She pleaded with me.

Mark, looking to Joe. This is new.

JOE STAFFORD
When it started in the streets nine months ago. She begged for us to leave. She packed our bags. I said, ‘A little longer.’ And what I was thinking was, ‘This is a good thing for me. Stay. Show Newsom you’ve got the balls. Grab for the ring.’

(MORE)
I think we’re gonna die here.

The feeling here is dangerous. Young men carrying automatic weapons casually.

Behrouz stands next to ALI KHALKALI, 30s, a Revolutionary Committee security official. There are RECONSTRUCTED EMBASSY PICTURES ON THE WALL.

We see the FAMOUS PICTURES OF THE HOSTAGES BEING MARCHED DOWN THE STEPS.

A Kafka-esque stairway. We see a YOUNG KOMITEH call up from the bottom and head up the stairs.

JUMP CUT TO: one flight to go.

Now on the level WITH CAMERA, we carry him INTO the office as he hands off the ARG0 script and STUDIO SIX BUSINESS CARD. Khalkali has some words in Farsi for the young man.

Tony looks at one of the Argo storyboards -- one depicting an EXOTIC SPICE MARKET, a BAZAAR -- in the light.

CORA LIJEK (V.O.)
This isn’t what we agreed to.

The Houseguests are gathered in the office. Cora hands the telefax to Bob Anders. Joe Stafford, looking on.

CORA LIJEK
You said ‘a day to learn your covers then straight to the airport.’ You said that.

BOB ANDERS
They suspect something?

(CONTINUED)
MENDEZ
What I know is we need to act like
a movie crew. We go to the bazaar
today, we fly out tomorrow.

Silent assent among the group. Then Joe Stafford,
sitting with his wife, speaks up --

JOE STAFFORD
We won’t do it.

MARK LIJEK
He told them there were six of us.
They’re expecting six.

JOE STAFFORD
(to Mendez)
You are about to show the only
card we’re holding. Which is that
they don’t know we’re here.

MENDEZ
I’m asking you to trust me.

JOE STAFFORD
I don’t trust you.

BOB ANDERS
(fed up, to Joe)
What’s the alternative? This is
the ball game, Joe. What world
are you living in?

JOE STAFFORD
The one where they’re hanging
people from construction cranes,
Bob.

Joe takes Kathy’s hand and goes, leaving Mendez with the
others. After a moment --

MARK LIJEK
(to Mendez)
So we’ll see you at two?

INT. CARPET FACTORY - MORNING

A KOMITEH BOSS inspects the work of the CARPET WEAVER
KIDS -- whose numbers have grown into the HUNDREDS -- as
they labor quietly.

Some HEADSHOTS are in various stages of repair.

(CONTINUED)
Dozens of documents are now complete, sitting on the floor in rows. Some pages from the EMBASSY MUG BOOK are now re-assembled. The boss picks one of the pages up: meticulously worked so that text and photos are now intact.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - DAY

PAT TAYLOR

This one.

She gives Bob Anders a Canadian maple leaf lapel pin, which he affixes to his shirt. Cora Lijek paints lighter hair dye onto her hair. The Houseguests are making subtle efforts to disguise themselves.

CORA LIJEK

(at a mirror, quoting instructions)

So don’t be recognizable, but look exactly like your passport picture.

MARK LIJEK

Not that picture. You won’t want to scare them.

A nervous smile. Trying to deal with anxiety.

Joe and Kathy Stafford look to each other. Sitting reading newspapers while the other Houseguests prep for the scout. The PHONE starts ringing.

PAT TAYLOR

(answering the phone)

Hello?

A cloud comes over Pat as she listens.

PAT TAYLOR

No, there’s no one like that here.

She hangs up the phone fast, as if it were hot to the touch.

BOB ANDERS

*Who was it?

Pat shakes her head.

ON JOE STAFFORD

listening. Kathy takes his hand.

(CONTINUED)
KATHY STAFFORD
(to Joe)
Somebody knows.

INT. SHERATON ROOM - DAY
Tony getting dressed. Thinking.
He gets up and leaves, and we start to hear the sound of
a man talking fast in Farsi.

EXT. CAR RENTAL - DAY
It’s a CAR RENTAL MAN, 60s, speaking. Tony is looking at
a MINIVAN on a lot of beaten-up rental cars.

MENDEZ
This one, how much? One day, how
much?

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - DAY
Four of the Houseguests are waiting on the couch, dressed
in their best approximation of the clothes of a movie
scout crew. Cora has the maple leaf flag pin on her
shirt.

They turn when they see Tony come in the door.

Tony as he steps down into the living room, down the hall --

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - DAY
... to find Joe Stafford sitting at the table. They are
badly shaken.

MENDEZ
I promise you that if you will
play along today, I will get you
out tomorrow.

JOE STAFFORD
I wish I could believe you, Mr.
Harkins.

MENDEZ
My name is Tony Mendez.

Mendez goes back out to the minivan. STAY WITH Joe and
Kathy.
Mendez, in the driver’s seat, looks at the house, then at his watch. He starts up the van, filled with four of the Houseguests.

Then he looks in the rearview and sees one of the back doors open. Joe and Kathy Stafford board.

Tony drives the minivan through streets of Tehran. The Houseguests sit in silence, looking out the windows. There is a vehement DEMONSTRATION going on -- stars-and-stripes burning in Molavi Square -- and it’s taking place right in their way.

They stop at the demonstration, then realize people aren’t passing by as much as celebrating in the street. Tony is forced to nose his way through the crowd -- chanting and yelling -- some SLAPPING THE WINDOWS.

They finally get through and pull away. With the demonstration receding behind them, Tony tries to regain their focus.

MENDEZ
Tell me who you are.

This recalls attention from the windows.

LEE SCHATZ
Mike McEwan, cameraman.

BOB ANDERS
Robert Baker, director.

MARK LIJEK
Timothy Harris, location manager.

CORA LIJEK
Mary Ann Boyd, screenwriter.

KATHY STAFFORD
Rachel Dewart, production designer.

Kathy looks at her husband.

JOE STAFFORD
Sean Bissett, associate producer.

MENDEZ
Let’s make a movie.
The minivan double-parks on Musavi Street. Taxis, men loading and unloading rolled-up carpets onto pickup trucks, chaos.

A YOUNG MAN IN SUIT WITH NO TIE waits. This is REZA, mid-20s, a low-level administrator in the Ministry of Guidance.

Mendez gets out and they speak and shake hands. The image FREEZES. In a BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH.

They exchange pleasantries and Reza leads them down a narrow street toward the bazaar.

