

RE-ENTRY

by

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[EXCERPT]

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RE-ENTRY

FADE IN:

EXT. TRAFFIC CIRCLE - DAY

A town car with government plates rounds the Lincoln Memorial and turns toward the Potomac River.

EXT. ARLINGTON MEMORIAL BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The car crosses over the gray water, diminishing in size as the perspective widens to embrace the heart of the nation's capital. Then the view shifts west.

EXT. NORTHERN VIRGINIA - CONTINUOUS

Suburban streets and cul-de-sacs yield to the broad runways of Dulles International Airport. Connected to the southern end of the airport, a separate installation appears.

EXT. BUILDING COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

A tightly-packed, eclectic mix of architecturally dramatic structures stands boldly against the sky.

SUPER: "CHANTILLY, VIRGINIA."

At the center of the complex is a long, arched-roof building. A smaller enclosure of similar design extends perpendicularly.

EXT. PUBLIC ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Visitors and tourists walk through a row of glass doors. A sign above reads: "Smithsonian Institution - National Air and Space Museum - Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center."

INT. DISPLAY HANGAR - SHORT TIME LATER

Surrounded by smaller, less impressive exhibits, the U.S. space shuttle "Discovery" sits serenely below a large American flag. Groups of people are gathered around, pointing at the polished, spotlit vehicle and taking pictures.

Incongruous with the festive atmosphere, three grim-faced men in dark suits walk purposively past the display.

A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY

the white-haired, friendly-looking DIRECTOR of the facility stands next to a shiny Mercury capsule, signing some paperwork on a clipboard, while a young ASSISTANT waits.

The Director finishes and hands the clipboard back to the Assistant. Then he turns and sees the approaching men.

DIRECTOR

Ah -- yes; good morning!

He shakes the hand of the one who seems to be the HEAD MAN.

DIRECTOR
(gesturing)
Please -- this way.

FARTHER FROM EXHIBITS - MOMENTS LATER

The Director leads the three men to the foot of an open stairway. He glances back at his guests.

DIRECTOR
As sorry as I was to see the shuttle program end, I must admit, Discovery has been very good to us.

They start walking up the stairs, looking down over the gleaming fuselage and tail section of the shuttle below.

DIRECTOR
Museum attendance has almost doubled since she arrived.

INT. HALLWAY - SHORT TIME LATER

The Director opens a door next to a mounted wall plate displaying his title.

DIRECTOR
Right in here, gentlemen.

They walk into

AN EXECUTIVE OFFICE

where the Director motions for the men to sit before taking his own seat behind his large, memorabilia-laden desk.

The Head Man and his SECOND sit down in two chairs on the other side of the desk. The THIRD MAN closes the door and remains standing.

DIRECTOR
So, what can I do for you? All I was told was that this has something to do with the shuttle.

The seated men exchange quick, uncomfortable glances. Then the Head Man looks squarely at the Director.

HEAD MAN
We need it back.

The Director's smile slowly disappears.

DIRECTOR
Excuse me?

EXT. SPACE

The dark side of the Earth turns toward the sun, revealing an orbiting object on the bright blue horizon. Seen from a great distance, the satellite appears tiny and indistinct.

SUPER: "EIGHTEEN MONTHS LATER."

As the Earth rotates into the light, the shuttle Discovery rises into view, looming large. It is flipped upside-down, with its protective black undercoating facing the stars.

Through the thick glass of one of the shuttle's illuminated windows, a woman's face can be seen, peering out.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

The woman is Mission Specialist DANA ANDERSON. She's in her early 30's, but looks younger; small-framed and attractively feminine despite her shapeless NASA attire and zero-g hair.

ANDERSON

There it is -- I can see it.

At the adjacent window is Pilot BOB TRUITT -- a cocky, crew-cut flyboy a few years older than Anderson. He lowers a pair of binoculars and responds with a homespun Texas twang.

TRUITT

Copy that.
(turning)
Your honors, Capt'n.

Drifting behind Truitt is Commander STEVE DRISCOLL, a 45-year-old space veteran, exuding competence and authority.

DRISCOLL

(into headset mic)
Control, this is Discovery. We now have XSAT in visual, and closing.

The second Mission Specialist, CHUCK GRIFFIN, floats over to see for himself. In his late 30's, Griffin appears studious and focused; every bit like the engineer he is.

GRIFFIN

Closing fast ...

The final member of the crew, Payload Specialist VERNON RICHTER, hovers off to the side. Bald and in his 40's, he looks a little green around the gills, as if he's never done anything like this before. He seems apart from the rest.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

FRANK BOYD, a NASA lifer two or three years away from his first heart attack, stands behind a console with a sign that reads, "Flight Director." Seated at a neighboring station labelled "CAPCOM" is the Capsule Communicator, TED CONWAY.

SUPER: "HOUSTON, TEXAS."

Boyd closely watches the three giant display screens in the front of the room. The center screen shows a grainy, moth-like image above the panoramic curvature of the Earth.

CONWAY
(into microphone)
Roger, Discovery; we've got it up
on the screen. Activate Code 201
for XSAT approach sequence.

Boyd turns to a TECHNICIAN.

BOYD
(pointing at screen)
Can we get more resolution on that?

Two short BEEPS sound from a phone on the console. With undisguised annoyance, Boyd picks up the receiver.

BOYD
Boyd.

LIAISON (V.O.)
Sorry, Frank; I've got another call
from Edwards.

BOYD
Jesus Christ, Hal, can't you handle
those guys for a while?
(glancing at watch)
We've got a regular briefing at --

LIAISON (V.O.)
It's Colonel Vaughn.

Boyd sighs, pushing back his thinning hair.

BOYD
Okay ... put him through.

EXT. POOL PATIO - NIGHT

Slumped dejectedly in a deck chair is the broken shell of DEAN CHANDLER, 33. Disheveled, unshaven; a handsome mess.

SUPER: "LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA."

The throbbing sound of club music pulsates from somewhere inside the large, Spanish-style house nearby.

Chandler gazes blankly at

THE POOL

where sees his warped reflection on its polluted surface.

ON THE PATIO

Chandler slowly and unsteadily stands up, grabbing the top of the chair for support. As he takes a step, a near-slip causes him to kick over an empty liquor bottle, which rolls noisily across the ceramic tile, coming to rest at the base of a withered potted palm.

He limps toward the house.

INT. THE HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Chandler walks through an open sliding-glass door. Inside the music is louder and every light is turned on, prompting him to shield his eyes as he stumbles into his wrecked

LIVING ROOM

where he shuts off the blaring stereo.

Slowly regaining his vision, he turns to face a plasma TV, now audible, which shows a cleaned-up, polished version of himself on the set of a program called "NightWatch." Below his image is the caption "Dean Chandler." In the lower right-hand corner of the screen is a network logo for "WNS."

CHANDLER (on TV)
 ... and although the senator has denied any improper use of campaign funds, he declined to say who paid for his wife's cosmetic surgery.

The TV camera changes, now tighter on Chandler.

CHANDLER (on TV)
 Coming up next, I'll ask MLB home run champ Victor Martino if he lied about steroids ... and what isn't the government telling you about the new flu? Back after --

Chandler presses a button on the TV, freezing the video on a close-up image of his face.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
 Hey!

Chandler spins around to see a dangerously young BLONDE sprawled out on the couch. On the coffee table in front of her are several smeared lines of white powder.

The Blonde daintily wipes under her nose with the tip of her pinky finger, then points at the TV.

BLONDE
 Is that you?

Chandler stares at her for a moment.

CHANDLER
 Not anymore.

He rubs his forehead.

CHANDLER

Don't touch my stuff, okay?

He presses another button on the TV. The image changes to a blank screen, then switches to current programming, which is showing a clip of a nighttime launch of the space shuttle.

COMMENTATOR (on TV, V.O.)

... lifted off early Thursday to retrieve a defective U.S. military satellite, known only as "XSAT."

Ignoring the broadcast, Chandler pulls a disc out of a DVD player next to the TV.

COMMENTATOR (on TV, V.O.)

Though all three shuttles were previously retired, NASA unexpectedly brought Discovery back into service for this final, top-secret mission.

Chandler flings the DVD across the room.

BLONDE

I just wanted to watch a movie ...

Chandler turns and staggers out.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Chandler lurches past off-kilter artwork and into

THE DEN

where he collapses onto a leather sofa.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK

Driscoll stares out the shuttle's forward windows.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

The strange satellite, seen earlier from afar, now appears in full view. It consists of two solid cones joined at their narrowed ends by a central sphere, from which extends a dense thicket of short, stubby protrusions. The entire mechanism rotates slowly around its axis in propeller fashion.

INT. DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

Truitt glides up to Driscoll with a clipboard in hand.

TRUITT

Ain't too pretty, is she?

Driscoll keeps staring out the windows.

DRISCOLL
It's an unconventional design.

Griffin comes over.

GRIFFIN
No stars and bars, either.

TRUITT
(to Driscoll)
Sure we got the right one?

Before Driscoll can answer, Richter appears from below.

RICHTER
XSAT does not have any insignia or
other markings to indicate national
origin. That's in the mission book.

At the Aft Crew Station, Anderson turns her head.

ANDERSON
The RMS diagnostic is complete.

Driscoll nods and moves his headset mic closer to his mouth.

DRISCOLL
Control, we're in position.

INT. CHANDLER'S HOUSE - DEN - DAY

Chandler awakes on the sofa where he ended up the night before. As soon as he sits up, he's hit by a sudden wave of nausea, which sends him hacking into a nearby wastebasket.

