

Armstrong

by

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Based in part upon the book
First Man by James Hansen

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OVER BLACK:

STATIC. And then faint, choppy **MILITARY COMMS.** Playback from an old reel-to-reel. Slowly we realize... it's in Russian.

A VOICE begins to translate...

GAGARIN (ON TAPE, RUSSIAN)
*Slow rotation, stage cutoff.
Calculated orbit achieved.*

ENGLISH TRANSLATOR
Slow rotation, stage cutoff.
Calculated orbit achieved.

CREDITS OVER BLACK. Small font, the corner of the screen. But our focus remains on what we're **HEARING.** [*NOTE: This scene is played entirely over black as credits roll*]

GAGARIN (ON TAPE, RUSSIAN)
*A sense of weightlessness...
I see, I am over America.*

ENGLISH TRANSLATOR
A sense of weightlessness, I
see, I... I am over America.

MURMURS. A reaction. Then a **CLICK;** the Comms go silent. As credits continue, we hear papers **SHUFFLING;** chairs **CREAKING.**

VOICE #1 (SORENSEN)
Jack needs a public response.

This voice is a bit clearer. But only a bit. It still feels like **LO-FI TAPE** of a meeting. An important meeting.

VOICE #2 (LOW)
Shepard's scheduled... in 2 weeks.

SORENSEN
Gagarin orbited three times, a
suborbital flight's not a response.

VOICE #3 (WEISNER)
(hard to hear)
Why not... something... clearer long-
term benefit. Desalinization--

SORENSEN
Salt water's not gonna sell, Jerry.
(then)
Is there no way our current program
can compete with the Soviets?

VOICE #4 (**GILRUTH**)
Not our current program. The
Soviets are too far ahead.

We feel the room turn to this new voice. Quiet. Commanding. We don't know it yet, but this is **BOB GILRUTH.**

GILRUTH

The only way to win is to pick a mission so far off, requiring so many new scientific developments that we could be first to get there.

SORENSEN

You have something in mind?

We hear paper shuffling. A report **DROPPED** on a table.

GILRUTH

It's... speculative.

A beat. More paper SHUFFLING.

SORENSEN

How much will this --

LOW

Thirty five, maybe forty.

WEISNER

Forty million doll...

GILRUTH

Billion. Forty billion dollars.

WEISNER

Jesus Christ.

We hear a door open. A whisper.

SORENSEN

Jack's ready for us.

The sound of chairs PUSHED BACK. Men SHUFFLING out. Then...

SORENSEN

Bob, hold up...

(sotto)

He won't like the price tag but if I can sell it, where would we start?

GILRUTH

Well. We're gonna need more men.

THE CREDITS END. A moment of **SILENCE OVER BLACK.**

Then we hear it. A low **RUMBLE.**

It grows LOUDER... then **LOUDER STILL.** A screaming **ENGINE.** And **HOWLING WIND.** BURSTS of **STATIC.** Faint **COMMS.**

It SURROUNDS us, filling us with dread, **POUNING US INTO --**

INT. X-15 COCKPIT, HIGH RANGE, ABOVE EDWARDS AFB - DAY

A pair of **BLUE EYES**. **TICKING** back and forth. Rapidly. We're knocked out by this **FIRST IMAGE**, by the eyes, oblivious to the **RAW** and **FRIGHTENING WALL OF SOUND** all around us.

JOE (COMMS)
Data check?

NEIL (O.C.)
2 APU on. Cabin pressure is good, 3500 on #1, 3355 on #2. Platform internal power.

PULL BACK TO FIND **NEIL ARMSTRONG**, 31, in a silver pressure suit and helmet. Neil is **INTENSE** and **INTENSELY FOCUSED**, impressive given the **SEVERE TURBULENCE** that bangs him around the cockpit.

JOE (COMMS)
What's your mixing chambers?

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
-44 and -45.

BUTCH (COMMS)
Two minute point.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
MH circuit breakers on...

Neil flips a switch on the low tech console. He glances up from the analogue dials and out the cockpit window... *and if the plane looks like a **ROCKET**, it's 'cause it is.*

This is the X-15. And as we're about to see, it's the **FASTEST FUCKING AIRCRAFT EVER MADE.**

But just now, it isn't flying... or rather, not flying alone. Neil's X-15 is attached to the wing of a B-52 -- **BALLS 8**, a four engine **BEHEMOTH** that's shaking even more than the X-15.

It's more than a bit terrifying, but Neil calmly hits another switch as he's **KNOCKED** across the cockpit.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Protocol is off. Little bumpy.

It's classic Armstrong understatement; underscored as we see the B-52 pilot (BUTCH) **TOSSED** against the window of his plane.

BUTCH (COMMS)
Worst it's ever been, real rough up here, fluctuating a half degree each side.

This just drives Neil into deeper focus.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Velocity 900 fps, altitude
44,500, pitch attitude level.

JOE (COMMS)
*Copy. Neil, we're reading
your heart rate at 145.*

No reply. Neil's eyes **TICK METHODICALLY** from gauge to gauge.

JOE (COMMS)
*Neil, we're reading your heart rate
at 145, do you copy?*

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Copy Joe. Igniter ready to light.

Neil's not gonna engage. Whatever adrenaline spike his body is experiencing, Neil's determined to remain detached.

A beat. We can almost hear **JOE WALKER**, on the other end of the comms, debating whether to abort. At last, he relents.

JOE (COMMS)
*Okay. Arm switch lite
checks.*

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Going to prime. Ammonia up.

In the bumpy cockpit, Neil springs back into action.

BUTCH (COMMS)
Twenty seconds to drop --

NEIL (COMMS)
Rog, precool on, lox pump
bearing plus eight.

BUTCH (COMMS) (CONT'D)
Ten seconds --

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Igniter idle, ready to launch
on 3, 2, 1, release...

Suddenly the X-15 is **RELEASED** from the wing of the B-52. Through the cockpit window, we see the B-52 **RISE SHARPLY** as the X-15 DROPS IN FREE FALL...

A FREE FALL we feel in our gut because WE'RE NOT CUTTING AWAY. And if you haven't figured it out by now, WE'RE GONNA BE IN THE COCKPIT WITH NEIL FOR THIS ENTIRE HEART-POUNGING RIDE.

So. We're **DROPPING. FAST.** Neil **PUNCHES** the igniter... the rocket LIGHTS and WE HEAR THE ROAR OF 57,000 POUNDS OF THRUST.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
And I got a good lite and aw...

The words are literally left behind and Neil's **THROWN** back into his seat as the rocket TAKES OFF at a **VIOLENT RATE.** Neil **FIGHTS OFF** 6 G's, reaching for the stick.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Roll.

He tilts the stick slightly and the plane **BUCKS TO THE RIGHT, TOSSING** Neil like a RAG DOLL and TAKING OUR BREATH AWAY.

JOE (FAINT, COMMS)
Good on track, 15 seconds.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Pulling up, I'm indicating
Mach 3.

Neil pulls on the stick and **RISES SHARPLY** towards the heavens. He's **PRESSED** into his seat and we see the plane's blue nickel nose, glowing CHERRY RED from the heat. Sweet Jesus.

JOE (FAINTER, COMMS)
Seem to be a tad steep.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Okay, I'm...

Neil's eyes **TICK** to the altitude gauge, SPINNING UP past 150,000 feet. He makes an adjustment as the X-15 PUSHES THROUGH THE HORIZON, **BLUE SKY NOW TURNING TO BLACK...**

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
I'm indicating 5,800, pushing over.

Yes, that's Mach 5.8, almost 4,000 mph, and we feel every bit of it... 'til we pass 170,000 feet and Neil CUTS THE ENGINE...

...**JOLTING** him against his harness... and **INTO MICROGRAVITY**.

For a moment all is STILL. Quiet. We hear a BUZZ over the radio, but it's GARBLED. Far away.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
190,000 feet, no radio reception,
setting instruments to record high
altitude flight response.

Neil punches a few buttons as A **LOGBOOK FLOATS PAST HIM...** because **WE'RE SUBORBITAL**, high as the first Mercury flights. So yeah, things float. Oh, and the view is pretty good too...

Neil looks out, takes in the earth stretching, curving away below the **BLACK SKY**. The STARS. The MOON.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
207,000 feet. Top view, looking
out, can see an awful long ways.

Everything is quiet save for the low purr of the APUs. Neil turns his attention to the **G-LIMITER GAUGE** as the X-15 slowly falls back to earth, the altitude gauge starting to spin...

The plane **SHAKES**, but Neil stays focused on the G-limiter, creeping towards 2.5 G's. Which is when we hear it...

An **ODD SOUND**. **A MECHANICAL WHINE**. It seems out of place. Neil ignores it as gravity takes hold, **PRESSING** him forward against his seat straps. We hear **GARBLED BUZZ** over comms.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Still no radio. 150,000 feet,
little shake in the yaw.

Again, Armstrong understatement... the plane **SHAKES VIOLENTLY** as the altitude gauge spins down past 120,000, the **BLACK SKY FADING BACK TO BLUE** as we fall back into the atmosphere.

JOE (FAINT, COMMS)
Okay, brakes out, check the RCS off.

WIND **WHIPS** over the plane. Neil reduces his angle of attack, still focused on the G-Limiter, still ignoring that **ODD WHINE**.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
RCS off, brakes are out, G-
Limiter not quite at 5 G's.

JOE (COMMS)
*Okay, 25° stabilizer, hard
left turn.*

Neil pulls on the stick, eyes **FIXED** on the G-limiter, **FAILING TO NOTICE** the plane isn't turning... that the altitude gauge is **HOLDING** at **115,000 FEET**. Slowly, it begins to CLIMB...

116, 117, 118... **THE SKY TURNS FROM BLUE TO A CHILLING BLACK**. The shaking **STOPS**, the whipping wind **FADES** to **EERIE SILENCE**.

JOE (COMMS)
We show you ballooning, not turning.

The comms are drowned out by the **ODD WHINE**. Neil, **FIXATED** on the G-limiter, doesn't see the altitude gauge **FLIPPING UP...**

JOE (COMMS)
Lot more left there. Neil!

Joe's voice cuts through the whine, which **FADES**. Neil **BLINKS**, noticing how QUIET it is... the plane has stopped shaking.

Neil's eyes **TICK** from the black sky to the altitude gauge... **120, 121, 122...** **SHIT**. He realizes he's fucked up.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Rog, I'm reading --

JOE (COMMS)
*You're bouncing off the
atmosphere, hard left!*

Neil **YANKS** on the stick, eyes **DARTING** from the dynamic pressure gauge to the vista sailing by below.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Aerodynamic controls not responding.

Unlike Joe, Neil remains calm... but as we **PUSH IN ON HIS EYES** ticking from gauge to gauge, we see the INTENSITY, the FOCUS.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Switching over to reaction controls.

Neil drops the stick, grabs the ballistic controls. We hear a **HISS** as a **BURST** of peroxide gas **SHOOTS OUT** from the nose of the plane and Neil's **TOSSED BACK** in his seat...

...the plane's nose **FLYING UP TOWARDS THE SKY**, the horizon now **ABOVE** Neil's head; the black sky, the stars, **BELOW** his feet.

And we realize... NEIL'S FLIPPED THE X-15 ON ITS BACK, THE NOSE IS STICKING STRAIGHT UP IN THE AIR! HOLY SHIT!!!

The canopy view is crazy, mountains above, sky below, the world upside down, but Neil keeps his eyes on the **ALTITUDE GAUGE**, inching up. **123, 124...** then **HOLDING** at 125,000 FEET.

A beat... then it begins to **DROP**. **123, 120, 115, 105...**

The sky once again **FADES TO BLUE** and we hear a **SLIGHT WIND** under the plane. Neil's eyes **TICK** from the altitude gauge to the dynamic pressure gauge...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Surface pressure rising, switch over to aerodynamic controls.

Neil reaches for the stick... but the atmosphere **GRABS THE PLANE, PULLING IT DOWN ON ITS BACK! FUCK!** Neil **STRAINS** to hold on as he's **THROWN** around the cockpit with 9 G'S OF FORCE!

The altitude gauge **SPINS** down at **TERRIFYING SPEED**. **95, 90, 85...** **Shit**. Neil **STRUGGLES, WRESTLING** with the stick... until he manages to **FLIP** the lifeless plane **RIGHT-SIDE UP**. Jesus.

As Neil points the plane towards Edwards, the RADIO **SQUAWKS** --

JOE (COMMS)
Neil, can you give us a visual estimate of your location?

Neil scans the landscape, searching for the desert runway as the plane **DIVES LIKE A BRICK** towards the mountains...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Looks like I'm pretty... in pretty bad shape for the south lake bed.

JOE (COMMS)
Okay, working the contingencies for a landing from the south.

Neil's eyes TICK over the horizon, but he knows what's coming--

JOE (COMMS)
*Neil, there is no contingency. You
 need to get back to Rogers.*

Neil **BEARS DOWN**, trying to GLIDE the engine-less plane farther than ever. *Yes, the X-15 was BUILT to land without power... but generally, a pilot had A LOT more altitude to work with.*

The plane **SHIMMIES** back and forth, wind **HOWLING** at 300 knots.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 I can see the base, runway 35, it'll
 have to be a straight in approach.

His eyes **DART** from the distant desert landing strip to the altitude gauge, dropping 20,000 feet per minute. Neil FLIPS his head bumper... and **SMOKE POURS** from the instrument panel.

JOE (COMMS)
Can we get a visual estimate?

The cockpit is **FILLED** with smoke...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 ...pretty hard to tell from here...

Neil hits a button. **WHOOSH!** The plane dumps peroxide and the smoke clears the cabin, but the view is HARDLY A RELIEF...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 I'm a little shorter than I thought.

Neil pulls the stick to hold altitude, but he keeps **DROPPING**. **9,000... 8500... 8000 feet... Fuck.** It's going to be close.

We see Butch's B-52 **SWING UP** on Neil's right.

BUTCH (COMMS)
Your ventral is still on!

Neil REACTS, ANNOYED at himself. He **HITS** the ventral button. The ventral fin **BLOWS OFF** and the plane **PITCHES** forward...

Neil **STRUGGLES** with the stick... **4,000, 3,500, 3,000 feet...**

BUTCH (COMMS)
Start your flaps down now!

Neil **PUNCHES** the flaps. The plane **BUCKS UP**, reaching towards the runway... and now the ODD MECHANICAL WHINE returns.

PUSH IN on Neil, INTENSITY **BURNING** as the whine **CRESCENDOS... 2,000, 1,000, 500 feet...** the plane **HURTLES** past the edge of the brush, JUST CLEARING THE JOSHUA TREES!!!

BUTCH (COMMS)
You're in! Go head and put her down!

Neil **PULLS UP HARD**, flaring the plane, nose up, skids down...

The plane **SLAMS DOWN** with a **BANG**. It **SKIDS ROUGHLY** across the desert... **SHAKING VIOLENTLY...** And just as we think it might **BREAK** into a million pieces, Neil **HITS** the back fin brakes...

The plane goes into a **CONTROLLED SLIDE...** kicking up a **HUGE CLOUD** of dust... and **TOSSING NEIL ACROSS THE COCKPIT...** until at last, the plane eases to a HALT.

For a moment, all is **STILL**. Silent. Then Neil **STIRS...** leans forward and takes his helmet off.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
I'm down.

BUTCH (COMMS)
Son of a bitch!

JOE (COMMS)
(clearly relieved)
Very nice, Neil. Posse will get there shortly.

As the dust clears and Neil looks out towards the fire trucks in the distance rolling towards him, we **CUT TO --**

EXT. LANDING STRIP 35, ROGERS DRY LAKE BED, EAFB - LATER

An Air Force jeep **WIPES FRAME...** **REVEALING** EDWARDS AFB FIRE TRUCKS, NASA PICK UPS and TECHS surrounding Neil's X-15. The period cars are cool, but our eye is drawn to the X-15.

It's our first real look at the hypersonic rocket plane. The long fuselage, the thick dorsal wedge fin, the NASA signage...

It's every bit as awesome as the flight we just witnessed.

PUSH IN on THE OPEN COCKPIT. NASA Engineers take readings off the instrument panel while Neil makes notes in his logbook. A beat, then Neil finishes up and climbs out of the cockpit.

BUTCH
Think you set a couple records.

A FAMILIAR VOICE. 'Butch' Butchart, 30s, flight gear, walks up with Neil's boss, Joe Walker, 40, thoughtful. Butch **GRINS**. Neil nods stiffly as a TECH with a MAP calls out.

TECH

Butch, you mind walking me through
the release data?

Butch heads off. Joe turns to Neil.

JOE

You okay?

NEIL

Uh huh. I don't think anyone's
experienced that kind of atmosphere
bounce, we should try to replicate
it in the sim --

JOE

Neil.

NEIL

Yeah?

Joe looks at him, concerned. But Neil's not going there. A
FLIGHT SURGEON who's been waiting by the plane intercedes.

FLIGHT SURGEON

Hey Joe, I gotta do his work up.

Joe nods. Neil follows the surgeon off. Joe turns back to
his jeep, only to find a grizzled AIR FORCE COLONEL, late 30s.

COLONEL YEAGER (O.C.)

Kid's a good engineer, but he's not
too good an airplane driver.
Bouncing up in the thin air where
you can't turn, it's not too bright.

JOE

He was focused on the G-limiter. It
was a core flight objective.

But it's not clear Joe believes that. The Colonel's tag
GLINTS in the sun. **C. YEAGER.**

COLONEL YEAGER

Three mishaps in three months. It's
not my call, but I'd ground him.

Yeager heads out. As we **HOLD ON** Joe, wondering if Yeager's
right, we hear it again... that **ODD MECHANICAL WHINE...** the
same unnerving sound Neil heard in the X-15. It takes us to --

INT. ROOM, DANIEL FREEMAN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - DAY

CLOSE ON a 2-year-old girl (**KAREN**). Quiet, self-contained.

PULL BACK to see a **COBALT RADIATION MACHINE** HULKING over her. The source of the now familiar **WHINE**, it beams **GAMMA RAYS** into her brain as she lies on a gurney.

HOLD for an AWFUL BEAT... then **REVERSE TO** the OBSERVATION WINDOW. Neil and his wife, **JANET**, 27. Watching.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM, MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Janet **BLINKS** back tears, reaches for Neil...

He takes her hand, but he's focused on the nearby **INSTRUMENT PANEL**... his ever alert eyes **TICKING** across the console as a **TECH** adjusts **RADIATION LEVELS**, sets the dials... **1.17. 1.33**.

Neil slips his hand out of Janet's, pulls out a **LOGBOOK** to jot down the numbers... all while trying to block out that **SOUND**.

HOLD ON Neil as the **WHINE CRESCENDOS**. Relentless.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY, ARMSTRONG CABIN - NIGHT

QUIET. Janet on the floor outside Karen's bedroom, her son, **RICK**, 4, asleep in her lap. In **SOFT B/G**, Neil **SINGS** softly to Karen, then kisses her forehead...

HOLD ON Janet trying to keep it together as Neil walks out.

NEIL
I'll put him down.

Janet nods. Exhausted. Neil tousles her hair then gathers Rick in his arms. As he carries Rick off, **CUT TO--**

INT. RICK'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Neil tucks Rick in, **METHODICALLY** straightens the sheets. He spots a mess of an unfinished model plane on the desk. Neil **COMPULSIVELY** moves to tidy it up... then pauses. And **SITS...**

...in the half light, he glues on a wing and gently blows it dry. The precision is calming. He'd keep at it, but the doorbell **RINGS**. Reluctantly, Neil stands and we **CUT TO --**

INT. FOYER/KITCHEN, ARMSTRONG CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Neil leads Joe Walker in. Joe carries in a casserole.

NEIL
Can I offer you a beer?

JOE
Sure.

NEIL
 (off the casserole)
 That wasn't necessary.

JOE
 Can't imagine Janet's been up to
 much cooking.

No. Neil hands Joe a beer. They drink.

JOE
 How's Karen?

NEIL
 She's doing fine.

Neil doesn't want to talk about it. An awkward beat. Then --

JOE
 Dick Day called from Houston, Bob
 Gilruth was asking after you.

NEIL
 For Gemini?

Joe nods. Neil's eyes TICK to the NASA X-Press newsletter in
 a pile of mail on the table. **NASA To Select More Astronauts.**

JOE
 I told them it's probably not the
 right time.

NEIL
 Gemini and Apollo are speculative.
 We're up as high as the Mercury
 flights, not sure why I'd leave now.

Joe clocks the emotional DENIAL, but doesn't comment on it.

JOE
 Well. It'll be nice to keep you
 around.

INT. BASEMENT OFFICE, ARMSTRONG CABIN - LATER THAT NIGHT

A small space. A desk, some shelves. A light CLICKS ON.
 Neil walks down the stairs, over to the desk. He sits.

We now see neatly stacked **MEDICAL BOOKS**, mimeographed copies
 of scientific RESEARCH PAPERS. All marked and tabbed.

Neil opens a LARGE COMPUTATIONAL NOTEBOOK filled with TIDY
 NOTES. He writes **Cobalt Session No.2...** then pulls out his
 logbook. He transfers the radiation levels. **1.17. 1.33.**

A beat. He adds a new heading. **Side Effects**. Neil pauses. Then... **Fatigue. Dizziness. Extreme headache. Vomiting (repeated). Hair loss/Scalp irritation. Loss of appetite.**

Neil stops writing. He scans the list, then grabs a stack of papers on COBALT THERAPY and **TUCKS** them into a MANILA FOLDER that he places on a shelf. Beside a DOZEN other folders.

Neil takes a breath, then reaches for a dog-eared research paper from Johns Hopkins. **Pre-Adolescent Glioma of the Pons: Experimental Treatments & Therapies.** It's WELL-MARKED.

Neil's clearly read it a hundred times. Yet he picks up a high-lighter and starts to read. Again. DETERMINED.

Off Neil, we **PRELAP** the chilling sound of a **MECHANICAL CRANK** --

EXT. JOSHUA MEMORIAL PARK - LANCASTER, CA - DAY

CLOSE ON a **CRANK**. Turning. Lowering a small coffin.

TIGHT ON Neil with Janet and their son, Rick. All in black. Janet and Rick cry as KAREN'S COFFIN sinks. Neil does not. He's impassive... but he **HUGS** his family **CLOSE**. **TIGHT**. The SOUND of the crank takes us to --

INT. LIVING ROOM, ARMSTRONG CABIN - DAY

A LONG PUSH IN over trays of food. Dark suits and dresses. Quiet murmurs. No laughter or smiles, no pleasant small talk.

There is no pain like the loss of a child.

We pass Joe and his wife, huddled with Janet. Neil's by the window nearby. Watching Rick toss a ball in the yard...

BARELY ENDURING the condolences, the soft pats on the back.

Just when it looks like Neil might break, he **SLIPS AWAY**. Winding through the crowd. Towards the basement door.

INT. BASEMENT OFFICE, ARMSTRONG CABIN - LATER THAT NIGHT

The desk now a MESS. Marked up medical books and scattered papers. Neil's notebook, now **FILLED**, lies open.

We hear the door. Neil walks down the stairs, moves to the desk. His eyes **TICK** over books... papers... the notebook.

A beat, then Neil closes the NOTEBOOK... slowly pulls together the PAPERS and the BOOKS...

...and, up on a high shelf, carefully **STACKS THEM ALL AWAY.**

Neil's eyes TICK over the **EMPTY DESK**. Then he turns off the light. And exits. We **HOLD** on the shelf, then **CUT TO --**

INT. BEDROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

CLOSE ON a WESTCLOX ELECTRIC ALARM CLOCK, hour hand near six.

A beat, then we PAN over to Neil. Staring up at the ceiling. Wide awake. The alarm TRILLS. Neil turns it off as Janet stirs. Groggy, she rolls over, reaching for him.

JANET

Neil?

But he's already gone. Off Janet, ALONE...

INT. TEST PILOT OFFICE, NASA FRC, EDWARDS AFB - EARLY MORNING

Joe, Butch and another pilot enter, coats and coffee. Jawing, laughing... until they spot Neil. Working at his desk.

The men PAUSE, **AWKWARD**. SURPRISED to see him.

BUTCH (CONT'D)

Hey, Neil.

PILOT

Neil.

NEIL

Hey. Butch, you have time to talk through the data on the bounce?

BUTCH

...sure, yeah, of course. Lemme just put my things down.

Butch and the other pilot head to their desks. Joe leans in.

JOE

You can take a few days, you know.

NEIL

I know.

Joe sees he's not going anywhere, starts to head off when --

BUTCH

You gotta be kidding me.

Butch clutches a XEROXED MEMO. He holds it up. A **DIAGRAM** of a strange, spider-like contraption, a cockpit on top.

BUTCH

They want a free flying trainer to simulate a moon landing... how the hell are we gonna do that?

JOE

I think that's the question.

BUTCH

They haven't even figured out how to get to the moon. I'm not wasting time on impossible problems.

Butch tosses the memo, exits. As Joe goes after him, Neil GLANCES at the memo, contemplating the challenge. His eyes TICK over the DIAGRAM, curious, absorbed... alive.

A beat, then Neil REACHES for the memo and we SMASH TO --

INT. EXAM ROOM ONE, ELLINGTON AIR FORCE BASE, HOUSTON, TX - DAY

CLOSE ON a SYRINGE pumping water into a MAN'S EAR.

**Astronaut Selection, Project Gemini
August 13, 1962**

The syringe empties. A TECH dips it in a bucket of ICE WATER, refills it and turns back to... Neil. In his underwear.

TECH

Tell us when you want to stop.

Neil eyes a SECOND TECH with a stopwatch as the WHOOSH of ice water in his ear propels us into a **SERIES OF SHORT SCENES --**

ISOLATION ROOM

Two TECHS walk Neil into the empty, windowless room.

TECH

Come out after two hours.

They leave and close the door. The lights flick off. It's PITCH BLACK. Silent. A beat. Then we hear Neil hum.

NEIL

Three hundred and sixty men in a boarding house bed, roll over, roll over. One turned over and the other man said, roll over, roll over...

INTERVIEW ROOM

A STACK of 'TESTS' is dropped on a desk in front of Neil. He eyes the first test. **For each of the paired statements below, select the statement that best fits your personality.**

Neil digs in: (1) *I worry a lot about things in the future that could go wrong;* (2) *It takes a lot for me to get angry.*

A beat. Neil circles **NUMBER TWO** and moves on...

EXAM ROOM TWO

A foot PLUNGES into an ICE BATH.

TECH

Take it out when it's too cold.

A tech starts a stopwatch, watches Neil. Who settles in.

ISOLATION ROOM (PITCH BLACK)

We see nothing, hear nothing... but Neil.

NEIL

Two hundred three men in a boarding house bed, roll over, roll over...

EXAM ROOM ONE

More ice water shoots into Neil's ear. The tech nearby glances at his stopwatch. Neil's jaw sets.

