

ARES

Written by

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OVER BLACK:

"Let us build a tower that reaches to the heavens. So that we may make a name for ourselves."

- Genesis 11:4

The following is based on a true story. To protect the survivors, names have been changed.

CUT TO:

A CELL PHONE SCREEN. Badly cracked. On it, a video plays:

EVAN LANGE is shown in close-up against a white background. He's 46. The kind of hollow face you see in a mental hospital. He looks at an OFF-CAMERA INTERVIEWER with unnerving intensity.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Please state your name.

EVAN

Evan Lange.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Are you currently of sound mind and body?

EVAN

Yes.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Can you please explain the problems you've been suffering from?

Evan pauses. It pains him to admit it.

EVAN

Whenever I try to stop drinking, I have delusions. Hallucinations. Doctors told me it's delirium tremens.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Have these delusions ever made you a danger to others?

EVAN

Yes.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Do you agree that if people hear you making strange claims, they should call the police?

EVAN

(with difficulty)

Yes. For their safety. And mine.

CUT TO:

The vast black reaches of space. A fireball blazes towards us.
A SOYUZ CAPSULE ENGULFED IN FLAMES.

EVAN (O.S.)

(trying to remain calm)

Eight fifty-five. Everything will be fine in an hour.

INT. ARES 1 CAPSULE

Everything is blurred. Frantic. The capsule shakes violently as EVAN struggles to reprogram its LANDING COORDINATES.

He's red. Panting. Overheating in his pressure suit.

He's talking to another ASTRONAUT, whom we only see from behind his fishbowl helmet. Evan's barely audible over the DEAFENING ROAR. Emergency alarms BLARE.

EVAN

Don't worry -- by 10am, the whole world will know.

He looks at the other astronaut -- as if for confirmation.

REVEAL: The other astronaut is DEAD. He's strapped in next to a SECOND DEAD ASTRONAUT.

Their eyes and mouths are black and sunken into nothingness.
Both have been rotting for months.

A burst of static from a SPEAKER in the wall and a VOICE with a RUSSIAN ACCENT. Concerned.

VOICE VIA SPEAKER

ARES 1, we've activated emergency
LLCD communication.

Evan STARTLES. As if he hasn't heard a voice in months.

VOICE VIA SPEAKER

(anxious)

We've lost sight of you. Last we saw,
your trajectory was zero-two-seven.
You must reset to four-oh-one
immediately --

Evan, in direct violation of the command, types completely different coordinates into the navigation system: "9-9-7..."

VOICE VIA SPEAKER

If you don't correct your trajectory,
the capsule will overheat. It'll
explode. Tell us where you are and we
can help --

The voice turns to STATIC. Smoke pours from the speaker as the system's insides melt. A shower of sparks rains down on Evan.

He buckles himself in NEXT TO THE TWO DEAD ASTRONAUTS.

The image cuts in and out as he goes in and out of consciousness.

He eyes the temperature gauges. EXTERIOR: 3706 F°. INTERIOR 197 F°. Both numbers RACE UP. He can't survive much longer...

Evan unzips his pocket. Pulls out an origami crane. He unfolds it. The "paper" is a PHOTO: his wife CHLOE (33) and son DANNY (8) beam out at him. The photo warps from the intense heat.

Evan takes the gloved hand of the DEAD ASTRONAUT next to him. Eyes fill with guilt.

EVAN

We're not gonna make it. I'm sorry...

He looks back at the WARPING PHOTO of his wife and son.

EVAN

I'm sorry... I'm sorry...

As the capsule jolts sideways, his head SLAMS so hard against the wall that his FISHBOWL HELMET CRACKS.

The world goes silent. Then --

Cryptic images. Cutting in and out. The SUNRISE flaring as

WHOOSH! The capsule's parachute opens. ARES 1 lands softly

IN THE OUTSKIRTS OF AN AFRICAN CITY

Shocked locals run to the capsule.

They stare as the hatch opens. Through smoke, EVAN crawls out.

It's slo-mo. Silent. Triumphant. Momentous.

Their black hands touch the white suit with awe, as if he were a god crashing-landing from the great beyond.

INTERCUT NEWS FOOTAGE of the landing: EVAN is carried through the streets on the shoulders of strangers. A hero's welcome.

CHLOE pushes through the crowd with her son DANNY. We recognize them from the warping photo in the capsule.

Chloe, crying with joy, takes Evan's face in her hands. Danny hugs his chest.

NEWS FOOTAGE: The American flag flies over the US Embassy as Evan and his family pass through its imposing gates...

CUT TO:

WHOOSH! THE ARES 1 PARACHUTE OPENS OVER RED DESERT

Floating over stark sand...

Until it crashes against a cliff face.

Plummets to the ground.

Finally the HATCH OPENS. Smoke pours out. EVAN crawls forward.

Evan's POV: The world appears bleached. He's blinded by the daylight. He can barely see his own hands. As he screams in shock, the world goes

TOTALLY WHITE.

CUT TO:

Evan's eyes SNAP OPEN. Crumbs of starlight above. The world around him all blues and violets. Aghast, he realizes he's

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FUCKING DESERT - NIGHT

No sign of humanity. The capsule lies behind him. The name "ARES 1" barely legible on its blistered exterior.

He clearly didn't land where he expected.

EVAN

Fuck. Fuck... FUCK!

As he talks, he feels like dice are rolling around in his mouth. He reaches in and pulls out A DISLODGED MOLAR.

Grimacing, he zips his molar into his pocket.

His eyes lock on a distant star. He mutters to himself as he pieces things together.

EVAN

M81. That's a mag 7. M81 is a mag 7.
That means... That means I'm at least
200 miles from the nearest city.

It sinks in. He's hopelessly far from civilization.

LAUGHTER from inside ARES 1.

ADRENALINE jolts through Evan. He stares at the capsule.
Shocked.

Silence. Then RUSTLING. Someone's INSIDE THE CAPSULE.

Evan, panicking, looks around -- sees nothing but the rocky hillside and parched honeycomb of the mud flat below.

He tries to stand, but is too weak. He picks up a rock to use as a weapon. CRAWLS toward the capsule. He's about to enter --

When AN ANIMAL with gaping jaws -- TEETH COVERED IN BLOOD -- steps into the doorway.

Evan GASPS. It's a HYENA. Behind it, he can see the inside of the capsule. A CHEWED, DECAYING LEG pokes out of a torn pressure suit. The hyena has been eating the dead astronauts.

Evan, yelling ferociously, HURLS his rock. Hitting the hyena. It SNARLS. Baring its teeth. It's about to attack, when --

Evan completely loses it. Throwing every rock in reach at it.

The hyena dodges the rocks and retreats. Then continues circling Evan. For the hyena, it's a waiting game.

