

SPACE COWBOYS

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**FOR EDUCATIONAL
PURPOSES ONLY**

MANUAL MILITARY TYPEWRITER

hammers out a screen narration:

SUPERIMPOSE: OCTOBER, 1958.

The successful launch of Sputnik I has started rumors that manned space flight is a year away for the Soviet Union. The United States has assumed the titanic challenge of "Taking the high ground of space."

EXT. USAF PROVING GROUND (CALIFORNIA HIGH DESERT) - DAY

A SONIC BOOM in the crystal blue desert sky. A modified Bell Labs X-2 Ultrasonic JET -- basically a rocket with stubby wings that look more like vestigial fins -- SCREAMS upwards, an 80 degree climb into space. On its side is stylishly painted "Daedalus."

INT. X- JET - CLOSE ON ALTIMETER - THAT MOMENT

108,999 FEET... THE "999's" roll over.

The pilot's voice strains with the G-forces and thin oxygen.

 PILOT (V.O.)
 109,000. Come on, Frank, let's
 poke our nose into space.

The pilot is Major WILLIAM "HAWK" HAWKINS, 26. In the seat behind him is MAJOR FRANK CORVIN, 29. Both wear bulky pressure suits and space helmets.

 FRANK
 No. That's enough, Hawk. We're
 approaching heat barrier. Let's
 level off.
 (into his radio)
 Recover One, this is Falcon.
 Beginning descent now.

INT. AIR FORCE B- - THAT MOMENT

Twelve miles below the X-2. Barrel-chested, buzz-cutted Captain "TANK" SULLIVAN is at the controls.

 TANK
 Roger, Daedalus. Got you on the
 scope, Frank.

Tank sharpens the radar blip. As he does, we see a plastic hula girl on the instrument panel "dancing"

frenetically.

INT. X- - THAT MOMENT

The altimeter hits 110,000. Frank and Hawk are breathing harder.

HAWK

Bingo. 110,000th floor, ladies' lingerie.

The DRONE of the rocket MOTOR HESITATES -- a nanosecond at most -- then RESUMES as normal.

FRANK

You catch that, Hawk?

Hawk is in the zone, listening and feeling the airplane.

FRANK

Hawk!

EXT. DESERT GROUND BELOW -- THAT MOMENT

Captain JERRY O'NEILL sits outside a USAF truck in front of a radar screen reading a Playboy magazine. He reads the copy aloud to himself.

JERRY

Miss September, herself a promising student pilot, has a particular weakness for structural engineers with Ph.D.'s in astrophysics.

He slowly moves the Playboy away and sees a scorpion climbing his bare ankle. He rolls up the magazine tightly, holds it above the scorpion, ready to swat it. He looks at the scorpion... he looks at Miss September's smiling face and airbrushed-breast...

He can't do it, he can't sully this redheaded vision: He calmly grabs the scorpion by its stinger tail and flings it. Hawk's voice crackles over the RADIO.

HAWK (V.O.)

She's alright, she's talking to me. You trust me, don't you, Frank?

JERRY

Uh oh... here we go again.

INT. X- - THAT MOMENT

THROUGH the canopy -- the horizon -- the blue turns to

black. Hawk and Frank are touching outer space.

HAWK

Frank, look.

The full moon is rising over the curvature of the Earth.

HAWK

(calm, faraway voice)

That's where we're going. I don't know how, I don't know when...

Frank looks up from the gauges at the horizon. He is mesmerized, speechless. Hawk starts to sing. Awesome pilot, lousy singer.

HAWK

Fly me to the moon and let me play among the stars --

Frank looks out the window at the moon. The ROCKET MOTOR HESITATES AGAIN, SPUTTERS and GOES SILENT. All the gauges drop to zero. Engine failure. Frank is jolted back to reality.

FRANK

Holy God.

All we hear is the WIND buffeting the plane and the eerie sound of the plane's airframe and body skin CREAKING. Hawk works frantically to restart the engine, trying to joke through it.

HAWK

Hey, Frank, wanna get out and gimme a push?

FRANK

Sonofabitch!

They're nosing over, beginning what every pilot dreads most -- a flat spin. The cockpit ALARM SOUNDS.

HAWK

We have to eject.

FRANK

At 112,000 feet?! Are you outta your mind?!

HAWK

We're not gonna ride this thing out. Call Mayday -- we're popping!

FRANK

(gasping for air)

We are not... losing... another... ship!

EXT. X- - THAT MOMENT

Spinning wildly, plummeting towards ground. The right wing shudders and rips away -- the plane inverts in its spin.

INT. X- - THAT MOMENT

HAWK

Don't think about it, Frank. Just do it. I'm gonna count down to one. Ready? One!

Hawk yanks the T-handle. The explosive BOLTS BLOW the canopy off. Two screams, one of terror, one of joy, as they eject, the supersonic wind hitting them like a truck.

Frank and Hawk are in free fall -- 22 miles over the desert. Approaching the speed of sound, they scream towards Earth. Frank is paralyzed in a still fall.

Hawk tumbles and soars like his namesake, living every man's ultimate fantasy -- pure flight. Side by side, he seems to taunt Frank as he flies about. Frank pulls his rip cord at 22,000, arresting his fall. Hawk keeps right on going.

EXT. GROUND - THAT MOMENT

Jerry, binoculars trained skyward, sees Frank's parachute deploy at exactly the moment he hears the thundering BOOM of the plane crashing into the desert floor,

JERRY

That's gotta be Frank... but where's Hawk?

EXT. SKY - THAT MOMENT

Hawk is soaring, spinning, laughing and screaming, ignoring the ground coming up quick.

INT. B- - THAT MOMENT

Tank searches through the windscreen for Hawk, when Hawk -- a flailing flash, really -- free-falls right past the cockpit windshield, startling Tank.

TANK

Whoa shit!!

He banks the huge plane hard left to avoid hitting him. Tank grimly takes the dancing hula girl off the instrument panel, replaces her with a plastic dashboard Jesus.

EXT. SKY - HAWK

One thousand feet -- Mach one plus. Sluggish, lethargic, almost out. He wills his eyes open to see the ground coming up mighty fast and pulls the cord; the chute releases. A gut-wrenching force nearly yanks him out of the harness as he is pulled skyward -- 700 mph to zero in three seconds. He opens his face plate, gulping air, laughing like a schoolboy.

EXT. GROUND - THAT MOMENT

Jerry laughs, relieved, when he sees the second chute. He climbs into the truck, tosses the Playboy aside and STARTS the ENGINE.

JERRY

Crazy son of a bitch almost made like a bug on a windshield.

Hawk touches down easily. He falls back on his chute, elated.

CUT TO:

EXT. EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE - THAT MOMENT

Establishing.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The office of Major BOB GERSON, Air Force Special Projects Administrator. Only 27, Gerson already has the look of a polished bureaucrat. He looks out the panoramic window behind his desk at a thick, black column of smoke rising above the desert -- obviously the experimental X-2. SIRENS audible.

His look is neither alarm nor concern. He studies the scene coldly and objectively like a scientist. And his eyes seem to smile, as though this is no real catastrophe to him.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - THAT MOMENT

As Frank descends, he lifts his faceplate and looks out

at --

A column of black smoke on the horizon -- where the X-2 crashed.

Frank touches down -- not quite as graceful or elated as Hawk. Matter of fact, he tumbles over, caught in the chute and rigging. A look of single-minded revenge on his face, Frank unharnesses himself and charges toward Hawk awkwardly in his stiff, cumbersome pressure suit. Hawk sits up, howls with joy.

HAWK

112,000 and I feel fine! Let's do it again, Frank!

Frank punches Hawk through the open faceplate of his helmet, knocking him off his feet.

FRANK

You always have to push things to their limit, don't you?

HAWK

That's what I do best, Frank.

Frank dives on him, they lock up in a fight. Jerry jumps out of the just-arriving truck, and dives into the melee, trying to pull them apart.

CUT TO:

INT. BOB GERSON'S OUTER OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

Frank enters, literally hat in hand. Hawk follows him in, hat still on his head. Frank swipes it off, shoves it into his hands. The duty sergeant opens Gerson's door.

INT. GERSON'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS ACTION

They enter, Gerson faces out his panoramic window -- we can still see the smoke from the brush fire caused by the crash of the X-2.

GERSON

Is that smoke I smell? Looks like a fire out by Ridgecrest.

FRANK

We crashed the X-2.

GERSON

My four-million dollar X-2? Is that the X-2 you're referring to?

HAWK

We did break both altitude and speed records, sir. And beat the free fall mark by 30,000 feet.

Frank glares at Hawk.

GERSON

Three planes in ten months. That's bound to be a record, too, Hawkins.

FRANK

The engine failed. The aircraft went into a flat spin and we couldn't recover.

Gerson nods "compassionately." No doubt that these two despise one another.

GERSON

(patronizing)

But you made it. That's the important thing.

(glances at his watch)

And you made it just in time, Frank.

CUT TO:

INT. PRESS ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Crammed with PRESS people and photographers. They snap away, shouting questions to Gerson at the podium, flanked by Team Daedalus: Frank, Hawk, Jerry and Tank, who smile for the cameras. Gerson holds up his hand for quiet, and produces an envelope with the Presidential seal.

GERSON

Gentlemen, I hold in my hand an announcement from the office of the President.

(reading the announcement)

'The United States' continued involvement in manned space exploration is hereby assigned to a new civilian agency, The National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Project Daedalus is now complete, and designated Mission Accomplished.

He folds up the announcement. Frank is utterly confused.

ANOTHER REPORTER (PRESS)

What about the pilots? Who's gonna be the first American in

space?

Gerson turns to Frank, smiling. He slaps him on the shoulder.

GERSON

The selection has been made.
After an exhaustive search we have
identified who could best carry
out this mission.

(to the Team)

This job calls for toughness --
physical and mental toughness --
and an ability to follow orders to
the letter.

Frank and Hawk exchange glances, wondering which it will be. Neither of them notices a sergeant walking in, holding the hand of...

SAM

a three-foot chimpanzee wearing a NASA flight suit.

GERSON

Gentlemen, meet Sam. The first
American to cross into outer
space.

The chimp grins huge. Frank and the Team are open-mouthed, in shock. Gerson picks him up, smiling for the photo-op. The flashbulbs and questions erupt like a thunderstorm. Sam reaches his hand out to Frank.

GERSON

Oh, look, Frank. He wants to
shake your hand.

FRANK

You bastard.

GERSON

Shake his hand for the cameras,
Frank. That's an order.

Frank slowly takes the chimp's hand, looking as though he might be sick. The cameras flash more, blinding an already stunned man.

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER (HOUSTON) - DAY

Establishing. SUPERIMPOSE: THE PRESENT

INT. SPACE TRACKING ROOM - DEEP IN COMPLEX - MORNING

If it's larger than a basketball and it's orbiting the Earth, it is tracked here. Pure NASA. Hi-Tech, all business.

Five engineers sit at computers banging away at their keyboards in frustration. Astronaut/Engineer ETHAN GLANCE, 34, pushes back from the console. Ethan usually has the clean-cut swagger of an arrogant, handsome young man with too many letters after his name. Today, however, he's got the dishevelled look of a guy who's been up all night working.

ETHAN

It just isn't responding.

The engineer next to Ethan turns to another engineer -- and translates in Russian to her.

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE WING - CORRIDOR - THAT MOMENT

Engineers and administrators move about, focused, with a purpose.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS ACTION

The sign on the door identifies this as the office of SARA HOLLAND, Space Shuttle Mission Director. Thirty-seven, ex-astronaut, focused like a laser beam on anything she pays attention to.

Right now, she scans a thick computer printout, shaking her head at whatever it's telling her. The PHONE RINGS, she grabs it absent-mindedly.

SARA

Sara Holland. Okay, be right there.

INT. NASA CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

At the conference table sit Flight Director EUGENE DAVIS (60s), an avuncular, rotund man.

Beside him are NASA administrators, a couple of STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS, orbital engineers, Russian engineers from Star City, and the Russian General VOSTOV (50s).

Sara enters, arms full of files and printouts.

BOB GERSON, now 67, quickly rises to meet her. Age has been kind to the retired General-turned-NASA Project Director: He at least has the appearance of venerability.

GERSON

Gentlemen, this is Mission Director Sara Holland. She's been closely monitoring the situation and she assures me the problem is well in hand.

She looks at Gerson skeptically. Not the politician Gerson is, she begins her briefing, speaking a no-bullshit scientist's lingo colored with a hint of her Virginia heritage.

SARA

Good morning, gentlemen. As you know, 11 days ago Atmospheric Tracking determined that Russian communications satellite Ikon has initiated orbital degradation. Computer trajectory models predict a steady acceleration in sequence with the gravitational constant.

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL

Would you mind translating that for all the non-Ph.D.'s, Dr. Holland?

SARA

The satellite's orbit is decaying, and the Earth's gravity is taking over.

Vostov looks particularly agitated.

SARA

There's a total systems failure in the on-line navigation and guidance avionics. All redundant systems are non-responsive. Without active course correction in the next 30 to 40 days, the satellite will reenter the atmosphere.

Gerson looks nervously at Vostov.

VOSTOV

And crash?

SARA

General, Ikon gave you fourteen years of service. That is within the performance range of a communications satellite. It will probably crash in the ocean or burn up in the atmosphere. I think it's best to let it.

Vostov stands, addresses the room conciliatorily.

VOSTOV

My country is grateful for the efforts of NASA and the State Department. However, losing Ikon is not an option. Ikon is not just a communications satellite to the Russian Federation. Ikon is the communications satellite. You are undoubtedly aware of our restructuring problems. Losing all telecommunications until we are able to replace Ikon could plunge us into chaos and perhaps even civil war.

DAVIS

Certainly you have other satellites aloft. Can't you transfer the workload?

GERSON

Gene, Sara; we have been given a Presidential mandate to assist the Russians...

(smiling at Vostov)

... our partners in the International Space Station.

(reassuringly to Vostov)

We will fix this problem. It's just a glitch.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

A clearly pissed off Sara walks briskly behind Gerson down the hallway.

SARA

You're feeding these guys bold-faced lies. This is a waste of money and a waste of my staff's time --

GERSON

You're a damn fine engineer, Sara, but you don't know shit about politics. Helping Russia save face is an act of good faith. You can't put a price on that.

Gerson stops in front of a door and slides his ID key card through the electronic lock.

INT. SPACE TRACKING - CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Sara and Gerson enter. Ethan stares at his computer monitor, exhausted and defeated. The Russian engineers are slumped asleep on couches and at their consoles.

ETHAN

This thing's dumb as a post. It's dead in the air.

GERSON

Forget trying to talk to the satellite. You have the code, override the guidance system.

Ethan points to four technical drawings pinned to the wall.

ETHAN

You figure that mess out. The guidance system on this thing is a dinosaur.

Sara crosses to the wall, analyzes the technical drawings.

ETHAN

(nodding to sleeping Russians)

Even these guys don't understand it, it's pre-microprocessor, it's pre-everything. Whoever designed this byzantine piece of shit is probably chopping rocks in Siberia.

SARA

(still staring at drawings)

Is there anyone around who remembers Skylab?

GERSON

What does that have to do with anything?

SARA

You're a damn fine politician, Bob, but you don't know shit about engineering.

(turns to face Bob)

This is the guidance system from Skylab.

GERSON

That's impossible. Maybe there are similarities, but they can't be the same.

Sara goes to one of the computers, logs on.

SARA
I'm looking up the designer.

GERSON
Don't bother. It was Francis D.
Corvin.

SARA
Is he dead?

Gerson closes his eyes in dread.

GERSON
Only if I'm lucky.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANCH HOUSE (YOUNTVILLE, CALIFORNIA) - DAY

Frank Corvin's ranch house. An old Porsche 356 in the driveway.

INT. GARAGE - DOOR OPEN

FRANK CORVIN, age 69, has aged well -- strong, fit, and tan if a bit weathered. He stands on a step ladder installing an electric garage opener with a cordless drill. He's losing his patience, cussing under and over his breath as his wife BARBARA, an attractive, long-gray-haired woman of 65 refers to --

INSTRUCTIONS

which show the bearded assistant from "Home Improvement" grinning as he easily installs the device.

BARBARA
Would you like me to read you the
instructions again -- ?

Frank cuts her off with the LOUD CORDLESS DRILL at maximum revs. The final screw screwed in, he presses a button on the unit. The garage door goes down, smooth, perfect, the timed light goes on.

FRANK
Let me explain something, darlin'.

Job done, he steps down from the ladder, victory on his face.

FRANK

Those instructions are written by a Japanese fella in Japan where they make the damn thing. Then they have some expatriated American, living in Japan because he can't get a job in the U.S., translate them. Then, since it's Japan and they're wary of foreigners, they get a Japanese fella to edit the American guy who translated the Japanese guy.

He grins smugly, takes the instructions from her, tears them in half. The timed light clicks off; it's pitch black inside the garage. We hear him fumble for the remote, and press the button. Nothing. He presses it again. Nothing.

BARBARA

You know the door to the house is locked, right?

FRANK

It's just the security code.

He pops the back off the remote --

FRANK

Or the battery...

BARBARA

You forgot the battery?

FRANK

(romantic)

Well, looks like it's just you and me, in a dark place, the smell of gasoline and fertilizer in the air...

He fumbles about, advancing on her. The ladder falls. She laughs, and "screams" for help.

BARBARA

Help! I'm locked in a smelly garage with a dirty old man!

He stubs his toe, cusses. And laughs. She gives in, they start to make out. The GARAGE DOOR suddenly HUMS to life and opens, casting the daylight on them mid-embrace, revealing --

SARA AND ETHAN

standing in front of Frank's Porsche, a beige government sedan behind it. Ethan holds an identical remote.

ETHAN

Mr. Corvin?

FRANK

Doctor Corvin.

ETHAN

Excuse me -- Doctor Corvin. Am I interrupting something?

The question is too stupid to even answer. Sara shoots him a look.

SARA

Doctor Corvin. I'm Sara Holland, and this is Astronaut Ethan Glance. We're with NASA.

Frank eyes them suspiciously, looking at the remote control in Ethan's hand.

ETHAN

It was in your car. I heard someone scream.