When he's finished, he wipes his mouth on his sleeve; then he looks over to his desk, where something catches his eye.

INSERT - A TELEPHONE ON THE DESK

A small red light is blinking.

BACK TO SCENE

Chandler shuffles over to the desk, hits a button on the phone, and drops into a chair. The phone emits a BEEP.

ANSWERING SERVICE (V.O.)
New message ... Saturday ... eleven
... thirty-three ... PM ...

The voice mail begins to play.

CALLER (V.O.)
Mr. Chandler, my name is John.
I've seen your show. I have to
talk to you right away.

Chandler inattentively pinches the bridge of his nose.

CALLER (V.O.)
 I've got something for you; it's
 bigger than anything you've ever
 done. I've gotta blow the lid off
 before it's too late -- but I think
 they're onto me; I need your help.

Chandler looks up, paying closer attention now.

CALLER (V.O.)
 Meet me tomorrow night at the Star-
 Brite Diner in Pasadena at 7:00. I
 promise, you won't be disappointed.

The message ends with another BEEP. Chandler hesitates for a moment, then punches a couple more buttons.

ANSWERING SERVICE (V.O.)
 Caller ID ... has been blocked.

Scowling, Chandler terminates the recording.

EXT. SPACE

Truitt, in his spacesuit, jets toward XSAT using the thrusters of the manned maneuvering unit strapped to his back.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

Driscoll and Richter follow Truitt's progress on a monitor, communicating with him through their headsets.

RICHTER
 You're going too fast; slow down.

INTERCUT - DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK / SPACEWALK

Truitt comes up to XSAT's strange-looking center sphere.

TRUITT
 I'm almost there ...

He reaches out and touches the sphere with his gloved hand as Driscoll and Truitt watch intently on the monitor.

DRISCOLL
 Give us a report, Bob.

TRUITT
 It's a really odd surface ...

DRISCOLL
 Go ahead.

TRUITT
 Well, there's all of these little,
 ah ... indentations along here ...

He trails off, as if unable to describe what he's seeing.

RICHTER
Are you experiencing any symptoms?

Driscoll gives Richter an inquisitive look.

TRUITT
Any what? Didn't copy that.

RICHTER
Dizziness, disorientation, nervous
sensation -- anything like that?

There's an uncomprehending delay before Truitt replies.

TRUITT
I feel fine, Vern -- how 'bout you?

DRISCOLL
(smiling)
Why don't you proceed to the
attachment, Bob?

TRUITT
Roger.

INT. CHANDLER'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Chandler stands motionless in the shower, his head under the
spray as steam rises around him.

SHORT TIME LATER

Chandler, with wet hair and a towel wrapped around his waist,
leans over a marble sink. He takes a long look in the mirror.

DEN - SHORT TIME LATER

Chandler, now in a pair of boxer shorts and an open shirt,
sits at his desk, staring off into space. Then he impulsively
picks up the receiver of his phone and presses some buttons.

He listens for a moment; then he puts the receiver back down,
presses another button, and leans back thoughtfully in his
chair, continuing to listen through the speaker.

CALLER (V.O.)
... bigger than anything you've
ever done. I've gotta blow the lid
off before it's too late --

Suddenly there's a loud BUZZ from a separate intercom box on
the desk. Chandler irritably flips a switch.

CHANDLER
(into intercom)
Go away.

VISITOR (V.O.)
Did you know your gate's busted?

CHANDLER

I said go away!

VISITOR (V.O.)

Yeah; I heard you. I'm coming up.

FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Chandler opens the front door; no one is there. Then he hears someone entering from a different part the house.

LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Chandler walks in to find SOL WEINSTEIN, a short, swarthy-looking man in his 50's, surveying the disaster area. He wears a tacky blazer and has an unlit cigar wedged between his lips, which he removes to express his bewilderment.

WEINSTEIN

What -- is it Rosa's day off?

CHANDLER

She quit. Two weeks ago.

WEINSTEIN

Then get a new girl -- what's the matter with you?

Chandler lowers his voice reproachfully.

CHANDLER

You know what's the matter with me.

There's an awkward silence; Weinstein looks uncomfortable.

WEINSTEIN

Yeah, well ... that's what I wanted to talk to you about.

He hesitates for a moment before continuing.

WEINSTEIN

You know I'm always lookin' out for you, right? You know that. But this isn't about friendship -- this is me talking as your agent, okay?

Chandler turns away and starts glancing around the room.

WEINSTEIN

If you don't pull yourself together, WNS is gonna cancel your contract.

Chandler locates a pair of jeans and yanks them on.

CHANDLER

Thanks for the tip.

He picks up a shoe; searches for the other.

WEINSTEIN
Just go back to the studio and --

CHANDLER
No. Forget it.

He finds the second shoe and slips his feet into both.

WEINSTEIN
Come on, Deano -- you've gotta get
over this. You're pissing away ten
million dollars!

Chandler stops to glare at Weinstein.

WEINSTEIN
It wasn't your fault.

CHANDLER
The hell it wasn't.

He turns away again, walks over to a mirror, and brushes
back his hair with his fingers. Then he grabs his keys.

WEINSTEIN
Where are you goin'?

CHANDLER
I can't deal with this now. I ...

He seems at a loss, grasping for some excuse to leave.

CHANDLER
I've got to meet someone, on a story.

WEINSTEIN
On a story? What story? You haven't
worked in months!

CHANDLER
Something just came up.

He scrutinizes Weinstein's attire.

CHANDLER
Give me your jacket.

WEINSTEIN
What for?

CHANDLER
Because I might be harder to
recognize in your crappy clothes.
(reaching out)
Come on -- give it to me.

Weinstein takes off his blazer and hands it over.

WEINSTEIN

Jeez ...

Chandler quickly puts on the blazer and turns to go.

CHANDLER

Don't be here when I get back.

EXT. SPACE

Truitt tightens a metal ring connected to a plate on the front of his spacesuit around one of XSAT's protrusions.

Griffin, also wearing a spacesuit, observes Truitt from directly below in Discovery's open payload bay.

GRIFFIN

How are you doing up there?

TRUITT

I think I've got a pretty good grip.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

Driscoll stares at the monitor.

DRISCOLL

Go with counter-rotation.

INTERCUT - DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK / SPACEWALK

TRUITT

Copy.

Truitt guns his thrusters, counteracting XSAT's spin and slowing down its rotation until it comes to a stop.

DRISCOLL

Prepare for capture.
(turns to Anderson)
OK, let's reel her in.

INT. STAR-BRITE DINER - NIGHT

Chandler, wearing Weinstein's blazer, sits alone at a booth in front of a half-eaten burger. He glances at his watch.

SUPER: "PASADENA, CALIFORNIA."

Chandler sighs and shakes his head. He takes out his wallet and drops some money on the table, getting ready to leave.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. Chandler?

Chandler looks up to see his informant, JOHN MILETTA, standing near his table. He's an unremarkable, middle-aged guy.

MILETTA
I'm John -- John Miletta.

CHANDLER
You're late.

Miletta sits down opposite Chandler.

MILETTA
Yeah; sorry ...

He puts a portable electronic device on the table in front of him. It looks like a bulked-up iPhone.

MILETTA
I was back there the whole time.
(motions with thumb)
Thought a couple fellas up at the counter might be watching me, so I waited 'til they left.

CHANDLER
How did you get my home number?

MILETTA
I've got a friend at Western Tel.
He can access their database and --

CHANDLER
Forget it. Just tell me what this is about; I gotta get back to L.A.

MILETTA
Right; okay ...

He hesitates, as if gathering his courage.

MILETTA
It's about the shuttle.

CHANDLER
The space shuttle?

MILETTA
Yeah. I told you it was big.

EXT. SPACE - SAME

As Truitt stabilizes XSAT, the end of Discovery's remote manipulator arm grabs onto another one of its protrusions.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

Anderson, checking her monitors, expertly controls the arm.

ANDERSON
I'm latched on.

DRISCOLL
 Alright; retract.

RICHTER
 Be careful -- we don't want any
 damage to the satellite.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Bending at its elbow joint, the manipulator arm pulls XSAT
 down toward the shuttle's payload bay, where Griffin waits.

INT. STAR-BRITE DINER - SAME

Chandler allows Miletta to continue.

MILETTA
 I work for an aerospace logistics
 company called UST.

He glances around furtively.

MILETTA
 Around the same time they brought
 the shuttle back, we were hired by
 the government on a big project at
 Edwards Air Force Base, out here in
 California. Highly classified; all
 very hush-hush, you know?

Chandler remains impassive.

MILETTA
 The job was to build what they call
 a "Special Containment Center." We
 later found out it's for Discovery,
 when it lands at the base after the
 XSAT mission.

A WAITRESS brings coffee, then hustles away.

MILETTA
 We're talking about a billion-dollar
 facility, just for this final flight.
 Black budget money; off the books.

Chandler still is unmoved.

CHANDLER
 So?

MILETTA
 (leans in)
 This is no ordinary hangar.

CHANDLER
 What do you mean?

MILETTA

It's designed so that it can be
locked up and sealed airtight.
Full bio control on the inside.

He takes a quick sip of coffee.

MILETTA

Soon as the shuttle lands, they're
gonna roll it in and shut the door;
run all these tests. Everything's
monitored; nothing gets out.

(pauses)

Including the crew.

Chandler stares back at him uncomprehendingly.

MILETTA

It's a quarantine.