Keeping an eye on his predator, Evan crawls

INSIDE THE CAPSULE

He tenderly tucks the chewed astronaut leg back in its pressure suit. Tries to collect himself --

EVAN

OK... OK. It'll take them 24 hours to
create an algorithm. Estimate where
we landed.

He punches buttons on the navigation system. Nothing turns on.

EVAN

Given wind and pressure, that estimate could be off by... a 200 mile radius? Pi times 200 squared... they'll have to search over 125,600 square miles. They'll never find me.

Evan smiles. Feels safer.

EVAN

But they'll figure out where I'm going.

(his smile disappears)

I gotta get there first...

The realization kicks him into gear. He rips the medical kit out of the capsule wall. Finds SUPER GLUE.

EXT. ARES 1 - MOMENTS LATER

Using his reflective FISHBOWL HELMET as a mirror, he super glues his molar back in. But the glue seeps everywhere. A mess. He tries to hold the tooth in place as it sets.

EVAN

Fuck, okay, keep twalking so youh mouth doesn't gwue shut. Keep tawalking. Keep tawalking...

The glue's probably set by now. He pulls his finger out.

Instead of being glued into his gums, the tooth is now super-glued to his fingertip.

He tries to dislodge the tooth. Can't. For a moment, his face crumbles. He's utterly defeated. It's all too much.

Finally the tooth peels off his finger. Relieved by the tiny victory, Evan pulls himself together.

He struggles out of his pressure suit to just his undershirt and sweatpants. He's muscle and bone.

He piles the collapsed parachute over the capsule. Starts heaping SAND on top. Hoping to obscure ARES 1 completely.

SEARING NOONDAY SUN - HOURS LATER

Evan's skin fries as he continues burying the capsule. Hunger gnaws at him. He's mad with thirst.

He digs in the ground. Moving sand aside reveals BLACK SKY AND STARS beneath, as if the ground is paper thin and there is nothing underneath but deep space. It's the view one might have out a spaceship window.

Disturbed, Evan covers the vision up again with sand.

INT. ARES 1 - MOMENTS LATER

He rips out wall panels, uncovering the cooling system. Clear pipes of FLUORESCENT LIQUID web like veins through the walls.

He empties a bottle of rubbing alcohol from the medical kit onto the sand.

EVAN

Coolant is 80% water, 20%...
liquefied neon? Or it is just dibutyl
phthalate? It glows so it can be
repaired in the dark...
(pouring coolant into the
empty bottle)
Can... I... drink you...

As he stares at the bottle, his gaze changes. His eyes lost.
He says quietly:

EVAN

I never vote in Presidential
elections.

He stops speaking, his mind now somewhere else completely. As he sets the bottle of neon green coolant down on top of the drawers built into the capsule wall, we hear:

EVAN (O.S.)

Anyone who thinks they're special
enough to be President is obviously
insane --

MATCH CUT TO:

CHLOE putting a neon green margarita down on the bar inside

A HOUSTON DIVE BAR

Evan sits beside her. He looks radically different. 15 years younger. Clean-cut. The only recognizable thing is the drive in his eyes.

Chloe's 24. Playful. Bold. Easy to fall for.

They obviously don't really know each other from the way they're sitting; occasionally she shoots a look over at her girlfriends in the corner. As they talk, she sips the margarita.

CHLOE

Didn't you tell me two seconds ago
that you're trying to be an
astronaut?

EVAN

(nods)
I find out in two weeks.

CHLOE

There's probably only been about as
many astronauts as presidents. What
makes you think you're qualified?

INTERCUT: EVAN IN THE CAPSULE IN THE DESERT

Leaning against a storage container as if over a bar. His eyes focused on thin air, totally detached from the present -- as if he were in the bar right now. He half says the words, half-mouths them. Unclear if this is memory or fantasy...

EVAN

I spent my life preparing for it.
Every decision I've ever made.

BACK TO THE BAR:

CHLOE

Wow. It is like running for
President.

EVAN

It's much easier to be President.
Bush did coke. Clinton and Obama
smoked weed. I don't get to do
anything.

CHLOE

You're telling me you've never smoked
weed?

EVAN

Impressed?

CHLOE

No.

EVAN

I haven't had sugar since I was eight.

CHLOE

What does that have to do with being an astronaut?

EVAN

Sugar causes all kinds of chronic problems. You can't have any if you want to go to space. Not even sinusitis.

CHLOE

You didn't even have birthday cake when you were like ten? That's sad.

EVAN

Only if you're thinking small. Immediate gratification. Think big picture. What do you want?

CHLOE

I'll take another margarita, I guess.

EVAN

No. What do you really want? What do you want to die having done?

CHLOE

Maybe had a family. Kids.

EVAN

That's it? That's your big accomplishment?

CHLOE

Having a family is an accomplishment if it sticks together.

EVAN

(shaking his head)
People act like the kids are the only thing that matters. Why are we still so focused on spreading our genes? It's primitive. Tribal.

CHLOE

You have to have children. Otherwise who will remember you?

EVAN

The whole world.

He smiles. She smiles despite herself. His confidence -- his conviction -- is magnetic.

CHLOE

If every decision you've ever made has been about getting to space, why did you decide to come over here and talk to me?

EVAN

If I'm going to be confined in a ship with other astronauts, I need to prove to my superiors that someone can stand me.

CHLOE

So you need a girlfriend?

EVAN

Or a wife.

CHLOE

(laughs)

I haven't even finished the drink you bought me. Now you're asking me to marry you?

EVAN

Now you're talking big picture. I thought we could start with dinner and go from there.

She looks at him. Can't tell if she thinks he's brilliant or bananas. He can tell she's unsure and smiles. Enjoying her uncertainty.

CHLOE

If you finish this.

She holds out her margarita to him.

EVAN

I can't drink margaritas. Sugar.

CHLOE

Exactly.

A test. He looks at her, uncertain. She stares back at him.

Finally he takes her glass and downs her drink. He splutters. Hasn't had anything that sweet in 16 years. Chloe cracks up.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ARES 1 CAPSULE

Evan spluttering as he drinks the disgusting GLOWING COOLANT. He puts the bottle of it outside by the door.

He opens the DRAWERS built into the walls. Inside are HUNDREDS of tiny lead boxes. Each is numbered and sealed shut with a strange complex lock.

He picks up a BOX labelled Lana Tube #97. Carefully zips it into his pocket.

EXT. ARES 1 CRASH SITE - TWILIGHT

Evan finishes heaping sand over the capsule. Gasps for breath.

The sound of blood coursing through his head grows LOUDER. Its rhythm changes. Like his heart's beating in double-time.

Evan swallows -- what's happening to him?