FRANK

Thanks for saving the day. Now what do you want?

ETHAN

Could we have a minute of your time?

FRANK

You should have called first. I'm a very busy man.

Barbara stifles a giggle. Frank sends her a dirty look.

SARA

Dr. Corvin, in thirty-five days a satellite with your guidance system on board is going to re-enter the atmosphere. The system is non-responsive. Want to take a crack at it?

CUT TO:

INT. FRANK'S DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ethan has spread the technical drawings on the dining table. They all drink glasses of iced tea. Frank slowly crunches his ice as he studies the drawings. This clearly sends shivers down Ethan's spine, and Frank knows it.

ETHAN

There seems to be an interruption in the path here, but the circuitry is still operational. It's sending us data --

FRANK

You've lost your uplink.

ETHAN

It has to be a problem in the manual routing drive here.

FRANK

I don't think so.

ETHAN

That's the consensus among the engineers.

FRANK

The same engineers that sent you here?

He crunches his ice for emphasis. Ethan winces.

FRANK

Does that bother you?

ETHAN

Yes, it does, actually.

Crunch.

SARA

Your design pre-dates all existing guidance systems. It was ahead of its time in '69, but this technology is obsolete now. None of the current engineers speak this language, and the older guys are...

She trails off, the conclusion clear -- they're all dead.

FRANK

It wasn't designed for this duration of duty. It was designed for SkyLab. My advice to you is capture the satellite and bring it home.

ETHAN

It's too big.

FRANK

For the space shuttle? What kind

of bird is it?

SARA

It's a Russian communications satellite.

FRANK

What the hell's my guidance system doing onboard a Russian satellite?

ETHAN

That's really not our primary concern at this time.

FRANK

(Frank really hates him now)

Where's it orbiting, or is that not a primary concern either?

SARA

One thousand miles.

FRANK

Rate of decay?

SARA

8000 meters per day. And accelerating.

FRANK

You're right about one thing; that bird's coming home. Five weeks at the most.

SARA

NASA's calculations agree. But here we are. Doctor, you designed this system. If anyone can solve this, it's you.

Frank chomps his ice, sizing up both of them.

FRANK

For a moment there, I was thinking you two might be a couple of Bob Gerson's lackeys.

FRANK (CONT'D)

But judging by your command of the facts of history, I see that's impossible. He's been taking credit for that since I worked it out in '58, the year he replaced my ass with a monkey.

His blood pressure's rising. He keeps his gaze on Sara, sees she looks uncomfortable.

FRANK

You don't work for Bob, do you?

SARA

He's a Project Manager at NASA.
He's one of many people assigned
to this problem.

Frank nods, unmoved.

FRANK

I'll have to ask you both to
leave.

ETHAN

Dr. Corvin, your country needs
you.

FRANK

Stick a sock in it, son. I've
heard it all before. You can't
solve this problem from here, and
you'll never get a crew up to
speed on it in time. Your bird's
dead, let her die. My only hope
is that what doesn't disintegrate
during re-entry lands on Bob
Gerson's house.

Frank's rage boils right under the surface. Barbara
watches from the kitchen.

FRANK

But before you go, let me offer
you both some career advice. Get
as far from that son of a bitch as
humanly possible.

Ethan rolls up the drawing.

ETHAN

Apparently the buzz on you is
correct.

FRANK

And what buzz is that?

ETHAN

You're not a team player. That's
why you washed out at NASA.

FRANK

Get the hell out of my house!

Ethan exits hurriedly. Sara takes her time. There's
disappointment, but respect on her face. She exits.
Frank's face is flushed red, his eyes angry slits, teeth

clenched.

BARBARA

We have to brush up on your
hospitality skills.

INT. CORVINS' KITCHEN - THAT NIGHT

Silence at the dinner table. Frank is still seething.

BARBARA

You know what the problem with
that satellite is, don't you.

Frank snorts, butters a roll. He obviously does.

BARBARA

You could fix it. Probably in a
day. Right?

FRANK

I won't crawl back for another
beating. Gerson made his bed, let
him lie in it. Barbara. It's an
old satellite, a Russian one at
that. It'll burn up on re-entry
and they'll build another one.

BARBARA

Frank...

Barbara watches him leave, hates to see him like this.

INT. FRANK'S GARAGE - LATE NIGHT

Frank takes the original drawing of the guidance system
out of a tube and spreads it across his drafting table.
He blows the dust off it. He studies it, casually eating
ice cream.

The look on his face tells us the problem is
obvious. His eyes travel up to --

GROUP PHOTO ON WALL

Team Daedalus in the '50s: Frank, Hawk, Jerry, Tank and
a few other guys posing in front of the X-2 jet pre-
crash. Full of youthful vigor, their dreams still alive,
eyes on the prize of space.

BACK TO FRANK

staring at the picture. His eyes are misty; it's as if
old dreams frozen inside him have begun to thaw. Like a

child, he licks the vanilla ice cream moustache off his upper lip.

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER (HOUSTON) - DAY

ESTABLISHING.

INT. SARA HOLLAND'S OFFICE - DAY

Sara looks up from a classified Air Force file entitled "Project Daedalus."

Frank Corvin stands at her door, wearing his cracked leather Air Force jacket and jeans, chewing gum.

FRANK

I have a solution to your problem.

CUT TO:

INT. BOB GERSON'S OFFICE - UPSTAIRS

The door opens. Gerson looks up, sees Sara bring Frank in, covers his disdain with an insincere smile.

GERSON

Frank Corvin. How long's it been?

FRANK

Not long enough, Bob.

GERSON

(laughs)

Haven't lost that Corvin charm, have we? Coffee?

Frank nods. Gerson goes to the credenza and pours a cup.

GERSON

Sara tells me you're up to speed on our little problem. We've got one sick bird.

(pointedly)

Apparently there's a flaw in the guidance system.

He hands Frank his coffee. Frank smiles at his jab.

FRANK

That's a helluva way to get the designer of that system to help you out.

GERSON

Well, I heard about your initial

response. Don't worry, I'm sure we'll come up with something.

SARA

Dr. Corvin is here with a solution.

GERSON

Well praise the Lord, we are delivered! Let's hear this solution, Frank.

Frank's delivery is as nonchalant as possible.

FRANK

Send my team up. We'll fix your broken satellite.

Both Gerson and Sara look incredulous. An eternity passes. Frank fills the silence with a loud slurp of coffee.

FRANK

You make a damn good cup of coffee, Bob.

GERSON

You want to run that by me again?

FRANK

Team Daedalus. Hawk, Tank, Jerry and me. Send us up.

GERSON

This is a joke, right?

Frank grins impishly, shakes his head no. Sara resists smiling.

FRANK

We trained five years for a space mission.

GERSON

How old are you, Frank?

FRANK

Old enough to know your ass is in a sling.

GERSON

Sara, would you excuse us? This is fast becoming a personal matter.

Enjoying this, Sara reluctantly exits.

FRANK

You're out of options. I know that because I'm the last person you'd come to for help.

GERSON

You got that right.

FRANK

Your satellite comes down in thirty-four days. It's too big to retrieve. It's too important to let crash. I designed that guidance system. I'm the only one who can fix it.

GERSON

I don't know how to break this to you, Frank. But you're an old man.

FRANK

Well, this old man's all you got. You know it, I know it. Besides, you let Glenn go up at 77. There's the offer. I'll be hearing from you.

Frank stands, turns to leave. Gerson shouts after him.

GERSON

You became a senior citizen five years ago!

Frank stops, turns around with a care-to-differ look.

FRANK

Four.

GERSON

For once in your life, be a team player. Train the crew if you like, but let the professionals at NASA fix the design flaw.

FRANK

(getting angry)

There aren't any design flaws. How it ended up in a Russian bird in the middle of the cold war -- that's the only flaw I see. How did that happen, Bob?

Gerson squirms.

FRANK

This is a hands-on job, and there's no way I can train anyone in this time-frame. My offer's on

the table. Me and the team. Take it or leave it.

He turns to leave again, walks to the door.

GERSON

You -- as a technical advisor, maybe. But I can't fill a space shuttle with geriatrics. You're professional enough to know that! Half those guys are probably dead anyway!

Frank opens the door, and without looking back, walks out.

FRANK (O.S.)

The clock's ticking, Bob. And I'm only getting older.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - ENTRY HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Frank strides confidently to the front door. He's chased by a SECURITY GUARD, who grabs him. Frank pushes the man off him and keeps on walking.

SECURITY

Mr. Gerson would like you to wait here.

Frank stops, turns around. Gerson exits an elevator and walks briskly towards him. Frank grins confidently, hands in the pockets of his leather flight jacket.

GERSON

Alright. It's a deal.

He sticks out his hand. Frank looks at it, doesn't take it.

FRANK

I want it in writing.

GERSON

Okay. But here are the terms: you and every member of your team has to pass the same physical requirements as any other astronaut here. If one of you fails, none of you go up.

(as Frank thinks,
nods)

And just to insure this isn't a total exercise in futility, you will train to fix that guidance system side-by-side with my people in case your men don't pass, which

is a distinct possibility.

FRANK

That's fair.

GERSON

I can't tell you how much I'm going to enjoy watching you make a complete ass out of yourself.

Frank sticks out his hand, and they shake. Frank grins.

FRANK

(sarcastic)

It's great to be working with you again, Bob.

Frank walks off. Gerson shakes his head.

CUT TO:

INT. AMERICA BAPTIST CHURCH (OKLAHOMA CITY) - SUNDAY MORNING

The Reverend Sullivan (Tank) pauses in his sermon -- puzzling over his notes. A youngish 67, his flowing robes can't hide his barrel-chest and Air Force tattoo on his wrist of a winged skull with a bloody dagger between its teeth. Tank is thoroughly lost, desperately trying to find his place, pages falling off the lectern.

TANK

Romans, uh... Chronicles... ah yes!

The sparse congregation waits in catatonic silence. An old man, drool on his chin, jolts awake from his wife's elbow in his ribs. Sitting in the back of the church is Frank, barely containing his laughter at Tank's awkwardness in the pulpit.

TANK

'And in the fortieth year, Amariah begat Zadok, who begat Libni, the brother of Uzziah.' No... that's not it, either.

Sighs from the congregation. Tank's losing them. He looks down at the face of the lectern at --

The hula girl we saw in his B-50 in '58. Keeps it there for good luck, and for moments like these.

TANK

Once upon a time, four of the best pilots in the Air Force trained to fly into space. They flew at the

speed of sound to the very top of
the sky, cheating death as they
freefall from twenty miles high.

The church is waking up now -- they apparently love these
old war stories from Reverend Tank.

INT. BACK OF CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

The recessional music thunders as the congregation
dismisses. Frank waits, smiling, at the end of the
receiving line. Tank sees him, and grabs him up in a
bear hug.

TANK

Boss.
(looks up to the
heavens)
Sorry. My former boss.

FRANK

I bring glad tidings, Reverend
Tank. They go by the name of
Daedalus. There appears to be a
resurrection after all.

INT. TANK'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Pilot pictures among the seminary books. Frank reaches
up and takes down a photo of Team Daedalus. Tank removes
his robe, shaking his head in disbelief.

TANK

I don't know, Frank. That's a
complicated proposition. I have a
flock. I have grandchildren.

FRANK

They'll be here when you get back.
Besides, you're bound to be able
to milk this for three or four
sermons.

TANK

I need to pray about this.

FRANK

Can you pray quick?

TANK

Wait... wait a moment, my stiff-
necked brother...
(closes his eyes,
swoons)
I am receiving a word from on
High.

FRANK

And what is this word?

Tank opens his eyes, grinning.

TANK

The word is, 'Why the hell not?'

CUT TO:

EXT. AMUSEMENT PARK (CALIFORNIA) - DAY

The park is under construction, empty except for cranes and crews assembling roller coasters. One of the roller coasters is completely built, and a single car rides around the track.

INT. ROLLER COASTER CAR

Riding alone in the car is Jerry O'Neill. Slight of build, a few wrinkles, a bad jet-black toupee under his baseball cap; at 68 he has become a swinging bachelor out of touch with the times. He grins ear to ear as he talks into a micro-cassette recorder.

JERRY

Let's kick this apogee up about 15 percent -- whoaa! Second bank's too fast, some little Johnny's gonna pass out on us... drop it a G going into third loop.

(going upside down)

Little more of a sine wave feel here... not so flat.

Standing at the bottom of the roller coaster are several technicians and a PRETTY YOUNG WOMAN about thirty, watching Jerry, smiling. Frank walks up to her as he watches Jerry go around. He seems to know her.

FRANK

Thirty-five years designing supersonic aircraft for the military. Now he's building roller coasters. Perfect.

(laughs at the irony)

Your father's a gifted man.

The Young Woman looks at Frank, doesn't recognize him.

PRETTY YOUNG WOMAN

Oh, he's gifted, alright.

The roller coaster come in. Jerry gets out and hugs the

Young Woman, gives her a prolonged kiss that is anything but paternal. He sees Frank laughing to himself.

JERRY

Frank Corvin! What are you doing here?

FRANK

Just wondering if you're busy for the next month and a half.

Jerry tosses his tape recorder to one of the technicians.

FRANK

NASA wants to send us into space.

Jerry examines Frank, leaning in and tilting his head like Frank is crazy. He looks concerned.

JERRY

I wondered who'd be the first. Forty-year-old memories are sharp as the day they happened but you can't for the life of you remember what you had for breakfast.

(pauses, loudly)

What did you have for breakfast, Frank?

FRANK

Vegetarian huevos rancheros and some kind of flavored decaf cappuccino that tasted like it was filtered through a jock strap.

Jerry smiles -- his old friend is okay.

JERRY

Frank!

Frank proudly shows a copy of the NASA contract to Jerry. Jerry takes out a pair of very thick-lensed glasses ('80s Porsche frames) and puts them on. Frank's look of pride turns to one of worry as he sees Jerry's thick glasses.

FRANK

You need those?

JERRY

(without irony)

Naah. They're just for reading... driving... seeing movies... walking.

(at the contract)

Frank, how on earth -- ?!

FRANK

Are you in?

JERRY

Hell yes I'm in.

Jerry hugs Frank, slaps his back.

JERRY

Team Daedalus rides again. Hawk must've gone into orbit when you told him.

FRANK

I haven't talked to him yet. I haven't talked to him in a while, Jerry.

JERRY

When are you guys gonna grow up and stop acting like little boys?

CUT TO:

EXT. UTAH AIRFIELD - DAY

Various aircraft ring a Quonset Hut next to this dirt field. The place houses a couple of flying schools, a crop-dusting outfit, and an Air Tours service. The YOUNG PILOTS inside the hut are all 30-ish, fresh out of the military, almost too serious about their work.

An antsy kid named JASON enters excitedly with his girlfriend.

JASON

It's my birthday. I want the shit scared outta me. You know, barrel rolls, loopde loops... all that stuff.

YOUNG PILOT

We don't do that kind of flying. It's dangerous and irresponsible.

PILOT #2

Too many lawsuits.

Jason's face falls.

JASON

Well who does?

The Young Pilot thinks, then points to the side of the Quonset Hut, which is open.

YOUNG PILOT

He does.

Hawk, now in his mid-sixties, sits unassumingly in a corroded aluminum fold-up chair, feet up on a cooler, reading a fishing magazine.

YOUNG PILOT

Hey, Hawk, this guy wants a scary ride.

Hawk looks up, calmly eyes Jason who bounces on the balls of his feet in anticipation.

JASON

It's my birthday.

HAWK

Well, happy birthday.

SLAM CUT TO:

EXT. AIRFIELD - MOMENTS LATER

A P-51 Mustang does a 450 mph barrel roll 100 feet off the deck.

INT. P- MUSTANG - THAT MOMENT

In the back seat, Jason hangs on for dear life.

HAWK

All right, let's go upstairs.

The P-51's nose pulls straight up, and they're in a 6-G climb.

JASON

Oh God...!!

HAWK

Here comes the fun part -- we're going weightless.

JASON

I don't think that's such a good idea!

HAWK

Aw, you'll love it.

10,000 feet up. The P-51 reaches its apogee, and gently noses over, her MOTOR WHINING down. As they go over the top, they go weightless.

JASON

Oh God!!

HAWK

This is what flying's all about.

Jason doesn't seem to agree. He's fully green, and gags.

JASON

I've had enough, sir.

HAWK

You sure? You got ten minutes left.

(as Jason nods
and groans)

Whatever. It's your money.

He throws the stick over, and Jason screams for his life as the plane plunges earthward.

EXT. NEARBY ROAD - DRIVING - THAT MOMENT

THROUGH the windshield of his rental car, Frank watches the plane as it does a twisting, rolling free fall -- straight down. He recognizes Hawk's signature flying style, laughs.

INT. P- MUSTANG - THAT MOMENT

Hawk pulls out of the dive 100 feet off the deck again, pulling a snap-turn as he lines it up for the runway. Jason loses his lunch.

EXT. TAXIWAY - THAT MOMENT

The P-51 gracefully hits the tarmac and rolls to a stop. Hawk CUTS the ENGINE, popping the canopy.

Jason pours himself out, wobbly-kneed. Hawk, annoyed, helps the humiliated, still-green Jason out. Vomit is splattered all over the back seat.

HAWK

Who gave you the bright idea to eat a big lunch before going up?

JASON

Oh my God, I'm so sorry, I'll clean it up, sir.

Hawk reaches into the cockpit and pulls out a towel. Out of the corner of his eye, Hawk sees Jason's girlfriend bounding towards them from across the tarmac. Jason doesn't.

HAWK

Don't worry about it, I'll do it.

(loudly, so girlfriend
hears)
You earned your wings today, Hot
Shot. I give.

Hawk musters up a wink and a smile that fades the second Jason steps down to hug his girl. Hawk turns and wearily begins cleaning out the cockpit.

In the b.g., Frank's rental car pulls up. Frank gets out, but Hawk doesn't immediately see him.

FRANK

Hey.

Hawk looks up, no visible reaction.

HAWK

Hey.

Frank walks closer. A long beat passes.

FRANK

You know what the worst day in my
life was?

HAWK

No.

FRANK

The day Armstrong set foot on the
moon. I think I must've been the
only person in the world who
wanted to kill myself that day.

