

SPACE FORCE

Episode 101

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First Draft

CLOSE ON MARK NAIRD - DAY

GENERAL MARK NAIRD has a 4th star pinned to his breast by the SECRETARY OF DEFENSE. A proud moment.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
There is no military rank higher
except Commander in Chief, the
President of the United States.

INT. PENTAGON BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Reveal we are in a small basement room. The two or three people in attendance applaud. Mark starts his speech.

MARK
It's always been my dream to run a
service branch. I've been shot
down, literally and figuratively,
but I've always gotten back up.

The Secretary of Defense makes a hurry-up motion.

MARK (CONT'D)
My old CO used to say, the most
valuable asset in an F-35 -- and
that's a 100 million dollar plane --
is the pilot. In Bosnia, when I was
eating bugs--

The SecDef makes the hurry-up motion more urgently.

MARK (CONT'D)
There's so much more I could say,
but we have work to do.
(choked up)
I wish my parents could be here to
see this. But they couldn't get
flights from New Jersey in time.
Maggie, Erin, this is a Naird
family team win!

Naird's wife MAGGIE and daughter ERIN clap. Naird joins them.

ERIN
I don't get it, Dad. When you made
3 star, we had a hundred guests and
a band.

MARK
Different administration, bug. This
is one is more... chaotic. Dynamic.

MAGGIE

What do you think happened to Kick?
Fired, resigned or me-tooed?

MARK

I don't know. But you know Kick, he
has so many principles it must have
been resigned.

Maggie snorts.

MAGGIE

Well, Air Force Chief's house in
Georgetown is gorgeous and comes
with a staff.

ERIN

I'm so proud of you, Dad.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

C'mon General, Joint Chiefs in five
minutes.

Mark makes a wish-me-luck face to his family and follows the
Secretary out.

INT. PENTAGON HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Outside the Joint Chiefs meeting Mark runs into KICK
GRABASTON, AIR FORCE CHIEF OF STAFF.

MARK

Kick?

KICK

Get lost, Naird. This is for 4
stars.

MARK

Like me. They didn't tell you? Or
did you forget, like you "forgot"
to get competitive bidding for the
AT-6B?

KICK

Tell me what? That you wear a
dress? I knew that already.

MARK

Offensive, and out-of-date. But I
don't have to listen anymore. Enjoy
retirement, Kick.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

Now you can marry all the industry
lobbyists you've been sleeping
with, you lazy hack.

INT. JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They go into the Joint Chiefs Meeting Room, which has a huge circular table at which are seated the Chiefs of the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard, all 4 star generals. Kick and Mark find seats.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

POTUS wants to make some changes.
He's tweeting about it
(checks watch)

In five minutes, so let's hope you like it. I want to welcome newest 4-star General Mark Naird, formerly number two at Air Force, who has done an amazing job and has a most distinguished career.

KICK

Eh.

MARK

(annoyed)
Why is Kick still in the room?

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Our nation's internet including Twitter runs through our vulnerable space satellites, and POTUS wants total space dominance. Boots on the moon by 2024. To that end, the President is creating a new branch called Space Force--

MARK

(rolls eyes)
Pfft.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

That Mark will run.

MARK

What?

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

In close cooperation with Air Force, which Kick will still head.

Mark is stunned.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (CONT'D)

This is not a joke. His words.
"Boots on the moon."

KICK

This is bullshit! Space is part of
the Air. Naird works for me!

NAVY

Hang on. I don't think there's air
in space.

KICK

There certainly isn't any fucking
water, so you don't get an opinion.

ARMY

Air Force used to be just a part of
Army, Kick. I'd like to stuff you
both back in.

MARINES

If there's no air or water, two
questions: what is it exactly and
two, it's invisible, right?

COAST GUARD

At least Coast Guard isn't last in
line anymore.

All the Joint Chiefs exchange a knowing look.

MARK

(to Coast Guard)
You're still last.

INT. NAIRD HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mark is awake in the middle of the night staring at his
future. He gets out of bed, makes his side of the bed until
you can bounce a quarter, then goes and pees and returns and
gets in.