He looks up. Sees TWO TINY MOONS in the sky, as if he were on an alien planet. He squints. The MOON reverts to normal. Then

A HELICOPTER sweeps over the brim of the mesa above him.

Evan's eyes widen in horror a second. He DUCKS BEHIND A ROCK.

Peeks out. Terrified. He realizes *he left the bottle of FLUORESCENT COOLANT* out. It's half-obsured by vegetation, but glows faintly in the dusk. Perhaps visible to the chopper.

EVAN

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

The helicopter swoops lower. Beams a giant SPOTLIGHT down.

Evan holds his breath. An eternity.

Finally the chopper moves on. Combs the hillside. Disappears.

Evan -- a long, deep breath.

He scans the sky. His voice is now just a dry rasp:

EVAN

No stars to the south yet. Sky must
be brighter that way...

(grasping for hope)

Somewhere -- that way -- is a city.

He gazes at the now-buried capsule. Eyes filling with guilt.

EVAN

I'll come back. And the whole fucking world is coming with me.

An oath.

He picks up the coolant and treks into the desert. Every step a struggle. The HYENA, sitting on the rocks, watches him go.

EXT. DAWN IN THE DESERT

Evan's LIPS and TONGUE GLOW in the dark from the dibutyl phthalate in the coolant.

His eyes are horrifically dilated. He mutters to himself. As if trying to prove he's alive.

EVAN

A day has 24 hours and 39 minutes. A year... has twenty-four months. 687 days.... Today is 547 Mina, year 32.

His breathing becomes so labored he can't speak.

INTERCUT: *Evan having sex with Chloe. 15 years earlier. Their labored breathing mixing with*

His gasps for air as he stumbles in the desert.

Near death. A distant look in his eye.

The distant look in Chloe's eye before orgasm --

Evan passes out. Collapsing onto the sand. AND SUDDENLY --

He's in his bed in Houston. Chloe's on top of him. She slips a finger in his open mouth. She keeps pulling it out just before he can bite down on it. That's the game. Both are giggling.

CHLOE

What'd I tell you? I'm fast, huh?
Here. Try me.

She opens her mouth. He sticks a finger in it. An intense look between them -- each trying to read the other's speed -- then--

She snaps down on his finger before he can fully pull it out.

CHLOE

(laughing)
I thought astronauts had great reflexes.

He grins. Pulls her closer.

EVAN

Do it again but harder.

BACK TO EVAN -- PASSED OUT IN THE DESERT

His eyes are open but frozen in place. He becomes part of the great stillness of the desert.

FLASH TO: DUSK. The HYENA eating Evan's body. Crunching and chewing and tearing flesh from bone.

CUT TO:

THE FACE OF A DEAD ANTELOPE. A fly walks across the surface of its eye.

REVEAL: We're seeing the world through Evan's POV. His bloodshot eyes are swollen to mere slits. Lips cracking.

Evan realizes he's TIED UP. Lashed to TWO ANTELOPE CORPSES. All bound back-to-back. A MASSIVE COW is dragging them across the desert, guided by --

AFRICAN TRIBESMEN. Each nearly-naked body is covered with mud paint. Patterns abstracting the bodies so they look alien.

They wear bullet-casings in their hair. Bottle caps in holes in their lips. All of them are armed with KALASHNIKOVs.

EVAN

Where are you taking me?

He attempts to get up. Can barely move with 200 lbs of antelope strapped to him. The TRIBESMEN see him straining against his ropes and push him back down with the barrels of their guns... Fingers tense on their triggers.

Evan, terrified, stops trying to break free. As the tribesmen pull him onward, he looks around. Mutters to himself:

EVAN

Shit. Where is it?

A wave of relief as he spots the MESA in the distance where he buried the capsule.

EXT. TRIBE'S CAMP - DESERT - TWILIGHT

Dust fills the air -- kicked up by hundreds of 1500-pound Ankole cattle -- as Evan is pulled into the camp.

Through the dust, he glimpses more PAINTED TRIBESMEN. They're ghostly. Alien.

Among the crowd, Evan catches a glimpse of a *WHITE BOY* whose body is *SMOLDERING* and covered with ash. It's *DANNY*. Smoke pouring out of his hair.

Evan stares at him. Whispers, barely audible --

EVAN

I'm sorry.

But the ash-covered boy disintegrates in the clouds of dust.

The tribe's CATTLE, with 5-foot horns twisting into the air, are monumental. Unearthly. Menacing.

As TRIBESMEN cut the ropes around Evan and the antelopes, the tribe's children begin stealing from Evan's pockets.

HOLD ON: A GIRL pulling what looks like seashells from them. She stares as she realizes they're human fingernails. *Why does this man have someone's fingernails in his pockets?*

BAULU, a 12-year-old BOY with a staff, snatches Evan's LEAD BOX from another pocket and takes off.

EVAN

(voice cracking with
thirst)

STOP! STOP!

Evan TACKLES Baulu. Tries desperately to grab the BOX back.

BANG!

A bullet hits the ground near Evan. He turns. Sees all the TRIBESMEN are training their guns on him.

EVAN

No -- no -- don't shoot me!

They GRAB EVAN. Drag him violently toward a BONFIRE in the camp's center. The dead antelope are being skinned. Evan's terrified it's his turn next.

EVAN

Let go! Give me the box back! It
could be dangerous --

EVAN'S POV: His vision is cutting in and out from exhaustion and thirst. Blood thumps in his ears like drums or chopper rotors.

FLASH IMAGE: Chloe breast-feeding their infant son. Evan puts his head on the baby's side and hears its heart POUNDING.

The tribesmen force Evan to his knees in front of THREE SILENT, STONE-FACED FIGURES. Painted head to toe with white cheetah-spots.

They are so tall and thin that it takes Evan a while to realize they are WOMEN. One around eighteen, another in her thirties, the oldest in her late fifties. Three generations.

EVAN

Please -- let me go! I just need to
get to Addis -- Addis Ababa --

Evan fights to break free but the tribesmen are too strong. The THREE WOMEN unwrap a long gleaming SABER from a blanket.

EVAN

WAIT! PLEASE.

The YOUNGEST WOMAN picks up the SABER. Turns toward Evan.

EVAN

Someone's looking for me -- they
might hurt my family -- I need to get
to Addis to see my family --

The women look at him with a cement gaze. Evan realizes they don't understand his pleas.

The Youngest Woman pricks a COW'S BACK with the knife. BLOOD squirts out. The OLDEST WOMAN collects it in a gourd.

EVAN

(still struggling)
I need to see my family. They need to
know what I've done --

The women force the gourd to Evan's parched lips, spilling BLOOD into his mouth. Evan gasps. Spits it out in disgust.

