

"In the Event of a Moon Disaster"

screenplay by Mike Jones

May 2, 2011

registered WGA

"You want to be thinking of some alternative posture for the President in the event of mishaps on Apollo 11... like what to do for the widows."

-- Astronaut Frank Borman to Nixon speech-writer William Safire, June 1969.

"On this movie there's one big roadblock, and that's history itself. And I expected to honor that roadblock. But then it hit me. My characters don't *know* they're part of history. They're in the here and now, this is *happening*. Any minute, they're dead."

-- Quentin Tarantino on *Inglorious Basterds*

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INT/EXT. APOLLO 11 LUNAR LANDER -- MOON.

BLOOD DRIPS SLOWLY down the inside of an ASTRONAUT'S faceplate, completely obscuring his face. He's motionless.

WE PULL BACK -- to ALARMS and RADIO STATIC. The lunar lander's instrument panel covered in flashing red and white.

The vessel is on its side, the bright moonscape beyond the canted windows.

BACK MORE -- to another astronaut, NEIL ARMSTRONG (37), struggling out of his harness.

Once free, Armstrong goes to his colleague, shaking him:

ARMSTRONG
Aldrin! ALDRIN!

BACK MORE UNTIL WE ARE --

OUTSIDE, ON THE LUNAR SURFACE.

Stark silence.

BACK MORE -- a white stream of crystallized gas shoots from the Eagle's ascent engine, impaled by a broken lander.

The brilliant lunar landscape is blanketed in white light.

Dust from a crash settles slowly in the moon's near-zero gravity. The black vacuum of space beyond.

BACK MORE -- to the EARTH in eerie repose, gazing on the crash like a passive blue eye.

BLACK:

CAPTION: "TWO WEEKS EARLIER."

KYLE (O.S.)
Whoever it is will be bigger than
Lindbergh. He'll be a legend, an
instant American hero.

FADE IN:

INT. WADE STEWART'S OFFICE.

Two GLOSSY PUBLICITY PHOTOS on a desk: Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin. Both posed in flight suits behind American flags, smiling.

Four NASA directors look down at them, drinking coffee and smoking:

KYLE MCCARDELL (42), NASA Flight Director, eagerly making his point to --

WADE STEWART (45), the piss-and-vinegar head of NASA.

Behind them -- WES GARRETT (40), NASA Publicity Director and TAYLOR EMBREE (36), NASA Deputy Administrator.

KYLE (CONT'D)

The problem is... Buzz wants it too much.

WADE

What's wrong with that? Hell, I want it too much but I ain't going.

Kyle leans forward.

KYLE

But Buzz wants it for himself, is my feeling. Not for the country.

Wade soaks this in.

WADE

Wes, what do you think?

WES

The first man to step on the moon will be the face of the Apollo program and NASA for all time. He's gotta be predictable. I can build a publicity strategy much more easily around that.

Wade nods, considering, changing his mind.

WADE

So it's Armstrong.

(sighs)

A civilian. I'll hear it from military.

TAYLOR

(joking)

Mike is Army. Send him. Leave the other two in the orbiter.

They chuckle as we see another picture on the desk, separated from Aldrin and Armstrong. MICHAEL COLLINS, posed exactly the same way as his colleagues. Yet there's something distant in his eyes.

WADE (O.S.)

The guy's a fucking taxi driver.
Easiest part of the job.

INT. ASTRONAUT BRIEFING ROOM.

TWO HANDS under a table ball up a napkin nervously. MICHAEL COLLINS (36) looks blank-eyed at a mile-long checklist.

NEIL (O.S.)

Mike.

Mike looks up to see Neil Armstrong holding out a pen at the other end of the table. The room is buzzing with people -- ASSISTANTS, TECHNICIANS, MANAGERS, etc.

Next to Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin has finished signing something and is walking away. Mike walks over, looks down at his publicity photo, cropped in a commemorative postal stamp template. SEVERAL POSTAL REPRESENTATIVES position them for Mike.

There are three separate templates.

COLLINS

Why three?

POSTAL REP

One is for us, one is to take up
with you and another is a
remembrance... for your wife and
family.

COLLINS

A remembrance? For our funeral?

The postal rep's awkward silence confirms this. Collins doesn't sign the third one, tossing the pen back to the postal rep and going back to his checklist.

COLLINS (cont'd)

She won't want it.

INT. COLLINS HOUSE.

MELISSA COLLINS paces in front of her TV as a BABY CRIES in another room.

On the mantle are pictures of Melissa with her husband, Michael Collins, all over the world, always in each other's arms.

Front and center is a large photo of Collins, Armstrong and Aldrin posing behind the NASA logo. She pulls a few family photos in front of it, blocking it.

CBS ANCHOR (O.S.)

"With only days to go before the Apollo 11 liftoff, all eyes are on the Kennedy Space Center..."

Finally, the baby's cries get louder. Melissa, stressed, walks to get the child.

INT. LIBRARY. DAY

A sign on an easel reads:

LONGVIEW WOMEN'S GROUP WELCOMES: Linda Aldrin, wife of Apollo Astronaut Buzz Aldrin.

LINDA ALDRIN, confident and smart, stands next to a screen, a slide projector remote control in her hand. A pointer in the other. On the screen is an illustration of Apollo's course to the moon.

In the audience are 30 WOMEN. Some drinking coffee or taking pictures as she takes questions.

WOMAN

What concerns you the most about the mission?

LINDA

(smiles politely)

That they'll run out of coffee. The man can't put his pants on without it.

The ladies laugh politely.

EXT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE.

ALICE ARMSTRONG opens the door to her house. Outside, a large camp of REPORTERS mill about. One REPORTER notices her as:

RICKY, 6, comes up the sidewalk holding a donut. She sweeps him inside angrily.

ALICE

Ricky, that's your third donut!

REPORTER

Mrs. Armstrong! A word please--?

ALICE

No! And for the love of god stop giving him donuts. Please!

INT. SUIT ROOM.

Armstrong, Collins, and Aldrin strip in front of a team of SUIT TECHNICIANS, all dressed in white and wearing hair nets. Each astronaut is handed a diaper, condom, tube, and waist-mounted collection bag.

CUT TO:

Bio-sensors are glued to each man's chest.

CUT TO:

It takes several technicians to help each man into the space suit. A lot of cramming, shifting, and groaning.

CUT TO:

The three astronauts, now in full gear, rest in lazy-boy recliners. They can't nap -- all have their eyes wide, staring off, their minds alive and tense.

EXT. NASA GRANDSTAND. DAY.

Linda makes her way through the crowded bleachers to her seat. In the distance stands the Saturn V rocket. Taking a seat, she looks behind her to see Alice holding her son's hand. Elsewhere, Melissa sits with her fussy baby, trying to settle it.

INT. ELEVATOR.

The three astronauts stand motionless as the tower elevator lifts them slowly up the side of the Saturn V rocket, caked in thick slabs of steaming ice.

The elevator reaches the top and each step out with their respective assistant, walking toward the open hatch where several other TECHNICIANS wait. Armstrong is last as he watches Mike and Aldrin squeeze into the rocket.

Armstrong looks into the horizon -- barren for about a mile, then throngs of PEOPLE for as far as he can see.

Wade comes from behind him as Armstrong looks at the press tents, campers, bonfires, and viewing stages sponsored by every sort of American corporation.

WADE

The whole world is watching this.
Even the unfriendly parts.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL -- KOROLEV, RUSSIA.

A windowless building in the industrial city of Korolev, cradle of Soviet space exploration.

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL.

The corresponding video image plays out on a giant screen in Russia's version of Mission Control. A photo of the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin, hangs on the wall.

The room, full of desks and controls, is only half full of RUSSIAN TECHNICIANS, mingling in groups, pointing and commenting on the U.S. rocket's features. Some snicker.

A couple of TECHNICIANS roll out an iced bucket of champagne.

TECHNICIAN (O.S.)

(in Russian)

What's that for?

TECHNICIAN (cont'd)

(in Russian)

When their little toy explodes! HA!

The room erupts in LAUGHTER, some of it nervous.

One technician doesn't laugh -- LUKA TARASOV (54) sits smoking, eyes bloodshot, watching the screen, studying it intensely. He pulls out a flask, tosses the cold coffee in his mug into the trashcan, and fills it with alcohol.

GREGORI, his friend, steps in his line of sight.

GREGORI

You should go home, Luka.

LUKA

Get out of the way, Gregori.

Gregori walks away. Luka remains staring at the rocket, troubled and far away, drinking. The superimposed countdown on the screen hits 2 minutes.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

Kyle McCardell stands arms folded behind his console, looking over a room full of CONTROLLERS and TECHNICIANS, each wearing short sleeves and a black tie. He speaks into his headset.

KYLE
 Controllers, I need your final go,
 no-go for launch. Retro?

CONTROLLER 1
 Go.

KYLE
 Guidance?

CONTROLLER 3
 Go.

KYLE
 CapCom?

We remain on BRUCE POPE, 38, the direct radio link to the astronauts. Fittingly, Pope is a jolly Texan with a twangy, smooth-as-silk voice.

POPE
 I'm a go, Flight.

EXT. SATURN V ROCKET.

The enormous Saturn V rocket drips with steam during the final countdown:

LAUNCH CONTROLLER (O.S.)
 Four... three... two... one.

White clouds of smoke billow from Apollo's engines as the gas is ignited, erasing the cloud in a giant ball of fire. Apollo lifts slowly off the lander as:

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

The three astronauts are pressed into their seats, shaking violently.

EXT. VEIHING STAGES.

Cameras slowly lift upward to catch the flight as other people shield their eyes and strain to watch as Apollo begins to disappear behind a streaking white and orange cloud.

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL.

The room is quiet as the technicians watch the liftoff, until someone blurts out:

TECHNICIAN
KABOOM! HA HA!

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

Collins, Armstrong, and Aldrin each have their faces frozen under the force of 4.5 Gs, their eyeballs pressed back into their heads. Suddenly the first-stage rocket separates.

EXT. APOLLO - CONTINUOUS

The vessel is overcome by a giant fireball as the first stage falls away, then shoots through it as the second stage fires. The vessel pushes through the final bit of blue atmosphere and into the blackness of space.

The launch needle is jettisoned, revealing its windows.

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE - CONTINUOUS

White sunlight streams into the cabin.

ARMSTRONG
We've got skirt sep.

The vessel slows, entering 0-g. In front of the astronauts float a myriad of different items lost during the vessel's construction -- bolts, nuts, washers, etc.

Armstrong unbuckles first, followed by Mike and Aldrin.

POPE (O.S.)
Apollo you are go for orbit.

EXT. APOLLO

In orbit at 300 miles per second, the vessel witnesses rapid day and night as the sun flies around them -- "reds, golds, blinding whites as fast as the snuff of a candle."

COLLINS (O.S.)
Jesus Christ, look at that horizon!

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE COMMAND MODULE, they look out the windows.

COLLINS (cont'd)
 Goddamn that's pretty. Where's the
 Hasselblad?

He drifts away to hunt for the camera. While Aldrin drifts to
 the opposite window to look at the moon.

ALDRIN
 Have you thought at all about what
 it'll feel like?

ARMSTRONG
 Emotionally? I don't think about
 it.

ALDRIN
 Why not?

ARMSTRONG
 My feelings aren't a part of this
 mission, now. Shouldn't be a part
 of yours, either.

Mike drifts back to the window with the camera, points the
 lens just in time to watch the sun disappear behind the earth
 again. The blackness is overwhelming.

COLLINS
 Damn.

Aldrin pats his shoulder and drifts away, leaving Mike to
 look out the window -- white light rims the distant horizon,
 there is nothing but deep black surrounding them.

INT. LIBRARY MEETING ROOM. DAY.

Linda Aldrin is doing another presentation at a different
 library. Behind the audience, a few JOURNALISTS and
 PHOTOGRAPHERS snap photos.

The slide on the screen is the same illustration of Apollo's
 course to the moon, with the Command Module (CM) now
 connected to the Lunar Module (LM) in mid-flight.

LINDA
 After Buzz and Neil finish their
 final surface experiments, they
 will ascend back into lunar orbit
 and re-connect with Mike Collins.

WOMAN 2
 Doesn't it worry you at all?

Again, Linda smiles politely at the question -- one she's
 answered countless times.

LINDA
I'm most worried they'll run out of
coffee. Buzz can't hardly back out
of the driveway without it.

As before, the ladies LAUGH except for one -- Alice
Armstrong.

LINDA (cont'd)
Thank you.

The women APPLAUD. Alice Armstrong approaches Linda as she
gets her things together.

ALICE
(smiling)
You're like me... can't sit home
all day.

Linda smiles.

INT. RESTAURANT.

Alice and Linda sit in front of half empty glasses of wine.

ALICE
They bring donuts for Ricky. He
doesn't know any better so he just
talks and talks. The next day it's
in the paper.

LINDA
Keep your sprinklers on. All day.
Your yard will be a mud pit like
mine but it keeps the parasites on
the street.

ALICE
Nice idea!

They LAUGH.

LINDA
Why didn't we do this a long time
ago, Alice?

ALICE
Well, Neil will never say it but he
was pretty angry by all that
jockeying to be the first man.

LINDA
Yes...

ALICE

Can I ask you something then?

Linda sips the wine, nods her head.

ALICE (cont'd)

Why did Buzz's dad write all those letters after they picked Neil?

LINDA

Your dad ever come to your defense on something?

ALICE

Yes.

LINDA

Now imagine that, but with a retired Congressman who is just angling to get into it with someone. Anyone.

Alice LAUGHS.

LINDA (cont'd)

And those letters to NASA... well, it just tore Buzz up. Because what could he do?

(beat)

Now, I will say Buzz does have his issues with Neil. But Buzz's fights are his own. They're not mine.

Alice smiles at this. She lifts her glass in a toast.

ALICE

Hey, I got an idea. Let's go see Melissa Collins.

