

Dead Reckoning
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FADE IN:

EXT. IN ORBIT - NIGHT

Earth, seen from 150 miles up.

Darkness covers the Indian subcontinent, relieved only by faint scatters of city lights.

A pinpoint of red flame becomes an orange flare, then swells into a tower of fire, as a subsonic RUMBLE builds to a deafening ROAR.

The nose-cone of a ballistic missile looms larger and larger, until finally it reaches its apogee, turns back toward Earth -
-

-- and aims for Washington, DC.

From above, a thin red beam of light finds its target and locks on. A pulse of energy travels along the red thread, reaches the nose-cone, and --

WHOOMMMP!

-- detonates it into a nuclear fireball.

The shock-wave ripples across the upper atmosphere, and the debris plummets to Earth in a flaming shower of micro-meteorites.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM - NIGHT

Out of the darkness...

THE PRESIDENT (O.S.)

(Texas accent)

Can we get some lights on in here?

The lights come up to reveal a windowless conference room with the Presidential seal and arrays of video monitors. SECRET SERVICE AGENTS wait by the door.

Grouped around a table are:

THE PRESIDENT, a good ol' gal in her 60's;

Air Force GENERAL SHREVE, late 50's, an ulcer in uniform;

various AIDES; and USAF Colonel DAVID BRODY.

David (40's) wears a full-dress winter uniform with an impressive array of decorations and a pilot's cowboy swagger.

The President gestures at the dark main video screen.

THE PRESIDENT

You get some Hollywood types to help you with that?

GENERAL SHREVE

We've found a high-quality simulation gets more airtime, ma'am.

THE PRESIDENT

And weapons that don't work get the wrong kinda airtime.

She indicates the wall of monitors.

THE PRESIDENT

We can't afford another billion dollar dud.

One screen shows a Pakistani nuclear missile site. Militants unfurl a banner showing a mushroom cloud over the US.

THE PRESIDENT

We dodged a bullet last week. But we can't count on drones or treaties to keep us safe.

She gestures at David.

THE PRESIDENT

When I was in the Senate, I fought long and hard to bring back the Space Shuttle, and update it for the twenty-first century.

She gives a little smile.

THE PRESIDENT

And not just because Houston's in Texas.

A few chuckles from around the table.

She indicates Russia on a world map.

THE PRESIDENT

It was a national disgrace for this country to have to hitch-hike on Russian rockets. Some of you-all may be too young to remember Sputnik, but I'm not.

She indicates the screen with the missile site again.

THE PRESIDENT

And now it's Sputnik all over again -- a million times worse.

She gives General Shreve a glare.

THE PRESIDENT

So I hope you got more for me than
just pretty pictures.

Shreve looks humiliated but keeps a lid on his temper.

GENERAL SHREVE

Dr. Edgars?

EDGARS, 40's, looks bone-tired, but his eyes gleam with a
fierce intelligence.

EDGARS

(South African accent)

As with any experiment, we learn as
much from our so-called failures as
from our successes, but --

GENERAL SHREVE

(cutting him off)

Ma'am, the team's been working
twenty-four seven for the past --

THE PRESIDENT

Then maybe they oughtta get some
sleep. Clear their heads.

An uncomfortable silence.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT

Excuse me, Madame President?
The guests are arriving.

The President stands. The others follow suit.

THE PRESIDENT

(to David)

Colonel, see you upstairs.

She nods curtly at the General and Edgars.

THE PRESIDENT

General Shreve. Doctor.

GENERAL SHREVE

Thank you, ma'am. And a Merry
Christmas.

THE PRESIDENT

You wanna give me a Merry
Christmas? Make that thing work.

She leaves, followed by the aides and agents.

GENERAL SHREVE
(to Edgars)
That wasn't exactly helpful.

EDGARS
And this wasn't exactly the best
use of my time.

He picks up his attache case and stomps out.

Shreve watches him go, unhappily.

GENERAL SHREVE
You better keep an eye on him up
there. He falls apart, you're
gonna need to pick up the pieces.

He squints suspiciously at David, who's wearing his best
poker face.

GENERAL SHREVE
You think it's funny, Colonel?
Seeing your commanding officer
called on the carpet?

DAVID
No, sir.

Shreve gathers his notes and shoves them into his briefcase.

GENERAL SHREVE
NASA sent me your paperwork for
this Mars thing. Not sure the Air
Force can spare you for another six
years.

DAVID
I'd think having an Air Force
officer on the Mars team would be
good for morale and recruitment,
sir.

GENERAL SHREVE
We're not recruiting people to fly
to Mars.

He picks up his briefcase.

GENERAL SHREVE
We'll talk about it when you get
back.

He heads for the door. David glares at his back.

DAVID
Thank you, sir.

INT. EAST ROOM OF THE WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

The room's set up for a formal dinner and decorated for Christmas as the guests arrive.

As David takes his seat, his attention's caught by:

SHARON SORONOW, late 30's -- formidable in a designer gown, softened by warm eyes and a wry smile.

A PROTOCOL OFFICER with a seating chart intercepts her and leads her to David's table.

Sharon's eyes widen as she spots David.

He stands as she approaches.

PROTOCOL OFFICER
Captain Sharon Soronow, meet
Colonel David Brody.

SHARON
Colonel...

She offers her hand. He takes it and smiles.

DAVID
Captain...

The other guests murmur their greetings as the Protocol Officer moves on.

SHARON
Shouldn't you be in quarantine or
something?

DAVID
I go in tomorrow night.

Sharon gently frees her hand.

