

UNTITLED MARS PROJECT

EPISODE 101

(6.21.16)

Written by

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1

TITLE AND CREDITS

1

They begin as WHITE TEXT on a BLACK SCREEN to Colin Stetson's "In Love and In Justice" - a multi-tonal piece played on a single bass sax.

The background shifts through the entire color spectrum from black to violet, red, orange, yellow, green, blue. The credits shift to the opposite end of the color wheel from the background, eventually BLACK TEXT, WHITE SCREEN.

The song evolves from its baritone drone to the introduction of progressive chords, punctuated by quick intakes of air from circular breathing.

On one of these chords we CUT TO--

2

EXT. HELLAS BASIN - MARS - EASTERN RIM - DAY

2

A vast, rust-colored plain beneath a pink sky. A smudge of mountains on the horizon. We hold on the hypnotic beauty of the emptiness. It could almost be a photograph.

...a faint dust devil in the distance - swirling into form and disappearing within seconds.

The camera EASES BACK. The move is barely detectable until something breaks the bottom of the frame - a gnarled tangle of metal, half-buried, covered with over half a century's red dust. Cyrillic script. A Soviet flag.

It's the Russian Mars 2 Lander, which failed to deploy its parachute and slammed into the ground 50 years ago - the first man-made object to touch Mars' surface.

Then, breaking the top of the frame, a hundred miles away from us, a bright flare in the sky descends obliquely. As it breaks the frame - a RESOUNDING CHORD - uplifting and dangerous - a sternum-rattling chain of notes, as though the music is willing this object into being.

The flare fades until all that is left is a small, dark speck. It continues to descend rapidly until - coinciding with another chord - a supersonic parachute deploys.

We CUT TO MUCH CLOSER as, a few hundred feet above the surface, a cocoon of balloons inflates and envelops the speck. The parachute disconnects and wafts away.

The ballooned object begins a free fall. It hits the ground, bouncing high up again and into a succession of smaller parabolas, until it finally comes to a rest.

The balloons deflate. Within is a landing pod, a conical vessel with a rounded bottom scorched by the entry. Mechanical arms extend outwards from the sides to right the pod, so the cone is facing up. The cone splits into three separate plates which rotate outward and down, like the petals of a blossoming flower.

REVEALING a ROVER - a six-wheeled chassis mounted with robotic hardware. It has two logos: NASA and VISTA.

With a deep, guttural note from the sax, the rover's "eye" - a 360 degree camera at the end of an extended rod - rises out from the hardware to survey the landing zone. The eye tilts up, as if awakening.

We CUT TO the Eye's view - the distant horizon. The song reaches its crescendo. Then abruptly stops, taking us to:

3

INT. VISTA MISSION CONTROL - LOS ANGELES, CA - NIGHT

3

The rover view of the horizon on a massive screen above 10 rows of room-wide desks covered with monitors, TECHNICIANS, SCIENTISTS, and ENGINEERS behind each.

Adjacent to the rover view is a digital map of Mars focused on the Hellas Basin with a marker for the rover's location (and other surface robots and hardware), as well as a second graphic showing Mars in its entirety and the position of multiple objects orbiting it.

In the upper right-hand corner are two timecodes marking Earth and Mars times to the hundredth of a second:

EARTH 6.16.25 16:39:XX GMT
MARS 114.52 13:39:XX MMT

Here on Earth, it is JUNE 16th, 2025, three and a half years out from the scheduled crew launch to Mars.

We CUT TO Flight Director ALVIN BARRIS (early 50s), and MARTHA HIRSCH (mid 40s), the Mission Control Director. Both wear headsets. Low-key and workaday in manner.

ALVIN
Proceed to landing zone.

MARTHA
Go transmission.

COMMS
Command sent. E.T.A for
transmission 9 minutes, 2 seconds.
E.T.A. to target: 2 hours, 12
minutes.

MARTHA
Copy. HAB 1 landing countdown
remains on schedule for T-minus 33
hours, 35 minutes.

We CUT TO the rear of the room where we find LAZ INGRAM (52, British), the founder and CEO of VISTA, the private space exploration company teamed with NASA on the venture. He's staring at the massive screen, arms folded.

Laz has the bearing of a man in cool command. He's a visionary who, like all visionaries, suffers from impatience but does not suffer fools.

4

INT. VISTA HQ - PRETESH'S OFFICE - DAY

4

PRETESH KHATTAK (40s, Pakistani-American, the Chief Engineer) is with his team of engineers, including: MIN ZHOU (Asian-American, 30s), VIVEK (Indian-American, 30s), GREG (beefy, white, 20s), and WEI (Asian-American, 20s).

They're watching the rover feed on a large mounted screen, listening to the audio from Mission Control.

COMMS (V.O.)
Feed incoming.

A moment later, we see the view pan 90 degrees to another part of the horizon. The assembled watch with awe.

MARTHA (O.S.)
Give me high res and I.R.

COMMS (V.O.)
Commands on deck.

PRETESH

Okay everyone, back to work. We've got data dumps coming in.

5 EXT. MARS - HELLAS BASIN - DAY

5

We follow a line of tire tracks in the fine dust, until we arrive at the ROVER. We come around front and see the tracks extending to the landing module in the distance.

The rover's eye tilts down toward the soil. A mechanical arm swings out with a small drill at the end.

The arm lowers the drill to the surface, whereupon the bit begins to spin, then descends into the soil. Its whirring and the screech of pulverized rock the only sounds from here to the horizon.

We hear another mechanical sound: THE ROAR OF A CHAINSAW.

6 EXT. ALASKA - 40 MILES NORTH OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE - DAY

6

TIGHT on a CHAINSAW biting into ice.

CUT TO a WIDE SHOT to see a parka-clad MAN with the saw at the center of a large, frozen lake. There's a snowmobile near him and a HUSKY darting around nearby.

CLOSER on the man, as he pushes the cut ice through, and water from the lake bubbles up through the hole.

The man is TOM HAGERTY. He's 52 but more fit than men 20 years his junior. A peppered beard dominates his face. There's a matter-of-factness about him, a sureness and efficiency to his every movement.

He fixes bait to a hook. Lowers the line into the hole with a rod. Props the rod up with a forked stick. Takes a moment to look around at the desolate surface of the lake. It never gets old - the sublime.

The husky starts to bark. Hagerty glances at the dog, who is barking in the direction of another ice hole about thirty yards away. The pole is quivering on its stick.

Hagerty makes his way over. Starts to reel in the line. The catch breaks the surface. A large rainbow trout. He unhooks the fish and heads back toward the snowmobile.

TIGHT on Hagerty gutting the fish, the blood spilling onto the white snow. He tosses some of the innards to the husky who hungrily devours them in a couple bites.

7 INT. VISTA HQ - PRESS AREA - NIGHT

7

ROBERT CORDINE (50s) - the NASA LIAISON - is doing a stand-up interview with a news team.

CORDINE

The rover will confirm our soil composition estimates and give us a ground-up view of the landing. But tomorrow, that's when interplanetary colonization really becomes tangible...

We CUT TO the coverage filling the screen. The chyron reads: Bob Cordine - NASA Mars Mission Director.

CORDINE (CONT'D)

By landing the HAB 1 module, we're putting the first technology on Mars that can support human life. The tests we do on HABs 1 and 2 - they'll improve the subsequent HABs our crew will call home.

HOLLY O'KEEFE (late 20s), Head of VISTA P.R. - to the PRODUCER--

HOLLY

Got what you need?

PRODUCER

We're good. Thank you.

As the Producer shakes hands with Cordine--

HOLLY

(to Cordine)

Plane's waiting.

Cordine's ASSISTANT escorts Cordine off.

PRODUCER

(to Holly)

When do I get Laz?

HOLLY
I gave you Cordine, didn't I?

PRODUCER
Cordine isn't news. Laz is news.

8 INT. VISTA HQ - MISSION CONTROL - DAY 8

ON Laz again, looking at the big screen.

ALVIN (O.S.)
Laz.

Laz looks to Alvin, who is pointing to Laz's ASSISTANT over by the door. She's tapping her wrist. Time to go.

9 EXT. FAIRBANKS, ALASKA - HELIPAD - DAY 9

LAUREN GUTIERREZ-HOLT (Latina, late 30s, VISTA's Program Director), parka-clad, on her phone. She personifies competence and authority. It's very windy. There's a HELICOPTER in the background, CHOPPER PILOT beside it. She has to shout to be heard above the wind.

LAUREN
Tomorrow morning.

LAZ (O.S.)
What was that?

She covers the phone so it's blocked from the wind.

LAUREN
Tomorrow morning. Earliest.

INTERCUT WITH--

10 INT. ELECTRIC AUTO-DRIVE MINIVAN - DAY 10 10

Laz in the back talking to the speaker phone. He's stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic on the highway. There is no one in the driver's seat. The car is driving itself.

LAZ
Maggie's adamant.