FLASH TO INSIDE A SPACE SHUTTLE: Another ASTRONAUT vomits BLOOD. In zero gravity, it floats as globules.

As the women push the blood to his lips again, Evan swallows it down. He's so thirsty that he can't help himself.

Evan blinks his eyes and --

IT'S DAY. NOT NIGHT.

He wakes to find himself lying on the sand in the tribe's camp. Dried blood on his lips.

He takes in the tribesmen. Some wear sneakers and ragged T-shirts. But they have few possessions other than Kalashnikovs.

The THREE STONE-FACED WOMEN sit nearby. They blast the latest Katy Perry hit from a cell phone. The Youngest clutches an RPG, which she thumps to the beat of the music.

Evan is surprised to see his lead box sitting next to him. He picks it up. The lock is still intact. He shakes it. Something RATTLES inside. Still there.

EVAN

(dazed)

How long was I out?

The Youngest Woman points to the horizon with her RPG.

YOUNGEST WOMAN

Addis Ababa.

She mimes driving. Then points to the sun. Makes a rotation motion with her hands.

EVAN

Tomorrow? A car tomorrow?

(he frowns; forcing
himself to his feet)

Tomorrow's too late. I walk.

He's staggering off in the direction the woman pointed, when --

BULLETS EXPLODE all around him. Hitting the sand at his feet.

Evan turns. Sees the Oldest Woman aiming her gun toward him.

EVAN

The fuck you doing?!

But she only fired it to get his attention: She mimes walking. Points at the sun. Holds up 6 fingers.

EVAN

Six days walk? Six days to Addis?

She nods. He frowns. Doesn't want to wait. Doesn't have a choice.

QUICK CUTS: Moments play abruptly, like hallucinations.

- Evan is surprised to find a TV in the camp, hooked up to a broken generator. He gets to work on the generator -- opening it up, reconnecting wires. The Three Women, who by now Evan has realized are the leaders of the tribe, are delighted as the TV flickers on. Hopeful, Evan searches through channels.

EVAN

News? Do you guys get the news? I need to see if I'm on it...

Instead all the TV picks up is a static-y station airing STARGATE. The tribesmen gather around to watch it.

- He wanders up a nearby a canyon, looking for privacy. He unzips his fly to take a leak. He mutters to himself, trying to psyche himself up:

EVAN

Tomorrow I'll arrive in Addis. Get Chloe and Danny. Take them to the Embassy. By tomorrow night, everybody's gonna know. Everything's gonna be fucking great...

Horrorified GASPS from behind him. He looks back:

Realizes that half the tribe has followed him. They stare at his GLOWING NEON PISS. Even the THREE WOMEN look perturbed.

Turning around, Evan gets a half-second glimpse of --

THE SHAPE OF A CAR, obscured by rocks, higher up the canyon.

The word "POLICE" on the car's side. Just as his heart is freezing -- he sees

THE CAR IS WEATHER-BEATEN. Clearly been there for ages. Evan clambers over rocks to get closer.

The CORPSES of two police officers are still strapped in their seats. Leathery skin stretched over their bones.

FLASH IMAGE: Evan floating on a spaceship. Watching in time-lapse as the TWO DEAD ASTRONAUTS decay inside their pressure suits. Months are compressed into seconds as -- before Evan's eyes -- bacteria inside the suits eat at the astronauts bodies -- causing the corpses to move inside the suits, shift in their seats.

Evan -- aghast -- looks back at the tribe. The Youngest of the Three Women proudly nods toward the cops and taps her RPG, to make it clear this was her accomplishment.

EVAN
(not sure what to say)
Yes. Very impressive.

A low THUMPING. Evan turns. Pales.

EVAN
Shit!

A HELICOPTER approaching fast. Evan rushes to the Three Women:

EVAN
Don't tell them I'm here. Please --
they'll kill me!

But the Women ignore him as PANIC ripples through the tribe.
Men run to stop their terrified cattle from fleeing.
Frightened women stash their kids and chickens in their tents.

EVAN SPRINTS INTO A RANDOM TENT

Crouches down to hide. A WOMAN INSIDE screams at him.

EVAN
Shh! Be quiet!

But the Woman is making a racket. Gesticulating for him to
leave, holding her frightened children close to her. He darts

OUT OF THE TENT

Tribesmen aim their GUNS on the chopper as it touches ground.
Eight MERCENARIES descend. Weapons drawn. Full body armor.

Evan -- scanning for a hiding place -- everything fast --
using the cattle as cover as he dashes into --

ANOTHER TENT

A bunch of kids hiding inside. Evan gets down. PEERS beneath
the tent's side. Sees:

NOVAK (40s, white-blond hair) emerge from the chopper. He
looks like someone from middle-management. He's unfazed by all
the Kalashnikovs pointing at him.

An ETHIOPIAN COP, trailing behind him, is terrified.

Novak smiles warmly and sets down the MASSIVE CASE in his
arms. The Three Women see it's full of VODKA BOTTLES. A gift.

Novak addresses the Three Women in Amharic. The COP translates
everything into the tribe's language.

The Women approach. Novak shakes their hands, chattering niceties. Then he shows them a photo on a CLIPBOARD.

Evan stiffens. Knows he's in the photo. Novak watches the Three Women's reactions closely. But they betray no emotion.

A long beat. Hell for Evan. He can't hear what's said next, but he's alarmed to see Novak take out his wallet.

EVAN
(whispers)
No -- no -- no --

As Novak counts out money, MERCENARIES fan out through the camp -- digging through supplies -- searching tents -- Evan can hear the women and children inside screaming.

EVAN
Shit!

He sees COMBAT BOOTS approaching his tent. Dives backward, crushing a REED CAGE full of CHICKENS. Now the chickens are loose, screeching and flapping in his face.

He throws a blanket over himself and the chickens just as --

A MERCENARY enters, aiming his machine gun around, including at the kids, who WAIL in fear.

The Mercenary sees the blanket with the suspicious amount of motion underneath. He snatches it up. A BLUR OF MOTION flies toward him --

BANG! BANG! He FIRES his automatic.

REVEAL: Evan had already rolled out of the tent. He's now on the ground outside. Desperately looking for a place to hide...

YELLING from all directions. The Tribesmen raise their guns.

The Mercenary lifts the blanket. Sees two dying chickens underneath. Novak, furious, yells at him in Amharic.

Evan spots the ANCIENT STONE WELL nearby. He scans for Mercenaries looking his way -- then

LURCHES OVER THE WALL INTO THE WELL

He hangs on the edge. Looks down -- the well goes down at least thirty feet before plunging into total darkness.

He peeks over the lip of the well. Sees the Mercenaries heading toward their chopper. A wave of relief sweeps over him

Until one glances his way. *Did he see Evan peeking out?*

MERCENARY

Novak!