Reza is leading Mendez and the group of Houseguests through the Tehran Bazaar. A word about the place: the world’s largest bazaar. 10 kilometers of narrow alleys. Chinese-made Swiss watches, banks, mosques, butchers, fabric stores, gold stands. Boys with hand-trucks loaded down with piles of fabric cut through the crowd. Older Islamic architecture elbows up against neon signs and rickety wooden stands with second-story balconies like Bourbon Street.

Bob Anders walks toward the front.

REZA
You are the director?

BOB ANDERS
Yes.

REZA
(pleasant)
Is this film a foreign bride film?

BOB ANDERS
I’m sorry?

REZA
A film where a foreign bride is brought to Iran, but she doesn’t understand the language and customs and there are misunderstandings and laughs.

BOB ANDERS
No.

(CONTINUED)
REZA
(not happy with that)

Mmm.

Mendez walking toward the back of the group. Lee, the cameraman, is looking through a viewfinder down the alley of the bazaar.

MENDEZ
(quiet)
Mike?

LEE SCHATZ
(not looking up)
Yeh.

MENDEZ
If I said you were looking through the wrong end of that viewfinder, would I be right?

Lee turns the viewfinder around and looks through it again.

LEE SCHATZ
Yep.

ANGLE

Mendez talking to Lee from a distance. A zoom, a closer snapshot of LEE. Then of CORA LIJEK, who walks through the bazaar with an open ARGO SCRIPT in her hand.

The Revolutionary Guard photographer is taking pictures of each of the Houseguests, picking their portraits off one by one like a sniper.

EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE (TEHRAN) - DAY

Two sedans turn onto the property and head up the driveway.

Ali Khalkali, the revolutionary official, gets out of one of the cars. He’s joined by a couple other OFFICIALS and by two armed REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS.

Sahar is moving through the garden, she sees the men approach. She goes to greet them at the gate.

SAHAR
(Farsi, from behind the gate)
Yes?
Reza leads Mendez and the Houseguests deeper into this city within a city; fundamentalist ground zero. BAZAARIS stand at their shop doors; puzzled; unfriendly; watching the visitors.

Kathy Stafford, the production designer on the scout, takes a Polaroid of a window adorned in gold. The SHOPKEEPER, a 70-ish bazaari, sees her do so.

He hurries out of his store, speaking in rapid-fire Farsi at her. The Houseguests stop. Reza speaks to the Shopkeeper.

REZA
   (to Kathy)
   He wants the photograph you took.

MENDEZ
   She’s the production designer.  
   Her job is to take photographs.

SHOPKEEPER getting more and more heated in Farsi.

REZA
   He says he did not give you 
   permission to take a photograph of 
   his store.

Other BAZAARIS and SHOPPERS are starting to gather. Kathy holds out the Polaroid toward the Shopkeeper.

KATHY STAFFORD
   He can have the photograph.  Tell him --

The Shopkeeper knocks the Polaroid out of her hand.

KHALKALI
   (Farsi) 
   When did they arrive? *

SAHAR
   (Farsi) 
   I’m sorry?
INT. TEHRAN BAZAAR - DAY

People are now starting to surround Mendez and Reza and the Houseguests. Bazaaris more and more heated. Women in chadors are screaming and finger-pointing.

ANGRY MAN
(in English)
America NO!... NO!

Then he speaks in Farsi and makes shooting gestures with his hand.

LEE SCHATZ
(quiet, to Mendez)
He's saying the Shah killed his son with an American gun.

Cauldron heating up and --

INT./EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - ENTRANCE - DAY

ON Sahar -- her face impassive -- and then --

SAHAR
(Farsi)
Two days. They arrived two days ago.

Khalkali looks to the other Officials.

INT. TEHRAN BAZAAR - ANGLE ON MORE AND MORE BAZAARIS - DAY

A CROWD starts to gather around the group.

ON KATHY

Her claustrophobia as the crowd closes in -- an ANGRY BAZAARI WOMAN sticks her finger in Kathy’s face --

CORA LIJEK
(to one of the women)
Canada... Ca-na-da...

(CONTINUED)
She’s showing a Canadian flag, Bob Anders’ lapel button --

LEE SCHATZ
(quiet; to Mendez)
He says we’re the CIA taking photographs to plan the bombing of the city.

INT./EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE – ENTRANCE – 217
DAY

Khalkali eyes Sahar, gauging her. She hides her fear well.

KHALKALI
(Farsi)
Sister, those who are with him, Rasool of Allah, we are tender among ourselves.
(beat)
But stern against the kuffar.

SAHAR
As god wills it.

KHALKALI
(quoting Mossadegh)
But those who sit silently have sinned.

Does he know? Does he not know? Is he trying to trick her? His opacity makes it impossible to know. He holds his look to her -- and she holds hers.

INT. TEHRAN BAZAAR – DAY 218

Reza indicates an exit to the street.

INT./EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE – ENTRANCE – 219
DAY

-- and Sahar, so dignified and stony she is almost shaming these men --

SAHAR
Everyone in this house is a friend of Iran.

Khalkali makes his decision. He wordlessly turns to go.
INT. TEHRAN BAZAAR - DAY

The CROWD heckles the Houseguests as they walk toward the exit.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - FOYER - DAY

Sahar calmly closes the door.

After she does, she lets the facade go. All of a sudden scared. Maybe she tears up. Either way, it’s clear she knows the stakes of the game she is playing.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - AFTERNOON

The aftermath. The Houseguests, badly shaken, come inside. Each dealing with shock and adrenaline.

Ken Taylor comes up next to Mendez and, for once, Taylor’s ambassadorial calm is breaking.

TAYLOR
They drew you out there to take your picture.

MENDEZ
Nobody broke.

At the door to the residence, Tony can see Pat Taylor, holding Sahar’s hand, both looking spooked as the Houseguests come inside.

TAYLOR
(sobered now)
And tomorrow?

A beat on Mendez, who stamps out his cigarette and follows.

MENDEZ
Tomorrow they’ll be ready.

We start to hear the sound of the evening’s call to prayer, amplified over a megaphone, in the distance. Then --
224A MONTAGE - EXT. TEHRAN - DUSK

The call to prayer echoing as night falls in Tehran. In an alley where cloaked women hurry past posters of Khomeini. On a street where a five-year-old boy, in the care of his eight-year-old brother, watches a pickup truck of armed komiteh speed past.

224B INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Mendez holds a passport and some papers in front of Bob Anders’ face. It feels late. The Houseguests are tired, sweating, sitting around a dining room. Mendez, sleeves rolled up, drilling them. The ARGO STORYBOARDS are scattered around the room.