HAWK

Thanks for that, Frank. We
haven't talked in 12 years, and
that was pretty much the big
question on my mind. What are you
doing here?

Frank grins mischievously. He's been looking forward to this.

FRANK

Keeping a promise. A promise I
made 40 years ago.

HAWK

The one where you were going to
kill me on sight or just have my
legs broken?

FRANK

(smiles, remembering)
The other one. I've engaged in a
little blackmail with NASA.

They've got a satellite that's gonna crash unless they find a way to fix the guidance system.

HAWK

I'm guessing you designed the guidance system.

FRANK

(nods, grins)

They're desperate. Bob Gerson came begging to me for help. I told him I'd fix it... but only if he sends up the original Daedalus team to do the job.

Frank shows him the contract. Hawk studies it.

FRANK

It's no joke, Hawk. Jerry and Tank are in; they're waiting for us at that roadhouse off the highway.

HAWK

You know, age just brings out more of the Frank in you, Frank. I am genuinely impressed.

Hawk laughs, Frank laughs, the two men laugh together -- this seems to be going well.

Hawk carefully folds up the contract and hands it back to Frank.

HAWK

Don't put foolish dreams in a fool's head. Especially not an old fool. Have a nice flight, Frank.

Hawk goes back to the P-51's engine.

FRANK

You weren't a fool then. But you're being one now.

HAWK

Say hello to Barbara for me.

Frank stares at him angrily, his temper rising.

FRANK

Sure. Say hello to Jackie for me.

HAWK

Wish I could, Frank. Wish I could.

Frank freezes, unaware that Hawk's wife had died.

FRANK
I'm sorry. I didn't know.

Hawk ignores him, continues checking the plugs.

INT. RENTAL CAR (HIGHWAY) - MOMENTS LATER

He curses to himself as he drives along the highway. An old pick-up truck passes him on the left lane, nearly going headfirst into an oncoming eighteen-wheeler. At the last minute, the pick-up quickly cuts in front of Frank, kicking up a cloud of dust and exhaust in his face and tearing off. Frank angrily HONKS the HORN.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADHOUSE (EDGE OF HIGHWAY) - DAY

Frank's car pulls up and parks. He gets out and walks to the front door. He notices the pickup truck that just cut him off parked in the lot, and glares at it. Jerry and Tank open the screen door, stand in the doorway. They see the pissed-off look on Frank's face.

JERRY
He said no, huh?

FRANK
Let's get the hell out of here.

TANK
Maybe we should talk to him.

FRANK
Forget it. He's still the same stubborn, thick-skulled jackass he always was.

Hawk, who has been sitting at the bar, turns around on his stool and finishes a beer. He smiles at Frank.

HAWK
And you still drive slower than a little old lady going to church.

A smile slowly ripples along Frank's face. A DRUM ROLL and PATRIOTIC MUSIC...

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY

The four men of Team Daedalus, all wearing their cracked leather flight jackets, stride towards the mammoth NASA Headquarters, awed and dwarfed by its sheer size. The steps falter just a bit, the men wondering what they've gotten themselves into. They reach the giant front doors of the --

EXT. ADMINISTRATIVE HEADQUARTERS

The twin glass doors open automatically. Frank enters, Hawk enters, Jerry enters, Tank hesitates. The biggest and toughest-looking of the bunch turns tail and starts to trot off when Frank grabs him and pulls him inside.

INT. COMPLEX - VARIOUS SHOTS

Our four heroes strut down corridor after windowless corridor of the interconnected buildings. Glances are exchanged between them and the younger men and women who make up NASA. The atmosphere is clinical, antiseptic, anti-heroic, and the people who work here are of the MIT-physicist-in-space mold. The two groups are a vivid contrast.

More corridors. And more corridors. This place goes on forever. Jerry and Tank are getting a little winded. Tank, exhausted, sits down. Frank grabs his arm and yanks him back up.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EQUIPMENT TEST ROOM - DAY

A tireless, hyperactive seven-year-old boy named ANDREW runs in tight circles, doing "airplanes" while making sound effects.

This room is set up for tours and class trips; space suits and tools are on display. Sara talks to a group of kids, age six to ten, and their TEACHER. Sara obviously loves being around kids.

Sara steps into a Manned Maneuvering Unit (MMU) supported by a stand, wired up to a treadmill. The MMU looks like a giant chair-back with tiny jet nozzles and canisters of nitrogen gas.

SARA

This is an M.M.U. That stands for Manned Maneuvering Unit. The M.M.U. allows our astronauts to move around in space so they can do work outside the space shuttle.

Frank, Hawk, Jerry and Tank enter the room. Sara smiles

at Frank. The boy doing airplanes flies right into Tank's abdomen. Tank buckles over in pain. The kid ricochets off him, into Hawk.

TANK

Ooof!

TEACHER

Andrew!

Hawk catches the kid and lifts him up.

SARA

Come here, Andrew. Let's have some fun.

She lowers the MMU down to him, and straps him in. She starts the treadmill. Andrew excitedly swivels the joysticks on the MMU's armrest controls. Gas sprays out from different nozzles on the MMU.

SARA

Just one little burst from these jets is enough to move the astronaut miles in space.

ANDREW

How come I'm not going anywhere?

SARA

Because we're on Earth, and that's a very heavy unit. In space you don't weigh anything. There's no gravity, and there's no air resistance.

The kids look fascinated but confused. Hawk holds his hand out, moves it up and down.

HAWK

Like when you stick your hand outside the car window and the air moves it up and down. That's air resistance.

SARA

(smiles at him)

Right. In space that wouldn't happen.

LITTLE GIRL

So if I jumped on a trampoline in space...?

SARA

You'd go up... and up... and you'd never come down.

The kids giggle, loving this. Frank, Hawk, Tank and Jerry look as awestruck and thrilled as the kids.

ANDREW

Could you hit a baseball to the moon?

SARA

Actually, you could. All you'd have to do is knock it halfway there, about a hundred thousand miles, and the moon's gravity would do the rest.

Hawk contemplates this. The teacher of the class herds the kids out of the room, leaving just Sara, Frank, Hawk, Tank and Jerry.

SARA

I've never met a kid who didn't dream of being an astronaut when he grew up.

Hawk throws his arm over Frank's shoulder.

HAWK

Ever met a kid who wouldn't let the dream go?

FRANK

Sara Holland, this is Colonel William "Hawk" Hawkins. Retired Air Force in 1990. Still the best pilot they ever had -- not counting me, that is.

HAWK

Ma'am.

He shakes her hand. Their eyes connect with a spark.

SARA

The Hawk. I've heard of you. Commander Cliff Jenkins once told me a story about you and him in Viet Nam.

HAWK

It if came out of Cliff's mouth, I guarantee it's 100 percent bullshit.

(laughs)

How is the old bullshitter?

SARA

He's dead, actually.

Hawk's smile freezes. Frank turns to Tank.

FRANK

While Hawk chews on his boot,
we'll move right along. Captain
'Tank' Sullivan. The best
navigator the Air Force ever had,
could find anything anywhere.
That is, before God got him.

TANK

Now more than ever. Pleased to
meet you, Miss Holland.

FRANK

And last but not least, Captain
Jerry O'Neill. Structural
Engineer and designer. The
Stealth Fighter is his drawing
come to life.

SARA

You don't have a nickname?

JERRY

(kisses her hand)
You can call me... 'anytime.'

Big laugh. Frank rolls his eyes.

SARA

O-kay. Well, if you men are
ready, we have some work to do.

INT. GERSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Gerson is alone with Vostov, who is pacing nervously.

VOSTOV

I don't need to remind you of the
consequences of failure here --
personal consequences.

GERSON

That's the problem with you
Russians, the glass is always half
empty.

VOSTOV

These men you are sending up, they
are not astronauts. The last time
they trained for a space mission,
people were driving cars with fins
on them!

Gerson laughs.

GERSON

Colonel Corvin isn't going
anywhere. His team won't pass the
physical trials.

VOSTOV

This is supposed to reassure me?
What will you do then?

GERSON

My best young astronaut is
training alongside Colonel Corvin,
gaining proficiency in this
antiquated guidance system of his.
Until he does, Corvin is to
believe he's going up.

VOSTOV

(panicky)

I don't know, perhaps we should
consult --

GERSON

There will be no consulting. No
one is to be in the loop on our
problem. Are we clear on that,
General?

CUT TO:

INT. OPERATIONS BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

Crowded room, filled with technicians, operations people,
engineers, back-up astronauts, Gerson and Vostov.

On the side wall stands Ethan and his team of astronauts:
three men, two women... and they don't look too happy.

Most pissed among them is astronaut ROGER HINES, 35, an
athletic black man with a lot of attitude. The room goes
quiet when Gerson and Sara bring in Frank, Hawk, Jerry
and Tank.

SARA

Good morning, all. Welcome to
the STS-200 OPS overview briefing.

All have NASA 3-ring binders, STS-200. That's the cue to
open.

SARA

This is a rather unusual mission,
I think we'd all agree. We'll get
started on the particulars here in
a moment, but first I'd like us to
make welcome the astronauts
selected for this mission, the

founding members of Project
Daedalus.

Polite applause. Roger Hines' glare is withering.

SARA

As all of you know these men are
the pioneers of this business.
They were around when rockets
were born.

SARA (CONT'D)

(smile)

Welcome, gentlemen. This is your
team now.

The door opens, and Flight Director Eugene Davis enters.

SARA

STS-200 was originally slated to
deliver a structural payload to
the international space station.
Circumstances have forced us to
push back that mission and
undertake an emergency rescue
operation. Our average staging
time for a mission is 12 months.
We're doing this one in 32 days.

(to Team Daedalus)

The flight crew you are replacing
is one of NASA's best.

ANGLE ON ETHAN, ROGER AND YOUNG TEAM

SARA

You will train right alongside
them in the interest of speed.
Colonel Hawkins, you will be
piloting the newest shuttle in our
fleet. This is her maiden flight.

Hawk looks at Frank with a devilish grin, whispers to
him.

HAWK

You know how much I love flying a
virgin.

SARA

You were the finest America had to
offer once; I've no doubts you
still are.

Sara signals someone in the back and the lights dim. A
3-D map of Earth appears on a video screen. Jerry puts
his glasses on. Frank reaches over and takes them off.

SARA

In 1986 the former Soviet Union launched communications satellite Ikon into orbit. Ikon is an irreplaceable link in Russia's telecommunication's chain.

The graphic changes to a satellite with large solar panels.

SARA

Her orbit is decaying rapidly. She will enter our atmosphere in 30 days. Your mission is to intercept and capture Ikon, using the shuttle's grappling arm. You will then have a 42-hour window in which to repair the guidance system. From there, Ikon will be reconfigured from Mission Control. Once accomplished, you will return her to geo-sync orbit, using the Payload Assist Module rockets.

The lights come up. Eugene Davis raises his hand.

DAVIS

Question.

(glances uneasily at Frank)

With all due respect to Frank -- why don't we just capture the bird and bring her home with a team trained in satellite retrieval.

It's clear that this is this question everyone here is wondering.

GERSON

It's too big, Gene.

DAVIS

For the space shuttle?

(to Vostov)

How did you guys get it up there?

VOSTOV

There were modifications post-deployment.

GERSON

The system has to be fixed on-site. Given the short time line, Frank, the only engineer proficient in such obsolete technology, is the only engineer who can do the job.

Davis is not convinced. Neither is Roger.

INT. CORRIDOR - OUTSIDE BRIEFING ROOM - MOMENT LATER

Davis waits impatiently for astronauts, techs and Vostov to clear the hall before he dive-bombs Gerson, Sara and Frank.

DAVIS

So Frank Corvin's taking his band of Leisure World Aviators for a ride into space. NASA agreed to this? The Russians agreed to it?

GERSON

Frank has left us little choice in the matter.

Frank grins. Davis smiles cynically.

DAVIS

I figured it might be something along those lines. You two hate each other too much to cook this up together.

No reply; it's obviously true. The smile fades.

DAVIS

I don't want any part of it. Get yourself another flight director.

He turns to walk away, stops and turns around.

DAVIS

By the way, how did the guidance system from SkyLab end up on a Russian Bird?

FRANK

Damned if I know. But I seem to be the only one able to fix it.

DAVIS

Grow up, Frank. Be a team player. Help my astronauts out -- as an engineer!

FRANK

If I weren't completely confident that I could deliver every bit as well as your astronauts, I wouldn't go near it.

Davis waits, then lets out a soft rolling laugh from his chest.

DAVIS

You haven't changed a bit.

FRANK

That seems to be the consensus.

DAVIS

(to Gerson)

I'm still the flight director, and I can pull the plug on this one.

Frank smirks.

DAVIS

You guys made a deal, fine. But here's my deal. I'm not turning over a brand new shuttle to four rookies with a month's training. You're taking two of my guys with you.

(off Frank's wince)

Ethan's a brown-nosing brat, Roger's a cocky little shit, but they're the best astronauts in our pipeline. They're on board, or this flight stays on the pad.

FRANK

Okay, Gene.

DAVIS

And if I sense for one second that you guys aren't cutting it physically or mentally, you're off and the original team flies. So let's see if you've still got it.

CUT TO:

INT. NASA MEDICAL BUILDING - DAY

Four naked male butts -- not exactly buns of steel. Wearing only their socks, Team Daedalus is lined up for hernia check. They cough, wheeze, and curl toes at the end of the doctor's cold, rubber gloves. They each step forward, moving on to --

FOUR SCALES

where they are weighed and have their height measured. Tank looks at his height, lets out a big laugh, turns to the straight-faced medical technician.

TANK

All this high-tech equipment and your calibration is off! This

says I've shrunk an inch!

He laughs, expecting the others to laugh with him. They don't; they just stare at him with pity. He gets the hint, stops laughing, stands as straight as he can.

INT. CARDIO CENTER - LATER

Hawk, Frank, Jerry and Tank stand on treadmills, stationary. An annoying CARDIO TECH applies EKG tabs on to our bare-chested men, connecting them to EKG monitors. The tech talks to them like they are deaf, old men, enunciating very loudly.

CARDIO TECH

I'm going to start you off very, very slow.

He points to a large, red button on each treadmill.

CARDIO TECH

If at any time you feel dizzy or weak, just hit the red button near your right hand. That will stop the treadmill

He starts the treadmills, slower even than a walking speed.

CARDIO TECH

How's everybody feeling?

Annoyed, apparently.

HAWK

(sarcastic)

Maybe you could talk a little louder.

CARDIO TECH

Is that speed okay?

HAWK

No. It's not.

Hawk presses a button on the treadmill that increases the speed of his treadmill so he's moving at a jogging pace. The others follow suit. The men get down to some serious exercise. Cardio Tech can tell he's not wanted, leaves the room.

MEDICAL CLINIC - LATER

Ears, throats, heartbeats are checked. DR. ANNE CARUTHERS, the flight surgeon, a pretty woman in her late 40s, examines Jerry's ear, and moves his toupee at least

an inch.

MEDICAL CLINIC - EYE CHART - LATER

Hawk stands on a red line, Frank waiting next to him.
Dr. Caruthers instructs Hawk.

DR. CARUTHERS

Place your hand over your right
eye and read the chart if you
would.

HAWK

(to Frank)

Time me.

FRANK

Huh?

Frank, confused, looks up at the big clock. Hawk goes
down the chart, reading incredibly fast.

HAWK

F,L,E,P,T,P,L,E,P,F,L,F,L,E,P,T,P,L,F,E,T...
M,A,D,E,I,N,U,S,A...

(laughs, fake
modesty)

Oh, made in U.S.A. What do you
know. Score one for the economy.

DR. CARUTHERS

You have twenty-ten vision,
Colonel.

HAWK

Uh, is that good?

Frank yanks the joker away by his arm. Hawk takes a seat
on a sofa a few feet behind.

FRANK

Fourteen seconds. Time me.

(a little slower)

F,L,E,P,T,P,L,E,P,F,L,F,L,E,P,T,P,F... I mean L... F...
E... P.

HAWK

T.

Frank shoots him a look.

DR. CARUTHERS

Twenty-twenty.

HAWK

And five seconds slow.

Dr. Caruthers smiles, amused by the competition between the two men. Jerry hands his thick glasses to Caruthers and steps up to the same eye chart Hawk read.

JERRY'S POV - EYE CHART

It's a complete blur.

ON JERRY

Not even squinting.

JERRY

F, L, E, P, T, P, L, E, P, F, L,
F, L, E, P, T, P, L, F, E, T.

DR. CARUTHERS

(shocked)

You have twenty-ten vision,
Captain.

Hawk and Frank exchange baffled looks. Caruthers hands the smiling Jerry back his glasses. He saunters off. Frank walks up to him -- he doesn't even have to ask.

JERRY

I may be blind, Frank, but I have
a perfect memory. Always did.

INT. MEDICAL CLINIC - BLOOD TEST - LATER

A needle comes out of Frank's arm. Dr. Caruthers quickly applies a cotton ball, closing his elbow. She hands the test tubes of his blood to an assistant.

DR. CARUTHERS

Next. Colonel Hawkins?

Hawk sheepishly steps forward, dreading this. Sitting down, he turns away, not wanting to see.

DR. CARUTHERS

Are you feeling all right?

HAWK

Not crazy about needles.

DR. CARUTHERS

That's very common. When was your
last physical?

HAWK

A while ago. I couldn't say.

She jabs Hawk, starts drawing blood.

DR. CARUTHERS

You don't remember me, do you? My father was flight surgeon at Beal Air Force Base for 21 years.

HAWK

Dr. Martin? The Goat?

DR. CARUTHERS

'The Goat.' That was my Dad. I met you when I was 12 years old, but that's been a while. I doubt you'd remember.

HAWK

(studies her a moment)

Freckles, pigtails, knobby knees. Was that you?

(as she grins, and nods)

So how is the Old Goat?

DR. CARUTHERS

Passed away. Nine years ago.

Hawk's smile freezes, again. She finishes, smiling sadly. And walks off with the blood. Frank and Hawk get up and go into --

HALL

both mulling over the same grim thought.

HAWK

Are you noticing how everybody seems to be dead lately?