Evan, panicking, tries to climb down the well. LOSES his hold.

He GASPS as he plummets into darkness. The screech and WHOOSH of disturbed BATS rushing past him as he falls --

SPLASH! He hits the water. Then resurfaces, gasping for air.

HIS POV: Everything is black, but for the tiny circle of bright sky 60 feet above.

The faces of mercenaries line the top of the well. They peer straight down at him. Evan's blood freezes.

As they yell in Amharic above him, Evan realizes they can't see him in the darkness. He quietly dunks back under. It's like being submerged in black oil.

FLASHLIGHTS cut through the water. Evan forces himself to swim deeper, closing his eyes and --

He's submerged in a swimming pool in Houston. He can see DANNY (7) above him, sitting in an innertube. Danny's voice is muffled by the water as he counts out the seconds that Evan holds his breath.

DANNY

That's two hundred! Keep going! 10 more seconds and you'll break your record! 10, 9, 8, 7...

But the memory of Danny blurs as Evan runs out of oxygen in the well. He pushes to the

WATER'S SURFACE

Gasps in breaths. The faces of TRIBESMEN appear around the top of the well. They drop down the end of a ROPE.

Evan's hesitates. Doesn't know whether this is a trick meant to lure him out. But he's out of options.

Wheezing, he ties the rope around himself. Tribesmen HAUL HIM UP.

EXT. THE TRIBE'S WELL - MOMENTS LATER

Evan peeks out the top. Not quite believing that the mercenaries left. He hears the distant thump of the chopper.

The Tribe exclaim excitedly as he emerges from the well.

EVAN
 (looking at the Three
 Women)
 Why didn't you give me up?

The Oldest Woman holds out a FLYER to Evan. He looks at it.

It reads "REWARD FOR STOLEN MINING EQUIPMENT AND MINERALS." There's images of the EQUIPMENT that was built into ARES 1, but no sign that they were in a space capsule.

The other page has a PHOTO OF EVAN: handsome and polished in a suit. 20 lbs heavier. It says "REWARD" in English and Amharic.

"EVAN LANGE. WANTED FOR MURDER AND THEFT. Last seen in Siberia in February. Believed to be near Dallol, Ethiopia."

FLASH TO: *KEIJU, one of the other astronauts, floating in the space shuttle as Evan slits his throat. BLOOD explodes from Keiju's neck. In zero-gravity, the blood beads and rises into the air in globules -- like red confetti.*

All around Evan -- giant FOOTPRINTS litter the red sand, left by the mercenaries' combat boots. Tribal children, giggling, put their tiny feet inside the footprints.

MATCH TO:

DANNY (7) steps inside giant footprints in red dirt. Walking within the footprints, he traces his father into

THEIR BARN. We're at EVAN'S MODEST RANCH HOUSE. OUTSIDE HOUSTON.

Evan looks up from repairing the engine of his 2-SEAT PROP PLANE and listening to an audio recording on his iPhone.

EVAN
 Danny, c'mere. Listen to this...

He backs up the audio as Danny crawls under the plane and lies down next to his father.

EVAN
 This might be my favorite thing in the entire world. It's from 50 years ago. The real recording from inside Apollo 10...

He hits play. Mid-Atlantic accents cut through the static --

CERNAN (ON RECORDING)
*Once you get out of lunar orbit, you
 can... Oh -- who did it?*

YOUNG (ON RECORDING)
Who did what?

Evan is already giggling.

STAFFORD (ON RECORDING)
*Give me a napkin quick. There's a
 turd floating through the air.*

YOUNG (ON RECORDING)
I didn't do it. It ain't one of mine.

Now Danny erupts in laughter. They both love it.

STAFFORD (ON RECORDING)
*Mine was a little more sticky than
 that. Throw that away.*

YOUNG (ON RECORDING)
God almighty.

Evan laughs so hard there are tears in his eyes.

EVAN
*And you know what? All those turds
 they're talking about are in freezers
 in the building where Daddy works. We
 kept them all in little bags.*

DANNY
*Will they keep your number twos from
 when you go to space?*

EVAN
Yup. They'll be scientific artifacts.

Danny's very impressed. Evan goes back to repairing the radio.

DANNY
*How soon do you have to go away
 again?*

EVAN
Sunday.

DANNY
How long this time?

EVAN
Six weeks.

Danny's heart sinks. Evan doesn't see it.

DANNY
Will you call me?

EVAN
(shakes his head)
I won't be allowed to. NASA needs to
know that I can be away from you guys
and still be just fine.

Danny's hurt by this, but Evan doesn't notice.

Danny nuzzles his dad. Doesn't want the moment to end.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE TRIBE'S CAMP - MORNING

Evan startles awake as he hears SHOUTING. A DUST CLOUD --
kicked up by a vehicle in the distance -- moves toward them.

Evan, nervous, slides behind a tent in the back of the camp.

Meantime, the tribe hide their cell phones, TV, T-shirts, and
sneakers so they're naked, except for their guns and paint.
They now resemble something from the "sad Africa" photo books
that litter coffee tables the world over.

A BUS, emblazoned with the name "HEART OF DARKNESS TOURS",
bumps over the desert into the tribe's camp.

A TOUR GUIDE with a megaphone descends first, followed by 30
WHITE UMBRELLAS in the hands of TOURISTS, shading themselves.
They're a smorgasbord of Chinese, Saudis, and whites. They
carry cameras in their free hands. Snap, snap, snap--

Their TOUR GUIDE is a burned-out and sun-burned Australian.

TOUR GUIDE
(into megaphone)
So the Saba tribe have been 'ere for
40,000 years. Can you believe that?
That's since Jesus times 20. This is
a snapshot of your ancestors, ladies
and gentlemen. You're now standing in
the past.

The tribe stares warily at their visitors. The tourists gape
back, mostly through the lenses of their cameras.

Evan -- using this moment of distraction -- ducks

INSIDE THE NEAREST TENT

He digs through bundles. Outside, the Guide drones loudly:

TOUR GUIDE (O.S.)

But the government wants to mine
copper 'ere. So they're trying to
push the Saba off their land.
Apparently just because you've had
something for 40,000 years doesn't
make it yours.

Finally Evan finds a stash of knives and handguns. He's
tucking a pistol into his waistband when --

BAULU, the boy with the staff, comes in. Sees him stealing the
gun. He yells at Evan, who quickly puts the gun back--

EVAN

Sorry, sorry --

He darts out.

The Guide is marching the tourists through the camp. Evan eyes
them from a distance. Not sure he can trust them.

TOUR GUIDE

So the Saba are warring with the
police. Hence, you might notice they
have some weapons.