MENDEZ
Where was your passport issued?

Bob Anders doesn’t know. ANGLES ON the Houseguests.

ANDERS
Vancouver.

MENDEZ
Where were you born?

BOB ANDERS
Toronto.

MENDEZ
Toronno like piranha. Canadians don’t pronounce the T.

LEE SCHATZ
Some border guard’s gonna know that?

MENDEZ
If you’re held for questioning, they’ll bring in somebody who knows that.

MENDEZ
(to Cora Lijek)
Last three Canadian prime ministers.

CORAL .LIJEK
(an A student)
Trudeau, Pearson, Diefenbaker.

(continues)
MENDEZ
Good.
(to Joe Stafford)
Your job on the film.

JOE STAFFORD
Producer.

MENDEZ
Associate Producer. What’s the name of the last film you worked on?

JOE STAFFORD
Uh... *High and Dry*.

MENDEZ
Who paid for the movie?

JOE STAFFORD
C.F.D.C.

MENDEZ
What’s your middle name?

Joe Stafford is silent. He looks down to consult the paper in front of him, but before he can, Mendez pulls the paper.

MENDEZ
He’s an American spy. Shoot him.

A beat on Stafford, frustrated --

MENDEZ
They’ll try to break you by getting you agitated. You need to know your résumé so well that you don’t flinch.

JOE STAFFORD
(nearly defeated, looking away)
You think your little story will matter when there’s guns to our heads?

MENDEZ
My story’s the only thing between you and the gun to your head.

A beat. Mendez puts the résumé back in front of Stafford. Kathy looks at her husband: he just isn’t good at this.

(CONTINUED)
Let’s go again.

O’Donnell, walking toward his office. It’s the first time today Malinov has seen him.

MALINOV
(good news)
They made it through the location scout.

O’Donnell ignores him. He goes straight to his office. Looking like he’s seen a ghost.

Mendez, finishing a cigarette outside. We might hear the distant sound of a phone ringing.

Ken Taylor emerges. Waits a beat.

TAYLOR
Kevin.

Mendez picks up the complicated-looking satellite phone in Ken Taylor’s home office. As soon as he does --

O’DONNELL
Go to black on green.

Jack’s calling him here, so he knows something’s wrong.

MENDEZ
What is it?

O’DONNELL
Go to black on green.

Mendez turns knobs on the satellite phone.

We see Jack is on a GREEN PHONE.

(CONTINUED)
O’DONNELL

It all just changed. They called the game. You’ve got to come back.

ON Mendez, not believing what he’s hearing.

O’DONNELL

(quiet, fast, clear)
Joint Chiefs are planning a military rescue of the hostages in a month. Delta Force started training to storm the grounds. So if the six of them get brought down there, they won’t be held for long.

MENDEZ

I never would have exposed them if I wasn’t authorized to take them out.

O’DONNELL

It’s over, Tony.

MENDEZ

They will be taken. Probably not ALIVE --

O’DONNELL

LISTEN TO ME. The thinking’s changed. Six Americans get pulled out of a Canadian diplomat’s house and executed, it’s another world outrage. Six Americans get caught playing movie make-believe with the CIA at the airport and executed, it’s a national embarrassment. They’re calling the operation.

MENDEZ

We’re responsible for those people.

O’DONNELL

(genuinely sad)
What we are is required to follow orders. I’m sorry.

Mendez hangs up. O’Donnell sits listening to the dial tone for a moment, then puts the phone on the receiver.

(CONTINUED)
Then, very suddenly, he looks at an old coffee cup near him and backhands it off his desk.

**TIME CUT TO:**

**INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - KEN TAYLOR’S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Maybe only a minute, maybe ten or more have passed. Mendez sits at Taylor’s desk, numb. Cora Lijek knocks but doesn’t get a response. She tentatively opens the door and sticks her head inside.

*CORA LIJEK*
We’re ready to try again.

*MENDEZ*  
(after a beat)*  
I think the most important thing you can do to be ready for tomorrow is rest.

**TIME CUT TO:**

**INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Now the mood among the Houseguests is lighter. Bob Anders, a handful of liquor bottles in his arms, puts them down on a table. Music plays on a record player.

*BOb ANDERS*  
Scorched earth policy tonight. Nothing gets left.

Taylor comes in, drink in hand, thoughts heavy, looks at Tony.

*MENDEZ*  
So you know.

*TAYLOR*  
(nods)*  
ExtAff wants you to burn the passports before you leave.

Mendez looks at the Houseguests, setting the table.

*TAYLOR*  
If we tell them, they’ll panic. It’s better if you just don’t show.  
(a beat)  
(MORE)
It was always a fucked mission.
You came closer than anybody else.

Kathy and Cora are cracking each other up.

No one sees Mendez take a bottle of Macallan from the table and put it in his bag.

INT. CAR - NIGHT
Mendez drives through nighttime Tehran, back to the hotel.

There is a dangling TOTEM from the rearview mirror. It reflects light.

He passes a VAN ON FIRE.

INT. SHERATON ROOM - NIGHT
Mendez takes the bottle of Macallan from his bag. He takes a drink, then drinks more.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY
Chambers, listening on a phone, shakes his head at Siegel. He hangs up.

CHAMBERS
It’s off. They want us to pack up the office.

A beat on Lester. He’s devastated but he’s not showing it.

SIEGEL
They can wait. Let’s go get a drink.

EXT. TEHRAN - DAWN
The city waking up.
INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - DAWN

The Houseguests, getting dressed. Suiting up for the airport.

Ken Taylor watches in the hall.

INT. SHERATON ROOM - DAWN

Mendez -- who looks like he hasn’t slept -- sits at a table, looking out the window.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - DAWN

Lee Schatz puts his Infant of Prague holy card into an Argo script. Packs the script.

Cora Lijek is sitting next to her husband.

Kathy Stafford looks at the clock.

KATHY STAFFORD
(to Joe Stafford)
He’s late.

EXT. SHERATON BALCONY - DAWN

Tony comes out to the balcony with a hotel ice bucket in one hand and the Canadian passports in the other. He puts the passports in the bucket, LIGHTS A MATCH.

He looks down at the match, at the passports. The first stirring of the morning calls-to-prayer echo in the distance.

HOLD for a long beat ON Tony. Thinking.

Then, HE BLOWS OUT THE MATCH.

INT. O’DONNELL’S OFFICE - NIGHT

O’Donnell is packing up for the night. Paper towels sit on top of the coffee spill on his rug.

His phone rings. He picks up.

O’DONNELL
Yeah.
MENDEZ
Somebody is responsible for things when things happen, Jack. I am responsible.
(a beat)
I’m taking them through.