MAGGIE

How are you handling this? You were
looking forward to Air Force, and
you're not the most flexible
person.

MARK

I can be flexible when I'm ordered
to be.

Reveal his ramrod back is supporting his head above the bed without a pillow.

MARK (CONT'D)

Am I disappointed? I was. But as I was walking out of the Pentagon, I passed a painting.

FLASHBACK

Mark stares at an oil painting. It reads: "John Paul Jones, Founder of the US Navy." Mark is moved, and something in his face becomes determined.

BACK TO SCENE

MARK

Founder of the Space Force. That's going to be me. That's bigger than being the 26th C-SAF. This is my chance to make something from the ground up, something special.

MAGGIE

Don't you have to use pieces from Air Force and NASA?

MARK

I will turn it into something new. Something beautiful. I'm going to build a brand new base.

MAGGIE

Ugh. With DC real estate the way it is, you'll be lucky to be this side of Dulles airport.

MARK

It's not going to be in DC. We're going to Colorado.

MAGGIE

What?!

MARK

An up and coming state. You and Erin are going to love it. Amazon almost put their new headquarters there, that's how cool it is.

(John Wayne accent)

We could even learn to ride. Whaddaya say, pardner?

FADE TO BLACK

Chyron: One year later. Wild Horse, Colorado.

FADE BACK UP:

CLOSE ON: a picture of the moon on the wrapper of a Moon Pie.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Mark is standing in a gas station convenience store in the middle of nowhere. He looks at the pastry and decides to pass. He pays for his coffee.

CLERK
Big launch today, huh?

MARK
(stiffens)
Launch?

CLERK
On the new base.

MARK
What base?

CLERK
Oh yeah. It's a "secret." If I told
ya, I'd haveta kill ya.

Off Mark's unamused face.

EXT. DESERT - LATER

Credits roll under shots of Mark driving his Buick LaCrosse out of the tiny one street town deep into the desert, passing John Ford classic American western mesas, pulling off the highway, passing signs saying "road washed out" and "turn back" and coming to a DoorKing box at the end of a long dirt road. He types in a code and we see a view of buttes and mesas is painted onto a wall, that rolls aside and he drives onto the base. Behind the wall, the base is teeming with new construction, and half-finished cool buildings suggestive of high tech purposes.

MARK
(to base guard)
There's a guy in my trunk. Hold him
'til after the launch please.

We hear the pounding now.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - DAY

Mark walks in past his secretary, Brad Gregory, who is a 1-star general.

BRAD
Big launch today.

MARK
(grumble)

Mark motions and Brad hands him his schedule.

BRAD
The Congressional delegation will be arriving for lunch; you have to speak for ten minutes at the local high school, don't worry there's a new copter pilot, you'll be in and out in no time; and the launch at 5 to be live on the East Coast. It's a light day, you can start at the gym.

Just as Mark goes into his office, Brad blurts out.

BRAD (CONT'D)
And Dr. Mallory is waiting for you, he said not to say anything.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Head science advisor, Dr. Adrian MALLORY is sitting at Mark's desk.

MALLORY
We should cancel this launch.

MARK
No. Senator Schugler, Piloti and the angry young congresswoman are coming. They need to see a success to keep the funding.

MALLORY
I wouldn't define "success" as a 6 billion dollar piece of hardware breaking up over Denver.

MARK

That's not going to happen.

MALLORY

Look, I hate to pull rank, but I order you to postpone the launch. There is too much moisture in the air, we prefer a less ionized environment.

MARK

Adrian, you're a civilian advisor, and we're always going to have to accept some risk. The conditions will never be perfect.

MALLORY

They're supposed to be perfect tomorrow.

MARK

The delegation will be back in Washington tomorrow.

MALLORY

When I hired you--

MARK

I hired you--

MALLORY

I thought your best quality was your ability to listen to good advice. If you've lost that, we may have to look elsewhere.

MARK

Who's this we? I still think you ex-NASA get together and meet secretly.