LINDA

Oh she's gonna piss her pants when she sees us together.

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

As Mike cleans the 0-g latrine he looks through the CM into the Lunar Module, watching Aldrin and Armstrong plan for the descent. He feels a bit left out.

IN THE LUNAR MODULE, Armstrong and Aldrin are looking over a series of lunar maps. Armstrong points.

ARMSTRONG

What's this? The flight plan has us on two orbits before touchdown. Where'd this third orbit come from?

ALDRIN

So the computer can re-acquire the landing coordinates. We've rehearsed it countless times in the sims...

ARMSTRONG

And it wastes fuel every time.

ALDRIN

We have the okay from Flight. Kyle feels--

ARMSTRONG

Wait, you talked with Kyle about this and not me?
(yelling into the CM)
Mike!

COLLINS

Yeah.

ARMSTRONG

Did you know about a third orbit?

COLLINS

We talked about it last week, didn't we?

ARMSTRONG

(angry)
No, we didn't.

ALDRIN

We only have one shot at the descent, Neil.

ARMSTRONG

(shakes his head)
And I'm not doing it on an empty tank. There's no reason to burn fuel for a third orbit. Two orbits, then touch down.

Armstrong floats away. Conversation over. Aldrin flings his pen away, frustrated.

EXT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

The CM fires into lunar orbit, heading for the dark side of the moon, careening away from the sun and earth and then disappearing.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

Kyle, watching the monitors, barks to his controllers.

KYLE

Mark the time.

POPE

Contact lost with Columbia at 0655
and 18 seconds.

Pope hits a stopwatch. The entire control room is silent, punctuating the ticking of the watch.

INT. COLLINS HOUSE.

Melissa, Linda and Alice watch the televised coverage of the moon, drinking wine.

CBS ANCHOR

(on the television)

While on the dark side of the moon,
the astronauts will stay out of
radio contact...

MELISSA

Were either of you able to get life
insurance for Neil or Buzz?

Linda and Alice scoff.

LINDA

After they said no, the rep asked
if I could get an autograph for
him. I told him sure, on an
insurance policy.

Linda and Alice laugh. Melissa doesn't.

MELISSA

Mike has to come home. I told him
if something happened on the moon
he needed to shoot back here.

Melissa wipes tears away as she looks at Linda and Alice.
Both fall silent, sad.

MELISSA (cont'd)
 Sorry. I shouldn't have said that.

ALICE
 It's okay, honey.

But Linda watches intently as Melissa says:

MELISSA
 Those vultures in my driveway ask me every day whether Mike would leave his friends on the moon.

LINDA
 What do you say?

MELISSA
 Wes told me to smile and laugh at the question.
 (beat, near tears)
 How am I supposed to do that when I think about it all the time?
 (beat)
 The problem is... Mike thinks about things too much. He imagines things and then convinces himself that they're real. It's cute sometimes.
 (beat)
 But not now.

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

Collins and Aldrin gaze out the window as they pass into the back side of the moon.

The lunar surface changes from the common pockmarked image to DEEPLY SCARRED AND TREACHEROUS. This is the horrific, hidden face of the moon. The pulverized surface gives evidence of a billion-plus years of constant assault -- a sight never seen from earth.

The sight affects Collins deeply.

COLLINS
 Christ. Looks like hell.

ALDRIN
 This is the side that gets the worst of it.

COLLINS
 Yeah, but think about it. It used to be a part of the earth.

ALDRIN
Well, that's a theory--

COLLINS
(interrupting)
And theory says this piece of the
earth was ejected into our orbit.
So it sits out here and accepts the
abuse of space and we don't.

ALDRIN
Where are you going here?

COLLINS
Do... do you think we're really
welcome here?

Aldrin cocks an eye at Mike, at a loss.

ALDRIN
Mike, you gotta keep it together.
You're our ride home.

COLLINS
I'm fine. I'm... just...

Mike grabs a clipboard and goes back to his tasks. Aldrin
looks intently at him.

COLLINS (cont'd)
Really. I'm fine.

Aldrin floats away. Collins looks back at the moon. As he
watches --

-- the cratered, lunar surface bubbles and coalesces into a
FIELD OF SKULLS, their mouths frozen as if caught screaming
into deep space.

Collins shuts his eyes and shakes away the vision. Looking
back, the skulls are gone.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

Pope stares at his stopwatch. Forty-eight minutes have gone
by as he says over and over:

POPE
Houston to Columbia, over.

Long beat.

COLLINS (O.S.)
Houston, this is Columbia.

A visible relief floods the room as shoulders relax and cigarettes come out.

POPE
(smiles)
Good to have you back, Columbia.

KYLE
They are go for lunar prep.

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

Collins helps Armstrong and Aldrin, suited in their exterior helmets and thick white suits, brace into their standing positions in the Lunar Module (LM). Armstrong runs through a checklist in front of two thruster controls. Aldrin makes some calculations into the computer.

ALDRIN
Neil, look at this. A third orbit
would eat up only 18% of fuel--

ARMSTRONG
Not saying no again.

ALDRIN
I know what to do. I can do it.

ARMSTRONG
You aren't the commander. I mean,
that gets to the heart of it,
right?

ALDRIN
Meaning what?

ARMSTRONG
I know how hard you lobbied to lead
this mission. Your father even
sent me a letter, for Christ's
sake. And when he didn't get what
he wanted, he started questioning
my integrity as commander.
(beat)
So did you, I hear.

Aldrin, caught, looks long at Armstrong.

ALDRIN
My issue was that you stick too
close to a script. NASA brass may
love that, but in a clutch I
wondered if you would go off-script
in order to save the mission. Or
whether it'd be too late.

ALDRIN (cont'd)
 That's why I'd like a third orbit.
 (beat)
 So yes. I made my concerns clear.
 You would have done the same.

ARMSTRONG
 I would have done it to your face.
 You did it behind mine.

COLLINS (O.S.)
 Guys!

They look behind them. Collins has been there the whole time.

COLLINS (cont'd)
 You're about to land on the moon.

He stares at them, both now silent. Collins closes the door.

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

As the lunar module detaches from the CM, a POP of white mist shoots from between the two vehicles.

INSIDE -- Armstrong turns to the sound, curious. Aldrin watches as the computer blinks off momentarily, scrambles, then comes back on.

ALDRIN
 Eagle, Houston. You just read that computer anomaly, too?

POPE (O.S.)
 Roger, Eagle. GNC says you are a go for powered descent.

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

The LM falls quickly toward the surface. Craters, mountains, and boulders become larger, more defined. Shadows grow.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Armstrong and Aldrin stand at their positions. Aldrin reads from the instrument panel as Armstrong works the thrusters.

ARMSTRONG
 We are now in the approach phase.
 Everything looking good.

ALDRIN
 Altitude 5200 feet.

POPE (O.S.)
You are go for landing, over.

ALDRIN
Roger.

A KLAXON SOUND and red warning light diverts their attention to a digital alarm number reading 1202.

ALDRIN (cont'd)
1202 alarm.

Armstrong is momentarily diverted.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

Covering the mic, Pope turns to the other controllers.

POPE
What the hell is that?

Over Pope's shoulder, Kyle points to a young MIT grad, IRA TAYLOR.

KYLE
Ira, get me a read on 1202.

Ira is already pouring through several thick notebooks frantically, his finger hitting a number -- 1202.

IRA
It's an executive overflow. Too much data. It's overloading the computer.

KYLE
Well, you can't fix it now, Ira. So clear your head give me your go/no go based on the last frame of data you have.

Ira, sweating buckets, is unable to answer as he pours over the readouts.

KYLE (cont'd)
Ira!

IRA
Go! Go! But it can't happen again.

POPE
Eagle you are go for landing.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Armstrong scans the horizon. A field of boulders looms.

ARMSTRONG
I can't land here.

ALDRIN
200 feet. Down four and half.

POPE (O.S.)
You guys are looking good, here.
Down in a half.

ARMSTRONG
Nothing looks familiar here. Are
we off course?

Aldrin checks the computer, but the ALARM RINGS AGAIN.

ALDRIN
Program alarm! 1201!

ARMSTRONG
(impatient)
Houston, give us a reading on
this alarm!

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

Stressed and shaking his head, Mike Collins listens to the descent exchange between Houston and the lunar module.

COLLINS
(to himself)
Abort... Abort the fucking
landing...

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

Kyle is over the shoulder of Ira, who shakes his head in frustration. The MEDICAL CONTROLLER stands, yelling at Kyle:

MEDICAL CONTROLLER
Their pulse rates are skyrocketing--

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
Houston, we are well out of the
designated landing area.

KYLE
Shit.

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
Looking for a new site.

An indicator in front of Bruce Pope lights.

POPE
Eagle, only sixty seconds of
descent fuel before mandatory
abort.

Pope grabs a stop watch. All technicians are on their feet.

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

The blue flame of the descent engine pushes hard. Just below, large boulders reach up. There's nowhere to land.

INT. LUNAR LANDER - CONTINUOUS

Armstrong strains his eyes to find a landing spot.

POPE (O.S.)
30 seconds, Eagle.

ALDRIN
75 feet.

Armstrong is tense on the thrusters. Aldrin reads the gyroscope.

ALDRIN (cont'd)
Pitching forward.

Outside, the terrain looks a little better. Lunar dust begins to cloud Armstrong's view.

ARMSTRONG
Picking up some dust.

ALDRIN
30 feet down.

The program alarm blares again. This time, Aldrin's altitude readouts disappear.

ALDRIN (cont'd)
Program alarm! Computer offline!
I... I got no altitude!

ARMSTRONG
Shit!

POPE (V.O.)
Eagle, abort. Abort! Abort!

ARMSTRONG
Arming ascent engine! Firing
in five, four, three...

ALDRIN
Columbia! We're coming back
up!

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

Mike Collins is all business:

 COLLINS
Houston, Columbia is now prepping
for LM recovery...!

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Armstrong reaches for the ascent engine switch just as --

EXT. LUNAR LANDER - CONTINUOUS

The lander's pad, drifting over a patch of smooth surface --
-- HITS A LARGE BOULDER. The lunar module pitches forward
violently.

INT. LUNAR LANDER - CONTINUOUS

Armstrong hits the ascent ignition switch as the cabin
careens forward. He and Aldrin SLAM against the console.

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

Hearing the MUFFLED CRASH, Collins is frantic.

 COLLINS
Buzz!! Neil!!

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

The module separates from the descent engine just as it slams
onto the moon's surface, buckling the landing gear and
driving it into the module's bottom half. The ascent engine
flickers on, then quickly off.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

The entire room gasps as the video screen of the LM's on-
board camera SMASHES into the lunar surface and goes offline
into snow.

 POPE
Houston to Eagle! Houston to
Eagle!

INT. COLLINS HOUSE.

Linda, Melissa and Alice are on their feet as they watch it all TV -- the image smashing into snow.

CBS ANCHOR

Uh... there's seems to have been a problem...

LINDA

NO!

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL -- KOROLEV, RUSSIA.

On their screen, some of the Russian technicians are on their feet, jumping and SHOUTING JOYOUSLY as they watch the televised crash.

Someone grabs the champagne and pops it open.

A few stay seated, shocked, including Luka. He stares at the screen.

Someone brings out a model of the U.S. lunar lander and flies it haphazardly around the room as the others laugh. He's about to crash it into the ground when --

-- Luka bolts from his desk, grabs the technician's arm and takes the model. He walks away to another room and closes the door.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Armstrong and Aldrin are hunched over their controls, motionless as Pope frantically calls to them:

POPE (O.S.)

Houston to Eagle! Come on, guys!

WE PICK UP THE FIRST SCENE AS --

Armstrong moves first, slowly. Unstrapping himself. He quickly goes to Aldrin, unstrapping him and turning him over. The interior of Aldrin's face-plate is coated in blood, obscuring his face.

ARMSTRONG

Aldrin! ALDRIN!

He shakes him. Aldrin reacts, wakes, starts to panic, grabbing at the helmet.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

Wait! We have to pressurize!

He takes Aldrin's gloved hand into his own, holding it. It seems to calm Aldrin as Armstrong flips several switches. The cabin pressurizes quickly as Armstrong gazes at the instrument readings.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

TECHNICIAN

I have cabin pressurization!

KYLE

(to Pope)

Get them on the radio!

Pope and Collins talk over each other frantically:

DUKE

(more intent)

Eagle!? We copy you down!?

Eagle!? Do you read us!?

COLLINS

Neil!! Come in!!

KYLE (cont'd)

(to Pope)

Shut him up!

POPE

Columbia, maintain radio silence!

Eagle!? Come in, Eagle! Over!

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Ignoring Houston, Armstrong rips off his gloves and helmet, takes a cautious, stressful breath in, realizes it's fine, then takes off Aldrin's helmet.

Aldrin's face is a bloody mess from a broken nose and large gash on his forehead.

Armstrong grabs at some towels as Aldrin takes off his gloves.

ARMSTRONG

Hey! Hey. You alright? Buzz!?

Dazed, Aldrin nods.

POPE (O.S.)

Houston to Eagle...

ARMSTRONG

(into headset)

Houston, Tranquility Base here.
Eagle has crashed on the lunar surface.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

The news shocks the controllers.

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)

We are lying on our aft side. Hull has not been breached. Pressure is steady. We... we have separated from the descent engine, it seems.

KYLE

How are they?

POPE

Eagle, are you both okay?

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)

Buzz got the worst of it. Looks like he has a broken nose. There's an open wound on his head.

(beat)

He is... indicating that his arm is broken.

POPE

Can he talk?

ALDRIN (O.S.)

I can. I'll be alright.

KYLE

We need a full damage report on the LM right away. As best as they can get it without stepping outside.

INT. MISSION CONTROL -- BOARD ROOM.

Wade Stewart steps into the busy Mission Control board room.

On a DRY-ERASE BOARD, a list of options stretch down -- all have been crossed out.