They walk down the hall holding cotton balls to their arms.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ASTRONAUT QUARTERS - NEXT MORNING

Dawn. Frank, Hawk, Jerry and Tank assemble out front in their NASA sweats, a humorous contrast to --

Roger, Ethan and the young team. They stretch. Roger not only touches the ground, he can palm it. Tank watches them, tries to stretch. He can barely touch his knees, goes as far as his ankles, hangs there, a distressed look on his face.

TANK
 (whisper)
 Hey, uh... Frank?

Frank and Hawk are in good shape, stretch like pros. Hawk looks at Frank, tips his head towards Tank. Frank walks over and straightens Tank out. This hurt.

ETHAN
 We'll start off easy today. Just do ten.

TANK
 (horrified)
 Minutes?

JERRY
 Miles.

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER GROUNDS - LATER

Mile two. Astronaut Roger Hines leads the pack, doing about a five-minute mile, not breaking a sweat. Ethan and the rest of the young team right behind -- looking fit and invincible. About a quarter-mile behind them are --

HAWK AND FRANK

A little less invincible, but keeping a good pace. A few steps behind them are --

TANK AND JERRY

Red-faced, huffing and puffing.

JERRY
 I'm an engineer. I haven't run since Nixon was President. How far have we gone?

FRANK
 Not quite two.

TANK
 This is gonna give me a heart attack.

HAWK
 That's the idea, Tank.

TANK
 What -- to give us heart attacks?

HAWK

Exactly. Imagine if we didn't make it through lift-off. The U.S. would be the first nation to launch four corpses into orbit.

FRANK

If we're gonna have heart attacks, NASA's gonna make damn sure we have them right here on Earth. So let's get this over with.

Frank picks up speed, leads the pack. The others catch up. A grim pall settles over their morning run.

CUT TO:

INT. WEIGHT ROOM - LATER THAT DAY

Roger pushes 225 pounds easily off his chest, repeats it eight times with perfect form, Ethan spotting him. Roger finishes, slams the barbells against the rack, turning to Hawk.

ROGER

Can you handle 225 pounds, Colonel?

HAWK

Sure.

Hawk nervously turns to Tank.

HAWK

Spot me.
(winks, whispers)
Spot the hell out of me.

Hawk slides onto the bench under the barbells. Tank rests his hands under the bar, spotting Hawk. Hawk grunts as he pushes the barbell up. Roger and Ethan don't realize --

TANK

isn't just spotting, he's helping Hawk by lifting. The exertion shows in his clenched jaw, and the bulging vein in his neck -- he is straining not to grunt, must find a way to camouflage his exertion. He yells at Hawk, like a drill sergeant.

TANK

PUSH IT! COME ON, HAWK, PUSH!
PUSH!

Hawk (and Tank) successfully lift the barbell five times.

Roger and Ethan are none the wiser, look impressed. Tank is suffering. Tank finally lets the weight drop back onto the rack. Hawk slides out. Easy.

ETHAN

Not bad.

Roger looks at Tank, sees his face is red from exertion.

ROGER

Man, you really get into it, don't you?

Tank, suppressing a groan, gives Roger a weak thumbs-up. Hawk slaps Tank on the shoulder.

TANK

(whispers)

I'm gonna go to my room and cry now.

INT. NASA DINING HALL - NIGHT

Full house. All crews breaking for dinner. Frank and the team bring their trays to a table reserved for them. They move slow and deliberately, obviously sore as hell. Creaks and groans as they fall into their chairs. They stare at the food, which includes corn on the cob, in exhausted silence.

TANK

I'm too tired to chew.

ANGLE ON ETHAN AND ROGER

sitting down with the young team. Looking over at our guys and laughing.

FRANK

sees the young team laughing. Cranky, he looks over his men.

FRANK

Try and look a little perkier, guys.

They manage some phony "perk," big smiles hiding big discomfort. Jerry has a few bites of corn.

TANK

I'm thinking now of my Uncle Wendell. The last ten years of his life, no one ever had a conversation with him that did not

center on his gout, his arthritis,
or his bowel movements.

(beat)

I am beginning to see the world
through Uncle Wendell's eyes.

JERRY

You still sure about this, Frank?

FRANK

We're almost done with the tough
stuff and you want to quit?

(looking his men
over)

Tomorrow we start training for our
mission. I want everyone to get a
good night's sleep.

TANK

Boy, there's a challenge.

Something catches Hawk's eye. He laughs.

HAWK

Jerry, what are you doing?

Jerry fiddles with his mouth.

JERRY

It's these damn teeth.

(he adjusts them)

They won't stay in.

Frank is mortified.

FRANK

For God's sake, Jerry.

Hawk laughs. The waiter walks over holding a tray with
four cans of Ensure, the power drink for seniors.

WAITER (O.S.)

Gentlemen. A round of drinks from
your friends at the table over
there.

Ethan, Roger, and the young team laugh as they raise
their coffee cups to them in a toast. The room goes
quiet, awaiting their response.

Frank, Hawk, Jerry and Tank raise the cans to their
hosts, and clink them together.

FRANK

(loudly, to the room)

To old farts in outer space.

The room fills with laughter as they drink up happily,

deflating the intended insult.

CUT TO:

INT. ASTRONAUT QUARTERS - FRANK AND HAWK'S ROOM - NIGHT

Three A.M., pitch black outside. Frank dozes on his bunk, glasses down his nose, STS-200 binder on his chest. A RUSTLING sound wakes him. He looks over, sees --

HAWK

quietly dressing in jogging sweats.

FRANK

Too much for you, huh? Decide to quit while you're ahead?

Hawk laughs as he puts a T-shirt on.

HAWK

Thought I'd start the day with a little jog.

FRANK

Are you crazy? We jog at five and it's only three. Go back to bed.

HAWK

You want to sleep, Frank, sleep. You look like you need the rest anyhow.

The gauntlet down, Hawk opens the door to leave.

FRANK

You bastard.

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER GROUNDS - PRE-DAWN

It's pitch-black out. Hawk jogs around the track --

FRANK

right next to him, wondering how he got conned into this.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME SCENE - DAWN

Hawk and Frank, still jogging around the track. Sweaty, but looking strong.

HAWK

I'll race you the last lap.

FRANK

Hawk... okay.

HAWK

Countdown to one. Ready...?

(beat)

One.

Hawk bursts forward, Frank right after him, two old men racing like schoolboys.

LONG SHOT - HAWK AND FRANK

running, neck and neck, the sun coming up behind them. The grounds' sprinklers burst on.

IN PARKING LOT - THAT MOMENT

Sara gets out of her car, walks briskly to the administrative offices, all business, until she sees --

FRANK AND HAWK

finish the race in a tie, then fall on the grass, exhausted. They sprawl on their backs underneath the sprinklers to cool off.

SARA

smiles to herself as she watches. A new feeling is coming over NASA.

INT. GYM - OUTSIDE MEN'S LOCKER/DRESSING ROOM - MORNING

Sara, holding a manila envelope, tentatively walks up to the men's locker room door. She listens to FRANK AND HAWK TALKING from inside. The door suddenly opens, surprising Sara. Frank steps out, fully dressed, looks at the embarrassed Sara with a smile. She gathers her wits.

SARA

Hi, Frank. I'm looking for Hawk.

FRANK

He's inside. You can go on in.

SARA

Is it... okay?

FRANK
 (with a twinkle in
 his eye)

Oh yeah.

He walks off. Sara enters the locker room.

INT. MEN'S LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Sara enters, looking around, hears Hawk humming.

She passes a row of lockers, looks behind it (we don't see what she sees) -- and instantly turns on her feet and walks back to the door, her face beet red.

SARA
 I am so sorry.

Hawk comes out from behind the lockers, towel wrapped around his waist.

HAWK
 It's okay, it's okay.
 (as she stops)
 So. What brings you to the...
 men's locker room, Sara?

SARA
 (difficulty
 concentrating)
 Gene moved up -- he moved up the
 simulator run.

She trails off, nodding. Hawk looks at her, waiting for her to finish.

HAWK
 To... when?

SARA
 Right. That would be... eleven
 o'clock. There are some new
 procedures I wanted you to be
 aware of.

She hands him the manila envelope. Hawk opens it and takes out several pages, which he carefully reviews, totally nonplussed by the situation. After a long, awkward beat, Hawk stares at her and smiles. She returns the smile weakly.

SARA
 This is extremely uncomfortable.
 I'm going to leave now.

Hawk gestures grandly to the door. He smiles, watching as she hurries off.

HAWK

Hey, Sara. I'm taking you out for a beer.

SARA

(to herself)
I'm going to need one.

CUT TO:

INT. SHUTTLE SIMULATOR - MORNING

It is a full-scale mock-up of the space shuttle. Tank sits in the payload area holding the grappling arm control joy stick in his hand. He faces a monitor showing a simulated satellite in space. Six stoic engineers in white coats watch him as he tries to capture the satellite with the grappling arm. He looks disturbed that he is being observed so closely.

TANK

You're making me nervous.

A FEMALE ENGINEER leans forward and whispers in Tank's ear.

FEMALE ENGINEER

You should probably get used to it. There's going to be a lot more people watching you on television.

He gulps, misses the satellite.

INT. CLINIC - ON FOUR TEST TUBES - MORNING

of blood in a stand.

Dr. Caruthers takes a drop of blood from one of the tubes and sandwiches it between two slides. She examines it under the microscope, focuses. She looks concerned. She takes one of the test tubes out of the rack and puts it in --

BLOOD CENTRIFUGE

She turns the centrifuge on and the test tube goes whipping around and around...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CENTRIFUGE ROOM - DAY

The massive arm swinging around the circular room slows to a stop. Two TECHS pop open the clear canopy and unfasten Jerry and Tank from the two seats. They're a little shaky as they exit the cockpit.

TECH

That was three G's. That's as bad as it gets during ascent and entry.

TANK

I'm so pleased.

Hawk and Frank are up now. They eagerly jump inside the cockpit, and get strapped down, hooking up their headsets. The canopy closes over their heads.

HAWK

First one to pass out buys the beers tonight.

FRANK

You're on.

Frank grabs the joystick and off they go, whipping around, 1 G, 2 G's... They reach 5 G's in no time.

HAWK

(over communicator)
Hey, Frank, did we start yet?

FRANK

(into communicator)
I don't know, feels like we're standing still.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - THAT MOMENT

The Engineers look aghast as the boys crank it up some more. Other crew people enter the room, including Roger and members of the young team.

HAWK (V.O.)

(shaky voice, over monitor)
What's the matter, is the damn thing broken?

This is a spectator event now. They're up to 8 G's. The room shakes.

TIGHT ON HAWK AND FRANK'S FACES

shaking and warping out like the science book pictures.

FRANK
 (really shaky)
 Hey, Hawk, I'm pretty sure the
 machine just kicked in.

Hawk cranks it up some more. And some more. This is getting serious.

HAWK AND FRANK

are beginning to "gray out," but neither will say "uncle" first.

HAWK
 Yyyyou're... e-e-easy...
 Fffrankkkk...

10 G's. The MACHINE is SCREAMING. The room is silent.

ROGER
 They're gonna kill themselves.

DAVIS (O.S.)
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON IN
HERE?!!

Everyone turns around. Davis, at the back of the room, steps forward and slams the "all stop" switch. The arm slowly winds down. Everybody is totally busted -- young and old alike -- just by being here.

The arm stops, but we don't see anything through the canopy from inside the booth. Davis is seething -- grabs the intercom microphone.

DAVIS
 I'm sure this was a great show.
 But this thing is not a toy!
 (into the intercom)
 One of you idiots care to explain
 this?!

ANGLE ON CENTRIFUGE COCKPIT

As the Tech lifts the canopy we see that Frank and Hawk have both passed out. With their flush red faces, drool at the corner of their mouths, and their sweaty hair, they look like sleeping babies strapped into car seats. The Tech takes their pulse. They groggily start to regain consciousness.

TECH
 They're just unconscious, sir.

Davis fights it, but his scowl gives way to a smirk... then a smile. The entire room looks relieved.

DAVIS

I'm getting too old for this shit.

INT. HONKY-TONK - NIGHT

The place is crowded with young professionals at happy hour. Hawk and Frank shoot pool. On the dance floor, a small group of pretty young women, led by Jerry, are line dancing.

Tank stands alone drinking a beer looking around the room. He sees something that draws him like a bug to a light --

An arcade game -- the kind where a joy stick operated claw-on-a-crane drops down and picks up a stuffed animal inside a glass booth.

Tank beelines towards the game and drops in two quarters. He swigs the last of his drink, then takes the joy stick.

TANK

Purple tiger.

The crane comes to life as Tank maneuvers the joy stick left and right. It drops over a little stuffed purple tiger. Tank gingerly clamps on and guides it over the chute, dropping it. Tank joyfully retrieves his little stuffed animal and starts laughing goofily. He looks around the room to see if anyone saw his victory. No one did. He stops laughing and stuffs it in his pocket.

OVER AT HAWK AND FRANK'S POOL TABLE

The pretty young COCKTAIL WAITRESS brings over two bottles of beer. She puts them on a narrow counter near the pool table.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

That'll be seven dollars.

Frank and Hawk just look at each other, a stand-off -- neither goes for their wallet.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

Hello?

HAWK

He's buying.

FRANK

Oh no. We passed out at the same time.

HAWK

Bullshit. I watched you pass out.
(beat)
Right before I passed out.

They crack up. Hawk reaches for his wallet.

HAWK

I got this round. Only because
I'm so confident in my superiority
to you in every aspect of human
life.

Frank stops Hawk from paying.

FRANK

Maybe there's a way to settle
this.

(turns to the
Waitress)

Given the choice, which one of us
would you take home with you
tonight?

She plays along, looking them over.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

You mean like, to 'the home'?
Like the retirement home?

Onlookers laugh. All except a big, tough man named TINY.

HAWK

No, seriously. Would you choose
this man, with his asymmetrical
sagging ass cheeks, love handles
the size of Nebraska, and yellow
ingrown toenails.

FRANK

Or this man, with the chicken-
gizzard neck and the face that
looks like a Death Valley fire
road?

The woman's charmed. She's about to answer when Tiny
intercedes.

TINY

Stop harassing the waitress.

FRANK

I'm not harassing anyone. I was
asking her a harmless question,
one that's got nothing to do with
you. So go back to nursing your
virgin peach daiquiri and mind
your own damn business.

TINY

It is my business. This woman's my friend, and she puts up with assholes like you all day because she has to --

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

Tiny --

Hawk mouths to Frank, in disbelief, "Tiny?"

TINY

-- but I don't. So if you want to harass someone, start harassing me.

HAWK

I do believe he is, son.

Onlookers laugh. The man isn't pleased.

TINY

I could put you in a hospital, old man.

FRANK

I've got Medicare. Take your best shot.

More laughter.

TINY

I don't want to make your old lady a widow.

This overheats Frank's core. Frank drops the charm, his temper flares. He grabs Tiny and shoves him against the counter.

FRANK

What did you say?

Tiny pushes Frank off him, gets in fighting stance. Frank rips his leather jacket off, pulls up his sleeves. Hawk has obviously seen this happen before, rolls his eyes as he steps between the two men and addresses Frank's opponent.

HAWK

Excuse me a minute.

(to Frank)

Listen, Frank. You can't do this. We're going up into space in 25 days.

Hawk speaks loudly enough that the crowd around them hears their conversation about "going into space." They

seem like loons.

The crowd includes one man drinking at the bar with a camera bag and notebook.

HAWK

If you hurt yourself, if you break a bone or sprain an ankle, your seat on the shuttle is going to that M.I.T. weenie with the blow-dried hair. And we all watch it on TV at your house.

FRANK

Who said I'm gonna hurt myself?

TINY

What the hell are you two talking about -- 'the space shuttle'?

Hawk holds up his finger to Tiny for more time.

HAWK

You're going to blow it for us again, aren't you? You and that mean-assed temper of yours.

FRANK

You still think I blew our shot in '58?

HAWK

Face it already, Frank. You did.

Tiny loses interest in fighting Frank. This suits Frank fine -- Hawk is now the subject of his wrath. Tank and Jerry watch from the sidelines, smiling.

JERRY

Here we go again.

Frank shoves Hawk. Hawk retreats, not wanting to fight.

FRANK

And the pilot who wrecked every rocket and experimental jet the Air Force gave us?

Frank shoves Hawk again. Hawk let the first one slide, but not this one. He pushes Frank back, grabs Frank's jacket off the pool table and throws it in his face. Frank catches it.

HAWK

Let's take it outside. I'm gonna kick your asymmetrical sagging ass.

Hawk and Frank storm out of the bar. Bar patrons watch the two men like they are crazy. All except the man at the bar with the camera bag, who scribbles something in his notebook.

OUTSIDE HONKY-TONK

Hawk and Frank step out the swinging doors into the parking lot. Frank seething. Hawk laughing.

HAWK

How'd you like that? Can I still get you out of a jam or what? You see that guy's face when I said, 'space shuttle' -- ?

Crack! Frank punches him hard in the jaw. Hawk hits the pavement, rubbing his jaw, realizing Frank wasn't in on the plan.

FRANK

Whose fault was it that Daedalus got canned, Colonel Hawkins?

HAWK

Shit. This is gonna be a long night.

Hawk gets up, punches Frank in the face. The two go at it like this, duking it out in the parking lot, bobbing and weaving, neither one relenting...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CORRIDOR - OUTSIDE ENGINEERING LAB - MORNING

Eugene Davis walks down the hall. He passes --

HAWK

walking toward him, head down because he's reading a file as he walks.

DAVIS

Good morning, Hawk.

Hawk looks up long enough to show us his black eye.

HAWK

Morning, Gene.

DAVIS

What the hell happened to your eye?

Hawk keeps on walking.

HAWK

I fell in the shower. Maybe you could have maintenance install some rubber no-slip adhesives on the floor, it can get pretty slippery in there.

Davis knows he's being bullshitted, lets it go. He enters the --

ENGINEERING LAB

Where Frank works on a mock-up of the guidance system with Jerry. His BACK is TO Davis and us. Ethan watches as Frank touches two separate electrical buses with probes. Jerry alternately watches a monitor while screwing something in.