MALLORY

That's above your pay grade.

MARK

(sigh)

Nothing on this base is above my pay grade, Adrian. I am the supreme ruler of this base.

MALLORY

Just postpone the launch, dear.

He hops up and leaves.

MARK

No!

INT. BASE GYM - LATER

Mark uses the leg machine with anger, pounding reps of 200 pounds.

MARK

Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen...

There is one extremely prominent vein pulsing in his forehead.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - LATER

Mark limps in past Brad.

BRAD

So no launch today I hear.

MARK

No. Launch is still on.

BRAD

Oh. I'll have to tell the base biologist, she has to collect all the endangered lizards within 600 yards of the launch site. I cancelled her after Mallory told me the launch was scrubbed.

MARK

Nobody can scrub anything but me.

Just as he goes into his office...

BRAD

Yuri's in there, he told me not to say anything.

Mark walks in to see a tall blond guy standing up from his desk. It appears he has been looking in the drawer.

YURI

(Russian accent)
... Do you keep breath mints anywhere?

MARK

What are you doing in here?

YURI
I heard launch was scrubbed.

MARK
No. That's not accurate, Yuri.

YURI
Call me Bobby, is more reassuring.
Can I see technical specifications
for the Epsilon part E-16f fuel
pump?

MARK
Why would you need to see that?

YURI
As observer from ISS partner
country, I just want to observe it.

MARK
No, that's weird. Just come to the
launch, observe that.

YURI
Your President desires close
cooperation and good relations
between US and Russia. C'mon, we're
not China here.

MARK
If the President tells me to show
it to you, fine.

YURI
Very well. Expect a text on the
secure phone.

MARK
How do you know about the secure
phone?

YURI
I don't know about the secure
phone.

MARK
You just said "secure phone."

YURI
No. I didn't say that..

MARK
You just did.

YURI

Oh, here they are.

He takes some mints out of his pocket and leaves.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY - A LITTLE LATER

Mark strides purposefully down the hall, limping slightly. Various people salute as he walks by. He gets a text on a weird red cellphone: "Show Bobby tech thing he wants to see. POTUS"

MARK

Hmmm.

He comes to a door marked "Army Liaison" and enters.

INT. CHAPPELLE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Army Liaison Dave Chappelle sits at a little desk playing on his phone.

CHAPPELLE

Yo!

(sits up)

General Naird.

MARK

We might have to scrub the Epsilon launch. Is Yellowjacket ready to show off?

CHAPPELLE

I doubt it.

MARK

For Chrissakes, they're a billion dollars and six months over.

CHAPPELLE

You're right. We should be able to see something. Let me make a call.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mark and Chappelle stride down a long deserted hall.

CHAPPELLE

Are you runnin--

MARK

No, keep up. Does Yellowjacket sound impressive enough though?

CHAPPELLE

First super-pressurized ultra-fast satellite-killer-killer missile? Fucking impressive to me. Joint Army-Space Force project, branch cooperation, civilian business applications, 100% manufactured in the US. Piloti's going to come in her pants.

MARK

Offensive.

CHAPPELLE

Withdrawn.

They get to a door marked "to observation room" and enter.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

It's a concrete pillbox with a thick small window. Mark looks out, Chappelle a half step behind him. Through the window we see a robot setting up a slim missile on a launch pad.

MARK

Looks good. Sleek. I like the yellow fins. You have enough to testfire one this afternoon too?

CHAPPELLE

Yes sir.

MARK

Let's do it.

CHAPPELLE

(into a walkie)
Go time.

EXT. OBSERVATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Looking at the window from outside, Mark and Chappelle are visible looking out, and the missile is visible in the reflection. The missile ignites, then after a beat, streams fire out a side seam, and spins around squirting fire everywhere. Mark watches this disaster stoically from inside. The vein on his forehead throbbing slightly. The missile explodes, scorching the outside of the observation room.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mark and Chappelle wince.

MARK

All right. That's not ready. How much was that prototype?

CHAPPELLE

Four.

MARK

Million?