And before Jack can answer, Tony hangs up. Stands. A duffel bag over his shoulder, Tony turns out the light in the hotel room. Goes.

O’Donnell, thinking. Looking at the phone. Then, with a sudden decision, he gets up.

Rushing out of his office, into --

-- where he catches ALAN SOSA, 50s, head of the Directorate of Support -- the CIA’s chief financial officer -- leaving for the night.

O’DONNELL
We need to confirm those seven tickets out of Tehran on Swissair --

SOSA
N.E. shut that down.

O’DONNELL
I’m saying it’s back on!

SOSA
I can’t do it. It’s backstopped pending Executive Branch GO.

O’DONNELL
What the fuck does that mean?

SOSA
Carter’s got to say yes for us to get the tickets.
She’s shocked to see him. Ken Taylor now appears behind Pat. In the hall behind him: The Houseguests are assembled, waiting to go. They look their parts — or, much more so than they did on the scout. Cora Lijek has darker hair. The Staffords look on, fully dressed.

INT. OUTSIDE ENGELL’S OFFICE - NIGHT

O’DONNELL
Where’s Engell?

SECRETARY
He’s in a meeting.

O’DONNELL
Pull him out.
(as she hesitates)
PULL HIM OUT!

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - DAWN

Pat Taylor is embracing the Houseguests, saying goodbye.

PAT TAYLOR
Sahar’s on a bus.

MENDEZ
Good. And you two leave right now.

Ken Taylor nods. Mendez shakes his hand.

INT./EXT. MINIVAN - DAWN

Mendez gets into the driver’s seat. Lee Schatz on the passenger side.

We see Ken’s black embassy sedan waiting, driven by a PAKISTANI DRIVER.

Mendez pulls away.

INT. KEN’S OFFICE - LATER

Ken Taylor watches a SGT. CLAUDE GAUTHIER, 30s, Canadian military policeman, use a sledgehammer to SMASH EVERYTHING IN THE OFFICE TO PIECES.

Pat Taylor comes to the door. She’s holding a suitcase.

(CONTINUED)
TAYLOR
(to Gauthier, as he leaves)
Get to your flight.

TAYLOR
(to Gauthier, as he leaves)
Get to your flight.

INT. OUTSIDE ENGELL’S OFFICE - NIGHT

ENGELL
N.E. said NO, this is not a long-leasher...

ENGELL
... and it never has been, YOU don’t decide if it goes...

O’DONNELL
... watching a show behind a one-way whorehouse mirror...

O’DONNELL
It is going.

ENGELL
You’re goddamn close...

O’DONNELL
Am I goddamn close?

ENGELL
You’re goddamn close to the line with me.

O’DONNELL
(interrupting)
I’m not leaving him at the airport with six people and his dick in his hand. Tell the Director to call the White House. DO YOUR FUCKING JOB.

Engell just stares O’Donnell down.

INT./EXT. MINIVAN - MORNING

The van speeds down the hills of the Shemiran district.

MENDEZ (V.O.)
The first checkpoint is just to look at your passport.

FLASHBACK - INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Mendez is sitting in the living room instructing the Houseguests.

(CONTINUED)
MENDEZ
Your passports came straight from the Canadians, so you’re gonna be fine.

INT. CIA (LANGLEY) - THE PIT - NIGHT (A MOMENT LATER)

O’Donnell, charging in --

O’DONNELL
Where’s the Director?

MALINOV
He’s on the plane.

O’DONNELL
Find White House Chief of Staff.

MALINOV
How would I find him?

O’DONNELL
We’re a fucking SPY AGENCY! FIND HIM!

FLASHBACK - INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

MENDEZ
The second checkpoint --

INT. CIA - THE PIT - NIGHT (PRESENT)

MALINOV
Jordan’s in the West Wing. He’s not taking calls.

A beat on O’Donnell.

O’DONNELL
Where are his kids?

LAMONT
WHAT?

O’DONNELL
Where do his kids go to school?

He gives out yellow immigration forms to the Houseguests.

(CONTINUED)
MENDEZ
The second is immigration. You’ll hand them these. They say you landed two days ago.

INT. MINIVAN - MORNING (PRESENT)
Cora Lijek fingers her yellow immigration form in one hand, holds Mark’s hand with the other.

MENDEZ (V.O.)
These guys are bureaucrats left over from the shah. They can’t be bothered to second-guess you.

INT. CIA - THE PIT - NIGHT
Malinov slams a phone down.

MALINOV
Pace Academy in Buckhead, Georgia!

O’Donnell dials a number.

O’DONNELL
Yes, it’s Mr. Murphy calling from Pace Academy for Mr. Jordan... I’m afraid it IS an emergency...

INT. WHITE HOUSE OPERATOR ROOM - NIGHT

WHITE HOUSE OPERATOR
Hold just a moment.

She plugs a wire into an old-fashioned Ma Bell switchboard.

MENDEZ (V.O.)
Third checkpoint is the trap.

INT. MINIVAN - MORNING

The van pulls up to the airport. We see THRONGS of people trying to get in -- so they can get out.

Tony pulls the car to a semi-open place and tries not to run anyone over.
FLASHBACK - INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

MENDEZ

It’s manned by Revolutionaries.
Most of them were educated in the
U.S. or Europe.

BOB ANDERS

Or Canada?

MENDEZ

They know how many ‘T’s are in
Toronto.

INT. WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF OFFICE - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Jordan is in a meeting with two staffers, his feet up on
the desk. His secretary opens the door without knocking,
hurries to Jordan, whispers something in his ear. He
immediately grabs the phone.

JORDAN

Hello?

O’DONNELL (V.O.)

Jack O’Donnell from C.I.

JORDAN

Wait -- WHO -- ?

O’DONNELL (V.O.)

Tehran Houseguest operation is ready NOW. We don’t have the
President’s go-ahead. They are going to be captured.

Jordan stands up with the phone.

JORDAN

(yelling out his
door)
DAVID! Pick up!

INT. KOMITEH HQ - MORNING

The office we visited earlier. A YOUNG KOMITEH comes up
the stairs again. This time, he’s RUNNING.

(CONTINUED)
KHALKALI, the fiery guy who came to the residence, along with two YOUNG KOMITEH compare (one who delivered the pictures): on one side, copies of re-assembled diplomatic photographs of Americans from the embassy -- like the ones of the Houseguests we saw early in the film -- and, on the other side, the candid photographs from the bazaar.

INT. CIA - THE PIT - NIGHT

LAMONT
Telex on Flash.

The telex begins to print, line by line...