Kyle, Pope and Taylor Embree are pouring over schematics of the Lunar Module with a horde of technicians looking over their shoulders, adding comments, interrupting each other.

WADE

Hey. HEY! Everyone out of here but Kyle, Taylor and Pope. Go.

It's met with INSTANT PROTEST before Kyle puts up his hand.

KYLE

They want to be here, Wade. We've been working on this hours--

WADE

I want them all out of here!

He pulls open the door as technicians, glaring at Wade, start to file out. He slams the door closed.

Kyle and Pope stare at him, saying nothing.

WADE (cont'd)

Now... where are we at?

Kyle takes a breath and glides a finger over the LM's schematic.

KYLE

Neil says the LM landed on its aft side and separated from the descent engine. As best we can tell they are 5 miles from the designated landing site...

KYLE CONTINUES TO EXPLAIN AS WE CUT TO:

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL.

AT THE SAME MOMENT, Luka looks at the tape of the crash, pausing it just as the camera hits the lunar surface.

He goes to the model of the LM, turning it over slowly on the table to simulate the crash, studying which pieces hit ground, as Kyle narrates:

KYLE (O.S.)

The aft landing gear buckled.

Luka snaps off one of the model's landing gears.

KYLE (O.S.) (cont'd)

The rendezvous radar was destroyed.
Ascent guidance system is offline.

Luka snaps off the rendezvous radar dish.

KYLE (O.S.) (cont'd)

But the real damage is where the
landing gear went after it broke.

Luka follows where the buckled landing gear could have been driven, seeing it goes right into the bottom portion of the lunar module.

POPE (O.S.)
 It went into the oxidizer.
 Unfortunately, dinitrogen tetroxide
 is one of the most corrosive
 substances around so the leak
 turned into a gaping hole in a
 matter of minutes, we think.

Luka inspects closely the place that Pope describes, but it's
 featureless. He picks up a phone and dials.

LUKA
 (into phone)
 Nikolai. It's Luka.
 (beat)
 Yes, I saw it.
 (beat)
 Well, I'm celebrating in my own
 way.

He looks closely at the LM model.

LUKA (cont'd)
 Listen, I need to know more about
 this American-made piece of shit.

INT. MISSION CONTROL -- BOARD ROOM.

Back inside the board room, Wade shakes his head at the
 schematics.

WADE
 So there's no oxidizer left? What
 about in the lander?

KYLE
 Also gone, used up in the descent.

WADE
 And the Aerozine tanks?

POPE
 They're stable.

WADE
 But without the oxidizer they can't
 power the ascent engine.

POPE
 That's right.

Beat.

WADE
 How long do they have?

KYLE

If they do nothing, two or three days until the O2 is tapped.

Wade sighs deeply.

WADE

There are no work-arounds for a failed ascent engine, am I right? We got them for most every situation but this. It's one shot and one shot only--

KYLE

Wade--

WADE

(interrupting)
Yes or no, Kyle.

KYLE

I refuse--

TAYLOR

That's correct.

Kyle looks at Taylor harshly.

TAYLOR (cont'd)

Come on, Kyle. You know as well as I do that we've had a big fail rate on the ascent engines. And every failure is permanent.

Kyle is about to argue when Wade interrupts:

WADE

Okay, okay... Let's have the room work it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

SUBTITLE: Four hours later.

A somber, darker air has set into the busy Mission Control room. By the looks on the controllers' faces it's not going well.

Kyle walks the room as controllers and technicians pour over computers and schematics. Wade paces in the back while Taylor works the phones.

Kyle stops at a desk of controllers.

KYLE

What do you got?

CONTROLLER

If Columbia can descend to 50,000 feet, Eagle would only need 1000 pounds of thrust to meet.

KYLE

(into the headset)

Mike, you got that?

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

Mike works the computer.

COLLINS

I got it. What about guidance?

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

Kyle steers over to another set of controllers, led by GREG (early 30s), young and easily stressed.

KYLE

Guidance!?

GREG

With the LM's system offline, it'll be all on Columbia's shoulders. If Mike has to stray off course to catch the LM, he will burn out of fuel in 4 minutes.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Armstrong and Aldrin hover over charts.

ALDRIN

But he can pitch into Area 2 and reacquire us at 32.852, correct?

GREG (O.S.)

(flustered)

Uh... Are...Are you asking *me*?

ALDRIN

I'm asking whoever can give me a fucking answer!

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

Greg looks lost, dives back into his computer as Kyle lets him have it.

KYLE
 Greg, get your head in this.
 (turns to another team)
 Life support!?

Across the room, another team stands.

TECHNICIAN
 They can switch to the suits for
 O2. Water and food can be
 stretched for a week. We'll have
 exact numbers in 10 minutes.

KYLE
 Okay, finally some good news.
 (turning to another)
 Propulsion?

This team in the far corner stays seated. They've heard him but seem afraid to answer. Their leader, TED (40s), is particularly stressed.

KYLE (cont'd)
 Tell me you have an option.

The technicians, sweating and shirts unbuttoned, stressed, can't answer. Wade watches Ted closely.

KYLE (cont'd)
 Ted? Any option.

TED
 (explodes)
 They have no oxidizer! What can I
 do!? I can't make oxidizer just
 appear on the fucking moon!

Ted angrily clears off the console with a sweep of his hand. The whole room goes silent.

KYLE
 (softly)
 Pick it up.

TED
 Kyle--

KYLE
 (interrupting)
 Get back on it, Ted.

Kyle walks away, noticing Wade is making his way to the door.

KYLE (cont'd)
Wade!? What are you doing?

WADE
It's been four hours now. I have
to brief the president.
(beat)
You know what to do.

POPE
It's not time to pull the plug,
Wade! Not now!

WADE
(angry)
Lucky for you it's not your call,
Pope!

Wade slams the door behind him.

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
Pope? What's going on?

Pope looks at Kyle, lost.

KYLE
I'll talk to him.

He patches his headset into the console, taking a long time
to finally speak.

KYLE (cont'd)
Neil... Wade is briefing the
president. He... he is moving
forward on the moon disaster
contingency.

Across the room, controllers open their thick Mission
Guidelines binders to a particular section.

WE FOCUS ON ONE -- the binder is opened to a section titled:
MOON DISASTER SEQUENCE.

Pope doesn't touch his binder. Neither does Kyle.

INT. WADE STEWART'S OFFICE.

The phone pressed to his ear and a hand pressed to his
temples, Wade is delivering the bad news into the phone.

WADE

And without that chemical reaction there is no way to shoot the LM back into lunar orbit.

(beat)

No, the orbiter has no way to land on the surface. The only choice Collins has is to come back home.

(beat)

Yes, Mr. President. There's no question he'll come back. His mission guidelines are clear.

INT. COLLINS HOUSE.

Wes Garrett sits on an coffee table in front of Linda and Alice, who hold hands. Melissa paces behind them nervously. Several other NASA EXECS stand behind Wes.

WES

Can I talk to you each... privately?

Linda looks to Alice, who grips her hands like a vice, barely keeping it together.

LINDA

No.

WES

Okay.

(beat)

Linda. Alice. Your husbands cannot be recovered from the lunar surface.

Alice leans down, in tears. Linda stares straight ahead, thinking.

WES (cont'd)

Melissa, Mike is coming back once he completes another orbit--

ALICE

Are they dead?

WES

I don't know.

LINDA

(interrupting)

What does the lunar module's life support indicator say?

WES
Like I said--

LINDA
(interrupting)
You *do* know. Mission Control can read everything inside the CM and LM. So what does the LM say?

WES
Even if life support is stable, they can't be recovered.

LINDA
Say that again and I'll push your fucking teeth in! *ARE THEY ALIVE!?*

WES
Linda, you know as well as I do what's happening now. According to mission guidelines, they will turn off the life support systems in the event that they can't be...
(eyes her carefully)
Recovered.

Linda drains, knowing it's true.

WES (cont'd)
I understand how overwhelming this is. We have counselors for you after we notify the press. That will happen in 30 minutes.
(looking at his watch)
Now I think the president will be calling you any minute now...

Linda closes her eyes, shutting him out.

INT. OVAL OFFICE.

A television camera and CREW along with the President's CABINET MEMBERS stare as PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON looks over a typewritten speech at his desk.

On the top of the page, we see the words: "IN THE EVENT OF A MOON DISASTER" from speech-writer William Safire.

Television lights bake the room. The President's anxious CHIEF OF STAFF stands next to the camera, looking at the monitor.

The President takes a deep breath, then nods. A RED LIGHT above the camera turns on.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

In one corner, a TV interrupts its programming to show a view of the Oval Office.

The President sits behind the desk, holding the speech.

Every controller freezes in place to watch.

PRESIDENT

My fellow Americans...

(beat)

Fate has ordained that the men who went to the moon to explore in peace will stay on the moon to rest in peace.

Pope has to sit down, burying his head in his hands. Kyle stares angrily at the TV, thinking a mile-a-minute.

PRESIDENT (cont'd)

These brave men, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, know that there is no hope for their recovery. But they also know that there is hope for mankind in their sacrifice.

INT. LUNAR MODULE.

Armstrong and Aldrin, heads down, listen through their headsets.

PRESIDENT (O.S.)

These two men are laying down their lives in mankind's most noble goal: the search for truth and understanding.

EXT. COLLINS HOUSEHOLD.

Hordes of PRESS with cameras, tape recorders and notebooks begin to rush toward Melissa Collins' house as several GOVERNMENT MEN carrying briefcases step up to the front door, letting themselves in.

PRESIDENT (O.S.)

In their exploration, they stirred the people of the world to feel as one; in their sacrifice, they bind more tightly the brotherhood of man.

A row of POLICE MEN stop the press onslaught as Wes holds out his hands to calm them.

WES

Mrs. Armstrong, Mrs. Aldrin and
Mrs. Collins will not be making a
statement at this time--

INT. COMMAND MODULE.

Mike stares out the window at the silver disc of earth in the
distance, listening.

PRESIDENT (O.S.)

In ancient days, men looked at the
stars and saw their heroes in the
constellations.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

Technicians stare at the screen in shock and disbelief.

PRESIDENT (O.S.)

In modern times, we do much the
same, but our heroes are epic men
of flesh and blood.

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL.

The champagne party has stopped dead as Russian technicians
put their glasses down to listen to someone standing next to
the TV, translating the president's words.

PRESIDENT (O.S.)

Others will follow, and surely find
their way home. Man's search will
not be denied. But these men were
the first, and they will remain the
foremost in our hearts.

We PAN to see Luka's desk, empty.

EXT. KGB BUILDING. NIGHT.

Luka jogs up the steps of the KGB Building two at a time.

PRESIDENT (O.S.)

For every human being who looks up
at the moon in the nights to come
will know that there is some corner
of another world that is forever
mankind.

INT. COMMAND MODULE.

Collins looks in the near distance -- the dark side of moon approaches.

COLLINS
(voice shaking)
Columbia to Eagle, over.

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
Eagle, over.

COLLINS
I got about a minute before I'm out
of contact. What can I do?

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
If we can't launch off this rock,
then there's nothing you can do.

COLLINS
Think you'll still be here when I
swing back?

Long beat.

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
I... I don't know, Mike.

The shadow of the moon rushes toward the command module.
Collins tries to get a words out.

COLLINS
I'll... I'll try you again...

The module is consumed in black.

INT. CBS NEWSROOM.

The CBS Anchor talks to GIL MCDONOUGH, the science
correspondent. Gil holds models of the Command Module and
Lunar Module.

GIL
One theory is the small space
within the docking mechanism wasn't
pressurized. So when the locks
were released, a pop of air pushed
the LM away at a faster rate of
speed.

Using the models, Gil glides the LM away from an X on the
table.

GIL (cont'd)

As they reached the surface, the error had grown exponentially until they were way off course. We don't yet know why their on-board computer couldn't reacquire, unless it went down. If it did, these two errors created the perfect set of circumstances for this disaster.

CBS ANCHOR

And NASA says they probably perished during impact. But if they didn't?

GIL

If the ascent engine is destroyed, there is no hope. In that event, Armstrong and Aldrin will shut off the life support system and pass away peacefully.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

The two main components of the wrecked lander lay among smaller pieces scattered on the moon's surface. The light of the unfiltered sun covers it all in white.

CUT TO:

INSIDE, Armstrong puts his hand on a lever.

ALDRIN

How long will we have?

ARMSTRONG

About twenty minutes. You should just... try to breathe normally.

ALDRIN

I think I stopped breathing normally three days ago.

ARMSTRONG

(into headset)

Houston. Columbia. We are cutting life support now.

He pulls the lever. A machine somewhere within the LM winds down and stops, leaving a deathly silence.

CUT TO:

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

CLOSE on an console indicator reading LM LIFE SUPPORT. It goes from green to red. The controller turns to Kyle. Wade and Taylor stand behind him.

CONTROLLER

I have life support shut-off.

Kyle says nothing, steaming. Wade pats him on the back and leaves. Taylor, after a beat, follows him.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Silence. Armstrong looks up at Aldrin.

ARMSTRONG

I'm sorry, Buzz.

ALDRIN

It's not your fault. There's nothing we could have done. A third orbit wouldn't have helped with a failed computer.

Long beat. Aldrin pulls out a photo of himself and Linda, smirks at it.

ALDRIN (cont'd)

She's pissed. I just know it. I almost feel pity for whoever gets ripped a new one by her.

He sees Armstrong just looking at the ground.

ALDRIN (cont'd)

(re: the photo)

Where's yours?

ARMSTRONG

Rather not look at it.

Aldrin notices a tear that Armstrong wipes away quickly.

ALDRIN

You okay?

ARMSTRONG

It's just... why wouldn't they let us talk to them, for christ's sake?

ALDRIN

It's easier if we die quickly.

ARMSTRONG
Easier on our wives?

ALDRIN
Easier on the world, probably.