CHAPPELLE

Middle schools. It cost as much as four new middle schools.

MARK

Fuck.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mark walks quickly back, Chappelle trying to keep up. Mark starts actually jogging.

CHAPPELLE

You are running.

MARK

Keep up!

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - DAY - LATER

He limps in.

BRAD

So I hear we're going with Yellowjacket this afternoon.

MARK

Nope.

BRAD

(into phone)

Sorry Sheila, still have to grab those lizards.

(after Mark)

Oh, Fuck Tony's in there...

(missed Mark)

Nevermind.

Mark enters his office to find FUCK TONY, his social media consultant lounging on a guest chair checking his phone.

MARK

Brad? Why doesn't anyone want to hang out out there with you?

FUCK TONY

Morning, General. I have your daily tweet ready for your review.

He shows him the phone. Mark reads it.

MARK

I don't get it.

FUCK TONY

(sigh)

Okay, well you know there's a new Star Wars out, right? And Wendy's has a new hamburger that they're serving rare, that's the gimmick.

MARK

So I'm saying if we had a light sabre I'd use it to cook their hamburger better? What does that have to do with the mission?

FUCK TONY

It's culturally relevant.

MARK

How is being snarky about a fast food hamburger culturally anything? Do you understand what the word culture means? I refuse to believe we've sunk this low as a country. And I am actually putting boots on the moon. Boots on the moon. A laser sword is a Halloween toy.

FUCK TONY

Light sabre.

MARK

You're fired.

FUCK TONY

Fine. Enjoy your three hundred thousand engineer followers. Oooh, such a big deal, you're a regular Billie Eilish.

MARK
Who's he again?

FUCK TONY
You're hopeless.

MARK
Your name is Fuck Tony. My name is
Four Star Space Force General Mark
Naird. Who's hopeless?

Fuck Tony leaves. Mark sticks his head out to talk to Brad.

MARK (CONT'D)
Brad, have Tony held until after
the launch. I don't want him
tweeting anything snarky.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Fuck Tony is on his phone and two guards grab him and march him in the other direction, taking his phone.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

A helicopter flies low and fast over the desert. SHEILA, the base biologist looks up as it goes overhead, then she notices a lizard and grabs it with her gloved hand, plunking it into a bag.

INT. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

ANGELA ALI, Black, 30s, is flying. Naird sits beside her. After a beat.

MARK
We're a little low don't you think?

ANGELA
I'm flying safely, sir, but I can
lift up if you like.

MARK
I'll leave it up to you.

Angela thinks for a beat, then flies a little higher.

ANGELA
Sir, you're rated for F-35s, aren't
you?

MARK
I believe I have flown every
Lockheed F-series.

ANGELA
Cool.

Mark smiles.

MARK
What's your name?

ANGELA
First Class Angela Ali, sir.

MARK
Air Force or Space Force?

ANGELA
Space Force, sir.

MARK
You don't like to use your full
title.

ANGELA
Sorry, sir. Spaceman First Class
Angela Ali.

MARK
There's nothing to be ashamed of.
The Air Force has Airmen, Space
Force has Spacemen. There's nothing
embarrassing or comical about it.

Beat.

ANGELA
Yes, sir.

MARK
Where are you from, Spaceman?

ANGELA
Hawaii, sir.

MARK
Mmm. Beautiful state.

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - A LITTLE LATER

The helicopter lands in the playyard.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - A LITTLE LATER

Mark is winding up an inspiring speech to a bunch of high school seniors. A screen is projecting images behind him. Earth from the Moon.

MARK

This is the only planet in the universe that we have found that supports life. This view from the moon is spiritual to me. Americans are the only people to have landed and taken this picture. And we are going back. Not for science this time, not for experiments, not just to say we've done it. But to occupy. Boots on the moon.

Two seniors, Connor and Owen, glance at each other, impressed. Naird's daughter Erin rolls her eyes. She looks very different from the first scene, pierced nose, etc.