INTERVIEW ROOM

A last pair: (1) *I like to help friends when they're in trouble;* (2) *I like to do my best in whatever I undertake.*

Neil reads, thinks and circles **NUMBER TWO**. Then he puts the test aside and reaches for the next one.

Draw a picture of yourself. A beat. As Neil starts to draw --

EXAM ROOM TWO

Neil's foot in an ice-bath. Turning WHITE. The tech with the stopwatch jots down a note. Neil doesn't move.

INTERVIEW ROOM

Neil finishes a fairly generic stick figure drawing of himself. He turns the page. **Draw a picture of your family.**

Neil HARDENS. As he STARES at the blank page, we **CUT TO --**

ISOLATION ROOM (PITCH BLACK)

NEIL

...but in the struggle, his neck got broke, roll over, roll...

Neil trails off. A LONG BEAT. We feel him **STRUGGLING**. Then, just when we think he might to break...

NEIL
*Eighty nine men in a boarding house
 bed, roll over, roll over...*

EXAM ROOM TWO

Neil's foot in an ice bath. Now BLUE. Neil bears down.

NEIL (O.C.)
*...he turned over and no one said
 roll over, roll over...*

EXAM ROOM ONE

WHOOSH... The tech unloads another syringe into Neil's ear.
PUSH IN on Neil, blank, NUMB. And as we go **TIGHT ON HIS EYES**,
 we see it again. The pain there. The deep, deep **PAIN**.

NEIL (O.C.)
*The last man thought it'd be a great
 joke, to keep on rolling when...*

INT. ISOLATION ROOM (PITCH BLACK)

NEIL (O.C.)
*...not a soul spoke, but he fell on
 the floor and his neck got broke,
 roll over, roll over.*

Neil BANGS on the door. It opens, the light JARRING. Neil
 blinks, then walks out. He follows a tech down the hall...
 but we **HOLD ON** a MAN in a tie and shirtsleeves.

Meet **DEKE SLAYTON**, 37, slightly gray, MACHO back when that was
 appealing. Deke turns to the tech with the stopwatch.

DEKE SLAYTON
 How long?

The tech shows Deke the watch. **2:03**.

INT. HALLWAY, OFFICE BUILDING, ELLINGTON AFB - LATER

The hall lined with chairs, candidates reading PROJECT GEMINI
 briefing books. FIND Neil looking for a seat... when **PETE**
CONRAD, 32, a wicked witted wasp from Princeton calls out.

PETE CONRAD
 Air Force? Navy? ...Leatherneck?

Neil looks at him, BLANK.

ED WHITE
 Christ, another egghead.

Pete SMIRKS, trades a look with **ED WHITE**, 32, a lanky Texan with easy-going charm. But Neil doesn't engage. Instead, he heads to the end of the hall, finds a seat and opens a packet.

ELLIOT SEE
Civilian?

Neil glances at **ELLIOT SEE**, 35, a flight test engineer from UCLA, older than the rest. And more cerebral. Neil nods.

ELLIOT SEE
Me too. Elliot See.

NEIL
Neil Armstrong.

Neil turns to his packet, but Elliot, anxious, keeps talking.

ELLIOT SEE
Tough morning, huh? I barely lasted two minutes in the ice bath. I saw one of the military guys keep his foot in so long it turned blue.

NEIL
I think NASA's more interested in psychological reactions than physiological performance.

ELLIOT SEE
I just figured he probably didn't do so well on the intelligence tests.

This draws a smile, maybe the first we've seen from Neil. A **SMALL CONNECTION.** *Which for Neil is no little thing.*

DEKE
Armstrong.

Neil looks up. Deke stands by the door at the end of the hall, a candidate slipping out behind him. Neil stands.

ELLIOT SEE
Good luck.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, ELLINGTON AFB - MOMENTS LATER

An empty chair in front of A PANEL OF MEN, including Bob Gilruth, 48, who's voice we heard earlier. In person, Gilruth is tall, hawkish and as commanding as he sounded at the top.

Deke leads Neil in, introduces him.

DEKE

Gentlemen, Neil Armstrong. Neil, you know Bob Gilruth, Head of the Manned Space Center; Chris Kraft, our flight director; and we asked John Glenn to sit in. I figure you watched his flight with the rest of the country.

If Neil's impressed he doesn't show it. He shakes hands with Gilruth; **CHRIS KRAFT**, 37, looks like a 50s ad rep; and JOHN GLENN, 40, clean cut, very much the American hero. Glenn smiles as Neil sits in front of the panel.

JOHN GLENN

Deke said you flew for the Navy in Korea. Panther, right?

NEIL

Yes, sir.

Yes, Neil was a Navy combat pilot. And if you're surprised he didn't mention that in the hall, you're not paying attention.

JOHN GLENN

Good lateral control, but pretty stiff in pitch, am I right?

NEIL

Never bothered me much.

JOHN GLENN

(laughs)

Well, I didn't fly as many missions as you. But I bet I took more flak.

Glenn warm, smiles; Neil doesn't. Awkward. Gilruth jumps in.

GILRUTH

Neil, we've been chatting with candidates about the program so we can get an idea of how everyone thinks. Now, as I'm sure you know, our decision to forego Direct Ascent in favor of Lunar-Orbit Rendezvous has had a major impact on Gemini.

CHRIS KRAFT

Do you have any thoughts on that decision, Neil?

NEIL

I think it was a good decision.

An awkward pause.

JOHN GLENN

Would you care to elaborate on that?

NEIL

Even taking Von Braun's initial criticism into account, the payload saved by parking the primary vehicle in lunar orbit seems well worth the resulting challenges.

KRAFT

What do you see as the challenges?

NEIL

(considers)

Cislunar navigation for one. You're aiming for a narrower target, inserting a craft into lunar orbit. Of course, you'd also need to design the smaller lunar excursion ship and figure out how to land it.

A beat. The panel waits. Deke prompts Neil.

DEKE

Is that all, Neil?

NEIL

...well, the most difficult hurdles would be rendezvous and docking. But that's only assuming you want to get the men back.

Is he serious? A beat, then Glenn LAUGHS.

The room follows suit, laughing hard, assuming Neil was joking. Of course, it's not clear that he was.

DEKE

Does anyone have anything else?

GILRUTH

Yes. Neil, I was very sorry to hear about your daughter.

Neil nods, impassive.

NEIL

What's the question?

GILRUTH

Well... how's your wife?

NEIL

I think she's handling it well.

Off Gilruth, satisfied with Neil's answer, we **SMASH TO --**

INT. ARMSTRONG CABIN - NIGHT

Neil, Jan and Rick eat supper. Deathly quiet, a **PALLOR** hangs.

RICK

Can I go play outside?

JANET

Just stay in the backyard where we can see you.

Rick scurries off. Neil barely notices. A **PAINFUL** beat... it's a relief when the phone RINGS. Janet gets up, answers.

JANET (INTO PHONE)

Hello? Yes, one second. Neil?

Neil looks up. Janet holds out the phone. He takes it.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

This is Neil. Yes. Uh huh. Okay.
Yes, sir. Thank you.

Neil hangs up. Processing. Then he sees Janet STARING.

NEIL

I got it.

He looks unsure. So does Janet, but she buries her qualms.

JANET

It's a fresh start.

NEIL

You think so?

JANET

It'll be an adventure.

He looks out the window at the night sky, **UNRESPONSIVE**. Jan **PULLS HIM** to her, trying to bridge the divide. Out of habit, Neil wraps his arms around her, but his eyes remain **LOCKED** on the sky. Off his focused gaze, we --

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, MANNED SPACE CENTER - HOUSTON, TX - DAY

GRAINY FOOTAGE of the Russian cosmonaut program. Two Vostok capsules blasting off, one after the next...

AGENT WELSH (O.C.)

Two weeks ago, the Soviets put two manned spacecraft in orbit.

PULL BACK to find NEIL in the flickering light. He sits at a small desk, taking **COPIOUS NOTES** as CIA AGENT JOHN WELSH narrates from beside the REEL-TO-REEL PROJECTOR.

AGENT WELSH

Vostok 3 and 4 were launched the same day and, at one point, orbited within 75 miles of each other.

Near Neil, Elliot See looks **GRIM**, but Neil remains analytical as Welsh finishes and Deke flips on a VU-GRAPH PROJECTOR.

DEKE

The Soviets are ahead of us on rendezvous and everything else. Which would scare the hell out of me if I weren't so pissed off.

Resolute, Deke puts a transparency on the overhead and **DRAWS** (yep, it's 1962) two circles. He labels them (EARTH, MOON) then **SKETCHES** a rocket flying from one to the other...

DEKE

The rocket Von Braun's building is big, it should get us to the moon. Course, a monkey could fly it. But to get to the surface and back...

PUSH IN on Neil as Deke draws a SMALL SHIP flying from the rocket to the surface, then returning to the original craft.

DEKE

...we'll need men trained to catch another ship in orbit and dock. This is the primary mission of Project Gemini.

Deke writes **RENDEZVOUS. DOCKING.** Neil, **INTENT**, takes it down.

DEKE

Proving men can live in space for the week it will take to get to the moon and back, proving men can survive and work outside the space craft... these are secondary goals.

DURATION. EXTRA VEHICULAR ACTIVITY (E.V.A.). Neil's eyes TICK from Deke to the screen to his notes, getting it down...

DEKE

Only if we master these tasks can we move on to Apollo and consider trying to land a man on the moon.

Gilruth flicks on the lights, revealing the nine Gemini men, including Ed White and Pete Conrad, who we met baiting Neil.

Now Ed and Pete look **TENSE**, as do the rest of the men. And like Neil and Elliot, they've all taken COPIOUS NOTES.

GILRUTH

None of you need incentive. But this is very much a race --

DEKE

And we're already more than a dick's length behind the other guy.

GILRUTH

...point is, the nine of you need to stay focused, despite the new pressures and the temptations that will invariably come your way.

PETE CONRAD

So anything we can eat, drink or screw within 24 hours, right?

Ed and some of the other men smirk. Deke, Gilruth do NOT.

ED WHITE

We know the drill, we're used to this kind of attention.

GILRUTH

Due respect, Mr. White? You're not.

As he says this, we see something on Neil's face we haven't seen before. **TREPIDATION.** We hear a crowd **ROAR** and **SMASH TO--**

INT. CULLEN AUDITORIUM, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON - DAY

An 1,800 seat auditorium, filled to capacity.

**Introduction of NASA Astronaut Group 2
September 17, 1962**

REPORTERS and CAMERA CREWS from the three major networks, the major radio broadcasting systems, the wire services and dozens of domestic and international newspapers and magazines.

GILRUTH (O.C., ON LOUDSPEAKER)
*Neil A. Armstrong. Frank F. Borman,
 Jr. Charles 'Pete' Conrad...*

ON STAGE, Deke is with Gilruth, who introduces the astronauts. They walk out, all in blue suits save Conrad, in white linen.

GILRUTH (ON LOUDSPEAKER)
*James A. Lovell. James A. McDivitt.
 Elliot M. See. Thomas P. Stafford.
 Edward H. White, II. John W. Young.
 These are The New Nine. This is
 Project Gemini.*

The crowd applauds, dozens of flashbulbs POP. **TIGHT ON** Neil, a smile frozen on his face, eyes DARTING every which way.

NEIL'S POV. In **BLURRED CUTS:** *flashbulbs; press; the crowd; astronauts waving; Rick and Janet (pregnant)...* It's **DIZZYING.**

GILRUTH
 We'll open it up for questions now.

Gilruth points and a man from the AP stands.

AP REPORTER
 Gentlemen, what drew you to apply
 for the job?

We go down the line, the men are RELAXED. **QUICK, CUTTY --**

FRANK BORMAN
 I like to be on the first team.

PETE CONRAD
 I wanted to be a part of it.

ELLIOT SEE
 I feel this is the most important
 thing I could possibly do.

ED WHITE
 I felt I had something to give to
 the program.

ON THE AP GUY, scribbling. A beat, then he looks up.

AP REPORTER
 Mr. Armstrong?

WHIP TO NEIL, **UNCOMFORTABLE** as we've seen. Halting, **STIFF --**

NEIL

It was the general challenge of...
the unknowns of the program... and
the general alignment of this part
of it with our national goals.

The men glance over. Elliot CLOCKS Neil's discomfort. Then --

JOHN YOUNG

I agree with those other guys.

As the crowd dissolves into laughter, **FLASHBULBS TAKE US TO --**

NASA ANNOUNCER (**PRELAP**)

T minus one minute.

EXT. CAPE CANAVERAL - DAY

The Gemini nine **STARE OUT** into the distance. Beside them, a
GRANDSTAND of a few hundred people and THREE NETWORK CAMERAS.

ED WHITE

I thought it'd be bigger.

We follow Ed's gaze across two hundred yards of dirt to a
small, orange scaffold holding up a THIN, RED-TIPPED **ROCKET**.

**Mercury 8 Launch, Cape Canaveral
October 3, 1962**

At 90 feet tall, 5 feet in diameter, the rocket's much smaller
than the Saturn to come. And clearly much less sophisticated.

NASA ANNOUNCER (LOUDSPEAKER)

Thirty seconds.

PETE CONRAD

Hard to believe Wally even
fits on top of that thing.

The men stare, SOBER, shaken by the fact that soon they'll be
atop a rocket like this. **PAN SLOWLY** over their ANXIOUS FACES.

NASA ANNOUNCER (LOUDSPEAKER)

Fifteen.

Elliot See, Ed White... even Pete Conrad is nervous, fingers
crossed on both hands...

LOUDSPEAKER

Ten.

As the countdown begins in earnest we **FIND NEIL**. In contrast
to the others, Neil is TOTALLY CALM.

LOUDSPEAKER
5, 4, 3, 2...

HOLD ON Neil as the rocket DROWNS OUT the call, his face **AGLOW** with the flame of 200,000 pounds of thrust...

LOUDSPEAKER
Liftoff! Clock is started!

And as we hear the rocket lift, we **HOLD ON** Neil, on the EMOTION in his eyes... a childlike look of WONDER.

INT. KITCHEN, ARMSTRONG HOUSE (HOUSTON) - EARLY EVENING

CLOSE ON a CBS NEWS BROADCAST. WALTER CRONKITE (in large earphones) at his desk. We see a chyron: **CRISIS IN CUBA.**

WALTER CRONKITE (ON TV)
If invasion is undertaken, the Russians have said that they would retaliate with rocket fire; we have said if there's rocket fire from Cuba we will retaliate and there goes the, uh, whole ballgame.

PULL BACK to find **JANET**, PREGNANT, in a kitchen full of boxes. No longer unpacking. **PALE**, she stares at the B&W TV... when the doorbell RINGS. She walks into --

INT. LIVING ROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE (HOUSTON) - EARLY EVENING

Also full of boxes. Rick plays on the floor. Neil, on the couch, marks up a thick binder labeled GEMINI. **ENGROSSED**, he doesn't look up as Janet walks in and opens the door.

Ed White stands with his WIFE **PAT**, 30.

PAT
Hey. Pat White, we live next door?

JANET
Of course. Hello. Janet Armstrong.

PAT
We only just moved in ourselves, but we've got a couple days on y'all...

Pat holds out a Tupperware container of cookies.

JANET
Well, that's awfully nice of you.

Neil comes to the door with his binder. Ed's uncomfortable; clearly this visit was Pat's idea.

ED
Hey Neil. We have an assignment?

NEIL
No.

An awkward beat. Pat fills it.

PAT
I've just about got the kitchen squared. With everything going on in the news, company might be nice, I've already got some soup on...

NEIL
Ed and I have an early flight out.

Janet flushes, EMBARRASSED. And disappointed. But Pat doesn't miss a beat.

PAT
Oh, yes... you boys are heading to Cleveland, right? Assuming the world doesn't end?

She smiles at Janet. It almost sets Janet at ease.

JANET
Maybe another time?

PAT
Yes, of course, that'd be swell. It's just so nice to meet y'all.

Neil forces a smile back, then shuts the door.

EXT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE (HOUSTON) - SAME TIME

Ed and Pat stand there.

PAT
Well.

ED
Told you.

As they turn and head back towards their house, we **CUT TO --**

INT. MULTI-AXIS TRAINER ROOM, LEWIS FLIGHT CENTER - CLEVELAND

CLOSE ON a familiar pair of blue eyes. Ticking to a pair of hands **BUCKLING** straps... **PULLING** them tight.

FIND Neil in a cockpit chair, suspended within THREE CONCENTRIC STEEL RINGS. Welcome to the MULTI-AXIS TRAINER.

MULTI-AXIS SUPE (O.C.)
This replicates roll coupling on all three axis, the kind you might encounter in space.

The SUPE nods to the hand controllers on the chair.

MULTI-AXIS SUPE
Trick is to take care of roll first, then pitch and yaw will be easier.

Neil nods. The Supe starts the machine; the inner rings spin, tossing Neil in all directions. Slowly at first, then FASTER.

PUSH IN on Neil. The chair speeds up, his head WHIPPING in and out of frame as he struggles to analyze the spin.

His HANDS **GRAB** the controls... they CLICK several times... but the machine just spins FASTER. Neil bores down... but it's fast, TOO FAST... His eyes droop... and we **FADE TO GRAY**.

DEKE (O.C.)
White, you're up.

Neil blinks, **OPENS HIS EYES**. The supe moves to unbuckle him.

NEIL
I'm good. Let's go again.

The Supe STARES. Then turns to Deke. Who shrugs. The other astronauts watch, curious, as the Supe tightens Neil's straps and starts the machine again. As it spins, we **PUSH INTO --**

NEIL'S POV. The room, spinning. *And if it's nauseating, well, that's how it's supposed to feel.*

Neil **CLICKS** the controls and the trainer slows... only to SPIN **FASTER**. Shit. In **BLURRED CUTS** we see: *the other ASTRONAUTS; FLASHBULBS; PRESS; a CROWD*... and again we **FADE TO GRAY**.

DEKE (O.C.)
Armstrong.

Neil **OPENS HIS EYES**. Deke's bent over him.

NEIL
Again.

Deke's SURPRISED. Ed White and a few others look ANNOYED, but Deke responds to the look in Neil's eyes. He nods to the Supe, who pulls Neil's straps tight and leans in, *WHISPERING --*

MULTI-AXIS SUPE
Use your inner ear.

As Neil processes, the Supe steps back, starts up the machine.

NEIL'S POV. This time, as he spins, Neil CLOSES his eyes.
THE SCREEN GOES DARK. But under the grating machine...

WE HEAR the PULSE **SLOSHING** in Neil's inner ear. Then the **CLICK** of the hand control. Again. And again... And as Neil opens his eyes, the machine SLOWS...

And then STOPS. Elliot GAPES as the Supe unstraps Neil. Neil tries to stand, wobbles and falls... **VOMITING all over.**

Ed looks UNIMPRESSED.

ED
Serves him right.

DEKE
Clean him up. White, strap in.

INT. BATHROOM, LEWIS FLIGHT CENTER - CLEVELAND

Neil stands, bent over a sink. **SHAKING.**

A beat, then he steadies himself and tries to stand up... only to start **DRY HEAVING.** Again. And AGAIN. Spittle forming at the corners of his mouth.

Neil finally gets it under control. Pale, he spits in the sink and splashes water on his face when... Ed walks in. In the mirror, Neil sees Ed. Trying to look collected.

But as Ed stands there, he turns GREEN. A beat, then...

Ed **RUSHES INTO** a stall. We hear him **VOMITING** off screen. Off Neil, unimpressed himself, **CUT TO --**

INT. TRAINER, ELLINGTON AIR FORCE BASE - DAY (POV)

CLOSE ON Elliot **UPSIDE DOWN** in a suit and helmet. Sweating.

PETE CONRAD
You ready?

REVEAL Pete Conrad, also upside down, in the other seat of a Gemini trainer. Surprisingly serious.

Elliot puts on a brave face, NODS. Conrad **PULLS** a handle and the hatch doors under them **SWING OPEN... WATER RUSHING IN.**

As the men STRUGGLE to undo their harnesses, we **CUT TO --**

INT. FLOTATION TANK ROOM, ELLINGTON AFB - CONTINUOUS

Neil and the astronauts stand at the edge of a pool with a few TECHS, watching as the submerged capsule SHAKES in the water.

EGRESS SUPE
15 seconds... 25 seconds...

The EGRESS SUPE eyes his stopwatch. No one emerges. **CONCERN** creeps across Neil's face... then Conrad surfaces, GASPING.

PETE CONRAD
Piece of cake.

Conrad sees the look on Neil's face, REALIZES. And DIVES for Elliot. Neil glances over at Deke, who doesn't move.

EGRESS SUPE
45 seconds...

Neil STARES at the water. He can't see what's happening. His eyes **TICK** from the rescue techs, to the Egress Supe, to Deke, back to the water again. He scans it, his hand **CLENCHING**.

EGRESS SUPE
60 seconds, Deke.

At last, Deke nods to the rescue techs, who dive... just as Conrad **EMERGES** with Elliot, **SPUTTERING**. Neil and others reach down to pull him out of the pool as Deke jots down a NOTE.

DEKE
Lovell, Armstrong, suit up.

Neil hovers for a moment over Elliot.

DEKE
Armstrong, get your ass in gear!

SMASH TO --

INT. CAPSULE (GONDOLA), JOHNSVILLE CENTRIFUGE - DAY

CLOSE ON NEIL in a low-tech capsule. STRAINING, his features **STRETCHED WIDE** by the g forces. **HOLD TIGHT** on him, STRUGGLING to breathe, trying to muscle it out. **SMASH TO --**

INT. CENTRIFUGE ROOM, JOHNSVILLE CENTRIFUGE - MOMENTS LATER

Neil VOMITS beside the capsule, which is at the business end of a **MASSIVE CENTRIFUGE**. PALE, Neil looks up as the next victim approaches... it's Elliot.

Elliot clocks how wrecked Neil is. And **BLANCHES**. **SMASH TO --**

INT. CLASSROOM, MANNED SPACE CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Neil, EXHAUSTED, collapses into a desk. As the other Gemini men sit, Neil opens the **THICK BINDER** in front of him.

Physics of Rocket Propulsion - Rocket Vehicle Performance

1. Equations defining stage performance
2. Theoretical optimization of stages
3. Practical techniques using digital computers
4. Trajectory losses (drag, gravity, potential energy velocity)

A man in a suit (HAMMOCK) walks in, turns on the vu-graph.

HAMMOCK

Gentlemen, I'm David Hammock, I'll be walking you through basic rocket physics. We'll just cover the first chapter tonight.

Neil flips through the chapter. It's 75 pages. Jesus.

INT. HALLWAY, MANNED SPACE CENTER - EARLY EVENING

CLOSE ON a wall clock. 10pm. A lone janitor mops the hall. It's QUIET... then the classroom door **OPENS**. Neil and the others stumble out, totally spent. They start to exit when...

DEKE (O.C.)

A couple of you have been asking about assignments.

Neil and the others turn. Deke and Kraft stand behind them. The men are suddenly WIDE AWAKE.

KRAFT

The first missions will test basic functionality of the new capsule. We've made selections accordingly.

You could hear a pin drop.

DEKE

Back ups will train alongside primary crews for now. But there'll be plenty of flights for everyone. The list is outside my office.

A beat. Then the men GRAB their packs and **RUSH INTO** --

INT. ASTRONAUT OFFICES, MANNED SPACE CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Pete leads the way, Ed and the others at his heels, crowding like high school kids around the LIST posted by Deke's door.

FRANK BORMAN
White, you lucky bastard.

Ed inches forward. Smiles broadly. We see the list...

<u>Mission</u>	<u>Prime</u>	<u>Backup</u>
GT-3	Grissom-Young	Schirra-Stafford
GT-4	McDivitt-White	Borman-Lovell
GT-5	Cooper-Conrad	Armstrong-See

PETE CONRAD
Shit, I'm flying with Gordo?

JIM LOVELL
Punishment fits the crime...

The men laugh as Neil walks out. Elliot turns to him.

ELLIOT SEE
We're backup. Gemini 5.

NEIL
Great.

Unfazed, Neil exits with Elliot, not bothering to check the list. Ed clocks this, puzzled... ***not getting Neil at all.***

INT. KITCHEN, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil's at the dinner table. It's late, he eats alone, but Janet sits with him, the new baby (**MARK**) asleep in her arms.

JANET
Rick had a nice time playing with little Ed next door... the White's boy? They seem like nice folks.

It's not oppressive, like after Karen died, but Neil's distant. *Maybe he is upset about the backup assignment?*

JANET
Neil?

NEIL
Sorry... There was this lecture on orbital mechanics. About how to rendezvous with the Agena? If you thrust, you wind up going slower because it puts you in a higher orbit. You need to reduce thrust and drop to a lower orbit to catch up. It's backwards from what you learn as a pilot but if you work the math, it follows. It's kinda neat.

Janet reacts. Trying not to laugh.

NEIL
Well, it is.

JANET
Yes, I'm sure that's how all the
other guys feel.

Neil smiles. Then chuckles, **RELAXING**. A nice, shared moment... atypical these days. Off Janet, **ENJOYING** it --

INT. BATHROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil stands in boxers and a T-shirt, **BRUSHING** his teeth. Perfect little circles on each tooth. His mind elsewhere.

Janet, in a nightgown, slips up behind him. Her hand reaches around his stomach... then DOWN into his boxers.

At first, Neil doesn't notice. Then his mind and brush **SLOW**. His eyes **TICK** to Janet in the mirror. **CONSIDERING**. Janet looks up at him. **Insistent**.

A beat, then Neil turns, kissing her. As he pulls at her blouse, we **CUT TO** --

INT. BEDROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - NIGHT

Dark. Quiet. The windows open, a breeze plays on the drapes, moving over Janet and Neil, **NAKED** on the bed. We hear a **CRACKLING** in the b/g... and Janet stirs. She sits up, sleepy.

Her expression **CLOUDS**. She nudges Neil, softly. Then **HARDER**.

JANET
Do you smell that?

Neil sits up, groggy. Half awake, still processing, he gets out of bed, tosses on his boxers and heads down the hall.

Janet waits. A beat, then **SMOKE CURLS IN** through the doorway. Janet's eyes **WIDEN** as she hears Neil from the hall.

NEIL (O.C.)
Call the fire department.

Janet, stunned, reaches for the phone as we **PUSH INTO** --

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Neil runs down the **HALLWAY**, the roof **IN FLAMES**. Neil coughs, pushes through the smoke, pausing at the door to...

RICK'S ROOM. Rick sits up in bed. Disoriented.

NEIL

Follow your mother outside.

Rick nods and Neil moves on down the hall, **HUSTLING INTO** --

THE NURSERY. FILLED with smoke, the baby CRYING in the crib. Neil grabs the baby, covers him in a blanket and **RUNS OUT**, hurrying down the **HALL** into...