ARMSTRONG
I would have liked to talk to them.
To her... To my boy...

Another tear falls, this time Armstrong lets it. In the near-zero gravity it floats slowly down. It shocks Aldrin.

ALDRIN
Hey. Look at me.

Armstrong looks at him.

ALDRIN (cont'd)
You feeling okay about this?

Armstrong says nothing, doesn't have to.

ALDRIN (cont'd)
Look... mission guidelines brought
us here. And now mission
guidelines will tell us how to die?
What do you think about that?

ARMSTRONG
I gotta say... you know... I don't
like it.

ALDRIN
Neither do I. So... so how about
this. They've already decided
we're dead. But... how about we
decide how we're going to die?

Armstrong looks at him. This is making sense.

ARMSTRONG
What are you thinking?

ALDRIN
We got enough water and food for
three days. Don't know about the
O2--

ARMSTRONG
I was thinking about that. Between
the LM's scrubber and the suits I
think we can last a week.

ALDRIN

We can rig the solar cells from the relay experiment to recharge the batteries.

ARMSTRONG

That's true.

ALDRIN

So... we have options, Neil.

ARMSTRONG

What about your arm?

ALDRIN

This suit might as well be a full body cast.

Armstrong considers, smiles.

ARMSTRONG

You know, they tested an edible skin for this thing (re: the LM)?

ALDRIN

Is that right?

ARMSTRONG

Tasted so bad they thought death would be better.

The astronauts LAUGH -- the first time in a long while.

ALDRIN

And I was thinking about something else... we're gonna kill each other if we stay cooped up in this can.

ARMSTRONG

Probably.

ALDRIN

So... how about we go for a walk?

(beat)

What's stopping us?

Armstrong thinks on this, smiles, flips the lever back up. The machine winds back into action.

ARMSTRONG

(into headset)

Eagle to Houston.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

CLOSE on the life support indicator as it goes back to green.

CONTROLLER
I have life support back online!

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
Eagle to Houston, do you copy?

Pope looks at Kyle.

POPE
What do we do?

KYLE
Answer him.

POPE
(into headset)
Go ahead, Eagle.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

ARMSTRONG
We're going to step outside.

POPE (O.S.)
Uh... stand by...

Armstrong smiles at Aldrin, who coyly smiles back.

ARMSTRONG
Ten bucks it'll be a no.

ALDRIN
That's a sucker bet.

They burst out laughing just as:

POPE (O.S.)
Houston to Eagle.

ARMSTRONG
Go ahead.

POPE (O.S.)
Uh... negative on the excursion.
Flight says you are to remain--

ARMSTRONG
(interrupting)
Houston, we're not asking
permission. Just wanted to let you
know where we'll be.

ALDRIN

We've also decided to stretch the survival capabilities of the LM in order to explore the lunar surface. We'll be reporting our findings... if anyone is listening.

INT. WADE STEWART'S OFFICE.

Wade Stewart is pacing with the phone to his ear, listening. Taylor looks on, concerned.

CHIEF OF STAFF (O.S.)

If there's no way of them getting off the moon, I see no reason for the president to re-address this.

WADE

But the situation has changed. They want to proceed with the lunar walk--

INT. OVAL OFFICE.

The Chief of Staff turns away from the President as he meets with advisors in the background.

WADE (O.S.)

They believe they can gather some valuable information--

CHIEF OF STAFF

(interrupting)

No, they aren't proceeding with the lunar walk. Because they're dead. That's what you told us, Mr. Stewart. You said they're as good as dead.

WADE (O.S.)

What I said is--

CHIEF OF STAFF

So now you want the world to watch them die?

WADE (O.S.)

There are other options--

CHIEF OF STAFF

(interrupting, harshly)

They are dead, Mr. Stewart.

CHIEF OF STAFF (cont'd)
And the President has already read
the contingency speech to the world
based on *your* information! Based
on Mission Guidelines that *you*
authored!

INT. WADE STEWART'S OFFICE.

Back in his office, Wade has gone white.

CHIEF OF STAFF (O.S.)
Do you see where this is going now?

Long beat.

WADE
I... I do.

CHIEF OF STAFF (O.S.)
Good. Then take care of it.

Wade hangs up the phone, stares at Taylor. Suddenly, a wave
of anger overcomes him and he rushes from around his desk.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

Wade throws open the door, heading right to Kyle.

WADE
Who the fuck gave the okay to
leave?

KYLE
Armstrong.

WADE
Pull him back.

POPE
(into mic)
Houston to Eagle...

But Pope can't do it. He shuts off the mic and turns to Wade
angrily.

POPE (cont'd)
Hold up, here. I don't get it.
Why can't they do the lunar walk?

KYLE
(to Wade)
If they can get out of the LM they
could relay some useful data for
the next Apollo.

WADE

If you think there is an Apollo program after this, you're deluded, Kyle.

(beat)

And the president doesn't want us, or the Russians, watching two men die on the moon. It'll rank as the greatest snuff film of all time, negating any scientific advantage we gleam from that rock.

KYLE

(confused)

So wait... We're having those guys kill themselves in the name of national security?

WADE

Kyle, I wholeheartedly agree with the president on this.

KYLE

(shocked)

You do!?

WADE

Yes.

Kyle eyes him, noting the distinct change in Wade.

KYLE

Look, we've already cut the video and audio feed to the press, Wade. We can keep it all internal--

Frustrated, Wade steps up to the CapCom, yanks the headset off of Pope, and puts it on.

WADE

Hey... Neil? It's Wade.

Long beat.

INT. LUNAR LANDER - CONTINUOUS

Armstrong and Aldrin both look up.

ALDRIN

Uh oh. Dad's on the phone.

Armstrong smiles as he starts pulling out the EVA suits.

WADE (O.S.)

I know you can hear me, fellas.
Look, I... uh... I can appreciate
your effort. But... I want to
speak to the spirit of the mission,
here. Particularly to you, Neil.

Armstrong stops what he's doing to listen.

WADE (O.S.) (cont'd)

As commander, you understand the
need for clear mission procedures
when things go wrong. As difficult
as they are, there is a higher
reason for these procedures. There
is a discipline in them. It is
born of that same discipline that
got us into space in the first
place.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

Wade lifts his eyes, speaking now to the entire control room
now.

WADE

It is discipline that sets us aside
from the animals. It is god's
great gift to us. To go against
this discipline is to embrace chaos
and to give in to the
uncontrollable. And that is not
what NASA is about. Not while I'm
running it.

INT. LUNAR LANDER - CONTINUOUS

Armstrong and Aldrin, heads down, take this in.

WADE (O.S.)

You are great men. Your
accomplishments will be remembered
forever. And cemented in history
by your sacrifice.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

Wade is having a hard time with this, but swallows it down.

WADE

As per mission guidelines, Mission
Control is now ending communication
with you. We wish you god speed.

He yanks off his headset, depressed the radio button to off, and walks away, wiping his eyes.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Aldrin and Armstrong remain heads down, like two scolded children. It hits Armstrong hard as he looks out to the lunar surface.

Suddenly, a helmet nudges him -- pushed to him by Aldrin.

ALDRIN

Dad's never been any fun.

INT. KGB BUILDING.

A SECRETARY brings Luka to an office where NIKOLAI, a sturdy, rotund Russian of 46, comes quickly around his desk.

NIKOLAI

Luka Tarasov in a KGB Building!
What a day this turned out to be.

LUKA

The day's not over, Nikolai.

He sits heavily.

LUKA (cont'd)

My sister tells me that she doesn't
approve of you drinking at work.

Luka cocks an eyebrow at him. Nikolai smiles and brings out a bottle and two coffee mugs, filling them liberally.

NIKOLAI

So what's the interest in the
American's ship?

LUKA

Curiosity.

NIKOLAI

Are you sure it's just that?

LUKA

I'm never sure about anything.

NIKOLAI

You know, Soyuz 4 wasn't your
fault, Luka.

Luka doesn't reply. He downs his drink.

LUKA
What can you tell me about the
lander?

VIKTOR (O.S.)
What lander?

Luka turns to VIKTOR ANDREEV, glaring at him from the doorway.

NIKOLAI
(nervous)
Luka, Viktor Andreev is head of
operations--

LUKA
Yes, I know Viktor.

The two regard each other steely. Some history is between them, much of it not good.

VIKTOR
Feeling good about today, Luka?

LUKA
Why?

VIKTOR
Evens the playing field, no?

Luka shrugs.

VIKTOR (cont'd)
Yet here you are, looking for what?

LUKA
I want to see what you have on the
American lander.

VIKTOR
Why?

Beat, as Luka reads the situation.

LUKA
You know me, Viktor. I'm an
engineer. I want to see if they
could have made it, or whether my
celebration is premature.

He toasts the mug of vodka to Viktor.

NIKOLAI
Okay if I take him downstairs,
Viktor?

Viktor thinks on it, only mildly trusting Luka.

VIKTOR

You'll tell me what you discover afterwards, yes?

(to Nikolai)

Let him see the pictures, too.

INT. KGB BUILDING - SUB BASEMENT.

Nikolai drops a box onto a table. Luka opens it and starts pulling out documents, finding photos of the lunar module schematics -- the same ones we saw in the Mission Control Board room.

LUKA

Why weren't these shared with us?

NIKOLAI

Like their landing coordinates, a lot of fingers were cut off to get these. Viktor wasn't about to let a bunch of scientists leak them.

Nikolai watches him, concerned.

NIKOLAI (cont'd)

Luka, what are you really doing here? This is all politics, now. You've never cared for politics.

LUKA

Oh, I care about politics, Nikolai. Very much.

NIKOLAI

Since when?

LUKA

Well... I remember that American president standing in front of the United Nations. Six years ago. He offered a joint voyage to the moon. A Russian/United States mission.

NIKOLAI

Luka--

LUKA

Think of that, Nikolai! Think what that would have done! And Krushchev was willing! Can you imagine what a different world we'd be living in now?

Nikolai is silent.

LUKA (cont'd)

Two months later that American president was assassinated. He became a martyr for their own lunar mission, and a reason for our hasty one. Science became a race. And we lost.

Nikolai watches Luka study the schematics as it dawns on him:

NIKOLAI

Wait... You want to save them? You want to save the Americans?

Luka doesn't answer as he looks deeply at the schematics, following where the collapsed landing gear could have entered the LM -- right into a tank labeled "oxidizer."

Luka's eyes widen.

LUKA

(to himself)

It's not a mechanical engine.

(beat)

It's a chemical one.

NIKOLAI

Luka--!

Luka glides his finger to another tank labeled "Aerozine." Both tanks are joined by a pipe, leading to the engine funnel.

LUKA

These two chemicals mix to cause a directed, consistent explosion. Control the explosion and you can control the thrust. The hard part is designing a valve...

Luka eyes the design closely, tracing the mechanics with an index finger.

LUKA (cont'd)

Impressive.

NIKOLAI

Luka, stop this! This will get you killed.

Luka turns on his heel and walks quickly out.

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL.

Gregori looks at Luka in disbelief.

GREGORI
But... you can't.

LUKA
We can. All they may need is an oxidizer, Gregori. [He points on a map.] And Soyuz 4 is right there--

GREGORI
(interrupting)
Chances are it's not even the right oxidizer.

LUKA
I'm willing to take that chance.

GREGORI
But Luka--

LUKA
Even if it's not, they only need about 1600 kilos of thrust to get into lunar orbit. The docking will be tricky since I think their ascent radar was destroyed, too--

GREGORI
(interrupting)
Let me get this straight. In the best situation, the Americans are able to walk many kilometers, retrieve the tank, and drag it back to their ship. And even if they ascend, re-join with their orbiter and come home...

(beat)
Even if all that happens, we still get shot.

(beat)
If you lead them to Soyuz 4, Luka, this country will erase us.

LUKA
The man who built their Saturn rockets also built missiles for the Nazis. The same ones that rained down on London. He got a second chance when he surrendered to the Americans. I want mine.

(beat)
Because I am not going back to building bombs, Gregori. Are you?

Long beat as Gregori battles with this, finally nodding.

GREGORI
What do we do first?

LUKA
(smiling)
Switch from champagne to vodka.

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL -- MEETING ROOM.

A case of vodka is placed on the table as the Russian technicians file in with their empty champagne glasses, laughing.

LUKA
Gentlemen, please. Let me have a moment.

They all quiet down as Luka goes around the room, pouring glasses. The Russian controllers are impressed.

LUKA (cont'd)
As you know, I haven't been myself lately. And I want to thank you for your patience. I've taken our failures to heart. I've taken them... personally. And I've let it show in my work with you. So let me say I'm sorry by filling your glasses with some of the best northern Russian vodka that money can buy.

He pours a glass for himself and lifts it in a toast.

LUKA (cont'd)
Lift your glasses, controllers. Here's to our Soviet Union! May she remain forever victorious in this endless fucking war! HA!

The controllers, not seeing the joke, laugh nervously. Luka watches as they all drink and start talking with one another. When the moment is right, he steps out of the room, closes the door --

-- and locks the controllers in.

He tosses the keys to Gregori, who begins locking other doors before going a main power console and activating several large switches.

Computers begin to power up. The large tracking screen turns on.

Gregori goes to the communications console and puts on a headset. Luka sits next to him.

GREGORI
How long do you think we have?

Luka shrugs, glancing at the locked room of technicians. No one yet realizes they've been locked inside.

INT. KGB BUILDING

Viktor stops by Nikolai's office, confused.

VIKTOR
Where's Luka?

NIKOLAI
He had to go. He... asked me to
send his regrets to you--

VIKTOR
(interrupting)
What was more urgent than talking
to me?

Nikolai has no answer, says nothing.

VIKTOR (cont'd)
Nikolai, why was he here?

Nikolai looks down.

VIKTOR (cont'd)
Nikolai! Why was he here!?

NIKOLAI
I think he wants to end the war.

