

Moondoggle

written by

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OVER BLACK:

JOHN F. KENNEDY (V.O.) (ARCHIVAL)
Now it is time to take longer
strides -- time for a great new
American enterprise -- time for
this nation to take a clearly
leading role in space achievement,
which in many ways may hold the
key to our future on Earth.

SUPER: MAY 25, 1961

FADE IN:

EXT. U.S. CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY - ESTABLISHING

JOHN F. KENNEDY (V.O.) (ARCHIVAL)
I believe that this nation should
commit itself to achieving the
goal, before this decade is out,
of landing a man on the Moon and
returning him safely to the Earth.

INT. HALL OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

President Kennedy addresses all of Congress assembled.

JOHN F. KENNEDY
No single space project in this
period will be more impressive to
mankind, or more important in the
long-range exploration of space;
and none will be so difficult or
expensive to accomplish.

**EXT. RICE UNIVERSITY - FOOTBALL STADIUM - DAY
(ARCHIVAL)**

JOHN F. KENNEDY
We choose to go to the Moon.
(MORE)

JOHN F. KENNEDY (CONT'D)

We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.

SUPER: SEPTEMBER 12, 1962

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. NASA COMPLEX - OUTSIDE WASHINGTON, DC - LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM

(This is a fictional facility, a building complex on a campus somewhere in Maryland or Virginia.)

The live image of JFK in color turns into a b/w image on a television screen as we pull back. The television sits on a rolling metal utility cart standing in a utilitarian conference room lit by overhead fluorescent bulbs. On the walls are framed photos of various science people and things.

JOHN F. KENNEDY (ARCHIVAL)

(on screen)

And this will be done in the decade of the sixties. It may be done while some of you are still here at school at this college and university. It will be done during the term of office of some of the people who sit here on this platform. But it will be done. And it will be done before the end of this decade.

REVERSE ANGLE

At the conference table sit six men: the "Brain Trust." All of them are middle-aged, white, and clean-cut. Each man wears a dress shirt (some with short sleeves) and a solid-color tie. They all watch the television intently.

On the left side of the table are: WILLIAM GRAHAM, Deputy Administrator; JOHN YOUNG, Chief of the Astronaut Office; and MAX FROSCH, Director of Engineering and Development.

On the right side are: WERNHER von BRAUN, Chief Rocketeer; JUDSON LOVINGOOD, Director of Propulsion; and GEORGE HARDY, Director of Science.

At the head of the table, opposite the television: JAMES WEBB, Head of NASA.

Webb picks up an almost comically large piece of technology from the table, extends an antenna that reaches almost halfway to the television, presses a button, and... turns off the TV.

WEBB
 (seriously)
 Gentlemen.
 (beat)
 Thoughts?

A tense moment. Each of the other six men looks at his colleagues, then as one all burst out laughing. Some smack the table.

WEBB (CONT'D)
 Okay, okay. It's obvious that the President of the United States is talking out of a hole in his head.
 (beat)
 But he is the President, and he is our boss, so we have our marching orders. How do we put a man on the Moon inside of ten years?

FROSCH
 We can't. It can't be done. Twenty years, maybe.

HARDY
 Fifty.

FROSCH
 Split the difference.

GRAHAM
 This is a boondoggle.

VON BRAUN
 (heavily accented)
 What is a boondoggle?

GRAHAM
This is.

VON BRAUN
 Nein. What is a "boondoggle"?

LOVINGOOD

It's a political project of questionable merit that gives the appearance of having value.

HARDY

A huge waste of time and money, in other words.

VON BRAUN

So this would be a...

FROSCH

Exactly.

(beat)

A space boondoggle.

The other Americans nod and murmur in agreement.

WEBB

We have to try, all the same.

He goes around the table, pointing at each man.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Bill, form some committees. John, recruit us some flyboys. Max, design a ship. Wernher, make it go up. Judd, make it come back. George... do everything else.

(beat)

We'll reconvene in one week.

As the men all get up from the table, we

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

The sounds of busy people at computers. Cross-chatter. PINGS. BEEPS. Typing.

FADE IN:

INT. MANNED SPACE CENTER - HOUSTON, TX - MISSION CONTROL - DAY

Men and women wearing one-ear headsets are seated at tiered banks of terminals. Cups of coffee and bottles of aspirin everywhere. Large monitors on the far wall display myriad technical readouts, trajectories, and calculations.

A BURST OF STATIC comes over the loudspeaker and everyone in the room shuts up. They're all waiting to hear...

MALE ASTRONAUT #1 (V.O.)
 (over the speaker)
 Houston... the Seagull is on the
 sand.

The room erupts in a wild cheer, then immediately quiets down again.

ANGLE ON GENE KRANZ, Director of Flight Operations, standing back and center, elevated above nearly everyone else.

KRANZ
 All right, now, gentlemen... exit
 the module slowly. Remember, it's
 a series of very small steps.

MALE ASTRONAUT #1 (V.O.)
 Houston... I think I'm just gonna
 jump down.

KRANZ
 Negative, negative. We need to do
 this by the book. Use the ladder
 as rehearsed. Acknowledge.

MALE ASTRONAUT #2 (V.O.)
 Acknowledged, Houston. We will
 proceed from the lander to the
 surface by small steps.

MALE ASTRONAUT #1 (V.O.)
 No, I'm going to take the giant
 leap.

KRANZ
 (agitated)
 Captain Mann, take the small
 steps!

A moment of anticipation... then:

MALE ASTRONAUT #1 (V.O.)
 I am on the surface.
 (beat)
 I took the small steps.

Applause and relieved sighs in the room.

KRANZ
 Van Dyne? Can you confirm?

MALE ASTRONAUT #2 (V.O.)
 Confirmed, Houston. The
 commander's steps were small.
 (MORE)

MALE ASTRONAUT #2 (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Not very exciting, really.
 (beat)
 I'm gonna take the giant leap.

KRANZ
 Negative, Colonel --

A muffled thud on the speaker.

MALE ASTRONAUT #2 (V.O.)
 Houston, we are standing on the
 Moon.

Another great cheer goes up. Kranz drops into his chair. All is forgiven. He turns to the operator at the console next to him.

KRANZ
 (for posterity)
 So that was small steps for
 Mann... a giant leap for Van Dyne?

SUPER: 16:17 EST
 SUPER: JULY 20, 1963

The superimposed date and time fade off. The year remains behind a moment after the rest disappears.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. NASA COMPLEX - LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The Brain Trust is again assembled with Webb. The mood is exuberant.

WEBB
 We are off to the races,
 gentlemen.

GRAHAM
 Oh, I'm pretty sure we won the
 race, sir. Suck it, Sputnik!

YOUNG
 We're off to the stars. And in
 record time.

FROSCH
 We did the impossible.

WEBB

We did.

(with increasing fervor)

Now let's do it again. And again.
Let's go back, faster. Let's go
back and forth as fast as we can,
then let's go farther, then let's
go farther faster. Let's see just
how far and how fast we can ride
this space train before the wheels
come off.

Webb stops talking to take a breath. He sees that the other men
are staring at him.

VON BRAUN

The... wheels?

WEBB

You know what I mean.

EXT. NIGHT SKY - NIGHT

A full Moon fills the screen. An appropriate song plays,
perhaps Sinatra's "Fly Me to the Moon" or even R.E.M.'s "Man on
the Moon."

Nine small circles appear in sequence, indicating landing
sites, numbered 01, 02, 03....

INT. NASA COMPLEX - WEBB'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Webb and his aide, LITTLEGREEN (30s, always in a non-specific
military uniform), are in Webb's personal office, a comfortable
room with a large desk, chairs, model rockets, photos, etc.
There's more than one telephone on the desk. An analog clock on
the wall shows the time as 1:35 p.m.

Littlegreen helps as Webb places files and other papers into a
briefcase.

SUPER: NOVEMBER 22, 1963

LITTLEGREEN

Sir, we've been to the Moon, what,
nine times already? In just four
months?

WEBB

And two days.

LITTLEGREEN

Four months and two days. Why are we first telling the President about our success now?

WEBB

Well, he's been busy. He was in Germany for a bit. Then Ireland, I think. I've been busy, myself. Anyway, by the time I meet with him tonight, in person...

Webb looks at his wristwatch, then to the wall clock.

WEBB (CONT'D)

...we'll have landed on the Moon ten times. And ten sounds so much more impressive than nine. Ten is double digits.

(beat)

How's my tie?

Before Littlegreen can reply, a PHONE on the desk RINGS. Webb answers it.

WEBB

Go for Webb.

(beat)

Say again?

(beat)

Understood.

He replaces the handset slowly. He turns back to his aide. He loosens his necktie.

WEBB

(distracted)

My trip to Dallas has been scrubbed.

CUT TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

MONTAGE OF ITEMS SPINNING INTO FRAME

1963 NEWSPAPER HEADLINE:

KENNEDY ASSASSINATED - JOHNSON ASSUMES PRESIDENCY

INTERNAL NASA MEMO:

FROM: J. Webb

TO: All Staff

RE: MISSION TO MERCURY

1964 NEWSPAPER HEADLINE:
CIVIL RIGHTS ACT SIGNED

INTERNAL NASA MEMO:
FROM: J. Webb
TO: All Staff
RE: VOYAGE TO VENUS

1965 NEWSPAPER HEADLINE:
U.S. COMBAT TROOPS IN VIETNAM

INTERNAL NASA MEMO:
FROM: J. Webb
TO: All Staff
RE: MARS OR BUST

1966 NEWSPAPER HEADLINE:
LENNON SAYS BEATLES "MORE POPULAR THAN JESUS"

INTERNAL NASA MEMO:
FROM: J. Webb
TO: All Staff
RE: CERES PREMIERE

1967 NEWSPAPER HEADLINE:
DORITOS DEBUT!

INTERNAL NASA MEMO:
FROM: J. Webb
TO: All Staff
RE: JUMPIN' TO JUPITER

FADE OUT.

OVER BLACK:

VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKER
Tee minus five... four... three...
two... one...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. NASA COMPLEX - LARGE HANGAR - MIDNIGHT

A spacious hangar filled with NASA personnel, all dressed for a cocktail party. The hangar has dozens of very advanced ships in it, all retired and mounted behind velvet ropes.

CROWD
(loudly)
Happy new year!

CORKS POP. MUSIC PLAYS. Laughter, cheers, kisses. We wend our way around the room, passing men and women celebrating. Eventually, we find Webb at the bar. Littlegreen is behind the bar.

LITTLEGREEN
What'll it be sir?

WEBB
What's popular tonight?

LITTLEGREEN
The Cosmonaut.

Webb raises an eyebrow.

WEBB
I don't even want to know.
Bourbon. Neat.

Littlegreen serves Webb his drink in a whiskey glass, then produces a small stack of index cards from a pocket and offers them to Webb.

LITTLEGREEN
Just in case, sir.

Webb is about to ask what Littlegreen means when a chant begins behind him.

CROWD
Speech! Speech!

Now Webb nods at Littlegreen, understanding.

Webb makes his way to a standing microphone on one side of the hangar. The chanting dies down and Webb taps the microphone. He looks at the cards Littlegreen gave him, then pockets them.

WEBB
Thank you. Thank you all.
(beat)
As a young boy growing up in a very small town in a county with a profoundly embarrassing literacy rate, I never imagined that I would tell some of the smartest people around what to do.
(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

And because most of you brilliant men and women listen to me, most of the time, this great space agency has done the improbable and realized the fever dream of a scrawny, sickly, trust-fund kid from Boston whose name is now synonymous with an airport, a bridge, a highway, and a concert hall in this country, plus hundreds of streets, schools, libraries, and parks worldwide.