MARK (CONT'D)

And although this is a joint mission with our international allies, they will be US boots, not Chinese. Boots on US feet, I mean. I can't guarantee where they were made. And any high school senior who enlists as a Junior Spaceman for 4 years gets thirty five thousand dollars for college. Is there a base in this town near your school? Maybe, maybe not. Enlist in Space Force and find out.

LATER

Erin comes up to Mark.

ERIN

I need a hundred dollars. Bobby is taking me into the desert to a pop-up concert.

MARK

Um, no. That's not happening.

ERIN

Dad, it's fine. Give me the money.

MARK

No.

ERIN
You know him. You work with him.

MARK
Bobby who?

ERIN
Bobby Telatovich.

MARK
Yuri?! He's twenty years older than you! That's the Bobby you've been seeing? Jesus Christ.

ERIN
He's really sweet.

MARK
Absolutely not.

ERIN
You can't stop me. I'm 18. It wasn't my idea to come to this shithole.

MARK
(glances at other students)
I have never called this town a shithole. This is a fine town.

ERIN
I'm going with or without you. I guess if I have no money, I will be totally reliant on Bobby, have to do whatever he says.

MARK
I'll talk it over with Mommy.

ERIN
You do that.

INT. HELICOPTER - A LITTLE LATER

Mark hands a slip of paper to Angela.

MARK
We have to make a stop. These are the GPS coordinates, there's a pad.

ANGELA
Yes, sir.

EXT. COMPOUND - DAY

The helicopter lands on a pad inside a compound behind barbed wire.

INT. COMPOUND - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Mark goes down a hall, and passes through security where he is x-rayed.

INT. VISITOR'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mark sits in a prison visitor room. On the other side of the glass, he watches Maggie, in an orange jumpsuit and wrist and ankle chains, be led across from him. A guard shackles her to the desk and walks off. They put their hands up on either side of the glass.

MARK

Hi.

MAGGIE

Hi.

MARK

How are you doing? Are you eating okay?

MAGGIE

Yeah. They're letting me grow radishes in a window box and I can eat them pretty much whenever I want. And there's a guard, Louise, she slips me extra food sometimes.

MARK

(voice catching)
You look good. I miss you so much.

MAGGIE

Mark, if you need... companionship, I'm going to be here a long time, I'll underst--

MARK

No! I am your husband, I will always be your husband.

MAGGIE

I'm just saying I would under--

MARK

Absolutely not. Don't bring it up again. I can wait, no matter how long it takes.

MAGGIE

How's Erin?

MARK

She wants to go to some concert in the desert with an older Russian man who's probably using her to get information.

MAGGIE

Well, eighteen is an age where you make some mistakes and figure some things out.

MARK

So you think I should let her go?

MAGGIE

I don't see how you can stop her. Louise says, when you can't do anything about a situation, might as well lean back and let it happen.

MARK

Hmm.

MAGGIE

Flexibility. I'm ordering you.

They smile at each other through the glass.

INT. HELICOPTER - LATER

Mark checks his watch.

MARK

Oh nuts, I'm late. Set me down next to the BX please.

ANGELA

I can't do that sir. I have to land on the designated pad.

MARK

I'm telling you you can do it, so you can do it.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

If I piss off this congressional delegation, it can compromise the mission.

ANGELA

It's only another hundred yards, sir. You will do great with the delegation, even if you're a minute late.

She sets down on the helicopter pad. Mark frowns.

MARK

We don't have an official motto yet, but I was considering "Above and Beyond." Spaceman, that was not conduct befitting that potential motto.

He runs out and runs down the tarmac, holding his hat on his head. Angela looks a little worried -- did she do the right thing?

EXT. BASE - CONSTRUCTION SITE

Mark runs past a weird-looking building under construction. KELLY, a fit woman in her 40s in a construction hat, is supervising.

KELLY

General? General! Hey, Naird!

She gets his attention and he slows down as he passes.

MARK

Late for a meeting with congress, Kelly.

KELLY

General, I ran the numbers and I can't put the bowling alley under the cyclotron unless the bowling alley is curved. And I don't see how that would work, really.

MARK

Just do it! Get it done. I have complete confidence in you!