EXT. SPACE - SAME

As Discovery's manipulator arm lowers XSAT over the shuttle
payload bay, Griffin and Truitt guide it into its transport
cradle and attempt to secure it in place.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

Driscoll watches on the monitor.

DRISCOLL

Any problem, Chuck?

GRIFFIN (V.O.)

It's tight, but within tolerance.

DRISCOLL

Roger.

(turns to Anderson)

Release the satellite. She's in.

He moves his headset mic closer to his mouth.

DRISCOLL

Houston, we have XSAT.

INT. STAR-BRITE DINER - SAME

Chandler looks uneasy.

CHANDLER

There must be some explanation.

MILETTA

You'd figure, it's a military
satellite, and they just want to
keep it under wraps, right?

CHANDLER

Yeah; something like that.

MILETTA

Okay -- but what kind of biological hazard comes from a dead satellite? Why can't the crew exit the shuttle on the tarmac? And why'd they bring three Army battalions to secure the facility? What are they afraid of?

He stares at Chandler.

CHANDLER

Are you going to tell me?

MILETTA

No; you have to see it for yourself.

CHANDLER

How am I gonna do that?

MILETTA

With this.

He takes a plastic ID card out of his pocket and tosses it on the table. Chandler picks it up.

MILETTA

It's a temporary security pass. To speed things up, the Air Force lets us give these to our new employees before they've been fully cleared.

He opens up the front of the iPhone-like device that he previously placed on the table. It's clearly something else.

CHANDLER

I'm not one of your new employees.

MILETTA

You are now.

Chandler looks down at the card.

MILETTA

I took the photo from your website and entered your name into the UST personnel records. Your real name, not the one you use on TV.

He pulls out a stylus that's attached to the device by a retractable cord and holds it up to eye level. A narrow, focused beam of light radiates from the tip.

CHANDLER

(still studying card)
How did you -- ?

MILETTA

Look up.

Chandler lifts his head and the beam of light falls on his left eye, prompting a confirmatory BEEP from Miletta's device.

CHANDLER

What the hell was that?

MILETTA

Iris scan.

He slides the stylus back into the main unit, presses a few buttons, and closes the cover. Then he looks back up.

MILETTA

Now you won't get shot.

Chandler pushes the ID card back to Miletta.

CHANDLER

Find someone else to not get shot.
I can't help you; I'm not the guy.

Miletta shakes his head.

MILETTA

No, you don't understand. Your personal information is in the system. I falsified our records to put it there. Once they figure that out, they'll come after me.
(pauses)
Then they'll come after you.

CHANDLER

(voice rising)
Hey, wait a minute -- I didn't even know anything about this!

MILETTA

You do now. That's all that matters to them.

EXT. SPACE

Discovery orbits with XSAT secured in her payload bay.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

At the Aft Crew Station, Griffin is fixated on one of the payload bay monitors. He looks concerned.

GRIFFIN

Dana? Could you come over here?

Anderson quickly jets over.

ANDERSON
Is there a problem?

GRIFFIN
Take a look at the side bay view.
(taps on monitor)
Do you see that?

Anderson squints at the black-and-white image.

ANDERSON
I don't see anything but XSAT.

GRIFFIN
Look at that one protrusion there,
off the sphere. I'll zoom in ...

ON THE MONITOR

a portion of XSAT is magnified. Griffin's finger points to what appears to be a segmented pole or tube, stretched out telescopically from the central sphere.

GRIFFIN (O.S.)
Does it look like it's extended?

AT THE AFT CREW STATION

Anderson leans in closer and nods.

ANDERSON
Yes -- I see it now.

GRIFFIN
I think it's coming into contact
with the interior wall of the bay.

Richter drifts over and peers into the monitor.

RICHTER
Sure it's not an attachment strut?

GRIFFIN
It's not an attachment strut. It's
part of XSAT. And it's ... changed.

EXT. ACCESS ROAD - DAY

Passing a military convoy heading in the other direction, a luxury sedan that looks like it's seen better days stops at

AN ENTRANCE GATE

manned by two USAF sentries. The FIRST SENTRY immediately comes out of the guard box; the SECOND SENTRY remains inside.

SUPER: "EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE - LANCASTER, CALIFORNIA."

The First Sentry RAPS on the top of the car. The driver's

side window rolls down. Chandler, wearing dark sunglasses, is behind the wheel. He seems apprehensive.

FIRST SENTRY

Pass, please.

CHANDLER

Sure ...

He hands over the ID card obtained earlier from Miletta.

CHANDLER

Hell of a day. Must be 90 already.

FIRST SENTRY

One moment.

EXT./INT. GUARD BOX - CONTINUOUS

The First Sentry gives the card to the Second Sentry, who swipes it through a reader attached to his computer.

ON THE COMPUTER SCREEN

a window opens with the heading "United Space Technologies." Underneath is a photo of Chandler with an ID number and other fabricated employee information.

INT./EXT. GUARD BOX - CONTINUOUS

The Second Sentry types rapidly on his keyboard.

SECOND SENTRY

(without looking up)

First time on base, Mr. Chankowski?

CHANDLER

Yeah.

The First Sentry slowly walks around the car, inspecting the underside with a mirror attached to the end of a long pole.

SECOND SENTRY

(glancing over)

Remove your sunglasses, cover your right eye, and look directly at the scanning lens.

Chandler does as he's told, staring into a parabolic piece of glass mounted outside the guard box.

THE COMPUTER SCREEN

now shows an enlarged image of Chandler's left eye.

INT./EXT. GUARD BOX - MOMENTS LATER

The Second Sentry clips the ID card onto a cord and hands it back to Chandler as the First Sentry completes his task.

SECOND SENTRY
Keep this visible at all times.

CHANDLER
Right; thanks.

He loops the cord around his neck. The gate opens, and the First Sentry waves Chandler through.

EXT. BASE - SHORT TIME LATER

Chandler walks self-consciously but unchallenged amid hustling civilian and military personnel toward the center of activity. He suddenly stops and looks up, mouth agape.

AHEAD

A monstrous, steel-ribbed building shimmers in the desert heat. Engineers and construction workers are scrambling to put finishing touches on the facility.

BACK

Chandler swallows hard and resumes walking.

EXT. SPECIAL CONTAINMENT CENTER - SHORT TIME LATER

Chandler stands near an entrance behind others waiting to be admitted by an MP. Then it's his turn.

CHANDLER
(holding up ID)
I'm with UST.

The MP looks at the card and nods.

INT. SPECIAL CONTAINMENT CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Chandler walks inside the facility and is visibly overwhelmed. The huge open interior is partially occupied by sophisticated-looking equipment and ringed with many smaller enclosed spaces behind tinted glass.

Chandler walks to the center of the arena and gazes up at the lofty ceiling; then he jumps back to avoid being struck by a lift truck carrying a load of drums with hazard labels.

A technician, RALPH EGGERT, approaches. A respiratory mask hangs around his neck.

EGGERT
First time, eh?

CHANDLER
Uh, yeah. Just started.

EGGERT
Welcome to Never-Never Land.
(MORE)

EGGERT (CONT'D)
 I'm Ralph Eggert -- Ambient Air
 Quality Control. And you're ...
 (reads Chandler's ID)
 ... "Leon Chankowski."

CHANDLER
 (hesitantly)
 Yeah.

Eggert stares at Chandler for a moment.

EGGERT
 You know, you look like someone --
 someone in the movies, maybe. Who
 am I thinking of?

CHANDLER
 No idea.

EGGERT
 Seriously -- who do people say you
 look like?

CHANDLER
 No one; really.
 (glances at watch)
 I'm supposed to report to Recovery
 Lab A. Do you know where that is?

EGGERT
 Oh, yeah; sure.
 (points ahead)
 Right over there.

OUTSIDE RECOVERY LAB A - SHORT TIME LATER

Near sealed double doors emblazoned with a giant letter "A," another MP waves a scanner past Chandler's ID card. A green light on the device flashes, followed by two approving BEEPS.

The MP enters a code into a keypad on the wall. The doors slide open with a HISS, evenly splitting the "A" in two.

Chandler walks into

THE LAB

whereupon the doors immediately slide shut behind him. The room is soundproofed against the noise and clamor outside.

In the far corner, two men in lab coats are talking softly to each other over a computer console, but their words cannot quite be heard. They briefly look up at Chandler before resuming their conversation.

Chandler glances around warily; then something grabs his attention. He walks over to a raised platform at the center of the room. On the platform sits an oversized operating

table, surrounded by a bewildering array of medical equipment. He reaches down.

INSERT - THE OPERATING TABLE

Chandler's hand touches a shiny, metallic cuff restraint.

BACK TO SCENE

Chandler turns to look at a nearby stand.

INSERT - THE STAND

Neatly laid out is an assortment of clamps, scalpels, and other instruments, including a long, serrated tool that looks like a small hacksaw.

BACK TO SCENE

Chandler turns again and observes a stack of empty Plexiglas boxes on a cart. He carefully picks one up.

INSERT - THE BOX

A label reads: "EBE Organ Receptacle (Med.) -- Wgt. []g."

BACK TO SCENE

Chandler's eyes grow wide.

In the corner of the room, the men in lab coats look up again.

LAB GUY
Hey buddy -- can I help you?

Chandler turns around, startled.

CHANDLER
Uh, no; that's all right ...

He quickly replaces the container and backs up a step.

CHANDLER
Just making a final check.

LAB GUY
Well, we're running some tests in here, so could you come back later?

CHANDLER
Yeah; no problem.