Viktor stares at him, confused. He steps away and starts running as it sinks in. He yells to his secretary:

VIKTOR
Get every man to the flight control
building. And call the police!

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL.

Gregori and Luka are busy at the communications console.

GREGORI
After we open communications we'll
have the police at the doors in
probably 30 minutes.

LUKA

Gregori, you should go. This was my decision.

GREGORI

(shakes his head)

You were right, Luka. I'm not building warheads again.

Gregori flips a switch.

LUKA

Who do you think will pick it up?

GREGORI

The Americans have a station in Turkey. They picked up everything during the Soyuz 1 crash. After that we turned off transponder 3. Let's turn it back on.

Gregori makes a few adjustments, checks the connection, then nods.

GREGORI (cont'd)

How should we start?

LUKA

Start reciting the coordinates. Over and over again with a delay between each transmission in case we get a response.

Gregori looks on a map of the moon next to him.

GREGORI

What are the coordinates?

LUKA

It's .8432 degrees North, 25.482 degrees East.

Luka knows them by heart. Gregori looks at him, nods.

GREGORI

NASA Mission Control .8432 degrees North, 25.482 degrees East...

(stops, then to Luka)

What do the Americans say? To end it?

LUKA

Uh... Over?

GREGORI

Yes. Over.

(back to mic)

NASA Mission Control .8432 degrees
North, 25.482 degrees East. Over.

They wait. No response.

GREGORI (cont'd)

NASA Mission Control .8432 degrees
North, 25.482 degrees East. Over.

Luka takes a deep breath, leans back in the chair. He looks to the locked room of technicians. A couple have their eyes pressed to the glass as another keeps trying the door. Luka sees it's attracting the attention of the others.

They don't have much time.

EXT. NATO COMMUNICATIONS SUB-STATION -- TURKEY.

A lone communications tower sits on a tall hill in northern Turkey.

INSIDE -- a TURKISH COMMUNICATIONS INTERCEPTOR sits feet up at desk wearing headphones, drinking tea. Hearing something, he sits upright. Confused, he grabs a paper and pencil and writes down the coordinates.

TURKISH INTERCEPTOR

(in Turkish, subtitled)

Ali!

His colleague, ALI, strides over, grabs another headset, and starts listening.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Finished with putting on their EVA suits, Armstrong and Aldrin check each other for rips, then check the pressure gages.

ARMSTRONG

You're good.

ALDRIN

All right. Let me check your mix.

He bends down to look at a readout on Armstrong's chest, nudging his broken arm against the console. He shudders in pain.

ALDRIN (cont'd)

Shit!

ARMSTRONG

You sure you're gonna be able to do this?

ALDRIN

No. Look, this isn't a good idea. I'm just gonna slow you down.

Armstrong considers, then shakes his head.

ARMSTRONG

No, we're getting you out.

He looks up at the hatch -- just above them.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

First I gotta get me out.

ALDRIN

Here. Grab hold of the lock and stand on my shoulders.

In 1/6 gravity, Armstrong pulls himself up as Aldrin gets under him, wincing all the way. Battling with the bulky suit, he opens the hatch and looks up at the black space outside, dotted with millions of stars.

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE, Armstrong grabs hold of both sides and pulls himself up through the hatch, gets a knee on the ledge and stands.

The landscape is stunning. Millions of stars hanging in the blackest of black above a smoky, desolate landscape. Armstrong takes it in, awestruck, frozen.

ARMSTRONG

Wow.

CUT TO:

Lying on his stomach, Armstrong reaches for the modular equipment stowage assembly and releases the latch. Inside is every tool they need for the outside -- and a TV camera. As soon as the latch is opened, the "live" light goes red.

Oblivious, Armstrong grabs a rope.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

A COMMUNICATIONS CONTROLLER at a desk speaks into his headset:

COM CONTROLLER
 .8432 degrees North, 25.482 degrees
 East. Right. And where did this
 originate from?

TECHNICIAN (O.S.)
 We got picture!

Suddenly, the other controllers in the room GASP. He stands, seeing a televised image on the big board of Armstrong grabbing a rope. When he pulls out of frame, the first images from the surface of the lunar landscape cause everyone to CHEER.

CONTROLLER
 Tell Armstrong we see him!

Pope grabs the headphones, forgetting the situation momentarily. He looks at Kyle, whose sudden enthusiasm fades quickly to disappointment. Pope puts the headset down.

The Com Controller approaches Kyle, handing him the paper with the coordinates. Kyle walks back over to the controller's desk.

But the noise of angry controllers yelling at Pope is overwhelming.

CONTROLLER (cont'd)
 Fuck Wade! Just tell him!

CONTROLLER 2
 Come on!

KYLE
 Quiet!

The room silences at this burst of anger. Kyle leans into the Com Controller privately, gravely.

KYLE (cont'd)
 Very quietly and very quickly,
 release the TV signal to the press
 pool.

COM CONTROLLER
 Wade will blow his top.

KYLE
 Yeah... yeah, I know...

Kyle patches his headset into the com's console.

KYLE (cont'd)
 (into mic)
 Substation 24-12.

KYLE (cont'd)
This is Flight Operations at NASA
Mission Control...

INT. NASA -- MEDIA PARKING LOT. DAY.

We follow a thick cable running into an NBC TV affiliate van. Suddenly the van door slams open as a REPORTER bolts out.

Inside, several TVs show the first images from the moon.

INT. CBS NEWSROOM.

NEWS ROOM EMPLOYEES are on their feet at the TV images. A CBS NEWS ANCHOR quickly sits at the set as a CAMERAMAN gives him the signal.

CBS ANCHOR
We are interrupting programming to report on a startling development from NASA. We are receiving what appear to be live images from the moon...

MONTAGE -- THE WORLD WATCHES.

All over the world, PEOPLE stop what they're doing to watch a TV, transfixed at the images.

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE.

Alice is being counseled by several government reps while her SISTER comforts her.

Ricky, eating another donut, points to the TV he's in front of.

RICKY
Dad!

Alice looks up, shocked. She runs to the TV.

INT. NASA PRESS ROOM.

A clueless Wes Garrett is surrounded by screaming REPORTERS.

WES
We will have some answers very soon. That's all I can say now. Thank you.

Turning to an ASSISTANT.

WES (cont'd)
Where the fuck is Wade!?

INT. OUTSIDE WADE STEWART'S OFFICE.

Wade runs out the door. EMPLOYEES are gathering just outside his office.

EMPLOYEE
Wade, is it true? Are they
outside!?

Furious, Wade doesn't answer, running at full gallop down the hall.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

Wade bursts into the room, pointing at Kyle.

WADE
Cut that goddamn feed!

KYLE
I won't.

Wade turns to the Com Controller.

WADE
You do it.

The Com Controller does nothing.

KYLE
As Flight Director I have sole
authority over this room. And this
room is here to help those guys.

Wade grabs a thick binder from a controller's desk. It's
reads in bold letters APOLLO MISSION GUIDELINES.

WADE
This room is here for this. A
failed ascent engine is an
unrecoverable event. The decision
was made. The President has sealed
it.

POPE
We get procedure, Wade. Problem is
they don't want to commit suicide
just yet.

Wade looks around the room. Every technician stares at him with deep disdain, united. Wade steps over to a red phone, picks it up.

WADE
(into the phone)
Security--

A hand grabs the phone away, hanging it up. It's Pope.

Two other technicians come around behind Wade.

WADE (cont'd)
They are my friends, too, Pope.
But this is what they signed up
for.

He makes a move for the phone. Pope grabs it off the table and yanks the cord from the floor.

Wade decks him and makes a run for the door but doesn't get far as the two technicians tackle him, using the phone line to hog-tie him.

WADE (cont'd)
Let me the fuck go! Right now!!

The technicians look to Kyle. He's like a deer in headlights, stunned at what he started. Finally he's able to snap out of it.

KYLE
Gag him. And put him in the
closet.

The technicians smile and do it. The room is deathly silent as Kyle looks out into the team of technicians.

KYLE (cont'd)
Anyone want to leave, they can.
But do it now. Because we're
barring the doors.

A handful of technicians take off their headsets and walk quickly, shamefully toward the door. One stops to talk to Kyle.

TECHNICIAN
Kyle... I...

KYLE
It's okay, Dan.

Head down, he leaves. The door is closed. Two others push a heavy desk in front of it while Wade is locked inside a closet.

Kyle looks at everyone.

KYLE (cont'd)

This is my room now. And we are here for them. Any mission guideline that goes against that is to be ignored. Nothing and no one goes in or out of this room until we are done. Understood?

The controllers nod, smiling, eager. Kyle puts on a headset.

KYLE (cont'd)

Neil? Come in, Neil. It's...
Kyle.

INT. LUNAR LANDER - CONTINUOUS

INSIDE THE LANDER, Aldrin is tying the rope to his waist as Armstrong holds the other end. Armstrong hits the button on his communicator.

ARMSTRONG

Uh... Houston, I thought we were done communicating.

KYLE (V.O.)

We're back. Some of us.

ALDRIN

Who's we?

KYLE (O.S.)

You got me and Pope and a bunch of other guys. We'll have all departments covered in some way.

ARMSTRONG

And Wade?

KYLE (O.S.)

Not a part of it.

(beat)

You should know your TV is live to the world now. Try to look pretty, alright?

ARMSTRONG

Just gonna get Aldrin up here.

With his one good arm, Aldrin grabs the lock and hoists himself up as Armstrong assists by pulling the rope.

MONTAGE -- THE WORLD WATCHES.

Across the world, more crowds gather under TVs to watch as both astronauts stand on top of the fallen Lunar Module.

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

Armstrong and Aldrin gaze at the landscape.

ALDRIN

My god.

ARMSTRONG

It's something, isn't it?

ALDRIN

Magnificent desolation.

The lunar surface holds infinite shades of gray -- the most complex Ansel Adams photograph ever. The landscape is lit by two swirling light sources -- the white klieg-light brightness of the sun and the blue-white of the earth.

The horizon seems just in front of them -- where the lunar landscape meets the blackness of space.

Armstrong takes hold of the rope, bracing it around his waist as Aldrin climbs down the fallen lander using his one good arm. He finally gets to the landing gear -- the upper portion hovers 2 feet from the surface while the bottom is bent and shoved into the lander. Aldrin peers at it.

ALDRIN (cont'd)

Yeah, it looks like the upper part of the landing gear has entered the ascent engine area. I can't see any details until we step off.

He looks up at Armstrong.

ALDRIN (cont'd)

Should we?

ARMSTRONG

Yeah, we should probably detail the damage--

ALDRIN

No, Neil. Should we step off the lander and... onto the moon?

Armstrong looks at him, blankly.

ALDRIN (cont'd)
You still got your head stuck in
checklists, don't you?

Armstrong smirks and goes back to the modular compartment,
pulling out the bulky video camera and tether. He positions
it pointing down to Aldrin.

He makes his way down to Aldrin slowly, standing next to him
on the buckled landing gear. They look at each other, each
understanding the moment is immense.

ARMSTRONG
(nervous)
We should say something, right?

ALDRIN
Yeah, probably.

ARMSTRONG
What?

ALDRIN
I... don't know. It wasn't me that
was going out first... so... I
didn't think about it.

ARMSTRONG
Well, we're stepping together.

ALDRIN
(smiles)
Did... Did you have something
prepared?

ARMSTRONG
Well... It's pretty short.

ALDRIN
Okay.

ARMSTRONG
If you wanna add anything to it--

ALDRIN
Neil, just say it. What is it?

Armstrong looks at the surface.

ARMSTRONG
This is.. one small step for a man.
One giant leap for mankind.

He looks at Aldrin, who's impressed.

They both extend a foot and drop down, each pillowing onto the lunar surface at the same time. A perfect semi-circle of ultra-fine dust puffs upward and falls in a perfect arc.

They are the first men on the moon.

MONTAGE -- THE WORLD CELEBRATES.

In HOMES, BUSINESSES, and STREET CORNERS -- PEOPLE all over the world CHEER WILDLY and hug in front of TV images of Armstrong and Aldrin on the moon.

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL.

Luka and Gregori watch the TV in amazement. Behind them, the locked-in Russian Controllers also watch.

Gregori looks at his console, seeing a blinking light. He puts on his headset.

GREGORI
USSR Mission Control, over.

ALI (O.S.)
This is NATO Substation 24-12.
Please state the purpose of these
coordinates.

Luka grabs the headset excitedly from Gregori.

LUKA
I am Luka Tarasoz, space flight
director for the Soviet Union. I
need to speak urgently with NASA
Flight.

ALI (O.S.)
Those direct communications are
against protocol.

LUKA
It is of life and death. Tell
them... tell them I think we have
some oxidizer.

ALI (O.S.)
Some what?

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

The Com looks at Kyle, confused.

COM CONTROLLER
 It's the Soviet flight director.
 He's insisting on talking to you.
 He says he knows how to fix the LM?

Kyle starts to patch his headset until the Com stops him.

KYLE
 This a secure channel?

COM CONTROLLER
 It is. But sir, we are not allowed
 to engage communications--

KYLE
 Harry, we just gagged the head of
 NASA and shoved him in a closet.
 (patching in)
 This is Kyle McCardell, NASA Flight
 Director.

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL.

Nervous and excited, Luka searches for words.

LUKA
 Uh... Yes. This is Luka Tarasov.
 Space Flight Director for the
 Soviet Union. How are you?

KYLE (O.S.)
 (confused)
 I've had better days, Dr. Tarasov.

LUKA
 Of course. Yes.
 (Gregori nudges him)
 Tell me, the damage to your moon
 lander. Is it the ascent engine
 oxidizer?

Long pause.

LUKA (cont'd)
 Are you there?

KYLE (O.S.)
 Yes. It is.

LUKA
 And your other chemical? Aerozine?
 Is it damaged?

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

Kyle covers his headset mic. Pope stands behind him, listening in.

POPE

How do they know so much about our lander?

