

Orbit

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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 --

WHOOOMMP!

-- 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 (40/50's) wears a full-dress winter uniform with an impressive array of decorations.

He sits next to USMC Colonel ENRIQUE LUCERO (40s, Latino), also in his dress uniform.

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. We can't afford another billion-dollar dud.

She gestures at David and Lucero.

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.

THE PRESIDENT

It was a national disgrace for this country to have to hitch-hike with the Russians or some boy billionaire's private Starfleet.

David and Lucero stifle their smiles.

The President gives General Shreve a glare.

THE PRESIDENT

But I promised the taxpayers they'd get their money's worth. So I hope you got more for me than just pretty pictures.

GENERAL SHREVE

Dr. Edgars? Can you give a status report?

EDGARS (40's/50'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 contractors have 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 and Lucero)

Gentlemen -- see you upstairs.

She nods curtly at the General and Edgars.

THE PRESIDENT

General Shreve. Doctor.

GENERAL SHREVE

Merry Christmas, ma'am.

THE PRESIDENT

You wanna gimme a Merry Christmas?
Make that thing work.

She leaves, followed by the aides and agents.

GENERAL SHREVE

(to Edgars)

That wasn't helpful.

Edgars gives him a defeated look, puts his laptop into a backpack with a "Consolidated Space Systems" logo, then trudges out.

Shreve watches him go, unhappily.

GENERAL SHREVE

You better keep an eye on him up there.

DAVID

Yes, sir.

Shreve 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 glowers 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.

David enters with Lucero, who spots his wife LLOYDA LUCERO (late 30s, pregnant, in evening wear), waving from a table.

The men go to join her.

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

SHARON SORONOW (30's/40's) -- formidable in a designer gown, softened by warm eyes and a wry smile.

Lucero sees her and beams.

Sharon's eyes widen as she spots David and Lucero.

They stand as she approaches.

Lucero holds out his arms for a hug.

LUCERO
Qué onda, morra? (What's up, girl?)
It's been too long...

They embrace.

He releases her and introduces her to his wife.

LUCERO
This is my wife, Lloyda.

Sharon smiles and shakes her hand.

SHARON
Sharon Soronow. Nice to meet you.

LUCERO
(to his wife)
Sharon was the best Warthog pilot
at Kandahar. Now she flies A380s.

Lloyda Lucero looks impressed.

Sharon turns to David, who looks awkward. So does she.

LUCERO
(grinning)
I guess this guy you know.

David holds out his hand.

Sharon eyes it -- *no hug?* -- then shakes.

SHARON
Nice to see you again, Colonel.

DAVID
Captain...

He doesn't let go of her hand.

SHARON
Shouldn't you be in quarantine or something?

DAVID
We go in tomorrow night.

Sharon gently frees her hand.

SHARON
I'll try not to sneeze on you.

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

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

SHARON
(too casually)
Lily couldn't join you?

DAVID
She... moved back to Colorado...
with her high school sweetheart.

Sharon raises an eyebrow and takes that in.

SHARON
You guys ever have any kids?

DAVID
Just Archer.

He takes out his phone to show her his screensaver picture:
Archer's a goofy-looking mutt with his tongue hanging out.

DAVID
I got custody.

Sharon smiles.

LATER

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

Lucero and Lloydla follow suit.

DAVID
(to Sharon)
Shall we?

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

SHARON
What?

DAVID
You haven't changed...

She snorts derisively.

SHARON
I'm sure I smell better now than I did back then.

He inhales, smiles, and holds her tighter.

DAVID
Oh, yeah...

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

As CAROLERS serenade, David, Sharon, Lucero, and Lloydla 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!"

They cross the street to the Hay-Adams Hotel.

INT. HAY-ADAMS HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

The four of them enter the elegant lobby.

Lloydla murmurs something to Lucero. He turns to the others, apologetically.

LUCERO
Looks like we better take a rain check on that drink...

He strokes his wife's swelling midsection.

LUCERO
 (to Sharon)
 Maybe you could come out to
 Houston? You guys get free tickets,
 right?

LLOYDA
 You could meet the girls.

SHARON
 I'd like that, thanks.

She gives each of them a hug and a kiss goodbye.

LUCERO
 (to David)
 See you in quarantine.

He and his wife head for the elevator, hand-in-hand.

David and Sharon stand there, awkwardly.

David gestures at the sign for the bar.

DAVID
 You still want to get that -- ?

SHARON
 (overlapping)
 Maybe we should call it a night,
 too...

David hesitates, unsure how hard to push.

DAVID
 You should at least see the view
 from my balcony.

Sharon hesitates, thinking about it.

SHARON
 OK... Just for a minute.

David brightens.

DAVID
 Wait here.

He strides to the Front Desk and has a few unheard words with
 the Clerk as Sharon waits -- not sure what she's doing here.

EXT. HOTEL ROOM BALCONY - NIGHT

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

SHARON

Think you'll ever get up there?

David points out a red dot in the sky.

DAVID

That's where the real action'll be.

SHARON

Mars?

DAVID

It's not public yet and I really shouldn't tell you, but... I'm on the short list for the first mission...

Sharon's face lights up.

SHARON

I remember you and Enrique, back in Kandahar, geeking out over your science fiction novels... Working on your NASA applications...

She shakes her head in wonderment.

SHARON

And now you're going to Mars...

DAVID

If I don't piss off Shreve and the budget doesn't get cut...

SHARON

Enrique, too?

DAVID

(shaking his head)

He doesn't want to be away from his kids that long... Four hundred fifty days...

He looks up at the night sky.

DAVID

Low Earth orbit's fine with him. Up and back in two weeks. Just another business trip.

Sharon smiles and gazes at Mars for a long moment.

SHARON
Bring me back a rock?

DAVID
You bet.

They edge closer.

SHARON
You seem pretty laid back about
next week....

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

SHARON
(scoffing)
But if your O-rings pop on the way
to the Galleria you --

She catches herself.

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

A KNOCK on the door to the room.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

David goes to answer it.

Sharon follows, closing the door to the balcony.

David pushes in a room service cart holding a carafe and a
cocktail shaker, two coffee cups, and two martini glasses.

SHARON
What's all that?

DAVID
One's coffee, the other's
Cosmopolitans.

Sharon laughs.

DAVID
You said that was what you missed
most, back in Kandahar... Cosmos
and baths.

She eyes him. *He remembered...*

SHARON
So what should we drink?

DAVID
You pick.

He gives her a look that makes her catch her breath.

She lets it out in a long sigh... and walks toward him.

SHARON
If we drink the Cosmos now, we can
always have the coffee...

She puts her hand on his chest and looks into his eyes.

SHARON
...in the morning.

She gives him a slow, wicked smile.

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.

INT. HAY-ADAMS HOTEL - DAY

By the first purple light of dawn, Sharon finishes dressing and tries not to wake David.

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

DAVID
I can order a fresh pot.

Sharon sits on the edge of the bed to put her shoes on.

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 bare shoulder.