FRANK

What's that doing?

JERRY

Still ten megahertz. Little more.

DAVIS

How's it coming along, Frank?

Frank turns around; he, too, has a black eye.

FRANK

Pretty good, Gene.

DAVIS

What happened to your eye, Frank?
You slip in the shower?

FRANK

How the hell did you know?

Frank slowly gives his most charming grin. Davis turns his back on it and walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. CARDIO CENTER - MORNING

Ethan, alone in the room, pedals on stationary bike while reading the manual to Frank's guidance system, frustrated. His arm band heart MONITOR BEEPS. Gerson walks in.

GERSON

I haven't seen you in my office in a couple of days. I'm starting to

worry.

ETHAN

You should worry. This guy won't let me within ten feet of him. I'm not even sure he knows how to fix the guidance system; he just wants a free ride.

Gerson shuts off the bike, Ethan stops pedaling and the BEEPING STOPS.

GERSON

Ethan, maybe it's time you and I took a look at the big picture. There are six slots on the first Space Station crew. There are fourteen partner countries and all of them will want to send up one of their own. Some of those are bound to be women. You're a pale, stale American male. Consider the odds.

ETHAN

I'm confident in my abilities.

GERSON

Well let's see if you can't apply those abilities to Frank's guidance system. Your efforts won't go unnoticed.

Gerson starts the bike again and we hear Ethan's HEARTBEAT RACING. Gerson smiles, satisfied, pats Ethan on the shoulder and leaves.

CUT TO:

LIGHTED RUNWAY

The shuttle is on final approach to Cape Kennedy, coming in for a night landing. We're actually --

INT. SHUTTLE SIMULATOR - MORNING

Roger and Ethan at the controls, Frank and Hawk observing in the seats immediately behind. Pace is fast and furious -- all business. Gauges flashing everywhere.

ETHAN

Gear is down and locked. Airspeed 300. Cross-wind on our right, 14 knots.

ROGER
We're a little hot. Dropping
flaps.

ETHAN
200... 100... touchdown.

The virtual shuttle rolls to a stop. Roger turns to Hawk.

ROGER
You're up.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - SIMULTANEOUS ACTION

The room is humming. These flight engineers train right along with the astronauts in the simulator. Sara watches the big screen with Eugene Davis.

DAVIS
Nice landing, guys. Let's put our
rookies up front. SimSupe, you on
with me?

INT. SIMULATOR CONTROL ROOM - THAT MOMENT

The Simulator Supervisor (SIMSUPE) answers.

SIMSUPE
SimSupe. Go, Gene.

DAVIS
Standard package -- throw a little
curve at 'em, though.

SIMSUPE
Roger that.

He punches up a program on the computer.

INT. SIMULATOR - MOMENTS LATER

Hawk and Frank at the controls. Same scene on the simulator screen. An ALARM sounds as they approach the runway.

FRANK
Hydraulic failure. Right aileron.

HAWK
Switching to manual control.

ROGER
You can't do that, Colonel. The
bird's on a computerized track.

Another ALARM.

FRANK

Airspeed's too high. Come on,
Hawk, stick to the protocol. Go
around.

HAWK

We'll never make it. Switching to
manual.

Ethan shakes his head no. The runway approaches rapidly.
Hawk pulls back on the wheel -- no response.

ROGER

You can't do that!!

Roger grabs onto the seat arms as though they are really
about to crash.

FRANK

Damn it! Prepare to abort!!

HAWK

Like hell.

He fights to hold the wheel -- it's a rough, nearly
sideways touchdown -- the shuttle bounces once, twice...

HAWK

Awww... shit.

And its gear collapses as it crashes down, tumbling over.
The screen goes blank.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

Silence in the room. Davis looks up at the blank screen,
calm, but obviously very concerned.

SARA

Come on, Gene. You can't throw
all that at him on his first run!

DAVIS

We've got three weeks, Sara. And
this is Flight School 101 stuff.
(shakes his head)
He's been out of the game too
long.

BACK TO SIMULATOR - THAT MOMENT

Ethan and Roger show professionalism, but their eyes show
satisfaction. Hawk and Frank stare straight ahead --

both angry and embarrassed.

FRANK

(whispers)

This isn't your P-51, Hawk. You gotta do it their way.

HAWK

I don't need a damn computer to land an airplane, Frank.

ROGER

Sir, it's not an airplane. It's a flying brick on approach and you've got to work with the on-board computer.

HAWK

And if the on-board computer fails?

ETHAN

It's never failed.

Hawk glances over at Frank -- sees how disappointed he is.

HAWK

(into communicator)

Houston, S.T.S-200.

CAPCOM (V.O.)

Go, 200.

HAWK

Request second landing.

(thinks)

Request also computer failure on approach.

CAPCOM (V.O.)

Say again, 200?

HAWK

You heard me.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

The whole room waits. The CAPCOM (the voice of Mission Control) turns to Davis. As does Sara. She pleads with her eyes. He relents with a sigh.

DAVIS

All right, run it again.

CAPCOM

S.T.S-200, stand by for second

approach.

DAVIS
Throw the works at him.

CUT TO:

SIMULATOR SCREEN (HAWK'S SECOND APPROACH) - MOMENTS
LATER

Emergency night landing into North Africa. Wind, rain,
very rough.

FRANK
Altitude 3000. You're coming in
too steep, Hawk.

ROGER
You better pull up, sir. You're
gonna lose it again!

Hawk ignores them. Another ALARM sounds.

FRANK
Auxiliary engine fire -- number
two! Shut it down.

Hawk calmly hits a sequence of switches, never taking his
eyes off the approach.

HAWK
Don't need it anyway. We're just
a flying brick from here on in.
(smiles to himself)
The flying brick...

He hums to himself, totally in his element. The shuttle
buffets wildly -- the radar ALARM sounds now.

FRANK
Wind shear on the nose.

All the computer screens go blank. Ethan gloats.

ETHAN
Computers are down, sir. She's
all yours.

Hawk doesn't even notice.

BACK TO MISSION CONTROL

Sara is worried. Looks like a repeat.

BACK TO HAWK

focused on the runway coming up, still humming calmly.

FRANK
Altitude 500. Lined up.

ETHAN
Your airspeed's way too high.

FRANK
Airspeed four-nine-zero. That's too hot, Hawk!

ROGER
You'll never get this thing stopped!

HAWK
Aw, it's easy. You just gotta tap the brakes.

He gently nudges the nose up.

ROGER
You can't do that! You're gonna put her into a stall!

The stall ALARM sounds. The wings can't support the weight at this speed and attitude.

FRANK
100 feet. Hawk, what are you doing?

HAWK
Tapping the brakes.

ROGER
Drop the nose! You're gonna lose it!

FRANK
50 feet! Drop the nose!

HAWK
Airspeed?

FRANK
(shocked)
Two hundred.

HAWK
What do you say we drop the nose?

He nudges the wheel over gently. Touchdown. Light as a feather.

BACK TO MISSION CONTROL

They watch in shock as the shuttle rolls to a perfect stop. Davis is open-mouthed. Sara yells out loud.

SARA

Alright, Hawk!

She can't believe she did that, looks around, embarrassed.

BACK TO SIMULATOR

Roger is flabbergasted.

ROGER

That's impossible.

HAWK

For a computer, maybe.

He gives Frank a signature Hawk grin.

HAWK

The Flying Brick. I like the sound of that.

INT. DINING HALL - THAT NIGHT

Dinner. Ethan, Roger, and the young team look up as the Waiter arrives.

WAITER

Ladies and gentlemen, from your teammates at the table over there.

He busily hands out a tray full of Gerber baby food jars, barely keeping a straight face.

WAITER

And some training material for you to look over...

He hands out a stack of Curious George Goes Into Space books. As the room erupts in applause and laughter, Ethan and Roger turn slowly to...

Team Daedalus -- They raise their cans of Ensure and clink them.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. BLUFF - CLOSE ON TWO BEER BOTTLES - NIGHT

clink together.

Hawk and Sara sit side by side on the hood of her '65 Mustang convertible, the Houston city lights below them, the moon shining bright above them. He takes a sip of his beer.

SARA

Forty percent.

HAWK

Forty percent?! That's the best you'll give me?

SARA

(grinning seductively)
You might nail it. You might crash and burn. The odds are against you, Colonel.

With a twinkly smile, he puts the beer bottle on the hood and turns to her, looking like he's about to make a move on her. Instead, he bends down and picks up a rock off the ground and lets it fly, hitting a telephone pole a hundred feet away.

HAWK

(mockingly)
Forty percent.

SARA

The wind was with you.

HAWK

The wind!?

She laughs and hands him his beer.

SARA

Forty percent for you, you nail it. Forty for me, I would've missed by a mile.

(sips her beer)
That's why I moved out of the astronaut program. The odds of me getting on a shuttle were nowhere near forty percent. But I was an astronaut. Yes, I was.

HAWK

Damn right, you were.

They clink bottles, then toast the moon.

SARA

You don't think like that, do you. You jumped out of planes twenty miles up, drove rocket sleds the speed of sound -- you're not afraid

of anything.

HAWK

No, that's not true. I've been afraid.

SARA

Bullshit. When.

HAWK

(thinking hard)

Well. When I was seventeen. God, I was crazy in love with this college girl. She was gorgeous, a real ball of fire and crazy in love with --

SARA

(wearily)

You.

HAWK

No. A&M's All-American defensive end. Scott LeBeau -- man he was six-six if he was a foot, and Gary Cooper handsome. One night some friends and I had a few too many of these...

(shakes his beer
bottle)

... and we crash this big ol' sorority cotillion, everyone all dressed up in chiffon gowns and Daddy's tuxedo. And there's us looking like three hobos that just fell off a boxcar -- and this is at the governor's ranch, you see.

SARA

I'm getting the picture.

HAWK

So my friends see Scott LeBeau entering the outhouse, right?

(takes a deep
breath)

Well, I did a better tackle on that outhouse than he'd ever done on the football field, rolled that sucker right down an embankment into the creek. There's screaming and crying the whole way down -- only it doesn't sound like an All-American defensive end. It is decidedly more feminine than that.

SARA

Oh my God, you didn't.

HAWK

The love of my life, slip-sliding away. My friends were pretty funny guys.

SARA

What did you do?

HAWK

Ran like hell, joined the Air Force the next morning.

She playfully shoves him.

SARA

You were afraid Scott LeBeau was gonna kick your ass.

HAWK

Hell no, I was afraid of her.

Laughing, they stare into each other's eyes. After an awkward pause, she makes the move, kissing him.

ON HAWK'S FACE

He's enjoying the kiss, but something is wrong. He kindly withdraws from the kiss, then hugs her. Sara looks quizzical. He stares over her shoulder, smiling, his thoughts far away.

HAWK

I married her four years later.

EXT. GROUNDS - DAWN

Frank, Hawk, Tank and Jerry run as a tight-knit group, keeping a good, strong pace.

SOMEWHERE IN TREES (OVERLOOKING GROUNDS)

The man from the bar hides in the bushes, aiming his telephoto lens at the men, clicking off pictures.

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES - MORNING

Sara arrives to work a little late, so she adds a little jaunt to her step.

Co-workers stare at her from their cubicles with prying, pitying eyes as she passes. She gets a little self-conscious.

SARA

What! I'm only fifteen minutes late.

Someone tosses her a copy of USA Today. The headline says: "THE RIPE STUFF." Underneath is a big, grainy spy picture of Frank, Hawk, Jerry and Tank running on the track in their NASA sweats. They look good. Inset is an old photo of Team Daedalus, the same one we saw in Frank's garage.

SARA

Oh, shit.

Holding the paper, she makes a bee-line for her office. She opens the door and goes --

INSIDE HER OFFICE

where Bob Gerson is sitting in her chair. He is not happy.

GERSON

Extra. Extra. Read all about it.

SARA

Bob, I don't know how this leaked out --

GERSON

NASA is getting calls from every tabloid and TV show in the country asking me to verify this story.

Sara weighs this.

SARA

Why can't we verify the story?

GERSON

S.T.S.-200 is a delicate and top secret satellite recovery. This looks like a three-ring circus. How do you suppose the Vice President felt this morning when he sat down for breakfast, opened his paper and saw this?

He opens the USA Today; there is a full-page grainy spy photo of Frank and Hawk, post-jog, shirts off and sweating, looking good for 70-year-old guys... but they're still old guys.

Sara emits a quick burst of laughter, chokes it back.

GERSON

I have to face him, Sara. You

don't.

He furiously throws his newspaper in the garbage and leaves.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

Inside is the shuttle simulator. It sits propped on a frame, with stairs leading to the cockpit hatch. Eugene Davis escorts Frank, Hawk, Jerry, Tank, Ethan and Roger, all wearing their flight uniforms, up the stairs. A technician opens the hatch.

DAVIS

This is a full-scale simulator of your cabin. Except for gravity, we're going to simulate living conditions on board in order to familiarize you with your new living environment. Bon voyage.

The men enter the hatch to the shuttle. He shuts the hatch.

INT. SHUTTLE SIMULATOR - BATHROOM - DAY

Roger demonstrates proper urination/defecation tools and technique for Frank, Hawk, Tank and Jerry. Roger holds up a clear funnel, speaks in a humorless deadpan.

ROGER

This is your funnel. Attaches to the hose here. Before starting up the hose, you want to make sure you have a tight seal against your skin.

Jerry raises his hand, an impish smile on his face. Roger looks at him, knowing the question he's about to ask.

ROGER

Yes, one size fits all.

Jerry lowers his hand. The others chuckle.

ROGER

Just in case, you also have a diaper under your pressure suits.

More chuckles from our heroes. Roger remains poker-faced.

CUT TO:

SAME - LATER

The men go about the simulated mission in the shuttle:

A) FRANK AND JERRY

runs systems check with the on-board computer.

B) TANK

practices capturing a mock-satellite with the robotic grappling arm.

C) LUNCH

The men eat "space food" while they work.

CUT TO:

SAME SCENE - LATER

A call comes in.

SARA (V.O.)
(dripping with irony)
Dr. Corvin, this is Mission
Director Sara Holland.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CONTROL BOOTH - THAT MOMENT

A distressed Sara holds a copy of People magazine with a posed photo of Frank, Hawk, Jerry and Tank on the cover, all wearing their leather flight jackets with NASA caps.

SARA
I'm having what my ex would call a
Salmon Day.

FRANK
A 'Salmon Day'?

SARA
You know, when you feel like
you've been swimming uphill all
day just to get screwed in the
end? I am looking at a copy of
People magazine with a picture of
you and the boys on the cover.
You wouldn't happen to know how
this happened, would you?

Frank and Hawk laugh.

FRANK

Let's see. They called me up on Tuesday. I met with them on Wednesday, I answered a few questions, they took a few photographs --

SARA

(cutting him off)

Frank, you have to clear this kind of stuff with me first. Are you aware of the impact this is going to have?

FRANK

I'd have to think that when you put four old S.O.B.'s on the cover of a magazine, it's gonna drop magazine sales pretty bad.

The techs around Sara laugh. She just shakes her head.

INT. SET OF "THE TONIGHT SHOW" - DAY

JAY LENO does his monologue.

JAY

Did you read this? NASA is training four guys in their late sixties to go on the next shuttle mission. I'm not kidding. So far, NASA's biggest fear is that these guys are gonna spend the entire launch doing 50 in the left hand lane.

(MORE)

JAY (CONT'D)

(off light laughter)

Brand new shuttle too. They had to make a few modifications, though. Like putting phone books on the seats so the astronauts can see above the wheel...

Behind Jay, Frank, Hawk, Jerry and Tank appear from behind the curtain, wearing their leather flight jackets. The crowd applauds wildly. Jay thinks it's for him.

JAY

Everybody at NASA loves these guys, they're very popular. Okay, there have been a few complaints from the ground crew. Apparently these guys keep putting those 'My grandchild is an honor student' bumper stickers on the back of the

shuttle, and the ground crew has
to keep scraping them off...

Frank eggs on the crowd with a thumbs down. The crowd starts to heckle Jay. Frank and Tank lift up Jay, "surprising" him, and they start to escort him off the stage.

JAY
Stick around. We've got Sandra
Bullock, Buck Owens, and these
guys!

"TONIGHT SHOW" SET - LATER

Frank, Hawk, Tank and Jerry sit on the couch next to Jay.

JAY
Forget all this Right Stuff crap
-- let's cut to the chase. I
understand one of you is just a
machine with the chicks...
(looks at Hawk)
Gotta be you, sir.

Hawk shakes his head, points to Jerry.

JERRY
Jay, it's like I tell these
clowns, you can't just know what a
woman needs, you have to know what
a woman wants.

INT. SARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Watching it on TV, laughing hysterically.

JAY (V.O.)
And you, sir. Is it true that you
are a Baptist Minister?

TANK (V.O.)
That's right, my son.

JAY (V.O.)
And your name is Tank? A preacher
named Tank?

Tank rolls up his sleeve, shows his new tattoo -- a cross with rocket exhaust coming out, headed for the stars. The audience loves it. Sara's PHONE RINGS. She ignores it, letting the MACHINE ANSWER. GERSON leaves an ANGRY MESSAGE. She turns the TV VOLUME UP to drown him out.

CUT TO:

EXT. OVER WATERS OVER CAPE CANAVERAL - DAY

Two NASA T-38 TRAINER JETS SCREAM by. Hawk and Roger practicing more approaches, each in his own jet, talking by radio.

ROGER (V.O.)
Follow me, Colonel. We're going to come in at forty degrees. This simulates the attitude of the ship on glide slope.

HAWK (V.O.)
The Flying Brick...

ROGER (V.O.)
That's correct.

HAWK (V.O.)
After you, Rog.

ROGER (V.O.)
Please don't call me 'Rog.'

HAWK (V.O.)
Roger, 'Rog.'

Roger, annoyed, takes his jet in. Fighting it, he sets the plane down for a bumpy landing... then lights the AFTERBURNERS into another take-off roll, climbing hard into the sky.

HAWK

Lines his jet up, humming to himself. And just to make it interesting, does a Snap Roll with the jet at 500 feet before taking her in for a perfect Touch & Go. He lights the AFTERBURNERS and the JET SCREAMS skyward in a vertical climb.