LAUREN

There's nothing I can do about the weather.

LAZ

Does tomorrow give you enough time to get back?

LAUREN

Depends how long it takes me to convince him.

LAZ

Say again.

Gusts of wind are tearing across the tarmac.

LAUREN

I'll call you when I have the yes.

She ends the call. Approaches the CHOPPER PILOT who was waiting for her to get off the phone.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

You sure we can't try to beat the blizzard?

CHOPPER PILOT

Hundred percent.

LAUREN

(pointing up)

The sky's crystal clear.

PILOT

That doesn't mean shit in Alaska.

11

EXT. ALASKA - 40 MILES NORTH OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE - DAY 11

Hagerty and the Husky are minding the ice holes. The wind is picking up. Hagerty looks toward the sky, now beginning to fill with an oncoming front of clouds. Decides it's better not to remain out here, exposed.

TIME CUT to Hagerty packing up the poles and strapping the fish to the back of the snowmobile. He starts the engine. The husky jumps onto the back sled. Hagerty drives toward the edge of the lake. The wind intensifies, snow beginning to slant down from the sky.

12 INT. PRIVATE JET - NIGHT

12

Cordine is already on the plane. Laz climbs aboard.

LAZ

Bob.

CORDINE

We could've come in the same car.

LAZ

We could've.

As Laz settles into a seat not facing Cordine and uncaps a waiting bottle of water--

CORDINE

I want to talk about Hagerty.

Laz ignores him. As he retrieves a sleeping pill and washes it down with the water, the JET PILOT boards--

JET PILOT

Gonna be a little bumpy on the way out. Fire in the mountains is throwing up some thermals.

The two men nod and the pilot heads into the cockpit.

CORDINE

Near where you live, right?

LAZ

Wind's blowing the other way.

Laz leans back and closes his eyes. A beat.

CORDINE

I think we should reconsider.

Laz keeps his eyes closed.

LAZ

Lauren's already en route.

CORDINE

I just think - from NASA's perspective - Hagerty's a wild card and we should--

Laz opens his eyes and drills Cordine with them.

LAZ

We had this discussion. Then we had it again. We can go for number three, but I just took an Ambien, and I'm even more stubborn when I'm sleepy. Shall we continue?

Cordine says nothing. Laz closes his eyes again.

13

INT. VISTA HQ - BUILD FACILITY - DAY

13

Pretesh, Min, and Greg are standing in front of the half-built HAB 3 wearing smocks, surgical masks, latex gloves, and plastic hair caps. Min shows them a small, rubber washer encircling a valve.

MIN

We ran the raw data again and our shake-bake analysis is off. We favored the wrong results.

GREG

The entry heat could be greater than its combustion limit.

PRETESH

It's at least six centimeters under the shield.

MIN

We're worried about free air.

Greg pokes his pinky finger into the tube.

GREG

Trapped here. Pressure might push it through the lock.

She points to a coil of nylon rope in a compartment about a foot away from the valve.

MIN

Could get this far.

(turns back to him)

Which is exactly what I said when I got outvoted by the other departments.

14 INT. FAIRBANKS, ALASKA - HOTEL - NIGHT

14

Lauren is on her phone, looking out the window at the blizzard. On the other end we hear--

CHIEF ACCOUNTANT (O.S.)
About 46 over because of OT this week.

LAUREN
How can we make it up?

INTERCUT WITH--

15 INT. VISTA HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

15

A glass-walled conference room at the far end of the office bull-pen. About a dozen DEPARTMENT HEADS gathered.

HEAD ACCOUNTANT
I'm working with Sam on materials.

SAM (HEAD OF PURCHASING)
Avisma will sell us titanium for 10 percent less. It's a Russian company, so NASA might not--

LAUREN
You tested the samples?

SAM
Pretesh says they're good.

LAUREN
Alright, I'll talk to Bob.
(shifting focus)
Press?

HOLLY
We've got the big four, plus CNN, Bloomberg, and MSNBC. They all want one-on--

A knock on the glass. Everyone looks over to see Pretesh. He mouths "Lauren?" Sam points to the speaker phone and mouths "On now." Pretesh opens the door.

LAUREN (O.S.)
Holly?

PRETESH
 Hi Lauren - it's Tesh.
 (to the others)
 I need the room.

TIME CUT to Lauren sitting on the edge of the bed. She looks stressed, but not shaken. She glances at her watch.

LAUREN
 He's in the hearing...

PRETESH (O.S.)
 I'm not saying we have to stop the
 countdown...

CUT BACK to the Conference Room. Pretesh is alone.

PRETESH (CONT'D)
 At least not yet. We should have a
 better sense in a couple of hours.

LAUREN
 Keep the circle tight. I don't want
 this distracting him...

16 INT. WASHINGTON - RAYBURN BUILDING - HEARING ROOM - DAY 16

A closed hearing. Laz and Cordine are seated before the Appropriations Committee. Seated with them is Senator MARGARET SAYERS (early 60s, a Republican from Texas). She's Ann Richards, if Richards was a conservative. They're joined by the NASA ADMINISTRATOR - Cordine's boss - DEIDRE KENT (early 50s, politically savvy with the polish of a career bureaucrat).

The Chairman of Committee is TED WINTHROP (mid 40s, a Republican from Wyoming). Among others are Rep. HAL SCHNEIDER (early 70s, Democrat from Massachusetts) and GAIL OGELBY (late 30s, Republican from Mississippi).

OGELBY
 We're getting into double digits.

SCHNEIDER
 Billions that aren't going to
 schools, to infrastructure...

SAYERS

Mr. Chairman. Congress has already committed to this plan.

WINTHROP

We approved 70 billion. Not 80. That's 15 percent over-budget.

LAZ

No, it's right on budget. We told you 85 when we first proposed. You said make it 70 or we get nothing.

Sayers discreetly touches Laz's arm, a signal that says he should soften his tone. But Laz continues--

LAZ (CONT'D)

We all knew we'd have to come back for more. Our plan is still less than half of what my colleagues at NASA were proposing.

Deidre shoots a look at Cordine while--

WINTHROP

Our job's to make sure we're spending the taxpayers' money responsibly. Your job is to justify that you are.

CORDINE

Mr. Chairman - if we can get back to the specific line items, I believe we can make clear how--

OGELBY

What is this 92 million for nanotech?

KENT

The FDA approved CRISPR testing on humans, and we need to fund it.

SCHNEIDER

But is it mission critical?

LAZ

We can't fully predict the bio-stressers. Nanotech in the bloodstream gives us the ability to monitor and treat in real-time.

OGELBY
By messing with genetic code.

LAZ
I'd say improving.

WINTHROP
Playing God.

LAZ
I don't believe in God, so I'm not
in the business of playing him.

Sayers, Cordine, and Kent stiffen. Ogelby is not pleased with the response.

SAYERS
We all know God is a she, Laz.

A few chuckles. This eases the tension in the room.

SAYERS (CONT'D)
The best way to see how the money
is being spent is with your own
eyes.

She looks over to Laz with a look that says "step up".

LAZ
We hope you'll join us for the HAB
landing tomorrow.

SAYERS
You can meet our top candidate for
crew commander.

Laz clenches his jaw. Sayers just made a promise he can't necessarily deliver.

We hear the whir of a snowmobile engine and CUT TO--

17 EXT. ALASKA - WOODS - DAY

17

The snowmobile is struggling to make headway through the quickly deepening snow. It's beginning to get dark, and with the storm, visibility is poor.

It lurches to a halt. Hagerty tries to restart the engine, but it stubbornly coughs, refusing to cooperate.

TIME CUT to Hagerty inspecting the engine. The husky huddles close to the snowmobile to get out of the gusts. Hagerty finds a snapped belt. Pulls it out. Checks his spare parts bin, but there's no backup belt to be found.

He unpacks a tent and a shovel from the sled. Starts to dig out a spot to camp.

18 INT. D.C. RESTAURANT - NIGHT 18

Laz alone at a secluded table. He's on his phone.

LAZ
Should I cancel the trip?

INTERCUT WITH--

19 INT. FAIRBANKS, ALASKA - DINER - NIGHT 19

Blizzard raging outside. Lauren's in a booth at a greasy spoon world's away from the plush restaurant Laz is in.

LAUREN
Tesh says they might need a delay.

LAZ
For how long?

LAUREN
He doesn't know. They have to work out a fix first.

LAZ
Maybe it's better if we put the breaks on everything. Takes the rush off you, gives me wiggle room with the clowns out here.

LAUREN
It didn't go well?

LAZ
It could've gone better.

LAUREN
What happened?

He sees a HOSTESS ushering Senator Sayers toward him.

LAZ
She's walking toward me.

LAUREN
Game face, Laz.

He ends the call. Stands up as Sayers approaches.

SAYERS
(to the Hostess)
Vodka gimlet up.

The Hostess nods and departs. As Laz and Sayers sit--

SAYERS (CONT'D)
Well - I appreciate your honesty,
if not your style.