THE FAMILY ROOM. All smoke and fire, we can't even see Neil. We hear him COUGH, STRUGGLING to breathe...

...then find him as he **PUSHES THROUGH** the back door into --

EXT. BACKYARD, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Neil holds the baby, **GASPING** for breath, eyes **TICKING**...

...to **ED WHITE**, rushing across his yard to help...

...to the **TERRIFYING BLAZE** already engulfing most of the roof.

...to **JANET**, standing there, staring. Lost. And ALONE.

Neil PROCESSES, rushing to Janet and handing her the baby.

JANET

Ricky...

Neil's already on it, already turning back towards the house when... **A SECTION OF THE ROOF COLLAPSES.**

Janet turns **WHITE**. Neil quickly grabs a wet towel off the clothes line, covers his face and **RUNS BACK INTO** --

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The walls of **THE FAMILY ROOM** now GLOWING RED. Glass windows **CRACK**, the smoke forcing Neil onto hands and knees.

HOLD ON Neil as he CRAWLS, groping his way into **THE HALL**, the towel tight on his face, walls IN FLAMES around him. We feel the heat as Neil INCHES along, eyes **FIXED** on a FARAWAY DOOR...

PUSH IN on Neil as the roar of the fire **FADES** and we hear the **FAMILIAR UNNERVING WHINE** of Karen's Cobalt Machine...

Neil blocks it out, reaching the door and pushing it open...

Neil peers into **RICK'S ROOM.** Smoke and fire everywhere. Neil's eyes **TICK** across the room, scanning for Rick.

PUSH IN on his eyes, on something we haven't seen... **FEAR**. The ODD WHINE **SCREAMS** above the din and Neil FREEZES, the thought of yet another loss creeping in...

...until another **SOUND** pierces through.

Faint at first, then LOUDER. A child's whimper. Neil's eyes **DART** to... Rick, TERRIFIED, hiding under his bed. Neil **LUNGES** forward, scoops Rick up, wrapping him in the towel...

...as the fire seems to EBB. Neil confused, turns. And spots ED, through the window, hosing down the roof.

The fire **ROARS**. Neil snaps to, RUSHES through **THE HALL** into **THE FAMILY ROOM**. ENGULFED AGAIN by smoke, he **FALTERS**... then holds Rick for dear life and **CHARGES** through the door into --

EXT. BACKYARD, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Neil carries Rick out, pulls off the towel and looks at him.

NEIL

You need to listen to what I say.

It's stark. **ANGRY**. Rick starts to **CRY**... as Janet rushes over, **RELIEVED**. She takes Rick and Neil moves towards the VOLUNTEER FIREMEN pouring out of the small FIRE TRUCK...

...but Neil starts to **WHEEZE**. He has to pause, bending over, STRUGGLING to catch his breath just as...

THE REST OF THE ROOF COLLAPSES. Ed and the firemen are forced back. Janet reacts, EYES WIDE... but Neil just stares at the blaze, at what's left of the house. **EMOTIONLESS**.

Janet reaches for Neil, but he's already moving towards Ed...

NEIL

Fire's heading towards the garage,
help me get the cars out?

Ed follows Neil to the garage... leaving Janet with the kids. Alone. Watching her house burn to the ground. **DISSOLVE TO --**

EXT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - MORNING

A birds-eye view of the house... now wet, black RUBBLE and DYING EMBERS, smoke still reaching skyward.

Neil picks through the wreckage as we **PULL BACK** into --

INT. UPSTAIRS GUEST ROOM, ED & PAT WHITE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

By the window, Janet holds the baby and a CHARRED WEDDING ALBUM. She looks down at a half destroyed PHOTO, Neil in a tuxedo. **BEAMING.** Lighter than we've ever seen him.

Janet glances out the window, at what's left of her house, at a very different Neil picking through the rubble.

She FIGHTS to contain her emotions.

PAT

We can put Rick in with Ed Jr. If this is big enough for you all?

Janet pulls herself together, closing the album and turning to Pat, who's walked in with sheets and towels.

JANET

Of course. Deke is already working on finding us a rental, so it shouldn't be too long.

PAT WHITE

Hush. It'll be nice to have a few more voices 'round the house. Not like Ed's ever home.

Janet smiles, appreciative as a doorbell RINGS. **CUT TO --**

INT. FOYER, ED & PAT WHITE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ed opens the door, finds Elliot and his wife **MARILYN SEE**, 30s. Marilyn holds a brisket; Elliot, his baby son and a bag. Elliot and Ed aren't that friendly; it's a bit **AWKWARD.**

ED

Elliot.

ELLIOT SEE

We heard Neil and Janet were--

JANET

Marilyn, Elliot?

Pat and Janet walk in. Marilyn holds out the brisket.

MARILYN

It was the least we could do.

ELLIOT SEE

And the girls insisted on sending some of their things.

He holds out a bag of Barbie dolls. Janet laughs, touched.

ELLIOT SEE
Where's Neil?

JANET
He's still over at the house.

ED
I thought we got everything.

JANET
You did.

Off Ed, CONFUSED, CUT TO --

INT./EXT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - DAY

Neil in the rubble with a FIRE INSPECTOR, 50s, nonchalant.

FIRE INSPECTOR
Probably a short in the wiring.
I'll write it up, send it over to
the insurance company.

The inspector starts to go, but Neil doesn't move.

NEIL
Fire came from the family room, we'd
just replaced the ceiling panels...

FIRE INSPECTOR
I'm sure they'll cover it, Mr.
Armstrong.

But Neil takes out a logbook and kneels, SCANNING the rubble.
The inspector **STARES** and we...

ED (O.C.)
...the hell?

PULL BACK to find Ed and Elliot at the edge of the yard.

ELLIOT SEE
Uh, he's trying to -- ` ED
I know what he's doing.

Ed shakes his head. A beat, then he has an idea.

ED
Let's take a ride.

They head off and we TIME CUT TO --

EXT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - DAY

Sunset. Wide on the house. Against the setting sun, the **SILHOUETTE** of a man... Neil inspecting the rubble. **TIRELESS**. A beat, then we see Neil bend down...

ANGLE ON a **BLACKENED BRACELET** amidst ruined keepsakes in the rubble. Neil wipes it off. *K A R...* the rest unreadable.

CLOSE ON Neil's eyes -- a **HINT** of emotion. Then he stands. **MOVING ON**. Inching over the collapsed roof, looking for something else. And then bending down again...

NEIL

Looks like it started here, probably was one of the paneling nails.

FIRE INSPECTOR

So we're good?

The exhausted inspector walks over, wiping his forehead.

NEIL

Yep. We just have to find the nail.

The inspector, **EXASPERATED**, stares as Neil digs into the roof.

ED (O.C.)

Neil!

Ed's in the yard with Elliot, holding the bag. He waves Neil over. A beat, then Neil joins them. Ed holds out the bag.

ED

Present.

Neil, confused, takes the bag. He opens it, pulls out a brand new 'IONIZATION CHAMBER SMOKE DETECTOR.'

ED

Smoke enters the chamber, it disrupts the current, thing screams like a son of a bitch.

ELLIOT SEE

He got one for every house in the development.

A beat. Neil looks up at Ed, **SURPRISED**. And **GRATEFUL**.

ED

How 'bout a break?

INT. DINING ROOM, ED & PAT WHITE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The three couples sit eating, kids playing in the family room. Janet's had a few glasses of wine.

PAT

I can't imagine how frightening it must have been, waking up like that.

JANET

It would've been worse if I hadn't.

MARILYN

Well, sure. But you're just handling this so well. Both of you.

She smiles at Neil. He nods, awkward.

NEIL

At this point it's just an inconvenience. Time spent on things which aren't very productive. Like getting into another house.

JANET

Yes, I'm sure it'll take up a lot of your time.

Neil blinks, SURPRISED. Elliot laughs.

MARILYN

What are you laughing at?

ELLIOT

Nothing.

JANET

(to Pat and Marilyn)
Do you think this is how the cosmonauts treat their wives?

PAT

Maybe it's how the female cosmonauts treat their husbands.

ED

That's enough.

PAT

No, I think we've hit on something. Maybe this is the problem.

MARILYN

No female astronauts?

PAT
Why do you think we're behind?

ED
We're not behind.

PAT
Right. The Russians are sending women up in space and I can't even attend a launch at the Cape.

Really? MARILYN What? JANET

PAT
No wives at the Cape. I asked about Ed's flight, that's what Deke said.

ED
It's NASA policy.

PAT
'Cause God forbid there's a photo of me reacting if the rocket explodes.

This is starting to get uncomfortable.

ED
Deke and Chris just don't want any distractions.

PAT
From what I understand, there are all sorts of distractions.

Honey -- ED PAT
Don't *honey* me.

NEIL
This reminds me of a story.

They turn to Neil, surprised.

NEIL
A fella I know made plans to play golf on his wedding anniversary. His wife got very upset. They had a spat, as couples do. She accused him of loving golf more than her. And the fella, well, he shrugged.
(acting it)
"I love you more than tennis."

A beat. It's not particularly funny, but from Neil it's surprising. And hilarious. The table bursts out laughing.

EXT. ED WHITE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

WIDE ON the yard. The house cozy, the windows casting warm light, the yard dotted with fireflies. And then over the crickets, we hear faint STATIC. And chatter... in RUSSIAN.

PAN UP to the stars above. **HOLD ON** them as the Comms continue. Chilling, spooky. And as we wonder what it means, **PRELAP --**

RICK (**PRELAP**)

I'm on the lookout for Dr. Zin.

EXT. PORCH, WHITE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON Rick crouching by the porch with a walkie talkie.

RICK (INTO WALKIE)

I'm on the lookout for Dr.
Zin. Copy?

ED JR (OVER WALKIE)

Roger, I'm flying to you.

Nearby, Neil watches Rick, CALM. Elliot holds up a **SEXTANT**.

ELLIOT

Vega, Rigel. 8 degrees. Check me?

Neil nods, takes Elliot's sextant. Surveys the two stars.

NEIL

Yes. 8 degree angle.

ELLIOT

You want to do Antares and Nunki?

Neil nods, takes a reading. Ed walks outside with beers. He sees Neil with the sextant and SHOTS a look at Elliot.

ELLIOT

We head to Morehead on Thursday.

ED

(sarcastic)

So why not waste a Saturday night.

Neil ignores him, keeps at it. Elliot looks over at Ed.

ELLIOT

You've been down there, right?

ED

To Morehead? Yeah. It's cool, they shift star positions to mimic an off course craft. Bitch of a sim, but it's how Cooper aligned Faith 7 when his navigation controls failed.

NEIL

Good thing to know, I guess.

Ed looks at Neil. Then chuckles, good-natured. Elliot does too. And Neil smiles, a bit surprised at the **BOND FORMING**.

INT. KITCHEN, WHITE'S HOUSE - LATER

Pat and Jan do dishes; Ed, Neil and Elliot in the window. Marilyn sits on the couch in the b/g with her youngest.

PAT

Your husband has a sense of humor.

JANET

A little corny.

PAT

I never would have guessed.

JANET

I'm a bit surprised myself.

A phone **RINGS**. Pat goes to get it, but we **HOLD ON** Jan, watching Neil with the others.

PAT (O.C.)

Ed? Deke's on the phone.

Ed hustles in. Neil follows behind, notices Janet's stare. As Ed picks up the phone, Neil drifts over to her.

NEIL

What?

JANET

Nothing. Just looking at you.

She's warm. Neil smiles, a bit mystified.

WALTER CRONKITE (ON TV)

*...Leonov is tethered to Voshkod 2,
but nothing separates him from space
other than his pressure suit...*

Neil turns. Ed's flipped on the TV. Neil's smile **FADES** as he sees B&W FOOTAGE of **A COSMONAUT FLOATING OVER EARTH**.

Neil tightens. The camera ominously **PUSHES IN** on the TV...

WALTER CRONKITE (ON TV)
*...a pressure suit we're told was
 designed for the lunar surface.
 This is, of course, mankind's first
 E.V.A., or Extra-Vehicular Activity.*

BANG! Ed **SLAMS** his fist against the wall in frustration.

ED
 Shit.

A beat, then Ed grabs his bag. Neil shoots him a look.

ED
 They've added another mission
 objective to Gemini 4.

Ed heads out the door but we **HOLD ON** Neil, **PUSHING IN ON HIM**
 as the RUSSIAN COMMS on TV get **LOUDER** and we --

FADE OUT.

OVER BLACK we hear the sound of U.S. COMMS --

ED (**PRELAP**, COMMS)
Am I in your view, Jimbo?

INT. MISSION CONTROL CENTER (MCC), MSC - HOUSTON - DAY

ANOTHER SCREEN. B&w footage. An ASTRONAUT floats in space.

JIM (COMMS)
You're right in front, Ed.

REVERSE to Neil and Elliot, watching RAPT, as we realize the
 floating astronaut is Ed.

**Gemini IV, Mission Day 1
 June 3, 1965**

Welcome to **MISSION CONTROL**, *the latest, greatest tech of 1965.*
 PUSH BUTTONS, ROTARY PHONES. Monitors of NUMBERS, STATIC MAPS
 on the big screens, a scrolling STYLUS tracking the capsule.

ED (COMMS)
*This is the greatest experience
 I've... it's just tremendous.*

Neil **SMILES** at Elliot as Deke enters with a group of men.

DEKE

Gentlemen, Neil Armstrong and Elliot
See, our backups on Gemini Five.
(to Neil, Elliot)
These are the fourteen newbies.
Keep an eye on them, would you?

As Deke heads off, Elliot notices a NEWBIE holding court.

NEWBIE (BUZZ)

Ed and I were stationed together in
Germany. He called me a few days
ago to ask if I had tips for him
based on my doctorate. I found that
amusing, of course. I only went to
MIT on his recommendation.

Neil glances over at **BUZZ ALDRIN**, 33. Smart, arrogant, TONE
DEAF; he clearly annoys the others. And the flight director.

KRAFT

Cut the chatter.

The room quiets. Kraft nods to CAPCOM **GUS GRISSOM**, 39, gruff.

GRISSOM (INTO COMMS)

Gemini 4, Houston Cap Com,
let's bring Ed in now.

ED (COMMS)

*Right now I'm standing on my
head, I'm looking down on...*

GRISSOM (INTO COMMS)

Gemini 4, do you read me?

ED (COMMS)

*My golly, I'm looking right
in the bay there!*

Ed and Jim clearly don't hear Gus.

GRISSOM (INTO COMMS)

Gemini 4, Houston; Gemini 4 --

JIM (COMMS)

*Ed, I'm gonna PUSH-TO-TALK,
see what the Flight Director
has to say. Gus, any message?*

GRISSOM (INTO COMMS)

Have Ed get his ass back in!

EECOM ENGINEER

45 seconds to Loss of Signal.

Kraft glances at EECOM. Neil catches it, notes his **CONCERN**.

JIM (COMMS)

They want you back now, Ed.

ED (COMMS)

*I'm trying to get a picture
of the spacecraft.*

JIM (COMMS)
No, back in. Come on.

ED (COMMS)
...Saddest moment of my life.

EECOM ENGINEER
 30 seconds to Bermuda LOS.

The video feed **BREAKS UP**. A long, silent beat.

GRISSOM (INTO COMMS)
 20 seconds to LOS, are you
 getting him back in? Jim --

JIM (COMMS)
*He's having some trouble
 getting into the space craft.*

EECOM ENGINEER
 10 seconds --

FLIGHT SURGEON
 Pilot's heart rate is
 spiking. He's up to 180 bps.

Shit. Neil watches INTENT. The whole room looks concerned.

GRISSOM (INTO COMMS)
 Gemini 4, give me a status.
 Is he getting back in, Jim?

JIM (COMMS)
*Listen, we're kinda busy! If
 you don't have something for
 us, wait a couple --*

The audio turns to **STATIC**.

EECOM ENGINEER
 Loss of Signal.

KRAFT
 Switch to UHF.

The EECOM engineer hits a switch; the static turns to **SILENCE**.

GRISSOM (INTO COMMS)
 Gemini 4, Houston Cap Com. Gemini
 4, give me your status.

CLOSE ON Neil and Elliot as they wait, the **TENSION PALPABLE**.
 All the newbies, even Buzz, STARE. The silence is DEAFENING.

PUSH IN on Neil, eyes **TICKING** from screen to console. A beat.

GRISSOM
 Gemini 4, do you --

ED (COMMS)
*...that was something. That
 was the most natural feeling.*

Neil RELAXES. We hear more voices over comms.

CARNAVON CAP COM (COMMS)
 Gemini 4, Carnavon Cap Com.

JIM (COMMS)
*Hello Carnavon. We are back
 inside the spacecraft. We
 are repressurized to 5 PSI...*

As the room lets out a collective breath, **CUT TO --**

INT. MISSION CONTROL CENTER, MSC - HOUSTON - NIGHT

It's late. Gus, exhausted, sits listening to Ed.

ED (COMMS)

...then with Jim pulling hard as he could and me pulling down as best I could, we forced me down into my seat and got the hatch closed.

PAN TO Neil, standing beside Gus. Listening, RAPT.

ED (COMMS)

I'm just glad we didn't have to make a re-entry with the hatch open.

GRISSOM (INTO COMMS)

Us too, Ed.

(to Neil, sotto)

Hold the fort, I gotta use the can.

Gus slips away. The flight surgeon approaches with a NOTE.

ED (COMMS)

But there was no disorientation whatsoever. I was using my tether, actually walking on the spacecraft.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)

(off the note)

Ed, the doc wants the sleep period changed to let you get some rest.

ED (COMMS)

Armstrong? Is that Neil?

NEIL

Yes. He'd like you to go four hours --

ED (COMMS)

Have you seen Pat? Did she and the kids hear the EVA?

NEIL

...uh, yeah. Jan said they listened on the squawk box.

ED (COMMS)

Oh, that's terrific. Tell them not to worry, I'm dandy.

Neil smiles, **DISTRACTED** from the task at hand. He almost seems bemused by Ed's warmth towards him, by the STRENGTH of their connection... Neil seems as **HUMAN** as we've ever seen.

NEIL
I'll tell them. It sounds great,
Ed. Like... it's really something.

ED (COMMS)
*Sure as hell is. Wait 'til you get
up here. You'll flip.*

A NICE MOMENT.. 'til Neil sees the doc GLARING.

NEIL
I bet. Listen, the doc would really
like if you could get some sleep.

ED (COMMS)
*Okay. I'll give it a try. But just
you wait, you won't be able to sleep
either. Not with this view.*

Off Neil --

EXT. MCC BUILDING, MSC - HOUSTON - NIGHT

Wide on a LARGE WINDOWLESS STRUCTURE, lit up against the
night. A sign, block letters: Mission Control Center.

FIND Neil. Heading across the parking lot, lost in thought.
But as he reaches the car... he PAUSES. And looks up...

A sky of stars. We know Ed's up there, in orbit, but it's not
warmth or wonder in Neil's eyes. It's something else...

...YEARNING.

EXT. CAPE KENNEDY/INT. GEMINI V CAPSULE - EARLY MORNING

A beautiful morning. **GEMINI-TITAN V** steaming on the pad.

NEIL (COMMS)
*Push-To-Talk Comm check.
Commander push-to-talk --*

KSC CAPCOM (COMMS)
*Yes, we read you, Neil.
We're at T minus 2 hours.*

PUSH IN CLOSER to the white room level, just outside the
capsule. Men in flight suits prep for launch.

**Gemini V, Pre-Launch
August 21, 1965**

Holy shit, are Neil and Elliot about to head into space?

Just as we think they are, we **PUSH INTO** the capsule... to find
the two of them not in spacesuits, but in routine FLIGHT GEAR.

ELLIOT (INTO COMMS)
Pilot Push-To-Talk.

GORDO COOPER (COMMS)
Read you loud and clear.

Elliot looks up, sees GORDO COOPER, 38, brusque, and Pete Conrad. In **SPACESUITS**.

PETE CONRAD (COMMS)
We got it, fellas.

Neil and Elliot (the backups) step out, awkwardly helping Cooper and Conrad into the small capsule. As Neil buckles in Pete, he eyes the Gemini 5 Patch on his arm. **8 DAYS OR BUST.**

INT./EXT. LAUNCH PAD ELEVATOR, PAD 19 - MOMENTS LATER

Neil, Elliot ride down the side of the Titan rocket. *And yes, it's more substantial than the Mercury Atlas, but at 100 feet, it still feels puny compared to the Apollo we all know.*

ELLIOT SEE
Think the docs know what eight days
in space'll do to those guys?

NEIL
Might kill both of them.

ELLIOT SEE
It'd be quieter 'round here.

NEIL
Sounds nice.

Elliot SMILES. Then Neil does. Clearly, they're even closer. The elevator stops and Neil and Elliot walk out onto --

THE LAUNCH PAD. They move to confer with Deke and a few engineers, Elliot shouting over the steaming rocket...

ELLIOT SEE
System checks look good, hydrogen's
steady at 101.5...

As Elliot continues, Deke pulls Neil aside. He nods at the Gemini capsule just ten stories up...

DEKE
Those two make it back, we'll be one
up on the Soviets. Not much of a
lead, but one we don't want to lose.
(then)
I'm putting you in command of Gemini
8. Like 6 and 7, rendezvous and
docking will be your primary goal.

NEIL
Elliot and I will start training.

DEKE
I'm gonna pair you with Dave Scott.
We've got a pretty strenuous E.V.A.
planned for eight, Dave's a horse.
Conrad will serve as your backup.

Neil pauses, looks back at Elliot.

DEKE
We'll put that brain of his to work.
But these missions are key to
Apollo. We wanna beat Brezhnev to
the moon, we gotta be ready soon as
Werner has the rocket to take us.

Off Neil, processing this, we **CUT TO** --

INT. GEMINI CAPSULE TRAINER, TRAINING HANGAR, MSC - DAY

DAVE SCOTT, 35, very good looking and very enthusiastic.

DAVE SCOTT
Pretty exciting mission, huh?

FIND Neil sitting beside Dave as a **MECHANICAL ARM** slowly pulls their Gemini trainer away from a mock Agena docking satellite.

DAVE SCOTT
I mean, it's the whole ball of wax,
everything we need for Apollo.
E.V.A., rendezvous, we'll be one of
the first to dock with the Agena...

Neil remains focused on a Gemini instrument chart, reaching for instruments without looking up, going over their position.

DAVE SCOTT
Can't ask for a better assignment.
Heck, I don't think I've been this
jazzed since they asked me to swim
Varsity as a freshman in High --

NEIL
Could you be quiet?

Dave, surprised, eyes Neil, who keeps studying the Gemini instruments... the slightest hint of ANNOYANCE on his face.

DAVE SCOTT
Didn't you do this already? On 5?

Neil doesn't respond. Dave, now annoyed himself, opens his manual. For a moment, they work in silence. And off Neil, perhaps wishing it were Elliot beside him, **PRELAP --**

ELLIOT SEE (**PRELAP**, COMMS)
*NASA 7 descending through 2,000
 feet, permission to approach.*

INT. T-38 FRONT COCKPIT, OVER LAMBERT AFB - NIGHT (POV)

Elliot sits in front, managing the T-38 descent for landing. Some light turbulence, clouds all around. ZERO VISIBILITY.

ELLINGTON TOWER (COMMS)
*Nasa 7, you're cleared for
 approach, come on down outta
 that soup...*

ELLIOT SEE (INTO COMMS)
 Roger that. Coming in.

As Elliot guides the plane down, he chats with his co-pilot in the rear cockpit, CHARLIE BASSETT, 34, all American.

CHARLIE BASSETT (COMMS)
 How long we here?

ELLIOT SEE (INTO COMMS)
 A while. Deke wants the new Agena
 ready for March.

CHARLIE BASSETT
 So 8'd get the first shot? Sets
 Neil and Dave up good for Apollo.

Elliot doesn't say anything. The slightest hint of **ENVY**.

CHARLIE BASSETT (COMMS)
 Thank god I didn't pull that
 assignment. Poor Dave, Armstrong's
 gonna run him ragged.

ELLIOT SEE (INTO COMMS)
 (smiles)
 That is an upside to training with
 Neil. Next assignment's a cakewalk.

Bassett LAUGHS as they drop through 500 feet, breaking through clouds. Elliot visually clocks his position...

...and instantly sees HE'S SHORT.

CHARLIE BASSETT (COMMS)
We're low and slow, Elliot...

ELLIOT SEE (INTO COMMS)
 Damn radar.
 (a quick decision)
 I don't wanna get lost in the clouds
 again, I'm just gonna go round.

He hits the afterburners, pulls the stick to make a low turn.

CHARLIE BASSETT (COMMS)
Elliot...

We hear the ANXIETY in Bassett's voice as Elliot sees... ***THE PLANE IS ROCKETING TOWARDS A TALL NASA BUILDING!!! OH SHIT!!!***

CHARLIE BASSETT (COMMS)
Pull up. Elliot...

ELLIOT SEE
 Dammit... Dammit...

Elliot YANKS up on the stick, but it's not enough. As they **SPEED** towards the building **ELLIOT'S EYES WIDEN** and we...

SMASH TO --

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - NIGHT

NEIL. Quiet. Studying rendezvous and docking calculations in a notebook, his dinner off to one side.

RICK
 Are you excited?

REVEAL Janet, Rick and Mark (*now 8 and 4*) also at the table, eating dinner. It's raining hard out, real Texas thunder.

RICK
 Dad?

JANET
 Honey, let your father eat his --

NEIL
 Excited about what?

Neil looks at Rick. Janet watches, surprised.

RICK
 That you might be first. To dock.

NEIL
 Well, you have to prepare for all sorts of eventualities when you do something first. There's much greater risk of failure.
 (MORE)

NEIL (CONT'D)

Fact is, the only reason we might be first is cause the first Agena exploded after separation and it's going to take a few months to build the new one.

Neil returns to his notebook, oblivious to WIDE-EYED Mark.

MARK

A ship exploded?

JANET

It was just a satellite, honey. No one was hurt.

Before Jan can say more we hear a **KNOCK**... Neil doesn't even notice. Janet, used to this, gets up, walks to door...

...and opens it. Ed's on the porch. SOAKED from the rain.

ED

Hey. Jan, can I speak to him?

JANET

Uh, sure. You want to come in?

ED

No.

Janet sees something in his eyes. Knows better than to ask.

EXT. PORCH, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - HOUSTON - MOMENTS LATER

Neil walks out onto the porch.

NEIL

Hey.

ED

Hey. I have some bad news.

NEIL

The delays on the Agena? I don't think we'll lose much time. Puts the pressure on Dave and me, but --

ED

Neil.

Neil stops. Sees it's something else.

ED
 Elliot and Charlie were flying into
 Lambert. Their plane... they
 crashed on approach.

Neil takes this in. Knowing from the look on Ed's face that
 neither Elliot nor Charlie made it.

The two of them stand there in **AWFUL SILENCE**. Nothing to say.