He makes for the door, but is momentarily unsure how to get out. Then he sees a single, large button and instinctively presses it. The doors slide open, and he exits.

LAB GUY
(to his partner)
Contractors.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Boyd sits alone in the wood-paneled, windowless room. Facing him across the long table is a large video conferencing screen displaying the NASA insignia against a white background.

The insignia disappears, replaced by an audio-visual message.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)
Please state your name.

BOYD
Frank Boyd.

He looks like he hates this.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)
Verifying ...

The word blinks on and off the screen for a few seconds.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)
Identification confirmed ... scramble
engaged ... please stand by ...

Appearing next is the stiff, square-jawed visage of COLONEL VAUGHN, identified by the tag on his neatly-pressed uniform.

VAUGHN (on screen)
Good afternoon.

BOYD
Hello, Colonel. What's the latest
weather out there at Edwards?

VAUGHN (on screen)
High skies for the rest of the week.

BOYD
That's good news.
(pauses)
Listen, Colonel, before we get to
the tracking data, I was wondering
if you had a chance to look at those
pictures we received from Discovery.

VAUGHN (on screen)
As a matter of fact, I have.

He motions to someone out of camera range who hands him a stack of photos. He leafs through them, then looks back up.

VAUGHN (on screen)
What exactly is the problem?

Boyd appears to think he's misheard the question.

BOYD
What is the problem?

VAUGHN (on screen)
Yes. Is there a specific issue?

BOYD
Well, we weren't anticipating any,
um ... expansion of the satellite.

VAUGHN (on screen)
Have their been any operational
effects on the shuttle? Any system
failures of any kind?

BOYD
No, but, as you know, we don't have
a lot of clearance in the payload
bay. We've got to be able to get
those doors closed before landing.

VAUGHN (on screen)
Is there a present danger?

BOYD
Not as far as we can tell. But it
would be helpful if we could just
get a little more information from
you guys about what XSAT is designed
to do and what we can expect by way
of future changes.

VAUGHN (on screen)
All functional capabilities of XSAT
are classified. We made that clear
on day one. Even I am not privy to
all of the technical details.

He shuffles the photos back into a stack.

VAUGHN (on screen)
However, in order to allay your
concerns, I'll have some of my people
look into it further.

BOYD
I'd appreciate it.

VAUGHN (on screen)
Unless there are any other pressing
matters, why don't you just transmit
the latest status report, and we'll
hold off on the rest until the 1900
briefing.

BOYD
That's fine; I'll send the report.

Vaughn reaches toward the camera; a second later, the screen
reverts to its initial NASA display.

INT. EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE - VAUGHN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Vaughn closes a laptop on his desk and returns the shuttle photos to the JUNIOR OFFICER who's been standing nearby.

VAUGHN
You've got six hours to come up
with something.

JUNIOR OFFICER
Yes sir.

He hands back a printout; Vaughn snatches it up.

VAUGHN
What the hell is this?
(pauses to read)
Who is this guy?

JUNIOR OFFICER
Unauthorized entrant -- this morning.
Word just came in from base security;
they're still checking it out.

Vaughn looks closer.

INSERT - THE PRINTOUT

Chandler's picture appears next to his bogus contractor info.

BACK TO SCENE

Vaughn's eyes grow wide with sudden recognition.

VAUGHN
(reaching for phone)
Son of a bitch ...

INT. BAR - NIGHT

The place is a dive; dimly-lit and mostly empty. Chandler, looking overwhelmed, knocks back the rest of his drink and sets the glass down hard on the counter.

He dials his cell phone and waits. The call is quickly answered by an emotionally strained female voice belonging to MILETTA'S WIFE.

WIFE (V.O.)
Hello?

CHANDLER
Uh, yeah ...
(clears throat)
John Miletta, please.

WIFE (V.O.)
He's not here. Who is this?

CHANDLER

Do you know how I can reach him?
He gave me this number ...

WIFE (V.O.)

(agitated)

I don't know where he is. I'm his
wife, and I haven't seen him since
yesterday. He said he had to meet
with someone on the project, but --

CHANDLER

Oh; I --

WIFE (V.O.)

Who is this? Who am I speaking to?

Chandler is speechless.

WIFE (V.O.)

Please -- I know something's wrong!

Chandler ends the call. He hastily puts some money on the
counter and gets up to leave.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - NIGHT

At the CAPCOM station, Conway speaks into his microphone.

CONWAY

Roger, Discovery; stand by.

He nods at Boyd, who stands over the Flight Director's console
holding a Styrofoam cup of coffee in one hand and a scribbled
notepad in the other.

BOYD

(into mic)

This is Flight. Everyone there?

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

The entire crew is assembled.

DRISCOLL

All present.

INTERCUT - DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK / MISSION CONTROL

BOYD

Alright; what's the latest on XSAT?

Griffin speaks up.

GRIFFIN

Frank, this is Chuck. We've got
significantly increased extension
of the center sphere protrusions.

BOYD
How much is that on the CSPs? Give
me an estimate.

GRIFFIN
Anywhere from two to four feet.

Boyd turns to his notes.

BOYD
Okay, I've got some feedback from
the Pentagon ...

TRUITT
(softly, to others)
'Bout time ...

BOYD
First of all, let me remind you
that this is a classified mission,
and therefore any details regarding
XSAT are given strictly on a need-
to-know basis. However, the Defense
Department has graciously provided
me with the following information.

He pauses to take a gulp of coffee.

BOYD
I have been told that the center
sphere protrusions or CSPs are anti-
missile particle beam emitters that
were designed to laterally project
from the satellite prior to firing.

GRIFFIN
Jesus ...

TRUITT
You've gotta be kidding ...

Boyd puts the notepad down.

BOYD
Now, listen up: XSAT is not active;
it is only a test device, and I've
been assured that it poses no threat
to shuttle operation or integrity.

Driscoll puts a stop to the crew's murmuring.

DRISCOLL
We copy that, Frank. But why are
the CSPs extending now?

Boyd and Conway exchange troubled looks.

BOYD

In, um, response to that ... the Air Force believes that XSAT's on-board electronics may be reacting in some way to Discovery's heat and/or magnetic field.

DRISCOLL

If XSAT expands any further, we might not be able to get the bay doors closed for re-entry.

BOYD

I'm aware of that issue. We're currently reviewing our options.

He swallows the last of his coffee.

BOYD

The guys at Edwards would like to confer with Vern on this privately.

Richter nods, ignoring Truitt's scowl.

RICHTER

Of course.

Floating in the back, Anderson turns and looks

THROUGH THE PAYLOAD BAY WINDOWS

where XSAT can be seen locked tightly in the hold.

INT. CHANDLER'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

Chandler, clearly frazzled and showing some effects of the alcohol he consumed earlier, bursts through his front door and immediately shuts and locks it behind him.

He flips a switch. Overhead lights go on for a moment, then suddenly switch off, making the house dark again.

Alarmed, Chandler walks quickly into

THE HALLWAY

where he is met by a large figure who jumps out from the darkness and SLAMS him face-first into a wall, twisting his arm behind his back. Chandler GROANS in pain.

Someone else emerges amid the confusion and follows as Chandler is muscled into

THE DEN

and violently pushed into the chair behind his desk. The chair careens backward, banging Chandler's head against a cabinet and causing display items to rain down on him.

CHANDLER
 (gasping in panic)
 What -- what ... ?

A gloved hand pulls the chain of a jostled desk lamp. Its shade askew, the lamp shines brightly on Chandler's bloodied face, while keeping a MAN sitting on the other side of the desk in shadow. A BURLY GUY, somewhat more visible, stands nearby, smoothing out his suit.

SHADOW MAN
 Good evening, Mr. Chankowski.

CHANDLER
 (squinting)
 Who are you?

The Shadow Man leans slightly forward. His features are jagged and cold.

SHADOW MAN
 Someone you didn't want to meet.

He leans back and lights a cigarette.

SHADOW MAN
 I understand you recently paid a visit to Edwards Air Force Base.

Chandler tries to get to his feet. The Burly Man advances a step and unbuttons his jacket.

SHADOW MAN
 Sit down before my partner accidentally blows your head off.

The Burly Man casually reveals a gun.

SHADOW MAN
 Believe me, accidents do happen.

Chandler slowly drops back down into his chair.

SHADOW MAN
 That's better.

The Burly Man retreats.

SHADOW MAN
 Do you have any idea how many different state and federal laws you violated today?

CHANDLER
 Why don't you arrest me then?

The Shadow Man flashes a barely-perceptible smile.

SHADOW MAN

I don't think you fully appreciate the gravity of the situation.

He takes a drag on his cigarette.

SHADOW MAN

We could have you arrested. But that might attract some unwanted attention, seeing as you, uh, used to be a big-shot TV star -- until that guy committed suicide.

Chandler's eyes grow wide.

SHADOW MAN

Sure, you remember him -- the televangelist who liked hookers. You nailed him good, didn't you? Got him on tape, fucking some whore. Funny, though -- after he blew his brains out, you killed the story.

CHANDLER

How did -- ?

SHADOW MAN

Poor bastard; left a wife and five kids. Police report said the eight-year-old was the one who found him.

He shakes his head in mock sympathy.

SHADOW MAN

Fortunately, no one needs to know about that. Just like no one needs to know about the narcotics we found in your living room. Or about the little sightseeing trip you took.

(another drag)

And when no one knows about something, it's like it never really happened at all.

Chandler looks stunned.

SHADOW MAN

So that's Option A -- we erase what you did. Option B is much simpler.