He keeps running. Kelly shrugs.

INT. BASE RESTAURANT - DAY

Mark eats with the congressional delegation. All around the room are TVs playing a view of Earth from the space station.

SCHUGLER

What's good here?

MARK

Try the tuna roll.

PITOSI

In Colorado. Wow. I wonder how much taxpayers are paying to fly sushi in to nowhere Colorado.

MARK

It's a canned tuna fish pinwheel.

PITOSI

... I knew that. It was a joke.

AYC

But with a grain of truth. Kick Grabaston at Air Force told us confidentially this base was a complete waste of money.

MARK

Well, Kick would know about that. He never met a handout to a defense contractor he didn't like.

SCHUGLER

According to the General Accounting Office, in the last six years Air Force had the best record of successful trials.

MARK

For five of those I was in charge of the trials. We are on track here. Epsilon will launch today at 5, in time for east coast news to carry it live.

AYC

Epsilon is the new spacecraft fighter, right?

MARK

That is correct.

AYC

What kind of armament will it have on board? Laser cannon? Pulse weapon?

MARK

I believe those are from Star Wars. I tell you what, though, if we had a laser cannon, we'd use it to cook Wendy's hamburgers.

They stare at him. He shrugs it off.

MARK (CONT'D)

The Epsilon is equipped with a kinetic disably system.

AYC

Meaning?

MARK

It can eject a metal net. We're hoping to get the net to tangle with enemy satellites.

SCHUGLER:

Exploding them?

MARK

Tangling them.

The delegation exchanges a look.

PITOSI

This better be one fucking flawless launch.

AYC

Six billion for a net. Not a good look.

MARK

It's more than a net, it's a new propulsion system and new landing software. When we put it all together, we will have net dominance in Space. Metal net.

Mark's phone goes off.

MARK (CONT'D)

Oh boy. Excuse me a moment.

He steps away from the table.

MARK (CONT'D)
Dad, is everything okay?

INT. NAIRD HOME - NUTLEY, NEW JERSEY - DAY

FRED NAIRD, (with luck played by an ex-astronaut, with extra luck Buzz Aldrin), stands in the doorway of a small suburban house looking out.

FRED
Yeah, only your mom's run off again. I can't see her. I'd run after her but I think I had a small heart attack this morning, I'm feeling a little draggy.

MARK (V.O.)
Is the caretaker there? Put the caretaker on.

FRED
He wants to talk to you.

He hands the phone to an anxious Haitian woman, CHERISE.

CHERISE
Oh god, I don't know what to do, your father should be in the hospital, your mama she's in the street somewhere in her nightgown, can you come home and help me?

INT. BASE RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

MARK
Wish I could, Cherise, but I'm having quite a day myself. Hang on a moment okay?
(calls on other line)
Brad, I need you to task the satellite again over Nutley. Four block radius. Nightgown...

EXT. OUTER SPACE - CONTINUOUS

A camera lens on a satellite adjusts its direction and focusses.

BACK TO SCENE

MARK

Hang on Cherise, get dad in the car, I'm going to give you an address shortly...

(switches over)

Anything? Okay, great.

(switches over)

Cherise, she's in the RiteAid parking lot. Text me when she's back in the house, okay?

He hangs up and sits down with the politicians. (Behind him for a few seconds, all the tvs are playing an overhead shot of an old woman in her nightgown in a parking lot. AYC notices.)

MARK (CONT'D)

Lost an important asset for a minute but she has been recovered.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Sheila the biologist is throwing lizards out of her bag and back into the environment, where they scurry away.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

Mark kicks open the door and slumps on his couch exhausted. Dr. Mallory is sitting at his desk.

MALLORY

I cancelled the launch.

Mark looks stressed; he rubs his temples.

MARK

Adrian...

MALLORY

It's a six billion dollar decision. We can't risk it.

MARK

It's a lot for a scientist, but in the military we have to risk lives.