He raises his glass.

WEBB (CONT'D)

To J.F.K!

CROWD

To J.F.K!

VON BRAUN

Er war ein Berliner!

WEBB

Enjoy yourselves, my friends.
Tonight, NASA stands for "Nerds
and Stiff Alcohol"!

Generous applause.

Webb steps away from the microphone and heads toward a side door. He turns around, taking a last look at the party with satisfaction and pride.

FLASHBACK - EXT. TALLY HO, NC - TOWN LIMITS - NIGHT

It snows on Christmas Eve. A placard on a pole reads:
WELCOME TO TALLY HO, NORTH CAROLINA
Pop. 245

A secondary sign attached to the first depicts a pointy white hood with black eye holes and a speech balloon reading "A KLAN TOWN!"

EXT. WEBB HOME - NIGHT

The modest childhood home of Jimmy Webb (10), decorated modestly on the outside for the holiday. Through a window, we see a lit Christmas tree.

INT. WEBB HOME

The Webb family -- MOM WEBB, POP WEBB, and YOUNG JIMMY -- are in the cozy living room. Pop Webb sits in an armchair. Mom Webb sits on the couch. YOUNG JIMMY is looking over the wrapped gifts under the tree, eyes wide.

YOUNG JIMMY
Can't I open just one gift
tonight, Mom? I promise to get
better grades! Just one present
tonight, Dad, please?

Mom and Pop Webb trade an amused glance.

MOM WEBB
All right, Jimmy. One gift
tonight.

YOUNG JIMMY
Aw, jeez, really? Thanks!

Young Jimmy dives into the gifts and pulls out something that is clearly a starter telescope.

YOUNG JIMMY
Ooh! What could this be?

Young Jimmy tears off the paper.

YOUNG JIMMY (CONT'D)
Wowsers! A microscope!

POP WEBB
That's a telescope, Jimmy!

But the boy is already running upstairs with his new science device.

POP WEBB (CONT'D)
(to Mom Webb)
That boy's gonna work for the
government one day, mark my words.

INT. WEBB HOME - YOUNG JIMMY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Young Jimmy plants his telescope on a radiator cabinet under a window, puts his eye to the eyepiece, and fiddles with the focusing knobs. After a moment, he removes the lens cap.

SERIES OF SHOTS - TELESCOPIC POV

We see several improbable things as Young Jimmy swings his device in various directions.

A shooting star streaking across the night sky.

A seagull in a tree staring back.

A KKK rally in a field.

A UFO buzzing by in the sky.

Finally, a woman undressing in her own bedroom window.

BACK TO SCENE

Young Jimmy removes his eye from the eyepiece.

YOUNG JIMMY

(starry-eyed)

One day, I'm gonna have a giant microscope named after me. Jimmy my words!

END FLASHBACK.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - LARGE HANGAR (BACK TO PRESENT)

Smiling wistfully, Webb slips out the side door.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - WEBB'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The door of Webb's office opens and Webb steps in. The room is quiet, a complete contrast to the party. We hear the CLOCK TICKING softly. Webb puts his glass down on his desk, then walks over to a wall calendar.

He carefully tears off the page reading DECEMBER 1967. He contemplates the new month -- JANUARY 1968 -- for a moment. Then:

WEBB

Oh, crap.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HALLWAY - DAY

SUPER: JANUARY 2, 1968

SUPER: 9:05 A.M.

Webb and Littlegreen walk the hallways, passing staffers here and there. Littlegreen holds an unfolded floor plan of the building. They reach a intersection of halls and turn left, OUT OF FRAME.

A moment later, they return INTO VIEW, walking in the opposite direction, to the right. Littlegreen is turning the floor plan in his hands.

**INT. NASA COMPLEX - HALLWAY - OUTSIDE ART DEPARTMENT -
MOMENTS LATER**

Webb and Littlegreen arrive at a door in a dark, empty hallway. Some of the overhead lights flicker. Apparently, this is a mostly-forgotten wing. The dusty glass pane on the door reads ART DEPARTMENT. Littlegreen opens the door for Webb.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - ART DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The art department is a single room absolutely filled with... stuff. There are color charts, wheels, and swatches. Posters on the walls show the evolution of designs for various NASA logos, including the famous "worm" insignia, plus some really incongruous type treatments of the NASA name. Stacks and stacks of papers obscure any work surfaces that might be in the room.

WEBB

Ah... hello? Is anyone here?

A man leans out from behind a mound of papers. This is STAN NESBITT (early 40s, white, not a little shaggy, colored pencils behind his ears).

STAN

Hi?

WEBB

(bemused)

Is this... are you...?

STAN

Stanford Nesbitt. Stan.

(beat)

And you are...?

WEBB

James Webb.

STAN

Never heard of him.

LITTLEGREEN

Mr. Webb is the head of NASA.

Nesbitt gets to his feet, knocking over a lot of paper.

STAN
Oh. Well, then... how can I help
you, sir?

WEBB
I need to get your team onto a new
project.

STAN
I am the team. There's a college
kid who helps out sometimes, but
otherwise it's just me.

WEBB
Fine. Can you be in the Kennedy
Conference Room in fifteen
minutes?

STAN
Yes.

LITTLEGREEN
You know where that is?

STAN
(amused)
I'll find it.

He points at the paper in Littlegreen's hands.

STAN (CONT'D)
I drew up that floor plan.

**INT. NASA COMPLEX - KENNEDY CONFERENCE ROOM - 16
MINUTES LATER**

This is the same conference room from years earlier, only now
it is much, much nicer. Nicer table, nicer chairs, nicer
decorations, nicer AV equipment. Same fluorescent lights
overhead, though.

At the conference table, on the side farther from the door, sit
Graham, Young, and Littlegreen. Webb sits at the head of the
table. He looks at his watch.

There is a tentative knock at the door. Then the door opens and
Stan enters. He takes a seat on the empty side of the table.

WEBB
I'll do very quick introductions.
Bill Graham, Deputy Administrator.
(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

John Young, Chief of the Astronaut Office. Littlegreen is my aide-de-camp.

Graham and Young nod in turn.

WEBB (CONT'D)

And this is Stan... Nesbitt? He is the Art Department. Apparently.

STAN

Nice to meet you all.

WEBB

Gentlemen, we're here this morning to discuss a serious and unfortunate oversight.

STAN

(mildly irritated)

Let me guess. You forgot you had an art department.

WEBB

Actually, that's true. But fortunately, I remembered. Because the art department is going to save the day.

Webb stands and paces.

WEBB (CONT'D)

You might recall that almost ten years ago the President of the United States -- then, not now -- the man for whom this very conference room was reimagined as a living memorial, made a promise to the world that America would put a man on the Moon before the decade had ended.

STAN

Oh, shit. Did you forget to do that?

WEBB

No, Mr. Nesbitt.

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

To the contrary, NASA has been putting men, and women, and in one instance an artificially intelligent ventriloquist's dummy, onto the surface of the Moon, four of the eight other planets in our solar system, and some of the larger asteroids between Mars and Jupiter for several years already.

Webb pauses to let all of that sink in.

STAN

What the hell are you talking about? We've already been to the Moon?!

WEBB

To the Moon and beyond, yes. In several directions.

STAN

How come I've never heard about any of this?

WEBB

No one has. No one outside NASA, anyway. And not even everyone inside NASA. Because what we forgot to do... is tell anyone.

STAN

You forgot... to tell anyone? That you've been flying all around up there, out there, landing on this thing and that thing and giving artificial intelligence to a ventriloquist's dummy? Man, that's one hell of an "oversight"!

WEBB

Yes.

STAN

So you're going to tell... everyone... now? That you did it? That you fulfilled President Kennedy's promise and then some? That America won the Space Race... by a lot?

GRAHAM

We can't.

STAN
You can't what?

WEBB
We can't now just announce everything we've accomplished. It would be... too much. No one would believe it.

STAN
Well, it's literally unbelievable. I don't think I believe it.

WEBB
I can prove it to you, if you need me to.

STAN
I think that would be nice.

WEBB
Yes, well, that's not why I asked you here. What I need from you is proof that I can give the public that we landed on the Moon. But just that. No more.

GRAHAM
No more, but no less.

WEBB
But, importantly, no more.

STAN
Wait. You don't have proof of that? You didn't... record anything? There's no video footage? No photographs? Nobody took pictures?

YOUNG
They did. There was. But it's gone.

STAN
Gone?

YOUNG
There was slow-scan telecast footage recorded to tape by the second crew, but those tapes were erased and reused at some point.

STAN
Hold on. The second crew?

WEBB

The first mission to the Moon wasn't actually supposed to land, so we didn't prepare that crew to record anything. But the mission went better than expected. So then we sent up a second crew pretty soon after that, and they recorded everything.

STAN

(semi-sarcastic)

Onto tapes that got erased and reused.

(beat)

What kind of fly-by-night outfit is this?

WEBB

NASA does not fly by night, Mr. Nesbitt. NASA flies by wire, and sometimes by the seat of its pants. But never by night.

GRAHAM

Except...

STAN

Except?

WEBB

That's a discussion for another time.

He gives Graham a meaningful look.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Or never.

STAN

(humoring Webb)

Okay. Fine. Even assuming that what you're saying is not absurd, you need something to show the public. Footage or whatever of an astronaut landing on the Moon.

(beat)

So why not just send a new crew to the Moon with a videocamera? Like, tomorrow?

WEBB

Because we've been to the Moon, Mr. Nesbitt. Many times.

(MORE)

WEBB (CONT'D)

That was five years ago and we're
light years ahead of that now.
Honestly, I don't even know if we
have rockets that weak anymore.

(beat)

Just pull together something
convincing, please.

(beat)

But not too good.

(beat)

Littlegreen will be your liaison.
Godspeed, Mr. Nesbitt.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HALLWAY - OUTSIDE ART DEPARTMENT

Stan and Littlegreen stand outside the closed door of the art department. As Stan opens the door:

LITTLEGREEN

It should go without saying that
what you just heard is classified.
All of it. Nothing leaves this
building.

STAN

Yeah, I get it.

(beat)

Hey... do you believe what I just
heard? That we've been to... all
those places?

LITTLEGREEN

You haven't, Mr. Nesbitt. We have.

Littlegreen turns on his heel and walks off. Stan salutes him sarcastically behind his back.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - ART DEPARTMENT - EVENING

As the sun goes down outside the window in the room, Stan sits at his drafting table, flipping through a large atlas of the solar system. As he peruses the book, he shakes his head. A lot.

A PHONE RINGS. The sound is muffled, however, because the phone is buried somewhere in the room. Stan looks for it, eventually digging it out from under a pile, and answers.

STAN

(jovially)

Arts & Spacecrafts.

LITTLEGREEN (V.O.)
Not a word to anyone, Mr. Nesbitt.

Stan looks at the handset, then puts it down.

EXT. NASA CAMPUS - PARKING LOT - LATER

Stan finds his car. As he unlocks the driver's side door, we read the bumper sticker: **TO THE STARS THROUGH THE ARTS**

INT. STAN'S CAR

Stan gets behind the wheel, pulls his door shut, puts on his seatbelt... and finds an envelope on the passenger seat. He picks it up, turns it over, tears it open, pulls out a single sheet of paper.

INSERT - MEMO

TO: S. NESBITT
FROM: A. LITTLEGREEN
RE: TOP SECRET PROJECT

Shh.

BACK TO SCENE

Stan crumples the paper and tosses the ball onto the floor. Then he starts his car.