(pauses ominously)

We erase you.

He puts his cigarette out on the desk.

SHADOW MAN

It's your choice -- we get paid either way.

Chandler lurches forward in his chair.

CHANDLER
You can't -- !

SHADOW MAN
(motioning with hand)
Ah -- no need to get up; we'll show
ourselves out.

He stands and straightens his tie.

SHADOW MAN
See you around.

The two men walk out as Chandler helplessly watches them go.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK

The astronauts busily work at their respective stations.
Driscoll and Truitt are seated next to each other up front.

TRUITT
What the hell ... ?

DRISCOLL
(turning)
What is it?

Truitt points at a computer screen on the main panel.

TRUITT
Look ...

ON THE SCREEN

a blur of text and numbers scroll past at unreadable speed.

TRUITT (O.S.)
There's some kind of a system scan
in progress ... but ...

ON THE FLIGHT DECK

the other astronauts gather around.

DRISCOLL
(to Truitt)
Did you -- ?

TRUITT
I didn't do anything.

Driscoll starts typing commands on a keyboard.

GRIFFIN
What is it looking for?

DRISCOLL
(stops typing)
I can't override; it won't let me.

Suddenly the scrolling ceases and the screen returns to what appears to be its regular display.

 GRIFFIN
Hey -- it stopped.

 TRUITT
You mean, it finished.
 (turns to Richter)
This has something to do with XSAT,
doesn't it? Now it's affecting the
computer!

Richter is silent.

 TRUITT
 (to Driscoll)
We've got to get rid of it. We can
initiate the emergency release --

 RICHTER
That is not authorized!

 TRUITT
Look, Vern, I don't care --

 ANDERSON
No -- it doesn't matter!

All eyes fall upon her.

 ANDERSON
XSAT is entangled with the cradle.
 (looks at Driscoll)
There's no longer a release option.
We have to bring it down.

INT. CHANDLER'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Chandler hurriedly packs two suitcases, tossing in clothes, toiletries, and other items with little consideration. He has a bruise under his right eye and wears a small Band-Aid above his brow. A TV is showing a news program.

 ANCHORWOMAN (on TV)
President Holbrooke has defended
the proposed tax increase despite
widespread opposition in Congress.

Chandler grabs a passport and cash from a dresser drawer.

 ANCHORWOMAN (on TV)
In other news, NASA has announced
that the space shuttle Discovery,
having successfully captured its
target satellite, will be landing
tonight at California's Edwards Air
Force Base, one day sooner than
previously planned.

Chandler spins around to look at the TV.

ANCHORWOMAN (on TV)
 Officials say the change was made
 due to what is being described as a
 "minor equipment malfunction," but
 emphasize that the problem poses no
 danger to the shuttle or crew.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK

The five astronauts, now in their orange flight suits, are strapped in for descent. Though wearing helmets, they are still able to communicate with each other and with Mission Control through their headsets underneath.

DRISCOLL
 APU prestart complete.

CONWAY (V.O.)
 Roger. Load deorbit program.

Driscoll enters a command on a computer keyboard.

TRUITT
 (watching screen)
 Hang in there, baby ...

INT. MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

Boyd motions to Conway.

BOYD
 Go.

Conway turns toward his console.

CONWAY
 Discovery, you are go for de-orbit
 burn; that's go for de-orbit burn.

INTERCUT - MISSION CONTROL / DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK

DRISCOLL
 Roger. Initiating APU.

Truitt rapidly flips more switches.

TRUITT
 APU engaged ... pressure steady.

DRISCOLL
 Houston, we have APU start and OMS
 engines are armed.

CONWAY
 Roger, Discovery. Go ahead.

Driscoll turns to Truitt.

DRISCOLL

Hit it.

TRUITT

Okay, here we go ...
 (presses a button)
 OMS burn ignition in five ... four
 ... three ... two ... one ...

Nothing happens. Truitt looks perplexed.

TRUITT

Jesus, what -- ?

CONWAY

Discovery -- where is your ignition?

DRISCOLL

It's not responding ...

CONWAY

Discovery, please advise. We see
 no ignition. What is OMS status?

DRISCOLL

We have apparent OMS failure.

BOYD

(to Conway)

We've got to have that burn in the
 next ten seconds or they'll miss
 the Edwards landing opportunity!

CONWAY

(to shuttle)

Reset and execute again -- now!

Driscoll repeatedly presses another button, to no effect.

DRISCOLL

Negative -- computer will not reset!

Boyd looks up at the Control Room's tracking screen, which
 shows Discovery's current position and orbital path.

BOYD

(to Conway)

De-arm for another orbit.

CONWAY

(to shuttle)

Switch off auto mode and de-arm the
 OMS engines.

A FLIGHT CONTROLLER comes over and opens a thick binder on
 the console in front of Boyd; the two confer urgently MOS.

Truitt throws up his hands, staring helplessly at frozen
 screens stuck on the number "1" from the OMS countdown.

DRISCOLL
 (to Mission Control)
 We can't seem to disengage; still
 in de-orbit hold at pre-ignition.

CONWAY
 Okay, sit tight; we're trying to
 sort this out down here ...

The Controller talking to Boyd directs his attention to something in the binder; then Boyd brings it to Conway.

TRUITT
 (to Driscoll)
 If that burn starts now, we could
 come down anywhere.

CONWAY
 Discovery, do you copy?

DRISCOLL
 Right here; what've you got?

CONWAY
 We're going to try to override the
 digital auto pilot.

DRISCOLL
 Roger.

Truitt hands Driscoll a manual.

DRISCOLL
 I've got the override summary here.

CONWAY
 (reading from binder)
 OK, first off, we want you to --

Suddenly, Discovery's displays come back to life, flashing the word "IGNITION" in big letters, then a stream of data.

TRUITT
 Holy shit!

DRISCOLL
 (to Mission Control)
 We have ignition! Repeat -- we
 have ignition -- full OMS burn!

BOYD
 That's impossible!

Driscoll and Truitt frantically work Discovery's controls.

DRISCOLL
 The orbiter is in descent!
 (MORE)

DRISCOLL (CONT'D)
 (glances at screen)
 Emergency protocols have been
 automatically engaged for an
 alternate landing site!

The Control Room falls into chaos.

BOYD
 (calling out)
 Where are they going?

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
 TAL site TNZ -- Emergency 015!

CONWAY
 Discovery, you are heading to
 Transatlantic Landing Site T-N-Z.

BOYD
 Where the hell is that?

Conway quickly slides his finger down a laminated list.

CONWAY
 Sabin Air Base -- Tanzania.

BOYD
 God Almighty ...

CONWAY
 (to shuttle)
 That's the Tanzania landing site,
 Discovery. You will use the main
 civilian runway in Dar es Salaam.

TRUITT
 Is that -- OK; just got the profile.

Richter, strapped in back, becomes extremely agitated.

RICHTER
 Wait a minute! We can't land at a
 foreign location -- it's not secure!

DRISCOLL
 The computer's already switched
 over; there's nothing we can do!

RICHTER
 No -- there must be another site!

DRISCOLL
 It's too late; we're going down!

Boyd looks at Conway.

BOYD
 When, Ted?

CONWAY
ETA in 54 minutes.

Boyd turns to another CONTROLLER.

BOYD
Get the word out to Sabin; they're
in for a big surprise.

INT. MILITARY OFFICE - DAY

NASA TAL Site Manager MIKE PANCHER, tan and relaxed, leans back in his chair, feet propped up on his desk, examining a small African figurine in his hands.

SUPER: "SABIN AIR BASE - DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA."

The breeze coming through an open window gently rattles a wind chime that hangs from the ceiling; then the melody is interrupted by a soft PING from an open laptop on the desk.

Pancher drops his feet and leans forward.

INSERT - THE COMPUTER SCREEN

A sequential list of executed commands from Discovery appears in seemingly ordinary fashion -- until the last, which flashes urgently in red: "NEW PATH ALT SITE 015 TAL TNZ."

BACK TO SCENE

Pancher lifts his head without taking his eyes off the screen.

PANCHER
(calling out)
Hey, Christine, will you check -- ?

Suddenly his phone RINGS; he quickly answers.

PANCHER
Mike Pancher. What's going -- ?
(pauses to listen)
Are you shitting me?

INT. MISSION CONTROL - SAME

All hell is breaking loose in the Control Room. People are running around, excitedly conferring with each other, handing off papers, and peering into computer terminals. In the eye of the storm, Boyd talks heatedly on his phone.

BOYD
Yeah ... yeah ... Hold on.
(to Conway)
What's happening now?

Conway holds up a finger as he waits to finish receiving a report from the shuttle.

CONWAY

Roger, Discovery. Prepare hydraulic
for re-entry and dump RCS propellant.

He looks up at Boyd.

CONWAY

On track; no further malfunction.

BOYD

What about the weather?
(looks around room)
Anyone got the weather in Tanzania?

METEOROLOGIST

Clear skies; wind's up a little but
she can handle it.

Boyd resumes his phone conversation.

BOYD

Look, Hal, we've got to get the
Rapid Response Team mobilized and
in the air; find out what we need.

A STAFFER approaches; Boyd lowers the phone.

BOYD

What?

STAFFER

We just got a call from the White
House. The President wants to be
briefed as soon as the shuttle is
on the ground.

BOYD

Then we'd better not screw this up.

INT. PANCHER'S OFFICE - DAY

The office is now packed with a boisterous, unruly crowd of
American and Tanzanian personnel, their exclamations competing
with the WAIL of sirens outside.