MALLORY

At 50 grand a year, it would take 120,000 years to earn 6 billion, not counting little expenses like food. That's the entire working lives of 3 thousand people. How's that for perspective? How many times can a country waste the lifetime earnings of thousands of people before something really bad happens?

MARK

Are you still mad about the button covers?

FLASHBACK

Mark is in a conference room going over bills with Mallory.

MARK

A thousand dollars for plastic button covers? No. That's insane.

CUT TO:

In the big launch room, Mark leans back in his chair and pushes a button by mistake.

MARK (CONT'D)

So you think we'll be ready in four mon--shit.

Through a window we see a rocket surrounded by people ignite. Workers jump off the scaffolding as it burns and falls over.

BACK TO SCENE

MALLORY

Just come to the launch site and let us show you.

MARK

Fine.

EXT. LAUNCH SITE - DAY

Dr. Mallory and 8 scientists are showing Mark the scorched earth launch site. Scientist CHAN has a heavy Chinese accent.

While he speaks, Mark crouches and touches the ground, crumbles the dirt in his fingers, sniffs the wind, examines the one or two clouds in the sky and basically pretends to be conducting an inspection of the site.

CHAN

Proper humidity for launch is under 40%. Today it is 54%. This can affect oxygenation and fuel burn.

MARK

Mmmm.

CHAN

Amount of fuel is measured very precisely. If fuel is insufficient, rocket return to earth without reaching orbit. Any questions?

MARK

Where are you from, Chan?

CHAN

Ohio.

MARK

Originally?

MALLORY

What does that have to do with anything? Are you suggesting Chan is a Chinese spy?

MARK

Pfft. Of course not. Pfft. Why did that even enter your head? But if you see something, say something. That goes for all of you, just a good habit. Well, we've heard from Mr. Chan.

CHAN

Doctor.

MARK

Doctor Chan. I'd like to hear another point of view. Someone willing to dissent from the party line. Who wants to offer the reasons to launch?

Nobody says anything.

MARK (CONT'D)

So I can weigh the pros and cons
and make my own decision. Anybody?
Don't you have any mavericks on
your team, Mallory?

VOICE OC

I say launch!

MARK

Great! And you are Doctor...?

Reveal it was a crazy-eyed disheveled maintenance guy.

MAINTENANCE GUY

Just call me Eddie. Ain't no
doctor, though I go to bunch of
'em.

MALLORY

Okay. So in favor of postponement
are me and Dr. Chan, Dr. Swedberg,
Dr. Bohr, Dr. Herzog, Dr. Yamato,
Dr. Lowenstein, Dr. Washington and
Dr. Zisk. In favor of launch are
you and Eddie. Any last name,
Eddie?

EDDIE

None I'd care to mention.

Mark thinks for a beat, the vein pulsing in his forehead. He
notices something and startles.

MARK

What are you holding behind your
back, Chan?

CHAN

Umbrella. What you think? Sword
cane? AK-47? You want to examine?

MARK

No, that's fine. Well, we're done
here.

He runs back to his helicopter.

MALLORY

So, the launch is scrubbed, right?

MARK

I can't hear you above the rotors!

INT. HELICOPTER - LATER

Mark sits lost in thought. Angela eyes him.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Mark walks down the hall. He comes upon a Lieutenant NOVAK on a cell phone with his back to him.

NOVAK

He's blowing it, like you thought.

It's a complete shitshow.

Novak turns and sees Mark listening, and reacts the tiniest amount. He smiles at Mark and covers the phone.

NOVAK (CONT'D)

(to Mark)

My dry cleaners. They lost my dress whites. What a shitshow.

Mark narrows his eyes and walks past.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM

He enters to find the Congressional delegation in the waiting room.

SCHUGLER

Is this happening or not? If not, there's no point us hanging around.

MARK

Excuse me a moment, Congresspeople. Brad, no interruptions for five minutes.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

He stands by the window, rubbing his temples, looking like he might stroke out. He takes some deep breaths, and then, oddly, starts singing the BeeGees' "To Love Somebody" in falsetto.