EXT. NASA CAMPUS - MORNING - ESTABLISHING

INT. NASA COMPLEX - WEBB'S OFFICE - MORNING

Webb is working at his desk when his INTERCOM BUZZES. He presses a button.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
Mr. Nesbitt to see you, sir.

WEBB
Send him in, Judith.

The door to the office opens and Stan enters. Webb gestures him toward a client chair on the other side of Webb's desk. Stan sits.

STAN
No.

WEBB

I'm sorry?

STAN

No, I'm sorry. Sorry and afraid.

WEBB

Afraid?

STAN

I'm afraid I can't do what you want. I won't do it, anyway.

(beat)

I've given a lot of thought to what you asked. I lost sleep over it. I might even have had a nightmare about bug-eyed monsters from Uranus.

(beat)

I concluded that this whole... situation is at best a practical joke and at worst a cruel hoax. Either way, I don't want any part of it.

Webb stands. He walks to a sideboard and pours himself a drink. With a gesture, he asks if Nesbitt wants one. With a shake of his head, Nesbitt declines.

WEBB

Mr. Nesbitt, I appreciate your reservations, and I want you to appreciate where you and I stand vis-a-vis each other. I am your boss.

Webb sits.

WEBB (CONT'D)

As your boss, I could threaten you with a court martial. I could tell you that if you refuse, your employment with NASA will be immediately terminated and you will be blacklisted with not just every state and federal agency, bureau, and department but also every private company that does any business with the government. I could also draft a strongly-worded letter of reprimand for your employment file.

When Webb says no more:

STAN

But?

WEBB

But what?

STAN

But what are you going to do?

WEBB

Isn't all of that enough to persuade you to get to work?

STAN

Oh. I thought.... Never mind.

WEBB

(softer)

Yes, Stan, what we're talking about here is a hoax, but it's not cruel at all. It's a white lie that will make the whole truth that much easier to swallow. And the truth itself isn't bad news. It's great news. It's just... too much.

STAN

(resigned)

There's another problem.

WEBB

Tell me.

STAN

I'd need help. I'm not a filmmaker. I'm not even a bad filmmaker.

(beat)

But I know one.

WEBB

You know a bad filmmaker?

STAN

I have a colleague who knows a lot of what I don't. We met at art school. She was studying film while I was studying design. We met on a movie poster.

Webb looks at Stan semi-suspiciously.

WEBB
Have you already discussed this
with her?

STAN
No, sir.

WEBB
Not at all?

STAN
Not much.

WEBB
Is she willing to help?

STAN
My colleague?

WEBB
Your colleague.

STAN
If I am.

WEBB
And are you?

STAN
If I can have my colleague's help.
Otherwise, I don't know what I can
do for you.

As Webb and Stan look at each other for a moment, we hear the
CLOCK TICK. Then:

WEBB
Have her report for security
clearance tomorrow morning.

As if on cue, there is a knock on the door and Littlegreen
opens it. Stan takes the hint and stands. As the two men leave,
something occurs to Webb; he calls after Stan:

WEBB (CONT'D)
We don't need a poster, Nesbitt!

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Littlegreen and Stan walk the halls again.

STAN
What's our budget?

LITTLEGREEN
Don't worry about that.

STAN
"Don't worry about that" like we
can have all the money we need, or
"Don't worry about that" like it's
none of our business.

LITTLEGREEN
The first one. Just get the asset
made.

STAN
Okay, but where's all the money
coming from? NASA is still funded
by taxes, right? You didn't secede
and starting printing your own
currency when no one was looking,
did you?

When Littlegreen doesn't answer right away:

STAN (CONT'D)
Wait, did you? Whose face is on
it?

LITTLEGREEN
NASA has been self-sufficient for
some time now. Applied science can
be very... lucrative. If you sell
the right products to the right
people.

STAN
What are the right products?

LITTLEGREEN
Integrated circuits. Digital
signal processors. Fuel cells.
Water purification systems. Things
like those.

STAN
(dubious)
And who are the right people?

LITTLEGREEN
Don't worry about that.

Stan gives Littlegreen a suspicious look.

EXT. NASA CAMPUS - PARKING LOT - MORNING

Stan's car pulls into a spot and parks.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HALLWAY - OUTSIDE SECURITY OFFICE

The door reads **OFFICE OF PROTECTIVE SERVICES**.

A smartly-dressed woman (early 30s, wearing a skirt, blouse, and jacket) carrying a portfolio case opens the door and enters. We follow her.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - SECURITY OFFICE

The smartly-dressed woman takes a seat in a waiting area where several other women already sit, all similarly smartly-dressed. Except for one woman, who wears a long, flowing, sleeveless flower dress and has her hair in braids. This is LEIGH BOSTWICK.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Bostwick, Leigh?

Leigh stands and leaves the waiting area.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - SECURITY OFFICE - INTERVIEW ROOM

Leigh enters a small interview room, where a middle-aged male security agent, WILSON, dressed in a suit and tie is already seated at a small desk, with a clipboard in front of him. He motions for Leigh to join him across the table.

WILSON
(humorlessly)
Good morning, Miss Bostwick.

LEIGH
(pleasantly)
You can call me Leigh.

WILSON
I can not.
(beat)
Miss Bostwick, I'm going to ask you a series of questions. Some of them might seem quite personal. I want you to answer my questions as honestly and completely as you can.

LEIGH

No.
(beat)
I mean yes.

WILSON

Miss Bostwick, are you now, or
have you ever been, a member of
the Communist Party.

LEIGH

No.

WILSON

Can you keep a secret?

LEIGH

Yes.

WILSON

Do you take drugs?

LEIGH

Yes.

WILSON

Are you pregnant?

LEIGH

I'd better not be.
(beat)
Because of the drugs.

WILSON

Let's move on to the physical
fitness tests.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Wilson shepherds Leigh through a series of activities, at times aided by other personnel. He always has his clipboard.

Wilson administers a vision test, pointing to a letter chart on a wall while Leigh stands several feet away and covers one eye with her hand.

Leigh, wearing headphones connected to a radio set, dances while Wilson turns knobs. With each turn of a knob, Leigh changes her style of dance.

Leigh spins in a multi-axis trainer while Wilson watches from a safe distance.

In a firing range, Leigh discharges a pistol at a hanging target. She and Wilson both wear protective headgear.

On an outdoor track, Leigh runs a sprint while Wilson times her with a handheld stopwatch.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - SECURITY OFFICE - INTERVIEW ROOM - LATER

Back in the room, Wilson and Leigh are again seated across from one another. His clipboard is again on the table before him.

WILSON
 Congratulations, Miss Bostwick.
 Welcome to NASA.

He reaches beneath the table and produces a security badge and a handgun. He places both on the table.

WILSON
 Please report to the Aeronautics
 Department.

LEIGH
 Aeronautics? No, I'm supposed to
 be joining the Art Department.

Wilson looks from Leigh to his clipboard. He stares at his clipboard for a long moment. Then he looks up again at Leigh and slowly removes the handgun from the table.

WILSON
 Yes. That's right. Please report
 to the Art Department.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - ART DEPARTMENT - AFTERNOON

The room is the slightest bit less chaotic. Stan is talking with KENDRICK (Black, male, very early 20s).

STAN
 So, everyone can use the word...
 for the whole month of February?

Before Kendrick can respond, a knock on the door announces a visitor. The door opens and Leigh enters.

STAN
 Leigh! Welcome. Come in. I tidied
 up for you.

Leigh takes it all in.

STAN (CONT'D)

So, yeah, this is where the magic happens. And by that I mean that this is where I completely disappear during working hours.

(beat)

Leigh, I'd like you to meet Kendrick, my intern from time to time. Kendrick, this is Leigh.

Kendrick gives the Black Power salute. Leigh returns it.

LEIGH

Are we going to be working... here?

Stan looks around.

STAN

No. That would be terrible. Let's find an empty conference room.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The trio sits at a small conference table. Each has a pad and a pencil.

LEIGH

Here's what's bothering me: Not one word of what you told me about this project makes any sense.

STAN

Ours not to reason why. Ours but to do or die. Tennyson. "The Charge of the Light Brigade."

LEIGH

The Light Brigade had six hundred men. We're all of three people. And only one of us has made a movie before. I assume. Kendrick, have you ever made a movie before?

KENDRICK

No, ma'am.

STAN

We don't have to make a feature film, Leigh. We have to make... a transmission.

(MORE)

STAN (CONT'D)

Something sent back to Earth
from... a lot of miles away. It
doesn't need to win an Oscar.

LEIGH

You said we have money to spend.
Can we hire more people?

STAN

No, we can't. This has to be done
entirely in-house. We can rent
equipment, buy supplies... but
this is all completely classified.

LEIGH

There's another problem.

(beat)

Do you guys know the joke about
the man who goes on vacation and
asks his brother to watch his cat?

KENDRICK

Why's the cat gotta be black?

LEIGH

I... I didn't say the cat was
black.

(beat)

Why did you assume I said the cat
was black?

KENDRICK

I don't know.

(beat)

So a guy asks his brother to watch
his cat...

STAN

A guy asks his brother to watch
his own cat?

LEIGH

No, the first guy has the cat. He
asks his brother to watch his cat
while he's away.

STAN

The brother's away?

LEIGH

Let me start over. A man... asks
his sister... to watch his cat
while he's away on vacation.

KENDRICK

Oh, yeah. I know this one. The cat gets run over by a truck and when the man calls, his sister tells him and the man gets mad and says you should have told me he was up a tree. Something like that.

(beat)

When I heard it, it was a white family that asked the Black boy next door to watch their German Shepherd.

STAN

(to Leigh)

This is a joke?

LEIGH

Yes. The man gets annoyed because his sister just blurts out the bad news. He thinks she should have built up to it over several phone calls. "Your cat's on the roof. Your cat won't come down. Your cat is freezing. Your cat isn't eating." Eventually, she can tell him that his cat's dead. So it won't ruin his vacation.

STAN

And what's the punchline?

KENDRICK

Grandma's dead.

A moment of awkward silence.

STAN

Okay, I think I see where you're going with this.

KENDRICK

You do?

STAN

Webb can't tell the world that NASA has put people on everything, everywhere all at once. He needs to build up to that.

(beat)

But that's not a new problem. That's the problem.

LEIGH

So what I'm saying is, NASA probably can't even just blurt out that we've landed on the Moon. People might not remember that we were trying to do that. And then it will seem suspicious.

STAN

So...

LEIGH

So I think we first have to put a man on the roof.

KENDRICK

And the cat?

STAN

The man is the cat.

KENDRICK

Is the man Black?

STAN

(uncomfortably)

Not yet.

(to Leigh)

What do we need to do to get the man onto the roof?

LEIGH

We need to back up.

KENDRICK

From the roof?

LEIGH

From the Moon. We'll need to fabricate a... a whole program. To get us to the Moon.

STAN

(hesitant)

That's not what Webb asked for...

LEIGH

But it's what he's going to need. Or else the world is going to wonder--

KENDRICK

About Grandma!

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HALLWAY

Stan, Leigh, and Kendrick walk in the halls, passing people who look at them funny.

KENDRICK

This place is... very white.

STAN

When we see Webb, let me do the talking.

(beat)

Please.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - WEBB'S OFFICE

Webb is behind his desk. Stan and Leigh sit in his two client chairs. Littlegreen drags in a third chair from somewhere else. He places it behind the other two chairs.

Kendrick gestures for Stan and Leigh to separate their chairs so that he can push his between them, on equal footing. Then he sits. Webb watches all of this patiently.

WEBB

You think we need... more than just a movie.

STAN

Yes, sir. Well, Leigh thinks you do.