O’DONNELL
Copy D.S.! Confirm the tickets! GO!

INT. SWISSAIR COUNTER (MEHRABAD) - MORNING

Mendez’s and the Houseguests’ passports sit on the counter.

SWISSAIR REP
I’m sorry, sir. I don’t have those reservations...

SWISSAIR REP looks at some green text on her screen, hits another button.

SWISSAIR REP
My apologies. They just came through.

She hits another button and tickets start to print.

INT. CIA - THE PIT - NIGHT

MALINOV
(to O’Donnell)
Swissair says they’ve picked up the tickets.

O’DONNELL
Get the L.A. office -- tell them to be ready in case they call.

(CONTINUED)
MALINOV

We told them to shut that **down**!

He RUNS toward a phone --

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - FIRST CHECKPOINT - MORNING

The PASSPORT OFFICIAL is looking at the Canadian passports of the six and waving them through. Mendez has already passed. Everyone except Kathy Stafford.

The Passport Official looks at Kathy, who is doing her best to look friendly and casual. Then he looks at Kathy’s passport, in which she looks stern and angry.

Kathy Stafford smoothes down her hair, frowns like she * does in the passport photo. The Passport Official half smiles and waves her through. They’ve all cleared the first checkpoint.

INT. KOMITEH HQ - MORNING

Khalkali comes upon a diplomatic photograph of a man with glasses.

He starts to leaf through the photographs from the bazaar.

QUICK CUT TO:

EXT. BAZAAR - POV OF THE REVOLUTIONARY GUARD PHOTOGRAPHER

Mark Lijek being photographed at the bazaar the previous day.

QUICK CUT BACK TO:

INT. KOMITEH HQ - MORNING

KHALKALI --

looks at the black and white still of Mark Lijek, compares it to his diplomatic picture, the first portrait we saw of Mark toward the beginning of the film. MATCH.

Khalkali stands up. SHOUTS in Farsi to another Komiteh --
Bob Anders stands in front of a rough-voiced IMMIGRATION OFFICER. He’s holding Bob Anders’ YELLOW IMMIGRATION FORM and leafing through a file of hundreds of WHITE IMMIGRATION FORMS, the duplicates. Without success.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER #2
(in Farsi; to Officer #1, re: his own white pile)
Nothing.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
(to Bob Anders)
When did you say you arrived in Iran?

BOB ANDERS
Two days ago.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
What was the purpose of your visit?

BOB ANDERS
We were looking at locations to make a film. I’m the director.

Immigration Officer pauses and looks up. Looks at the six other faces. He looks every bit as confrontational as Tony acted in rehearsal.

BOB ANDERS
(very calm)
We have a letter from the Minister of Culture ... *

The Immigration Officer gestures for the letter. Bob takes the letter inviting them on their location scout out of a folder. Tony, barely perceptibly, nods.

Khalkali is now speaking with MORADI, an older Komiteh official. They speak Farsi and it’s untranslated, but we get it. He is showing the photograph of Mark Lijek from the bazaar and comparing it to the U.S. diplomatic photograph.

Moradi picks up the phone as Khalkali heads out.
Immigration Officer is conferring with Immigration Officer #2 as they look at the letter from the Minister of Culture. The Houseguests and Mendez wait.

Finally, Immigration Officer #2 shrugs.

**IMMIGRATION OFFICER**

Okay -- Yes -- Okay --

He waves them through. Second checkpoint done.

Malinov, a phone to his ear. Ringing.

**MALINOV**

C’mon c’mon c’mon --

The phone in the office rings. No one is there.

Siegel and Chambers are walking back to the *Argo* office.

They are within sight of the *Argo* bungalow, but a P.A. * steps in front of them.

**P.A.**

(a stage whisper)

I’m sorry, we’re shooting.

He motions for them to wait. A movie -- it looks like a police procedural -- is shooting on the lot between them and the office.

**ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)**

Swissair announces general boarding for Flight 363 to Zurich.

Passengers, mostly European businessmen, get up and approach the gate.
Mendez checks in with the Houseguests with his eyes. They are now in sight of the airport gates. And here are six Komiteh. Young men -- none more than 33 or so -- holding automatic weapons.

They have created their own checkpoint. It looks recent, a SCREENED-OFF AREA WITH TABLES.

KOMITEH #1

Passports.

He looks at the Canadian passports and then almost immediately speaks.

KOMITEH #1

You come.

He directs Mendez and the Houseguests into the screened-off area. Speaks in Farsi to another Komiteh.

INT. CIA - THE PIT - NIGHT

LAMONT

(holding the phone)
Purser’s telling Swissair they’re not on the plane.

O’DONNELL

They should have boarded already.

MALINOV

(on another phone)
Still no answer in L.A.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - THIRD CHECKPOINT - MORNING

MARK LIJEK

A film.

Mark mimes turning the rotor of a movie camera. Komiteh #1 doesn’t understand.

AZIZI (O.S.)

Sit down.

A young man with a beard -- AZIZI, late 20s -- arriving on the scene, speaking in Farsi to the others and then in very good American English. He looks at the six and the face he singles out is Joe Stafford’s.

(CONTINUED)
AZIZI
(harsh, icy; in Farsi)
You. You had no business in Iran.

He motions for JOE STAFFORD to step forward. Mendez shifts. A tense moment.

JOE STAFFORD
(Farsi)
We did. We were preparing to make a movie here, sir.

AZIZI
(Farsi)
You don’t have journalist visas.

JOE STAFFORD
(Farsi)
Not a documentary. A movie.

Joe Stafford reaches into his pocket and gives Azizi a copy of the *Argo Variety* ad.

JOE STAFFORD
(Farsi)
You see?
(to Mendez; English)
Kevin, where’s your briefcase?

A beat on Mendez. Who then opens his accordion folder and takes from it the *Argo Storyboards*. Joe Stafford spreads them out on the table.

Three other Komiteh in the room lean forward, their automatic weapons at their sides, and look at the *Storyboard Drawings*. The Persian Empire futurism of Jack Kirby’s drawings.

JOE STAFFORD
(Farsi)
These are the villains. Y’see these guys here? And these are the heroes... in the spice market...

Joe Stafford points at the various drawings. He speaks with an ease and confidence that we didn’t know he had.

JOE STAFFORD
(Farsi)
They know our hero is the Chosen One, so they kidnap his son in the spice market... They have these chariots... like this one...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
they go like this... whooosh,
hmm? They can fly... The people
are just farmers, but they rise up
and find their courage and defeat
the alien king--

Mendez watches. It’s a performance. The three young
Komiteh are now wide-eyed, pointing, whispering in Farsi,
like teenagers around a comic book.