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE (HOUSTON) - MOMENTS LATER

Neil walks back in. Sits down at the table.

RICK
 So are they going to make the new
 Agena better? Dad?

Neil looks over at Rick. Lost.

NEIL
 What?

RICK
 Are they going to make the new Agena
 better? So it doesn't explode?

NEIL
 Uh, yes. I'm, I'm sure they...

Neil trails off, clearly elsewhere. Janet intercedes.

JANET
 Ricky, go get your math homework so
 I can check.

Rick nods, heads off to his room. Janet glances over at Mark,
 playing with his peas, then quietly leans over to Neil.

JANET
 Who was it?

NEIL
 Elliot.

Janet pales. **CUT TO --**

EXT. ARLINGTON CEMETERY - DAY

Gray, rainy. SIX BLACK HORSES pull a caisson bearing a **FLAG
 DRAPED COFFIN** into Section 4 of the famous cemetery, TWO NAVAL
 PLATOONS and a COLOR GUARD alongside.

The horses stop. The Navy men lift the coffin and carry it past a 9-YEAR-OLD GIRL. In tears. The girl, Elliot's daughter, stands with Marilyn and Elliot's other children...

...but we **HOLD ON** her as she watches the casket pass and **SOBS**, burying her face in ED'S OVERCOAT. Ed puts an arm around her, fighting it himself, holding on to Pat and looking over at...

Janet and Neil. Who's **BLANK**. His face devoid of emotion, his features **FROZEN**... save for **HIS EYES**. **DARTING** from the coffin... to the **CRANK** by the grave... to Elliot's daughter.

And for a moment, she looks just like Neil's daughter Karen. **PUSH IN** on Neil's eyes and **MATCH CUT TO --**

EXT. PORCH, ELLIOT SEE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil, staring down at a **SEXTANT**. He turns it in his hands.

PETE CONRAD (O.C.)

Wouldja believe Mondale cornered me at Arlington? Senator thought it was a good time to ask why we don't just send machines to the moon?

PULL BACK to a circle of astronauts nearby. Conrad, Lovell, Scott and others pass a bottle of vodka, a lime inside.

DAVE SCOTT

Shit. How the hell did this happen?

JIM LOVELL

Cernan told me the cloud cover was down to 500 feet. A low go-around underneath low clouds, that's tough. Probably never saw the building.

BUZZ

Clearly, the error was the approach.

Conrad glances at Buzz Aldrin. Even he's taken aback.

BUZZ

The T-38 stalls below 270 knots. He wasn't aggressive enough.

The men go quiet. Buzz may be right, but it's not the time. Uneasy, they look away... save for Neil. Who **STARES** at Buzz.

BUZZ

What? Tell me you disagree.

Neil does. But he just turns, walks into --

INT. LIVING ROOM, ELLIOT AND MARILYN SEE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil, tense, moves through the gathered mourners, eyes darting, SEARCHING for Janet. We **CUT INTO NEIL'S POV** --

*...eyes ticking past **WIVES** raising hands in greeting...*

*...past **ED** waving, calling to Neil from across the room...*

*...pausing on **ELLIOT'S PHOTO** on the mantle...*

Neil **KEEPS GOING** until he spots Janet. He moves **SWIFTLY** into--

INT. KITCHEN, ELLIOT AND MARILYN SEE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Janet lays cookies out on a tray. Neil rolls up beside her.

NEIL

Let's go.

JANET

I told Pat I'd help put out dessert.

NEIL

(quiet)

I need to go.

JANET

Okay. It'll just be another minute.

She keeps plating cookies... until she realizes Neil's gone.

JANET

Neil?

She turns. We hear the car start before we see it. Neil pulling away and driving off. Off Janet --

INT. ED WHITE'S CAR (MOVING) - LATER

Close on Janet. In the backseat. Upset and embarrassed.

JANET

I'm sorry. I hate to be a bother.

PAT

It's no bother.

Ed drives. Pat beside him. A beat.

JANET

Has he ever talked to you about her?
About Karen?

ED
No. Not really.

JANET
I talk about her. But never to him.

Janet stares out the window. Off Ed, processing, we --

EXT. ARMSTRONG BACK PORCH - LATER

Neil stands under the stars, taking readings with the sextant. Practicing. Jotting notes down in a logbook beside him.

ED
Hey.

Ed walks up. Neil just keeps taking readings. A beat.

ED
Lovell said Buzz was mouthing off.
Certainly wasn't the place for it.

Neil glances over. Something not sitting well.

ED
You know Deke had doubts about
Elliot. Deke moved him off Eight.

NEIL
Deke wanted him for command.

ED
Neil. Elliot always flew too slow.
(then)
I mean, it's tough to blame a guy
for his own death. And Aldrin's an
asshole. But you of all people know--

NEIL
(hot)
No. I don't. I didn't investigate
the crash, I didn't study the flight
trajectory, I wouldn't pretend to
know what happened.

Ed's surprised. Neil's **DARK**, more emotional than we've seen.

NEIL
You all want to make yourselves feel
better, but this had, it had nothing
to do with Elliot. You know the
odds, this... it happens, it'll
happen again and if you can't handle
it... you should do something else.

Neil contains himself, turns away. Starts taking readings.

ED
Neil. Hey, we're all broken
up here, I didn't mean to --

NEIL
I need to practice.

ED
What?

NEIL
We're going to be the first to dock,
I need to practice.

ED
Shit. You should be with your wife,
playing with your kids --

NEIL
And you should be minding your own
damn business.

He's COLD. Ed reacts. Then walks off. As he goes, we see...

Janet. In the window, a tired look in her eyes. She watches
as Neil takes another reading. He seems unmoved. Exhausted,
Janet turns away, and we **RACK FOCUS** back to...

Neil. **SHAKING.** As RATTLED as we've seen. He lowers the
sextant... and stares down at the small label. "**E. SEE.**"

INT. UPSTAIRS FOYER, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil walks up the stairs. He turns off the light and starts
to head into the bedroom... when he HESITATES.

He walks to the door across the hall, looks in at Rick and
Mark in their beds, sleeping soundly. As he stands there, we
PUSH IN on his eyes. Filled with TEARS.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

CLOSE ON a familiar Westclox electric alarm clock. The time
flips to 6:00 AM and the alarm **TRILLS.**

Janet stirs, rolls over. The bed is EMPTY.

INT. KITCHEN, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Janet, groggy, walks in, then STOPS. SURPRISED to see...

Neil, with Rick and Mark at the kitchen table, huddled over a
PAPER EARTH... pushing a PAPER GEMINI towards a PAPER AGENA.

NEIL

Before we can dock, we have to meet
up with the Agena in space.

RICK

(telling Mark)
That's called rendezvous.

Neil nods. Then notices Janet in the door. Watching them.

NEIL

Hey.

JANET

Hey.

Janet, AFFECTED, swallows her emotions and starts breakfast.
PRELAP the sound of a **THUNDERING ROCKET** and **SMASH TO --**

INT. GEMINI 8 CAPSULE, PAD 19, KSC - MARCH 16, 1966, 10AM

UPSIDE DOWN through a cockpit window we see a rocket **RUMBLING**
SKYWARD. As the cabin **SHAKES...**

KSC CAPCOM (COMMS)

*Atlas-Agena Liftoff 10:00:30, flight
dynamics plot looks very good.*

REVERSE TO Neil and Dave suited up, prepping for launch and
getting strapped in by backups Pete Conrad and Richard Gordon.

**Gemini VIII, Pre-Launch
March 16, 1966, 10:00:30**

DAVE SCOTT (COMMS)

You guys have a liftoff time for us?

KSC CAPCOM (COMMS)

Fido's running numbers...

PETE CONRAD (INTO COMMS)

Hold still, wouldja?

Neil looks over, sees Pete is **STRUGGLING** to buckle Dave's
parachute harness; one of its catches is clogged.

RICHARD GORDON

What is that? Glue?

PETE CONRAD

(calls outside)

Guenter, you got a Swiss Army
Knife?

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)

A Swiss Army Knife? Are you
shitting me?

Pad leader **GUENTER WENDT** (42, spectacles, bow tie) leans in.

GUENTER WENDT

See if this'll do the trick, Pete.

He holds out a TOOTHPICK. Dave watches Pete dig in, AGITATED.

INT. HALLWAY, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - HOUSTON - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON Janet. Staring into a HALL MIRROR. Sweating.

KSC CAPCOM (O.C., COMMS)
*What's going on up there? Do
 we need to hold? Neil?*

NEIL (O.C., COMMS)
*No, just a little glitch with
 Dave's parachute.*

Janet reacts. A beat, then she wipes her eyes, STEELS herself with a last look and walks into --

INT. LIVING ROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - HOUSTON - CONTINUOUS

LURTON SCOTT hovers by a NASA SQUAWKBOX, the kids in the b/g.

LURTON
 Did you hear that? A glitch with
 his parachute?

JANET
 Neil doesn't have much faith in the
 ejection seats anyway.

Hardly reassuring. Lurton tries to keep it together as LIFE MAGAZINE PHOTOGRAPHER **RALPH MORSE** approaches with a camera.

RALPH MORSE
 Ladies, would you mind posing?

It's the last thing they want to do, but it's part of the job. They nod and pose, forcing smiles. As Morse takes photos --

RALPH MORSE
 Big day, big smiles.

FIDO (COMMS)
*The Agena is looking good,
 orbit is 162 by 156.*

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT, PAD 19, KSC - SAME TIME

The capsule is now SEALED and CLAUSTROPHOBIC. We're **CONFINED** with Neil and Dave, the tiny window providing little relief.

FIDO (COMMS)
T minus 2 minutes.

KSC CAPCOM (COMMS)
Engines to start, Neil.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 Engines to start position,
 initiating LOX pressurization.

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
Ground power removal...

EECOM ENGINEER (COMMS)
*Pressurization initiated.
Ground power removed.*

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Closing Visors, heaters off.

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Final pre-flight.

They slide their visors closed. Dave eyes the clock, TENSE.
And no, we're not cutting away. We're gonna HOLD ON NEIL AND
DAVE STRAIGHT THROUGH THE LAUNCH IN REAL TIME...

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Booster?

BOOSTER ENGINEER (COMMS)
Go.

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
FIDO?

FIDO (COMMS)
I'm go.

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Doc? ...Doc?

FLIGHT SURGEON (COMMS)
Armstrong's at 146 bpm.

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Commander?

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
I'm good.

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Do we need to hold, Doc?

FIDO (COMMS)
*Colonel, even a 30 second
hold will jeopardize our
ability to rendezvous --*

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
I understand. Doc?

Dave glances at Neil. Is it nerves? **PUSH IN** on Neil's eyes.

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Doc, I need an answer...

FLIGHT SURGEON (COMMS)
He's within tolerable limits.

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
*That's a go... start APUs,
start Gimbal...*

FIDO (COMMS)
T minus 30 seconds.

RELIEVED, Neil and Dave spring back into action...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Starting APUs.

DAVE (INTO COMMS)
Starting Gimbal.

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Prepare for launch.

DAVE (INTO COMMS)
 Roger. Stowing checklist.

Dave stows the checklist, then he and Neil SET for launch as we feel the weight of the last few minutes, months, years...

FIDO (COMMS)
15 seconds... 10, 9, 8, 7, 6... Main engines start...

A **DULL THUNDER** from ten stories below...

FIDO (COMMS)
4, 3, 2, 1... Ignition...

...turns to a **ROAR**. Neil and Dave feel a **JOLT** as the anchor bolts SHEAR OFF and the Titan **JERKS** them off the launch pad.

KSC CAPCOM (COMMS)
Lift-off! Lift-off 16:41:00!

The **THRUST** kicks in, **7G's SHOVING** them into their seats. Neil STRAINS, reaching forward to punch in roll and pitch programs.

KSC LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Watch your clock, Gemini.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 Got a Roll Program in. The roll is on. We have a Pitch program...

Oddly, it's CALMER then we'd imagine, the blue sky out the window easily sliding to black... but the STRAIN on Neil's face tells us we're accelerating to 18,000 MILES PER HOUR.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 DCS looks good, pulse is good...

DAVE (INTO COMMS)
 Stage 2 tanks look good.

KSC CAPCOM (COMMS)
Go from the ground for staging.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 (entering staging command)
 Roger, we have staging ignit --

A **SHEET OF FIRE** washes over the craft... 100,000 POUNDS OF FLAMING THRUST RIPPING THE TWO STAGES APART!!

IT'S FUCKING TERRIFYING. Dave FLINCHES... even Neil BLINKS. We wonder what the hell is going on and **SMASH TO --**

EXT. GEMINI VIII, SUBORBITAL SPACE - SAME TIME

From afar, it looks like the rocket is **EXPLODING**...

NEIL (COMMS)
We're having Wally's fireball here.

DAVE SCOTT (COMMS)
...uh, yeah.

We see the first stage fall away. The second stage **LIGHTS**... then **ROCKETS** forward and we realize... *Jesus, this is normal.*

NEIL (COMMS)
Fuel cells are solid, the second stage is a real good machine.

SMASH BACK INTO --

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT, PAD 19, KSC - SAME TIME

Dave **REELS** as Neil calmly refocuses on the gauges. A beat.

KSC CAPCOM (COMMS)
*Gemini 8, you're go from the ground.
Mark. V/VR = point zero eight.*

NEIL (INTO COMMS) DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
Okay. Mode 3. (following Neil's lead)
Burn stop.

Neil flicks off the engines and the men are **JOLTED FORWARD, tossed into MICROGRAVITY**. Dave lets out a GRUNT... as a mission checklists **FLOATS** across the cabin.

Engines off, it's eerily **QUIET**. Dave takes a breath, glances out the window. The world's **UPSIDE DOWN**, sky at his feet, horizon **ABOVE** his head. **STRUCK**, he nudges Neil...

Neil looks up. It's the view from the X-15, but **FOUR TIMES HIGHER**. **PUSH IN** on Neil's eyes, a surprising **SENSE OF WONDER**.

JIM LOVELL (COMMS)
*I alpha time is 15:06, orbit is 87
by 147, hold for plane adjust...*

INT. MISSION CONTROL CENTER (MCC), HOUSTON - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON a hand **PINNING** a PAPER GEMINI onto a RUDIMENTARY ORBITAL MAP. A PAPER AGENA is already tacked on the map.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER (ON LOUDSPEAKER)
*This is mission control, Houston, we
will now begin rendezvous maneuvers.*

The room is BUZZING. Kraft and Flight Director **JOHN HODGE**, 37, British, gray, stand over a gaggle of MPAD ENGINEERS.

HODGE

I need the transfer arc, gentlemen.

CLOSE ON a DIAGRAM of the two ships in orbit... SLIDE RULES... CALCULATORS... PENCILS doing complex math...

One of the engineers **QUICKLY SCRIBBLES** on a transparency and **RUNS** it through a door under the BIG SCREEN up front, into...

THE PROJECTION ROOM. A DOZEN VU-GRAPHS behind the screens. *Clearly another era.* Our engineer throws the slide up on a Vu-Graph; it's BOUNCED off a mirror and --

IN MISSION CONTROL the hand drawn transparency APPEARS on the big screen. Hodge nods to Jim Lovell at the CapCom Console.

JIM LOVELL (INTO COMMS)
Gemini 8, Houston CapCom. I
have a Plane-Adjust update.

DAVE (COMMS)
...uh, stand by, Houston.

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Helmets, checklists, and mission rule books **FLOAT** about the cabin. Neil and Dave, helmets off, look OVERWHELMED.

DAVE SCOTT

Where'd the flight book go?

Dave turns to look, accidentally **CLOCKS** Neil in the head.

DAVE SCOTT
Shit, sorry.

LOVELL (COMMS)
*Let me know when you're
ready, 8.*

Neil spots the book, hands it to Dave.

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
Houston, Gemini 8, go ahead.

LOVELL (OVER COMMS)
*GET B: 02:45:50; 26.2 burn
time, yaw 90 right, pitch 0.*

DAVE (INTO COMMS)
(writing it down)
Roger. Prepping for burn.

CLOSE ON hands setting the YAW DIAL to 90 right; PITCH at 0; THRUSTERS on. Neil's eyes **TICK** to the clock. 2:45:28, 29...

NEIL
Give me the call.

DAVE SCOTT
10... 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Now!

Neil hits the thrusters. **POP POP POP!!** The craft **RUSHES TO THE RIGHT**. The mission plan **SMACKS** against the wall.

NEIL	DAVE SCOTT
Time check. ...Dave?	(disoriented)
	20 seconds... 25... 30, 31, 32, 33, 34... cut off.

Neil lets go of the thrusters. It's **QUIET**; the mission plan **FLOATS** off the wall. Neil's eyes **TICK** over the instruments.

NEIL
I think we overdid it a little.

He **GRABS** a calculator. As he works the numbers, **SMASH TO --**

INT. MISSION CONTROL CENTER (MCC), HOUSTON - SAME TIME

Hodge and Kraft stand over two MPAD engineers working numbers.

HODGE
Shit. They went long. Jim, we're
sending another burn.

LOVELL (INTO COMMS)	MPAD ENGINEER #2
8, sending a correction.	That's the wrong vector!

The engineers are clearly at odds. Kraft steps in.

KRAFT
I need an answer, let's go.

One engineer takes charge, writes up a transparency, **DASHES** into the projection room... and it **APPEARS** on the big screen.

LOVELL (INTO COMMS)
Stand by to copy, 8... Get B:
03:03:41. 0°, 0°, 0°, 02:54.

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Neil writes, but the pen **SLIPS OUT** of his hand and **FLOATS OFF**.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Uh, Houston. Can you repeat that?

LOVELL (COMMS)	NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Roger, Delta-V 2 feet per second, 2 plus 0, posigrade.	(grabs the pen, writes) Okay, I've got it.

LOVELL (COMMS)
25 seconds, I'll count you down.

A nice thaw... until Mr. Morse snaps a PHOTO. Pat turns.

PAT

Dear Lord, can we not get even a semblance of privacy?

Ed glances out the window at the **ARMY OF PRESS** on the lawn.

ED

I'm guessing the Cosmonauts have it easier on this front.

LOVELL (ON SQUAWKBOX)
8, do you have visual on the Agena? 8, do you read?

As they turn back to the squawk box, **SMASH TO --**

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Neil and Dave stare at calculators; something's not right.

DAVE SCOTT

You want me to... I get a horrendous 25 feet per --

NEIL

I can't talk to you, I've got to figure this.

Dave QUIETS as Neil works the numbers.

LOVELL (COMMS)

8, can you give us a status?

NEIL (INTO COMMS)

No, I've got too much to do.

LOVELL (COMMS)

Copy.

NEIL

(beat)
...okay. 25 forward, 8 left, 3 up. On my mark.

Dave quickly adjusts the dials. Neil eyes **TICK** to the clock.

NEIL

...3, 2, 1, burn.

Neil **HITS** the thrusters. **POP, POP!** The craft **SWINGS** left and Neil lets go. Dave eyes the instruments, jots down residuals.

DAVE SCOTT

Did you burn at 26:10?

NEIL

That - that's right. It was about 30, negative 34...

...but Neil goes quiet as he spots what looks like a **BRIGHT STAR** in the window. Dave follows his gaze.

NEIL

Could be Sirius.

DAVE SCOTT
Could be.

But Dave grabs a sextant, takes a reading... and **SMILES**.

LOVELL (COMMS)
*Gemini 8, this is Houston
Capcom. Do you read?*

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
Gemini 8 to Houston, we've
got a visual on the Agena.

...just as he says it, the Agena **SWINGS** out of the window.

DAVE SCOTT
Ah, shit...

NEIL
I need a readout.

DAVE SCOTT
4 forward, 2 left... wait, needles
are wandering. 12 forward, 1 right?

The instruments **OSCILLATE**, two DIFFERENT headings. Fuck.

NEIL
We'll burn the closed loop, 12 and
1. Ready? 3, 2, 1... burn.

Neil **HITS** the thrusters again. **POP POP**... the Gemini gives
chase... and the Agena **SWINGS** into the window.

DAVE SCOTT
There! We're swinging into... shit!

Dave **SQUINTS**, **BLINDED** by the sun, appearing over the horizon.
He shields his eyes, turns up the instrument panel lights.

NEIL
I need range and rate.

DAVE SCOTT
6,000 feet, 31 feet per
second, going too fast!

Neil **SQUINTS** at the Agena growing in the window... and **HITS**
the braking thrusters. **POP! POP! POP!** Steam **SHOOTs OUT** in
front of us, slowing the Gemini...

DAVE SCOTT
19 feet per second... 3,400 feet...
2,880 feet, you need to slow down!

THE AGENA SWINGS UP OUT OF THE WINDOW AGAIN! **Fuck!** Neil hits
the braking thrusters again, **FIGHTING** to slow down...

DAVE SCOTT
10 feet per second. 1,900
feet...

NEIL
Put in a little to the left.

Dave adjusts the dial. The Agena **SWINGS** in the window, LIT UP LIKE A CHRISTMAS TREE IN THE DAYLIGHT. HOVERING in full view.

DAVE SCOTT
God, that's amazing! Outstanding
job, Coach. Look at that sucker!

Neil looks up. Again a touch of that **CHILDLIKE WONDER**.

LOVELL (COMMS)
*Gemini 8, Houston Cap Com. Standing
by for any Rendezvous remarks. Over.*

DAVE SCOTT
You tell them.

INT. MCC - SAME TIME

A lot of tight faces. Tense. Waiting for...

NEIL (COMMS)
*Houston, we're station keeping on
the Agena at about 150 feet.*

A few scattered CHEERS go up. Hodge, standing at his console, wipes his brow as Deke walks over.

DEKE
You okay, John?

HODGE
I'm... yes. I'm fine.

But he looks TENSE, nervous for this last step as we **CUT TO --**

EXT. GEMINI VIII, EARTH ORBIT - SAME TIME

WIDE ON the Gemini, 150 feet from the Agena. We're **FAR AWAY**, the floating crafts **DWARFED** by the earth below. It's **SILENT** until... **STEAM SHOOT**s from the Gemini thrusters.

As the Gemini slowly circles the Agena, we **CUT INTO --**

INT. GEMINI VIII - SAME TIME

Neil flies the Gemini, a **LIGHTNESS** to him. The grit of training, the darkness of Elliot's death all **FALL AWAY**.

NEIL
Man it flies easy. This station
keeping, there's nothing to it.

Dave **SMILES** at Neil's atypical enthusiasm as he moves the Gemini ever closer to the Agena...

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
Houston, this is 8. We're
sitting about 2 feet out.

LOVELL (COMMS)
Okay. Stand by for a minute.

HOLD ON Neil and Dave, waiting on the precipice.

LOVELL (COMMS)
*Gemini 8, we have T/M solid. Go
ahead and dock.*

Neil nods to Dave, who hits a switch. We hear a **BUZZ**, see a **CONE EXTEND** through the docking window.

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
Extending docking cone.

LOVELL (COMMS)
8, we're showing cone rigid.

Neil squeezes the throttle **GENTLY**, moving forward slowly... until the Gemini and the Agena **CRUNCH** together. It's **JARRING**.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Okay, we're going to cycle
our Right/Stop switch now.

LOVELL (COMMS)
Roger.

Neil nods to Dave. Moment of truth. Dave hits a switch. We hear the motor aboard the Agena **WHIR** and we **PUSH OUTSIDE...**

EXT. GEMINI VIII, EARTH ORBIT - SAME TIME

From afar, we see the Agena **CLASP** onto the Gemini, which mechanically **PULLS IT IN...**

There's a loud **CLANK** as it stops and we **SMASH BACK INTO --**

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT - SAME TIME

In the cockpit, the Agena docking button **LIGHTS UP**, displaying a green "RIGID" confirmation. Neil and Dave share a **LOOK**.

INT. MCC - SAME TIME

The whole room waits. Hodge, Kraft, Deke on pins and needles.

NEIL (COMMS)
Flight, we are docked.

Deke **SMILES BROADLY** as the room explodes with **CHEERS**. Kraft shakes Hodge's hand. Deke calls out...

DEKE
Someone call Cronkite, have him tell
the Soviets they can go screw! And
call Congress while you're at it!

More CHEERS, laughter as the comms BUZZ. Neil, methodical...

NEIL (COMMS)

Okay. Just for your information, the Agena was very stable, we are having no noticeable oscillations at all.

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - SAME TIME

A **FLASHBULB** pops. Morse takes a photo of Janet and Rick, his paper Gemini and Agena now GLUED TOGETHER over earth.

RALPH MORSE

Congratulations, Mrs. Armstrong. A great day for the United States.

Ed walks up with a PLATE OF FOOD for Janet. She hesitates.

ED

You can't fast the whole three days.

A beat. Then, as she takes the plate...

LOVELL (ON SQUAWKBOX)

We're about to have LOS, but I have some dope for you to follow...

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Dave grabs a pen, takes notes as Lovell continues.

LOVELL (COMMS)

CSQ will pick you up on the other...

But the Comms turn **STATIC** as they lose signal. Dave drops his pen, sees Neil's pulled out two PACKETS. **DAY 1, MEAL B.**

DAVE SCOTT

No thanks, I want to prep the E.V.A.

NEIL

We should eat.

It's an order. Neil holds a packet up to a nozzle on the side console, injects it with water. It looks pretty bad.

NEIL

I think there's some air bubbles.

Neil tosses it to Dave, who spins it around, then leaves it.

DAVE SCOTT

I'm gonna let it breathe.

Dave grabs the EVA manual, glances at the console... PAUSING.

DAVE SCOTT
...Neil, we're in a bank.

Neil turns. **CLOSE ON** the 8 ball, showing a 30 degree roll.

DAVE SCOTT
None of our thrusters are on,
it must be the --

NEIL
Cut the Agena's thrusters.

Dave quickly follows orders. Neil WATCHES the 8 ball...

NEIL
Stabilizing... Reactivating OAMS,
reorienting to correct position.

Neil hits the Gemini's thrusters, but the ship **LURCHES**, starts **SPINNING**. Dave GRUNTS. Neil's eyes **TICK** to the console.

NEIL
Okay, let's shut everything down.

They shut everything off, but the ship **KEEPS SPINNING ON ALL 3 AXIS**. Food, checklists, charts start **FLYING** about the CABIN.

NEIL
I need a thruster readout.

DAVE SCOTT
We're quiet but I read the
Agena firing.

PUSH IN on Neil, working the problem, eyes **TICKING**...

...to the 8 BALL showing a HUGE BANK...

...to the GAUGES showing VIOLENT SPIN RATES...

...to DAVE STRUGGLING with the disparate G forces...

NEIL
Prepare to separate from the Agena.

Dave looks at Neil, **UNSURE**.

DAVE SCOTT
I can't map the trajectories,
we could smash into --

NEIL
(cuts him off)
Reset the Agena to allow
remote command.

Dave follows orders. Neil **GRABS** the throttle.