20

INT. FAIRBANKS ALASKA - DINER - NIGHT

20

A WAITRESS is setting down a piece of pie with a fresh spoon, while Lauren's phone is connecting a video call.

We see a five-year old girl - Ellie - on the screen. There's something slightly off about Ellie's look and the fatigue in her voice, but with the image tight on her face and the shakiness of the camera, we're not sure...

LAUREN
Hey sweetheart.

ELLIE
Hi Mommy.

LAUREN
You going to bed soon?

ELLIE
Yeah. Are you?

LAUREN
I'm having some pie first.

Lauren shows her the slice of pie with the phone.

ELLIE
I want some.

DELL (O.S.)
You already had dessert.

ELLIE
But now I want pie.

LAUREN
Daddy's right, it's time for sleep.
Give me a kiss.

Ellie blows her a kiss. Lauren blows one back. Her husband DELL (early 40s) comes onto the screen.

DELL
How's it looking?

She holds the phone to the window to show the blizzard.

DELL (CONT'D)
Don't push him to go earlier than
he's comfortable with.

LAUREN
I won't.

DELL
You will.

LAUREN
I won't.

ELLIE (O.S.)
Can I see?

DELL
Show her the snow.

Lauren holds the phone up to the window again. When she looks back at the phone, Ellie has reappeared.

ELLIE
Did you see Santa Claus yet?

LAUREN
Santa Claus?

ELLIE
Daddy says you're at the North Pole.

LAUREN
Close to it.

ELLIE
So you'll see him.

LAUREN
Santa Claus doesn't exist, darling.

Ellie's face contorts. Dell appears back on the screen.

DELL
What are you doing?

LAUREN
We talked about this.

DELL
She's five.

LAUREN
I'm not going to lie to her.

DELL
We'll call you tomorrow.

LAUREN
Dell...

DELL
She's crying now. I gotta go.

The call ends. Lauren looks at herself in the spoon - an upside down, distorted image of herself. Allows herself three seconds of guilt, then buries it.

Sets down the spoon. Picks up her phone. Starts to type something out. During which we hear HOWLING WIND, which takes us to--

21 INT. ALASKA WOODS - HAGERTY'S TENT - NIGHT

21

Hagerty has a SATPHONE linked up to a TABLET DEVICE within the cramped quarters, his dog taking up half the space intended for a single human.

On the screen, we see that he's checking the weather forecast. There's a large front making its way over northern Alaska. He tries to zoom in on it but the website is not responding.

He reorients the antenna on the satphone and holds it up toward the top of the flapping tent to get a better signal. It works. Zooms in on his location. It looks pretty bad weather-wise.

He clicks to a new window. His email. Many of the messages are Google alerts for the VISTA/NASA Mars Mission. But among them, he sees an email from Lauren Gutierrez-Holt. The subject is: SEE YOU SOON

Opens it. It reads:

Since you won't answer my emails, I'm showing up on your doorstep. Stuck in Fairbanks, but coming your way. Don't shoot at the chopper. LGH

ON Hagerty, brow furrowed in the blue glow of the screen.

22

INT. D.C. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

22

SAYERS

This level of funding doesn't happen without oversight.

LAZ

You can't outsource and micromanage at the same time. We promised faster and cheaper, and you promised autonomy.

SAYERS

Within reason.

LAZ

Congress is slowing us down.

SAYERS

You won't speed anything up by pissing in NASA's eye at hearings.

LAZ

Their skin in the game is covering their asses. Mine is getting to Mars.

SAYERS

Same as my skin.

LAZ

Yours is the construction jobs in Houston.

SAYERS

If all I wanted was pork, there's a helluva lot of easier ways to kill a pig.

LAZ

I can't get us there when we're 15 billion short. I'm spending way too much time and effort--

SAYERS

Deal with it. There's no Michelangelo without the Medicis.

LAZ

The Medicis were smart enough to buy the paint and get the fuck out Michelangelo's way.

She starts to cut her last piece of steak in half.

SAYERS

I would never tell you how to build a rocket. My expertise is Washington. I'll get you the money. But that means rolling out the red carpet tomorrow.

LAZ

The landing could be delayed.

Off her look--

LAZ (CONT'D)

It's a technical problem. There's a valve washer that--

SAYERS

Then you better get me Hagerty.

23

EXT. ALASKA WOODS - DAY

23

Hagerty emerges from the tent with the husky. The snow is deep but falling lightly now. The wind has died down.

TIME CUT to him crouched over a propane stove. He holds both ends of the snapped belt over the flame, melting the rubber, then presses them together, fusing them. Holds the fused portion over the flame once again, pressing the bond together with his gloved hands. Then pushes the belt into the snow to solidify the bond.

TIME CUT to Hagerty fitting the belt back into the engine. The sky is clear now. He hears rotor blades. Looks up through the tree branches and sees a helicopter dart by overhead.

TIME CUT to Hagerty on the snowmobile, priming the fuel pump then starting the ignition. The machine sputters to life. He hops off and inspects the engine. The belt is working. Closes the cover lid and remounts the snowmobile. It lurches forward through the deep snow.

24

EXT. HAGERTY'S CABIN - DAY

24

A couple hours later. As Hagerty emerges from the woods into a clearing, we see a small cabin ahead - a modest abode that looks like a collision of the 19th and 21st centuries. The structure itself could be out of a Jack London novel. But the roof is covered with solar arrays and a large satellite dish and antennas. Nearby are half a dozen 30-foot-tall, modern-looking wind turbines.

A few dozen yards from the cabin is the helicopter we saw earlier. Lauren is standing beside it in a big parka. She walks toward Hagerty as the snowmobile comes to a stop.

LAUREN

Thought you might've bailed.

HAGERTY

Got caught in the blizzard.

He retrieves the frozen trout from the snowmobile --

HAGERTY (CONT'D)

Hungry?

LAUREN

I could eat.

25

INT. HAGERTY'S CABIN - MAIN ROOM - DAY

25

TIGHT on the filleted trout frying in a pan. We pull back to see Hagerty at the stove, Lauren at small table.

The two-room cabin is tidy. Essentials only. But in one corner is a computer station with several monitors. Top of the line equipment.

LAUREN

I emailed so many times, I grew calluses.

HAGERTY

I read all of them.

LAUREN

Why didn't you answer?

HAGERTY

Didn't know if you were serious or just testing the waters.

LAUREN

Well I hope me flying to your doorstep shows how serious we are.

Hagerty plates the fish and brings it to Lauren.

HAGERTY

What about Cordine?

LAUREN

Approved.

HAGERTY

He must've put up a fight.

LAUREN

Laz always wins the important ones. That's why I work for him.

HAGERTY

So how does this work?

LAUREN

In person. You fly back with me.

HAGERTY

I'm not a wine and dine guy.

LAUREN
The head of the Appropriations
Committee is coming in.

HAGERTY
You need to show me off.

LAUREN
It's a few handshakes.

HAGERTY
Before I've said yes.

LAUREN
I'm an optimist.

HAGERTY
You know what my demand will be.

LAUREN
Laz is prepared to address that.

HAGERTY
Will I get a yes or a or no?

LAUREN
You have to talk to him yourself. I
won't speak on his behalf.

Hagerty cocks his head with deliberation. Then--

HAGERTY
You eat. I'll pack.

On Lauren - relief. Hagerty disappears into the bedroom.

26

INT. HAGERTY'S CABIN - BEDROOM - DAY

26

A fork scrapes across the plate in the other room as Hagerty packs a duffel with clothing. He takes a couple shirts down from hangers on a pole which stretches above the single bed. Among the shirts is a NASA flight jacket. He looks at the insignia for a moment. Resumes packing.

27 EXT. HAGERTY'S CABIN - DAY 27

The helicopter rotors swirl to life, kicking up billows of snow beneath. It lifts off the ground.

28 INT. HELICOPTER - DAY 28

Hagerty and Lauren in the back, the husky crammed in too. Hagerty looks out the window, as the pristine Alaskan landscape stretches beneath them.

29 EXT. SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS - DAY 29

In stark contrast to the snowy peaks - the arid Santa Monica mountains. Smoke is billowing upwards from a ridge-line. In the distance, we see a private plane making a wide turn to position itself for final approach.

30 EXT. SANTA MONICA AIRPORT - DAY 30

The camera is beneath the fuselage of the plane. We see the plane's shadow appear over the runway, get closer, then hear the squelch of the tires, as they contact the ground with puffs of burnt rubber.

31 EXT. VISTA HQ - DAY 31

An Electric Minivan pulls through a security gate at the entrance of a massive building that stretches for a quarter of a mile. The VISTA logo in three-story letters along the side. The van parks in a space next to the entrance. Laz, Sayers, Cordine, and Winthrop get out. Laz's ASSISTANT is waiting. Holds open the door as they enter.