KYLE

Mr. Tarasov, please state the purpose of this?

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

LUKA

The coordinates that we relayed are the location of a Soviet vessel. It is approximately five kilometers from where your astronauts are now. There is an unused tank of oxidizer. You are welcome to use it if you think it'll help.

KYLE (O.S.)

All due respect, Mr. Tarasov, we will need much more lift than that canister can probably supply. This a robotic probe from your Lunokhod program, correct?

Long pause. Luka looks at Gregori. Gregori looks down, not knowing what to say.

LUKA

You need 3500 pounds of thrust, no?

Long beat.

KYLE (O.S.)

Approximately, yes.

LUKA

It... it will be enough. I will put my colleague, Gregori, on. He will better tell you how to access the tank.

(beat)

And... as a fellow engineer... here's hoping our days get better.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

Confused, Kyle listens intently.

LUKA (O.S.)
I believe this may help us both.

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

Aldrin and Armstrong peer underneath the LM.

POPE (O.S.)
Houston to Eagle, over.

ARMSTRONG
Go ahead.

POPE (O.S.)
You ain't gonna believe this...

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

Armstrong presses a thick map against the LM, tracing the coordinates with his finger.

ALDRIN
What do you think's there?

ARMSTRONG
Probably a failed probe of some sort. The Russians never advertise anything that doesn't work first.

ALDRIN
I like that idea.

ARMSTRONG
It's just over 3 miles away. And we have no idea what the terrain looks like.

ALDRIN
If it's a straight shot, we have enough O2 to get there. But not enough water.

ARMSTRONG
Is that how you want to die?

ALDRIN
I'd rather die trying to get back. Wouldn't you?

COLLINS (O.S.)
Columbia to Eagle. Over?

ARMSTRONG
We copy you, Collins.

COLLINS (O.S.)
So glad to hear your voice.

ARMSTRONG
That might change. Listen, there is apparently a Russian lander of some sort about 3 miles away that they think could help us.

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE - CONTINUOUS

Collins listens intently.

COLLINS
How long would it take to get to it?

ALDRIN (O.S.)
Hard to say. We got to drag their oxidizer tank back, somehow hook it to the LM.

COLLINS
What should I do? I'm supposed to go back.

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
Collins, I can't command you to stay. You're under orders to return home. Mission guidelines are clear on that.

COLLINS
Houston, are you on board with this?

POPE (O.S.)
Those that matter are.

EXT. LUNAR LANDER - CONTINUOUS

Armstrong and Aldrin look up to see Columbia -- a bright, fast-moving spec like a shooting star -- dart over the black sky.

ARMSTRONG
Mike, we're going to try all we can to get off this rock. And if we somehow make the ascent, I hope you're there to greet us.

COLLINS (O.S.)
Neil.. I... I gotta think about this. I promised Melissa.

ARMSTRONG

I know you did. I'll leave it up to you.

INT. ALDRIN HOUSE.

Linda, a drink in one hand and a tissue in the other, watches the now-silent video feed on the TV.

ON SCREEN: Buzz and Neil are busy collecting tools, preparing. They move quickly, purposefully.

CBS ANCHOR (O.S.)

NASA has kept the audio feed cut. We don't yet know why. Information is hard to come by from them. So it's up to us to wonder what's going through the astronauts' minds. Gil, any ideas?

GIL (O.S.)

Well, I'm very curious about the map and the tools we've seen them pull out now. Mission guidelines are clear that they stay within a certain distance from the lander in case of a quick evacuation.

CBS ANCHOR (O.S.)

Well, those guidelines are out the window now, I assume.

GIL (O.S.)

Armstrong is known as a stickler for the rules, though. But now it seems like they are preparing for a long walk.

As Linda watches, Buzz hops up to the camera. She's unable to see his face. He presses his palm against his chest, leaving it there, motionless.

A rare tear falls from Linda's eye, until suddenly she realizes something.

She gasps. She grabs the phone, dials frantically.

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE.

Alice is on the phone.

ALICE

Have you told this to Wade? Or Wes?

LINDA (O.S.)
You can guess what Wes said.

ALICE
I don't know, Linda...

LINDA (O.S.)
Alice, when you look at your
husband... when you see what he's
doing, how he's moving... Does that
look like a man who's committing
suicide?

(beat)
I know Buzz's every move. And it's
as clear as day to me. They are
doing *something*. They may be
trying to get off somehow.

Long beat.

ALICE
What do you want to do?

LINDA (O.S.)
You still got a load of press
people messing up your lawn?

ALICE
More than ever.

LINDA (O.S.)
Tell them we're having that press
conference in an hour. I'm coming
over.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

The controllers are huddled over a speaker taking notes as
Gregori narrates the instructions.

GREGORI (O.S.)
They will need a small, hard tool.
Like a hammer or a crowbar. And
they will need to moderate their
exertion because it will not be an
easy journey.

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

Armstrong hoists a coil of rope around his helmet while
Aldrin uses his one good arm to pack his pockets with tools --
a small shovel, hammer, pick.

They both begin to jump to a large mountain ahead.

GREGORI (O.S.)

Between them and the lander is the Sea of Orange. Our probes found it has several areas of intense mascons. At one moment the gravity will be 1/6 of earth's. But at the very next it could be equal to earth's pull. A 10 kilo helmet will suddenly weigh 60 kilos.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE.

Wes and a few NASA PRESS PEOPLE screech up to Alice's house in sedans. Wes jumps out and walks quickly toward the front door where a make-shift podium is decorated heavily with microphones.

A sea of JOURNALISTS mill about anxiously. They swarm him, barraging him with questions.

JOURNALIST

Wes! Is this a NASA sanctioned press conference?

JOURNALIST 2

What's this all about, Wes--?

WES

In due time, gentlemen!

He let's himself in and closes the door hard.

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE.

Linda is on the phone in the hallway. Wes and his NASA people enter in the background, met by Alice and her assembled FAMILY MEMBERS.

LINDA

(pleading)

Melissa, Alice and I know they wouldn't be doing this if they weren't up to something.

MELISSA (O.S.)

What are they doing, though?

LINDA

I don't know--

MELISSA (O.S.)
 (interrupting)
 Michael can't stay in orbit waiting
 for them to figure it out.

LINDA
 He has some time--

INT. COLLINS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Melissa, on the phone, erupts angrily.

MELISSA
He's got some time!? What about *my*
time!? I can't get back what I've
 lost to the space program. Now the
 moon is going to take all the time
 I have left with him.

LINDA (O.S.)
 Melissa--

MELISSA
 What you're really saying to me,
 Linda, is that Buzz and Neil are
 willing to kill Michael for some
 remote chance of saving themselves.
 Am I right?

LINDA (O.S.)
 Please listen, Melissa. Neil and
 Buzz would never order Mike to
 stay.

MELISSA
 Wake up, Linda. They don't *have* to
 order him. All they need to do is
 tell him there's a chance and his
 guilty conscience will start
 working overtime. They know that.
 (beat)
 No! I got my promise. And Mike's
 never broken a promise to me
 before.

Linda doesn't know what to say.

MELISSA (cont'd)
 My answer to you is hell no. I
 won't be standing by you on this.
 He's coming back. You'll see!

She hangs up.

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE.

Wes sits on the edge of the coffee table talking to Alice and Linda.

ALICE

But why can't we just try to talk to them?

WES

I'll look into it.

LINDA

I want to talk to Wade, too.

WES

I haven't been able to reach him all day so if you get him, tell him to call me, alright?

He smiles at the little joke. Alice and Linda don't.

WES (cont'd)

Ladies, I need your help in guiding the American people through this. But now is not the time for this press conference.

LINDA

Bullshit.

WES

(lets it slide)

So... since you're intent on doing it, we've written up a few points we want you to consider. And also a few things that you should avoid.

He passes them a sheet of paper. A list of bullet-pointed items stretch down it. Alice and Linda read them.

LINDA

(reading)

There is no hope for their recovery!?

Wes leans forward.

WES

Nothing has changed, Linda. They may be walking on the moon but the fact remains we still can't get them off.

LINDA

We just watched them get a bunch of tools and hop away. Where are they going?

WES

I'm not in Mission Control, so I don't know--

ALICE

(interrupting)

Neil wouldn't break protocol if he didn't have to. Why is he now?

Wes, for once, is at a momentary loss for words.

LINDA

She's right, Wes. Where the fuck are they going in such a hurry?

WES

I will get answers for you. But I can't do anything if you separate yourselves from our process. If you go out alone on this, you will remain alone.

Wes lets this sink in, then points to the talking-points.

WES (cont'd)

So let's tell those journalists how you are holding strong through this international tragedy.

EXT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE.

Linda stands behind the podium. Alice stands behind her along with her family members.

In front of a cluster of microphones, Linda looks at Wes's talking-points --

-- then crumbles it into a ball.

She looks out over the sea of REPORTERS.

LINDA

In light of the events, both Alice and I believe our husbands... are trying to get off the moon. We don't know their plan or their progress. And NASA won't allow us to speak with them. Therefore, we call on NASA to do all in their power to help our husbands.

The assembled press ERUPT with questions.

INT. COLLINS HOUSE.

Melissa watches Linda's statement on the TV angrily. Linda yells over the commotion.

LINDA

(from TV)

These men have risked all they have for the space program. And they are owed the very same commitment, if not more. Anything less will forever tarnish this great nation.

(beat)

We will not be taking any questions.

The camera LIFTS off the tripod and runs with other journalists --

-- catching Wes and the NASA reps walking quickly off to their cars and driving away without comment.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LUNAR SURFACE.

Armstrong, intent on his progress, kangaroo jumps into the barren moonscape. He stops to look behind him. Aldrin is a few yards back.

ARMSTRONG

How're you doing?

ALDRIN

Don't ask. It's a waste of time. I'll tell you if I need help, alright?

ARMSTRONG

Roger.

He goes back to his path, stopping to check the map occasionally and checking on Aldrin. Every time he does, Aldrin is a little further behind him.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

I'm not asking!

ALDRIN

Yes you are!

Armstrong smiles, jumping forward. Suddenly one jump seems to pull him down forcibly. He loses his footing and falls face first, using his hands to stop his helmet from shattering on a rock. The lunar dust in front of his face is more flat and dense. He has trouble lifting his arm.

ARMSTRONG

Buzz! I'm in a mascon!

He tries to get up, but the gravitation force is too hard. Something CRACKS on his EVA suit.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

(straining)

Damn...!

Struggling through the full weight of the suit, Armstrong grabs a handful of dust, scraping it from the hard surface. He throws it forward, watching it closely --

-- the dust within the invisible mascon falls to the ground quickly, but the furthest particles stop their descent and float to the ground. The effect creates a eerily wall of floating dust about four feet in front of him -- the now-visible border of the mascon.

Armstrong pulls himself toward it, struggling hard. Once out of the gravitational pit, he pulls himself to his feet.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

Aldrin, there's a pretty intense mascon here.

But he doesn't see Aldrin.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

Buzz! Buzz, come in!

He starts jumping back, careful to watch his footing in the mascon.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

Buzz!

He finds Aldrin by almost stepping on him. Aldrin is covered in dust, effectively camouflaging him. He's been struggling to get up with only one arm. Armstrong lifts him upright.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

(furious)

Why didn't you call!?

He sees Aldrin mouthing words inside his helmet. His radio is broken.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
Shit, the radio is broken?

Aldrin'S POV --

ALDRIN
I can't hear you!

Armstrong'S POV -- He watches Aldrin mouth the words above.

They both stop talking. Trying to think what to do. Armstrong checks the connections as best he can, but it's no use. Aldrin motions his hand forward, mouthing the words:

ALDRIN (cont'd)
Keep going! Keep going!

Armstrong takes off the rope and gives an end to Aldrin, tries to gesture his words while saying:

ARMSTRONG
We need to keep together!

Aldrin gets it, ties the rope around his waist as Armstrong does the same.

Aldrin looks at his colleague, then at himself. The dust causes them to blend into the landscape -- Armstrong's once white suit now deathly gray.

ALDRIN
The moon is taking us.

Armstrong doesn't understand. Aldrin shakes his head as if to say "forget it."

EXT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL.

CARS screech to a stop out the windowless building of Russian Mission Control. Viktor, other KGB agents and POLICE stream out of their cars. He tries the door. Locked. He motions over a team wielding a battering ram.

INT. LUNAR SURFACE.

The earth now low on the horizon, Armstrong struggles deeper into the moon. Out of breath, he sucks at the straw next to his face -- empty. He looks behind him. The rope is stretched to its furthest point. Aldrin lurches slowly forward.

Exhausted, Armstrong leans slowly against a huge boulder, waits for Aldrin to get closer.

When he does, Armstrong sees Aldrin's face-plate is coated in dust. He wipes it off with a dusty hand, revealing his colleague is in bad sorts -- exhausted and also out of water. The wound on his head has started bleeding again into his eyes. Aldrin tries to wipe it away on the side of his helmet. He mouths the words:

ALDRIN

Where?

Armstrong lifts the map, pointing and motioning.

ARMSTRONG

100 yards.

He rises and walks slowly around the boulder. Aldrin remains, still catching his breath until he feels a pull on the rope. Looking up he sees Armstrong yanking it, motioning for Aldrin to come.

As Aldrin comes we see what he sees --

-- a strange LUNAR LANDER with the distinctive "CCCP" emblazoned on its side.

All of the lander's visible landing pads have buckled from a hard fall, its lower portion crumpled into the surface.

As Armstrong approaches, he sees one of its three crushed landing pads juts out dangerously into a GIANT CRATER -- larger than the Grand Canyon. The lander teeters on it dangerously.

Armstrong looks down into the crater -- impossibly deep and jagged. He feels a tug on his rope.

Coming to Aldrin, he sees his colleague is in a state of shock, staring at the lander, at a hatch 5 feet off the ground. Armstrong looks to where Aldrin points --

-- just below the hatch is a ladder.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

My god.