(beat)

And I trust Leigh. Completely.

LEIGH

Sir, when you first went to the Moon, for real, you didn't get there on your very first attempt, did you?

WEBB

Actually, we got there before that.

LEIGH

Before your first attempt.

WEBB

Technically, yes. We're really very good at what we do.

LEIGH

Okay. Well...

(MORE)

LEIGH (CONT'D)

I'm sure that there were milestones along the way. Maybe even hiccups. Breakthroughs and setbacks.

WEBB

No, Miss Bostwick. Smooth sailing all the way. Still.

KENDRICK

Nothing exploded?

Everyone looks to him, then back to Webb.

WEBB

As difficult as it might be to accept, esteemed members of the Art Department, I run a tight ship. The tightest ship in the spaceship business. And our spaceships are airtight and shipshape.

(off the others' expressions)

No explosions. No casualties. Not a misplaced O-ring, T-nut, or U-bolt.

LEIGH

I'm sorry, but the public just won't buy that.

(beat)

We're going to have to give them a better story.

While Leigh and Webb stare each other down:

KENDRICK

What was the program called? The original go-to-the-Moon program.

WEBB

Project Moon.

STAN

(chuckling)

Okay, but seriously.

Now Webb gives Stan a stare.

STAN (CONT'D)

Okay. Not a terrible name. But we might want to--

LEIGH
 We'll come up with something
 sexier.

Webb's eyebrows rise.

STAN
 (quickly)
Appealing. Exciting.

KENDRICK
 (enthusiastically)
 Like Project...
 (he falters)
 Moon...
 (quietly)
 ...roof?

Stan rises and motions for the others to get up.

STAN
 Thank you for your time, sir.
 (beat)
 We'll see ourselves out.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - CAFETERIA

A very late-1960s cafeteria, all plastic, chrome, and linoleum. Stan, Leigh, and Kendrick sit at a table, each with a mug of coffee or tea. The room isn't empty, but it's not full, either.

STAN
 So much for letting me do the
 talking.
 (beat)
 But that was... fine. I guess.
 (beat)
 Anyway, now we can get started on
 Project Moonroof.

KENDRICK
 (embarrassed)
 Man, shut up. I panicked.

STAN
 I know. I heard.
 (beat)
 Tell you what. You can redeem
 yourself by coming up with a
 better name.

LEIGH
 It should be something...
 majestic. Monumental.
 Mythological, even.

STAN
 The whole thing... the whole
 program is going to lead to a
 spectacle like the world has never
 seen.

LEIGH
 Even though they should have. Five
 years ago.
 (beat)
 Right? Five years ago?

STAN
 I think so. I'm still a little
 fuzzy on the timeline.

KENDRICK
 Okay. I gotcha. Monumental.
 Mythological.
 (beat)
 Multicultural.

LEIGH
 Just the first two.

STAN
 What's the most spectacular thing
 you've ever seen?

LEIGH
 The Grand Canyon. You?

STAN
 Disneyland. Kendrick?

KENDRICK
 (thoughtfully)
 Stevie Wonder. At the Apollo
 Theater in Harlem. He was amazing.
 It blew my whole mind. I've never
 been the same since.

A moment of quiet contemplation, then:

KENDRICK
 (inspired)
 "Project Wonder."

LEIGH
 Close. Try again.

STAN
"Project... Steve"?

INT. NASA COMPLEX - SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Leigh stands on a step stool, hanging a last sheet of perforated continuous printer paper high on a wall. Printed on the pages in asterisks are the words **PROJECT APOLLO**.

We pull back and find Stan and Kendrick seated at the table. Leigh joins them. Each has their pad and pencil.

STAN
Well, it's official. NASA is going to the Moon.

KENDRICK
So what now?

STAN
I'm going to draft some press releases. Leigh's going to start on a storyboard. You're going to talk to people.

KENDRICK
Who?

LEIGH
Anyone who knows anything about the real Moon landing. There's got to be someone here who remembers something useful.

STAN
Littlegreen might be able to point you in the right direction.

KENDRICK
I think the right direction is away from him. Dude gives me the creeps.

STAN
I think that's part of his job. Still, he knows things. And he's supposed to be helping us.

Stan sneaks a glance at Leigh. She smiles back.

STAN (CONT'D)
 (to Kendrick)
 Why don't you go see if you can
 find him now. Littlegreen.

KENDRICK
 Yeah, all right.

He gets up to go.

KENDRICK (CONT'D)
 But if I don't come back alive,
 y'all make up a better story than
 I got murdered by G.I. Joe-bot.

Kendrick leaves. As soon as the door closes behind him, Stan and Leigh get up and start making out. After a couple of seconds, they disengage.

STAN
 We... shouldn't.

LEIGH
 Yeah, we have a lot of work to do.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - LITTLEGREEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Littlegreen sits behind his own desk in his own office, much smaller and less well-appointed than Webb's. The sheer orderliness of it is intimidating. Kendrick is seated opposite Littlegreen. Kendrick has a notepad with a list of names on it.

KENDRICK
 (checking his notes as
 needed)
 So, you're telling me that of
 the... thirty-six men and women
 who have stood on the Moon, all
 sent up there by NASA... thirty-
 five of them are not available for
 an interview.

LITTLEGREEN
 That is correct.

KENDRICK
 Jones?

LITTLEGREEN
 Deceased.

KENDRICK
 White?

LITTLEGREEN
Committed to an asylum.

KENDRICK
Shabazz?

LITTLEGREEN
Whereabouts unknown.

KENDRICK
I made that one up.

LITTLEGREEN
Exactly.

Kendrick gives Littlegreen a look.

KENDRICK
You know this is starting to feel
a lot like a conspiracy.

Littlegreen doesn't respond.

KENDRICK (CONT'D)
Okay, then... Turner, Jameson G.
Second-in-command of the...
fourteenth mission. Where can I
find him?

LITTLEGREEN
At home. He rarely leaves his
house. I will arrange an
appointment for you to visit.

**INT. NASA COMPLEX - OUTSIDE LITTLEGREEN'S OFFICE -
MOMENTS LATER**

Kendrick steps out, followed by Littlegreen.

KENDRICK
Something strange happens to every
person you put up there. Anybody
ever look into that?

LITTLEGREEN
If we had, that would be
classified.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - WEBB'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Littlegreen enters. Webb is on the phone; he gestures for his
aide to wait a moment.

WEBB
 (on phone)
 That's confirmed?
 (beat)
 Well, that's just terrific. Keep
 going.

Webb hangs up the phone. He opens a desk drawer, takes out a miniature American flag on a pointed stick. He walks over to the sideboard, where there is a scale model of our solar system. Mercury, Venus, Mars, and Jupiter already have flags stuck into them.

WEBB
 (triumphantly)
 And Saturn makes five.

He plants a flag into mini-Saturn, then turns to Littlegreen.

WEBB (CONT'D)
 How goes Project...

LITTLEGREEN
 Apollo, sir.

WEBB
 I don't see why it couldn't have a nice, American name. But how goes it anyway?

LITTLEGREEN
 Research is underway.

WEBB
 Research is overrated, Littlegreen. I think those art-heads forget that the average person doesn't know what they don't know.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HANGAR - DAY

The hangar where the New Year's Eve party was held is now empty of people, except for one man, a JANITOR (ancient) pushing a broom to corral the tinsel and confetti very slowly.

Leigh enters the hangar and walks from exhibited spaceship to spaceship, shaking her head at each. Eventually she notices the Janitor and approaches him.

LEIGH
 Excuse me.

JANITOR

Party's over.

(beat)

Might be some popcorn in the ashtrays.

LEIGH

That's all right. I'm actually here for the spaceships.

(beat)

Are these... all of them?

JANITOR

All of them in this hangar. Yup.

LEIGH

I mean... are there any more, somewhere else. Any older vehicles?

JANITOR

You mean like a horse and buggy? Or a German flying submarine? There are no German flying submarines here, ma'am.

LEIGH

No, I'm looking for the original Moon lander.

JANITOR

Oh, that vehicle.

(beat)

That vehicle was thrown out.

(off her reaction)

I mean... it was recycled. Definitely not thrown in the ocean.

LEIGH

(disheartened)

But it's gone.

JANITOR

All gone.

(beat)

Would seeing a real German flying submarine cheer you up?

After a moment:

LEIGH

Maybe.

INT. JAMES TURNER'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

The living room of JAMES TURNER (early 50s) is a time capsule of the atomic age aesthetic. Bold, high-contrast colors. Boomerang patterns. Asymmetrical furniture.

Kendrick sits on a bright yellow couch. Turner calls from the kitchen.

TURNER (O.S.)
Tang, young man?

KENDRICK
Say what?

Turner enters, carrying a tall glass of muddy brown liquid.

TURNER
(re: the drink)
It's like JELL-O that you can drink. It was invented by a chemist.

KENDRICK
Yeah, no, thank you.

Turner sits and sips at his drink while the men talk.

TURNER
So, you wanted to talk to me about Judaism?

KENDRICK
No. I... what? No, I'd like to ask you some questions about the Moon.

TURNER
The Moon?
(chuckling)
Oh, I haven't been to the Moon in a long time.

KENDRICK
(sotto)
I'm not so sure about that.
(to Turner)
Look, I don't want to take up a lot of your time. I just want to know some basic things. Like... well, what was the surface of the Moon like?

TURNER
Rocky. Dusty.

Kendrick writes. This is exactly what he came for.

TURNER (CONT'D)

No, wait. Those were the fellas I went up with. I think they were brothers. Maybe even twins.

Kendrick crosses out what he's written.

TURNER (CONT'D)

The surface was like... what's that stuff you sprinkle on your private parts? Or on pancakes?

KENDRICK

(confused)
Sugar?

TURNER

Powder. It was like powder. And it smelled like... ash.

KENDRICK

(incredulous)
You smelled the surface of the Moon?

TURNER

Well, not when we were there. We brought some back with us.

(beat)

I might even still have some. I keep it in a tin...

Turner struggles to remember. Kendrick looks off toward the kitchen... then at the glass of murky liquid Turner is holding.

Turner looks at Kendrick... then at his glass.

TURNER (CONT'D)

Oh.

Turner offers the glass to Kendrick.

TURNER (CONT'D)

Will this help? You can borrow it.

(bet)

It's Moon juice.

EXT. TURNER HOME - FRONT DOOR - LATER

Kendrick stands on the front steps of the house, calling back inside through the open door.

He holds a Mason jar with the Moon mud in it.

KENDRICK

(calling)

Okay, now, Captain Turner. Thanks again. And remember what we talked about.

(beat)

Please see a doctor.

Kendrick pulls the door shut and steps off the steps. A young girl on roller skates comes walking INTO VIEW. She stops and stares at Kendrick.

Kendrick gives the Black Power salute. The girl returns it.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Stan is standing a couple of feet from the wall where he has placed a series of sheets of paper under the PROJECT APOLLO sign. They read, in order:

1. Unmanned rocket test
2. Manned flight to low Earth orbit
3. Longer Earth orbit
4. First orbit with the lunar lander
5. Major setback
6. Lunar orbit
7. Moon landing!

While Stan is looking at the wall, the door opens and closes again.

STAN

(over his shoulder)

I think I have it.

(beat)

Take a look?

Leigh steps INTO FRAME, coming to stand next to Stan. She considers the timeline, then walks to the wall and moves things around. She also renumbers some things with a marker.

When she's finished, she steps back and we see the revised timeline:

1. Major setback
- 4-6. Unmanned rocket tests
7. Manned flight to low Earth orbit
8. Longer Earth orbit
9. First orbit with the lunar lander
10. Lunar orbit
11. Moon landing!