The tourists laugh nervously, eyeing the Saba's guns.

TOUR GUIDE

These women in cheetah-print...

He motions to the three HEAD WOMEN.

TOUR GUIDE

...Are the wives of the chief, who's
in prison for killing several police
officers.

Knowing the Saba can't understand, the Guide adds flippantly:

TOUR GUIDE

Eventually the police will just force
the Saba to re-locate to the city or
lose patience and kill them all.
Aaaaanyway, you have ten minutes
here. Get some photos. But remember:
they're not zoo animals. So they
expect you to pay for them.

The tourists use selfie sticks to pose for photos with the
tribe. They cradle the Saba's Kalashnikovs and grin widely.

Evan crosses the camp toward the Tour Guide. The tourists stare. Wondering what a white man in filthy rags could be doing here. Even the Guide looks scared of him.

TOUR GUIDE

Fuckin' A. What happened to you?

EVAN

I was sightseeing up north. My Jeep broke down. I was trying to walk back to Addis when these people found me.

TOUR GUIDE

Bloody 'ell. Didn't anyone at your hotel tell you it's only safe to come out 'ere on a guided safari?

EVAN

I need to get back to Addis. Can I hitch a ride with you guys?

TOUR GUIDE

It's two thousand Birr per person.

EVAN

I lost my wallet in the desert. I'll pay you when we get to Addis. My wife is there...

TOUR GUIDE

Sorry. Can't let people on the safari carriage who haven't paid. But I'll call the police and I'm sure someone can come and --

EVAN

(quickly)

But I've already been out here three days. My wife must be worried sick about me.

(the Tour Guide shakes his head "no" --)

She'll pay you extra for helping me. Please. A thousand dollars. Maybe more.

That gets the Guide's attention. He relents.

TOUR GUIDE

I'm really not supposed to do this...

(taking out his roster)

What's your name?

EVAN
Chris. Chris Padrick.

The Tour Guide scribbles it on his roster.

TOUR GUIDE
We'll leave as soon as the women have
finished their craft activity.

Evan realizes the female tourists are now doing some sort of basket-weaving with the Saba women.

INSIDE THE BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Evan takes a seat in the back. The Youngest of the Three Women taps on his window with the barrel of her RPG. Evan tenses. Next to her is BAULU, who caught him trying to steal the gun.

EVAN
Fuck...

The Woman, scowling, raps on the window again. Evan opens it.

EVAN
I'm sorry, I wasn't going to take --

The Woman thrusts a BUNDLE through the window and leans in.

YOUNGEST WOMAN
(heavily accented)
Go kill police.

Evan startles -- *she speaks English?* -- but before he can reply, the TOURISTS begin filling the bus.

He peeks into the bundle. Inside is a RUSTING HANDGUN.

He surreptitiously checks the chamber. Six bullets inside.

SUDDEN CUT TO BLACK.

MAN'S VOICE
Chris. Chris?

Evan's EYES OPENING -- heart pounding -- springing up -- where is he? He sees he's IN THE BACK OF THE SAFARI BUS bumping through the desert. But he's unsure how he got there.

MAN'S VOICE
Chris. Want some?

The voice belongs to a SUNBURNED BRITISH TOURIST, who holds out a BAG OF CHIPS. Sun blisters cover his bald red head.

FLASH IMAGE: The surface of a red planet, covered in craters.

SUNBURNED TOURIST

You know where y' are?

Evan looks at him blankly.

SUNBURNED TOURIST

You got lost in the desert. Y' Jeep
broke down... Don't remember?

EVAN

No, I do... I do.

He stuffs some chips in his mouth. The Tourist sees Evan is jittery. Like he's afraid. Or in withdrawal.

SUNBURNED TOURIST

Your hands are shakin'.

Evan thrusts his hands in his bundle. Keeping his hands hidden, he starts folding the WANTED AD into an origami crane. As if by keeping his hands busy, he can calm his nerves.

SUNBURNED TOURIST

I had the shakes once. When I first
got clean. Couldn't fill my coffee
cup too full or I'd spill it carryin'
it to my desk.

Evan yanks down the window and VOMITS outside.

SUNBURNED TOURIST

That too.

Beat.

EVAN

One time, when I was getting sober, I
told people I'd gone to space. I was
in a bar, saying I was an astronaut.
My wife had to come haul me out of
there.

The Tourist smiles and starts blabbering about his AA experiences. But the sound of his voice cuts out as --

Evan's focus shifts to the strange world out the window: Beehive-shaped huts. Termite obelisks. Children playing on the road. Vultures, flapping ragged wings, tear at dead animals.

He startles as he sees TWO ASTRONAUTS in pressure suits setting up equipment in the desert. He STARES at them.

The Tourist follows his gaze, but sees nothing.

The bus bumps into a DUSTY VILLAGE. Evan turns to the Tourist.

EVAN

Why're we stopping?

He sees they are pulling up next to some ETHIOPIAN POLICEMEN.

EVAN

(panicking)

Are we scheduled to stop here?

The Sunburned Tourist shrugs. Evan looks like he might jump out the window until the Guide announces:

TOUR GUIDE

This is Harar market, ladies and gents. They sell the finest *khat* in Ethiopia. A mild stimulant. Let's go sample something that would be illegal where you come from...

The tourists follow the Guide into the NIGHT MARKET outside. Evan turns to the Sunburned Tourist, who's about to get off:

EVAN

Hey. Could I borrow some money? Just 'til Addis...

SUNBURNED TOURIST

(over his shoulder)

Sorry mate, I only have forty Birr left and there's no ATMs out here...

Evan's now alone on the bus, but for the DRIVER, who yaps on his phone.

He sees many of the tourists left their BAGS onboard.

Keeping an eye on the Driver, Evan checks the bags. He's disappointed -- most people took their wallets out with them.

Finally he finds a purse with A CELL PHONE and WALLET inside.

EVAN

(mutters to himself)

Big picture.

A TOURIST comes back on the bus. Evan quickly drops the ENTIRE PURSE into his bundle from the tribeswomen. He hurries out

INTO THE CHAOTIC NIGHT MARKET

The Guide and tourists furiously chew khat leaves at various stalls. Bits of green spittle flying out of their mouths.

TOUR GUIDE

Don't go overboard. It takes a few minutes for the narcotic to kick in --

Evan sees a NEON SIGN that says "INTERNET." An internet cafe. He heads toward it, past vendors hawking from cars and booths.

Villagers STARE at Evan and the tourists. Beggars grab at him, gesturing that they want food. Children chant "Faranji!"

Evan realizes that, as a white person, he's too conspicuous.

His eye falls on a VEILED WOMAN selling BURKAS. Modesty for Muslim women. He picks out a burka with netting over the eye hole. Buys it with cash from the stolen wallet.