32 INT. VISTA HQ - HALLWAY - DAY 32

They approach a set of double doors. Above them is a sign which reads: BUILD FACILITY. Laz holds his phone up to a scanner. The doors unlock with a click. As Laz opens the door, we hear the hum of machines, a beeping forklift, metal against metal, a symphony of construction.

33 INT. VISTA HQ - BUILD FACILITY - DAY

33

EXTREME WIDE SHOT from above, as the foursome make their way down a central corridor. The room is vast. One area is dedicated to satellites. Another to the HAB 3 build. A prototype section for the Lander/Mars-Ascent Vehicle (LMAV). An air-lock portion with engineers in sterilized jumpsuits and hoods doing post-assembly cleaning and stress testing. A laser cutting and welding section.

And at the far end of the room - dominating an entire side - the assembly of a massive rocket.

34 INT. PRETESH'S OFFICE - DAY

34

Pretesh and Min are showing Alvin a copy of the valve--

PRETESH

When we changed the washer from metal to rubber, we did three shake and bakes. Two were within the margin, one wasn't.

ALVIN

How does a red flag like that--

MIN

You were pushing us on the launch.

PRETESH

(more diplomatic)

Everyone was under pressure. I know you were too.

ALVIN

Give me odds.

MIN

8 to 1.2 percent catastrophic.

ALVIN

What's the fix?

PRETESH

We can't get inside with the arm, so our focus is entry angle.

MIN

My team's crunching numbers.

ALVIN
 (to Pretesh)
 Freeze the countdown?

PRETESH
 We could use more time.

ALVIN
 Alright. I'll freeze it.
 (as he exits)
 Get me within the margin.

35 INT. VISTA HQ - BUILD FACILITY - DAY

35

Sayers and Winthrop are dwarfed by the massive rocket they are standing near, gazing at it. Laz and Cordine are a few yards away talking to Alvin.

WINTHROP
 When do I get to meet Hagerty?

SAYERS
 They're in the air now.

WINTHROP
 I want a picture with him. Next to one of these.

SAYERS
 I'm sure we can make that happen.

Laz and Cordine approach them as Alvin walks off.

LAZ
 Countdown's frozen.

WINTHROP
 Why?

LAZ
 There's a valve we're taking a look at. Our engineers are working on the problem.

WINTHROP
 We talking hours, or...

LAZ
 Hopefully. Might be days.

WINTHROP
 (to Sayers)
 I've got to be back for the
 leadership caucus Thursday morning.

LAZ
 We'll do our best.

SAYERS
 (to Winthrop)
 These sort of things are common.

WINTHROP
 (to Laz)
 Seems serious.

LAZ
 Everything's serious 80 million
 miles from earth.

WINTHROP
 I'd like to pray.

Winthrop takes Sayers' hand. He means an actual prayer.
 They're all a little taken aback by it.

WINTHROP (CONT'D)
 Bob?

Cordine takes Winthrop's other hand, going with the flow.

WINTHROP (CONT'D)
 (to Laz)
 I know you're not a believer...but
 if you'll indulge me.

Sayers shoots a look to Laz. Time to play nice. Laz takes
 Sayers' and Cordine's hands to complete the circle. Winthrop
 bows his head and closes his eyes.

WINTHROP (CONT'D)
 Dear heavenly father...

Sayers and Cordine follow suit, bowing their heads and
 closing their eyes. Laz keeps his open. We start to hear a
 deep drone from the baritone sax...

WINTHROP (CONT'D)
Please give your guidance and
blessing to the engineers...

36 INT. VISTA HQ - PRETESH'S OFFICE - DAY 36

Pretesh, Min, and a team of six other engineers in a heated discussion. Greg finishes an equation on a dry erase board, then Min crosses something out, pointing to an entry-angle diagram--

WINTHROP (V.O.)
...that they might be enlightened
with your infinite wisdom...

37 INT. VISTA HQ - MISSION CONTROL - DAY 37

Alvin approaches Martha and says something. She speaks into the headset. We CUT TO to the big screen where we see the countdown clock FREEZE.

WINTHROP (V.O.)
...that this delay be brief, and we
proceed soon with the mission at
hand...

38 INT. VISTA HQ - PRESS AREA - DAY 38

Holly is briefing several news camera crews and a dozen reporters on the delay. One of the reporters asks how long the delay we be. Holly says she doesn't know.

WINTHROP (V.O.)
...So that with the world's eyes on
us, we can show what gifts you have
endowed us with...

39 INT. PRIVATE JET - NIGHT 39

Hagerty's POV out the window, a moonless sky filled with stars above a bank of clouds stretching to the horizon.

WINTHROP (V.O.)
...And continue on our path into
the magnificent universe you have
created...

40 INT. VISTA HQ - BUILD FACILITY - DAY 40

WIDE SHOT of the four linking hands from above. Tiny in relation to the booster rocket. The drone gets louder.

WINTHROP

Amen.

41 INT. MUSIC STUDIO - DAY 41

A SAXOPHONE PLAYER is playing the baritone sax that we've heard throughout the episode thus far. Circular breathing. Cheeks and veins straining, eyes closed, sweat on the brow. He's swaying back and forth slowly, as he wills the unbroken drone into being.

42 EXT. 249 MILES ABOVE EARTH - DAY TO NIGHT 42

As the drone continues, we see the ISS serenely orbiting earth, passing from day into night, the sun disappearing behind the earth.

43 INT. ISS - NIGHT 43

The drone is replaced with a SWISHING sound.

KAYLA FORD (early 40s, African-American) is floating in micro gravity looking out the window. Her face lit up by the sun's blue reflection on earth.

KAYLA

Hank.

HANK (mid 50s) is working at the other end of the compartment. He looks over.

HANK

You can see that fire in the Santa Monica mountains.

He floats over. Looks out the window. Kayla points.

KAYLA

Right there.

HANK
Yeah, I see it.

KAYLA
Big one, huh?

We CUT TO their POV and see the west coast of North America below, major metropolises, a web of bright lights, Los Angeles dominating. Just to the north of the city is a string of glowing fire lines, reddish orange in contrast to the yellow-white electric light. Fingers of smoke stretch for twenty miles to the east. As we slowly push in on the tangle of fire lines and smoke, we hear the sound of a raging a fire.

44 EXT. SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS - NIGHT 44

Fifty foot flames. Trunks and branches snapping and crackling. The relentless violence of nature.

45 EXT. LAZ'S MANSION - NIGHT 45

An electric minivan winds up the driveway of a sprawling Italian villa. We can see the orange glow of the forest fire in the far distance behind the mountains.

46 INT. LAZ'S MANSION - NIGHT 46

DAVID, Laz's butler, shows Hagerty and Lauren into a large living room. Everything is packed up in boxes. The walls and floors are bare. Most of the furniture is pushed to one side of the room along with the boxes and rolled up rugs, except for one sofa and two chairs placed in the center. A bubble-wrapped Warhol self-portrait is leaned up against one wall, upside-down.

Laz is sitting on the sofa. He doesn't stand when Hagerty and Lauren enter.

LAZ
Forgive the appearance.

HAGERTY
Moving out or moving in?

LAZ
Out.

HAGERTY
Not the fire...

LAZ
Divorce.

HAGERTY
Been there.

LAZ
(re the chairs)
Please.

Hagerty and Lauren sit in the chairs opposite the sofa.

LAZ (CONT'D)
Why Alaska?

HAGERTY
Where my mother grew up.

LAZ
Back to your roots.

HAGERTY
Something like that.

LAZ
Not because Bob shit-canned you.

Hagerty looks to Lauren. What can she do? Laz is Laz.

LAZ (CONT'D)
He gave me his version. I want
yours.

HAGERTY
NASA's plan was too convoluted. Too
expensive. They were never going to
get it off the ground. I was vocal.
That rubbed Bob the wrong way.

LAZ
There's a political element to
bringing you back. You'll have to
play nice this time.

HAGERTY
Bob must've wanted someone still on
the inside.

LAZ

He did. I don't. But I need someone with a NASA pedigree.

HAGERTY

With more allegiance to you.

LAZ

Two birds, one commander.

HAGERTY

You know my ask.

LAZ

I can't give you final say on the crew. A lot of people will want to weigh in.

HAGERTY

They can weigh in all they want, but this is over two years there and back. I need to pick the team.

LAZ

I'll do everything I can to protect your choices. But I'm not the sole sovereign here, as much as I'd like to be.

HAGERTY

When the terms aren't clear, it gets messy. I learned that the hard way.

LAZ

If you want the command, you're going to have to place the same faith in me as I'm prepared to place in you.

They hold each other's gaze, then abruptly--

LAZ (CONT'D)

(to Lauren)

Where are we putting him up?

LAUREN

Four Seasons.

LAZ
 I hate the Four Seasons.
 (to Hagerty)
 You can stay in the guest house.

Laz exits without a word, no hand shake. Hagerty and Lauren are left alone.

HAGERTY
 That's it?