STAN
That... what? Why?

LEIGH
Your timeline was too... linear.
Too predictable. A good story -- a
great story -- starts with a bang.

STAN
Okay, but... where are two and
three?

LEIGH
We're going to skip those.

STAN
Skip--?

LEIGH
We want the landing to land on
eleven.

STAN
We do? Why?

LEIGH
"Apollo Eleven" has a beautiful
ring to it. "Eleven" sounds like
"heaven."

STAN
"Seven" sounds more like "heaven."

LEIGH
Maybe. But the meter is off.
"Apollo Eleven" is amphibrachic
dimeter.

STAN
Is it, now?

LEIGH
Say it.

STAN
(dubious)
Apollo Eleven.

BOTH
Apollo Eleven.

STAN
I guess.

The door to the room opens again and Kendrick enters, joining them looking at the wall.

KENDRICK
 "Apollo Eleven." That's got a nice
 ring to it. Eleven even rhymes
 with --

LEIGH
 (pleased)
 "Heaven."

KENDRICK
 I was gonna say "Devin," but okay.

Stan looks at Kendrick.

STAN
 Who's Devin?

KENDRICK
 Friend of mine.

Kendrick looks at Stan like Stan's the strange one.

STAN
 What'd you learn from Turner?
 Anything?

KENDRICK
 I found out what the Moon smells
 like. And that smelling the Moon
 maybe gives you brain damage.
 (beat)
 And I got this...

He holds up the Mason jar of mud.

KENDRICK (CONT'D)
 ...which might or might not be
 from outer space.
 (beat)
 Either way, don't drink it.

Stan takes the jar and looks into the mud.

LEIGH
 All right, now let me show you
 what I've been up to.

Leigh turns around and leads the men to the other side of the room...

REVERSE ANGLE

...to the opposite wall -- absolutely covered, top to bottom, in storyboards. In full color. It is an awe-inspiring display. The men goggle at it.

LEIGH

I'll walk you through it...

INT. NASA COMPLEX - LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Webb meets with the Brain Trust, the other six men in their customary seats at the conference table; Webb at the head.

WEBB

And that brings us to our final item of business: By the end of the decade, we will have visited, in person, every planet in our solar system.

(ticking them off on his fingers)

Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto.

GRAHAM

That is impressive.

(beat)

How do you remember them all in order?

WEBB

The planets?

FROSCH

Yeah. I always flip Saturn and Jupiter.

WEBB

There's a trick. You think of the sentence "My very elderly mother just served us nine plums."

Silence.

GRAHAM

And how does that help?

LOVINGOOD

Does your mom know the order of the planets? Do you ask her when she brings the plums?

WEBB

No... the words and the planets
start with the same letters.

HARDY

Fun fact: In about ten years,
Neptune and Pluto are going to
switch places. For about 20 years.
And then they'll switch back for
another 230 years.

YOUNG

Do they switch names, too?

HARDY

I don't think so.

(beat)

Hey, who named the planets,
anyway?

GRAHAM

And why don't they all have
simple, American names? Like
"Earth"?

All nod and murmur.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

It's late, but Leigh is in the small conference room, sitting
in a chair with her feet up on the table. She's staring at her
storyboard... but her eyes are glazing over.

There is a KNOCK at the door. Leigh jerks alert.

LEIGH

Come... come in!

The door opens to reveal the elderly janitor standing there,
with his giant push broom.

JANITOR

I hope I didn't wake you. I know
it's late.

LEIGH

It's okay. I was just... What can
I do for you?

JANITOR

Oh, there's nothing you can do for
me. Unless you like sweeping?

LEIGH
Not really.

JANITOR
Then there's something I can do
for you.

He reaches into a pocket and produces a single scrap of paper.
He hands it to Leigh, who takes it and looks at it.

LEIGH
What's this?

JANITOR
That's the ship you were looking
for.
(beat)
Well, it's not the actual ship.
It's a drawing someone made of the
ship.

LEIGH
Where did you get this?

JANITOR
I have a collection of scraps of
paper with drawings and
calculations and secret messages.
Gonna sell them one day and
retire.

Leigh looks skeptical.

JANITOR (CONT'D)
But that one's on the house.

Leigh looks at the paper again.

LEIGH
(thoughtfully)
Or on the roof.

JANITOR
Oh, you know that joke? They wrote
that about my late wife.

The janitor turns and shuffles off.

CLOSE ON THE PAPER AND LEIGH'S HANDS

The drawing is of the lunar lander. As Leigh's hands rotate it
once, then again, then a third time, we...

MATCH CUT TO:

OVER BLACK:

A newspaper spins INTO VIEW. A secondary headline on the front page reads:

APOLLO LIFTS HOPES SKY HIGH

The subheadline reads:

TRIP TO MOON COMING SOON?

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HALLWAY - DAY

We move down the hallway toward the small conference room. Along one side of the corridor are a dozen men -- all white, trim, and mid-30s -- seated in folding chairs, waiting to be called.

When we reach the small conference room, the door opens and Kendrick steps out.

KENDRICK

Next!

**INT. NASA COMPLEX - SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS
LATER**

In the room, the conference table has been rotated so that Stan and Leigh can sit behind it, toward the rear of the room, away from the door. In the space created is a stool; on the stool sit an astronaut helmet and a single index card.

Kendrick enters, followed by an auditioner from the waiting line. Kendrick has his own index card.

STAN

(to auditioner)

Name?

AUDITIONER #1

Guy.

LEIGH

(gesturing)

All right, Guy, please put on the helmet and take the card. Wait for your cue, then read the line.

Guy dons the helmet and takes the card. Leigh nods at Kendrick.

KENDRICK
 (stiffly)
 Isn't it nice to be standing here
 on the Moon?

Standing still, Guy says something completely indiscernible from within the helmet.

STAN
 Okay, thank you. We'll be in
 touch.

Guy removes the helmet and leaves it and the card on the stool, then exits the room. Kendrick follows him out. Stan and Leigh trade a "not bad" look. Kendrick returns with the next auditioner.

STAN
 Name?

AUDITIONER #2
 Glen.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - CAFETERIA - LATER

Stan, Leigh, and Kendrick are back at their table, with headshots of auditioners on the table.

LEIGH
 I like Neil, Edwin, and...
 Michael.

STAN
 I like Michael, Neil, and Edwin.

KENDRICK
 I'd like to see a brother in the
 running, but since only white
 dudes read for the parts... Edwin,
 Michael, and Neil.

A moment of contemplation, then:

STAN
 Well, that's all the same three
 men.

KENDRICK
 (half-aside)
 Are they even three different men?

LEIGH
 (ignoring him)
 Then we have our cast.

STAN
 (collecting the headshots)
 Excellent. I'll let Littlegreen know.
 (to Kendrick)
 How's the set coming?

KENDRICK
 Pretty good, I think. I was a little surprised that there's a sound stage here already, but why not? There's everything else: cafeteria, barber shop, post office. Did you know this place has its own ZIP code?

STAN
 (to Leigh)
 Do you have the equipment you need to shoot? Lights, camera...?

LEIGH
 Pretty much. I think we could start filming next week.

CUT TO:

INT. NASA COMPLEX - SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

SUPER: TWO WEEKS LATER

The film set is at once incredible and completely credible. The base looks like the surface of the Moon. On the surface are a convincing lunar lander model and a stiff American flag on a metal pole. The background is completely black but for an image of Earth, positioned appropriately high in the sky.

There is a modest craft service table to one side of the room with an assortment of snack foods and drinks. Next to the table is a folding chair.

Stan and Leigh are conferring in the room. Leigh holds a handheld camera; Stan holds an old-timey megaphone and a clipboard.

Kendrick arrives with three men: NEIL, ED, and MICHAEL, all wearing spacesuits and holding helmets.

KENDRICK
 Moon men walking!

STAN
 Great. Welcome, gentlemen.
 (MORE)

STAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

Okay, so two of you will be in the
lander to start.

He looks at his clipboard.

STAN (CONT'D)

Michael?

Michael steps forward.

MICHAEL

Here, sir.

STAN

You'll be in the orbiter...
(gesturing)
...which will be that chair by the
snack table.

Michael walks to the snack table and takes a seat. Then a
snack.

STAN (CONT'D)

All right, Neil, Ed... places,
please.

Neil heads onto the set and behind the lander model. Ed stays.

ED

You can call me "Buzz."

STAN

What's that?

ED

Everyone calls me "Buzz."

LEIGH

"Bugs"?

ED

"Buzz," ma'am.

LEIGH

Why?

ED

I couldn't say, ma'am.

Ed walks off to join Neil. Leigh takes a position at the edge
of the set, raises the camera to her eye.

LEIGH
Rolling.

STAN
(into megaphone)
And... action!

A moment... then Neil comes walking down the ladder of the lander. Facing forward.

LEIGH
(lowering the camera)
Cut.

STAN
(into megaphone)
Cut!
(turning to Leigh)
What's wrong?

Leigh winces. Stan lowers his megaphone.

STAN (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

LEIGH
(to Neil)
You need to come down the ladder backward.

Neil removes his helmet.

NEIL
I beg your pardon, ma'am. What was that?

LEIGH
You need to come down the ladder backward.

NEIL
(nodding)
Oh, okay. Gotcha.

STAN
Back to one!

They reset to go again.

LEIGH
Rolling.

STAN
Action!

Neil comes down the lander ladder, backward.

LEIGH
Cut.

STAN
Cut!

Neil looks at his own orientation, takes off his helmet, then looks to Stan and Leigh.

NEIL
I came down backward.

LEIGH
You did. Do that again, but a bit slower?

NEIL
I'll try, ma'am.

STAN
Back to one!

They reset to go a third time.

LEIGH
Rolling.

STAN
Action!

Neil comes down the lander ladder, backward and slowly... but without his helmet.

LEIGH
Cut.

STAN
Cut!

Neil looks to them curiously.

LEIGH
(patiently)
Your helmet.

NEIL
(realizing)
My apologies, ma'am.

LEIGH
It's okay. We'll get it.

MIS-TAKES MONTAGE:

Neil tumbles down the ladder.

Neil descends perfectly, but Ed falls down the ladder.

Neil and Ed descend perfectly, but the flag falls over.

Neil and Ed descend perfectly, but the lander falls over.

Neil and Ed descend perfectly, but then Michael comes out of the lander.

Finally, a perfect take.

LEIGH
(relieved)
I think we got it.

STAN
That's a wrap!

Stan and Leigh shake hands with the three "astronauts."

ANGLE ON SNACK TABLE

KENDRICK
(shaking his head)
Now white folks are rapping.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. NASA COMPLEX - ART DEPARTMENT - DAYS LATER

Stan sits at his desk in the art department, alone. It is very quiet. Stan picks up some papers from one pile... moves them to another pile. More than once.

Eventually, he sneaks a look at the door to the room, sees that it's closed and he is still very much alone... so he slides a large folder from behind some piles onto his desk. He opens the secret folder and pulls out...

...a movie poster he's been pasting up surreptitiously. It's roughly tabloid-sized, with each element removable. The current version has a tagline at top that reads **They were called lunatics...** and a large central title of **OVER THE MOON.**

Below these is text reading:

NASA Presents

a Film by
Stanford Nesbitt

Cinematography by
Leigh Bostwick

In the folder are slips of paper with additional taglines and titles. Stan picks up a title reading **MOONSHOT** and swaps it in for the title on the poster. Then he goes back and forth between them... ultimately leaving **MOONSHOT** on the board.