NEIL
On my mark. 3, 2, 1, Disengage.

Dave FLIPS a switch; THE GREEN DOCKING LIGHT **BLINKS OUT**. Neil **FIRES** the thrusters and the Gemini **JERKS** away...

The Agena SPINS VIOLENTLY outside the window, Dave BLANCHING as it **NARROWLY MISSES** the nose of the Gemini...

NEIL

Engaging thrusters to reduce roll.

Neil hits the throttle... but the ship **SPINS FASTER**, whipping everything WILDLY around the cabin! Neil, **SURPRISED**, lets go of the throttle, eyes **TICKING** to the console when...

THWACK! A flight plan **SMACKS** him in the head!

DAVE SCOTT

OAMS propellant down to 30 percent!
Neil, it's us!

Neil **STRAINS** against the **ROCKETING G FORCES**, NAUSEATING and DEADLY... his eyes **TICKING** to the roll rate gauge at **300°/SEC.**

FUCCI (COMMS)

Gemini 8, CSQ. How do you read?

INT. BRIDGE, COSTAL SENTRY QUEBEC, ATLANTIC OCEAN - SAME TIME

CALM SEAS through the window. A few men helm the **U.S.A.F. SHIP** as **JIM FUCCI**, 42, mans a state of the art TRACKING CONSOLE.

FUCCI (COMMS)

Gemini 8, CSQ. How do you --

DAVE SCOTT (COMMS)

We have serious problems!

Fucci **FREEZES**, stares at his instrument panel.

DAVE (COMMS)

*We're tumbling end over end up here,
we're disengaged from the Agena.*

Off Fucci, PALE, **SMASH TO --**

INT. MCC - SAME TIME

Kraft, Deke, Hodge gather round Lovell, listening intently.

FUCCI (COMMS)

*...uh, what seems to be the
problem?*

NEIL (COMMS)

(beat)
..rolling.. can't turn off...

LOVELL (INTO COMMS)
 CSQ, Flight. Did he say he
 could not turn the Agena off?

FUCCI (COMMS)
*No, he's separated from the
 Agena and is in a pretty
 violent tumble.*

Off the men, REACTING, we **SMASH TO --**

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE - SAME TIME

Janet, WHITE, kneels by the squawk box, leaning in to hear,
 Morse SNAPS a photo. Ed shoots him a look and he slinks back.

DAVE SCOTT (ON SQUAWKBOX)
We have... left roll... we can't...

The box **CUTS OUT**. No static, just SILENT. Janet turns to
 Ed... who's GRIM. Off Janet, TERRIFIED, **SMASH BACK TO --**

EXT. SPACE, GEMINI VIII - SAME TIME

The capsule hurtles at A REVOLUTION A SECOND, the Agena
 spinning slowly in the distance...

FUCCI (COMMS)
Did you copy that, Flight?

Sunlight FLASHES off the windows, **SMASHING US BACK INTO --**

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Sunlight BLAZES intermittently, a STROBE LIGHT on the ephemera
 flying across the cabin. It's **DIZZYING...**

FUCCI (COMMS)
They seem to have a stuck thruster.

Dave's eyes ROLL BACK. Neil clocks it, tries to focus on the
 console, searching for an answer. The sound **FADES** to the
SLOSHING in Neil's ears as we **SMASH INTO --**

NEIL'S POV. He's starting to GRAY OUT. He SHUTS his eyes and
 OPENS them... everything **SPINS AROUND HIM** at nauseating speed,
 it's almost as if he's not moving at all...

Now the sloshing in his ears **FADES** to EERIE QUIET... and we
 hear THE AWFUL WHIR of KAREN'S COBALT MACHINE.

Neil **SHUTS HIS EYES** again... trying to PUSH the sound away...
 in the dark, he faintly **HEARS** a HISSING...

NEIL
OAMS thruster must be stuck...

Neil's eyes **FLY OPEN** and he **YANKS** the breakers, CUTTING ALL POWER. It goes **BLACK**, save for the flickering sunlight...

Neil's eyes **TICK** over GAUGES. OAMS DROP but ROLL RATE keeps RISING. **PUSH IN ON** Neil's eyes, **TWITCHING** and **SMASH INTO --**

NEIL'S POV. A BLUR. The fuzzy roll rate needle inches past 500°/second. Neil's eyes start to roll back and...

IT GOES DARK... Karen's cobalt machine grows **LOUDER...**

Neil **FORCES** his eyes open... they **DART** across the controls... searching for an answer, a way out...

...when he looks overhead and spots a RED CONTROL.

NEIL

Initiate RCS squibs. Dave. Dave!

Neil shakes Dave, pulling him awake.

FUCCI (COMMS)

Gemini 8, CSQ, come in...

NEIL

We need a rocket to stop the spin. The Re-entry rockets...

Dave, GROGGY, gets it. He reaches for the squibs.

NEIL

On my mark! 3, 2, 1, now!

Dave blows the squibs and Neil **REACHES OVER HIS HEAD**, flicks on the re-entry control system. NOTHING HAPPENS. **Shit.**

NEIL

Didn't fire. Re-Arm. Dave!

Dave, struggling to stay conscious, resets.

NEIL

On my mark... 3, 2, 1, now.

Dave re-arms as Neil again reaches up and... **BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!** The re-entry boosters **FIRE**, SPINNING the capsule **FASTER...**

Neil **GRIPS** the thruster, **BATTLES** to stabilize the ship as Dave **FADES**. Neil's eyes **TICK** to the roll rate. **525, 530, 530...** the needle **HOLDS**. *Is it working?* **PUSH IN ON** Neil, **FORCING HIMSELF** to stay conscious, **WILLING** the needle to **FALL...**

FUCCI (COMMS)

Gemini 8, CSQ, come in. Gemini 8?

As Neil, struggling, **STARTS TO FADE**, we **SMASH TO --**

INT. BRIDGE, COASTAL SENTRY QUEBEC - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON a needle, **QUIVERING** at **530°/second**. Men crowd around Fucci, staring. And sweating.

LOVELL (COMMS)
CSQ, is there a status update?

INT. MCC - SAME TIME

The men stand frozen, worried. It's **SILENT**. Lovell looks to Kraft, Deke and Hodge. Conrad and others crowd round. **GRIM**.

LOVELL (INTO COMMS)
CSQ, this is Flight. Can you --

STATIC cuts him off. Then, faintly...

DAVE (COMMS)
...regaining control... RCS direct.

CONRAD
Motherfucker.

As the group lets out a collective breath, **SMASH BACK TO --**

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Dave, foggy, unsettled, watches Neil calmly pulsing the RCS, eyes on the **DROPPING** roll rate gauge... **300°... 250°... 200°...**

NEIL
Keep an eye on our RCS fuel.

Dave nods, eyes the fuel gauge. The sun stops strobing, the flight plans stop whipping about the cabin...

FUCCI (COMMS)
8, CSQ. How are you doing?

DAVE (INTO COMMS)
We are pulsing the RCS pretty slowly so we don't-- it's all roll right, we are trying to kill our roll rate.

FUCCI (COMMS)
Okay. Everything's okay.

DAVE
(to Neil)
You believe this guy?

NEIL
Move us back to one ring.

Off Neil, **CUT BACK TO --**

INT. MCC - SAME TIME

Hodge leans in.

HODGE (INTO COMMS)
CSQ, Flight. Find out how
much RCS fuel he has used.

FUCCI (COMMS)
*Roger. Gemini 8, CSQ. How
much RCS have you used?*

KRAFT
(to the MPAD guys)
I want emergency landing options.

Hodge and Deke both turn to Kraft, surprised.

DEKE
What about the E.V.A. and --

KRAFT
We gotta get them home.

Kraft heads off. As Deke **REELS**, Ed walks up. *Sotto* --

ED
Jan's outside.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE MCC - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON Jan waiting by the door. In her eyes, intense **ANGER**
and **WORRY**. A long beat... then Deke walks out with Ed.

ED
Neil's okay.

DEKE
The ship's stable, he'll be all
right, Jan. I need you to go home.

JANET
(processes, then)
Fine. Turn the box back on.

DEKE
I'll see what I can --

JANET
Turn it back on now.

DEKE
There's a security protocol,
I can't just --

JANET
Bullshit.

DEKE
Jan. You have to trust me, we have
this under control.

JANET
All these goddamn protocols and
procedures to make it seem like...
(MORE)

JANET (CONT'D)
 like it's 'under control.' You're a
 bunch of boys making models from
 balsa wood, you don't have anything
 under control.

TEARS WELL... Embarrassed and ANGRY, she **STALKS OFF**.

DEKE
 Take her home, will ya?

ED
 What do we say to the press?

Deke doesn't follow.

ED
 The Life guy, Morse, he was
 with Jan, he leaked it to -- PAO (O.C.)
 Deke, I need a statement.

The Public Affairs Officer RUNS up.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
 We're getting calls from the
 networks, the papers, local news...

Shit. Off Deke, **CUT BACK TO --**

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT - SAME TIME

It's quiet, a checklist floating calmly, the roll stopped.

FUCCI (COMMS)
*8, Flight's told me to relay that
 they're looking into 6 or 7 dash 3
 area at this time. Please enter re-
 entry Module 4 in the ATM computer.*

Dave hesitates, realizing they're terminating the flight. But
 Neil just pulls out a map, surveys the landing area.

NEIL
 Right in the middle. Okinawa. That
 was the third choice, remote areas.
 (then)
 I'd like to argue. About the going
 home. But I don't know how we can.

The slightest hint of frustration. But there's nothing to do.

DAVE SCOTT
 I'll get started on re-entry.

Downcast, Dave turns to the basic computer, starts punching
 numbers in when... **POP! POP! POP!** Dave STIFFENS, SPINS...

...to find Neil **FIRING** the OAMS thrusters.

DAVE SCOTT
What are-- we'll start to spin again!

NEIL
Only way to find the culprit.

Off Dave, **UNNERVED**, **CUT TO --**

INT. MCC - SAME TIME

The room BUZZES, prepping for re-entry. Gilruth huddles with Deke and Kraft. A beat. Then we hear Lovell --

LOVELL (O.C., INTO COMMS)
8, we're showing your roll rate back up to 90 degrees. Confirm? Neil?

The men turn, **ALARMED**. Hodge and Lovell look TENSE.

Neil?	LOVELL	NEIL (COMMS)
		(beat)
		<i>Checking OAMS, thruster 8 failed open at present.</i>

NEIL (COMMS)
This could have been true at the time of the incident, although we cannot verify that at this time.

Is he nuts? Hodge leans into the Comms.

HODGE (OVER COMMS)
Neil, this is Hodge, we've got ten minutes to re-entry, let's put a pin in the analysis for now, shall we?

Off the men, we **CUT TO --**

INT. ED'S CORVETTE - NIGHT

Ed drives Janet home. She stares ahead, **STILL FURIOUS**. Ed considers talking, thinks better of it. A beat, then he turns onto their street. We see the **HORDE of PRESS**. It's GROWN.

VARIOUS PRESS (PRELAP)	VARIOUS PRESS (PRELAP)
Mrs. Armstrong? Janet?	Can we get a photo? Jan?

INT. LIVING ROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - HOUSTON - SAME TIME

Ed **PUSHES** into the house with Janet, press calling out after them until Ed **SHUTS THE DOOR**. The press falls back.

As Jan recovers, Ed glances at Pat, on the sofa with the kids... watching Adam West's **BATMAN**. OBLIVIOUS. Ed smiles... when the show is INTERRUPTED by an **ABC NEWS SPECIAL REPORT**.

PETER JENNINGS (ON TV)
*We've interrupted our regular
 program due to the emergency
 return of Gemini 8...*

RICK
 Mom?

SCARED, Rick looks to Janet. At a loss, she walks into --

INT. KITCHEN, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - HOUSTON - CONTINUOUS

Janet pours herself a glass of water. She starts to lift it, but her hand is **SHAKING**. Janet tries to settle herself...

...but she can't. The glass shakes even **MORE VIOLENTLY**, until Janet has no choice but to set it down.

As Janet leans against the sink, **STRUGGLING**, we **PRELAP--**

LOVELL (COMMS, **PRELAP**)
*One minute to LOS. Naha RESCUE 1
 will be on station at splashdown...*

INT. GEMINI VIII COCKPIT - LATER

Dave stows gear while Neil checks headings, helmets now on.

LOVELL (COMMS)
*...I have a backup yaw star for you
 at Retrofire minus 4 minutes. Sirius
 will be 4 degrees. Stand by for --*

The COMMS **CUT OUT**. They're on their own.

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
 30 seconds. I'm on Auto
 Retro --

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 I'll do it manually.

Dave looks UNSURE, but Neil reaches for the throttle.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 Retro Rocket Squibs - Arm.

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
 (flicks the 4 squibs)
 1, 2, 3, 4, LIGHT.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 Okay. Count me down.

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
 (eyes on the clock)
 ...5, 4, 3, 2, 1 RETROFIRE.

Neil **FIRES** the Retro-rockets... he and Dave are **SLAMMED** into their seats as the spaceship **HURTLES** down towards the earth...

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
 Props off. Retro-power, safe. Retro-
 jett, safe. Lock restraint harness.

Neil's harness won't lock. Frustrated, he **JAMS** the buckle together... RESTRICTING his right arm. Neil grimaces as sunlight streams in, the horizon at the top of the window.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 I keep thinking there's something
 we've forgotten about...

Neil's uncharacteristically ANTSY. It makes Dave NERVOUS.

DAVE SCOTT (INTO COMMS)
 We did everything, far as I know.

If not, it's too late.

The atmosphere **GRABS HOLD**, G forces **INCREASING**. The heat **CONSUMES** them, the plasma **GLOWING PINK** in the window...

As Neil and Dave **SWEAT** and **STRAIN** against it all, we --

SMASH TO BLACK.

GILRUTH (O.C., OVER BLACK)
 Gemini 8 saw two complex vehicles
 launched on the same day, on time...

FADE IN:

INT. AUDITORIUM, MANNED SPACE CENTER - HOUSTON, TX

Gilruth stands at the podium, addressing a **MASS** of reporters.

**Gemini 8 Pilot Press Conference
 March 26, 1966**

GILRUTH
 ...we saw a flawless rendezvous and
 docking. All of which has tended to
 be overshadowed by the malfunction.

Find Neil behind him with Dave and NASA personnel. Neil looks MORE UNCOMFORTABLE than he was moments ago...

GILRUTH
 But I think we should focus on the
 progress resulting from the mission.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, MANNED SPACE CENTER - HOUSTON, TX

Low, Gilruth, Kraft, Deke and ARMY BRASS at a long table.
Neil and Dave sit across from them.

GEORGE LOW
Neil, the board would like to focus
on the malfunction.

We hear **CLACKING**, spot a STENOGRAPHER. It's a **FORMAL MISSION REVIEW**. And judging by Low's tone, Neil's job is on the line.

GEORGE LOW
Can you walk us through the decision
to separate from the Agena?

As Neil considers, we **SMASH BACK TO --**

THE PRESS CONFERENCE. A HOUSTON POST reporter.

HOUSTON POST REPORTER
You mentioned the rate of revolution
was more than once a second. How
near were you to being unconscious?

NEIL
We didn't have any specific
difficulty in observing the panel.

HOUSTON POST REPORTER
You hadn't begun to gray out or
anything like that?

Off Neil, HESITATING, not in his element, **SMASH BACK TO --**

THE FORMAL MISSION REVIEW.

GEORGE LOW
Why didn't you use the Agena to
stabilize the combined craft?

NEIL
We did. This was not effective.
And, as I've said, we initially
assumed there was some anomaly in
the Agena control system.

TIMES REPORTER (**PRELAP**)
Okay, but have you really ruled out
the possibility that you...

THE PRESS CONFERENCE. A TIMES Reporter.

TIMES REPORTER

...accidentally or intentionally activated some electrical system at the time this trouble occurred?

Neil HESITATES... and questions KEEP COMING. In **QUICK CUTS** --

AGENCE FRANCE REPORTER

Did you have any feeling of anxiety after the failure of the thrusters?

HAMBURG PRESS

In the midst of the spinning did you seem to realize or feel the presence of God closer than other times?

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Does this make you question whether the space program is worth the cost? In money and in lives?

ABC REPORTER

Neil, I have about 8,000 letters from Batman fans, which I wonder if you would like to answer?

SPIN BACK TO Neil. Blank, EXHAUSTED. Is he going to EXPLODE?

NEIL

I appreciate your problem, why don't you see if you can rerun the Batman sequence for them? And for us. We missed it too.

A pause. Then the room breaks into LAUGHTER. Neil forces a smile as we **SMASH BACK TO** --

THE CONFERENCE ROOM. The men huddle. **PULL BACK** to find Neil still sitting there. Waiting. A LONG beat, then Low stands.

GEORGE LOW

Thanks, Neil. There's a lot to discuss but I think that's all for now. We'll be in touch soon.

It's not warm. Neil stands but no one else does. As Neil awkwardly walks out, **UNSURE OF HIS FUTURE,** we **PRELAP** --

NEIL (**PRELAP**) (CONT'D)

No, no, no! It's unacc-- it's unacceptable!

INT. KITCHEN, ARMSTRONG HOME - DAY

CLOSE ON Neil on the phone. As **AGITATED** as we've seen him.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)
It's, it's, it's sensationalist.
It's not appropriate, it's not an
appropriate title for the piece!

Neil holds an **ADVANCED COPY** of a LIFE MAGAZINE article: "***Our Wild Ride in Space!***" **by Neil Armstrong.**

NEIL (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
I'm not interested in how the other
magazines are framing the story!

Now we see the Wall Street Journal on the kitchen table. A
headline below the fold: ***Moon Race: Can't Machines Do It?***

NEIL (INTO PHONE)
Well then... then maybe my name
shouldn't be on the damn article!

Neil **SLAMS** down the phone. Janet, plating dinner, looks up.

JANET
Neil?

But he walks out. Off Janet, CONCERNED, **PRELAP** a DOORBELL --

EXT. ED WHITE'S HOUSE - DAY

Ed opens the front door. And finds Janet.

JANET
Can you come over?

ED
Not sure that's gonna help.

JANET
Please.

She's insistent. Ed hesitates but Pat, at the door as well,
nudges him. He heads across the yard. Pat offers a smile.

PAT
My sister married a dentist. I used
to wonder what it was like. He's
home by six every night. And every
three months my sister calls to say
she wishes he weren't.

Janet manages a laugh. A beat.

JANET

I keep hoping it'll be better. If things go right. When they do.

INT. NEIL'S BASEMENT OFFICE, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

A LARGE DESK. Covered with **SCHEMATICS** of the Agena, **DATA** from Gemini 8, **DIAGRAMS** of the Gemini's sixteen OAMS thrusters.

FIND Neil hunched over it all with an ENGINEER'S PAD. **HOLD ON** him, studying the malfunction, working the problem. We hear a **RUMBLE** and Neil looks up... Ed rolls down the stairs.

ED

Back to work?

NEIL

I'm trying to find a way to isolate a single thruster.

It's **AWKWARD**, the fight still not really behind them. A beat.

ED

I was gonna go over to Dave's.

No response from Neil. Ed, giving up, starts to retreat...

NEIL

...I could use a break.

Ed pauses. He and Neil share a look. **Detente**. WE HEAR the Second Movement of **Dvorak's New World Symphony** and **CUT TO --**

INT. KITCHEN, DAVE SCOTT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil and Ed sit drinking with Dave Scott. They listen to an **8-TRACK**, Dvorak washing over them. Off the music --

NEIL

Felt a little like that, right?
Being up there?

ED

How much did you have to drink?

Neil tosses a empty beer can at Ed. Ed laughs. So does Neil.

DAVE SCOTT

I will say one thing. It's all I can think about. Getting back up.

Neil nods. Ed eyes his beer, an odd look on his face.

DAVE SCOTT (CONT'D)

What?

ED

Gus grabbed me earlier. He and Deke want me on the team.

NEIL

For the first Apollo mission?

Ed nods, tentative. Dave explodes, thrilled for him.

DAVE SCOTT

Holy shit. That's huge!

NEIL (CONT'D)

That Saturn's a monster. It's gonna be a helluva ride.

Neil's SMILING, genuinely excited.

DAVE SCOTT

You know Deke wants Gus to be first one on the moon, so that first team--

ED

Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Okay, but it is pretty exciting. Heck, just to be the first to test the new capsule --

ED

Yeah, Gus is already bitching.

DAVE SCOTT

I'll bet.

NEIL

Well, I can't wait to hear about it.

ED

Gus bitching? You will.

They all laugh, Ed clearly relieved at Neil's reaction.

EXT. DAVE SCOTT'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ed and Neil stumble out of Dave's house, start walking home. They walk quietly for a beat. Then --

NEIL

Janet told me you came 'round during the mission.

ED
You would have done the same.

NEIL
No. I wouldn't have.

Ed looks at Neil. Then **LAUGHS**. Neil does too. Then he slows, looking up at the night sky.

NEIL
You ever fly an Aeronca?

ED
Sure. Learned to fly on one.

NEIL
I flew that plane a ton before I joined the Navy. I used to like coming down steep on final approach so I could land early and have time to roll out...

ED
Bet the Navy instructors loved that.

NEIL
They beat it out of me.

Ed smiles.

NEIL
After Korea, I went back to Purdue. The flight club had an Aeronca, so one weekend I flew it home to Wapakoneta. I put it into a big slip on final approach like when I was a kid... I banged the thing so hard on the landing, it couldn't fly back.

ED
You crashed an Aeronca? After all those missions in Korea?

NEIL
Had to take the wings off and haul it back to Lafayette on a trailer.

ED
I hope none of the coeds saw you.

Ed smiles broadly. Neil smiles back... then he **TIGHTENS**.

NEIL

The whole way back, I kept trying to replay the landing in my head. But I couldn't. I hadn't been paying attention. It was like riding a bike so I'd just... I hadn't been paying attention.

ED (CONT'D)

Neil.

NEIL

I keep thinking if I'd been smarter, if I'd done a little more prep...

ED

Bullshit.

NEIL

I was distracted. After Elliot... I was distracted.

ED

Neil. This wasn't your fault.

But Neil isn't sure. Off the **DOUBT** in his eyes, **CUT TO --**

EXT. GILRUTH'S OFFICE, MANNED SPACE CENTER - NIGHT

A long hallway. At the end of it, Neil sits on a folding chair outside the corner office. **TAPPING** his foot.

CLOSE ON Neil, **SWEATING**. Nervous unlike anything we've seen. He scratches his leg. Again. Foot still **TAPPING**. At last, the door opens. Deke leans out.

DEKE

Neil. Come on in.

Neil stands. Quickly. Deke leads him into --

INT. GILRUTH'S OFFICE, MANNED SPACE CENTER - NIGHT

Wood paneling, a few service plaques, function over form. Gilruth sits behind a desk, Kraft at a work table.

GILRUTH

Hey, Neil. Don't bother sitting, it's gonna be a short meeting.

Neil stands. Awkward.

GILRUTH

We've talked it through and we think it's pretty clear. If you hadn't kept cool, well, you wouldn't be here and we'd still be asking what the hell happened.

DEKE

So would Congress. It coulda been a showstopper.

GILRUTH

You docked, you got your ship home, this mission was a success. And we're gonna treat it that way from here on out. You good with that?

NEIL

...yes sir.

Neil doesn't show much, but he's clearly relieved.

GILRUTH

I trust you won't mind representing us next month at the White House?

NEIL

Uh, no sir.

GILRUTH

Good. Then you're dismissed.

Neil nods, walks out. Deke follows him into --

INT. HALLWAY, MANNED SPACE CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Neil and Deke walk down the hall. A beat, then --

NEIL

...I don't really have to go to the White House, do I?

Deke glances at him.

DEKE

I know you think this is bullshit, nobody likes kissing up to those idiots in D.C. But it's part of the job. Especially nowadays.

Off Neil, less than thrilled, **CUT TO** --

INT. KITCHEN, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - MORNING

Janet holds up a BLUE SUIT. Irritated.

JANET

Neil Alden Armstrong, you cannot wear a suit!

Neil, in an **APRON**, makes pancakes. PERFECT HALF DOLLARS.

NEIL

It said Black Tie *Optional*.

JANET

You're one of three astronauts representing NASA, Deke specifically told me it was *not optional*.

Neil frowns as Ed walks in the front door with a duffle.

ED

Nice apron. Manly.

JANET

Would you tell him he's got to wear a tuxedo to the White House?

ED

I dunno, maybe he should wear the apron.

NEIL

Don't you have a plane to catch?

Ed laughs. And notices SCHEMATICS on the table. DIAGRAMS for the **LUNAR LANDING TEST VEHICLE**, an odd, free-flying trainer that'll simulate lunar gravity. *And yes, it's an update of the diagram that inspired Neil to join Apollo back on P.19.*

ED

Is this the lunar landing Sim?

NEIL

Gene and the folks at FRC have been having a heck of a time with it.

ED

(off the diagrams, impressed)
It's completely fly by wire?

NEIL

Does a decent job simulating lunar gravity but if the electrical system craps out or you get a good 20 knot wind, it's a real hairy deal. Deke asked me to take a look but I think the thing's just too damn dangerous.

ED

This from the 'Hero of Gemini 8'?

Neil grimaces.

JANET

Don't get him started again. He's been grumbling about the trip all morning.

NEIL

How 'bout we trade and I go to the Cape?

ED

No, you got the guts, you gotta go enjoy the glory.

INT. BEDROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - LATER

CLOSE ON an OPEN SUITCASE. Socks, underwear and A TUX; packed **METICULOUSLY**. Neil adds a dopp kit then hesitates. He picks it up. Eyes **TICKING** over the toothbrush, toothpaste...

JANET

You already repacked it. Twice.

Neil looks up flustered, **AGITATED**. Janet moves to him.

JANET

When you meet the President, just look at his shoes. It'll be okay.

Neil looks up, nods. Janet leans in, kisses his cheek, starts to go... but he pulls her back.

NEIL

I, uh, I know I, since I got back...

JANET

It's okay.

It isn't really. But she wants to be strong for him. Neil, **VULNERABLE**, pulls her in. Holds tight. Off Janet, **CUT TO --**

INT. LIMOUSINE - LATE AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON Neil. In a TUXEDO. Stiff. Uncomfortable.

PETE CONRAD (O.C.)
Looks like he was born in a tux.

REVERSE to Conrad and Jim Lovell, across from Neil. Conrad SMIRKS at Neil as the limo stops and the door opens on...

A RED CARPET. REPORTERS line the entrance to **THE WHITE HOUSE**. As Pete gets out, WAVING, we **HOLD ON** Neil... uneasy.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON (**PRELAP**)
We have never succeeded in freeing
our planet from war.

INT. EAST ROOM, THE WHITE HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

CLOSE ON a formal international document: **The Treaty on Outer Space, January 27, 1967**. As LBJ's familiar voice rolls on...