INT. INTERNET CAFE - MOMENTS LATER

Evan sits in front of a decade-old computer with recording software and an "Upload to Youtube" window open.

He sees himself projected on the screen, recorded by the computer's camera. He looks like shit.

He spits on his hands and rubs his face clean. Rifles through his stolen purse. Tidies his hair with the woman's brush.

CUT TO:

CHLOE (33 now) fixes Evan's hair. They're backstage at

A NASA PRESS CONFERENCE - HOUSTON

Evan's 40. Wearing a sleek suit. He can't stop beaming.

She holds his face in her hand a moment. Overwhelmed with pride. A look that says *I love you no matter what*.

An ANNOUNCER ONSTAGE introduces "EVAN LANGE" and...

He strides onstage. Facing a cheering auditorium. A row of press in front with DOZENS of CAMERAS.

BACK IN HARAR'S INTERNET CAFE:

Evan stares into computer's single lens. Lost in the dream.

EVAN (O.S.; PRE-LAP)
If you wanted to tell the history of
mankind over the last million years,
you'd say...

BACK TO THE NASA PRESS CONFERENCE

Evan soaks up the crowd's feverish excitement as he speaks.

EVAN
Man learned to make fire. Man walked
on the moon... And two years from
today, we'll add a third milestone to
human history: Man walks on Mars.

On cue, the curtains behind him PULL BACK, revealing: A 30-
FOOT IMAGE OF MARS with the NASA logo on it.

EVAN
America will lead the world there!

BACK TO THE DUMPY INTERNET CAFE

The sound of the NASA crowd cheering continues in Evan's mind
as he sits facing the crowd of dumpy computers and people
glumly surfing the web. Completely ignoring him.

He clicks the RECORD button. He speaks with quiet intensity:

EVAN (INTO THE VIDEO CAMERA)
My name is Evan Lange, retired
Colonel, U.S. Air Force. I'm posting
this statement in case something
happens to me before I can go to the
press with proof of what I've done.

BACK TO THE NASA AUDITORIUM:

The crowd continues to applaud. Evan's elated. A man whose
dreams are coming true.

Evan's eyes meet Chloe's as she holds up their son DANNY (8)
in the eaves of the stage.

Danny watches in awe. Can't believe this legend in the
spotlight is his father.

EVAN (O.S.)
I was part of a team of three
astronauts that went to Mars.

BACK TO THE INTERNET CAFE IN HARAR

Evan continues speaking quietly into the camera:

EVAN (INTO THE VIDEO CAMERA)
The other two, Yuri Gershkovich and
Keiju Sasaki, are now dead. They were
murdered to preserve the mission's
secrecy. Now my life is in danger. My
family's might be as well. I meant to
land near Addis, so I could get my
family to safety... But the capsule
went off course. I landed at --

A jolt of fear as he glimpses OUT THE WINDOW --

POLICE walking toward the internet cafe with the Tour Guide,
who clutches a WANTED flyer, like the one Novak gave the Saba.

Evan's fucked. Has to stop recording now. He hits UPLOAD and --
Runs out the back door as POLICE come in the main entrance.

EXT. EMPTY ALLEY

Evan pulls on his BURKA. Sprints round the corner and back
INTO THE CHAOTIC MARKET.

Changing pace so no one will suspect him. He tries to burrow
through the human traffic -- trying to look small --

INTERCUT THE NASA CELEBRATION AT THE SPACE CENTER

The blood thumping through Evan's ears in Harar giving way to
the thumping, celebratory music.

Evan weaves through the NASA party. Standing tall. Lapping up
attention from every direction.

Evan has Danny on his shoulders and Chloe on his arm. Her hair
has fallen out of place. He tenderly tucks it back behind her
ear.

EVAN
Ground Control to Shoulders 1, please
state your destination.

Danny spots a buffet table, laden with desserts.

DANNY
Shoulders 1 to Ground Control.
Steering to cookies, over.

EVAN
(following his son's gaze)
Roger that.

He heads toward the desserts, but Congressmen and journalists stop him for autographs and photos. Everyone wants a piece of the man who will make history. One man lowers his bald head for Evan to sign. The FLASH FLASH FLASH of cameras --

BACK TO:

A BRIGHT LIGHT BEAMED OVER THE HARAR NIGHT MARKET

Evan looks back. Shit, there's a COP following him -- beaming a SUPER HIGH POWER FLASHLIGHT over the crowd -- saying something into his radio --

Evan, increasingly panicked, quickens his pace --

He checks again. The POLICE OFFICER ducks down another street.

Evan turns onto an alley. Lined with cars. No one in sight.

Using the HANDGUN from the Saba, he smashes the window of a beat-to-shit SEDAN. This sets off a nearby DOG barking.

Evan unlocks the door. Gets in.

Through the SIDE-MIRROR -- he sees POLICE searching further down the street near the barking DOG.

EVAN traces the battery and starter WIRES. Strips the rubber off them with his teeth. Twists the bare wires together.

SPARKS cascade over his hands. The CAR'S LIGHTS GO ON.

-- illuminating A HUGE MAN screaming and wielding a crow bar, who rushes toward Evan from down the alley. The SEDAN'S OWNER.

Evan, trying to stay focused, darts out. Tears open the hood.

It is a strange sight: A "woman" in a burka, shouldering a purse, frantically hotwiring a car. Pumping the throttle...

The SEDAN'S OWNER is only ten feet away as --

The ENGINE finally roars to life. Evan leaps inside as the SEDAN'S OWNER raises the crow bar --

Evan slams the door shut behind him and --

The crowbar HITS THE DOOR. Blowing a huge dent in it.

It gets worse -- other NEIGHBORS rush out in front of the car. Evan can't drive forward -- they're blocking his way.

The OWNER opens the door. Grabs Evan. About to pull him from the car when --

Evan THROWS the car in reverse. The Owner is left just holding a RIPPED PIECE OF BURKA as Evan guns the car back. The CROWD and COPS rush after him. TOO LATE. He tears round a corner --

INSIDE THE CAR

Going flat out. Pedal to the floor.

Evan's beaming. Ecstatic to have gotten away.

But then he notices TOYS on the dash. Clearly belonging to the OWNER'S KIDS. A flash of guilt in his eyes.

EVAN

Big picture.

Evan tosses the toys into the back. Out of sight.

MATCH CUT from the night sky out the windows to --

THE STARS OUT THE WINDOW OF A SPACE SHUTTLE - **FLASHBACK**

Evan (40), naked, sings as he takes a space shower. It seems as if he's in deep space until we cut outside to:

INT. MASSIVE NASA HANGAR - HOUSTON - SIMULTANEOUS

The NASA Mars Czar JOE DERRINGER (54, obese) and CHLOE (33) stride toward the docked SPACE SHUTTLE. Visibly upset.