Armstrong takes the hammer and climbs up. At a panel to the right of the latch, he shoves the claw-end into a seam and works to pop off the cover. Inside is a handle with Russian text written below it. He pulls it.

Lunar dust puffs out as pressurized air escapes. Armstrong gets the hammer into the door and pries it open until he can get a hand in between it. As he pulls it open fully --

-- the body of a COSMONAUT FALLS OUT, toward him.

Horrified, Armstrong moves out of the way as the body slowly falls to the ground next to Aldrin.

Aldrin bends down to the man, face obscured by the tinted helmet.

His name-plate reads PASHA.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

Still huddled over the speaker, Kyle's eyes go wide as he looks at the notes.

KYLE

Gregori, this is not a probe, is it?

Long beat.

KYLE (cont'd)

Gregori, please acknowledge.

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

Gregori looks down at the console, unable to reply. Luka takes the headset, puts it on.

LUKA

These are coordinates for the crash site of Soyuz 4. Inside... are the bodies of Gavril Kapsirko and Danilo Pasha.

In the distance a BATTERING RAM slams against metal doors. Luka tries to ignore it.

LUKA (cont'd)

When the KGB acquired your landing coordinates, we were ordered to redraw ours. The Kremlin wanted your astronauts to land on a Russian flag. But our rush to launch cost us.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

LUKA (O.S.)

The craft was caught in a severe mascon. The lander's fuel was quickly emptied and they impacted on the surface.

(beat)

LUKA (O.S.) (cont'd)
I lost two dear friends. But maybe
you can save yours.

Suddenly a loud RAMMING sound followed by a sharp crack comes from the speaker.

LUKA (O.S.) (cont'd)
We are out of time.

KYLE
What?

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

Luka and Gregori watch as police stream into the room. They rush toward Luka and Gregori.

Gregori grabs a chair and starts swinging, connecting with a policeman. A SHOT rings out and he's hit in the chest --

-- from a gun held by Viktor.

LUKA
Gregori!

Viktor levels the gun at Luka.

VIKTOR
Turn it off.

Luka stares at him defiantly as he says into his headset.

LUKA
NASA Flight, the Soviet Union hopes
this information will be the first
step in bringing our countries
closer to benefit all mankind--

Another SHOT.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

The GUN SHOT echoes through Kyle's headset.

KYLE
Luka! Luka! NASA Flight to
Russian Mission Control. Do you
copy!?

EXT. SOYUZ 4.

Armstrong and Aldrin kneel down to the lifeless body of Danilo Pasha. They look at each other, each understanding the moment: "This could be us."

INT. SOYUZ 4.

Armstrong steps inside the damaged lander. The rope tied to his waist, the other end still tied to Aldrin on the surface.

Inside, a second RUSSIAN COSMONAUT is hunched over the control, lifeless. Armstrong takes a cautious step forward.

The lander moves --

EXT. SOYUZ 4 - CONTINUOUS

Aldrin watches the lander tilt dangerously toward the crater. He quickly runs.

INT. SOYUZ 4.

Cautiously walking forward, Armstrong finds a particular panel on the lander's floor. He takes out a screw driver, unscrews it to reveal the lander's ascent engine. He finds a large tank of oxidizer connected to a series of pipes. He caps off the tank and applies the block cutters to the pipe leading into it, cutting it.

The lander moves, gains momentum. Armstrong tugs at the tank, trying to free it. But it's difficult to maneuver out.

EXT. SOYUZ 4 - CONTINUOUS

Aldrin painfully ties the rope to a boulder, wincing through the lightning shooting through his broken arm.

INT. SOYUZ 4 - CONTINUOUS

The entire lander continues to tilt into the crater. Desperate, Armstrong unties the rope and loops it quickly around the tank, using the rope's leverage for one more tug.

The tank pops free from the compartment just as --

EXT. SOYUZ 4 - CONTINUOUS

The lander falls slowly into the crater. Aldrin watches as Armstrong flies out of the hatch at the last moment, hitting the ground as the Russian lander disappears behind him. The rope goes taunt.

Aldrin helps him up and they both pull the rope up. On the end -- the oxidizer tank.

INT. RUSSIAN MISSION CONTROL.

Viktor picks up the headset as, behind him, Russian controllers are let out of the locked room. They are shocked to see the bodies Luka and Gregori.

From the headset, WE HEAR Kyle:

KYLE (O.S.)
Luka! Luka, come in!!

Viktor yanks the headset from the console.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LUNAR SURFACE.

Aldrin and Armstrong, the rope tied to their waists, follow their footsteps back, dragging the tank behind them, traveling at a quarter of their original speed.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER -- Gasping, Armstrong struggles to push his feet forward. He stops, looks behind him. Aldrin is ten yards back, moving imperceptibly. Behind him, the tank leaves a long trail of drag.

Armstrong goes back to his walk. But after a few steps, the rope around his waist goes taunt, pulling him back. He turns quickly, bracing his feet, looking to where he last saw Aldrin.

Aldrin is gone -- as if he has fallen behind the horizon.

The rope pulls the tank toward Aldrin's last position.

Armstrong watches as it, too, disappears, falling over the side of something, as if vanishing over the horizon.

Anticipating what's coming, Armstrong dives on the ground, grabbing at whatever he can as the slack rope tightens quickly. It pulls him across the surface.

Armstrong claws for some traction. His feet finally hit a boulder, stopping him.

He carefully ties the rope to the boulder, rises and jumps quickly to where Aldrin and the tank disappeared. He almost falls into what swallowed them -- A DEEP FISSURE.

Aldrin hangs upside down, unmoving. The tank is gone.

Armstrong tries to pull the rope, but he's too exhausted. Instead, he loops it around the boulder and pulls, using the rock as a pulley. He makes slow progress, walking toward the fissure as he pulls. Finally he sees Aldrin's hand appear at the edge. Aldrin struggles to grab at the rim with one hand as Armstrong uses everything he has for the last pull.

Finally, Aldrin struggles onto the surface, pulling up with his broken arm --

-- the oxidizer tank.

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

With the fallen U.S. lunar lander looming in the foreground, we see two white specks making slow progress toward it.

CLOSER -- Armstrong drags Aldrin behind him, the other arm dragging the oxidizer. His lips are cracked and eyes bloodshot as he struggles against his failing body. Every painful step is a marathon. He stops to rest.

He feels Aldrin struggle to get out of his grasp. He looks into the astronaut's faceplate. Aldrin, lips also cracked and discolored, mouths the words:

ALDRIN
Drop... me...

But Armstrong pulls him back up, determined. He keeps going.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

An empty headset sits on a console as MILITARY POLICE course through the room.

Bruce Pope, Kyle McCardell, and a few other controllers are handcuffed, facedown on the floor. Some are being carried away. Other controllers remain at their stations, hands on their heads.

Wade Stewart, now freed, storms over to Pope's station.

KYLE

They are alive, Wade! They got a shot to get off! You can't leave them!

Wade ignores him, addressing the other controllers.

WADE

Listen up! We are now back in control of this room. And there are two ways to leave. You can either leave now, in handcuffs. Or you can walk out on your own after your shift is complete. Make your choice now.

The remaining controllers look to Kyle.

WADE (cont'd)

Don't look to him! Look at me--!

KYLE

(interrupting)

EVERYONE should stay.

The MPs take out Kyle. Wade watches as the controllers reluctantly get back to work. He picks up a headset and dials in a channel.

WADE

Houston to Columbia.

COLLINS (O.S.)

Columbia, copy. That you Wade?

WADE

Yes, Collins. It is. We've regained control of the mission. So you now need to light that candle and come home.

COLLINS (O.S.)

They're still alive down there, Wade.

WADE

Mike, they are never getting off the moon.

COLLINS (O.S.)

They said they have an option--

WADE

(interrupting)

They are never getting off the moon!

WADE (cont'd)
 You are ordered to come back. We
 need to deal with this together.

COLLINS (O.S.)
 What are you talking about?

WADE
 The organization needs to close
 ranks and address this tragedy-

COLLINS (O.S.)
 That's not what you said. You said
 together. You and I. That's what
 you said.

WADE
 Mike--

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE - CONTINUOUS

COLLINS
 If I come back, Wade, it's all on
 me. *I'm* forever known as the guy
 who left his men on the moon.
 Alive.

WADE (O.S.)
 You'll come back a hero.

COLLINS
 Bullshit. I come back a marked man
 for the rest of my days.

WADE (O.S.)
 Mike, stay focused, now. Think
 about this. Staying in lunar orbit
 is certain suicide. You will burn
 out of fuel. I need you back home.
 (beat)
 Your wife and new little girl need
 you back home.

This hits Mike hard. He doesn't know what to do.

WADE (O.S.) (cont'd)
 Collins, you there? MIKE!

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

WADE
 Mike! Come in!

He takes off his headset, pointing to another controller at a
 desk

WADE (cont'd)
 You. Sit here. Keep trying him.
 Get that asshole back here.

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE - CONTINUOUS

Collins listens to Mission Control call for him over and over. He stares at the ignition switch as Columbia again goes to the dark side of the moon, covering the ship in blackness.

The radio goes to STATIC.

Collins doesn't make a move to turn it off. He looks out the window at the last moment of light -- the white horizon of the moon fades to black. He puts his head in his hands, tormented.

INT. NASA PRESS ROOM.

Wes addresses the PRESS POOL, who are frantic to get their mics in position.

WES
 We have exhausted every option.
 And it is my burden to report that
 Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin
 cannot be retrieved from the moon.

Reporters ERUPT WITH QUESTIONS.

REPORTER
 How can you explain the video
 images?

WES
 They survived the impact and went
 outside the lunar lander to inspect
 the damage. We have only limited
 contact with them.

The reporters again erupt.

REPORTER 2
 Has Collins fired back toward
 earth?

WES
 Yes. Yes he has.

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE.

Alice and Linda watch the TV of Wes's announcement.

The phone rings off the wall in the background.

ALICE

You think that's true? That...
that can't be true, right?

LINDA

I don't know. I can't believe
anything he says any more.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Armstrong heaves Aldrin into the LM. Aldrin drops motionless to the bottom. Armstrong struggles in, closes the latch, and goes to the console, pressing buttons to pressurize the cabin.

As he looks at the gauges, waiting for the dial to crawl into the green zone, he almost closes his eyes. He darts them back open, forcing himself to stay conscious. As soon as the dial hits green, he laboriously takes off his helmet and gloves, grabs a packet of water and drinks, long. He takes off Aldrin's helmet, forcing the straw into his mouth and squeezes.

The water falls out of Aldrin's mouth. Armstrong shakes him.

ARMSTRONG

Come on, Buzz! Drink! You can
sleep after you drink!

Aldrin's eyes flutter and he finally drinks.

Armstrong lies him down, then patches his mic into the console.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

Tranquility Base to Houston. Over.

Static.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)

Houston, this is Tranquility Base.
Over.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

The controller who has taken over Pope's desk looks at Wade. Wade shakes his head. The controller remains silent.

INT. LUNAR LANDER - CONTINUOUS

ARMSTRONG
Pope. Kyle. Anyone there?

He switches channels.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
Collins. It's Neil. Come in.
Over.

Again, static.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
Eagle to Columbia. Over.

ALDRIN
(weakly)
He's on the other side, now.

ARMSTRONG
Hey. How are you feeling?

ALDRIN
How do I look?

ARMSTRONG
Like hell.

ALDRIN
Yeah that's about how I feel.

They both drink, soaking in the rest.

After a long beat, Aldrin starts chuckling.

ARMSTRONG
What?

ALDRIN
(weakly)
You ever do this elementary school
experiment? Where you had to
figure out a way to protect a raw
egg from a one-story fall?

ARMSTRONG
Yeah. I wrapped mine in straw.
Didn't work.

ALDRIN
I was just thinking... that's all
this is. Billions of dollars in
expensive bubble wrap to protect a
couple of raw eggs. Didn't work.

ARMSTRONG
We're not dead yet.
(beat)
So what did you do?

ALDRIN
What?

ARMSTRONG
How did you protect your egg?

ALDRIN
I strapped it to a baby doll.

ARMSTRONG
That work?

ALDRIN
Of course. Who's gonna throw a
baby off the roof?

Armstrong bursts out LAUGHING. So does Aldrin.

ARMSTRONG
Why is it we never hung out more
before this?

ALDRIN
Because you're a dick.

Armstrong doesn't laugh, just looks down, accepting it.

ALDRIN (cont'd)
Hey... that was a joke.

ARMSTRONG
No, it wasn't. But you're right.
I've been very tunnel-visioned
about this mission. I let the
guidelines make all the decisions.

ALDRIN
Neil, you're the best commander
they've got. There's a reason they
picked you.

Aldrin COUGH, deeply and sickly.

ARMSTRONG
We gotta get you off this rock.
You still got some strength in you?

Aldrin nods.

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

Outside the LM, Armstrong puts both hands against the side, then tugs at the rope.

INSIDE THE LM, Aldrin leans against the far wall. The rope attached to him trails out of the open hatch. He starts rocking the lander back and forth while --

OUTSIDE, Armstrong starts pushing it back and forth. The lander gains momentum until it finally rolls slightly away from the descent engine. The collapsed landing gear pulls out.

INSIDE, Aldrin falls. A window cracks on a rock.

OUTSIDE, once away from the descent portion, the lander falls right side up.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

With the cracked window behind them, Armstrong and Aldrin -- still in their moon suits -- work to connect the Soviet oxidizer tank to the descent engine. It is hard to do with the limited movement of the thick gloves.

Aldrin taps Armstrong, pointing to the gloves and shaking his head.

CUT TO:

Armstrong and Aldrin try to plug the cracked window with a piece of the floor. They then spread an extra space suit over it. Armstrong holds it in place as Aldrin flips the valve to pressurize. They both watch the window as the hard vacuum of space begins to lengthens the cracks. Armstrong bunches the suit around it. When he thinks he has it plugged, he removes his arm.