HAWK (V.O.)
Something like that?

ROGER (V.O.)
(impressed)
Yeah. Something like that.

HAWK (V.O.)
Can I call you 'Rog' now?

ROGER (V.O.)
Yeah. You can call me 'Rog' now.

CUT TO:

INT. WEIGHTLESS ENVIRONMENT TRAINING FACILITY - DAY

The Neutral Buoyancy Lab. A giant pool where the astronauts train for weightless work.

UNDERWATER

Frank, Jerry, and Tank in cumbersome space suits, do repairs on a mock satellite. Divers stand by alongside.

Ethan is at poolside, on headset, observing the procedure on the video screen looking frustrated.

FRANK

The lead is connected here, across the relay.

JERRY

You're a genius, Frank.

Frank gives the divers a thumbs up. Frank, Jerry and Tank are lifted out of the water by cranes. Once out, techs help them removes their helmets. Ethan walks over.

ETHAN

So the relay patch is the key?

FRANK

Plain as the nose on your face.

ETHAN

How did you by-pass the heat exchanger?

FRANK

I didn't by-pass anything.

ETHAN

You're not being very forthcoming on the workings of the guidance system --

FRANK

I've tried everything short of calculus lessons to get you to understand this thing. What do you want me to do -- draw you a picture, connect the dots for you?

ETHAN

Excuse me. I hold two Masters Degrees from M.I.T., Dr. Corvin.

FRANK

I'd get my money back.

JERRY

Ethan, you've been trained on a different set of technologies. That's all.

ETHAN

(ignoring Jerry, to Frank)

You're compromising this mission. I'm your backup. I am on a need-to-know basis.

FRANK

You don't need-to-know shit. And I don't need a backup.

ETHAN

Yes, you do. More than you know.

FRANK

(stops, turns)

What is that supposed to mean?

Ethan realizes too late that he's said too much. Frank looks suspicious, paranoid, furious.

FRANK

What don't I know?

(as Ethan holds his tongue)

What don't I know?!

INT. GERSON'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Gerson is in a tele-conference (via video feed) with a Suited Man appearing on a laptop computer which sits on his desk.

SUITED MAN (V.O.)

Let me spell it out for you, Bob.

P-R spells bud-get.

Frank bursts into the room, pointing a finger at Gerson.

FRANK

You're setting me up again!

GERSON

Here's one of our astronauts now. Frank, what a semi-pleasant surprise.

FRANK

You sonofabitch! You had no intention of sending me up.

GERSON

Frank, I'm in the middle of something just now.

Frank angrily slams Gerson's laptop shut, terminating the call. Gerson smiles smugly.

GERSON

You just hung up on the head of our program, the Vice President. So what can I do for you, Frank?

Frank quakes with anger. Red-faced, snorting loudly.

FRANK

You had no intention of sending me up, did you?! You screwed me over in '58 and you're screwing me over now -- !

GERSON

Screwed you over -- ?

FRANK

You lied to me again. How could I be so stupid as to make a deal with a chronic liar?!

GERSON

Deal, Frank? You blackmailed me. I didn't make any 'deal' with you. But whatever you want to call it -- you lost. I don't have to send you up.

Frank looks confused. Gerson hands Frank a printout of a lab report. Frank looks it over; it makes no sense to him.

FRANK

I don't know what this shit means.

GERSON

It means someone didn't pass his physical. One of you has cancer.

Frank goes white, tentatively turns the page over of the lab report, sees in cruel, military typeface: "HAWKINS, WILLIAM B." Frank's mouth goes dry.

GERSON

It's his pancreas. And it's inoperable.

FRANK

Does he know?

GERSON

Dr. Caruthers told him this morning.

Frank shakes his head, getting angry again.

FRANK

No. I don't trust you! This is bullshit!

He tears up the lab report, throws the scraps on Gerson's desk.

FRANK

I want independent tests done by independent doctors -- not ones you bankroll to lie for you and print up bullshit lab results!

(catches his breath)

This is low, even by your standards. Just to keep me from going into space.

Gerson smiles smugly.

GERSON

Oh, that's what this drama is all about? And this whole time I thought it was Hawk, your friend. But it's really your seat on the space shuttle, isn't it? You can rest easy, Frank. NASA is still sending you, Jerry and Tank up on the shuttle -- regardless of the 'deal' you and I made.

FRANK

I don't understand.

GERSON

You're front page news, Frank. A real American hero. You've made NASA popular all over again. Thanks to you, they're gonna get that juicy budget infusion they've been drooling over. Oh, you're going, Frank. The Vice President insists.

Gerson opens up the laptop, prepares to reconnect.

GERSON

Now if you'll excuse me, I have to call the head of our space program back and apologize for the interruption.

Like a zombie, Frank wanders out of the office.

OUTSIDE GERSON'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Frank wanders down the corridor, lost in painful thought. People greet him as they pass, but he doesn't hear them.

EXT. AIRCRAFT HANGAR - DUSK

Across from the space center complex. One of NASA's and the Air Force's storage garages. High-performance aircraft are lined up silently and eerily still, as though waiting.

NEXT TO SR-

is Hawk, dressed in civilian clothes. He walks the plane silently, deep in thought. As he ducks under the fuselage, he sees --

SARA

watching him walk the plane. The obvious doesn't need to be said.

HAWK

This was my Blackbird. I retired this very airplane in '90. And here she is.

SARA

I've never actually seen one before.

Hawk smiles like a proud parent showing off his kid.

HAWK

SR-71. This is what a plane's supposed to be. She's ugly on the ground, leaks like a sieve. But up around mach one, her seals all expand, she dries up and leans into the wind and goes like hell. I took her right to the edge. 128,000 feet.

He runs his hand along the plane's skin, softly, reverently.

HAWK

She's only happy up there, goin' fast. She's not meant to be sitting on the ground. That's a lousy way to die. Sitting around, waiting...

(pauses)
 Eight months. That's the best I
 can do, huh?

SARA
 They don't know that for sure.
 There's chemo. Radiation.

HAWK
 (shakes his head)
 I watched my wife go out that way.
 I ain't taking that road.

She nods, making sense of the other evening.

SARA
 (softly)
 The love of your life.

HAWK
 (changing the subject)
 Where the hell is the pancreas,
 anyway? I don't even know what
 the damn thing does beside give
 you cancer.

They share a weak laugh.

HAWK
 What odds would you have given us?

SARA
 Better than forty.

She smiles coyly. He kisses her and they hug.

FRANK

approaches tentatively from the other end of the hangar.
 He sees Hawk and Sara break out of the hug and say a
 few words. Frank stops and waits respectfully. Sara
 walks away from Hawk, passing Frank.

SARA
 Hi, Frank.

FRANK
 Sara.

Frank approaches Hawk, can't find the words.

HAWK
 I'm sorry, Frank. I know how much
 this flight meant to you. Looks
 like I crashed another one. I'm
 sorry.

Frank dreads what he has to say next.

FRANK

They still want to send us up.
Me, Jerry and Tank.

Hawk thinks on this, smiles slowly.

HAWK

Well, that's great, Frank. You
played these guys perfectly.
(off Frank's worried
look)
You said yes, right?

FRANK

I didn't say anything.

HAWK

Don't be an ass, Frank. Don't
blow it a second time -- this is
your last shot!

FRANK

This isn't easy, Hawk...

HAWK

Easy? Don't whine to me about
easy.

FRANK

Put yourself in my shoes --

HAWK

Oh no you don't. You've blamed me
for Daedalus for 40 damn years!
You're not laying this one on me!
You choke this one, it's you. All
you!

FRANK

What would you do?

HAWK

I'd leave you behind in a
heartbeat!

Frank's temper starts to cook -- which is just what Hawk
wanted.

FRANK

You would, wouldn't you?

HAWK

To go into space? Bet your ass,
boy. In a heartbeat.

Hawk turns on his heels and walks off. He stops and

spins around.

HAWK

You know what the worst day in my life was, Frank? The day I met you and you put the idea in my head that I could pilot a ship into space.

He turns and walks off. Frank watches him go.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VEHICLE ASSEMBLY BUILDING - NIGHT

The mammoth hangar is the height of a thirty-story skyscraper, but we can't tell from this angle. Frank shows his clearance badge to the SECURITY GUARDS at the door.

GUARD

How can I help you, Colonel?

FRANK

I just wanted to go inside and have a look.

GUARD

Everyone's left for the night, tomorrow's roll-out, you know.

FRANK

That's okay, I want to be alone.

GUARD

Yes, sir.

(opens door)

By the way, I thought you might find it funny: My daughter has a photo of you on her wall next to Leonardo DiCaprio.

FRANK

And why would I find that funny?

Frank winks, pats the guy on the shoulder. And goes --

INT. VEHICLE ASSEMBLY PLANT - CONTINUOUS ACTION

We STAY TIGHT ON Frank as he walks across the expansive floor, looking up at something. (NOTE: This is the biggest enclosed space in the world, but we don't get the sense of that yet.)

Frank sits down on the floor, props himself up against the wall. He sticks a piece of bubble gum in his mouth, chews, blows a bubble as he looks up at it...

DISSOLVE TO:

FRANK - LATER

in the same position, only sound asleep. An enormous MOTOR WHIRS as daylight streams across Frank's face. His eyes squint open, and he looks over at the light, coming from --

MIGHTY CONCRETE DOORS

rolling apart, letting in a slit of light a foot wide and thirty stories high. The light hits --

SPACE SHUTTLE

sitting on its enormous roll-out platform. Rays of sunlight play on the brand new titanium skin and protective tiles.

She's positively gleaming in the morning sun, her fuel tanks and solid rocket boosters dwarfing everything around it, including --

FRANK

who stares up in awe at it.

The ground crew stands by proudly, preparing for roll-out. A CONSTRUCTION TECH sees Frank.

CONSTRUCTION TECH
Sir, are you here for roll-out?

FRANK
No.

He gets up and strides out of the hangar, passing through the slowly-expanding slit of the concrete doors and onto the crawler-way as the one MPH roll-out begins behind him. The ground crew looks at him strangely.

INT. GERSON'S OFFICE - MORNING

Sara talks with Gerson. Frank enters the room.

FRANK
I'm not going. Not without Hawk.

GERSON
You're blackmailing me again,
aren't you?

FRANK

No. I'll teach Ethan everything he needs to know. But I don't go up without Hawk.

Frank turns around and exits. Gerson turns slowly to Sara.

GERSON

Next idea, Miss Holland?

SARA

You know, even with the cancer, Colonel Hawkins passed all his physicals. There's really no reason he can't fly the mission. Especially with a back-up.

GERSON

Frank Corvin is going to put me in the nut-house.

Sara holds back her smile, runs out of the room.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - ENTRY HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Frank walks to the front door. He knows he's done the right thing, but it hasn't brought him any joy. A SECURITY GUARD grabs his arm. He pushes the man off, keeps on walking.

SECURITY

Colonel Corvin, Miss Holland would like you to wait here.

Frank stops, turns around. Sara exits an elevator, breaking into a wide grin.

SARA

Team Daedalus -- all of Team Daedalus -- has a launch in 92 hours. Let's get rested and prepped.

CUT TO:

INT. MISSION CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

THREE TECHS, Sara, and Davis in a huddle. Very serious, looks of dreading and foreboding.

SARA

This is a problem. Somebody has to deal with it.

TECH #1

Don't look at me. I'm not doing it.

TECH #2

I'm not doing it either.

Sara looks pleadingly to Davis.

DAVIS

No way. I'm not trained for this. I'm just the flight director.

Sara winces.

INT. SUIT-UP ROOM - ANGLE ON FRANK, HAWK, TANK, AND JERRY - AT THAT MOMENT

Across the room, in their spacesuits, holding their helmets. A last minute helmet fitting. Sara enters, walks over.

SARA

Jerry, can I talk to you in private?

JERRY

Sure thing, pretty lady.

They walk over to a corner where they can have some privacy.

JERRY

Now how can I be of service?

Sara hesitates with dread, can't look him in the eye.

SARA

It's your toupee, Jerry. You're going to have to remove it.

JERRY

What toupee?

Sara stares at him blankly, doesn't know what to say next. He gives her a coy wink.

JERRY

But I'll get a haircut if you like.

STEVE MILLER's "Space Cowboy" thunders in as we...

CUT TO:

INT. TRAINING ENTRYWAY - NEXT DAY

Female engineers swoon, whistling, giving high-fives
to□--□

Jerry swaggers down the hall in his blue NASA astronaut jumpsuit, zipper down to his chest, gold chain dangling, a Stetson on his head. He does a disco twirl and removes his hat to reveal his shiny pate -- he has totally shaved his head and pierced both ears.

JERRY

Come on girls, give it up for the
space cowboy!

CUT TO:

INT. READY ROOM (CAPE CANAVERAL) - NIGHT

Pre-dawn launch. Team Daedalus, Roger and Ethan go through the final suit-up and preparations. Quiet, thoughtful, nerves in evidence -- a pre-game, locker-room feel.

CUT TO:

INT. MISSION CONTROL (HOUSTON)

The place is humming with activity. Engineers at their stations, Sara flips through computer spreadsheets. Eugene Davis barks through the checklist procedure through his headset -- every answer coming over the COMMUNICATOR is "GO."

DAVIS

P.P.C, Guidance, Cape Flight,
L.P.S., L.R.D...

EXT. ASTRONAUT BLOCKHOUSE - NIGHT

The doors open, Team Daedalus comes out -- to the applause and cheers of --

SMALL CROWD OF PEOPLE

standing on the other side of a cordon. The crowd is a select one -- Frank's wife Barbara, members of Tank's congregation, Jerry's girl friend, Roger's wife and kid, Ethan's mother. The astronauts walk to a cordon, about 15 feet from their loved ones and shout their goodbyes. (NOTE: The unintimate goodbye is necessary to keep the astronauts from getting contaminated before boarding.)

FRANK
 (to Barbara)
 Why are you so nervous?

BARBARA
 (what a stupid
 question)
 Why am I nervous.

Husband and wife stare at each other. Barbara looks to Frank's right, signals for Frank to look at --

HAWK

He stands there, silently watching everybody else bidding farewell to their loved ones.

The loner, he is the only one with no one to say goodbye to, but doesn't seem bothered.

BARBARA
 You bring that man back alive,
 Hawk.

HAWK
 It's against my better judgement,
 Barb, but if that's your wish,
 I'll honor it.

They all laugh, say final goodbyes and board the NASA van.

EXT. LAUNCH PAD -B - MOMENTS LATER

The space shuttle, poised on the pad, glowing in the beacon lights, clouds of VAPOR SNORT out as she is fueled -- this ship is alive, waiting for them. The van stops. The men exit and pause -- letting their eyes travel to the top.

HAWK
 Hot-damn, Sam... that's a bird.

Tank points to the side of the shuttle.

TANK
 Well I'll be.

Printed on the side, the name of the new shuttle:
 "DAEDALUS." The men smile in disbelief.

FRANK
 Nice touch.

INT. TOP OF TOWER - WHITE ROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION

QUALLS, the launch safety officer, awaits -- giving their pressure suits a final check. He's as nervous and excited as they are, just not as skilled in hiding it.

QUALLS

General Corvin, General Hawkins,
welcome to Daedalus.

FRANK

We're only colonels, Mr. Qualls.

QUALLS

I'm just sayin' it like it oughtta be.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS ACTION

The men are brought aboard the now-vertical ship, one by one. All business now, the techs and flight engineers strap them in, seal their helmets, and get their oxygen and communicators up and going.

His job done, Qualls pauses at the round hatch, his eyes glistening, face beaming with pride.

QUALLS

You're good to go, men. See ya
back on the ground, Team Daedalus.

He slams the hatch shut. The men stare straight ahead, listening as the BOLTS SLAM into place and the airlock seals up. Then a deafening silence. Not on-line yet, they sit in a moment's contemplation. Looking at one another, realizing this is it.

FRANK

I don't know, maybe a prayer is in
order. Reverend?

TANK

I was just reciting the Shepherd's
prayer.

(beat)

Alan Shepherd's prayer.

All smile -- even Roger -- and together recite Alan Shepherd's famous pre-launch prayer on his 1961 Mercury flight.

TEAM DAEDALUS

Oh Lord, please don't let me fuck up.

OVERLAPS TO:

INT. MISSION CONTROL - SIMULTANEOUS ACTION

They hear. And laugh and applaud, a great tension

breaker.

DAVIS
Very appropriate, Reverend.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LAUNCH PAD -B - PRE-DAWN (T-MINUS ONE MINUTE)

Not a human being in sight.

Just space shuttle Daedalus -- fuel tanks filled with 4.5 million gallons of liquid hydrogen and oxygen, breathing steam, barely held to the gantry. Ready to go. As the VOICE of the LAUNCH CONTROL OFFICER (LC) commences the FINAL COUNTDOWN...

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) INSIDE OF COCKPIT

is aglow with the instruments and screens.

B) HAWK

performs the final preparations and checks.

C) CAPCOM

continues his monotonous checklist of NASA three-letter acronyms.

D) INSIDE HOUSTON MISSION CONTROL

Davis's check is complete. He settles into the flight director's chair, watching the big screen with Daedalus on it. Sara puts her print-out aside.

LC
T-Minus 15 seconds.

The room goes still. This remains the most tense moment of any mission -- no one has forgotten Challenger around here.

LC
10...

EXT. ROOF OF CAPE HEADQUARTERS - THAT MOMENT

The gallery of family, friends and officials joins in the countdown... Silent, awestruck.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

FLASH TO each of the men of Daedalus. Faces serious, anticipating. Hawk's is more like a kid's -- awaiting his ride on Space Mountain. Frank's shows just a hint of anxiety...

LC (V.O.)
9, 8, 7... ignition sequence
begin. We have main engine start.

ANGLE FROM ROOF OF CAPE HEADQUARTERS - THAT MOMENT

The night sky is lit up for miles as the ENGINES ROAR to life. The SHUTTLE SHUDDERS from the force, "twanging in" 40 inches towards its liquid hydrogen fuel tank.

LC (V.O.)
3, 2, 1... and lift off. Lift off
of space shuttle Daedalus, and
S.T.S.-200.