MARK

There's a light, a certain kind of light, that never shone on me. I want my life to be, lived with you, lived with you.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

There's a way, everybody say, to do each and every little thing. But what does it bring, if I ain't got you?

Hey, yeah, you don't know what it's like, Baby, you don't know what it's like, to love somebody, to love somebody, the way I love you.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM

Mark bursts out of his office.

MARK

The launch is on. See you at 5.

He strides out of the hall. Brad picks up the phone.

BRAD

Sheila, it's back on.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUOUS

Sheila the biologist runs around frantically grabbing as many lizards as she can, with one eye on the horizon where the giant rocket simmers.

INT. LAUNCH ROOM - 4:52 PM

The congressional delegation, all the base characters and various assembled dignitaries have gathered to watch the launch.

MARK

When I was a child, during the cold war, our country, the oldest democracy in the world, put a man on the moon. It might have been our greatest moment up til that point, alongside our constitution and bill of rights. Today, we launch Epsilon 6, a collaborative effort between the scientists of the United States, Japan, Europe, Turkey, Israel, India and our old enemy, Russia. We are creating a new tiny moon of the earth that will orbit every 90 minutes and be visible from the ground as a glowing speck in the night sky. Amazing.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

And it will bring us one step closer to returning to the moon, and from there to Mars. There will be setbacks along the way, there are risks to any great endeavor, but greatness was never won without struggle and sacrifice. I am so damn proud of all of you.

(chokes up)

You guys! We're doing it!! We're really doing it!

Novak whispers to Chappelle next to him.

NOVAK

Oh my god, he is really on the edge.

MARK

With this button, I so launch...
Epsilon 6.

He presses a big button.

Mallory opens a plastic cover and presses the real button.

EXT. LAUNCH SITE - CONTINUOUS

The burners fire and the giant Epsilon rocket quivers on the pad. The onlookers, including news cameras, watch intently. The launch chains fall away and slowly the enormous rockets start to lift off.

In the reflection of the launch window, Mark watches the majestic lift off with awe and gratitude.

Various beauty shots of Epsilon 6 taking off, with power and grace.

Everyone watches it rise up and disappear into the sky, hesitant to clap. Finally it's up and away.

MARK

Dr. Mallory? Did it blow up?

MALLORY

Not yet.

Brad starts to applaud. Gradually the room starts to applaud. Schugler, Pitosi and AYC look impressed. Mark is all smiles.

INT. ANGELA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Angela climbs the stairs to her apartment, bone tired. She is on the cell phone with her mom.

ANGELA

He'll probably transfer me tomorrow when he has a moment to think about it, but what was I supposed to do? You put a whirlybird down in the wrong spot and someone could get his head removed. Hang on, Mom.

She notices a pineapple on her doorstep. Curious she picks it up and reads the card.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

(reading)

"Sorry I snapped at you. Glad you're on the team. 4 Star Space Force General Naird."

Angela looks less tired.

EXT. NAIRD HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Mark and Mallory sit on the porch with cigars and scotch.

MALLORY

I don't really get it. You were right. But you don't know shit about science.

MARK

I know a little about people. There were two tiny clouds in the sky, and Chan brought an umbrella. Someone like that can't handle any risk at all. We'll never get to the moon again thinking that way.

MALLORY

(looks at him with a bit more respect)

Hmm. Good observation and well-reasoned. Hey, Epsilon should be passing overhead any second. Can you see it?

Mark gets up and behind a nice old telescope. He squints at the sky.

MARK
There! That spark.

MALLORY
That's it. It's beautiful.

Mark bends to the telescope.

TELESCOPE VIEW

He finds the Epsilon, a beautiful satellite with a blinking light and a US flag and delicate solar panels.

MALLORY (V.O.)
Wait, there's another spark...

Behind the Epsilon suddenly looms a larger satellite with the flag of China. A robot arm extends from the Chinese satellite and delicately snaps off the solar panels from the Epsilon like pulling the wings off a fly. The light on the Epsilon stops blinking and goes out. The giant Chinese satellite flies past.

EXT. NAIRD HOUSE - PORCH

MARK
Motherfucker!