LAUREN
 Ball's in your court.

Hagerty gets up and walks over to the Warhol painting.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
 His wife is a collector. Ex-wife.

Hagerty considers the painting for a moment, then--

HAGERTY
 The engineers still at it?

LAUREN
 Until there's a fix.

HAGERTY
 I want to stop by.

LAUREN
 Is that a yes?

HAGERTY
 It's a maybe.

47 INT. VISTA HQ - PRETESH'S OFFICE - DAY

47

Hagerty and Lauren with Pretesh, along with Min, Wei, Greg, and two other engineers. All the engineers look exhausted. The dry erase board is filled edge to edge with hastily drawn diagrams and complex equations.

Pretesh holding up a VISTA mug at an angle, using it as a model for the aeroshell.

PRETESH

We reduce heat back here...
 (pointing to the bottom
 edge)
 But the increase here takes us out
 of the margin.

HAGERTY

You could rotate during entry.

Hagerty takes the mug, using it to illustrate.

HAGERTY (CONT'D)

Distribute heat across the rim.

MIN

Problem is, it could twist the
 parachute cords.

HAGERTY

Not if you stop rotation just
 before deployment.

GREG

We can't predict how the atmosphere
 will affect rotation speed. If we
 pre-program incorrectly...

Illustrating with the mug--

HAGERTY

You don't have to be perfect. The
 torque of the parachute will
 stabilize even if you have a little
 spin. Worked like a gem on Apollo
 20. Look...

He goes over to a computer. Pulls up a video. Everyone crowds
 around. We see footage of a re-entry taken from a high
 altitude drone, an orange glow on a turning capsule.

HAGERTY (CONT'D)

X-axis spin - unplanned. Right here
 - I pump the thruster. Manual, so
 nowhere close to perfect...still
 spinning a little...and here...

We see the chutes deploy, the capsule jerks from the tension,
 spins slightly in the other direction then settles, the spin
 stopping.

HAGERTY (CONT'D)
 Boom. A little jerky for a second,
 but stable.

MIN
 You had more air resistance.

HAGERTY
 I'm not an engineer. I'm just going
 from experience.

PRETESH
 Let's do the math.

As the engineers get to work, Hagerty turns to Lauren.

HAGERTY
 Go get some sleep.

LAUREN
 I'm fine.

HAGERTY
 Go home. I'll do the sprint. You do
 the marathon.

She nods, squeezes his hand, then exits.

48 INT. LAUREN'S HOME - BEDROOM - DAY

48

Early morning. Dell is asleep in bed. We hear a door open.
 Footsteps.

VOICE (O.S.)
 Okay little one - here we go.

Dell stirs, squinting at the morning light. Looks over at the
 other side of the room.

We see Ellie being lifted by a nanny - INEZ (20s) - from a
 medical bed into a high-tech, child-sized wheelchair,
 transferring a catheter tube connected to the bed to a socket
 on the chair. Ellie has a swollen abdomen and weak limbs. She
 has advanced Gaucher's disease.

Dell sits up.

DELL
 Morning Inez.

INEZ

Morning.

49

INT. LAUREN'S HOME - UPSTAIRS - DAY 49

49

Dell - showered and dressed - lightly knocks on a door. He's got a mug of coffee in the other hand. Without waiting for a response, he opens the door to find Lauren in her home office. The walls are covered with Mars maps and several large calendars with key mission dates filled in. Lauren is folding a blanket and placing it on a small sofa where we see a couple of pillows.

DELL

Again?

LAUREN

I didn't want to wake her when I came in.

DELL

(letting it slide)

Inez has breakfast ready.

LAUREN

I've got to change and get to the office.

(re the coffee)

That for me?

He holds out the mug. She takes it, has a sip.

DELL

Can you go in a little late today?

LAUREN

Winthrop's here, and the countdown is frozen because--

DELL

She hasn't seen you in two days.

LAUREN

I know, and it kills me, but I--

DELL

Alright, forget it.

LAUREN
Don't punish me.

DELL
Punish you?

LAUREN
For the Santa thing.

DELL
I'm not.

LAUREN
I'll stay for breakfast.

Dell says nothing. His version of a truce. She sets the coffee down, gives him a peck on the cheek.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
I love you.

She exits. Dell picks up the mug she left behind.

50

INT. LAUREN'S HOME - DAY

50

Lauren is feeding Ellie with a spoon. Dell silently eats on the other side of the table. Inez washes dishes.

ELLIE
Can I try?

LAUREN
Absolutely.

Lauren scoops up a spoonful of Ellie's oatmeal, then wraps Ellie's hand around the spoon. It takes some effort for Ellie to bring the spoon to her lips, but she does.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Great.

Lauren wipes the excess oatmeal off of Ellie's mouth. Takes the spoon and scoops up some more oatmeal. Places the spoon back in Ellie's hand. But this time, she drops the spoon before it gets to her mouth. Inez, hearing the clatter, starts to come over.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
It's alright. I got it.

Lauren picks up the spoon. Wipes it off with the napkin.
Scoops another spoonful of oatmeal.

ELLIE
Sorry.

LAUREN
Let's try again.

Places the spoon back in Ellie's hand. Keeping her hand wrapped around Ellie's--

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Here - I'll help you.

On Dell - who can't help but be moved by the tenderness Lauren is exhibiting toward their daughter.

51 INT. VISTA HQ - PRESS AREA - DAY

51

Winthrop is in the middle of giving an interview to a camera crew. Holly and Sayers looking on.

WINTHROP
When you're here, and you see
hundreds of people - the magnitude
of it - I'm convinced that America
will get there before the
Chinese...

As Winthrop continues, we CUT TO Sayers leaning into Holly's ear, sotto voce--

SAYERS
You line up as many as you can.
There's nothing he loves more than
free press. Well, except baby
Jesus.

Holly has to stifle her laugh.

52 INT. VISTA HQ - BULL-PEN - LAUREN'S CUBICLE - DAY

52

Lauren and Cordine mid-conversation.

CORDINE
What's the hesitation?

LAUREN
He wants final say on crew.

CORDINE
You see - this is exactly why I
didn't -

LAUREN
Laz told him no.

CORDINE
The guy's not a team player. I can
list three other candidates who--

LAUREN
We can't second guess every
decision like this, Bob.

VOICE (O.S.)
Lauren.

They both look over to see LAUREN'S ASSISTANT nod toward the
central corridor. Laz is approaching. Before he even gets to
Lauren's cubicle--

LAZ
What's Pretesh saying?

LAUREN
They're getting there.

CORDINE
We were just discussing Hagerty.

Laz glances at Lauren to get a sense of how the conversation
was going. Not well is the sense he gets.

CORDINE (CONT'D)
There's no way he gets final say on
crew selection.

LAUREN
I told him you--

CORDINE
And I don't care if I sound like a
broken record. I still have serious
doubts about--

LAZ

I've got a 4-billion-dollar HAB
we're trying to keep from blowing
up. This is the discussion you want
to be--

Cordine calmly, firmly interrupts--

CORDINE

You've been given a great deal of
freedom, but that's your privilege,
not your right. I can veto. I am
the safeguard. So if I want to
discuss this a third time, and a
fourth and a fifth, that's what
we'll do.

53

INT. VISTA HQ - PRESS AREA - DAY

53

Winthrop doing another interview.

REPORTER #1

How close are the Chinese?

WINTHROP

They've got Russia and India
helping - a lot of tech and
financial resources. But we're
about to start crew selection. I
don't think the Chinese are
anywhere near that stage.

REPORTER #2

Does that mean a crew commander's
already been chosen?

WINTHROP

I've been told it's probably going
to be Tom Hagerty, which I think
would be an excellent choice.

CUT TO Holly and Sayers, both dumbstruck.

HOLLY

He didn't...

SAYERS

He did.

54 INT. VISTA HQ - BULL-PEN - LAUREN'S CUBICLE - DAY

54

Laz, Cordine, and Lauren in the thick of it.

LAZ

You wanted a NASA guy. I'm getting you a NASA guy.

CORDINE

Former NASA.

LAZ

We're all pros, Bob. You can work with someone you fired.

CORDINE

He doesn't respect authority.

LAZ

Because he was right. You were dragging your asses.

During which Lauren gets a text message.

CORDINE

This is still a NASA venture.

LAZ

It's a joint venture.

LAUREN

The Congressman just announced Hagerty.

CORDINE

What...?

LAUREN

On camera.

The two men are stunned for a moment.

LAZ

Well that's that.

CORDINE

Did you put him up to it?

LAZ
I'm a prick, but I'm not a two-
faced prick.

55 INT. LAZ'S GUEST HOUSE - DAY

55

Hagerty is in the living room watching coverage of Winthrop on TV. He looks as though he's barely slept.

WINTHROP (ON TV)
...expect to meet with him today,
and we'll go from there.