Armstrong quickly looks at the gage. It crawls into the green. The moment it does, he yanks off his suit and grabs at the console radio.

They hear small pieces of the window breaking off, putting stress on the suit and floor paneling.

ARMSTRONG
Eagle to Columbia. Over.

No response.

ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
Collins. Collins!

COLLINS (O.S.)

Neil!

ARMSTRONG

I don't have much time so listen. The module hull has been breached, our suit radios are broken. This is the only shot we have to talk. I don't think the plug will hold very long. Do you copy?

COLLINS (O.S.)

I copy!

ARMSTRONG

We have the tank of oxidizer. I will try connecting it now. Buzz calculates that you will pass over our rendezvous point in approximately 20 minutes, correct?

COLLINS (O.S.)

Yes! Yes, I will.

Aldrin sets the console timer for 20 minutes.

ARMSTRONG

Look for us. We won't be able to communicate.

COLLINS (O.S.)

I will!

The floor paneling in the window begins to crack, creating a small seam. Aldrin quickly plugs it again.

ARMSTRONG

And Mike, if you don't rendezvous with us, you are to go back.

COLLINS (O.S.)

If you ascend, I will find you.

ARMSTRONG

If you don't, *go home*. That is an order. Understand?

Another crack, bigger this time, forms in the plug.

Armstrong is frantically trying to connect the tank as Aldrin does all he can to plug leaks. But they keep coming. Aldrin looks at the pressurization gage. It's tilting into red.

He screams through his helmet.

ALDRIN

Neil!

Neil's hands begin to SWELL AND GROW RED as he works, making it harder. He finally finishes and dives into his EVA suit with Aldrin's help just as --

-- the covered window EXPLODES outward, buckling the paneling and shooting the space suit across the surface. The escaping air instantly crystallizes.

The violent pressurization draws both astronauts across the module toward the window. Aldrin slams into Armstrong. Armstrong's backpack catches on a switch, breaking it off.

Armstrong's body is jammed into the window. Aldrin sees him screaming.

Clawing his way to the controls, Aldrin finally gets to the pressurization lever and pulls it. The stress on Armstrong lessens and Aldrin quickly pulls him back inside.

Aldrin looks into Armstrong's facemask, mouthing:

ALDRIN (cont'd)

Okay?

Armstrong, though in pain, nods his head and mouths.

ARMSTRONG

How long!?

ALDRIN

(showing hands)

5 minutes!

They take their standing positions, quickly strapping themselves in. They make final preparations into the computer. Aldrin reaches for the ignition switch --

-- it's broken, pulled off by Armstrong's pack.

The both look at each other, hope draining. Armstrong struggles to think of an option.

Aldrin's eyes fall on something on the console -- the ball point pen resting between two switches. He quickly grabs it, yanks out the ink cartridge painfully, and jams it into broken switch. He tugs at Armstrong, motioning him to hold on. Armstrong does as Aldrin pushes the pen into the switch with everything he's got.

The ascent engine IGNITES, throwing the astronauts back.

OUTSIDE, the LM shoots into space as if yanked by a string.

INSIDE, the pipe to the Russian tank begins to crack. The corrosive oxidizer shoots into the cabin. The ascent engine dies down.

Aldrin unlatches himself quickly and goes to the leak. Armstrong tries to stop him.

Aldrin grabs the leak, gripping the pipe with his gloves, stemming the flow. Its corrosive oxidizer begins to eat them away. He quickly grabs at anything he can use to patch it, trying to save his hands.

Armstrong stays intent on the controls, compensating with the thrusters as the vehicle drifts.

OUTSIDE, the LM continues to climb, struggling out of the moon's gravitation pull. The lunar surface shrinks behind it.

Finally the oxidizer empties. The LM continues to silently rise.

INSIDE, Aldrin gets back into position, looking at the clock--
-- it's 10 minutes past. He looks at Armstrong, frustrated and lost. They missed their window.

They look out the windows, searching for Columbia. It's nowhere to be seen.

Armstrong reaches over, grips Aldrin's shoulder. Aldrin smiles, nods. They both stare out the windows, at the thousands of stars now unobstructed by glass. One star seems to move quickly, growing bigger. It starts to take shape. Armstrong squints at it, fixated, until the outlines of Columbia can be seen. Armstrong reacts:

ARMSTRONG
MIKE! YEAH! WHOOOOH!

He yanks at Aldrin, pointing out Columbia. They both start joyously hollering, though neither can hear each other.

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

Sweating buckets, Collins steers the Command Module straight to the LM.

EXT. LUNAR LANDER.

With Columbia now 200 yards away, the LM spot-fires its thrusters to align.

INSIDE THE LM -- Armstrong stays intent on driving as Aldrin grabs anything he can to plug the window.

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE.

Using the view-finder, Collins docks with the LM and quickly goes to the hatch. He hears a sharp, continuous BANGING, stopping himself from unbolting the door. It's Morse Code.

COLLINS
W. A. I. T.

He puts his hands on the lock and waits, at the ready.

INT. LUNAR LANDER.

Armstrong frantically stuffs the hole as Aldrin keeps sending the Morse Code by hammering it out on the door. He finally stops when he sees the latch is not opening.

In zero-gravity, Armstrong finds it difficult to keep everything in one place. Finally satisfied he flips the pressurization lever. The random items swirling around the broken window immediately jam into it. Armstrong puts more items on top -- tools, extra boots, gloves, anything.

The pressurization gage creeps into the green zone.

Armstrong pushes quickly over to Aldrin, giving him the go-ahead. Aldrin wraps on the door: GO, GO, GO...

INT. COLUMBIA COMMAND MODULE - CONTINUOUS

Collins reads it, takes a breath, and unlocks the hatch. It immediately flies open into the LM.

The pressurized air of Columbia fills the LM. The items pressed against the window begin to strain outward like a weak dam.

Armstrong pushes Aldrin with all he's got, fighting the growing current.

The window behind them immediately starts to cave outward.

Collins grabs Aldrin's outstretched hand and pulls him in, struggling. Then they both grab Armstrong by his feet.

The window bows outward more. Outside, items are launched into space as small holes grow into big ones.

Aldrin and Collins brace themselves and pull at Armstrong's legs.

Armstrong tries to help with one hand, as the other holds the door. Finally they are able to pull him inside, as he closes the door behind him. Locking it, just as --

-- the window plug EXPLODES OUTWARD.

Collins erupts:

COLLINS
YEAH! YEAH!

He rips at his friends' helmets, yanking them off. When he sees Aldrin, he grabs him by the ears and kisses his forehead. He does the same with Armstrong. They hug joyously, laughing and spinning around the cabin.

INT. MISSION CONTROL.

The CAPCOM controller sits at his desk, bored with repeating over and over:

COM CONTROLLER
Houston to Columbia.
(beat)
Houston to Columbia. Please
acknowledge.
(beat)
Houston--

A controller in the front row raises a hand:

CONTROLLER
I'm showing Columbia has fired the
SPS burn for TEI--!

COLLINS
(interrupting)
Houston, this is Columbia.

Wade is already leaping over the stairs to get to CapCom.

COM CONTROLLER
Uhh... Stand by for Flight,
Columbia.

WADE
(putting on a headset)
Collins, it's Wade. Glad to see
your engines are on.

COLLINS (O.S.)
We are go for splash down in
approximately 37 hours, Flight.

COLLINS (O.S.) (cont'd)
I am increasing speed by 23 percent
to 5794. Splash down site A43,
weather-permitting.

WADE
Great, we'll be there.

COLLINS (O.S.)
And Flight?

WADE
Yes?

COLLINS (O.S.)
We'll need medical help at our
door. Two stretchers with full
body and neck immobilizers.

A BUZZ rifles through the controllers. Some stand. All eyes
are on Wade. His are wide in disbelief.

WADE
(stuttering)
Columbia, please clarify--

COLLINS (O.S.)
(interrupting)
I have both Armstrong and Aldrin
isolated inside the command
module...

An UPROARIOUS YELL bursts from the controllers as they toss
papers in the air and hug.

COLLINS (O.S.) (cont'd)
Both have sustained heavy injuries,
but seem stable. Both would like
to talk to their families ASAP.

The celebration inside Mission Control continues as Wade
tries to get his bearings.

COLLINS (cont'd)
But before that... the commander
would like to speak to you, Wade.

Wade goes white. Everyone turns to look at him as:

ARMSTRONG
Wade, this is Neil, over.

WADE
Neil! I'm so glad to hear your
voice--

ARMSTRONG

(interrupting)

As commander of the Apollo mission and in accordance with your mission guidelines, I hereby request that the acting Flight Director be relieved of duty.

WADE

Neil, let's talk about all this when you're safely back--

A controller stands, reading from the opened Mission Guidelines binder.

CONTROLLER

The Apollo Mission Commander may request the dismissal of a Flight Director during an active mission--

WADE

Sit down!

CONTROLLER

If the Commander believes the mission is in conflict.

Another controller next to him stands. Then they all do, standing and staring at Wade with deep resentment.

Wade swallows hard, takes off the headset, and walks out the door.

EXT. MISSION CONTROL.

A van waits for the chain-link fence to open as REPORTERS and CAMERAMEN scurry around it. The van drives into the compound stopping in front of the windowless mission control building.

Kyle, Pope, and the other arrested controllers quickly run into the building.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

As Kyle and the others run into the room, the controllers APPLAUD WILDLY. But Kyle won't have it:

KYLE

Get back to work! Where are we? I want a go/no go from all departments! Right now!

As the controllers answer Kyle one by one, Bruce Pope sits quickly at the Com station, speaking into the headset even before he puts it on.

POPE
(smiling)
Houston to Columbia. Heard you
brought back somethin' for me?

EXT. EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE.

Four-hundred miles above the earth, the re-entry capsule separates from the propulsion system and begins descending into earth's atmosphere.

CBS ANCHOR (O.S.)
The continuing fallout from the
Apollo scandal took a different
turn as portions of an audio tape
were released today of
conversations between US and
Russian flight controllers.

CUT TO:

The silver covering of the re-entry capsule begins to BURN AWAY as the capsule dives violently through the haze.

CBS ANCHOR (O.S.) (cont'd)
The tape provides clear evidence of
a unique collaboration between the
two countries.

CUT TO:

The capsule parachutes open above the Atlantic Ocean. The capsule splashes down as helicopters race to the site.

CBS ANCHOR (O.S.) (cont'd)
In a statement, the Soviet Union
acknowledged they had offered
assistance to NASA Flight
Controllers, but failed to
elaborate.

CUT TO:

NAVY SEALS in scuba gear pull out Aldrin, placing him on a stretcher connected to a hovering helicopter.

CBS ANCHOR (O.S.) (cont'd)
 NASA is also being tight-lipped,
 though experts outside the agency
 speculate that Armstrong and Aldrin
 were able to salvage spare parts
 from a Soviet Lunokhod spacecraft
 that was carrying a robotic probe.

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE HELICOPTER, Aldrin and Armstrong are lying down,
 wearing oxygen masks as the copter heads for an aircraft
 carrier. Collins, also wearing a mask, lifts his arms up and
 down, feeling the gravity.

CBS ANCHOR (O.S.) (cont'd)
 NASA said both Aldrin and Armstrong
 are injured, though stable.

CUT TO:

INT. NASA -- LUNAR RECEIVING LABORATORY.

DOCTORS in FULL HAZMAT SUITS check Aldrin and Armstrong in a
 large isolation chamber. Linda and Alice, also in suits,
 hold their husbands' hands.

CBS ANCHOR (O.S.)
 A press conference has been
 scheduled for Wednesday as the
 world waits out the astronauts'
 quarantine.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER, sitting up in their hospital beds, Wes talks to both
 Aldrin and Armstrong. He wears a protective white suit, face
 mask and vinyl gloves.

Wes hands them a sheet of paper inside a sterile plastic bag,
 pointing items out on it, explaining things. Both Aldrin and
 Armstrong listen, saying nothing.

CBS ANCHOR (O.S.) (cont'd)
 Armstrong is expected to elaborate
 on the astronauts' harrowing
 experience on the lunar surface,
 though the NASA press office said
 he will not comment on the scandal
 inside Mission Control.

CUT TO:

Separately, Wes does the same thing with Collins who sits in
 a chair next to Melissa.

WES

These are a few points we'd like you to consider. And a few that you are required to avoid all discussion of...

INT. NASA -- HALLWAY.

With their wives next to them, Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins walk down a long hallway. Aldrin has his arm in a sling and walks with a severe limp.

At the end they see Kyle, Pope, and the team of controllers standing outside a PACKED PRESS ROOM.

Armstrong brightens when he sees them, starts laughing, then starts walking quickly over to them. The walk turns into a jog. Aldrin and Collins follow.

The wives are left to themselves. Linda and Alice look at each other and smile, hug. Linda glances behind them -- at Melissa carrying her baby. She keeps to herself.

At the end of the hallway, Armstrong's handshake with Kyle turns into a tearful hug.

KYLE

You ready for this?

Armstrong shrugs, lifting up Wes's "talking points."

ARMSTRONG

They sure make it easy to lie, don't they?

KYLE

Do they?

Armstrong looks at him gravely as Wes breaks through the reunion to grab Armstrong.

WES

They're ready for you.

INT. NASA -- PRESS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins step into the press room, packed with eager REPORTERS and CAMERAMEN.

Flashbulbs bake the room in white light.

Armstrong steps up to the podium covered in microphones. He looks at the piece of paper.

He steals a look to Aldrin and Collins. Against the wall he spots Kyle, Pope and the team of controllers.

Armstrong crumples the paper in his hand, and looks up at the press.

ARMSTRONG

We got a lot to talk about.

Suddenly, Wes looks uncomfortable.

END.

"In the Event of a Moon Disaster"
by Mike Jones
5/2/2011