...**REVEAL** a room of DIGNITARIES. LBJ sits at a signing table. We're **BEHIND HIM** with Neil and the other astronauts.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON (O.C.)
But this treaty means the moon will
serve only the purposes of peace...
and that astronaut and cosmonaut
might meet on the moon as brothers.

LBJ hands a pen to a heavysset AMBASSADOR wearing a SICKLE PIN. As he moves to sign the treaty, Conrad whispers to the others.

PETE CONRAD
What a load of horseshit.

Neil turns, but before Pete can go on, they're overwhelmed by APPLAUSE and FLASHBULBS. As Neil flinches, we **FLASH TO --**

INT. EAST ROOM, WHITE HOUSE - LATER

Lovell and Neil talk to a Senator. Neil clings to a beer.

LOVELL
...we're very bullish on Apollo.

SENATOR
I should hope, given the time we've
spent developing it.

Neil looks uncomfortable. The congressman notices.

SENATOR

Commander Armstrong? You disagree?

NEIL

We learned to fly sixty years ago.
So if you consider the technological
development in the context of
history --

SENATOR

I'm considering it in the context of
taxpayer dollars.

Neil doesn't know what to say. Lovell steps in...

LOVELL

So are we, Senator. And between us,
if the capsule passes plugs out,
we'll have a heck of a launch next
month. I'm sure Mr. Gilruth would
be happy to discuss it in detail.

Lovell leads the Senator across the room to Gilruth... and
away from Neil. Neil awkwardly drifts toward the bar.

He stands there for a moment, totally out of place... when a
PRETTY STAFFER appears at his side with a FLIRTY SMILE.

PRETTY FEMALE STAFFER

Aren't you someone I should know?

NEIL

...uh, probably not.

She walks off, confused.

CONRAD

We need to get you a stronger drink.

Neil sees Conrad's beside him. Conrad waves for a beer.

CONRAD

No stomach for political theater?

NEIL

...that what this is?

CONRAD

We've got more troops on the ground
in Vietnam every day. You think LBJ
wants astronaut and cosmonaut to
'meet on the moon as brothers'?

NEIL

Then why sign the treaty?

CONRAD

You can't lose a race you don't run.

(off Neil)

We're still neck and neck with the Russians, and for what? ICBM's have made space irrelevant, militarily. Why break the bank on the moon when you could spend it in Saigon?

NEIL

...you think he'd just drop Apollo?

CONRAD

Oh yeah. If LBJ wasn't from Texas we'd already be dead.

Neil stares at him.

CONRAD

Jesus, Armstrong, where've you been? Did you see the polling on Apollo?

ARMSTRONG

No. I didn't.

CONRAD

Well, it's not good.

LOVELL

Knock it off, Pete.

Lovell walks up, nods to the bartender for a beer.

LOVELL

We launch Apollo, nobody's going to cut our funding. That shiny new capsule's gonna have every kid in the country dreaming about a trip to the moon.

CONRAD

That shiny new capsule hasn't passed plugs out.

LOVELL

Talk to me in an hour.

He takes a drink, then leans into Neil so Pete can't hear him.

LOVELL

Any word on plugs out?

EXT./INT. GANTRY ELEVATOR, LAUNCH TOWER, PAD 34, CAPE - DAY

Deke rides up the elevator with Gus, Ed and ROGER CHAFFEE, 32, suited up, carrying helmets. Ed looks down the side of the **SATURN 1B ROCKET**, at the cape stretching out below. **THRILLED**.

ED

Pretty, isn't she?

*Yes, we're 40 STORIES UP, scaling a rocket **FOUR TIMES THE SIZE OF GEMINI'S TITAN** and it's SPECTACULAR. But only Ed notices.*

GUS

I think the 21st is pushing it.

DEKE

The Russians have already tested the Soyuz. Once they get the Proton-K off the ground --

GUS

I got it. But if the capsule's not ready, it's not ready. I'm not going up there in a lemon.

DEKE

No. We wouldn't let you.

The elevator stops. **Short.** A FOOT below ADJUSTABLE LEVEL 8 and the **GLEAMING APOLLO CAPSULE** sitting atop the Saturn. As Gus **SHOOTS** Deke a look, pulls himself up, we **CUT TO --**

INT. THE WHITE ROOM, ADJUSTABLE LEVEL 8, PAD 34 - MOMENTS LATER

PAD LEADER GUENTER WENDT oversees techs removing thick power cords from the new APOLLO CAPSULE. It's very shiny indeed.

GUENTER WENDT

Power up the capsule's internal batteries for plugs out. Closing hatches now.

Through the hatch, we see Ed, helmet now on, pushes the inner hatch towards us SEALING THE CAPSULE. We feel the excitement as techs close the middle hatch above it and we go...

CLOSE ON RATCHETS. Tightening six different latches. **CUT** from **RATCHET** to **RATCHET** until...

TECH

Ablative hatch closed. Closing the boost protective cover.

They close the cover, start the process again. **PUSH INTO --**

INT. APOLLO COCKPIT, PAD 34 - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON another ratchet tightening a latch.

ED (O.C.)
That's all of 'em.

FIND Ed in the familiar Apollo cockpit. He glances at the OTHER FIVE LOCKED LATCHES, puts away the ratchet.

GUS (INTO COMMS)
Ready for oxygen purge.

We hear the **HISS** of oxygen... and **SNIPPETS** of conversation over Comms. Gus, beside Ed, hits the comms button.

GUS (INTO COMMS)
Guys, we've got an open mic. LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Uh, let's hold the countdown.

A beat. The crew looks annoyed.

DEKE (COMMS)
Sorry guys, we'll get this squared.

GUS (INTO COMMS)
How are we gonna get to the moon if we can't talk between two buildings? LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
...Gus, we didn't get that.

As Gus, pissed, shakes his head, we **CUT TO --**

INT. HALLWAY, GEORGETOWN INN - WASHINGTON, DC - SAME TIME

An elevator **DINGS**. Lovell, Conrad and Neil get off.

PETE CONRAD
I'm gonna get outta this monkey suit and head to the bar.

LOVELL
I'm in. Neil?

NEIL
I think I'll check in with the Cape.

PETE CONRAD
You hell raiser, you.

Neil peels off.

INT. ROOM, GEORGETOWN INN, WASHINGTON, DC - MOMENTS LATER

Neil walks in, neatly hangs his jacket in the closet. He pulls at his tie, sits on the bed and reaches for the phone, DIALING then taking off his shoes as he waits for...

PETRONE (OVER PHONE)

Rocco.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

It's Neil. How's it going there?

PETRONE (OVER PHONE)

We're on a hold. Glitch in the Comms, about ten away, I think.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

Huh. Okay. How's the capsule look?

PETRONE (OVER PHONE)

Oh, she's a beaut.

Neil can't help but smile. Excited for Apollo. For Ed.

PETRONE

Happy to give you guys a holler a bit later with a status report.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

That'd be great. Thanks, Rocco.

Neil hangs up, grabs the remote... a Zenith '**SPACE COMMANDER.**' He blinks at the name... then snaps on the TV and settles in.

INT. APOLLO COCKPIT, PAD 34 - LATER

Ed looks over a manual, clearly BORED.

DEKE (COMMS)

A few more minutes, we've just about got it sorted.

GUS (INTO COMMS)

Shit, we're gonna be here all night.

ED (INTO COMMS, to Roger)

He'll turn the corner. In half an hour he'll be singing Sinatra.

GUS (INTO COMMS, to Ed)

Stop screwing around, wouldya?

DEKE (COMMS)
Easy, everyone just cool it.

GUS (INTO COMMS)
 Get the damn comms working
 and we'll cool it.

TECH (COMMS)
*I got a surge in the AC Bus 2
 Voltage.*

LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Try resetting the meter.

Gus, happy to have something to do, looks over the gauges.

GUS (INTO COMMS)
 Rog, you see anything on the dials?

Chaffee turns to look and notices a **SMALL FLAME** on the floor.
 Before he can react... the flame **JUMPS**.

CHAFFEE (INTO COMMS)
 Hey!

The flame **FLASHES** through the cockpit, **FIRE BLAZING** around all
 three of them. Ed and Gus react -- it's frightening, but they
 stay CALM, HUSTLING through evacuation procedures...

Ed reaches for the hatch... the latches are TIGHT. He grabs a
 ratchet, **STRUGGLES** to loosen a latch, but his arm is **ENGULFED**
 by fire. He **KEEPS WORKING**... even as his suit starts to MELT.

Ed GRIMACES. The latch isn't budging. His eyes **DART** to the
 other five latches. As he starts to PANIC, **SMASH TO --**

INT. BLOCKHOUSE, PAD 34, CAPE CANAVERAL - SAME TIME

A FAR VIEW of the CAPSULE from 400 feet below. It looks fine.

PETRONE (INTO COMMS)
 Gus? Can you hear us up there?

LAUNCH DIRECTOR ROCCO PETRONE, 40, eyes the capsule on the B&W
 MONITOR. We're in a makeshift **LAUNCH COMMAND** at the base of
 the rocket. Deke walks up with a cup of coffee.

DEKE
 Comms are still out?

TECH
 Should have been fixed by now.

The tech at the comms shrugs. Petrone tries again.

PETRONE (INTO COMMS)
 Gus, can you hear --

ED (COMMS)
We got a fire in the cockpit!

Petrone pauses, eyes the monitor... as the hatch window **LIGHTS UP**, turning **WHITE**. Deke remains calm.

DEKE
Okay. Get them out of there.

PETRONE (INTO COMMS)
Hey crew, can you egress at this time? Confirm it.

No response. Deke takes the Comms.

DEKE (INTO COMMS)
Guenter, get in there and help them.

Deke looks up. High above, techs move towards the capsule.

PETRONE (INTO COMMS)
Crew did we get verification?
Can you egress at --

CHAFFEE (COMMS)
We have a bad fire! We're burning up! We're burning...

They hear Chaffee **SCREAM**. It's PRIMAL, HEART-STOPPING. Deke, now **CONCERNED**, looks up. A beat, then --

BOOM!!! The capsule **RUPTURES**, SMOKE POURING OUT...

Everyone in the blockhouse **PALES**. Deke and Petrone stare, incredulous as the techs above fall back.

PETRONE (INTO COMMS)
Pad leader, are you able to hear them? Guenter --

GUENTER WENDT (COMMS)
All the smoke, we can't...

Deke, **UNNERVED**, takes the comms, tries to remain professional.

DEKE (INTO COMMS)
Gus, can you hear us? Gus?

But there's NO RESPONSE. Off Deke --

INT. LIVING ROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - NIGHT

Janet reads, Rick and Mark play on floor. A quiet moment... until the phone **RINGS**. Janet stands, picks up the phone.

JANET (INTO PHONE)
Hello?

DEKE (OVER PHONE)
Janet, it's Deke. There's been an accident at the Cape. We... we don't know how bad yet. Would you mind going over to Pat's?

Off Janet, PALE, **SMASH TO --**

INT. WHITE'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

The kids play as Janet helps Pat carry in grocery bags.

PAT

Thank goodness you swung by, I'd
have a car full of melted ice pops.

Pat smiles, chipper, when the doorbell **RINGS**.

PAT

You mind tossing the rest of the
perishables into the fridge?

JANET

Of course not.

Pat exits. Janet puts the milk in the fridge... when she
hears an AWFUL, GUT WRENCHING, ANIMALISTIC **SCREAM**.

Jan freezes. As the sound **RIPPLES** through her, **SMASH TO --**

INT. ROOM, GEORGETOWN INN - WASHINGTON, DC - MOMENTS LATER

Neil as we left him, on his bed, tux still on, watching TV.
And waiting. A beat. Then the phone **RINGS**. Neil grabs it.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

Hello?

DEKE (OVER PHONE)

Neil.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

Hey. How'd it go?

DEKE (OVER PHONE)

(pause)

Not great, there was... an accident.
No easy way to say this... Ed, Gus
and Roger, they're, they're gone.

Neil sits there. Blinks. Not following.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

I don't understand. It was a test.

DEKE (OVER PHONE)

We think there was a wiring issue.

NEIL

I don't... I don't follow.

DEKE

There was a fire and, and we'll get to the bottom of it. Right now we need you guys to lay low. The press is all over this, Senator Mondale's going to call for an investigation, we don't want you to have to deal with any of that, okay? Neil?

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

Yes. Okay. Thanks.

Neil hangs up. A beat. Neil sits, silent. Blank. He lifts the phone, as if to make a call... and holds the receiver, the dial tone PULSING, growing **LOUDER**, until...

...he **SMASHES** the receiver on the cradle.

Again.

And again.

And AGAIN.

Harder now. Until he's smashing the receiver on the cradle with such **FORCE**...

...that the phone **CRACKS**... the nightstand **BUCKLES**.

And still he continues. Pain and rage pouring out...

He keeps **POUNDING** the phone... UNTIL it's **PULVERIZED**... UNTIL the nightstand **SPLITS**... UNTIL his fingers, his hand starts to **BLEED**... UNTIL at last he runs out of steam.

And pauses. **PANTING**. His face contorted... his eyes **TICKING** to his hand. **BADLY MAULED**, blood **DRIPPING** down the phone...

We hold on him for an awful beat and then we...

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. ELLINGTON AIR FORCE BASE, HOUSTON, TX - DAY

TIGHT ON NEIL'S FACE. Eyes focused, but EMOTIONLESS. **DEAD.** A stark contrast to the jagged hand-held camera. *And a stark contrast to the Neil we last saw. Wounds buried, yet there on the surface. Scar tissue, invisible to most, less so to us.*

**Ellington Air Force Base
May 6, 1968**

JIM LOVELL (COMMS)
*Winds are pretty rough today, keep
 an eye on your translation rates.*

PULL BACK to find Neil exposed to the elements, strapped into **THE LUNAR LANDING TEST VEHICLE**. A MESS of METAL PIPES with a COCKPIT. *The realization of the DIAGRAMS we saw on **P.101**.*

JIM LOVELL (COMMS)
*Approaching altitude,
 drifting east.*

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 Copy. Correcting.

Neil hits the thruster and a **BURST** of peroxide spits out to our right. As it pushes the LLTV left we **PULL BACK FURTHER...**

Neil's **HUNDREDS OF FEET ABOVE THE GROUND** in a contraption that *doesn't look like it should fly.* Jesus. The camera does a **WILD 360** around the belching craft then... **PUSHES IN** on Neil.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 Five hundred feet. Switching to
 lunar mode and starting descent.

Dead-eyed, but alert, Neil hits a button and starts to guide the LLTV to a landing. Thrusters **POP** and **HISS**; the craft **ROCKS** and **BUCKS**, but Neil's eyes REMAIN STEADY on his gauges.

CLOSE ON the ALTITUDE GAUGE: **400... 300... 200 feet.**

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 Final landing approach.

Neil calmly pilots the LLTV down through 100 feet... When the bottom **FALLS OUT**. The craft starts to **DROP RAPIDLY**.

Neil **PULLS** on the thruster, but the LLTV doesn't respond.

JIM LOVELL (COMMS)
Increase altitude! Neil!

Neil **HITS** the thrusters again... The craft **SHOOTS UP** to 200 feet... then **ROLLS SHARPLY TO THE RIGHT!!** It's terrifying.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 Attitude control degrading.

Steam **SPITS** from the thrusters; peroxide particles burn Neil's neck. UNFAZED, he tries to correct the roll... only to have the craft go **UP ON IT'S SIDE LIKE A CARNIVAL RIDE!**

Neil quickly **PULLS** the throttle right, but now the LLTV **SWAYS BACK EVEN FURTHER ON THE OTHER SIDE!!** **HOLY FUCK!!**

JIM LOVELL (COMMS)
*Your translation rates are too high!
 You've gotta bail out! Neil, do you
 hear me, you have to bail out now!*

But Neil, eyes **DARK**, barely registers this. Lovell's voice
 FADES... then **THE SOUND DROPS OUT ENTIRELY**.

PUSH IN TIGHT ON NEIL'S FACE IN TOTAL SILENCE.

We clock the **INTENSITY, HARD** and **COLD**, the **DARKNESS** in his
 eyes... MORE FRIGHTENING than anything happening around him.

A long beat... then Neil's eyes **TICK DOWN**.

We see the ground **RUSHING UP** to meet the craft.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 I gotta go.

LIGHTENING FAST Neil PULLS the ejection handle. **BOOM!!!**

SOUND COMES RUSHING BACK as the Ejection Seat **EXPLODES** out of
 the LLTV, **TOSSING** Neil a hundred feet up into the air!!!

POP POP POP! Neil's parachute unfurls, stabilizing us just in
 time to see the LLTV CRASH below... and **BURST INTO FLAMES**.
 Off Neil, staring down at the **FIERY BLAZE OF METAL, PRELAP --**

DEKE (**PRELAP**)
 The vehicle is not safe.

EXT./INT. DEKE'S OFFICE, MSC, HOUSTON - NIGHT

Kraft and Deke argue with Neil.

DEKE
 We need to shut it down, Neil.

NEIL
 It's the best simulation we have.

KRAFT
 Yes, but --

NEIL
 Landing in lunar gravity is the most
 substantial hurdle left; the vehicle
 gives us the best approximation of
 flight in a lunar environment.

KRAFT

Okay, but you and the others are too valuable to risk on a fly by wire system with no backup.

NEIL

The ejection seat is the backup.

DEKE

Neil, the political fallout from another accident --

NEIL

That's what you're worried about?

DEKE

You could have died, Neil.

NEIL

But I didn't.

DEKE

A split second more and --

NEIL

We need to fail!

Deke REACTS, but Neil's too far gone to notice...

NEIL

That's the point. These tests aren't about getting it right, they're about knowledge. We fail and we learn and we fail and we learn and it's the only goddamn reason we've gotten this far. We have to keep failing here so we don't fail there.

KRAFT

But at what cost?

NEIL

Whatever it takes.

A beat. Off the tense standoff, we **PRELAP** --

KTRH ANCHOR (ON RADIO)

...the NASA press release said the ejection took place at 200 feet...

INT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE (HOUSTON) - NIGHT

Janet stands by the stove, cooking. Or rather she was. Now she LISTENS to the radio on the sill. **PALE.**

KTRH ANCHOR (ON RADIO)

...but eyewitnesses said Armstrong was much lower. Senator Mondale was particularly vocal on the loss of the multi-million dollar machine...

The door opens. Neil walks in, sees dinner isn't on the table, starts to head towards his office when...

JANET
Are you okay?

Neil stops, turns. **IMPENETRABLE.**

NEIL
It's always a sad day when you lose a machine.

It's hard to take; Janet needs more, but Neil's distracted. His eyes **TICK** to the radio.

SENATOR MONDALE (ON RADIO)
...we've spent more than we did on the Manhattan project, we've put our most talented young men at risk, and what are the odds of success?

Neil STIFFENS. Janet, visibly upset, turns back to the stove. The radio seems to grow **LOUDER.**

SENATOR MONDALE (ON RADIO)
Is it any wonder that a majority of the public no longer feel the space program is worth it?

The front door **SLAMS.** Janet turns. Neil's gone.

INT. WOLFIE'S RESTAURANT, CAPE KENNEDY - DAY

A 60's diner. Neil eats alone, studying data from his LLTV crash. He jots down a note and takes a bite of steak which he's cut into CUBES (so he can eat while he works).

Neil's so engrossed, he doesn't hear **THE MUSIC.** Hendrix. **All Along the Watchtower.** As it rolls past him, we **RACK FOCUS** to a table of YOUNG HIPPIES. Facial hair, tie-dye, a box radio.

A **GIRL** in Joplin sunglasses (*think Penny Lane*) **STARES** at Neil. His cut up steak. His close cropped hair. His thin black tie. **He's a walking ANACHRONISM.**

The girl points. The others **SNICKER.** Neil doesn't notice.

PUSH IN on him, **OBLIVIOUS.** A man alone, out of time, but nonetheless hell bent, single minded, **DETERMINED.** His eyes **TICKING** insistently, his focus **UNWAVERING.** That is, until...

A **FILE** is dropped in front of Neil. **CONFIDENTIAL.** Neil looks up, finds Deke. Who sits, nods at the file. Neil opens it.

GRAINY PHOTOGRAPHS of a **HUGE ROCKET**. With **RUSSIAN MARKINGS**.

DEKE

It was unmanned. 2 million pounds of thrust. It circled the moon.

Dammit.

NEIL

How long until we test the first stage of Saturn Five?

DEKE

Public support for Apollo has been dropping like a brick since the fire, Congress won't fund us to be second best. Shit, we move too slow, they won't fund us at all.

Neil **REALIZES...**

NEIL

We're testing all 3 stages at once.

Deke nods. Holy shit. Even Neil is struck.

DEKE

Apollo 8 will attempt to duplicate what the Soviets did. Lovell's in command. You're the backup. Kraft may not have been impressed by your tirade, but Gilruth was. At least my version of it.

(standing)

Get the new LLTV online asap. You, Conrad and Borman'll rotate. If we actually manage to get there, one of you is gonna have to land.

Deke leaves. Neil processes. He's one of three men who might land on the moon. Jesus. A beat, then we **PULL BACK...**

HIGH AND WIDE on the **DINER**. The Hendrix, the hippies and the anonymous astronaut... who very well might make history.

We take in the oddity of the tableau, then **CUT TO --**

INT. VEHICLE ASSEMBLY BUILDING (VAB), KSC - DAY

A crane lifts the ENORMOUS SECOND STAGE of a **SATURN ROCKET**. We're in the 8-acre, 526-foot-tall hanger that is the V.A.B.

MIKE COLLINS

Jesus, that's a big mother.

MIKE COLLINS (38, shrewd) stands with Neil, Buzz, Lovell, Dave and a few others as the crane sets the second stage atop the first, which sits on the massive APOLLO CRAWLER-TRANSPORTER.

BUZZ

Gonna be some kind of explosion if it goes up.

(off the others)

The MPAD guys said there's a twenty percent chance.

LOVELL

I'm gonna get some water.

Lovell, a little pale, heads off towards the office.

MIKE COLLINS

Shit, Buzz, he's gotta fly that thing.

NEIL

It's in the briefing pack.

Dave turns towards Neil, surprised. And a bit AGITATED.

DAVE SCOTT

You don't think that's a problem? This is exactly the kinda rush job that led to the fire.

Neil doesn't respond. Dave, annoyed, walks off after Lovell.

BUZZ

He's just pissed off cause he lost the lunar lottery.

ANOTHER ASTRONAUT

What? What are you talking about?

BUZZ

The LLTV rotation. The LLTV's unstable, the only guys they'll risk on it are the ones who actually might land. 3 commanders, 2 pilots.

Neil doesn't like this talk; neither do the others.

MIKE COLLINS

You think you're going to the moon?

BUZZ

The landing's been up for grabs ever since Gus and Ed died.

(MORE)

BUZZ (CONT'D)

If 8 makes it there and back, 10, 11
or 12 is going to be the one.
That's Borman, Conrad or Neil. With
Anders or me piloting.
(off their reaction)
What? I'm just saying what you're
all thinking out loud.

NEIL

Maybe you shouldn't.

It's **SHARP**. Buzz turns, surprised. Before he can respond,
the men see Lovell WAVING from the office. **SMASH TO --**

INT. OFFICE, VEHICLE ASSEMBLY BUILDING, KSC - LATER

CLOSE ON a **RADIO CONSOLE**. We hear COMMS. IN RUSSIAN.

KOMAROV (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
Activated, activated.

GROUND (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
*Understood. Our comrades
recommend a deep breath.*

Neil and the others join Lovell and Deke at the console. A
MILITARY AIDE/TRANSLATOR, 20s, explains.

MILITARY TRANSLATOR

The Japanese picked up the radio
signal. A telemetry antenna and one
of the solar arrays failed.

DAVE SCOTT

Bad maiden run for the Soyuz.

KOMAROV (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
Orientation problems persist.

MILITARY TRANSLATOR
(off the comms)
He's mid-retrofire.

BUZZ

One wing, no telemetry, how's he
managing re-entry?

MILITARY AIDE

This is his third attempt.

LOVELL

Jesus.

It's good news for our team. But no one's smiling.

KOMAROV (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
*Entering atmosphere... unable
to control attitude...*

GROUND (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
*Center of gravity is off,
you're coming down too fast.*

The men clock Komarov's tone.

NEIL
What's happening?

MILITARY TRANSLATOR
The Soyuz's attitude is off,
it's not getting any lift.

KOMAROV (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
*Nothing I lay my hands on
works!*

GROUND (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
*Rubin, this is Zarya, deploy
your drogue to slow descent!*

MILITARY TRANSLATOR
He's deploying parachutes.

DAVE SCOTT
He's gotta be coming in hot.

They LEAN IN, the human element superseding the competitive.

KOMAROV (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
Main parachute has fail...

GROUND (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
Didn't get that. Can you re--

KOMAROV (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
*Main parachute has fail... manually
deploying reserve chute!*

MILITARY TRANSLATOR
His main chute failed.

LOVELL
He's got to have a reserve.

They listen, TENSE... then Komarov starts to **SCREAM**.

KOMAROV (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
The release failed! The release...

STATIC. The astronauts BLANCH.

GROUND (RUSSIAN, ON RADIO)
*Rubin, this is Zarya, how do you
hear me? Rubin, do you hear me?*

A beat. Nothing but STATIC on the radio.

MILITARY TRANSLATOR
I... I think he's crashed.

The men look down. **GRIM.** All save for Neil. Who heads out.

DAVE SCOTT
Where are you going?

NEIL
More of a head start now. We should
make use of it.

He exits. Off Dave, STUNNED, we **CUT TO --**

TELEVISION FOOTAGE - ABC NEWS

COLOR FOOTAGE of ABC SCIENCE EDITOR JULES BERGMAN at the Cape, **APOLLO 8** towering on the launch pad in the distance.

JULES BERGMAN (ON TV)
*Good morning, I'm ABC Science Editor
 Jules Bergman at Cape Kennedy with a
 late status report on Apollo 8...*

EXT. CAPE KENNEDY - SAME TIME

The broadcast continues but we're now on the scene. Bergman sits at a desk in front of an ABC camera crew.

JULES BERGMAN (TO CAMERA)
 ...Astronauts Borman, Lovell and
 Anders are in their command module,
 the first manned spacecraft to leave
 Earth's orbit...

The camera starts MOVING, **PUSHING PAST** Bergman to a **HUGE FIELD OF HUMANITY**; Apollo posters, bell bottoms, Sgt. Pepper... *it's Woodstock for geeks.* In the middle of it all, a **NASA VAN** rolls from the launch pad towards mission control. **CUT INTO --**

INT. NASA VAN (MOVING) - CAPE KENNEDY - SAME TIME

Neil, Buzz and Fred Haise, the Apollo 8 backups, sit in back. Buzz stares out the window, **riveted**, focusing on...