Hagerty numb. The coverage CUTS TO a NEWS ANCHOR--

NEWS ANCHOR
Colonel Tom Hagerty commanded two
missions and oversaw the astronaut
training program before leaving
NASA three years ago...

We see footage of Hagerty on a moon walk.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)
He's conducted more space flights
than any American, second only to
Sasha Illyich of Russia...

There's a knock at the door. During the coverage...

HAGERTY
It's open.

It's David, the butler.

DAVID
Car's here for you.

HAGERTY
Let me take Apollo for a quick walk
first.

DAVID
Whenever you're ready.

As David leaves, Hagerty crouches down and takes Apollo's face in his hands.

HAGERTY
Leash or no leash?

Apollo swivels his head free and barks.

HAGERTY (CONT'D)
Alright - no leash.

Hagerty's cell phone vibrates on the coffee table. He looks at it, decides to ignore. Turns off the TV instead. Heads to the door, as the phone continues to vibrate--

HAGERTY (CONT'D)
Come on, boy.

56 INT. VISTA HQ - HALLWAY/PRETESH'S OFFICE - DAY 56

We FOLLOW Laz, as he briskly makes his way down the hallway to Pretesh's office. Opens the door. The camera whirls around to Pretesh and his team, all turning to look at the boss.

LAZ
Tell me there's progress.

PRETESH
We may have something.

57 EXT. BEL AIR STREET - DAY 57

WIDE shot of Hagerty walking slowly along the road - all gated houses on lush estates. Sprinklers going full force in one of them. Apollo is trotting along ahead, sniffing here and there. In the distance we can see the smoke rising from the Santa Monica mountain fire.

A HUMMER-ESQUE vehicle barrels down the road, blaring music and whizzing past Hagerty and his dog. Hagerty watches the vehicle disappear over the crest.

He turns back to Apollo, who scampers around a bend and out of sight. After a few moments, he hears barking, then growling. He whistles for Apollo, but the dog does not come when called.

The barking and growling continue. Hagerty picks up his pace to a fast walk. As he rounds the bend, he sees Apollo square off with three COYOTES. They're smaller than Apollo but have power in numbers.

HAGERTY

Apollo!

But it does no good. The posturing continues. Hagerty walks closer, tentatively, hoping to scare the coyotes away. He claps his hands loudly as he yells out--

HAGERTY (CONT'D)

Go on now! Go on!

But this snaps them from defensive to offensive. One of the coyotes lunges at Apollo. Apollo claws and bites, sending one of the coyotes darting a few yards away, but just as it retreats, another one attacks. Apollo has a tougher time with this one, and, sensing weakness, the first and third coyotes pounce as well.

Apollo is thrashing about, trying to fend them off, but he can't cover all sides at once. The coyotes are snapping at his legs, going for his throat when they can. Apollo gets pinned to the ground.

Hagerty acts instinctively. He whips off his pullover and wraps it around one of his forearms. Heads into the fray. Uses the padded arm to swipe at the coyotes. One of them locks onto his covered arm with its jaw. Hagerty swings back and forth to shake him off. The coyote scampers off. He turns his attention to the other two, whacking until they roll off of Apollo and trot away into the brush. Apollo whimpers on the ground, bloodied by gashes.

58

EXT. LAZ'S MANSION - DAY

58

Hagerty carries Apollo toward the front gate. It's no small feat - the dog weighs well over a hundred pounds. But adrenalin has kicked in, and his only thought is getting help. When he gets to the intercom, he presses the call button with his elbow. A moment later--

DAVID (V.O.)

Mr. Hagerty?

HAGERTY

Bring the car down. Now.

59 INT. VETERINARIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

59

Apollo squirms as Hagerty and a VET'S ASSISTANT hold him down on an examination table. The VETERINARIAN gives Apollo a shot in the hindquarter. Apollo lets out a high-pitched whine. Hagerty runs a hand along Apollo's snout.

HAGERTY

It's okay, buddy. It's alright.

In a few moments, Apollo slackens from the sedation.

VETERINARIAN

There's a couple deep bites - here...and here. We'll have to stitch those up. I'll want to do a rabies and tetanus treatment too.

DRIVER (O.S.)

Colonel.

The DRIVER has entered. Holds out a phone.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Mr. Ingram's office. Say they've been trying to reach you.

60 INT. VISTA HQ - MISSION CONTROL - DAY

60

Sayers is introducing Winthrop to Alvin and Martha. Lauren is on her phone about twenty yards away, keeping an eye on them.

LAUREN

He's getting antsy. I need you to spend some face time with him.

INTERCUT WITH --

61 INT. VET'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

61

Hagerty on the Driver's cell phone.

HAGERTY

When we're done here.

LAUREN

How long?

HAGERTY

Could be a while.

LAUREN

I know he jumped the gun. I'm sorry for that. We're not trying to corner you.

HAGERTY

It's not about him. I won't leave my dog. He'll sense if I'm gone.

LAUREN

Please Tom - do me this favor.

62 INT. PRETESH'S OFFICE - DAY

62

The office is crammed with people now, including Laz, Pretesh, Min, Wei, Vivek, Greg, Alvin, the Mission Geologist, and several Engineers. With a paucity of chairs, most people are standing. Min is holding up a model of HAB 1, slowly rotating it.

MIN

All we need is about sixty seconds of relief on this side, so if we--

Cordine enters. People move aside to make room for him in the cramped space.

CORDINE

Please. Continue.

63 INT. VISTA HQ - BUILD FACILITY - DAY

63

Lauren escorts Hagerty toward the large booster rocket, where Winthrop and Sayers are waiting with a photographer. Winthrop lights up at seeing Hagerty.

WINTHROP

Colonel, it's an honor.

As they shake hands--

WINTHROP (CONT'D)

Not everyday I shake hands with a man who's been to the moon. Just wish my son could be here with me.

SAYERS
Studying astrophysics at M.I.T.

HAGERTY
Great program.

WINTHROP
Too far from home. And chock full
of liberals. But if you want to
study space, you make sacrifices.

Winthrop laughs. Hagerty forces a smile.

WINTHROP (CONT'D)
I'd like to take a picture, if you
don't mind - to send to him.

HAGERTY
Of course.

As Hagerty and Winthrop walk toward the rocket--

WINTHROP
Maggie tells me I opened my trap
too soon about you coming on.

HAGERTY
No worries.

WINTHROP
Well, sure as heck hope you say
yes. I don't want to allocate all
this money to build a ship that
doesn't have the best skipper.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Right there is great.

Winthrop throws his arm around Hagerty with a big, toothy
smile. Hagerty manages half a smile. Camera flashes.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)
Thank you.

WINTHROP
(to Hagerty)
So tell me - what was it like? The
first time you set foot on the
moon? What was your very first
thought?

HAGERTY
Disappointment.

Winthrop's face falls. Sayers and Lauren stiffen.

WINTHROP
Disappointment...?

HAGERTY
It wasn't Mars. And it could've
been. If NASA spent its money
right.

SAYERS
I think what the Colonel is trying
to say is--

WINTHROP
Don't sugar-coat it, Maggie.
(to Hagerty)
It's refreshing to hear the truth.
Sign of a good leader.

64 INT. VISTA HQ - PRETESH'S OFFICE - DAY

64

Further into the presentation. Pretesh is pointing to a map of Mars on the wall. Sundry equations and diagrams populate the dry erase board.

PRETESH
The new entry angle means we'll
have to put down here - the
Cerberus Plains - either landing
site three or nine.

ALVIN
How's the soil situation?

GEOLOGIST
It's not as mineral or water rich,
but it's flat, open terrain.

LAZ
Is there enough water to test the
fuel generators?

GEOLOGIST

We only got half a meter down so
it's tough to say. Our estimate is
yes. Barely.

PRETESH

But this puts us close to our
margin on the valve.

LAZ

Just close?

VIVEK

Point zero six.

All eyes on Laz, waiting for his decision. He looks down at
the ground, considering, then back up at Cordine.

LAZ

I'm willing to roll the dice if you
are, Bob.

CORDINE

It's your call.

LAZ

Our call.

Cordine appreciates the respect given him in front of the
assembled team.

CORDINE

Let's roll 'em.

An appreciative nod from Laz. Cordine is stepping up.

LAZ

(to Alvin)

Program the entry, and let's get to
countdown.

65

INT. VISTA HQ - MISSION CONTROL - DAY

65

Alvin and Martha are at their stations. Lauren, Sayers, and
Winthrop are behind them.

MARTHA

Navigation.

We CUT TO each of the stations as they pipe in.

NAVIGATION
Primary MPS check. Secondary check.

MARTHA
Propulsion.

PROPULSION
Thrusters one through six
operational.

MARTHA
Software.

SOFTWARE
Check.

MARTHA
Telemetry.

TELEMETRY
Check.

MARTHA
Meteorology.

METEOROLOGY
Check.

MARTHA
(to Alvin)
Ready to transmit.

ALVIN
(to Winthrop)
Will you do us the honor,
Congressman?