Azizi says something to another Komiteh in the room.
Then --

AZIZI
(to Joe Stafford; in English)
You don’t go until we verify.

MENDEZ
You can call our office.

Mendez hands Azizi his card. STUDIO SIX FILMS. Kevin
Harkins. A 213 (818 wasn’t around yet) phone number.

ANGLES ON THE HOUSEGUESTS

as Azizi leaves the room with the business card and three
young Komiteh barely look up from the drawings --

EXT. WARNER BROS. STUDIOS - NIGHT

P.A., still holding Chambers and Siegel. The ACTOR
playing the cop is conferring with the director. He’s
not happy with something. They’re holding everyone until
the next take, and --

P.A.
Going again please! We’re
rolling --

EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - MORNING

A PICKUP TRUCK with 5 Komiteh -- including Khalkali --
automatic weapons out -- drives up to the Canadian
Ambassador’s residence.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - KOMITEH STATION - MORNING

Azizi, who apparently has some authority here, enters,
telling another Komiteh in Farsi to get off the phone.

(CONTINUED)
Azizi looks at the Studio Six business card and picks up the receiver.

EXT. WARNER BROS. STUDIOS - NIGHT

SIEGEL
I’m sorry, pally. We’re just gonna be in the movie. Call my agent.

P.A.
Sir. SIR!

Siegel and Chambers walk through the shot toward the Argo office.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - KOMITEH STATION - MORNING

Azizi dials the long international number. And it is a DIAL, so this takes a long time.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - THIRD CHECKPOINT - MORNING

One of the young Komiteh is loudly debating with another Komiteh the air-worthiness of a futuristic desert glider in the storyboards. He’s miming the thing crashing.

Joe Stafford and the Houseguests are silent. Mendez can see the line of passengers on their Swissair flight dwindling.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - KOMITEH STATION - MORNING

Azizi rings the phone three times -- four times -- he’s going to hang up --

CHAMBERS (V.O.)
(out of breath)
Studio Six Films.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - NIGHT

A beat of silence. Chambers catching his breath, listening. The door to the office wide open.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - KOMITEH STATION - MORNING

AZIZI
May I speak to Mr. Kevin Harkins --

(CONTINUED)
CHAMBERS (V.O.)
He’s out of the country on a location scout. Can I take a message?

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - NIGHT
Chambers listens for a response. Siegel now catches up.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - KOMITEH STATION - MORNING
AZIZI
No message.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - MORNING
ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)
Swissair announces final boarding of Flight 363 to Zurich. All passengers should be at the gate at this time.

EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE - MORNING
Khalkali and Komiteh are forcing the front door of the house open.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - THIRD CHECKPOINT - MORNING
Azizi comes back into the screened-off area. Looks at Joe Stafford, then at Mendez. Then says something in Farsi to the three Komiteh in the holding area. Then he leaves.

The three young Komiteh look at the drawings, then at Joe Stafford. Silence for a moment.

MENDEZ
(pushes the storyboards toward them)
Our gift to you. From our film.

Komiteh #1, who speaks enough English to understand, translates to the others. They forget their revolutionary mission for a second, happy with their gift. They’d high-five if they could. They’re kids.

Komiteh #1 motions for the Houseguests to go.
Khalkali and a dozen Komiteh, guns drawn, rush into the residence. Empty liquor bottles. The remains of what looks like breakfast for a group of people.

But the place is empty.

A BUSLOAD of passengers about to be ferried to the airplane.

A Swissair Rep is closing the gate to Flight 363. She looks up to see the Houseguests and Mendez hurrying through the terminal, headed toward her. She holds the gate, speaks in German into a walkie, and --

The Komiteh search the house. Khalkali gets on the phone.

OMITTED

Kathy Stafford’s ticket is taken and she walks through the door. Hurries toward the transport bus. The other five Houseguests and Mendez behind her and --

A phone rings and a Young Komiteh picks up the call. He listens for a moment. Then he drops the phone and RUNS into the airport terminal and --

The Houseguests sit aboard the bus, headed to a waiting DC-10.

The DRIVER puts the bus into gear. It doesn’t go. He shakes his head. This goddamn thing. Shifts gears again. Now it goes.
INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - MORNING

Young Komiteh RUNNING through the terminal, pushing through a crowd, making a woman drop her suitcase, contents scattering. An automatic weapon at his side.

EXT. SWISSAIR DC-10 - MORNING

The Houseguests head up the stairs to the plane.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - FLIGHT GATE - MORNING

Azizi and the three Komiteh from the third checkpoint stand up from the table with the Argo storyboards. Young Komiteh shouts at them and they take up their weapons and join him, running --

Azizi and the three Komiteh arrive at Flight 363’s gate. The door is CLOSED.

INT. SWISSAIR DC-10 - MORNING

The Houseguests put their carry-on luggage into the overhead bins. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT is already holding a detached seatbelt preparing to do her safety mime.

PILOT (V.O.)

(German-accented English)

Ladies and gentlemen, from the flight-deck. We’re looking at a brief delay -- *

Passengers groan a bit as they read paperbacks or International Herald Tribunes. Mark Lijek’s arm is around Cora. Lee Schatz is moving his mouth in what looks like a prayer. Kathy Stafford’s fingers shake as she holds an arm rest. Joe Stafford tries to stay her hand.

Mendez is sitting looking out the window toward the terminal.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - FLIGHT GATE - MORNING

Azizi yells to the Swissair Rep, dragging her back toward the gate. We can’t hear what she says back, but she’s shaking her head.
From the window, we can see a GROUND CREWMAN give a thumbs-up. The scrubbed Swiss PILOT, 50s, gives a thumbs-up back.

He gently releases the throttle lever.

Mendez and the Houseguests feel the plane start to move.

Azizi goes to the WINDOW. He can see the Swissair plane slowly backing onto the runway.

He picks up a walkie and pushes through the flight gate door, setting off an alarm, followed by the three other Komiteh.

He reaches the METAL BARS outside and can’t get past.

He CALLS INTO THE WALKIE.

An Iranian FLIGHT TRAFFIC CONTROLLER calmly speaks into his radio in British-accented English.

FLIGHT TRAFFIC CONTROLLER
SwissAir 363, you are Number 2 for departure.

Out the window of the plane. Two IRANIAN POLICE CARS and a CANVAS-TOPPED TRUCK are headed down the runway toward the plane.

looking out from his window seat.