PROTESTORS. We note the banners: *Is space more important than our poor? Our boys in Vietnam?* Buzz sees the **ANGER.**

BUZZ
 Nuts. Just nuts, huh?

Buzz turns to Neil, reading a manual. **COMPLETELY OBLIVIOUS.** Off Buzz, *clearly not understanding Neil at all*, we **CUT TO --**

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, LAUNCH CONTROL CENTER - EARLY MORN

CLOSE ON Neil's eyes, now staring through the ENORMOUS WINDOWS of Launch Control at Apollo 8, steaming on the pad. In the b/g, the launch director runs through flight checks.

Even at a distance, the Saturn is **HUGE.** *And at 7.5 million pounds of thrust, it's the most powerful rocket in history.*

FIDO (O.C.)
 T minus 1 minute.

As the flight crew sounds off, Deke joins Neil and looks down the line.... at Dave's jaw tensing, at Buzz scratching at his neck, at Mike biting a nail... and then at Neil. Still.

LAUNCH DIRECTOR
Final go, no go. EECOM? EECOM ENGINEER
I'm go. Launch commit.

The whole room **QUIETS** as the call continues.

FIDO
*T minus ten, nine, eight, seven,
main engine start...*

We SEE the engines FIRE before we HEAR them... Lights and ceiling tiles begin to **SHAKE**. A couple come **CRASHING DOWN**.

FIDO
Four, three, two, one, ignition...

We hear the engines ROAR. A **TSUNAMI OF THUNDER SLAMS** into the windows, **BUCKLING** the big one in front of Neil. **Holy Shit!!!** A number of men **HIT THE DECK**. Even Neil **FLINCHES...**

But the window HOLDS. And Apollo 8 lifts off the pad.

There's something **TERRIFYING** about the POWER of the big rocket, the SPEED at which it hurtles into the sky...

...but as it continues to rise, there's scattered CLAPPING... the launch is successful. And momentarily, everyone starts to **CHEER**. Everyone, that is, but Neil. Who heads for the door.

Off Deke, **CLOCKING THIS**, we **CUT TO --**

INT. BATHROOM, KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON Neil washing his hands. Concentrating. Methodical.

DEKE (O.C.)
Helluva launch.

Neil looks up. Deke's walked in. Neil shrugs, turns back to the sink. Deke looks at him for a moment. Scrutinizing him.

DEKE
I talked with Chris and Bob about the schedule and we'd like you to command 11. Obviously, if 8 is successful, 11 or 12 will probably be our first attempt at a landing.

Neil nods, pleased, but doesn't acknowledge the potentially momentous nature of the mission.

NEIL

Who are you thinking for the crew?

DEKE

Collins was cleared by the doc, he's the best Command Module Pilot available. The Lunar Module Pilot, well, you could take Lovell, but it's a quick turnaround. And he's in line for his own command.

NEIL

Who's the other option?

DEKE

Buzz is the guy with the most experience.

Neil considers.

NEIL

Let me have 24 hours.

INT. MCC, PILOT'S OFFICES - 9PM

Clock reads 9pm. Neil's hunched over a preliminary training schedule for Apollo 11.

CONRAD (O.C.)

You beat me to the moon I'm gonna kick your ass.

Conrad, leaving, holds up a PACKET. Labeled **APOLLO 12**.

CONRAD

I hear Deke's trying to stick you with Aldrin.

Neil shrugs. Conrad shakes his head.

CONRAD

If you can survive 8 days with him in that sardine can, power to you...

INT. MSC, HALLWAY - LATER

Neil heads out. He starts to turn into the elevator bank when he spots a **LIGHT ON** down the hall. Curious, he walks on...

...and finds an open door. Inside, Buzz pours over a desk full of DIAGRAMS, EQUATIONS, TRAJECTORIES for the lunar landing. Buzz is so focused he doesn't even notice Neil.

Off Neil, standing, watching Buzz, PROCESSING, **CUT TO --**

INT. MSC, MOVIE THEATER - EARLY MORNING

THREE MEN in **GAS MASKS** are led into a theater packed with reporters, pads and cameras ready. It's ODD.

**Apollo 11, Pre-Flight Press Conference
July 5, 1969**

The men are led on stage to a **TALL, THREE-SIDED PLASTIC BOX**. Fans are turned on to blow air TOWARDS THE AUDIENCE as the men sit, take off the masks. It's Neil, Mike Collins... and BUZZ.

Neil, STIFF, glances at Deke then walks to the podium.

NEIL

We're here today to talk a bit about the forthcoming flight. We're able to talk about it because of previous flights. Every flight took on new objectives and left us with very few additions to be completed. We're grateful to those people who made it possible for us to sit here today.

Neil sits, no trace of emotion. Deke takes the podium.

DEKE

We'll take questions now. Jim?

REPORTER #1

(standing)

Neil, when you learned you were going to command this flight, were you surprised? Overjoyed?

NEIL

...I was pleased.

REPORTER #1

Okay, but how would you compare this feeling with winning an automobile? Or being selected as an astronaut?

NEIL

(pause)

I was pleased.

The reporter isn't pleased, but another jumps up.

NEWSWEEK REPORTER

Neil, were you aware that Ralph Abernathy is planning a protest for the day of the launch?

NEIL

No. I was not.

NEWSWEEK REPORTER

He said, and I quote, "*A fifth of this nation lives in poverty. In the face of such suffering, space flight represents an inhuman priority.*" Do you have any comment?

NEIL

No.

An awkward beat. Deke shoots Neil a look. Try harder.

REPORTER #2

Neil, if it does turn out, you'll go down in history. What kind of thoughts do you have about that?

NEIL

(making an effort)

Several people have mentioned that. I hope that you and the public will recognize the thing as a group effort because it really is that.

REPORTER #2

But when a thought hits you; 'Gosh, suppose that flight is successful' --

NEIL

I'm planning on it being successful. Why do you always say 'suppose that flight will be successful?'

REPORTER #2

...uh, I just meant, how you look at yourself as being part of history?

Neil hesitates... and in that moment Buzz jumps in.

BUZZ

I think I can shed some light here. It's a responsibility, but it's exciting to be first. Even my wife is excited. She keeps slipping jewelry into my PPK.

Some laughter. Neil looks ever so slightly **IRRITATED.**

REPORTER #3

You're planning to take some of her jewelry to the moon, Buzz?

BUZZ

Well, sure. What fella wouldn't want to give his wife bragging rights?

Buzz smiles, enjoying the limelight.

REPORTER #3

Neil, will you take anything?

NEIL

If I had a choice, I'd take more fuel.

An awkward SILENCE. Then Mike LAUGHS. Reporters, relieved, follow suit. But Neil doesn't. Off Neil, **UNCOMFORTABLE** --

INT. NEIL AND JANET'S BEDROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a SUITCASE. Very tidy. FIND Neil packing. Methodical. Emotionless. A beat, then Janet walks in.

JANET

Come say good night to the boys.

Neil keeps packing. A beat, then Janet reaches over, **CLOSES** the suitcase. Neil looks up at her.

JANET

The boys want you to tuck them in.

NEIL

I gotta pack.

He starts to turn back but she GRABS his arm. **FORCEFUL.**

JANET

I'd like you to talk to the boys.

NEIL

(firm)
I don't have time.

JANET

Pat tried to commit suicide. Three days ago. Did you even know? She's okay now. Okay as she'll ever be.

(then, off Neil)

Everyday I pack your lunch, I make your dinner and I... I used to hope that someday I'd have something to show for it. I won't. I know that now. And that's fine. But Rick and Mark? What are the chances you're coming back? 50 percent? 40?

(MORE)

JANET (CONT'D)
 What are the chances it's the last
 time they see you?
 (and then)
 You don't have time? Make the
 fucking time.

Off Neil, **CUT TO --**

INT. MARK AND RICK'S BEDROOM, ARMSTRONG HOUSE - NIGHT

Rick (12) and Mark (6) both tucked in. Neil on Rick's bed.

RICK
 So the trip is eight days?

NEIL
 Yes.

RICK
 (explaining to Mark)
 They'll be quarantined when they get
 back, to make sure they haven't
 picked up any moon germs.

MARK
 (worried)
 Are you scared, Daddy?

NEIL
 We've done everything before except
 for the actual landing.

MARK
 (beat)
 But why do you have to go?

Neil hesitates.

NEIL
 Because we have to demonstrate we
 can do this.

Mark doesn't know what to make of that. Rick tries to help.

RICK
 Dad's going to be famous.

MARK
 You are?

Neil doesn't like the question any more than he did from the
 reporters. He's quiet. An **AWKWARD BEAT**. Jan steps in.

JANET
Okay, it's time for bed.

Relieved, Neil leaves. **HOLD ON** Janet. **ALONE**.

EXT. ARMSTRONG HOUSE (HOUSTON) - NIGHT

WIDE on the house. A BLACK CAR idling by the curb. Neil comes to the door, duffel and a briefcase. He gives Janet a perfunctory peck and walks to the car.

ON JANET, watching as Neil hands off his duffel, gets in the car and, without so much as a look back, shuts the door.

INT. BLACK CAR (PARKED), ARMSTRONG HOUSE - SAME TIME

Neil sits back in his seat. He pulls out a mission briefing, starts to read as the driver gets back in the car.

The car pulls off. In that moment, the tension LEAVES Neil's face. He looks out the window, at the houses slipping away... and we see imperceptible **RELIEF**. The mission has begun.

EXT. ASTRONAUT CREW QUARTERS, CAPE CANAVERAL - 4 AM

A large campus, a maze of one story barracks.

Cape Canaveral, 4:20 AM, July 16, 1969

It's DARK, save for a light from one low window. And QUIET, save for a MUFFLED THUMPING. **THA-THUMP. THA-THUMP.** The sound takes us through the lit window into --

INT. FLIGHT SURGEON'S OFFICE, CREW QUARTERS - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON a **STETHOSCOPE**. FIND Neil, shirtless, in front of the flight surgeon. We hear Neil's heart rate **SPEED UP**. Neil's eyes **TICK** to the Doc. *Is he concerned?* A long beat, then...

SURGEON
He's clear. Send in Aldrin.

INT. MESS HALL, KSC, JULY 16, 1969 - LATER

Neil sits beside an odd flower centerpiece, working his way through steak and eggs. Like it's any other day.

DEKE (O.C.)
What the hell are you doing?

Deke eats breakfast with Neil and the two other astronauts. He's staring at Buzz, SIGNING multiple **PHOTOS OF HIMSELF**.

BUZZ

Life insurance. Mine was denied.
 (passing them to Deke)
 Would you get these to Jean Ann?

Mike reacts. *Seriously?* Unnerved, he glances at Neil, but Neil just keeps eating, totally unfazed.

GILRUTH (O.C.)

Gentlemen.

The men look up. Gilruth stands in the doorway, waiting. It's time. As Neil stands, we CUT TO --

INT. CREW QUARTERS, CAPE CANAVERAL - 5:30 AM

Deke leads the men into the ready room. Multiple techs swarm around **THREE ASTRONAUT SPACESUITS**.

5:30 AM (T minus 4 hours, 3 minutes)

As the men start to strip down, we see **A SERIES of QUICK CUTS:**

Tape **SEALS** up a DIAPER around a man's waist.

A MESH of LIQUID-COOLING TUBES are **FILLED** with water; a ZIPPER **CLOSES** the thin, nylon one-piece containing them.

A ZIPPER **CLOSES** the internal pressure suit; a 'SLIDE FASTENER' **ZIPS** it shut; then a THERMAL SKIN is **VELCROED** on top of that.

METALLIC RINGS **SNAP ON** one glove, then another; SLEEVES are **ROLLED** over the rings.

A COMMS (SNOOPY) CAP chin-strap is **SNAPPED** in place; its wire is **PLUGGED INTO** the top of the suit.

An AIR NOZZLE is **TWISTED ONTO** the BLUE PORTAL on the front of a spacesuit; we hear the **HISS** of air as...

A HELMET is **PLACED** on the head of a PRETERNATURALLY CALM NEIL. The helmet **SWIVELS** into place and the sound **FADES...**

...we hear only the **HISS OF OXYGEN** as Neil **CLOSES HIS EYES**.

MATCH CUT TO --

EXT. GANTRY ELEVATOR, LAUNCH PAD 39A, CAPE CANAVERAL - LATER

CLOSE ON Neil, eyes still closed. The HISS of air pervades.

6:45 AM (T minus 2 hours, 48 minutes)

Neil opens his eyes, takes in the **ENORMOUS SATURN V ROCKET** beside him. He rises quickly up its side on the high speed elevator with Buzz and Mike (suited up) and Deke.

And we can't help but notice the **FLOCK OF PRESS VANS** below, the **HORDE OF MEDIA AND SPECTATORS** stretching out before them.

MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)
Guess we have a couple fans.

Even Mike and Buzz find it STAGGERING. But for Neil it's DEEPLY UNSETTLING. He looks away, eyes **TICKING** to the checklist on his wrist, **FOCUSING** on it as only he can...

...until the elevator **JERKS** to a halt.

DEKE (COMMS)
Ready?

Neil looks up. The door SWINGS opens. They've reached SWING ARM 9, which leads to the white room and the command module. Neil grabs his oxygen tank and leads the others onto --

EXT. SWING ARM 9, LAUNCH PAD 39A, CAPE CANAVERAL - CONTINUOUS

Neil walks forward, eyes on the CAPSULE. Techs scurry, we hear chatter over comms, but it's FAINT, SUBSUMED by the eerie hiss of oxygen and Neil's **INTENSE FOCUS** on the task ahead.

This is a solitary moment. Neil barely noticing as a tech walks up to help him with his oxygen tank. Neil hands his tank to the tech, blinks... the tech looks like **ELLIOT**.

Neil turns away... and spots a tech who looks like **ED**.

Neil pauses. **PUSH IN** on his face, his eyes... as he **CLOSES** them. The **HISSING** grows louder and we **PRELAP** FAINT COMMS --

LAUNCH DIRECTOR (PRELAP)
*The leaky hydrogen valve on the 200
foot level shouldn't be a problem...*

MATCH CUT TO --

INT. APOLLO 11 CSM, LAUNCH PAD 39A - LATER

Neil. Eyes closed.

T minus 2 hours 10 minutes

LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
We're powering up the console now.

His eyes BLINK OPEN as the lights on the console FLASH ON. Neil's strapped into the capsule. Buzz and Mike beside him.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
Console on. We're go to close up.

The techs move to close the hatch but Deke leans in.

DEKE
Give me a second.
(to Neil, COMMS)
...We thought about a pill but we realized if the landing goes south and you get stranded you can just...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Purge the suits, go to sleep.

Neil's thought it through, he isn't fazed at all. Deke reacts. SURPRISINGLY EMOTIONAL, he **GRABS** Neil's gloved hand.

DEKE (COMMS)
Make us proud.

Deke exits. The techs move in to close the hatch, **COVERING** the front window with a PROTECTIVE SHIELD. We **HOLD ON** the three men in the tight, **CLAUSTROPHOBIC** cabin.

An odd quiet. Eerily punctuated by a loud **HISS**.

LAUNCH CONTROL (COMMS)
Pressurizing the cabin.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Proceeding to checks. Running Emergency Detection system.

Neil, seemingly oblivious to the stifling atmosphere, starts into checks with the others and we see **A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS:**

HANDS flipping through the Flight Plan and the Mission Rules.

FINGERS flicking switches, punching buttons.

EYES ticking from the books to the console to the clock.

MIKE (O.C., INTO COMMS)
Arming escape rocket...

NEIL (O.C., INTO COMMS)
Checking Propulsion System...

MIKE (O.C., INTO COMMS)
Arming hand controllers.

BUZZ (O.C., INTO COMMS)
Finalizing Stabilization...

NEIL (O.C., INTO COMMS)
Full internal power.

A FINAL **FLURRY** of **BUTTONS** DEPRESSED, LIGHTING UP, of **SWITCHES** FLIPPED ON and we arrive at...

FIDO (COMMS)
T minus 2 minutes.

LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
Final Pre-launch sequence.

The men sit, nothing to do but wait. Neil is BLANK, but we FEEL the nervous anticipation of Buzz and Mike because... we're not going anywhere. WE'RE GONNA STAY WITH THE CREW FOR THE WHOLE DAMN MISSION. So buckle the fuck up...

CRAFT TEST CONDUCTOR (COMMS)
Personnel status check complete, all go.

LAUNCH OPS MANAGER (COMMS)
Operations is go for launch.

TEST SUPERVISOR (COMMS)
Test supervisor, go for launch.

LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
We are on the automatic sequence. Final abort checks.

PUSH IN on Neil, hand on the ABORT HANDLE. Seemingly **CALM**.

FIDO (COMMS)
60 seconds and counting.

LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
All is still go. Propellant tanks pressurized, oxidizer tanks now have pressurized.

PUSH IN FURTHER on Neil's EYES. Dark. **INTENSE**. A WEALTH of EMOTIONS. We **HOLD ON NEIL'S EYES** as the call continues...

FIDO (COMMS)
T minus 30 seconds.

LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
3rd stage tanks pressurized, readings indicate we are go.

FIDO (COMMS)
20 seconds...

LAUNCH DIRECTOR (COMMS)
2nd stage tanks pressurized, guidance is now internal...

FIDO (COMMS)
T minus 10, 9, ignition sequence...

We hear a LOUD **RUMBLING** from far below as the capsule begins to shake. **HOLD ON** Neil. Steady. Unyielding.

FIDO (COMMS)
6, 5, 4...

The noise gets **LOUDER**... the **ROAR** of 7.5 MILLION POUNDS OF THRUST SLAMMING into the ground **DROWNS OUT** the countdown.

The capsule **BUCKS** violently, **SLAMMING** Neil back in his seat.

It's **FAR WORSE THAN GEMINI**. Even Neil is **STARTLED**, but he **WILLS** himself to FOCUS, eyes **TICKING RAPIDLY** from clock to console as the **ROAR** goes on, the cockpit continues to **SHAKE...**

Neil glances to his right... Buzz looks **TENSE**, Mike looks **BEWILDERED**... no sense of whether they've lifted off...

Can this possibly be what it's supposed to feel like?

Neil's eyes TICK to his CHECKLIST... **ROLL AT 15 SECONDS**. He glances at the clock, **PUNCHES** in the maneuver... and we **FEEL** the rocket **ROLL**, g-forces so INTENSE all three men turn GREEN.

Neil **PUSHES THROUGH**, eyes **GLUED** to the instruments as, at last, the roar **FADES** and, faintly, we hear COMMS...

CAPCOM (COMMS)
Mode 1 Charlie. Go for staging.

Neil nods to Buzz. He hits a switch and the roar **QUIETS**.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)	NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Inboard cut off.	(inputs sequence)
	Staging... and ignit--

BOOM! The men are SLAMMED back into their seats... but the shaking quickly **FADES** to an **UNSETTLING QUIET** as the second stage propels them out of the atmosphere.

It's SURPRISINGLY SERENE until...

BANG! Neil hits a button and the escape rocket and protective shield are **JETTISONED**. BLUE SKY appears in the window.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)	CAPCOM (COMMS)
Skirt SEP, tower's gone.	Roger. We confirm.

MIKE COLLINS (INTO COMMS)
They finally gave us a window.

The small square of blue is a RELIEF... but Mike's smile **FADES** as the blue sky **RAPIDLY TURNS BLACK**... *MUCH FASTER than Gemini or in the X-15.* It's TERRIFYING, but Neil ignores it...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)	BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
Prep for TLI. Pyros armed?	4 breakers in, switches up.

Buzz punches a ready button... and gets no response. He hits the button a few more times... it finally flicks ON.

NOTHING BUT SPACE. Earth is far behind already, they're on a dark and lonely sea. It's **AWESOME.** And **TERRIFYING.**

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Residuals at 3.3 on the delta.

BUZZ
Good burn, good focus, Neil. MIKE COLLINS (INTO COMMS)
Houston, do you copy?

No answer from Houston. Mike leans in again.

MIKE COLLINS
Houston, you read? Do you read 11?

Still no answer. Buzz and Mike trade a look, the silence **CHILLING.** Neil, unconcerned, jots down residuals, then --

NEIL
Let's prep for separation.

BUZZ
We should wait until we re-establish contact. Mission Rules say we wait.

But Neil ignores him, starts **PUNCHING BUTTONS.** Buzz, surprised, takes the comms from Mike.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
Houston? Houston, you read us?

Still nothing. Neil keeps prepping.

NEIL
Want to help me out, Mike?

Mike is **UNEASY,** unsure what to do. An **AWKWARD BEAT,** then...

CAPCOM (COMMS)
11, Houston. Do you read? 11?

Buzz and Mike trade a look. RELIEVED.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
Roger, Houston. We read an EMS plus 3.3. Over. CAPCOM (COMMS)
Roger. It looks like you are well on your way now.

But Buzz and Mike pause, **TROUBLED.** Watching Neil. There's no escaping what transpired. **And there's no turning back.**

CAPCOM (COMMS)
Apollo 11, you're go for separation.

Mike and Buzz snap to, ready for the maneuver.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Pyro B coming armed.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
Vehicle SEP pushbutton.

MIKE COLLINS (INTO COMMS)
Here we go. Thrusting... and SEP.

Neil hits the PYROS. The LOUD **CRACK** of the pyro explosion surprises the crew and **SMASH TO --**

EXT. TRANSLUNAR SPACE - SAME TIME

FROM AFAR we see the explosion **RIP OFF** four panels connecting the Command Service Module (**CSM**) to the Saturn's third stage.

It's **JARRING**. *Was that planned?* We watch the panels **FLOAT** off as the CSM and what's left of the Saturn race on towards the moon. The quiet is eerie, **UNNERVING**, until...

NEIL (COMMS)
*Okay. I see a SLA panel going out.
Go for turn and dock.*

RCS jets **FIRE** in four directions. In a **THRILLING LONG SHOT**, the CSM slowly **ROTATES** 180 degrees, nosing towards what's left of the Saturn rocket... and the **LUNAR MODULE (LM)** within.

NEIL (COMMS)
We need a 5 degree right, Mike...

It's a **STUNNING BALLET**, the CSM shifting, **INCHING** forward...

NEIL (COMMS)
Capture probe, extend/release.

A small PROBE extends from the CSM's nose, **SCRAPING** the LM... **NAILS on a chalkboard**. *Is something wrong?* For a beat, we wonder... then the LM's **DROGUE** latches on. Both crafts **SHAKE**.

MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)
Okay, I'm go for retract.

NEIL (COMMS)
Docking probe, retract.

The CSM gently **PULLS** the LM free of the Saturn, its **FAMOUS ORANGE HULL SHIMMERING** in the sunlight. **It's BREATHTAKING**.

NEIL (COMMS)
Beginning solar rotation.

Slowly, the COMBINED CRAFT starts **ROTATING**, speeding **BACKWARDS** towards the moon. We **PAN** around the ship... **PUSH** down the side, **CUTTING INTO --**

INT. APOLLO CSM, TRANSLUNAR SPACE - SAME TIME

Mike looks to the earth, **FURTHER AWAY** than he's ever seen it and **SWIFTLY RECEDING** into the distance... the magnitude of what they're doing now clear.

It's **HUMBLING. FRIGHTENING.**

MIKE COLLINS

Wish I'd thought to bring music.

Neil reaches into the hold, pulls out an **8-TRACK** and floats it to Mike. Mike surprised, grabs the 8-track, hits play as Neil grabs a **SEXTANT**, starts checking their alignment...

We hear the 2nd movement of **DVORAK'S NEW WORLD SYMPHONY**. The purposeful, optimistic opening giving way to drums and a **LONELY CLARINET**. It **SWIRLS** around the men...

...and now Buzz stops working, catching sight of the **RECEDING EARTH** in the window. He and Mike **STARE**, struck by how **FRAGILE** the earth looks, how **SMALL**.

Mike glances at Neil, taking readings, checking calculations, **not taking even a moment to note the majesty or the grandeur.**

As the **HAUNTING CLARINET** moves us through time and space, the earth getting smaller in the window, Neil fails to notice.

As he mechanically lifts **ELLIOT'S SEXTANT** for another reading--

TIME CUT TO --

MISSION DAY THREE (00:29:36). **CLOSE ON** a small compartment door closing and a hand writing on it. **SMELLY WASTE**.

REVEAL Mike, **GRIMY** flight suit, thick **STUBBLE**, red eyes. He floats past wires taped with soiled duct tape over to a grubby **CALENDAR** scrawled on the wall. He crosses off day 3 of 9.

Mike wipes his brow, already sick of the **DANK** cabin and floats over to Buzz and Neil (flight suits, stubble). They hover over a **TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP** of the moon.

DEKE (COMMS)

...the landing area is beyond the Maskelyne series, it should be flat. Which is good cause you won't have much wiggle room. That fuel tank's a bitch, if you're not under 100 feet at 20 seconds to bingo --

NEIL

We will be.

He's dismissive. Buzz notes it. Uneasy.

CAPCOM (COMMS)
*Hate to interrupt, but we've played
 back the LOI 2 burn, it looks good,
 we got an orbit at 65.4 by 53.9.*

As he says it, a **DARK OBJECT** fills THREE QUARTERS of the hatch window. It's our first close view of **THE MOON**, its barren surface **STARK** and **FORBODING**. As the men take it in, **CUT TO --**

EXT. THE CAPSULE, LUNAR ORBITAL INSERTION - CONTINUOUS

The craft floats **BACKWARDS** in orbit around the moon.

BUZZ (O.C.)
 Man, look at it.

The moon is no longer an image in the window but a **FULL-SCALE PLANETARY BODY**. The sight of the craft orbiting it is both viscerally **REAL** and unbelievably **UNREAL**. It's **STARTLING**.

MIKE COLLINS (O.C.)
 Boy, look at that son of a bitch.

Mike's voice **PULLS US BACK INTO --**

INT. THE CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

Mike and Buzz stare out at the moon, in **AWE...** but Neil's already focused on what's next.

NEIL
 Buzz.
 (points, all business)
 We just passed Mount Marilyn. We're coming up on Maskelyne series, coming into the landing area. We roll right here at this... that crater, the big one. Duke Island.

MIKE COLLINS
 ...that's US 1, I guess.

NEIL
 The flat area, that's our target.

BUZZ
 Sure is eerie looking.

MIKE COLLINS
 There must be nothing more desolate than inside some of these craters.

They stare. Buzz and Mike clearly both **ANTSY**.

CAPCOM (COMMS)
*Apollo 11, this is Houston, do you
 read? The spacecraft is looking
 good to us on telemetry. Flight is
 requesting a burn status report.*

Mike and Buzz move to comply, but Neil stares out the window. **PUSH IN** on his eyes, resolved. More **INTENSE** than ever.

INT. APOLLO 11, BOTTOM DECK - DAY 3 (14:30:37)

The cabin lights are dim. Mike **TAPES UP** the windows to keep out the sunlight and the bright moonshine.