Alvin hands Winthrop his headset. As Winthrop puts it on--

ALVIN (CONT'D)
The command is "Go on landing
sequence."

WINTHROP
Now?

Alvin nods. Winthrop looks like a kid in a candy store.

WINTHROP (CONT'D)
 (into the headset)
 Go on landing sequence.

COMMS (V.O.)
 Landing sequence sent.

MARTHA
 Countdown is transmission plus
 15:52. T-minus 24:17.

We see the COUNTDOWN appear on the big screen.

CUT TO Laz standing in the back of the room, as he was near the top of the episode. TIGHT on his finger tapping his bicep with each second that ticks off the countdown clock. He's wound up. Abruptly, he makes for the exit.

We STAY with him, FOLLOWING from behind.

A rapid flurry of sax notes starts to bubble up, the slapping of the valves and circular breathing giving it a percussive energy.

66 INT. VISTA HQ - PRESS AREA - CONTINUOUS 66

As Laz passes by the camera crews--

REPOTER #1
 Laz...

Without stopping he holds up a hand that says "not now." We stay with him as he passes through a set of doors into--

67 INT. VISTA HQ - BULL-PEN - CONTINUOUS 67

The music continues. A sea of cubicles. Everywhere he walks, he draws glances - he's the big boss, after all. The music is picking up in pace and intensity, an anxious frenetic feel to it.

He passes through the lobby and main double door into...

68

EXT. VISTA HQ - FRONT ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

68

...the BRIGHT SUNLIGHT. Keeps walking through the front parking lot, away from the building, away from everyone. The notes are furiously fast now.

There are satellite trucks parked out front now to cover the landing. Laz heads in the opposite direction.

He stops about 30 yards away from the entrance. And as he stops, the music abruptly stops too.

We finally COME AROUND on him. He's got his eyes closed. Lets the sun shine down on his face. Breathing.

He pulls out his phone. Speed dials. On speaker. A double-ring, like they have in the U.K.

An ELDERLY WOMAN'S voice answers. It's a middle class Yorkshire accent.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)

Hallo?

LAZ

Hi mum.

LAZ'S MOTHER (V.O.)

This is a nice surprise.

Her voice is a balm.

LAZ

Sorry to call so late.

LAZ'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Isn't today your big day?

LAZ

Supposed to be. How are you?

LAZ'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Oh fine. Had our final rehearsal tonight for the Carlisle concert. Everyone's nervous, of course.

LAZ

I'm going to have to come see the choir sometime.

LAZ'S MOTHER (V.O.)
 You'd rather be caught dead than in
 a church.

LAZ
 True.

LAZ'S MOTHER (V.O.)
 It's a nice program. Vitry and
 Machaut. Philip gave me one of the
 featured sopranos.

LAZ
 Let's have a taste. Over the phone.

LAZ'S MOTHER (V.O.)
 (laughs)
 I'm embarrassed.

LAZ
 It's just me.

LAZ'S MOTHER (V.O.)
 Well...okay, but just a little. I
 haven't done my vocal exercises.

She clears her throat, then begins to sing a portion from
 Guillaume de Machaut's "La Messe de Nostre Dame." Her voice
 is tinny through the phone, but soothing and confident. Its
 measured melody an antidote to the unsettling saxophone
 assault we heard moments before.

Laz sits down on the ground between two cars. Leans his back
 against a wheel well. Holds the phone between his knees and
 listens, as though it's a blood transfusion.

As her singing continues, we SMASH CUT TO:

69

INT. VISTA HQ - RECEPTION - DAY

69

Laz entering the front doors - calm and re-energized. We stay
 with him again, but this time from the front, moving
 backwards as he moves forward. As he passes through the
 double-doors to the main bull-pen, additional voices come in,
 filling out the full harmony of Machaut's piece.

70 INT. VISTA HQ - BULL-PEN/PRESS AREA - CONTINUOUS 70

We retrace the same route as before, but TIME CUTTING to leap through it faster, the music continuing.

71 INT. VISTA HQ - MISSION CONTROL - DAY 71

Laz makes his way back inside. Assumes his usual place in the back. Lauren approaches.

LAUREN
You okay?

LAZ
I'm good.

As the music continues we CUT TO a tracking shot of Mission Control staff waiting anxiously.

CUT TO half a dozen news cameras pointed at the Mission Control room, one of the cameramen chewing his lip.

Over the P.A. --

MARTHA (O.S.)
Transmission delivery in 5..4..3...

We CUT TO Martha and Alvin at their station.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
2...1...landing sequence initiated.
Countdown to confirmation 9 minutes
14 seconds.

Martha leans back in her chair. Alvin remains forward, elbows on the table.

ALVIN
Wish the speed of light was about
twenty times faster.

The music continues as we move through a MONTAGE--

-- Winthrop and Sayers in the back. Sayers staring at the big screen. Winthrop's head bowed in prayer.

-- Hagerty looking up at the screen, as still as a statue.

-- WIDE SHOT outside the control room, where scores of staff have gathered to watch on monitors.

-- the empty rocket tube, work lights still inside, but no technicians there.

-- WIDE SHOT of the long central corridor, devoid of anyone.

-- Exterior of the VISTA Headquarters, the satellite trucks dwarfed by the massive logo.

-- Two car mechanics working under the hood of a side-swiped Prius in a rundown auto shop on Lincoln Blvd. Another mechanic gets their attention to show them live coverage on his phone.

-- A homeless man pushing a cart down the sidewalk, a cardboard sign on his back: I HAVE DREAMS TOO.

-- People in business attire waiting in line at a food truck in downtown L.A. All watching their phones.

-- Third graders in a classroom. All of them watching coverage on a TV that's been brought into the room.

-- Directly above the city of Los Angeles, a clover-leaf highway intersection dominating the center of the frame, every lane jammed with traffic. Slowly PULLING BACK...

-- The Santa Monica mountains - raw nature in contrast to the urban sprawl of the city. A wisp of smoke.

-- A burned-out log in a sea of scorched and naked tree trunks, the remains of the forest fire. A small bird fluttering onto one of the logs - the only bit of color in black and ashen landscape.

Then the bird flying off, whipping the camera toward the sky in a failed attempt to follow it.

-- Taking us to the interior of the ISS - Kayla and Hank floating as they stare at a computer screen, the same imagery on the big screen at Mission Control.

We shift focus from them to a small socket wrench floating behind them, slowly spinning as it inches across the cabin. Which takes us to--

72 EXT. MARS ORBIT - DAY

72

The HAB 1 ENTRY MODULE floats serenely above the curvature of the red planet below. With several short bursts, the thrusters angle the bottom of the module toward the surface. A burst from a side thruster initiates a gentle rotation. A final sequence of bursts stops the angling and rotation, then one long burst slows the module down enough to succumb to Mars' gravity. It begins a gradual descent. We see the faintest glimmer of entry burn start to glow on the lip of the module.

73 INT. VISTA HQ - MISSION CONTROL - DAY

73

73 Martha and Alvin at their station, both waiting for the transmission to come through. We can tell from a shift in body posture that it's arrived. Alvin looks to Martha.

PROPULSION

Thruster sequence check. Entry
angle confirmed at 23.78 degrees.
Rotation at 1.14 rpm.

INTERCUT between Martha and the following--

MARTHA

Trajectory.

TRAJECTORY

On course check, speed: two one
zero five with uniform decrease
eight nine seven kilometers per
second.

MARTHA

Heat readings.

HEAD OF SYSTEMS

Variable from 650 to 935 Celsius.

CUT TO Pretesh, Vivek, and Min toward the back.

VIVEK

(to Pretesh)

That's in our zone.

Pretesh holds up both hands, fingers crossed on each.

74 EXT. MARS ATMOSPHERE - DAY

74

The HAB 1 module screaming toward the Mars surface, a massive burn glow enveloping the entire craft, strongest on the lowest part of the lip angled most toward the ground. But as the atmospheric resistance slows the module, the burn glow starts to reduce, finally disappearing altogether. Then another thruster burst, which slows down the rotation to almost nothing. As it slows, the MUSIC FADES until it is gone.

75 INT. VISTA HQ - MISSION CONTROL - DAY

75

The tension is felt by the stillness of the room, people barely breathing.

TRAJECTORY
Rotation 0.09 rpm...

Silence as they wait for the next phase. Then--

MARTHA
Chute deployment?

She waits for a response.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Chute deployment?

A beat, then--

SYSTEMS
Parachute deployed.

A few people clap, but most don't. One of them is next to the Head of Systems who whispers--

SYSTEMS (CONT'D)
Not yet.

MARTHA
Eight seconds until secondary chute.

On Sayers and Winthrop. Then to Pretesh and his team.

VIVEK
(to Pretesh)
(MORE)

VIVEK (CONT'D)

If the washer had burned, it would've affected the primary chute. I think we're gonna--

MIN

Shut up. We're not down til we're down.