SHARON
I'll try not to sneeze on you.

He holds her chair and she sits.

She picks up a menu card (headed "The White House Honors Aerospace Pioneers") and sneaks a peak at David's empty ring finger.

He peruses his own menu -- and notes that her ring finger is bare as well.

LATER

Waiters clear the desserts, the Marine Band strikes up, and the First Gentleman escorts the President onto the dance floor.

DAVID

Shall we?

He leads her out and they dance. He studies her face.

INT. OFFICERS' MESS TENT - NIGHT (MEMORY FLASH)

Sharon's face - 10 years younger.

Amid the remains of a rowdy party, Sharon, wearing desert fatigues, slow dances in David's arms.

Hand-lettered signs hang on the canvas walls:

"Happy New Year!" "Kandahar AB"

INT. EAST ROOM OF THE WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

Sharon notices David staring at her.

SHARON

What?

DAVID

You haven't changed...

She snorts derisively. He smiles and holds her tighter.

The music stops. David still holds Sharon close, and looks like he never wants to let go.

SHARON

The music's over...

DAVID

Is it...?

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

As CAROLERS serenade, David and Sharon join the departing guests heading out into the frosty night.

They barely notice a handful of protestors at the security fence, carrying signs:

"No weapons in space!" "Stop 'Star Wars' now!"

SHARON

Where are you staying?

DAVID

The Hay-Adams. Got a great view.
Want to come up and see?

She hesitates, then smiles.

SHARON

Sure...

They cross the street.

INT. HAY-ADAMS HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

While Sharon waits at a distance, David has a few unheard words with the Front Desk Clerk.

INT. GUEST ROOM -- MINUTES LATER

David opens the door but doesn't turn on the light. The French window frames the view of the illuminated White House.

EXT. HOTEL ROOM BALCONY - NIGHT

David and Sharon stand on the balcony, admiring the view of the moon hovering over the Washington Monument.

SHARON

(re the moon)

Think you'll ever get there?

He points out a red dot in the sky.

DAVID

That's where the real action'll be.

SHARON

Mars?

DAVID

I'm on the short list for the first mission... if I don't piss off Shreve and the budget doesn't get cut.

SHARON

Bring me back a rock?

DAVID

You bet.

They grin at each other and edge closer.

SHARON

You seem pretty laid back about your trip next week....

DAVID

Mile-for-mile space travel's safer than a drive to the mall.

SHARON

But if your O-rings pop on the way
to the Galleria you don't --

She catches herself.

SHARON

Sorry. That's the last thing you
need to hear right now.

A KNOCK on the door. David goes to answer it and returns
with a room service cart with two carafes.

SHARON

What's that?

DAVID

One's coffee, the other's vodka
martinis. You choose.

She closes her eyes and silently goes eeny-meeny-miney, then
picks a carafe and unscrews the cap. Steam rises.

SHARON

If we drink the martinis now, we
can always have the coffee... in
the morning.

She sets down the carafe and moves toward David..

SHARON

If you think it'll still be hot...?

They're face to face, silhouetted against the view. He
kisses her, gently at first, then with the pent-up longing of
all those lost years.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HAY-ADAMS HOTEL - DAY

By the first purple light of dawn, Sharon gathers her
scattered clothes and tries not to wake David.

She pours herself a cup of coffee, tastes it, and grimaces.

DAVID (O.S.)

How is it?

SHARON

Lukewarm.

DAVID

I can order more.

Sharon sits on the edge of the bed to dress.

SHARON

Don't you have a rocket to catch?

DAVID

They won't leave without me.

He kisses the tattoo of a winged warthog on her shoulder.

DAVID

I've missed you.

SHARON

(after a moment)

Me too.

He kneads her tense shoulders.

DAVID

I want to see you when I get back.
I want you there when I land...

He kisses her back.

DAVID

...and the day after that...

He kisses her shoulder.

DAVID

...and all the days after that.

He kisses her neck, her ear, her cheek. Her back arches with pleasure but she pulls away and finishes dressing.

DAVID

Global flies into Houston. You
could put in for a transfer.

SHARON

And I'm just supposed to pack up my
life and move to Texas?

DAVID

Something like that.

She glances at her watch, then gets up.

SHARON

I have to go.

She fumbles with the door locks. In an instant, David's at her side with his arms around her.

DAVID

I'll put your name on the VIP list
at the Cape.

SHARON
Maybe we should just...

DAVID
What?

She kisses him on the cheek.

SHARON
Have a safe flight, OK?

She pulls away and leaves. He leans against the door.

EXT. GEORGETOWN - DAY

A cab pulls away from a Georgetown townhouse.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

In the entry, Sharon hangs up her evening cloak and slips off her shoes.

She sets her bag on the hall table, next to a framed photo of a 60-ish woman wearing a pink bandanna over her bald head and a pink "Run for the Cure" t-shirt.

Sharon looks at the picture with a pang, then kisses her finger and gently touches the face of the woman.

As she tiptoes upstairs, shoes in hand, she meets her father BEN (60s, distinguished) coming down in his robe and slippers. She freezes, embarrassed.

BEN
Good morning, Cinderella.

He notices the shoes, her smudged makeup and unkempt hair.

BEN
I see you still have both of your glass slippers.

She gives him a baleful look and continues up the stairs.

BEN
Your turn to cook!

KITCHEN - LATER

Sharon comes in wearing jeans and a Red Sox t-shirt. Ben's reading the Sunday paper.

BEN
I made coffee.

Stifling a yawn, Sharon pours herself a cup, then rummages in the fridge.