Pancher jumps up on his chair.

PANCHER

Quiet -- everybody! Quiet!

The arguing dies down.

PANCHER

The space shuttle will arrive here
to attempt a landing in 25 minutes!
That means there's no time for any
more of this bureaucratic bullshit!
I want all air traffic re-routed,
and I want it done now!

A Tanzanian AVIATION OFFICIAL speaks up.

OFFICIAL
But ... we have not yet received
clearance from the Defense Ministry!

Pancher hops off the chair and surges toward the Official.

PANCHER
The shuttle is now a glider, okay?
It can't change course, and it can't
be stopped! So go and tell General
Zaramo that it's coming down whether
he clears it or not!

The Official blinks twice, then hurries out of the room.
Pancher turns toward the rest of the group.

PANCHER
Alright, what about the runway?
Where's the layout?

A petrified-looking COORDINATOR steps forward.

PANCHER
For Christ's sake -- let's go!

The Coordinator struggles to open a large, unwieldy map of
the airport across Pancher's desk. Pancher pulls it closer.

PANCHER
I want emergency and rescue
positioned here, here, and here.
(poking map)
How many fire trucks have we got?

GROUND CHIEF
Two of ours and maybe five or six
local, plus the water cannons.

PANCHER
(turns his head)
What's the word from Discovery?
Are they locked on?

NAVIGATION SPECIALIST
We'll know in a few minutes, after
they emerge from the communications
blackout. But TANCAN and microwave
landing systems are up and running.

PANCHER
OK; let's head to the tower.

EXT. UPPER ATMOSPHERE - SHORT TIME LATER

Discovery descends to 180,000 feet above Lake Malawi.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

Driscoll switches to a new communications channel.

DRISCOLL
TAL Ground Control, this is
Discovery. Do you copy?

INT. AIRPORT CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

The NASA team is in place, assisted by a few Tanzanian air traffic controllers and related personnel.

SUPER: "NYERERE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT."

Pancher mans the radio.

PANCHER
Roger, Discovery. All traffic has
been cleared and you'll be coming
in at 045 in the designated area.

INTERCUT - CONTROL TOWER / DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK

DRISCOLL
Roger that. What's your weather?

PANCHER
Unlimited visibility; wind out of
the southeast at 10-15 knots.

Truitt carefully steers Discovery with the control stick; Driscoll eyes the altimeter.

DRISCOLL
Now at 90,000 feet. Locked on
autoland guidance ... proceeding to
heading alignment Waypoint One.

EXT. OVER TANZANIA - SHORT TIME LATER

High above the savanna, Discovery unleashes a double SONIC BOOM, scattering herds of zebra and impala below.

INT. DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

TRUITT
(softly)
Hello, hello ...

EXT. OVER DAR ES SALAAM - SHORT TIME LATER

Discovery ZOOMS past the city, arcing toward the Indian Ocean.

THROUGH THE SHUTTLE WINDOWS

can be glimpsed a jumble of red rooftops clustered by a deep-water harbor dotted with merchant vessels and container ships.

EXT. OVER DAR ES SALAAM BAY - CONTINUOUS

Discovery circles around for its final approach.

INT. CONTROL TOWER - MOMENTS LATER

Pancher gazes through the observation window.

PANCHER

We can see you now, Discovery.
You're coming in a little steep.

INT. DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

TRUITT

Deploying landing gear.

EXT. OVER NYERERE AIRPORT - MOMENTS LATER

Discovery approaches the main runway from the northeast.

INT. CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

An AIR CONTROLLER peers through a pair of binoculars.

CONTROLLER

Gear down!

PANCHER

Discovery, we confirm gear down.

DRISCOLL (V.O.)

Roger. Gear down and locked.

EXT. MAIN RUNWAY - MOMENTS LATER

With a tremendous WHOOSH, Discovery swoops in to land.

INT. CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

PANCHER

Come on ... come on ...

INT. DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

Inside the violently shaking shuttle, the astronauts barely can be heard over the thunderous ROAR of the landing.

TRUITT

Touchdown -- speed 191 knots!

INT. CONTROL TOWER - MOMENTS LATER

The NASA and Tanzanian controllers watch Discovery blow by.

EXT. RUNWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Discovery SCREAMS past emergency vehicles and ground crews.

INT. CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

PANCHER
You're too fast!

INT. DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

DRISCOLL
(to Truitt)
Deploy the chute!

TRUITT
I got it, I got it ...

EXT. RUNWAY - MOMENTS LATER

A huge, red-and-white parachute shoots out from Discovery's tail section and opens up behind it.

INT. CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

CONTROLLER
(still with binoculars)
They're running out of room ...

EXT. RUNWAY - CONTINUOUS

Slowed by the chute but still careening forward, Discovery CRASHES through a low wooden gate and hurtles onto a rough, gravel extension of the runway.

INT. DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

There's a huge jolt.

DRISCOLL
(to Truitt)
We're on the overrun.

Truitt struggles to bring the shuttle to a stop.

PANCHER (V.O.)
You've only got a few hundred feet!

TRUITT
Hang on ...

EXT. END OF RUNWAY - CONTINUOUS

With wheels GRINDING through the gravel, Discovery slides to a harrowing halt, kicking up an obscuring cloud of dirt and grit. A formidable-looking concrete barrier lies just ahead.

INT. DISCOVERY FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

Hearts almost pounding out of their flight suits, Driscoll and Truitt stare at the barrier through the forward windows.

DRISCOLL
Any landing you walk away from ...

TRUITT
(exhaling)
... is a good landing.

In the back row of seats, Anderson, Griffin, and Richter trade expressions of relief.

GRIFFIN
Amen.

Driscoll speaks into his microphone.

DRISCOLL
Ground Control, this is Discovery.
We have wheels stop.

INT. CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

Pancher's face breaks into a broad, exhausted grin.

PANCHER
Roger, Discovery.
(wipes forehead)
Welcome to Tanzania.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

GARRETT DEVANE, a bearded, distinguished-looking man in his early 60's, lies asleep in bed alongside his WIFE. A phone on the nightstand RINGS.

SUPER: "PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY."

The phone RINGS again. Devane's wife rouses and answers.

WIFE
Hello?
(pauses to listen)
Just a minute.

She nudges Devane awake and hands him the phone.

WIFE
Sounds important ...

DEVANE
(groggily into phone)
Yes? Yes, it is ...
(pauses to listen)
What?

He suddenly sits upright in the bed.

DEVANE
Can you say that again?

EXT. NYERERE AIRPORT - END OF MAIN RUNWAY - DAY

Discovery sits like a white elephant in the African sun, encircled by a ring of military and rescue vehicles.

INT. CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

A freckle-faced CORPORAL hands Pancher his walkie-talkie.

CORPORAL
It's the C.O.

PANCHER
(into walkie-talkie)
Colonel?

EXT. END OF RUNWAY - CONTINUOUS

Standing next to a Jeep is the Base Commander, COLONEL SCOTT.

SCOTT
What's the word up there? I'm getting a lot of flack; Defense Ministry's got a bug up its ass.

INTERCUT - END OF RUNWAY / CONTROL TOWER

PANCHER
My team's ready to go. Is the shuttle secure?

SCOTT
Affirmative. Send your boys on down; we'll handle the natives.

EXT. NEAR AIR BASE - SHORT TIME LATER

A NASA van rolls off the rear ramp of a parked C-130 cargo plane, followed by much larger equipment trucks.

EXT. MAIN RUNWAY - SHORT TIME LATER

The NASA vehicles proceed down the runway.

EXT. END OF RUNWAY - SHORT TIME LATER

The NASA vehicles move inside a U.S. Marine perimeter around the shuttle and come to a halt. NASA personnel jump out and set to work.

Service booms from two of the giant trucks rise up and extend like fire engine ladders. NASA techs attach umbilical hoses to connection points near the tail of the shuttle.

NEARBY - SHORT TIME LATER

Another vehicle drives up. Workers unload an airline-type passenger stairway and begin to wheel it up to the shuttle.

IN FRONT OF THE SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

The NASA Ground Chief speaks into his van's two-way radio.

GROUND CHIEF
We're ready to open the hatch.

INT. CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

A COMMUNICATIONS MAN wearing a headset nods at Pancher.

COMM MAN
They're ready.

PANCHER
Tell them to stand by.

He picks up his microphone.

PANCHER
Discovery, what's your status?

DRISCOLL (V.O.)
Shutdown complete; ready for egress.

PANCHER
Roger. The folks in Houston are pretty anxious to hear your report.

DRISCOLL (V.O.)
We're kind of looking forward to talking to them, too.

PANCHER
(smiling)
Copy that. Control out.

He turns to the Communications Man.

PANCHER
Alright; tell them to --

The walkie-talkie crackles in Pancher's other hand.

SCOTT (V.O.)
Come in, Tower!

PANCHER
(answering)
What is it, Colonel?

EXT. END OF MAIN RUNWAY - CONTINUOUS

Colonel Scott speaks gruffly into his walkie-talkie.

SCOTT
We've got company.

INT. CONTROL TOWER - CONTINUOUS

Pancher moves closer to the observation window.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

a long column of camouflaged military vehicles can be seen heading down the runway toward Discovery.

IN THE TOWER

Pancher looks alarmed.

PANCHER
Who the hell is that?

INTERCUT - CONTROL TOWER / END OF RUNWAY

SCOTT
Tanzanian Defense Forces. There's a separate detachment heading your way. Better call your people back.

COMM MAN
(to Pancher)
Mike? The ground team wants to know what's going on.