SYSTEMS

Secondary chute deployed.

We can sense the tension starting to let up in the room. They're not home free yet, but they survived the burn phase and the chute deployment. The two stages everyone was most worried about.

TRAJECTORY

Speed remains constant.

Not good. Tension ripples back through the room.

MARTHA

Repeat trajectory. You said speed is constant?

TRAJECTORY

Now it's increasing. Point eight terminal velocity. Point nine...

SYSTEMS

Erratic rotation.

PROPULSION

Retro-thrusters have kicked in...

We CUT BACK TO Pretesh, Vivek, and Min.

MIN

Too high.

The module is six kilometers above the surface, plummeting fast.

Its primary and secondary chutes are tangled, causing it to spin wildly, the tangled chutes unable to slow its descent and the thrusters doing little to slow descent at this speed, especially at this height and with the erratic spin.

77 INT. VISTA HQ - MISSION CONTROL - DAY

77

Laz, Cordine, and Pretesh are standing over Martha and Alvin's shoulders now, staring at their screens.

LAZ

The landing thrusters...

ALVIN

It's not enough at this speed.

PRETESH

The rotation's too variable to counteract.

HEAD OF SYSTEMS

Impact in nine...eight...seven...

Lauren has walked over to Holly now.

LAUREN

Can we get Laz out of his interviews?

HOLLY

You're killing me.

LAUREN

How is this good press?

SYSTEMS

...three...two...one.

A beat, then Martha, trying not to sound defeated--

MARTHA

Telemetry.

HEAD OF TELEMETRY

We've lost contact.

A wave of disappointment through the room. These people are all professionals. They've seen dozens of launch and landing failures, but never one as important as this.

On Hagerty, stoic.

CUT TO Sayers and Winthrop. She steals a glance at him. He's shaking his head.

We CUT TO Laz and Pretesh. Pretesh looks devastated but is trying to keep it together.

PRETESH

It wasn't the valve. I'm guessing it was something with the deployment mechanism.

LAZ

Full diagnostics.

PRETESH

I'm sorry, Laz.

LAZ

We'll land the next one.

Lauren and Cordine approach.

CORDINE

I'll do the press, if you'd rather not.

LAZ

Let's do it together.

78 EXT. MARS - DAY

78

From the saxophone, we hear one long, somber note. The camera glides over the Martian red dust, pristine and untouched, angled down so the ground fills the frame. As the note begins to taper off, the camera slows, and we see the gnarled wreckage of the HAB, smoldering from the crash. The tattered and scorched parachutes stretching a hundred yards, as though the module were bleeding cloth.

79 INT. MUSIC STUDIO

79

TIGHT on the Saxophone player, as the tapering note retreats into silence. Then he takes a breath, removes the reed and opens the valves, dumping the built up spit onto the ground. Over which we hear--

LAZ (O.S.)

We can't predict everything. That's the nature of space exploration...

80 INT. VISTA HQ - OUTSIDE MISSION CONTROL - DAY

80

Laz and Cordine are speaking to a scrum of press.

LAZ

We try, we fail, we try again.

CORRESPONDENT #1

But once you send people, if there's a failure...

CORDINE

Will people die? Obviously we want to prevent that. But it's possible.

LAZ

It's not just possible, it's probable. Colonizing a new planet is the biggest challenge humanity has ever faced.

CORRESPONDENT #2

Even if the cost is human life.

LAZ

We're doing this to perpetuate human life.

81 EXT. VISTA HQ - FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

81

Laz and Cordine are walking Sayers and Winthrop out the door to their waiting minivan. They're mid-conversation.

WINTHROP

Not saying it won't happen, but it's a much tougher sell now.

LAZ

I hope we can count on you.

WINTHROP

The only thing I've learned from politics is never to make promises.

(as he climbs in)

But get Hagerty out East. My people will be much more amenable to an American hero than a limey billionaire.

Being a limey, Laz appreciates the dry humor of this.

82 INT. VISTA HQ - BUILD FACILITY - NIGHT 82

The HAB 3 unit. Pretesh is there with his team.

PRETESH

Let's dismantle the entire system.
Lay it out, piece by piece...

83 INT. LAUREN'S HOME - NIGHT 83

Lauren enters the house, looking exhausted. Makes her way into the living room, where she sees a CONGRATULATIONS sign draped above the archway to the dining room, balloons everywhere. Dell waiting for her in a chair.

DELL

I left it up on purpose.

Off her look--

DELL (CONT'D)

Take this.

He hands her a balloon.

84 INT. LAZ'S GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT 84

Hagerty puts a bowl of water on the ground. Apollo, bandaged and still a bit out of it, laps up the water. Hagerty runs a hand through his mane. A knock.

HAGERTY

It's open.

Laz enters.

LAZ

(seeing Apollo)
How's he doing?

HAGERTY

A few cuts. He'll be fine.

Laz steps closer to pet him, but Apollo barks.

HAGERTY (CONT'D)
Doesn't make friends easily.

LAZ
Was it just the two of you up
north?

HAGERTY
Just the two of us.

LAZ
Your mother's not from Alaska. She
lived there for less than a year
when your grandad was working the
rigs in Prudhoe.

HAGERTY
Did you check before or after I
lied to you?

LAZ
Before.

HAGERTY
Why didn't you call me out on it?

LAZ
You don't embarrass a man you're
trying to convince.

HAGERTY
I haven't said yes yet.

LAZ
Why did you go?

Hagerty just shakes his head.

LAZ (CONT'D)
Forget I asked.

Laz crouches down and lets Apollo sniff his hand. This time,
Apollo doesn't bark and lets Laz pet him.

HAGERTY
The sky.

Laz looks up.

HAGERTY (CONT'D)

When it's clear - in the winter -
you can see it all. Twenty-three
hours of night. As cold as space.
If I was never gonna get the chance
again, it was the next best thing.

LAZ

Now you've got your chance.

HAGERTY

Still no final say?

LAZ

I can't promise it any more than
you can promise the crew they'll
survive. But I'll do my best.

The logic is sound, and Hagerty believes him.

HAGERTY

When do I start?

LAZ

You need to settle things up back
home?

HAGERTY

There's nothing there I can't leave
behind.

LAZ

Then tomorrow. We'll fly you out to
D.C. with Bob to rub shoulders.
(points)
The beard.

HAGERTY

I'll shave.

Without a handshake or farewell, Laz exits.

85

INT. LAUREN'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

85

Lauren and Dell enter and turn on the light, Lauren holding a
balloon. Ellie stirs awake. She's hooked up in her medical
bed.

ELLIE

Hi Mommy.

Lauren pierces one of the balloons with her teeth and sucks in the helium. With a high-pitched voice--

LAUREN

Hi sweetheart. Mommy's happy to see you.

Ellie bursts into laughter at the sound of her mother's voice.

ELLIE

Again!

During which, Dell edges out of the room to let them have some time alone together. With lungs full of more helium--

LAUREN

This is what I sounded like - when I was your age.

More laughter from Ellie. Then abruptly, matter-of-fact--

ELLIE

Am I going to die?

The question catches Lauren off guard, and yet--

LAUREN

Everybody--

But she still has the helium voice.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Fuck.

She exhales, letting the helium pass from her lungs. Then, with a normal voice--

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Everyone dies.

ELLIE

But will I die soon?

Lauren considers for a moment, then - unblinking--

LAUREN

You've already lived longer than
you were supposed to. Because
you're strong.

Ellie weighs this, then - straightforward--

ELLIE

Do the funny sound again.

Off Lauren as she sucks in more helium from the balloon.

86

INT. LAZ'S GUEST HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

86

TIGHT on Hagerty's face in the shower, hot water streaming
down from crown to chin.

TIME CUT to Hagerty in front of the sink, a circle wiped away
on the steamed mirror so he can see himself. The BUZZ of
clippers as he begins to shave off his beard.

TIGHT on the sink, hair falling into the bowl.

TIME CUT to Hagerty in the bedroom, completely naked, staring
at himself in the full-length mirror. He's clean shaven now.
His body is not that of a young man's anymore - its
imperfections amplified by age. But he's still fit. Strong in
stature, vulnerable in nakedness. Human.

He walks over to a sliding door leading to a terrace, still
naked. Opens it and walks outside, letting the warm, dry
California night air envelop his skin.

Looks over at the burning orange glow from the Santa Monica
Mountains fire in the distance.

His focus shifts to the big house, where he sees Laz on the
patio looking at the glow from the fire as well. Laz turns to
him. Hagerty makes no move hide his nakedness. Laz doesn't
show any outward reaction to it.

Laz gives him a casual salute, then heads back inside.

Hagerty turns his attention back to the sky, in the opposite
direction of the fire.

From his POV we see a tiny reddish dot in the cloudless night
sky. Mars. You have to strain to see it.

BACK ON Hagerty, staring up at the sky.

HAGERTY
Goddamn.

BLACK OUT.

END OF EPISODE