He then picks up a third title -- **MOONSTRUCK** -- considers it, then crumples it and tosses it in a wastebasket.

Finally, he closes the folder, hides it away again, gets up from his desk, and leaves the room.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Stan steps out of the art department room into the hallway, then walks to the small conference room.

OUTSIDE SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM

He is about to knock on the door, but he stops himself. He puts an ear to the closed door instead. We hear soft sounds of reel-to-reel tape going back and forth in short bursts.

Stan opens the door slowly and slips inside.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Leigh is seated at a Moviola machine, her feet on the floor pedals, her eyes to the viewing screen, her back to the door. She is editing the footage and concentrating deeply.

Stan steps up behind her and begins to massage her shoulders.

LEIGH
(without looking up)
Now's not a good time.

Stan removes his hands.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - CAFETERIA - LATER

Stan sits alone at a table, nursing a cup of coffee. After a moment, **MICHAEL** approaches his table.

MICHAEL
Mind if I join you?

STAN
No... not at all. Ah...?

MICHAEL
Collins, sir. Michael Collins.

STAN
(remembering)
Michael. Yes. Hi. How's...
everything?

MICHAEL
Not bad. No complaints.
(beat)
Listen, can I ask you something
about the movie you're making?

STAN
I'm not really supposed to talk
about it. Not even with the people
involved.

MICHAEL
Well, see, that's kind of what I
wanted to talk about. I think I
could contribute more. As it is, I
didn't do very much at all.

STAN
That's true.
(beat)
But you were there in case the
other guys got into trouble. And
that was important.

MICHAEL
Oh, of course. But... I don't
know. I just wish I could get my
boots on the ground, so to speak.
Make the folks back home proud,
you know?

STAN
(sympathetic)
Tell you what, Mike. If there's a
sequel... and I don't see why
there wouldn't be... I'll talk to
Webb about putting you front and
center. How does that sound?

MICHAEL
You'd do that for me?

STAN
I would.

MICHAEL

(pleased as punch)

That means more than you know,
sir. I just don't want to spend
the rest of my life wondering,
"What if...?"

Michael walks off, and Stan notices Littlegreen sitting at a table as far away from the center of the room as possible. Stan gets up from his table and walks over to Littlegreen's.

STAN

Mind some company?

Littlegreen looks at Stan blankly at first, then more welcomingly. Stan sits and sees that Littlegreen has the complex floorplan open on the table.

STAN (CONT'D)

Planning an Easter egg hunt?
You've got a couple of months.

LITTLEGREEN

You mentioned that you designed
this floorplan. Do I remember that
correctly?

STAN

Ah... yeah. That's right. One of
my first projects when I signed on
here.

LITTLEGREEN

Did you just walk the halls, or
were you provided reference
material?

STAN

Someone gave me blueprints.
(beat)
I guess that wasn't you.

LITTLEGREEN

Do you still have those
blueprints?

STAN

If I do, they're in the studio.
Somewhere.
(beat)
Do you need them?

LITTLEGREEN

I could use them.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - ART DEPARTMENT

Littlegreen waits patiently while Stan rummages through the piles. Eventually, Stan locates rolled-up blueprints, extricates them -- causing a minor avalanche of paper -- and hands them over to Littlegreen.

STAN

I don't need those back, to be honest. They might have been load-bearing... but not anymore.

Before Littlegreen can reply, Kendrick enters, bundled in cold-weather clothing.

KENDRICK

Cold out.
(noticing Littlegreen)
Oh, hey there, Lurch.

Littlegreen leaves. Kendrick takes off his jacket, etc. The men sit.

KENDRICK

(to Stan)
There's something about that guy.
(beat)
He stands up way too straight.
It's not normal.

STAN

He's a military man. They're...
built different.

KENDRICK

You think he's ever killed anyone?

STAN

I'm sure of it.

KENDRICK

You think he used his bare hands?
Or just his personality?

Stan chuckles.

KENDRICK

So what do we got going on?

STAN

A lot of nothing. Leigh's working with the footage. Webb's... I don't know what Webb's doing.

(MORE)

STAN (CONT'D)

I don't really know what anybody else here is doing unless they need a patch or a decal --

KENDRICK

Or a giant practical joke. On everyone.

STAN

Or one of those.

(beat)

But this is the first time I've worked on one of those.

KENDRICK

It might not be the last. If these jokers have really been all the places they claim they've been... and if they're somehow also really as disorganized as they say they are... then we might have to do one of these for every planet, all the way out to Pluto.

STAN

Or Neptune, if those two have switched places.

KENDRICK

What?

STAN

Never mind. I'm getting way ahead of myself. It's still only 1968.

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

A newspaper spins INTO VIEW. The headline reads:

NIXON TAKES OATH

PRE-LAP: The WHIRRING of a FILM PROJECTOR, then the sound of the last bit of FILM FLAPPING off the reel.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

The lights come on in the room to reveal that Webb and the six men of the Brain Trust are sitting at their usual seats at the table. At the end opposite Webb sit Stan and Leigh, turned around with their backs to the others.

Everyone is more or less facing a portable movie screen on a stand set up in the room.

Of to the side, Littlegreen stands next to a film projector on the utility cart. He clicks off the projector, and there is silence in the room.

Stan and Leigh turn their chairs around so that now everyone can see everyone else at the table. No one speaks just yet. Someone coughs.

LEIGH

And just a reminder: The dialogue will be dubbed in later.

STAN

So... what are we thinking?

The men of the Brain Trust all look uncomfortable. They all look to Webb.

WEBB

Let's be honest, please, gentlemen.

Another uncomfortable moment of silence, then:

HARDY

The flag.

STAN

The... flag?

HARDY

The American flag. It was moving. Rippling. But there's not enough of an atmosphere on the Moon for a breeze that would make the flag ripple like that.

LEIGH

I think the movement you saw was caused by the astronauts themselves handling the rod on which the flag was held.

YOUNG

What about the stars?

STAN

What about the stars?

YOUNG

There weren't any. In the sky. In space.

LEIGH

We're operating under the presumption that the landing takes place during lunar daytime, are we not?

YOUNG

Yeah. So?

LEIGH

So the sun would be illuminating the white suits of the astronauts and the surface of the Moon. The camera would be adjusted for that brightness, making it impossible to capture the glow of faint, distant stars.

YOUNG

(unconvinced)

I guess...

FROSCH

The shadows were inconsistent, though.

STAN

Were they?

FROSCH

Some of them were. They looked like they were produced by studio lights.

LEIGH

The Sun is the sole light source, but shadows would be distorted by the uneven terrain of the Moon's surface. Also perspective.

LOVINGOOD

Correct me if I'm wrong, but shouldn't there be a blast crater beneath the lander?

LEIGH

Actually, because the Moon's gravity is low, the lunar module is throttled down to a low-thrust hover before landing, which results in little to no cratering.

The members of the Brain Trust all look at the table, sheepishly. None wants to make eye contact with Stan or Leigh.

STAN
 (none too happy)
 Any other comments, questions, or
 concerns?

No one speaks up.

WEBB
 I think that's all for now. Thank
 you both for your hard work. If
 you'll excuse us, we're going to
 move on to other matters.

Stan and Leigh get up from the table and head for the door.
 They exit the room and Littlegreen follows them out closely.
 When the door closes:

WEBB
 Well, that was complete garbage.

The other men murmur in agreement and relief.

WEBB (CONT'D)
 What about you, von Braun? What do
 you think?

VON BRAUN
 I?
 (beat)
 I thought it was excellent.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Stan and Leigh walk. Littlegreen walks behind them. Leigh is
 pissed. Stan notices.

STAN
 You know what they say: "The
 client pays for the right to be
 wrong."

LEIGH
 Are we getting paid for this?

STAN
 Well... I am. Because I work here.
 (beat)
 Anyway, you know you did a great
 job. I know you did a great job.
 And maybe after they watch the
 film again, they'll realize that
 you did a great job.

LITTLEGREEN

I would not bet real money on that.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - WEBB'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Webb behind his desk; Stan seated across from him. Stan has a report in his hands; he flips through it. Littlegreen stands to the side.

STAN

She is not going to like this.

WEBB

Be that as it may, we need some changes to be made. You have to understand that while Miss Bostwick might know filmmaking, we know moon-landing.

STAN

I... do understand that.

(beat)

I will take this back to the team.

WEBB

Please.

Webb stands, so Stan stands. Webb comes around to walk Stan out.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Fortunately, we still have time to get this right.

Stan exits. As Webb returns to his desk, his intercom buzzes. He presses the talk button.

WEBB

Yes, Judith?

JUDITH (V.O.)

I have President Nixon on Line Two, sir.

WEBB'S POV

The LINE TWO light on his desk phone blinks.

BACK TO SCENE

Webb sits, waves Littlegreen from the room, picks up the headset and takes Nixon's call.

WEBB
 (into the phone)
 Mr. President.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSSIAN FARMLAND - ESTABLISHING - DAY

SUPER: ДВА ДНЯ НАЗАД / TWO DAYS EARLIER

A frigid landscape. A lone farmhouse on a vast expanse of snow-covered land.

INT. RUSSIAN FARMHOUSE - SECOND FLOOR BEDROOM

A child's small bedroom in the farmhouse, decorated with Soviet paraphernalia. At the window is a Russian boy of ten or eleven. His eye is to a telescope that reads on the side "Li'l Jimmy".

TELESCOPIC POV

We see a sky that is almost completely white. Then something bright falls from the sky... a meteorite? It impacts with the ground in the distance, throwing up a cloud of snow.

BACK TO SCENE

The Russian boy bolts from his room.

EXT. RUSSIAN FARMLAND - SNOWFIELD

The Russian boy and his husky run across the snowfield until they reach the point of impact. Something protrudes from the frozen ground, steaming. The boy wipes as much snow from it as he can. It appears to be an irregular shard of metal about the size of the boy himself.

On the fragment are an American flag symbol and scale depictions of the planets from Mercury to Uranus, like storks on an ambulance.

**INT. RUSSIA - LUBYANKA BUILDING - INTELLIGENCE OFFICE -
 LATER**

A large desk in a large room full of Soviet paraphernalia. On the desk are multiple phones. A nameplate reads **FIRST CHIEF DIRECTORATE / FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS**. Behind the desk sits the FIRST CHIEF DIRECTOR himself. He has a handset to his ear.

FIRST CHIEF DIRECTOR
 (into phone)
 Da.
 (beat)
 Da.
 (longer beat)
 Da.

He hangs up that handset, picks up a very red one, and presses a button.

FIRST CHIEF DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
 (into the phone)
 Mr. Premier.
 (beat)
 We have situation.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

President Nixon sits behind the Wilson Desk. Various members of Nixon's administration -- KISSINGER, Ehrlichman, Haldeman -- are present in the room. Nixon has a telephone handset to his ear.

NIXON
 (into the phone)
 That's right: I want it to say,
 "Nixon-Kennedy Center for the
 Performing Arts."
 (beat)
 Just make it happen.

He hangs up his phone, then gestures toward the door.

NIXON (CONT'D)
 All right, send them in.

Webb and Graham enter, take seats opposite Nixon. As they do:

NIXON (CONT'D)
 Sit down, sit down.
 (beat)
 Level with me, gentlemen. What is it that the Russians now know that we didn't want them to know, and why didn't I know it?

WEBB

(shifting in his seat)
Well, sir... the United States
space program is... let's say a
bit farther along than you might
imagine.

NIXON

How much farther?

Webb looks to Graham. Nixon looks to Graham. Graham clears his
throat.

GRAHAM

About seven hundred forty six
million miles.

Nixon massages his temples with his fingers. Everyone waits.