An IRAN AIRLINES 747 takes off, revealing the Swissair jet behind it. Only empty runway ahead of Swissair 363 now and --
INT. MEHRABAD FLIGHT TOWER - MORNING 308

ANGLE ON BOOTS
taking stairs two at a time.
Three KOMITEH WITH AUTOMATICS rush up the tower stairs --

EXT. AIRPORT RUNWAY - MORNING 309

We’re SPEEDING BEHIND two Iranian police cars and a canvas-topped TRUCK as they speed toward the Swissair plane. In the back of the truck we can see half a dozen Komiteh, weapons drawn and --

INT. SWISSAIR DC-10 - COCKPIT - MORNING 310

FLIGHT TRAFFIC CONTROLLER (V.O.)
Swissair 363 --
The Pilot puts his hand on the throttle control.

INT. MEHRABAD FLIGHT TOWER - MORNING 311

FLIGHT TRAFFIC CONTROLLER
-- you are cleared for take-off.
The Flight Traffic Controller moves his head-set mic away from his mouth to take a drink of very strong Iranian tea, and -- the door to the Control Room BURSTS OPEN. Three Komiteh with automatics, shouting instructions to the Traffic Controller, who spills his tea --

INT. SWISSAIR DC-10 - MORNING 312

Mendez looking out the window --

EXT. AIRPORT RUNWAY - MORNING 313

ANGLE ON THE THREE IRANIAN VEHICLES
speeding ahead -- they’re GAINING ON us --

INT. COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS ACTION 313A

The CO-PILOT looks out the window. Sees they are being pursued by militia and police. He looks to the Pilot.

(CONTINUED)
A beat. The Pilot reaches down and pushes all four engines to go FULL THROTTLE.

EXT. AIRPORT RUNWAY - CONTINUOUS ACTION

ANGLE ON THE JEEPS

We start to PULL AWAY FROM them -- leaving them behind -- beginning to RISE UP --

INT. MEHRABAD FLIGHT TOWER - MORNING

The Flight Controller has his arms up... THROUGH the floor-to-ceiling windows of the tower, as three Komiteh watch a Swissair DC-10 angle upward and leave the ground...

EXT. AIRPORT RUNWAY - MORNING

The Komiteh from the Jeep are now standing on the runway watching the plane disappear.

EXT. TEHRAN STREET NEAR AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS ACTION

We are looking at a street corner in Tehran when the PLANE CRESTS THE STOREFRONT, heading upward and away.

INT. CIA (LANGLEY) - NIGHT

O’Donnell and the Kids gathered around some phones and monitors in the Pit.

LAMONT
(taking off headphones)
We have wheels up.

He starts to punch the air. O’Donnell stays his arm.

O’DONNELL
Wait.

INT. SWISSAIR DC-10 - MORNING

The Houseguests -- holding their breath --

Mendez -- looking out the window -- scanning the air around the plane -- behind every cloud --

(CONTINUED)
FLIGHT ATTENDANT (V.O.)
Ladies and gentlemen, it is our pleasure to announce that alcoholic beverages are now available, as we have cleared Iranian airspace.

The Houseguests shout and embrace and celebrate. Bob Anders high-fives Lee Schatz, then the other Houseguests. Mark Lijek, crying, embraces Cora.

Kathy Stafford is laughing. She kisses her husband’s hand.

Some of the other passengers look up from their newspapers, annoyed at this Canadian fuss.

INT. CIA (LANGLEY) - THE PIT - NIGHT
All eyes watch Malinov, listening, headphone to one ear...

MALINOV
They’re CLEAR!

Cheers in the Pit. O’Donnell embraces Malinov.

INT./EXT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - NIGHT
Siegel throws down a phone and rushes outside... to where Chambers smokes.

SIEGEL
OUUUT! THEY’RE OUT!

Chambers and Lester scream like kids who’ve just scored the game-winning touchdown. The P.A. tries to shush them.

INT. SWISSAIR DC-10 - MORNING
A mini-champagne bottle pops. The Houseguests are celebrating: New Year’s Eve and a Super Bowl victory party in a DC-10 aisle.

FIND Mendez, sitting alone, apart from the celebration. Looking out the window. Mendez turns to see that someone is standing in the aisle next to him. Joe Stafford. Tony looks up at Joe.
I’m sorry, sir. You need to sit down.

But Joe doesn’t pay attention to the Flight Attendant. He extends his hand to Mendez. Who takes it. A moment between them.

Sir?

Joe goes back to his seat.

HOLD ON Tony Mendez.

Drinking straight from a bottle of Beefeater.

It’s history, is what it is. ‘History plays out first as farce, then as tragedy.’

The quote’s the other way around.

Who said it?

Marx.

Groucho?

Karl.

An IRAQI BORDER GUARD, checking passports at a chain-link, barbed-wire fence, speaks to a WOMAN IN HIJAB who is turned away from us. The Guard stamps the Woman’s passport.

You are admitted to the Republic of Iraq.

He closes the passport and the Woman turns around: it is SAHAR.
She stands and stares at the line of REFUGEES still waiting to cross: WOMEN balancing blankets tied up with all they own. An OLD MAN being helped by his SON. A couple of KIDS, a SEVEN YEAR-OLD shushing an INFANT in her arms. Lives that have become another tableau of refugees.

Sahar, now one of them, walks into Iraq.

INT. CIA (LANGLEY) - NIGHT

The celebration is quieter and drunker now.

LAMONT
(a couple of beers along)
We are the good guys!

ROSSI
Six down, fifty to go.

LAMONT
Call the Times, nail it to the fucking door. The CIA are the good guys.

MALINOV
The Canadians are the good guys.

LAMONT
-- we’re not greedy -- them too --

MALINOV
Only. Canada takes the credit, or they’ll retaliate against the hostages. Great Satan wasn’t involved. No CIA.

LAMONT
Is that right, Jack?

O’DONNELL
Involved in what? We’re as surprised as anybody. Thank you, Canada.

Jack raises a glass of Scotch and takes a drink.

A homemade sign that reads: “THANK YOU CANADA!”

(*Homecoming ceremony for Houseguests 2/1980.) Hundreds are gathered to welcome the six back.

(CONTINUED)
TED KOPPEL (V.O.)
Finally, a sliver of really good news.

*AMERICA HELD HOSTAGE, DAY 87, BROADCAST (1/29/80).

CUT TO:

CANADIAN MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
FLORA MacDONALD, late 60’s. (*A.H.H. 1/29/80)

FLORA MacDONALD (V.O.)
It was a simple operation, really.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT - LOBBY - DAY
The Houseguests arrive in the State Department lobby. Television lights everywhere.

TED KOPPEL (V.O.)
The six fled the country posing as Canadian diplomats. They simply walked away.