SCOTT
(to Pancher)
I'm taking over this operation.

PANCHER
Shit ...

He turns to the freckle-faced Corporal.

PANCHER
Lock the door!

The Corporal freezes for a second; then he runs over and shuts the door. Pancher grabs the headset away from the Communications Man and puts it on.

PANCHER
(to ground team)
Abort egress! Get away from Discovery and secure the hatch equipment in the truck!

GROUND CHIEF (V.O.)
What the hell's happening, Mike?
Bad-asses are coming from all over!

PANCHER
Just get out of there!

There's a loud POUNDING outside the door. The Corporal withdraws his pistol and slowly backs away.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
Kufungua mlango!

The Tanzanians in the room look apprehensive and uncertain; the Americans even more so.

CORPORAL
(unsteadily)
Everybody ... get down!

Everyone takes cover except Pancher, who remains standing. He picks up the radio mic.

PANCHER
Discovery -- this is Control! You
are to stay in the orbiter! Repeat:
stay in the orbiter!

The POUNDING on the door gets louder. The Corporal stands in the middle of the room, waving his gun.

CORPORAL
(to Pancher)
Get down!

PANCHER
Put your gun away!

Heavily-armed Tanzanian soldiers break down the door.

LEAD SOLDIER
Kuweka chini silaha yako!

The Corporal drops his gun and thrusts his hands in the air as the soldiers surge in.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK - SAME

Helmets off, the astronauts listen to the commotion in the control tower through their headset earpieces.

TRUITT
What the heck is that?

DRISCOLL
Come in, Tower! This is Discovery!

Some indecipherable voices are heard; then, nothing.

EXT. END OF MAIN RUNWAY - SHORT TIME LATER

Colonel Scott and his men take up defensive positions behind their vehicles as the NASA team hastily pulls back from the shuttle, leaving its hatch sealed shut.

A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY

the Tanzanian military convoy comes to a halt. Hundreds of soldiers get out and line up in neat rows. Then the troops

part, allowing a flag-adorned Jeep to drive through, moving toward the U.S. Marine contingent.

NEAR THE SHUTTLE

Scott looks back at his men.

SCOTT
Don't any of you do a damn thing
until I say so.

OUTSIDE THE MARINE PERIMETER

the Jeep stops. A large passenger gets out.

NEAR THE SHUTTLE

Scott's LIEUTENANT lowers his binoculars.

LIEUTENANT
It's General Zaramo.

SCOTT
Oh, Christ ...
(scowls)
Come on; let's get this over with.

OUTSIDE THE MARINE PERIMETER - MOMENTS LATER

Scott and the Lieutenant walk up to the Tanzanian vehicle. Standing beside it is GENERAL ZARAMO, his prodigious chest covered with an implausible assortment of ribbons and medals. He's a bombastic, intimidating figure who looks like he's about ready for his next meal.

When the Americans approach, Zaramo salutes.

ZARAMO
On behalf of President Hassan Kanote,
I greet you.

Scott refuses to return the gesture.

SCOTT
What's this all about, General?

Zaramo lowers his hand and frowns, then shifts his gaze to Discovery.

ZARAMO
It is an impressive-looking plane.

SCOTT
Look, we've obviously got an
emergency situation here. Your
people were fully notified.

Zaramo refocuses on Scott.

ZARAMO

Yes ... we were notified that our airspace was to be invaded; that our sovereignty was to be violated. Now we are notifying you that your presence here is no longer welcome.

On a cue from his commander, Zaramo's DRIVER stands in the Jeep and begins counting the Marines with his finger, MOS.

SCOTT

General, you know as well as I do that we are authorized to be here, and I demand that --

ZARAMO

You demand? You do not demand; I demand. We have occupied your base; we are in control now.

SCOTT

What? That's illegal! Sabin Air Base is U.S. government property!

ZARAMO

The air base is only leased to the United States. We have terminated the lease. Now you must leave.

SCOTT

We're not going anywhere. We're under orders to protect the shuttle, and that's what we're going to do.

Zaramo casually turns to his driver.

ZARAMO

Ngapi?

DRIVER

Arobaini na tatu.

Zaramo buoyantly turns back to Scott.

ZARAMO

You have 43 men.

He gestures toward his own troops with a sweep of his arm.

ZARAMO

I have 450. That means you are outnumbered approximately 10 to 1.

Zaramo grins triumphantly as Scott seethes.

SCOTT

You son of a bitch.

ZARAMO
 (smile fades)
 I will accept your surrender.

He signals for his troops to advance. Scott looks helplessly at his lieutenant, then back to Zaramo.

SCOTT
 You'll never get away with this.

ZARAMO
 We shall see.

INT. HOTEL LOUNGE - DAY

Chandler sits in an overstuffed chair holding his cell phone to his ear. Over near the bar, a TV is showing a White House press conference above a graphic announcing "BREAKING NEWS." A crowd of guests is gathered around, paying rapt attention.

PRESS SECRETARY (on TV)
 (reading statement)
 ... can now confirm that the U.S. space shuttle Discovery has made an emergency landing at Sabin Air Base, an American military installation located adjacent to the airport in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. We don't --

Chandler turns away to speak on the phone.

CHANDLER
 Hey -- Max; it's Dean.

INT. VIDEO EDITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

On the other end is MAX TREADWAY, a well-built African-American who looks like he could start in the NFL. He's working with some sophisticated equipment while other tech people mill about. A screen in front of him shows a lion running in slow-motion after a gazelle.

TREADWAY
 Dean Chandler? Well, I'll be damned. Long time, no see. Where are you?

INTERCUT - VIDEO EDITING ROOM / HOTEL LOUNGE

CHANDLER
 I'm at the Hilton, in Beverly Hills. Did you hear about the shuttle?

TREADWAY
 Yeah; it's nuts. But I gotta work.

Chandler glances back up at the TV.

CHANDLER
You're shooting for that Africa
show now, right? What's it called?

TREADWAY
"Eco-Safari." But what does -- ?

CHANDLER
Listen, Max, I need you to grab all
your stuff and come pick me up.

TREADWAY
Pick you up? Why?

CHANDLER
Because I just booked us on a flight
to Nairobi.

TREADWAY
What? What the hell for?

CHANDLER
Bigger game.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

A sedan drives past well-lit granite and marble buildings.

SUPER: "WASHINGTON, D.C."

A steady rain is falling.

INT. SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Devane sits silently next to a uniformed AIRMAN in the back
seat. He looks out the window to catch a blurry glimpse of

THE WHITE HOUSE

but, to his apparent surprise, the car keeps on going.

EXT. SIDE STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The sedan pulls up in front of the historic Old Executive
Office Building next to the White House. A MAN holding an
umbrella approaches the car and opens the door for Devane.

UMBRELLA MAN
Good evening, Professor.

Devane steps out and looks up at the huge gothic edifice.

UMBRELLA MAN
(gesturing)
Right this way ...

INT. OLD EXECUTIVE OFFICE BUILDING - SHORT TIME LATER

Devane is led into an ornate

MEETING ROOM

dominated by a large conference table and illuminated by antique chandeliers. Knots of important-looking civilian and military people are gathered around.

Standing near the head of the table with several advisors is ELIZABETH HOLBROOKE, the President of the United States -- a silver-haired, statuesque woman; smart and tough. She spots Devane and comes over to greet him.

HOLBROOKE

Dr. Devane; glad you could join us.

(shakes his hand)

I just finished your book on extra-solar planets. It was fascinating.

DEVANE

Thank you, Madam President.

The Defense Secretary, WILLIAM RAMSEY, approaches, casting Devane a quick, disapproving glance. An American flag pin is affixed to the lapel of his conservative blue suit.

HOLBROOKE

(pivoting)

You recognize Secretary Ramsey, I'm sure. Bill, this is Garrett Devane.

Ramsey nods at Devane dismissively; turns to Holbrooke.

RAMSEY

I believe we're ready to get started.

HOLBROOKE

Alright; good.

(to Devane)

I apologize for bringing you into this so late, but your expertise is needed now.

DEVANE

(uncertain)

Yes ... of course.

Holbrooke turns and walks back to the head of the table as people begin to take their seats. Devane finds a chair.

HOLBROOKE

Let's get everyone up to speed.

(looks down the table)

James?

The President's National Security Advisor, JAMES MARTIN, presses a button on a device in front of him, causing a rotating, photo-realistic hologram to be projected from a circular glass plate at the center of the table.

HOLOGRAM - A 3-D radio signal graph hovers above the glass.

MARTIN

Three-and-a-half years ago, an unusually strong pulsed radio signal of unknown origin was detected by the SETI group in San Francisco.

HOLOGRAM - A series of colorful cones pop up on the graph.

MARTIN

After being sent to the Defense Department for analysis, it was determined that the signal was artificial and extraterrestrial in nature. Pursuant to NSC Directive 303, this information was not shared with SETI and was not made public.

Devane turns to the President; her face betrays no emotion.

MARTIN

Over the next several months, the signal continued to be monitored by the U.S. Space Command in Colorado. Point-source comparisons indicated that the signal was emanating from a variable position approximately 130 million miles away, heading toward the Earth at a high but gradually slowing rate of speed.

HOLOGRAM - A representation of the solar system appears. A blinking dot shows the source of the signal between Jupiter and Mars; a dotted line indicates its projected path.

MARTIN

Several months after that, first visual contact was made with the emitting object, just beyond the Moon. Within hours, the object entered Earth orbit.