NIXON

Someone tell Pat I'm going to be
late for dinner.
(to Webb and Graham)
I hope you're happy. It's
spaghetti Wednesday.

KISSINGER

We need to let the world know. We
must release the footage of our
Moon landing.

WEBB

Right... so, about that.
(beat)
The footage isn't ready.

KISSINGER

Not ready?

WEBB

We have to... recreate it.

NIXON

What happened to the original
footage?

WEBB

(abashed)
The tape was erased.

NIXON

Erased?
(beat)
On purpose?

INT. NASA COMPLEX - ART DEPARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Webb is standing inside the door. Stan and Kendrick are in rolling chairs, rolled toward the middle of the room.

WEBB

When can you reshoot?

STAN

Ah... that's going to be a problem. Leigh quit the project. I gave her your notes. She said you wouldn't know a good film if it shot from Uranus. Her words.

(beat)

I tried to persuade her to stay.

KENDRICK

You should have heard them fight. Like an old married couple.

STAN

We've been married for ten years. Today's our anniversary, actually.

(beat)

Did nobody know that?

WEBB

Well, maybe try again to convince her this weekend. If she refuses, though, you're just going to have to start over without her. We're under the gun now. We need a Moon landing by the end of the month or my head will roll. Right onto Nixon's desk.

KENDRICK

Richard Nixon?

WEBB

(ignoring him)

I'll see you on Monday.

(beat)

Hang on... Monday... Moon-day.

(beat)

Huh.

EXT. NASA COMPLEX - PARKING LOT - EVENING

Stan gets into his car, closes the door, does not start the engine. We PULL OUT to see the parking lot from above. Cars start to leave the lot.

Eventually, they all leave... except Stan's. His just sits there, alone.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HANGAR - MONDAY MORNING

In the hangar, still not fully cleaned after New Year's Eve, the elderly janitor sweeps the floor, slowly... slowly.... As he passes one of the spaceship exhibits, we see the velvet ropes and signage, but no spaceship. It takes a moment, but the janitor notices, too.

JANITOR

Well, something isn't right here.

We PULL OUT to see that all of the spaceships are gone.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - WEBB'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

PHONES RING. All of the lines are blinking. Webb's office is empty.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM

The Brain Trust is assembled with Webb. Everyone has coffee and cigarettes. Everyone's talking over everyone else.

WEBB

All right, let's settle down. This is a crisis, and we remain calm in a crisis.

YOUNG

Do we?

HARDY

Every department is reporting thefts. We're missing... a lot of stuff.

GRAHAM

Effectively, everything we've acquired since... well, since we left Earth.

Webb pinches the bridge of his nose.

WEBB
 I need...
 (beat)
 Littlegreen?

But Littlegreen is not present. Webb realizes this for the first time now.

WEBB (CONT'D)
 (to no one in particular)
 Where is Littlegreen?

The other men look around, come up empty.

LOVINGOOD
 (scandalized)
 They even took Littlegreen?

INT. NASA COMPLEX - ART DEPARTMENT - LATER

Webb visits the art department. The room is almost entirely empty. All the piles of papers are gone. Some posters remain on the walls. Stan and Kendrick are standing in the middle of the room, looking around, scratching their heads figuratively and literally.

WEBB
 You, too?

KENDRICK
 Us two, what?

WEBB
 He took everything?

STAN
 Who?

WEBB
 Littlegreen. He's gone. He cleaned us out.

Stan and Kendrick nod, understanding.

WEBB
 Obviously, he was a spy.

STAN
 (simultaneously)
 ...an angel.

KENDRICK
 (simultaneously)
 ...an alien.

The three men exchange looks, then:

WEBB
Did he take the film?

STAN
You had the film.

WEBB
(thinking)
Then he took the film. Damn it.

STAN
I thought we had to start over,
anyway. So does it matter if he
took the film?

WEBB
I guess not particularly, no.
Unless he leaks it.

KENDRICK
You gonna run him down?

WEBB
We'll never find him. By now, he's
halfway to Russia.

STAN
(simultaneously; nodding)
...Heaven.

KENDRICK
(simultaneously; nodding)
...outer space.

Another three-way glance exchange.

WEBB
You're probably going to have to
freshen up the set.

KENDRICK
Yeah, probably.

When Kendrick doesn't move...

WEBB
So you might want to get started
on that sooner rather than later.

To keep Kendrick from saying anything foolish:

STAN
 We'll get on it right away.
 (for Kendrick's benefit)
 Sir. Give us a few days.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HALLWAY - DAYS LATER

Stan and Kendrick walk in a corridor we haven't seen before.

KENDRICK
 Leigh still not talking to you?

STAN
 No. But it's fine.
 (beat)
 It'll be fine. This isn't the
 first time we've tried to
 collaborate and ended up fighting.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - OUTSIDE SOUNDSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

They arrive at the door to the sound stage, open the door, turn on a light, and see that the Moon set is gone. The old janitor is sweeping the floor, slowly....

KENDRICK
 And now the Moon's gone.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HANGAR - LATER

The large hangar has been converted into a large soundstage. The empty spaceship exhibits have been removed, and the hangar now looks like a place where real moviemaking magic can happen.

And it's bustling; there are people everywhere. Too many people, probably, all busy -- this includes all of the Brain Trust plus dozens of others.

We make our way around the hangar and encounter, among other things: a wardrobe rack of spacesuits rolling by; a hair and makeup station; generous crafts services tables; crates marked "CAUTION: PYROTECHNICS"; cables snaking all along the floor; two (or three) manned stationary television cameras; studio lighting; multiple large wind fans; a standing microphone for a narrator; and a man in a tuxedo behind two timpani.

And we haven't even seen the actual set yet.

We finally reach the center of it all, where Webb sits in a director's chair straight out of central casting. He has Stan's old megaphone. Just as we arrive at Webb's chair, Stan and Kendrick do, too.

KENDRICK
 (flabbergasted)
 What did you do to my set?

WEBB
 We retrofitted it. Made some
 upgrades.

ANGLE ON MOON SET

The "Moon" set is more... well, it's just more. The surface has higher highs and lower lows. The backdrop is still black (for now) but the "Earth" painted on it is larger, brighter, and rotated so that North America is visible. There's a flagpole, but no flag yet. Also no lunar lander.

BACK TO MEN

KENDRICK
 Where's the ship?

Webb gestures for them to look up. They do.

ANGLE UP

to a giant rocket ship suspended by pulley riggings from the ceiling girders. This craft looks nothing like the real lunar lander. This one looks like something from a pulp science fiction paperback cover. It's like a pointy missile with four tail fins; and it's red. It faces nose upward, ready to come down on its rear thrusters.

Kendrick whistles.

KENDRICK (O.S.)
 Sexy.

BACK TO MEN

STAN
 (to Webb)
 So you're directing now?

WEBB
 I remembered that my actual title here is "Director." So why not?

KENDRICK
 You know you're gonna set back rocket science and the art of filmmaking about thirty years, right?

WEBB

It'll be fine. Nobody but we know what a Moon landing should look like, and even most of us don't remember.

(beat)

So we'll give the world a really good show.

KENDRICK

(ribbing Stan)

A spectacle, even.

WEBB

(unironically)

Exactly. A spectacle. Something to talk about for years to come.

STAN

Until the Russians get to the Moon, take their own pictures, and reveal the truth.

WEBB

What's the truth? That America didn't go to the Moon? America did go to the Moon!

STAN

(gesturing at all of it)

This... isn't going to work.

WEBB

It absolutely will work.

He looks at his wristwatch.

WEBB (CONT'D)

And if you'd like to see it all come together, you're welcome to stick around. But right now it's time to play the music and light the lights.

Stan and Kendrick step away. Stan shakes his head.

KENDRICK

Music?

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

All's quiet and dark on the set.

A crescendo roll from the timpani...

A spotlight shines on the narrator -- Lovingood, standing behind the standing microphone.

CLOSE ON LOVINGOOD

LOVINGOOD
(melodramatically)
Webster's Dictionary defines "the Moon" as "the natural satellite of Earth, visible chiefly at night."

We PULL OUT to get a wider view as backlights come on, behind the backdrop, shining through hundreds of pinpricks in the black.

And now a spotlight shines on the "Earth."

LOVINGOOD (O.S.)
For thousands of years, men, women, children, and wolves have looked up at the Moon with wonder and awe... in America and elsewhere.

More lights come up and illuminate the surface, casting a motley patchwork of shadows.

LOVINGOOD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
But never in a million years did anyone on Earth imagine that man would ever set foot on the Moon.

More timpani.

LOVINGOOD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Until now...

Now all the lights come on, illuminating the Moon set more than the sun ever might.

But then nothing happens.

CLOSE ON WEBB

Webb looks up to the ceiling.

ANGLE ON CEILING

The rocket ship is still suspended there.

WEBB (O.S.)
(yelling)
von Braun...?

ANGLE ON WEBB

Webb remembers his megaphone and raises it to his mouth.

WEBB
 (through megaphone)
 Where's my rocket, von Braun? You
 have one job...

CLOSE ON von BRAUN

off to the side of the set, straining on pulley ropes.

VON BRAUN
 (flustered)
 The rocket will not come down!

WEBB (O.S.)
 All right, abort. Abort!

A KLAXON BLARES, all the lights in the hangar come back on, and everyone moves around again, resetting the production.

EXT. NASA CAMPUS - PARKING LOT - STAN'S CAR

We're behind Stan's car. After a moment, the driver's door opens and smoke billows out. After another moment, Stan himself gets out.

EXT. NASA CAMPUS - LAWN - MOMENTS LATER

It's quiet on the campus. And it's a beautiful day. Stan walks on the lawn, finds a nice spot, lies down in the grass, sunglasses on.

ANGLE UP

to the sky, where clouds drift along, slowly.

CLOSE ON STAN'S FACE

Stan continues to watch the clouds.

ANGLE UP

One cloud shifts shape until it looks like Webb's rocket ship, then moves across the sky a bit... then changes shape once more.

STAN

throws an arm over his face.

INT. NASA COMPLEX - WEBB'S OFFICE - MONTHS LATER

Webb is behind his desk. A knock at the door, then Stan enters, takes a seat.

WEBB

Thanks for coming in.

STAN

I assume this will be the last time we meet.

WEBB

Why's that?

STAN

Well... I... Do I still have a job here?

WEBB

Of course. NASA needs an art department more than ever now. Probably. Maybe. I don't really know. But I'm giving you permission to hire your intern full-time. Cooper, is it?

STAN

Kendrick. And I might. I don't know that he'll accept the offer. Things have gotten a little weird around here.

WEBB

All right, well, if he doesn't, then someone else. But you can grow your department by a hundred percent, Nesbitt.

STAN

Thank you, sir.

(beat)

So... how's the movie going?

WEBB

Remember when I told you it would be great?

STAN

Yes.

WEBB

Well, it's going to be great.

STAN

I'm glad.

(beat)

I was thinking... if you're going to be broadcasting the Moon landing, won't people wonder when this mission left for the Moon? Don't your actual launches usually attract crowds?

Webb looks at Stan for a moment... until he realizes what Stan's getting at.

WEBB

Oh, crap.

Webb punches his intercom button with a finger.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Judith, get me Houston.

Stan gets up and sees himself out. Webb's phone rings. He snatches up the handset.

WEBB (CONT'D)

Gene, Webb. How soon can you get something into space?

(beat)

Unmanned. Doesn't have to go anywhere. Just has to go.

(beat)

Fine. Do it.