MIKE COLLINS
 I thought today went pretty well.
 If tomorrow and the next day are
 like today, we'll be safe.

BUZZ (O.C.)
 Absolutely.

The camera **FLOATS DOWN** to the lower deck, Buzz and Neil stretched out in floating hammocks. Buzz is chatty, **TENSE**.

BUZZ
 Helluva sight out there. You know
 what you'll say if we manage to
 land? It's an historic moment.

NEIL
 We should sleep.

It's **ABRUPT**. As Buzz, **AFFRONTED**, closes his eyes, we **PAN UP** to Neil and **PUSH IN** on his **EYES**. **WIDE OPEN**. Tired, but **TICKING** up and down, reading something. **TILT UP** to...

A MAP OF THE LUNAR LANDING AREA taped to the ceiling. We **HOLD ON** it for a beat...

...then **PAN BACK DOWN** to Neil. Still studying the map.

CAPCOM (COMMS)
*Apollo 11, Apollo 11. Good morning
 from the Black Team.*

We've **TIME CUT**... the day is upon us. Neil's eyes now **SUNKEN**, but we see the **ADRENALINE PUMPING**. As he sits up, we **CUT TO** --

INT. APOLLO 11 CSM (COLUMBIA) - DAY 4 (00:03:00)

Mike, **ON EDGE**, works a fuel cell purge, a camera set up and an auto maneuver. Neil collects his pack, preps to enter the LM.

MIKE COLLINS

All this food and stuff up here, you going to take it with you? Chewing gum, you want any of that?

Neil shakes him off. Mike, sweaty, wrestles a storage bin.

MIKE COLLINS

This is a damn three-ring circus. I got a fuel cell purge in progress, I gotta watch an AUTO maneuver and --

The storage bin **POPS** open, film rolls **FLOAT** in all directions.

MIKE COLLINS

(trying to grab them)
Christ! You son of a bitch, you!

NEIL

Mike.

Mike tries to **SETTLE**, clearly nervous about being left alone.

MIKE COLLINS

Come back, will you?

Neil nods, grabs his **PLSS** pack and **FLOATS TO** the open hatch at the **TOP** of the CSM. STAY WITH NEIL as he **FLOATS INTO --**

THE CONNECTING TUNNEL. We look up... from Neil's POV, Buzz is **STANDING UPSIDE DOWN** in the Lunar Module. It's **DISORIENTING.**

Neil **BLINKS** away the vertigo, pulls himself into --

INT. LUNAR MODULE (EAGLE) - CONTINUOUS

We follow Neil in, **ROTATING** with him until what was just upside down is RIGHT SIDE UP. Neil glances at Mike, now upside down in the CSM, then closes the hatch.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)

Columbia, Eagle. Have you got the -- got to the tunnel vent step yet?

MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)

I'm just coming to that.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)

Well, we're waiting on you.

Buzz, **ANTSY**, looks at Neil, calmly stowing his gear.

BUZZ

I heard Conrad was taking bets before we left. He told me our odds were about 10 to 1. The guy actually had the audacity to ask me which way I wanted to bet.

Neil doesn't say anything. It makes Buzz **MORE FIDGETY**.

MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)

I'm going to start to depressurize. We got just about a minute to go, you guys all set?

Buzz looks to Neil. Neil nods.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)

Maneuver us to undocking attitude.

MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)

Roger.

We hear the CSM THRUSTERS repositioning the combined craft... the moon **TURNING SLOWLY** in the window.

MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)

Maneuver on target. 15 seconds.

Neil reaches for the throttle. **PUSH IN** on his tired eyes...

JUMP CUT to his WATCH... seconds ticking by... until at last we HEAR the probe above them **RETRACT**.

MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)

There you go.

Neil **PUSHES** the thruster. The LM slowly moves from the CSM.

CAPCOM (COMMS)

Eagle, we see you on the steerable.

Neil looks towards the waiting moon. **PUSH OUT INTO --**

EXT. LUNAR MODULE, LUNAR ORBIT - CONTINUOUS

FROM AFAR we see the LM slowly **BREAKING AWAY** from the CSM...

NEIL (COMMS)

Roger. The Eagle has wings.

The gas jets **ROTATE** the LM, pointing the landing gear forward.

CAPCOM (COMMS)

Go for powered descent.

MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)

Go for PDI, Eagle.

BUZZ (COMMS)
Roger. We read you.

But Buzz sounds **CONCERNED** as we **PUSH BACK INTO --**

INT. LUNAR MODULE - SAME TIME

Neil **STRUGGLES** with a BREAKER on the console. It's come LOOSE, Neil tries to JAM it back into place.

NEIL
 ...cottonpicker won't stay.

CAPCOM (COMMS)
Eagle, Houston. Alignment is go. One minute to ignition.

BUZZ
 We should report the breaker.

Neil doesn't respond, just keeps working on it.

CAPCOM (COMMS)
 40 seconds.

BUZZ
 Protocol says we should --

BANG! Neil **POUNDS** the breaker back in. It stays.

NEIL
 Let's prep for descent.

Neil gets to work, like nothing happened. For a moment, Buzz stands, staring... **UNEASY**, knowing his life's in Neil's hands.

MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)
 20 seconds.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
 (focusing)
 Altitude lights on. Proceed.

Neil eyes his stopwatch again... the seconds **TICK** by...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 3, 2, 1, 0... ignition.

Neil eases the throttle forward and the lunar module **LURCHES** ahead... towards the surface.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
 Rate of descent looks good.

Neil's eyes **TICK** across the console; we've seen it before, but now he's **PUSHING THROUGH** fatigue, running on **ADRENALINE...**

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 We went by the 3 minute point early... a little off.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
Rate of descent looks good, altitude
rate looks right down the groove.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Our position checks downrange show
us to be a little off...

A button on the console **FLASHES ON**. 1202. It beeps softly.

BUZZ
Program alarm. 1202...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Houston, give us a reading on the 1202 program alarm.
CAPCOM (COMMS)
Roger.

A long beat. The beeping seems to grow **LOUDER**. Neil's eyes **TICK RAPIDLY** from the alarm to his DROPPING ALTITUDE GAUGE...

CAPCOM (COMMS)
We got...

STATIC. Fuck. The alarm seems to grow **LOUDER, DEAFENING**.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
Houston, come in. Houston...
CAPCOM (COMMS)
...we're go on that alarm.

Buzz, relieved, shuts it off. Neil checks his instruments.

NEIL
5000 feet, attitude control's good.

Another button **FLASHES ON**. The same **BEEPING** again...

BUZZ
Same alarm.

Neil reacts, uncharacteristically **ANNOYED**. Buzz shuts it off.

CAPCOM (COMMS, STATIC)
*Eagle, you're... go, repeat,
you're go for landing.*
BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
Roger. Go for landing.

A **THIRD ALARM** beeps. A new one. This time Neil **IGNORES** it.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
Program alarm, 1201. It's in core.

But Neil keeps flying. The beeping **PERVADES** the tiny space.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
Houston, program alarm 1201.
(to Neil)
We should slow our descent.

Neil ignores him. Buzz sees the moon **RISING UP** to meet them.

BUZZ
Neil, we need to slow our -- CAPCOM (COMMS)
1201 alarm, go for landing.
Same type.

As Buzz shuts off the alarm, Neil looks out the window, eyes **TICKING** over the surface below... and then **NARROWING**.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
Just past Maskelyne now... pretty
rocky area.

NEIL'S POV. *The landing area is not flat.* There's a HUGE
CRATER, A HUNDRED YARDS ACROSS. Surrounded by **GIANT BOULDERS**.

THERE'S NO CLEAR AREA FOR LANDING.

BUZZ
Jesus. We can't land there.

Neil makes a **QUICK DECISION**, PUSHES on the throttle.

NEIL
Switching to manual control.

We hear the **POP** and **HISS** of the Descent Propulsion System
(**DPS**) as the craft **RUSHES FORWARD**. Buzz eyes the gauges...

BUZZ
Copy. We have enough fuel?

Neil doesn't respond. Buzz does some quick calculations.

BUZZ
Not sure we have enough fuel to
clear the area. Neil?

NEIL
What's the LPD?

Buzz glances at Neil, who remains focused on the surface.

BUZZ NEIL
Did you hear -- What's the LPD?

Buzz hesitates. Then gives Neil what he needs.

BUZZ
47 degrees, 400 feet, down to 9.

Neil eases the thruster forward. The DPS **HISSES** as they push over the rocky terrain. Buzz watches the PROPULSION CONSOLE.

CLOSE ON the FUEL NUMBER. **DROPPING.** 12, 11, 10...

CAPCOM (COMMS, STATIC)
We see you've... manual... give an update, Eagle?

Neil doesn't say a thing. He remains focused, **INTENT.**

BUZZ
300 down, 47 forward...
MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)
What's going on there? You keeping an eye on your fuel?

Neil grips the throttle, eyes **TICKING FURIOUSLY** from the window to the ALTITUDE GAUGE. As the DPS **HISSES**...

RACK FOCUS to Buzz, UNSETTLED, staring at the propulsion console. **CLOSE ON** the fuel numbers. 8, 7, 6...

BUZZ
Fuel is getting low.

Neil IGNORES him. Buzz **CLOCKS** Neil's intensity... and at that moment he knows. Neil's landing this ship one way or another.

UNNERVED, nothing to do but help, Buzz continues the call.

BUZZ
250, down at 2, 19 forward.

Buzz sees the fuel numbers have **DROPPED BELOW 5.**

BUZZ
160 feet, 6 down, 9 forward.
MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)
Your fuel's below low level!

Neil keeps going, even as the FUEL QUANTITY LIGHT **FLASHES ON.**

BUZZ
120 feet, 3 down, 9 forward,
fuel is at five perc --
NEIL
I understand.

There's **FIRE** in Neil's eyes, DETERMINATION, an **ABJECT REFUSAL TO ABORT.** Jesus. Buzz **TENSES.**

CAPCOM (COMMS, STATIC)
...45 seconds to Bingo.
MIKE COLLINS (COMMS, STATIC)
You need to consider abort--

BUZZ
 Engine stop; ACA out of
 DETENT.

CAPCOM (COMMS)
...copy you down, Eagle.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 Houston, Tranquility Base here. The
Eagle has landed.

An **ENORMOUS CHEER** goes up in Mission Control. Neil **FLINCHES**.
 It's VISCERAL; something about it hits him right in the gut.

CAPCOM (COMMS)
Roger, tranquility.... copy... You
got a lotta guys about to turn blue.
We're breathing again, thanks a lot.

Neil sits, struggling to process. Buzz extends a shaky hand.

BUZZ
 Very smooth touchdown.

Neil, AWKWARD, nods. **PUSH IN** on his eyes, deep PAIN and JOY
 battling within and we hear a familiar **HISS...**

MATCH CUT TO --

INT. LUNAR MODULE - LATER

CLOSE ON Neil's eyes. Staring ahead as he puts his helmet on.

He snaps the helmet into place then reaches for a glove. And
 snaps it on. Meticulous, careful... cognizant of the DANGERS
 of the lunar surface and the enormity of the moment.

Neil reaches for a second glove when Buzz, struggling with his
 PLSS in the small cabin, **JOSTLES** him. The force pushes Neil
 towards the thin wall of the LM...

...we hear a small **SNAP...** and just as it seems Neil might go
 through the wall he **GRABS** the ceiling and stops himself.

BUZZ
 Sorry...

Neil looks to see what snapped... can't find anything. Not
 entirely satisfied, he nonetheless returns to the task at
 hand, putting on his on PLSS and connecting the oxygen tube.

We hear a familiar **HISS** as Neil takes a beat, eyeing a PAD
 clipped to the wall, a SCRIBBLED SENTENCE. *One small step...*

We can't make out all the words, but we know what it says.

BUZZ (COMMS)

Ready?

Buzz is fully suited up. Neil nods and Buzz opens a valve. Through the window, we see the AIR in the LM VENTING OUT. It's nerve-wracking, all that air disappearing into space.

A long beat... then it **STOPS**.

BUZZ (COMMS)

Lunar module depressurized.

Buzz reaches for the hatch... but it won't budge.

BUZZ (COMMS)

Damn thing.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)

Too much pressure in here.

Buzz pulls again, harder.

BUZZ (COMMS)

Shit.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)

Don't rupture it.

Buzz stops. FRUSTRATED. Then something occurs to him... He reaches up and **PEELS BACK** a small part of the flimsy door. We hear a slight HISS. Then the door easily **PULLS OPEN**...

...revealing the gray, barren surface below.

Neil and Buzz STARE, taking in the world outside the door. In this moment, we understand how odd, how **UNDENIABLY STRANGE** it is to be parked on the surface of another heavenly body.

Neil lumbers forward, towards the hatch. **PUSH IN** on him, a bevy of emotions flickering across his face...

...a face we **HOLD ON** as he lowers his feet through the hatch, climbing down the ladder to...

EXT. LUNAR SURFACE - 04 13 43 00

TIGHT ON Neil, sweat on his brow as he SHIMMIES down the ladder, down towards the new world. He remains focused, eyes on the LADDER, HANDS, FEET, until he reaches the final rung.

He stares out, a million things going through his mind...

The **ODDNESS** of it all... the **DESOLATE BEAUTY**... the years of work and sacrifice... and Elliot... and Ed...

...and now he catches a glimpse of the **EARTH** off on the horizon... hovering there... and the **MAJESTY** of it... the **GLORY** of what he's done... it almost **OVERWHELMS** him.

CAPCOM (COMMS)
*Okay, Neil, we can see you coming
 down the ladder now.*

Neil tries to keep it together, **STRUGGLING** THROUGH...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 I'm, uh, at the foot of the ladder,
 the LEM footbeds are only uh...
 depressed in the surface about...
 uh, one or two inches. I'm gonna
 step off the LEM now.

And now he takes that little hop down **ONTO THE MOON**... oddly
DISCONNECTED from the moment, the rote line he's memorized...

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 That's one small step for man, one
 giant leap for mankind...

PUSH IN on Neil, STILL STRUGGLING. The COMMS **FADE** and he hops
 forward... turning from the golden, glimmering lunar module...

...to the **BEAUTIFUL BLUE PLANET** hovering just above the
 horizon. And now he finds he's **UNABLE TO CONTROL HIMSELF**...

A TEAR FALLS. A bevy of emotions rising to the surface...

Pain. Joy. Loss. Triumph. All swirling round until the
 tears come **FREELY**, raining down with all the pent up feelings.
It's the first and last such outburst we'll ever see.

BUZZ (**PRELAP**, COMMS)
Beautiful view.

MATCH CUT TO --

EXT. LUNAR SURFACE - MOMENTS LATER

Buzz lumbers across the lunar surface to Neil, who's still
 staring out at the earth. The LM shimmers in the background.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)
 Isn't that something. Magnificent.

BUZZ (COMMS)
Magnificent desolation.

The words **RESONATE**. As Neil takes it all in, we, like Neil,
 are humbled before the **MAJESTY** of space.

The last ten years flicker before us, not in flashback, but in
 the depths of Neil's eyes. And for a moment, the **WONDER** there
 makes us feel like maybe, just maybe, it was all worth it.

Off the view from the mountaintop, the **LOOK** in Neil's eyes...

MATCH CUT TO --

EXT. LUNAR SURFACE - LATER

Neil's eyes are FOCUSED, his face sweating.

BUZZ (COMMS)

Neil?

PULL BACK to find Neil walking, or rather LOPING, away from the Eagle. Buzz, standing by the American Flag in the far b/g, watches... *Confused*.

Neil keeps moving... until he comes to the edge of a **CRATER**. He surveys it. Deep and vast, it's like nothing we've seen.

BUZZ (COMMS)

Neil, we need to get back.

A beat. Then Neil **UNZIPS** a pocket in the front of his suit. He reaches in, pulls out a few items and looks down at them.

An **APOLLO 1 PATCH - GRISSOM WHITE CHAFFEE. ELLIOT'S SEXTANT.** And finally a **SMALL BRACELET.** That of a little girl.

PUSH IN on Neil's eyes, on the PAIN. A beat, then Neil **THROWS** the three tokens far as he can...

Off Neil, watching them soar on and on and on...

INT. LUNAR MODULE - LATER

Neil and Buzz stand in the LM, the hatch closed, brushing each other off. Moon dust swirls, slowly falling to the floor. At last, they take off their helmets... and start **COUGHING**.

The COUGHING takes us to...

INT. LUNAR MODULE - LATER

Neil preps for liftoff in his flight suit, still COUGHING.

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)

ATT Control, 2 minutes to... for the guidance steering in the AGS.

NEIL (INTO COMMS)

On. Right?

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)

Right. Master arm, Engine arm on?

Neil pauses. Buzz sees Neil examining the engine arm switch. It's **BROKEN**. Just a small stub. **Shit**.

NEIL
Must've hit it when I got out. MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)
One minute to launch.

If they can't fix it, they can't get off the moon.

Buzz STARES. **Shit shit shit**. Neil bends down, examines the stub. Buzz eyes the clock. **50 seconds... 45 seconds...**

NEIL
You got a pen?

Takes Buzz a moment, then he floats a PEN over to Neil. Neil grabs it, jams it beside the stub. And pulls... Nothing.

NEIL MIKE COLLINS (COMMS)
Dammit. *30 seconds.*

A tense beat. Neil tries again. And again...

MIKE COLLINS
20 seconds.

Fuck. Neil **SHOVES** the pen in deeper... and **PULLS**...

...until at last we hear a **CLICK**. The light FLASHES. **ENGINE ARMED**. Buzz takes a breath, his face FLOODING with relief.

NEIL
Got your ascent card?

Recovering, Buzz preps for launch. Neil does too, but his focus is FARAWAY, eyes **LINGERING** on the lunar horizon...

BUZZ (INTO COMMS)
15... 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, abort stage
- engine arm, ascent, proceed...

Neil **HITS** the thrusters. DUST kicks up as the ship **ROCKS BACK AND FORTH**, lifting off the surface... casting a **LONG SHADOW** as it slowly rises above the moon...

BUZZ
Look at that shadow. Beautiful!

HOLD ON Neil's eyes, watching the moon fall away. As we do, we hear familiar voices from a television broadcast...

WALTER CRONKITE (O.C.)
*It may not be a beauty one can pass
on to future beholders.*
(MORE)

WALTER CRONKITE (O.C.)
*These first men on the moon can see
 something that men who follow will
 miss...*

PUSH IN on Neil. Staring out at the moon.

ERIC SEVAREID (O.C.)
*Yes, we're always going to feel,
 somehow, strangers to these men.*

Off Neil, we **CUT TO** --

EXT. USS HORNET, NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN - JULY 24, 1969

A ship of men, watch, excited, as the Apollo Capsule
 parachutes down from the skies...

ERIC SEVAREID (O.C.)
*They will, in effect be a bit
 stranger... even to their own wives
 and children...*

EXT. APOLLO 11 CAPSULE, NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN - LATER

Neil, Buzz and Mike, covered in **FULL BODY CONTAMINATION SUITS**,
 are helped out of the floating capsule and onto a small skiff.

ERIC SEVAREID (O.C.)
*...disappeared into another life
 that we can't follow.*

INT. USS HORNET, NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN - LATER THAT WEEK

The men, in contamination suits, are walked across a lower
 deck to the **QUARANTINE AIRSTREAM** that awaits. The enter it.

ERIC SEVAREID (O.C.)
*I wonder what their life will be
 like, now.*

APOLLO 11 QUARANTINE AIRSTREAM MONTAGE

The **QUARANTINE AIRSTREAM** is moved onto an **ARMY TRUCK**...

ERIC SEVAREID (O.C.)
The moon treated them well...

From **ARMY TRUCK** to **AIR FORCE PLANE**...

ERIC SEVAREID (O.C.)
*How people on earth will treat these
 men, the rest of their lives...*

From **AIR FORCE PLANE** to **ANOTHER AIR FORCE TRUCK**...

ERIC SEVAREID (O.C.)
*That gives me more foreboding, I
 think, than anything else...*

...and at last to the **MSC QUARANTINE FACILITY**.

INT. TOWN CAR (MOVING) - HOUSTON, TX - DAY

ON JANET. In back, staring out the window. As the car pulls ahead, we hear a **DULL ROAR**. Janet's eyes **WIDEN**. **REVERSE TO --**

THE MSC ENTRANCE. A **THRONG OF PEOPLE** around a **HUGE DISPLAY** of FLOWERS and SIGNS, the pride **PALPABLE**. Janet **TEARS UP**.

FLIGHT SURGEON (**PRELAP**)
 We'll keep them in quarantine for
 the full three weeks --

INT. HALLWAY, QUARANTINE FACILITY, MSC - JULY 28, 1969 - DAY

A FLIGHT SURGEON leads Janet down a lackluster hall.

FLIGHT SURGEON (O.C.)
 ...but none of the tests have shown
 any sign of infection or disease.

They reach a door, an ARMY GUARD. Janet's escort hands him papers and the guard opens the door. They walk into --

INT. QUARANTINE PRESS ROOM, MCC - CONTINUOUS

The NASA logo. And a GLASS WALL. On the other side of it, in a large room, Neil stands in a flight suit. Alone.

Janet, relieved, walks to the glass. Neil looks at her, but his eyes are **FARAWAY**. Impossibly distant. Janet **TIGHTENS**.

HOLD ON the two of them, as far apart as they've ever been.

INT. ASTRONAUT LOUNGE, QUARANTINE FACILITY, MSC - LATER

CLOSE ON a SEA of MAGAZINES and NEWSPAPERS: **TIME, LIFE**, the **NEW YORK TIMES...** All with front page coverage of Apollo 11.

FIND BUZZ hovering over it all, staring at a TV. **MESMERIZED**. Neil walks in. Glances at the TV, reporters asking people where they were when Apollo 11 landed on the moon.

BUZZ
 Have you seen this? Can you believe
 it? The entire world was watching.
 We missed the whole damn thing.

Buzz shakes his head. He looks **LOST**. Off Neil, processing...

EXT. QUARANTINE FACILITY, MSC - AUGUST 10, 1969, NIGHT (9PM)

Three BLACK CARS parked in front of the building. Doors open and Mike, Buzz and Neil exit with duffels, MILITARY ESCORTS.

The men BREATHE IN the fresh air... then walk to the cars.

INT. TOWN CAR (MOVING), MSC GATE - NIGHT

Neil sits in back, quiet, as the car pulls up to the MSC gate. The escort beside him rolls down the window, hands papers to a GUARD. He starts to wave them through... but can't resist.

GUARD

Mr. Armstrong, you make us proud.

Neil nods, AWKWARD. The escort rolls up the window and the driver pulls forward. A beat, then...

ESCORT

He's right, you're a real hero. I bet you're the most famous man in the world.

Neil gives the escort a tight smile, his eyes **TICKING** to a NEWS VAN that starts to tail them. Off Neil, **TENSE, CUT TO --**

EXT./INT. TOWN CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

The town car turns off the main road into a suburban development. THREE NEWS VANS now follow behind.

INSIDE THE CAR Neil's ANTSY. The car turns a corner and we see... a **HUGE MEDIA CIRCUS**. TV trucks, reporters, fans camped out at Neil's house. Neil's jaw goes **TIGHT** as the car stops.

ESCORT

I'll clear a path.

The escort opens the door. Neil steps out and is **SWARMED... INUNDATED** with questions, **BLINDED** by an ARSENAL of CAMERAS.

PUSH IN on Neil as he presses through it, eyes down... until a **LITTLE GIRL** steps forward. With a model rocket. Neil **PAUSES**.

FATHER

Would you mind signing it for her?

Neil's eyes **TICK** from the girl to her father. A beat, then he takes the model. The reporters **QUIET**. One hands him a pen.

NEIL

Uh, what's your name?

GIRL
 ...it's Katherine.

Neil blinks at her. The WONDER in her eyes is oddly **DAUNTING**. Awkward, he signs the rocket. But when he hands it back...

MULTIPLE FANS
 (calling out)
 Can I get an autograph, Neil? / Can
 I get a picture, Mr. Armstrong?

Neil BLANCHES. The calls grow into a **ROAR**, TAKING US TO --

INT./EXT. CONVERTIBLE, NEW YORK CITY - AUGUST 13, 1969, 10AM

A RIVER of HUMANITY. A huge crowd gathered for the largest **TICKER TAPE PARADE** we've ever seen. The **DIN** is **DEAFENING**

New York City - August 13, 1969

Find Neil in an OPEN-TOP CONVERTIBLE with Buzz and Mike. Neil's eyes have **DARK CIRCLES** underneath; they **DART** from the crowds on the streets, to the men and women hanging out of building windows, tossing down stacks of IBM punch cards...

Buzz and Mike enjoy it more than Neil, but even they seem **OVERWHELMED**. Off Neil, smile **PLASTERED** to his face, **CUT TO --**

INT. CENTURY PLAZA HOTEL, BALLROOM - LA - AUGUST 13, 1969

A packed ballroom. Black tie. President Nixon, forty odd Governors, Hollywood Stars and dozens of other dignitaries. A gala to end all galas. Everyone **GIDDY** in anticipation.

From BEHIND the empty head table, we see GOVERNOR RONALD REAGAN clink his glass into the mic at the rostrum.

GOVERNOR REAGAN (O.C.)
 Ladies, Gentlemen, I understand our
 guests of honor have just arrived.
 If you'll take your seats...

As the crowd sits, we **PUSH INTO --**

INT. GREEN ROOM, CENTURY PLAZA HOTEL - SAME TIME

Neil, Buzz, Mike and their wives stand, waiting to be introduced. Neil is at the back, **SWEATING** now.

DEKE
 Who wants a beer?

Deke walks in with beers for the men.

GOVERNOR REAGAN (O.C.)
*How about a California welcome for
 Command Module Pilot Mike Collins!*

MIKE COLLINS
 Put mine on ice, will ya?

As Mike heads off, Deke pulls Neil off to one side.

DEKE
 Everything okay?

NEIL
 I got the itinerary. 25 countries?

DEKE
 The whole damn world wants to give
 you guys a hug.

NEIL
 When can we get back to work?

DEKE
 This is work.

NEIL
 Deke. When are we going back up
 again?

DEKE
 Neil... you're a symbol now. We
 can't risk losing you up there.

Neil stares. Realizing that he's permanently grounded.

GOVERNOR REAGAN (O.C.)
*And now, the man you've been waiting
 for, the first man to walk on the
 moon, Neil Armstrong!*

As the crowd breaks out in applause and cheers, Neil,
DEVASTATED, walks into --

INT. CENTURY PLAZA HOTEL, BALLROOM, LA - CONTINUOUS

As the cheers SWELL, **PUSH IN** on Neil, in front of the crowd,
 only now realizing he's made the greatest sacrifice of all.

As he nods to the crowd, **NUMB**, the isolation now complete...

FADE OUT.