And the mighty ship slowly, majestically rises, shaking off her tethers. Shuttle Daedalus is on her way.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

Thunderous applause -- but all eyes remain riveted to the screen as she clears the tower.

SARA
Go get 'em, guys.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Shoved hard into their seats as they go from 0 to Mach 1. Hawk war whoops with delight as the shuttle rolls over in her inverted flight attitude.

FRANK
Houston, this is Daedalus. Roll
program.

CAPCOM (V.O.)
Roger roll, Daedalus.

JERRY
Omigod...!!!

TANK
(laughing under
the G's)
Thank you, God.

CAPCOM (V.O.)
Daedalus, you are go at throttle up.

FRANK

Roger, go at throttle up.

He fights the G's to turn to look at Hawk -- who is just waiting for the command.

FRANK

Pull the trigger, Hawk.

Hawk grins, and throws the throttle up.

CAPCOM (V.O.)

Stand by for separation of
S.R.B.'s...

FRANK

Roger, Houston. Standing by... 3,
2, 1...

A THUNDEROUS EXPLOSION...

EXT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

The SOLID ROCKET BOOSTERS IGNITE, FIRING DAEDALUS out of the stratosphere and into HYPER-SONIC speed.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

FRANK

S.R.B.s are gone.

CAPCOM (V.O.)

Roger, Daedalus. You are negative return.

FRANK

Roger, Houston. Negative return.
(to Hawk)
We're a dot.

EXT. PAD -B - THAT MOMENT

Darkness returns. Space shuttle Daedalus is now just a tiny pinpoint of light, high in the pre-dawn sky -- heading east towards the rising sun.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE DAEDALUS - T-PLUS MINUTES

17,100 MPH, in Earth orbit.

HAWK

Houston, this is Daedalus. Do we have a go for orbit OPS?

CAPCOM (V.O.)

Roger, Daedalus. You are go for orbit OPS. Good work, guys.

They remove their helmets and watch them float away. Frank unbuckles and pushes off from his seat, followed by the others. They float about the cabin, weightless, tumbling, goofing like kids. Except Ethan: he's all professionalism and seriousness.

FRANK

stares THROUGH the window on one side at the vivid blue and white earth beneath him, small, tangible. Smiling, elated, he looks over his shoulder at --

HAWK

staring THROUGH window on other side. Hawk looks at the moon -- and it is huge and bright. Hawk looks back at Frank.

HAWK

It was worth the wait.

FRANK

Yeah. It was.

Hawk holds out his hand. After a beat, Frank grabs it.

HAWK

Thanks, Frank. I owe you one.

They reel each other in, the handshake becoming a meaningful hug between two old friends. Roger floats up to Hawk.

ROGER

Not a bad take-off, for a rookie. You're over now.

(off Hawk's puzzled look)

Over the edge. You're in space. Welcome to the club.

Big grin, big slap on the back.

MID-DECK - LATER

Jerry tries to prepare himself a snack, fumbling with the galley equipment. Frustrated as his afternoon snack takes flight in the weightless compartment. He attempts

to retrieve it.

ETHAN

Let's get ready, everyone, we have a live global broadcast in two minutes.

CUT TO:

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

Frank and the rest of the team can be seen on a giant TV monitor. Eugene Davis, Sara, Barbara Corvin and WALTER CRONKITE stand by.

TECH

5... 4... 3... 2...

He waves his finger down, a signal to Cronkite.

CRONKITE

Good morning, Colonel.

When Frank speaks, his lips are curled around his gums and he sounds odd, like he has no teeth.

FRANK (V.O.)

Good morning, Walter.

CRONKITE

Well I guess the question on everyone's mind is: how has age affected your ability to command this shuttle so far?

FRANK (V.O.)

As you and I know, Walter, age is a very overrated factor in determining one's capabilities...

As Frank talks, a pair of dentures floats by, between Frank and the video camera. He reaches out and grabs them.

FRANK (V.O.)

I've been looking everywhere for these.

A tense moment at Mission Control, until Frank uncurls his lips from his teeth and grins. Whooping laughter from the entire room, including Sara, Eugene, and Cronkite. Barbara, Frank's wife, covers her face in embarrassment.

BARBARA

No. I didn't just see that.

INT. SHUTTLE - MOMENTS LATER

Frank and the crew stare into the video camera.

FRANK & CREW

So long, everyone.

The camera's light goes from green to red. Ethan puts himself in Frank's face, mighty pissed.

ETHAN

What the hell was that?

FRANK

'That' was a joke.

ETHAN

Not funny. Half the world was watching us, we represent the best America has to offer. Why can't you act your age?

FRANK

Lighten up, peachfuzz. Take a moment and enjoy yourself, you're in space.

INT. MISSION CONTROL (HOUSTON)

In the far corner, Gerson and General Vostov huddle in conference.

Vostov is sweating nervously.

GERSON

Four hours to intercept. We're right on schedule.

VOSTOV

That's not what I'm worried about.

GERSON

Relax. Our man is up there with them.

ANGLE - FLIGHT DIRECTOR'S CONSOLE

Eugene Davis monitors the situation. Sara, on headset, talks to the payload engineer on the floor.

SARA

Okay, Daedalus's got Ikon on the scopes. We should have a visual momentarily.

DAVIS
Stand by for terminal initiation
burn.

CUT TO:

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE COCKPIT

Hawk and Roger gingerly guide the shuttle towards an object on the radar screen. Work mode now, the crew is getting set to grab Ikon.

HAWK
Range 5,000 meters.

TANK AND JERRY

In the crew cabin, operating the capture control. They stare at a tiny dot on the video guidance screen. Tank sweats it.

JERRY
Roger, Hawk. We've got a visual
here.

HAWK
Standing by for a 15 second burn.

FRANK
Let's go ahead and deploy the arm.

Tank operates a joystick, focusing intently on the screen. No smiling and joking now.

EXT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

The shuttle's grappling arm unfolds from the open cargo bay.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

TANK
Deploying the arm. 2200 feet,
dead center. Good driving up
there, Hawk.

FRANK
Let's light 'em up.

Hawk cranes his neck to see the satellite growing nearer.

HAWK
Stand by. T.I. burn in four,
three, two, one...

He hits a glowing switch. The shuttle's orbital maneuvering ENGINES FIRE, slowing them down on the line to satellite Ikon.

HAWK

Hello, Ikon. And how are we feeling today?

ROGER

Activating secondary radar and floods.

Roger flips two switches.

EXT. SATELLITE IKON - THAT MOMENT

The shuttle hits Ikon with a flood light. Suddenly, like an origami flower unfolding into a dragon, the satellite slowly transforms into something very menacing looking. It morphs and grows, modules coming out of modules. The solar panels fold back like the ears of an attacking dogs. It slowly rotates to face the shuttle.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Frank stares through the bay window. His mouth drops open.

FRANK

Dear God...

Roger hears SOMETHING on the RADAR.

ROGER

Holy shit, this thing's trying to get tone on us!

ETHAN

What are you talking about?

HAWK

It's painting a target on us. It thinks we're a bogie. Kill the radar.

Roger flips OFF the RADAR. They wait nervously.

EXT. SATELLITE IKON - THAT MOMENT

It completes its rotation, facing the shuttle. We can see painted on the side of Ikon the faded letters "C.C.C.P."

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

A tense beat passes. They all stare through the cockpit window.

ROGER

We're okay.

JERRY

No wonder the damn thing's orbit is decaying. It's gotta weigh 50 tons.

FRANK

Fire the retros, Hawk.
(into headset)
Houston, Daedalus. Do you see what we see?

CAPCOM (V.O.)

Roger, Daedalus. We're studying it from here. Stand by for a decision.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

Davis, in deep thought, watches Ikon on the screen along with everyone else in Mission Control.

DAVIS

Does that look like a communications satellite to you, Sara?

SARA

(turns to Vostov)
General, what kind of modifications have your people made here?

DAVIS

There's just so much stress that grappling arm can take.

Vostov stumbles.

GERSON

It's within operational limits. Tell Frank he can latch on.

CUT TO:

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - PAYLOAD CAPTURE BAY

Frank stares out at the cockpit windows, mesmerized by Ikon.

FRANK

That is the damnedest thing I ever saw.

JERRY

It must be fitted with some kind of self-defense mechanism. The radar must have activated it.

FRANK

Can you grab it, Tank?

TANK

Yeah. I can reconfigure. I'm just worried about the mass.

FRANK

I'm worried the damn thing's gonna get pissed off again.

JERRY

Tank, you're gonna have to latch on without any radar assist.

TANK

Tank's gonna have to do what?

FRANK

I don't know about this.

ETHAN

The objective of this mission is the restoration of this satellite. Let's get on with it.

FRANK

I'm not getting my crew killed -- and that includes you.

(into communicator)

Houston, Daedalus. We're still standing by.

CAPCOM (V.O.)

Daedalus, this is Houston. You have a go for capture.

FRANK

Roger, Houston. We copy. Okay, guys, let's grab it and have a look.

EXT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Hawk has maneuvered the shuttle to within 10 feet -- the grappling arm extended.

INT. SHUTTLE COCKPIT - THAT MOMENT

Roger turns to Hawk.

ROGER

Is he as good as you say he is?

HAWK

Tank? He's da man.

Tank is in The Zone. He moves the arm with robotic precision.

ETHAN

Drifting left, Tank! That's too far!

TANK

Hail Mary, full of grace, holy shit! I got it!

EXT. SATELLITE - THAT MOMENT

The grappling arm contacts the satellite, and locks on.

HAWK

You da man, Tank.

TANK

I da man.

High fives all around. Even Ethan is impressed.

INT. AIRLOCK - LATER

Frank, Ethan and Jerry do a final hook-up in their space suits and MMUs (Manned Maneuvering Units). Roger looks them all over, nods his approval.

ROGER

Man, you boys look sharp.

He exits the airlock. The SEAL on the door HISSES as it opens and they float into --

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS ACTION

DAVIS (V.O.)

(over radio)

Welcome to space, Frank. You've waited a while for this.

FRANK

Only forty years.

They rip around like George Jetson.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

Everyone watches Frank jet around the satellite in his MMU, laughing.

FRANK

This feels kinda like that '43 Buick you used to drive, Gene. A little slow around the curves, brakes don't work for shit.

JERRY

All right, cowboys, let's herd 'em up. We do have a job here, you know.

And they approach Satellite Ikon. Jerry latches his MMU to the side of the satellite next to the panel. Ethan hovers nearby.

EXT. IKON - LATER

Frank and Ethan float inside a long, narrow cylindrical compartment inside the satellite; they are deep into the repair. Several control panel plates float freely, the circuit patch boards exposed. Frank throws a switch inside a control panel. Pinpoint lights fade on inside the compartment.

FRANK

Okay, we've got power now. Let's have a look at the brains.

Frank goes to open a new access panel with his cordless drill.

ETHAN

Frank. I don't think that's the panel.

Ethan is below Frank, couldn't get to Frank's access panel in the cramped quarters if he wanted to.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

Gerson and Vostov watch the goings-on anxiously.

EXT. IKON - THAT MOMENT

With the cordless drill Frank unscrews the last sheet metal screw, removing an access panel. In the shadows of the compartment, Frank sees a long cylindrical object.

He aims a penlight at it. Its tip is bullet-shaped, the tail disappears into darkness.

FRANK

Abort activity.

JERRY

What is it, Frank?

ETHAN

Frank, listen to me --

FRANK

I said, abort activity!

CUT TO:

INT. SHUTTLE AIR-LOCK - MOMENTS LATER

In decompression. They remove their helmets. Frank is confused, and furious.

FRANK

Ethan, what the hell is going on here? What is this damn thing?

ETHAN

A Russian Communications satellite, Colonel.

FRANK

Bullshit! You think I don't know a nuclear launch platform when I see it?! Why the hell are we helping the Russians put a missile silo back into orbit?

ETHAN

You're some kind of genius, you figure it out.

Frank shoves Ethan in the chest hard. He flies backwards into the bulkhead.

ETHAN

You're only here as a publicity stunt. You got what you wanted, you're in space. Now finish the mission!

Frank looks duped and unhappy about it.

CUT TO:

INT. MISSION CONTROL - LATER

Davis, Sara, Gerson and Vostov look up at Frank on the video screen.

DAVIS

Okay, Frank. This is a secure line.

FRANK (V.O.)

You have good reason not to want this bird to fall, Gene. It has six armed nuclear warheads onboard.

Davis turns to Gerson, incredulous.

DAVIS

What's he talking about?

Gerson looks as incredulous as everyone else.

GERSON

I have no idea.

(to Vostov)

General, is there something you'd like to tell us?

At first Vostov looks betrayed, then faces Sara and Davis.

VOSTOV

Ikon is a relic from the cold war. It has floated dead in space ever since the Soviet Union fell. There are six missiles onboard targeted at strategic American installations. All, most regrettably, in large metropolitan areas. If Ikon goes off-line it will assume that there has been a catastrophe and will initiate launch on its own.

The silence is deafening.

SARA

You picked a helluva time for a confession, General.

GERSON

(indignant)

Those are our men up there. This is a treaty violation. A big one.

VOSTOV

(under his breath)

You bastard.

FRANK (V.O.)

You know, it's really touching,
Bob -- your concern for our safety
and all. While you're at it,
maybe you could ask the General
how my guidance system for SkyLab
ended up on this six-gun.

Gerson squirms.

VOSTOV

It was stolen by the KGB from Mr.
Gerson's personal files.

Sara and Davis look at Gerson, shocked. Gerson acts
aghast.

GERSON

This is all new to me.

FRANK (V.O.)

You'd hook us on to this bastard,
put it back into orbit fully
armed, and keep it a secret just
to save your own ass?

DAVIS

People, we have a real problem to
deal with. We don't have time for
this now.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Frank looks morose. Hawk kills the transmit switch.

HAWK

Huddle. We got a big-ass problem.
We're locked into a 20-megaton
hydrogen bomb going 17,000 miles
an hour.

FRANK

Jerry, how high can we send this
shitheap? Can we get it into deep
space?

JERRY

With three Payload Assist rockets?
Just. Maybe. I don't know.

The "AIRLOCK OPEN" light blinks, accompanied by a BUZZER.

FRANK

What the hell's that?

Hawk floats to the side window, sees Ethan, in the MMU,
floating towards the satellite, towing the Payload Assist

Modules (three four-foot-long rockets strapped to an aluminum pallet) with a tether. Frank furiously shouts into the communicator.

FRANK

Ethan, what are you doing?!

ETHAN (V.O.)

Your job, Frank. I'm putting Ikon back into geo-sync orbit.

FRANK

You don't know what you're doing, Ethan! Get back here!

(on no response)

Ethan -- !?

EXT. IKON - THAT MOMENT

Ethan, propelling himself towards Ikon, flicks OFF his RADIO, cutting off Frank. He reaches Ikon, latching his MMU to the side of the satellite.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Frank goes to the airlock door.

JERRY

Frank, he jammed the airlock door.

FRANK

Open the panel and override it!

EXT. IKON - THAT MOMENT

Ethan unbuckles the rockets and removes one. The other two float freely next to him in space. He starts locking the rocket in place on a circuited bracket on the belly of the satellite.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Frank talks into the communicator.

FRANK

Ethan! Do not lock-on the P.A.M. rockets, do you read me!?

(urgent, to Jerry)

How long?

JERRY

I almost have it, Frank.

EXT. IKON - THAT MOMENT

Ethan locks the first P.A.M. rocket in place. As he clamps it down, it suddenly FIRES a SHORT POWERFUL BURST -- The satellite lurches on the shuttle's arm, twisting it, heading right towards the shuttle.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

The SATELLITE CRASHES into the BULKHEAD with an ENORMOUS BOOM! The bracing and shelving collapses under the weight and on top of Roger. He is slammed to the floor, head bleeding badly.

Pandemonium. Pressure leak starts, oxygen escapes, a fire in the aft crew compartment. Team Daedalus reacts, all their actions drilled, they attack the situation swiftly.

TANK

Roger's hurt mid-deck! Bleeding bad!

FRANK

He's yours, Tank!

JERRY

We got a fire in here!

HAWK

Coming in!

As he floats by the window hatch, fighting the smoke, he glances outside -- and freezes in horror:

HAWK

Oh shit!!!
(shouting)
We lost Ikon and Ethan!

SATELLITE IKON

has bounced off the shuttle and is falling towards Earth. It is taking the shuttle's broken retractor arm and Ethan, in MMU, with it. It moves at what looks to be about 2 mph. It jetisons six panels in unison, leaving debris in its wake.

ETHAN (V.O.)

(over radio)
Help me!!

Hawk flies over to Frank, sucking on an oxygen regulator.

FRANK
 (as Hawk nods)
 Tank! Contain the situation!
 Hawk and I are going out.

Frank and Hawk reach the airlock door. Jerry works frantically on the door's control panel.

FRANK
 Hurry up! We're losing them!

The airlock door opens. Hawk and Frank hurry in.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

Pandemonium here, too. Engineers return to their stations. Sara watches in horror as the satellite drifts away from Daedalus.

ENGINEER
 Range 200 meters. It's
 accelerating, Miss Holland.

SARA
 They're gonna lose it.

INT. AIRLOCK - THAT MOMENT

Hawk and Frank finish their suit-up. They fall back into the MMUs and strap them on.

Hawk hyperventilates the pure oxygen, trying to replace the nitrogen in his blood with pure O2.

FRANK
 How long till Ikon goes off-line?

JERRY
 Those missiles are heating up
 right now. You got five minutes,
 but by that time it'll be out of
 your range.

HAWK
 Anything else you want to know?

FRANK
 Blow the seal!

The AIRLOCK SEAL BLOWS. Hawk and Frank jet out --

INTO SPACE

FIRING their MMUs' nitrogen JETS towards the fleeing satellite, side-by-side. Ikon is about two hundred feet

away.

FRANK

Latch-on Starboard. On my signal,
fire all jets.

They split up. Frank latches his MMU on to one side of
the satellite. Hawk latches on to the other.

FRANK

Fire!

The JETS on the two MMU's FIRE in unison, nitrogen vapor
spraying out. This is a tough battle, but they're
winning, gradually slowing the satellite's fall. Hawk
glances at a readout on the MMU: "NITROGEN FUEL AT TEN
PERCENT."