Webb hangs up his phone, gets up from his desk, walks over to his wall calendar with a marker. The JULY page is showing. Webb draws a little rocket on the square for the 16th, then draws an arcing arrow from the rocket into the square for the 20th, then circles the arrowhead.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANNED SPACE CENTER - HOUSTON, TX - DAY

SUPER: JULY 16, 1969

A beat-up Saturn V rocket on the launchpad, engines thrusting up.

KRANZ (V.O.)

And... up we go.

INT. MANNED SPACE CENTER - HOUSTON, TX - MISSION CONTROL

CLOSE ON MAIN MONITOR

The rocket lifts off from the pad and begins its ascent.

CLOSE ON LAUNCH CONSOLE

A man's finger depressing a button. The finger moves off the button and we see that the button reads **LAUNCH**.

CLOSE ON KRANZ

He looks satisfied. He looks around the room.

KRANZ
That was easy.

We PULL OUT to see that Kranz is alone in the room.

CUT TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

A newspaper spins INTO VIEW. The headline reads:

OFF TO MOON!

INT. NASA COMPLEX - WEBB'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON WALL CALENDAR

The page for July now shows the squares for the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th are Xed out in red marker.

We PULL OUT

Webb's office is empty.

WEBB (V.O.)
Thirty seconds.

FROSCH (V.O.)
Contact light. Okay, engine
stopped... descent engine command
override off...

CUT TO:

INT. NASA COMPLEX - BROADCAST ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A dedicated communications room, not unlike a television control room, with screens and consoles. Webb and Frosch are seated at consoles, each wearing a microphone headset. Also in the room are Graham, Young, Lovingood, and Hardy, standing to the side.

On one of the screens is the CBS News live broadcast with WALTER CRONKITE and WALLY SCHIRRA.

SCHIRRA (V.O.)
We're home!

CRONKITE
Man on the Moon!

CUT TO:

INT. CBS NEWS SPACE HEADQUARTERS

Cronkite and Schirra at the anchor desk.

CRONKITE
Oh, boy!
(beat)
Whew! Boy!

SCHIRRA
That is really something. I'd love to be aboard.

CRONKITE
I know!

INT. NASA COMPLEX - BROADCAST ROOM

FROSCH
Okay, Houston, I'm on the porch.

WEBB
Roger. We copy and we're standing by for your TV.

FROSCH
TV circuit breaker's in. Receive loud and clear.

WEBB
Man, we're getting a picture on the TV.

Webb turns and points to Hardy, now standing at the console. Hardy flips a toggle and presses a button.

A second screen flicks on and the footage rolls.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Various people watch the "Moon landing" broadcast on televisions screens all around the world.

The broadcast footage is ridiculous, and although we never see it from start to finish, we catch glimpses of it on the different screens: the surface of the Moon... the stars twinkling... the clear Earth in the background... the descent of the rocket ship... the emergence of the three astronauts... the planting of the flag... the astronauts tossing a beach ball around....

Under all of the shots of people watching the broadcast is the audio of JFK's speeches.

JOHN F. KENNEDY (V.O.) (ARCHIVAL)

I believe that this nation should
commit itself to achieving the
goal, before this decade is out,
of landing a man on the Moon and
returning him safely to the Earth.

A "traditional" American family -- dad, mom, three kids -- watch in their suburban living room.

A crowd of pedestrians watches an array of televisions in a store window in a city.

Leather-clad patrons and a bartender watch on a wall-mounted television in a rough-and-tumble biker bar.

Richard Nixon watches on a portable desk television set in the Oval Office.

The New York Mets watch in their locker room.

Pope Paul VI watches in the Apostolic Palace.

Stan and Leigh watch at their home, sitting on opposite sides of their couch, Kendrick leaning over the back of the couch between them.

Finally, Littlegreen watching on a screen embedded in a wall in a spare, mysterious, metallic chamber.

JOHN F. KENNEDY (V.O.) (ARCHIVAL) (CONT'D)

No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important in the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.

SERIES OF SHOTS

The same shots as earlier, in the same order, but now the viewers lean forward toward their respective screens. Some viewers grab other viewers in anticipation.

JOHN F. KENNEDY (V.O.) (ARCHIVAL) (CONT'D)

We choose to go to the Moon. We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.

SERIES OF SHOTS

The traditional family: Kids cheer, mom and dad kiss.

The crowd of pedestrians: All cheer, a man and woman kiss.

In the biker bar: All cheer, two male bikers kiss.

In the Oval Office: Nixon nods, everyone else is stoic.

The New York Mets cheer.

In the Apostolic Palace, the Pope crosses himself.

Stan leans over to kiss Leigh, but Leigh gets up from the couch and walks off. Kendrick looks at Stan, shakes his head "no, thank you," and walks away next. Stan remains on the couch.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. NASA COMPLEX - PRESS ROOM - MORNING

SUPER: AUGUST 12, 1969

A simple room. At the top of the room, a desk with the NASA logo on the front, behind which sit Neil, Ed, and Michael, each with a microphone.

Facing them, in chairs, about two dozen reporters and photographers, about half of whom are NASA plants, including Webb and the five American members of the Brain Trust, each wearing a fake mustache. During the press conference, the occasional flash bulb explodes.

REPORTER #1

Gentlemen, when you first stepped on the Moon, did it feel like you were stepping on a piece of the Earth, like you were standing in a desert, or did it feel like it really was another world?

NEIL

Well, there was no question in our minds where we were.

ED

I thought it felt a lot like Earth.

MICHAEL

I also stood on the Moon.

YOUNG

What advice do you have for any young boys or even girls who might want to be astronauts?

NEIL

Study hard.

ED

Eat a balanced breakfast every morning.

MICHAEL

Get to know a good graphic designer.

REPORTER #2

Would you recommend any changes in procedure for reaching and landing on the Moon?

The "astronauts" look to Webb; Webb subtly shakes his head.

ED

No, sir.

NEIL

Everything is perfect.

MICHAEL

I might make the lander a bit larger.

(beat)

Just for comfort.

HARDY

What was the most memorable part of the experience for each of you?

NEIL

The majestic desolation.

The crowd murmurs with appreciation.

ED

I'd have to say... the food.

The crowd laughs.

MICHAEL

(quietly, thoughtfully)

There was a moment... during lunar orbit docking, after the two vehicles made contact, when a yaw oscillation developed.

We PUSH IN on Michael ever so slowly and dramatically as he recounts...

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(spellbindingly)

This oscillation covered, perhaps, fifteen degrees in yaw over a period of one or two seconds and was not normal. It was not anything that any of us expected.

(beat)

The two vehicles are held together initially by three capture latches and then a gas bottle which, when fired, initiates a retract cycle that allows the two to be more rigidly connected by strong latches around the periphery of the tunnel.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

This takes six or eight seconds, between initial contact and the retract. And it was during this period of time, that we did have a yaw oscillation.

(beat)

But Neil and I both took manual corrective action to bring the two vehicles back in line. And while this was going on, the retract cycle was successfully taking place. The latches fired... and the problem was over.

The crowd applauds.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(jovially)

I would also just like to thank Stan Nesbitt. Stan, if you're watching...

He gives a big wink and a thumbs up.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. NASA COMPLEX - HANGAR - DAY

The large hangar is once again empty. We're in the center of the space, where a single chair sits. It's the kind of chair one might be interviewed in.

At the moment, Stan sits in the chair. But several people will be interviewed, individually, sitting in this same chair.

INTERCUT INTERVIEWS

LEIGH (O.S.)

How did that feel, being thanked -- by name -- by one of the astronauts who'd walked on the Moon?

Stan gives Leigh a look that says, "Come on..."

STAN

It felt... nice. It was an unnecessary gesture, but I appreciated it.

LEIGH (O.S.)
Unnecessary. Why?

KENDRICK
I mean, he could have thanked me,
too. I helped... put him on the
Moon. All three of them.
(beat)
Lots of us pitched in.

LEIGH (O.S.)
Would you do it again?

WEBB
I can't make an official statement
just yet, but I'd like to think
that there will be opportunities
to... recreate the success we've
had with our Moon mission.

LEIGH (O.S.)
Is there anything you might do
differently a second time?

WEBB
A second time.
(beat)
I... I'd have to think about that.

VON BRAUN
I might like to make certain...
adjustments... to the rocketry.
Perhaps a tweak of the guidance
system would make for a smoother
journey.

HARDY
Well, without going into the
technical reasons, we were only
able to get a black and white
transmission this time. So it
might be nice to see color footage
from the Moon.

KENDRICK
It might be nice to see a colored
person on the Moon.

LEIGH (O.S.)
And maybe a woman?

STAN
(in agreement)
And maybe a woman.

WEBB

And maybe a woman. Maybe even children, too. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

HARDY

And an artificially intelligent ventriloquist's dummy.

(beat)

But... let's not get ahead of ourselves.

JANITOR & DUMMY

(via dummy)

A what?

LEIGH (O.S.)

There are bound to be some who just won't believe it -- that man has set foot on the Moon. What would you say to them?

STAN

It is incredible. But you can believe it.

KENDRICK

I've seen stranger shit.

HARDY

(angrily)

Well, those people can just --

SERIOUS BLEEPING.

WEBB

When a man first ran a mile in under four minutes -- something the world was convinced couldn't be done -- there were those who denied the truth, even eyewitnesses to history.

(beat)

So I'm sure you're right. I'm sure there will be those who say it didn't happen, that we didn't go to the Moon, that we haven't -- that we can't go to Venus or Mars or even farther, sooner or later.

(beat)

But as far as I know, we did.

INT. JAMES TURNER'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

WEBB (V.O.)

We did.

Turner sits in his armchair, watching television. An animated commercial for Tang comes on screen.

ALIEN DAD (V.O.) (ARCHIVAL)

Well, we're all out of orange-flavored Tang.

ALIEN MOM (V.O.) (ARCHIVAL)

Golly, the grape flavor's gone, too.

ALIEN DAD (V.O.) (ARCHIVAL)

Listen, why don't I go to the Earth and get some more...

Turner gets up from his chair and shuffles off toward the kitchen.

TURNER

Don't mind if I do.

KITCHEN

Turner stands at a cabinet. He opens both doors, left and right, revealing a set of eight Tang tins. On each tin is a strip of masking tape, and on each strip of tape is the handwritten name of a planet: MERCURY, VENUS, MARS, JUPITER, SATURN, URANUS, NEPTUNE, PLUTO.

Turner lifts a hand to the tins, trying to choose one. Eventually, he takes down the VENUS tin and places it on a counter, aside.

Then, with both hands, he reaches into the cabinet and swaps the positions of the NEPTUNE and PLUTO tins.

CUT TO:

EXT. NIGHT SKY

SUPER:

STAN NESBITT and LEIGH BOSTWICK divorced amicably in 1971, after eleven years of marriage.

Stan left NASA in 1976 and had a second career designing spacecraft for an up-and-coming young filmmaker making movies about wars out among the stars.

Leigh joined NASA as a full-time staff documentarian and archivist.

KENDRICK BLACKMAN became the executive producer at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, overseeing the venue's 50th anniversary celebration in 1985.

JAMES WEBB died in 1992 at the age of 85. In 2002, a really big space telescope was renamed for him.

MICHAEL COLLINS had a second career as a television actor, gaining considerable fame for his multiple roles on the daytime soap opera "Where the Heart Trembles."

NASA janitor FRED STOKES retired at the age of 103 and was soon after convicted of federal espionage crimes. He is serving a life sentence in the United States Penitentiary, Hazelton.

The man called LITTLEGREEN was never seen or heard from again.

And that little Russian boy? His name was VLADIMIR PUTIN.

FADE OUT.