HOLOGRAM - The dotted line is completed; the depiction of the Earth is magnified to the size of a basketball, with a tiny glowing speck slowly moving around it.

MARTIN

The object was assigned the code name "XSAT" and was tracked by DoD ground stations under the guise of being a U.S. military satellite. XSAT's sudden appearance was explained as resulting from the failure of an experimental cloaking device which previously had made it invisible to radar.

HOLOGRAM - The image zooms in on XSAT; based on the initial photographs, it looks like a fuzzy fly.

MARTIN

More detailed photos of XSAT eventually were obtained from the International Space Station.

HOLOGRAM - XSAT becomes fully visible in high-resolution, spinning on its axis as the Earth turns below.

Devane's jaw drops; he leans forward, as if mesmerized.

MARTIN

By this time, XSAT's orbit had degraded significantly. At the known rate of regression it was estimated that, without some form of intervention, XSAT would enter the atmosphere in two years.

HOLOGRAM - In accelerated time, XSAT falls toward the Earth.

MARTIN

Since the composition of XSAT's surface materials was unknown, it could not be determined whether XSAT would survive de-orbit burn, and, if so, whether it would be recoverable afterward.

HOLOGRAM - XSAT disappears into the cloudy atmosphere.

MARTIN

A study was then conducted to determine the feasibility of a retrieval mission by the space shuttle, insofar as the dimensions of XSAT were roughly compatible with the shuttle's payload bay.

HOLOGRAM - XSAT reappears directly above a depiction of the space shuttle, showing the spacecrafts' relative size.

MARTIN

Although by this time the shuttle fleet had been officially retired, the study concluded that, if brought back into service, the shuttle could be retrofitted to accommodate XSAT, and that a retrieval was viable.

HOLOGRAM - XSAT drops neatly into the shuttle's payload bay.

MARTIN

After considerable debate, final approval was then issued for XSAT recovery on the shuttle Discovery, then on loan to the Smithsonian.

HOLOGRAM - Discovery is wheeled out of its museum hangar.

MARTIN

Working around the clock, the preparations for the shuttle and infrastructure took 18 months.

HOLOGRAM - Time-lapse images show workers installing the XSAT support cradle in Discovery's payload bay.

MARTIN

The XSAT retrieval mission was launched last week.

HOLOGRAM - Discovery blasts off into the night sky.

Devane can remain silent no longer.

DEVANE

How could you keep all of this quiet?
What about NASA?

Martin presses another button; the hologram disappears.

MARTIN

The mission profile given to the flight controllers and the astronauts was consistent with a classified Defense Department test satellite retrieval. Requests for additional information were denied on the basis of national security.

Devane takes a moment to digest this.

DEVANE

You mean ... the crew doesn't know?

MARTIN

That's correct -- except for the DoD-assigned payload specialist, Vernon Richter.

Ramsey, looking annoyed, interjects.

RAMSEY

He's been reporting to us separately.

DEVANE

But ... what of the danger?

RAMSEY

All XSAT indicators were negative.
No electrical discharge, no radiation --
no nothing.

He turns to the rest of the group, as if trying to reassure the others as much as Devane.

RAMSEY

To the best of our knowledge, XSAT is completely inert, except for the protrusion expansion reported by the astronauts, which --

DEVANE

Wait -- what "protrusion expansion?"

RAMSEY

Some structural elongations were observed after XSAT was retrieved.

DEVANE

And even after that, you went ahead?

RAMSEY

XSAT had become enmeshed in the support cradle; it was impossible to eject by then.

(straightens his tie)

Anyway, as it turned out, that phase of the operation was a success.

Devane stares at Ramsey.

DEVANE

Then why is the shuttle in Tanzania?

There is an awkward silence; the President breaks it.

HOLBROOKE

That's what we need to find out.

EXT. NYERERE AIRPORT - TAXIWAY - DAY

Trucks laden with materials and equipment rumble past directing Tanzanian soldiers and turn onto the main runway.

EXT. END OF MAIN RUNWAY - SHORT TIME LATER

One by one, the trucks roll to a stop near Discovery, where more Tanzanian soldiers move in to help unload their cargo. Other men are assembled in work crews at various points around the shuttle, hastily digging deep pits into the gravel overrun while superiors shout orders.

INT. DISCOVERY CREW COMPARTMENT - FLIGHT DECK - CONTINUOUS

The astronauts have shed their bulky flight suits, but they still look hot and cramped in a cabin that wasn't designed for gravity. Anderson and Griffin stare out the windows; the others are close by.

ANDERSON

What are they doing out there?

GRIFFIN
 Beats me. But I don't think it's a
 welcoming party.
 (to Driscoll)
 What's the latest from Houston?

DRISCOLL
 All of our guys have been deported;
 we're the only ones left.

GRIFFIN
 So what are we supposed to do now?

DRISCOLL
 Await further instructions.

Truitt motions over his shoulder with his thumb.

TRUITT
 I think the boys back home are more
 worried about that than us.

DRISCOLL
 You mean XSAT?

TRUITT
 That's why we're here, isn't it?
 (pointedly, at Richter)
 Isn't it?

Richter, looking cornered, remains silent.

INT. OLD EXECUTIVE OFFICE BUILDING - MEETING ROOM - SAME

The crisis meeting continues. Many people are talking at
 once, but Devane is quiet, working through his own thoughts.

The CIA Director, SPENCER LEVAL, challenges a young, sleep-
 deprived SYSTEMS ANALYST sitting across the table.

LEVAL
 Are you trying to tell us that XSAT
 caused the shuttle's malfunction?

ANALYST
 (tentatively)
 There's no definitive proof, but
 our preliminary analysis raises the
 possibility that XSAT somehow was
 able to tap into the shuttle's on-
 board computer system and redirect
 Discovery to the alternate site.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, ADMIRAL YARRINGTON, leans
 forward, ready to pounce.

YARRINGTON
 How can that be?

ANALYST

All of the TAL contingencies are pre-programmed into the computer.

He pauses, cautiously looking around the table.

ANALYST

Theoretically, it would have been possible to initiate an emergency landing scenario by deliberately causing a delay in the de-orbit burn for half a revolution, then reinitiating the burn so that the shuttle was committed to re-entry at the preferred TAL site.

Vice President LLOYD ENHARDT, seated beside his boss, pulls off his reading glasses and jumps into the fray.

ENHARDT

"Preferred?" Are you saying that it wanted to land in Africa?

A cacophony of animated voices rises up again.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

That's preposterous!

DEVANE

Actually, it makes sense.

All eyes shift to Devane. The President urges him on.

HOLBROOKE

Please explain, Doctor.

DEVANE

The shuttle was supposed to land at Edwards Air Force Base, correct?

He turns to Defense Secretary Ramsey.

DEVANE

What kind of setup do you have there?

Ramsey stiffens.

RAMSEY

The Special Containment Center is an environmentally-stable disassembly and testing facility designed to --

DEVANE

Any biology labs?

RAMSEY

Yes, we --

DEVANE

Autopsy?

Ramsey starts to look uncomfortable.

RAMSEY

I don't, uh, personally have all of the details on that ...

He turns to an AIDE for help.

AIDE

There is an autopsy room.

DEVANE

Okay. So, from -- let's just say, from XSAT's point of view -- Edwards would not be a desirable location.

More murmuring. The Aide confers with Ramsey MOS.

HOLBROOKE

In other words, XSAT ascertained that our intent was to bring it to Edwards for aggressive study, and responded by instigating an emergency landing in Tanzania, so as to avoid the perceived threat posed by us?

DEVANE

(nods)

Self-preservation is the most powerful instinct among life forms on Earth. It seems reasonable to assume that the same would be true for alien life forms, as well.

The room is quiet.

HOLBROOKE

We have to get it back.

(pauses)

Unfortunately, the Tanzanians are not cooperating. Evidently they think they can use the shuttle as some kind of bargaining chip.

LEVAL

It's worse than that. We've just learned that President Kanote has agreed to allow a team of Chinese "technical advisors" to secretly enter the country from Mozambique.

YARRINGTON

Jesus H. Christ ...

LEVAL

We suspect that they're interested in XSAT's purported radar cloaking technology, which we've fabricated.

HOLBROOKE

Would we know if someone tried to open the payload bay?

National Security Advisor Martin speaks up.

MARTIN

The crew would know, as long as they remained on board.

LEVAL

That would be seen by our spy satellites, as well.

HOLBROOKE

But there's nothing which would actually prevent an incursion.

MARTIN

That's right.

ENHARDT

So what we need is a deterrent ...

Devane brashly interrupts.

DEVANE

Excuse me -- I think we're forgetting one thing.

HOLBROOKE

What's that, Doctor?

DEVANE

The object, or whatever's controlling it, may attempt to release itself.

RAMSEY

I think that's pretty unlikely. After all, it was unable to stop us from capturing it.

Devane smiles wanly.

DEVANE

Has anyone in this room considered what an extraordinary coincidence it is that XSAT, a unique spacecraft produced by an unimaginably different civilization, was able to fit, almost perfectly, inside the shuttle bay?

There's no response.

DEVANE

Offhand, I'd say the odds against
that are at least a million to one.

RAMSEY

Meaning?

DEVANE

Meaning that it probably isn't a
coincidence at all.

ENHARDT

Then what is it?

DEVANE

To borrow a page from history ...
(turns to Holbrooke)
... it appears that we have been
offered a Trojan horse.

[TO VIEW ENTIRE SCRIPT, PLEASE CONTACT ROBERT CHOLETTE]