HAWK

I'm at ten percent, Frank.

FRANK

Don't let it get past five or
we're not getting back to the
ship.

They both release their fingers from the jet triggers.
They look up towards the shuttle for a reference. They
have stopped the satellite.

HAWK

She's static.

FRANK

Houston, we've arrested the fall.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

A collective exhale, a collective cheer.

DAVIS

Attaboy, Frank.

EXT. IKON - THAT MOMENT

Frank hovers over Ethan, still in his MMU, pinned in by
the damaged grappling arm. Frank releases the arm,
pushes it away and peers inside Ethan's face-plate, sees
movement.

FRANK

He's out.

HAWK

Throw me the other payload assist
modules. I'll hook them up while

you bring Johnny Quest back to the ship.

Frank looks at the empty pallet... then into space, sees the two PAM rockets floating away, irretrievable.

FRANK

We got a problem. We only have one rocket.

JERRY (V.O.)

One P.A.M.'s not gonna get this thing into orbit, Frank! Without active course correction the damn thing'll go in a circle like a boat with one oar in the water!

Hawk looks at the satellite, sees that two of the solar panels are crumpled like tin foil.

HAWK

(to Frank)

You got another problem.

Frank looks over, sees the broken panels.

FRANK

Shit. Even if we do get her up, she can't power herself with two broken panels.

Frank looks down at Earth, sighs, flustered, defeated.

HAWK

Bring the kid back. Let me take care of this.

FRANK

And how exactly are you gonna take care of this, professor? You're a pilot.

Hawk propels over to a panel on the satellite, pops it open.

HAWK

Stand back! Blowing solar panels!

FRANK

Hawk, what are you -- ?!

He's interrupted by a MUFFLED EXPLOSION as the giant solar panels blow off. Frank stares at Hawk, dumbfounded, but he knows what Hawk's got planned.

HAWK

Throw me your auxiliary O2 module.

Frank won't. Can't.

FRANK

No.

HAWK

I love you, Frank, but why do you always have to be such a killjoy?

(beat)

You only got one rocket. This damn thing ain't gonna steer itself. You need a pilot.

(as he tilts his head at the moon)

Besides, you ever seen a prettier moon?

Frank looks at the moon.

JERRY (V.O.)

What's he talking about, Frank?

They ignore Jerry.

FRANK

We're a quarter-million miles away. You'll never make it.

HAWK

Sure I will. It'll be just like hitting a baseball to the moon. All I gotta do is get myself halfway there, the moon's gravity's gonna do the rest. I'll fire these things into deep space and let 'em self-destruct.

Frank thinks long and hard. Finally, he detaches his auxiliary O2 tank, tosses it to Hawk. He rips off Ethan's, too, tosses it over. Hawk clips them onto his MMU.

HAWK

Somebody's gotta be first in every race. Guess it had to be me this time.

FRANK

Like always, dammit.

Frank pulls Ethan out of his MMU.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - MOMENTS LATER

All rapt by the sight on screen -- Hawk setting the payload assist module, talking to Tank.

TANK

Pitch should be set at 060
degrees.

HAWK (V.O.)

Roger, 060.

INT. CREW CABIN - THAT MOMENT

The airlock door opens. Frank floats into the cabin from the airlock, holding Ethan. Jerry is in Frank's face immediately.

JERRY

You can't let him do this.
There's gotta be another way!

FRANK

There isn't. I'll explain later.
(beat)
What's our status here?

JERRY

(shocked at Frank)
The orbital maneuvering engines
were destroyed in the fire.
Computer guidance is gone, and we
lost a few heat tiles.

FRANK

How's Roger?

JERRY

Concussion.
(hesitates)
He's out of action, Frank. You're
gonna have to pilot this bird in.

Frank swallows hard. He looks over at Tank.

TANK

Don't look at me. I haven't flown
anything bigger than a Cessna in
thirty years.

They hear Hawk's rich LAUGHTER over the RADIO.

EXT. SHUTTLE - HAWK

climbs into Ethan's vacant MMU, straps in, still
laughing. The moon hangs overhead, feels so close you
could reach out and grab it.

HAWK

(laughing)
Hey, Frank, it's starting to look

like I got the better end of this deal.

FRANK (V.O.)
Quit laughing, you dummy. You're using up oxygen.

HAWK
Alright. Let's shoot this baby to the moon!

INT. SHUTTLE - ON FRANK

He flicks up a safety guard on a control panel and hovers his finger over a trigger. A poignant, sardonic grin overcomes him.

FRANK
I'm gonna countdown to one.

FRANK AND HAWK (V.O.)
One!

Frank hits the button.

A bright light -- the P.A.M. IGNITES. The satellite begins to quake, then streaks away.

EXT. SPACE

Hawk's head arcs back as he and the satellite accelerate to the moon, which is looming large ahead. Hawk's war whoop can barely be heard over the ROAR of the ENGINE. He makes course corrections with pulses from the nitrogen jets.

ON SPACE SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Pin-drop silence. Frank watches through the window. Hawk getting smaller, heading right for the moon. The PAM burns out (normal). Quiet.... then --

HAWK (V.O.)
(singing, over radio)
Fly me to the moon and let me play
among the stars...

STATIC CRACKLES as his voice transmission gets weaker.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MISSION CONTROL - AM

Sara watches the trajectory screen at the front of the room. Drained -- exhausted mentally and physically. The

situation is serious. Davis comes out of a huddle with flight controllers, and motions Sara to join him at an unoccupied station.

DAVIS

Ikon has left our gravitational field. Hawk was able to launch the missiles into deep space.

She nods slowly, a tear swelling up in her eye.

SARA

How's Daedalus?

DAVIS

She's a damaged ship. They're gonna have to reenter the atmosphere, find the correct glide slope, and put her down with no power and no computer.

SARA

That's impossible.

DAVIS

Well, it's never been done. The only two pilots alive that could even think about it are Roger and Hawk. Roger's wounded and Hawk's...

Sara shuts down emotions and is all business now.

SARA

Let's get them in as close as we can and abort the landing. They'll have to bail out. What's the survival probability?

DAVIS

Twenty percent. At best. But it's zero if they try to set her down. The ship's dead. She might not even glide with the structural damage.

SARA

Twenty's better than zero.

She places her headset back on, goes back to work.

CUT TO:

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE DAEDALUS - LATER

The men go about preparations for reentry in silence. Full pressure suits, attached to their parachutes. Frank

eases the injured Roger into his, Tank helps Ethan. Both are helpless, look like children being dressed by a parent.

Tank and Jerry retract the drag chute arm that will deploy under the shuttle's wing to release them when they jump.

INT. SHUTTLE - COCKPIT

Frank sits at the controls, warning lights blinking everywhere, reading a thick operations manual. Tank makes his way up.

TANK

You all right?

Frank nods. Tank looks compassionate.

TANK

You gonna be able to do this?

FRANK

I don't know. I never imagined having to without Hawk.

He exhales a big sigh. Tank reaches into his pocket, pulls out...

HULA GIRL

from the dash of his B-50 in 1958.

He sticks it on the instrument display panel, and she starts to dance. Frank looks at Tank like he's crazy.

FRANK

You saved that thing?

CAPCOM (V.O.)

Daedalus. Stand by for Eugene Davis.

DAVIS (V.O.)

Frank, the judgement here is to go for California. We're gonna get you as close as we can to Edwards. Now you're still inverted. And you're flying tail first. Ordinarily, we'd do a de-orbit burn to right her --

FRANK

-- but we don't have an engine to do that with.

DAVIS (V.O.)

You're gonna have to jostle her a little -- bringing her around with your speed and a little gravity. Go easy, though. You're still at 17,000 miles per hour.

Frank eases the stick over and around. She's not very responsive. He gives it a pull, and the ship snap-rolls, and begins shaking violently.

FRANK

Whoaaaa, shit!

DAVIS (V.O.)

Easy, Frank. She's not a fighter jet.

Frank taps on the rudder pedals and pulls hard on the stick until the horizon changes. Earth is below him now, instead of over his head. He lets out the breath he's been holding.

FRANK

Okay, we're righted.

INT. MISSION CONTROL

Not a small amount of shock on the faces. Davis lets out the breath he was holding.

DAVIS

That's a good start.

INTERCUT WITH Frank.

Frank looks at the altimeter -- 400,000 feet.

FRANK

Houston, we are at entry interface.

DAVIS

Roger, Frank. You're gonna punch in here in 15 seconds. I'm gonna lose you till you hit the stratosphere. Frank, you've shed some tiles. She's gonna heat up on you.

FRANK

Roger, Houston.

DAVIS

10 seconds. Frank, you've got the procedure. It's not optimum, but I want all you guys home.

Understood?

FRANK

We copy. Daedalus out.

DAVIS

Good luck, Frank.

(to engineers)

Okay, folks. Here we go.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Frank grabs the stick, glancing over at Tank.

FRANK

You wanna pray now, Rev?

TANK

What the hell you think I've been doing?

Tank sees the worry and concentration in Frank's face and smiles.

TANK

What would Hawk do?

Frank shakes his head. He's not Hawk. The shuttle begins to bounce, entering our atmosphere. And heat up. With no orbital maneuvering engines, they're coming in more than 50 percent faster than they should. And the ride is about 100 percent more bumpy. Frank talks into his communicator. His voice shaking from the turbulence... at the very least.

FRANK

It's gonna be a very steep dive so we don't overshoot. I'm gonna have to pull a couple very tight turns to slow her down -- last one at 13,000. At ten, we'll be over California. I want everybody up and clipped then. I'm blowing the hatch at 5,000 and out we go. Ethan and Roger first, make sure they clear the wing. Everybody got that?

They all affirm. And Frank pushes the nose over into a steep dive. DAEDALUS GROANS in response. Her airframe was not designed for this.

EXT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Tiles flake away, she's heating up to 2,000 degrees.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Agony in the faces. The ship bounces wildly, anything not locked down in steel flies about the cabin. The hula girl dances madly.

FRANK

Come on, baby. Hold it together.

Frank's knuckles are white, holding the stick, jamming the unresponsive rudders. First turn, over Japan, 50 miles up. She's heating up to 2500 now. And they're feeling it inside, the men sweating like crazy. The AIRFRAME is SCREECHING in protest.

ROGER

That's too steep, Frank!! She's gonna fall apart on you!!

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

They track the ship, unable to communicate.

TRAJECTORY ENGINEER

Altitude 30 miles, over Guam.

EXT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

The skin's over 3000 now, the left wing shaking its rivets.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

It's an oven. Frank has to wipe the sweat away from his eyes to see. He tries to level off, but she won't respond. He fights, and curses it. Nothing. He stops, thinking, what would Hawk do?

... Then throws the stick over -- a major, and unnatural bank. Then banks it right back across, zig-zagging to slow it down. Ethan screams in protest, at the same pitch as the BENDING METAL.

But Roger nods. This will work. Frank pulls one last time, and they bank into their turn, heading south, over Hawaii.

FRANK

That's it, baby. One more turn.
Come on, line me up. Line me
up...

Frank battles with the stick like the Old Man and the Sea fighting the Great Fish. His face shows a warrior's

calm.

The SHIP levels off at 10 miles, shaking and RATTLING like a '55 Chevy on a dirt road, and turns for home. And Frank's agonized grimace eases.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

BURSTS of STATIC.

CAPCOM

He's trying to call, sir.

DAVIS

He's fried his antenna.
Trajectory, where is he?

TRAJECTORY

He's on final. But he is way too hot. He's gonna overshoot to Colorado at this rate.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

The moment of calm is gone.

TANK

35,000. We're going way too fast.

Looking ahead, cloud and marine layer at the California coast.

TANK

We can't bail out at Mach 2, Frank.

FRANK

I'm gliding at 22 degrees. We can slow down some, but the most we can hope for is Mach 1. That, or we go in 1,000 miles past.

TANK

Your call.

The decision. The shuttle feels like it could break up at any moment. The cloud cover looms ahead as they drop rapidly.

TANK

Come up on 10.

FRANK

Everybody up! Hook on!

He begins to weave the shuttle in long back and forth

turns -- trying to slow her down.

MISSION CONTROL - THAT MOMENT

Horror on the faces.

DAVIS

No, Frank, no...

SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

7,000 feet. In the clouds. Mach 1.

FRANK

Stand by. Okay, Tank. Clip on.

TANK

What about you?

FRANK

I just need a visual so I can line her up on Death Valley, and I'm out. Blowing the hatch!

He throws a switch, the EXPLOSIVE BOLTS BLOW, and the 600 MPH WIND HOWLS through Daedalus.

IN CREW CABIN

Jerry muscles the drag chute arm into place, and clips Roger in.

JERRY

You ready?

ROGER

Yeah.

Jerry lifts him up, and shoves him out on the arm, keeping him clear of the wobbling wing.

JERRY

One gone!

Jerry shoves Ethan forward, smiles as he lets him fly.

JERRY

Two gone!

And the clouds dissolve beneath them. Looking back, they can see two chutes opened, floating gently down.

FRANK

Get out now!

Looking ahead, Frank can see they're too high for Edwards, too low to overshoot a desert oasis community of tract homes in the distance. The shuttle is on the line to crash right into it.

Frank's decision is instantaneous. He's staying with it. He turns around to see Jerry and Tank, pausing at the hatchway.

FRANK

What the hell are you waiting for?

They unclip simultaneously.

JERRY

We're a team, Frank.

FRANK

Go, dammit! That's an order!

TANK

We're staying.

Frank throws the stick over, plunging them down. Whatever momentum he lost, he's got it all back now. A normal 22 degree descent is now 50. They're heading in like a missile.

FRANK

Airspeed?

TANK

500! Pull it up!

Frank holds the dive, seeing --

TWO FIGHTER ESCORTS

on either side.

FIGHTER (V.O.)

Daedalus, this is Recover Five.
You're way too hot. Recommend
abort -- Abort now!

Frank levels it off.

FRANK

Negative, Recover. I'm taking her in.

TANK

410. Here comes the runway.

FRANK

No problem...

Just like Hawk in the simulator, he hums to himself, totally in his element, a look of peace overcomes him.

FRANK

... you just gotta tap the brakes.

INT. AIR FORCE F- - THAT MOMENT

The PILOT watches in disbelief as the shuttle's nose pitches up.

PILOT

Shit, he's lost it! Mayday,
Mayday!!

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

The STALL ALARM is WAILING. The left wing is about to go.

FRANK

Call my airspeed.

TANK

350, 310, 280 -- she's stalling,
Frank! You're gonna go over!
Drop the nose!

FRANK

Speed!?

TANK

215! Drop the nose!

FRANK

Whattaya say we drop the nose?

10, 5, 2, 1... touchdown. She's wobbly, bouncing, leaning hard right with the damaged left wing. Frank stamps on the brakes as the drag chute opens -- and she levels off, a landing almost identical to Hawk's in the simulator.

INT. MISSION CONTROL (HOUSTON)

Watching the shuttle roll gently to a stop at the far end of the runway. Barbara watches nervously.

FRANK (V.O.)

Wheels stop. Daedalus is home.

They rise as one, cheering wildly. Barbara bursts out crying. Sara grabs the woman and holds her tight. Davis sighs.

DAVIS
I'm getting too old for this shit.

ON GERSON

He hesitates for a moment, then forces a smile and claps his hands disingenuously.

BACK TO SCENE

The media rushes back into the room.

Davis makes his way through the room shaking hands. He sees Sara staring at the screen, crying. He heads for her. Sara puts an arm on his shoulder.

SARA
Gene?

DAVIS
Yeah?

SARA
Never mind...
(as Davis looks back
at the screen)
You think it's too late for me to
re-join the program... as an
astronaut?

DAVIS
(nodding at the
big screen)
That oughtta answer your question.

She smiles. Something catches Davis's eye, he turns to see Gerson talking to a news crew.

GERSON
I never doubted Frank for a
minute. I brought Frank on to
Project Daedalus forty years ago,
and I brought him in for this
mission, and I can tell you
this...

EXT. DESERT - MILES BEHIND

A Navy CH-54 rescue helicopter eases down. Two rescue personnel bound out to assist Ethan and Roger -- shaken, but standing.

INT. SHUTTLE - THAT MOMENT

Frank turns to look at Jerry and Tank.

JERRY

Just a walk in the park, Frank.

FRANK

slumps back, closing his eyes. Opening his eyes slowly, he sees the only thing moving in the shuttle --

FRANK'S POV - HULA GIRL

Her crazy jig slowly comes to an end.

DISSOLVE TO:

ANGLE ON FULL MOON - NIGHT

The sound of CRICKETS in the night.

EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE (YOUNTVILLE, CA) - NIGHT

Frank stares at the moon, deep in thought. He doesn't notice Barbara joining him at his side.

BARBARA

You think he made it?

Frank slowly breaks into a pensive grin as "FLY ME TO THE MOON" FADES SLOWLY UP.

FRANK

Yeah. I think he made it.

His eyes travel back to the moon.

EXT. MOON - SEA OF TRANQUILITY - THAT MOMENT

We are MOVING IN TOWARDS the moon, slowly, the shadowed contours of the sand dunes and craters getting sharper. SINATRA'S VOICE KICKS IN. Something PASSES us --

SATELLITE IKON

And as it passes, we see Hawk still attached to it in his MMU. The satellite gently hits the edge of a sand dune, the soft surface cushioning the impact. The satellite bounces once, throwing --

HAWK

Out of the MMU.

SATELLITE

spins, topples over and lands back on the moon.

HAWK

arcs and tumbles through the air until the moon's gravity gently pulls him back down, on to the deep, pillow-soft moon dust, where he bounces once, then lays motionless.

TIGHT ON HAWK'S FACEPLATE

The Earth is reflected, and we can't see his face, can't tell whether he's alive or dead. Then, in VOICE OVER we hear HAWK'S joyous LAUGHTER.

WIDER - HAWK

Lying there, flat on his back. There is a deep impression around him in the lunar dust where he fell, especially around his arms and legs. Maybe it was the fall. Or maybe, like a kid at Winter's first snow fall, he was making angels in the virgin snow.

FADE OUT.

THE END