Camera flashes, wild cheers. Banners: “WELCOME HOME CORA AND MARK!” “IDAHO LOVES YOU, LEE!” “WELCOME HOME, BOB ANDERS!” It’s the first moment of national celebration since the beginning of the crisis.

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE
IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SADEQ GHOTBZADEH speaks angrily into a microphone.

SADEQ GHOTBZADEH (V.O.)
Sooner or later, here or anywhere in the world, Canada will pay for this violation of the sovereignty of Iran. (*News conference 1/29/80.)

MORE ARCHIVE FOOTAGE (*1/30/1980)
Of the State Department WELCOME HOME CEREMONY. Ambassador KEN TAYLOR is presented with a HUGE FLORAL BOUQUET. Cheering crowds all around him.

OMITTED
EXT. BY LESTER’S POOL – DAY

Siegel in a bathrobe, looking out over L.A., holding The New York Times in front of him: SIX U.S. DIPLOMATS, HIDDEN BY CANADA, LEAVE IRAN SAFELY. Next to that, an article about Ken Taylor: DIPLOMAT DIRECTED ESCAPE IN IRAN. (Front page, *NYT 1/30/80.)

SIEGEL
She said, ‘Why couldn’t we pull off something like that?’ You know what I said to her?

INT. CIA (LANGLEY) – THE PIT – DAY

Mendez stands at a desk on the main floor.

MENDEZ
Wha’d you say to her?

EXT. BY LESTER’S POOL – DAY

SIEGEL
I said, ‘Argo fuck yourself.’

INT. CIA ARCHIVES – DAY

And suddenly it’s dead-quiet. We’re in a vault inside a vault in the basement of the main building.

Mendez’s suitcase is laying on a low counter, an ARCHIVES OFFICER toe-tagging and cataloging various items. Separating Mendez’s personal things from material related to the operation.

Mendez empties his briefcase and the officer puts a sticker on the VARIETY featuring the ARGO ad. Another on the ARGO script. He’s putting things into a box that reads: USCIA CLASSIFIED MATERIAL.

Mendez opens his accordion folder -- flips through it -- it’s empty -- no. There’s something inside.

In one of the compartments is a STORYBOARD FROM ARGO.

One that the Komiteh missed. While the Archives Officer is turned around, Mendez slips the storyboard back into the accordion folder and puts it back with his personal things.
O’Donnell is on his way out, heading toward Tony who is heading in. Seeing Mendez, he stops dead.

O’DONNELL
And I left my autograph book at home. His Eminence called me. He wants to see you.

MENDEZ
He wants to fire me himself.

O’DONNELL
He wants to give you the Intelligence Star. You’re getting the highest award of merit of the Clandestine Services of these United States. Ceremony’s two weeks from today.

Mendez stops walking. A beat.

MENDEZ
If they push it a week, I can bring Ian. That’s his winter break.

O’DONNELL
The op was classified so the ceremony’s classified. He can’t know about it. Nobody can know about it.

MENDEZ
They’re gonna hand me an award, then they’re gonna take it back?

O’DONNELL
If we wanted applause, we would have joined the circus.

MENDEZ
I thought we did.

O’Donnell claps Tony on the shoulder. Tony walks towards the entrance and Jack heads to his car.

O’DONNELL
(yelling to Tony; an afterthought)
Carter said you were a great American.

(CONTINUED)
MENDEZ
(yelling back)
A great American what?

O’DONNELL
He didn’t say.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - ANGLE ON A POSTER - DAY
on the wall. ARGO: A COSMIC CONFLAGRATION.
A hand takes the poster down.

ANOTHER ANGLE
Chambers is disassembling the office. Boxes packed. Everything now off the walls.
A PRODUCER walks by, sees Chambers in the door.

PRODUCER
What happened to your picture?

CHAMBERS
It’s in turnaround.
He turns out the lights.

EXT. ROAD UP TO CHRISTINE’S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON
Mendez’s car heads up the road, past a mailbox. Pulls up to the house.

EXT. CHRISTINE’S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON
Mendez, a duffel bag on his shoulder, knocks on the door. He waits. After a moment, Christine opens the door.

MENDEZ
Hi.

CHRISTINE
Hi.
They look at each other.
Before she can speak, he’s embraced her. Holds tight.*
It’s something in between romantic and fraternal. Not reconciliation, necessarily, but warmth. She reciprocates. It feels right, and good.

(CONTINUED)
WIDEN to HOLD ON them holding each other in the dark hall of the very American, even Hummel-kitschy house. HOLD there for a while.

INT. CHRISTINE’S HOUSE – IAN’S BEDROOM – ANGLE ON TV – NIGHT

A scene of the Old West on a television.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Ian is watching 1973’s sci-fi Western Westworld in the bedroom. Ian doesn’t have to describe the scene to his father this time. WIDEN to see that his head is on a pillow on Tony’s lap.

CARD #1: THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS ENDED ON JANUARY 20, 1981, WHEN THE REMAINING EMBASSY HOSTAGES WERE RELEASED AFTER 444 DAYS IN CAPTIVITY.

INT. IAN’S BEDROOM – NIGHT

We can hear the sounds of gunslinging from the movie. Glow-in-the-dark stars on the wall. A Star Wars X-Wing fighter. A couple of rubber Planet of the Apes figures that look like they’ve been chewed by a dog.


The CAMERA MOVES OVER the dresser of Ian’s toys -- settling on a motley group of action figures.

CARD #3: THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE CIA COMPLEMENTED EFFORTS OF THE CANADIAN EMBASSY IN FREEING THE SIX HELD IN TEHRAN. TO THIS DAY, THE STORY STANDS AS AN ENDURING MODEL OF COOPERATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS.

-- settling on a motley group of action figures.

CARD #4: ALL OF THE HOUSEGUESTS RETURNED TO THE U.S. FOREIGN SERVICE AFTER THEIR ORDEAL IN IRAN.

Then FIND, almost unnoticeable among Ian’s science fiction collection, a piece of cardboard behind Captain Kirk and Han Solo figures.

It’s a STORYBOARD FROM ARGO. The one missed by the Komiteh at the airport.

(CONTINUED)
CARD #5: TONY MENDEZ WAS NOT GIVEN BACK HIS INTELLIGENCE STAR UNTIL 1997, WHEN THE ARGO OPERATION WAS DECLASSIFIED BY PRESIDENT CLINTON.

LINGER ON the ARGO STORYBOARD. A MAN in a futuristic chariot sheltering a KID from what look like laser beams.

CARD #6: HE LIVES IN RURAL MARYLAND WITH HIS FAMILY.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END