Video screens simulate stars outside the shuttle's windows.

Derringer tears past the obstructions blocking the shuttle's entrance. A huge sign reads: **"ISOLATION TEST. DO NOT ENTER. Days remaining: 43."**

He opens the shuttle door and they enter

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

Evan gasps and tries to hide his naked ass from his boss.

EVAN

You guys -- get out! I've got a month left in here!

Chloe looks raw. Like something horrible has happened and she's afraid to tell him. She steps toward him.

CHLOE

The budget vote was today. They
wanted you to hear it from me.

It doesn't sink in for Evan. Denial hits first.

EVAN

Am I gonna have to start isolation
all over again? I've already done 97
days --

Then he sees tears in Derringer's eyes.

DERRINGER

Evan. No one's going to Mars. It's
over.

Evan's body sags under the weight of disappointment. His eyes
screwing shut, his knees caving. Chloe goes to hold him.

Derringer FLICKS a switch outside the door and THE SIMULATION
OF OUTER SPACE -- its endless sparkling stars -- GOES DARK.

INT. STOLEN SEDAN -- STREETS OF ADDIS ABABA - EARLY MORNING

Evan careens past goats, motorbikes, people in suits. He takes
in the chaos from behind the anonymity of his burka.

He Googles "Bechtel Addis" on the phone from the STOLEN PURSE.

CUT TO:

EXT. SLEEK BECHTEL OFFICES - ADDIS - MINUTES LATER

Evan, still in his burka, waits outside in the stolen sedan.
He watches the building intently.

He notices a MAN (mid-40s) crossing the street, speaking on a
phone in Russian. He looks very ordinary, but his face is
taught with worry.

Evan's eyes lock on the man. *A sense of time slowing down.*

EVAN

(murmurs)

You fucker. You knew I'd come here...

Keeping his gun hidden inside the purse, he cocks it. Steps
out of the car. Follows the man.

Evan glances around -- the street is crowded -- *Can he shoot a man in broad daylight?* -- suddenly he sees --

CHLOE (39 now). Exiting the Bechtel offices.

No longer the harried mother from Houston, she's the image of success. A suit and pearls. Her face is turned away as she laughs about something with her TWO ASSISTANTS.

Through the burka's eyehole, we see in Evan's eyes -- longing. Regret. And fear.

Chloe enters a CHAUFFEURED TOWN CAR, which quickly drives off.

Evan turns back to the RUSSIAN. He's already getting in a JEEP. It peels off to tail CHLOE'S CAR.

Evan darts back to the stolen sedan. He nearly mows down a WOMAN in his desperation not to lose sight of CHLOE'S CAR.

CUT TO:

EVAN trailing Chloe's car and the Russian's Jeep. They stop

OUTSIDE A MASSIVE SKY-SCRAPER CONSTRUCTION SITE

Chloe emerges from her car in a hard hat. Evan can only recognize her by the BLOND BRAID poking out.

FLASH IMAGE: Evan's hands braiding Chloe's hair -- just the top part, then Chloe takes over. Their morning routine.

Chloe speaks through a megaphone in Amharic, organizing the army of construction workers. Big smile. She loves this.

Evan looks around. Unsure how to reach her without the Russian seeing from his JEEP parked outside the construction site.

Finally he sees a nearby MOSQUE marked by a minaret. WOMEN file into one entrance. Men into another. *Now he has an idea.*

MOMENTS LATER ON THE STREET OUTSIDE THE CONSTRUCTION SITE

Evan approaches an old man in a tattered suit. He raises his pitch a little, trying to sound feminine:

EVAN

English? Speak English?

The man clearly doesn't understand.

Evan spots CHILDREN heading toward their PREP SCHOOL. They wear little ties and oxford shoes. He approaches.

EVAN
You speak English?

SCHOOLBOY 1
I speak English!

SCHOOLGIRL
I speak better English!

SCHOOLBOY 2
I'm FBI! I'm Spiderman!

SCHOOLBOY 3
(looking at Evan, who
towers over them in his
black burka)
Are you Batman?

He holds up a finger of his gloved hand. "Wait."

He types a message on the cell phone: *I pay you to help me.*

SCHOOLGIRL
(reading the message)
What help?

Evan types: *Go in the new building. Ask for Chloe Lange. Tell her a woman needs to talk to her in the mosque. About Danny.*

The Schoolgirl reads the message. Looks perplexed.

SCHOOLGIRL
I don't think I should --

Before she says more, Evan holds out several bills from the STOLEN WALLET. He has no clue how much they're worth, but the girl looks as if she just won the lottery.

SOUND SEGUE:

EVAN (O.S.)
Many economists argue that the first
trillionaires will make their
fortunes from mining Mars.

CUT TO:

INT. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE - PENTAGON - **FLASHBACK**

Evan (42) delivers a formal PowerPoint presentation to NEIL MCMURTRY, a drowsy D.O.D. official.

Evan is out of shape. Red-eyed. On edge. Something is off. We don't know what yet.

EVAN

The US can't afford to let foreign companies or governments get there first and reap the rewards.

Evan flips to slides of cerium, lanthanum, iridium, etc.

EVAN

The 21st century runs on rare earth minerals. The only problem: the Chinese have bought up the world's supply. If China has a total monopoly on the raw materials necessary to build electronics -- is that a safe position for our country?

McMurtry's deep and gravelly voice contrasts comically with his boyish looks.

MCMURTRY

If the American people didn't believe in financing the manned NASA mission, it's not the D.O.D.'s job to over-ride them.

EVAN

That's because no one presented it to them as a matter of national security.

He rambles, getting closer to McMurtry --

EVAN

You don't have to get Congress to approve every project. I know the D.O.D. has never balanced its budget. Has never explained to Congress or anyone else where defense spending actually goes. Financing NASA's manned Mars mission is the only truly important thing we could be doing right now. As a nation. As a species.

As Evan gets close, McMurtry's expression changes as he gets a whiff of Evan's breath.

MCMURTRY

If it's so important, why did you show up drunk?

A look between them. McMurtry feels like Evan is pissing away his time. He gets up and leaves Evan standing in the empty conference room. Humiliated.

BACK TO:

INT./EXT - THE MOSQUE NEAR CHLOE'S CONSTRUCTION SITE

Evan tries to pass through the WOMEN'S ENTRANCE, but a SHROUDED WOMAN stops him. She says something sharply in Amharic. He's starting to panic--

Until he follows the woman's gaze down to HIS FEET: *He's not supposed to wear shoes here.* He tucks his shoes in his purse.

Tall panels divide men from the women inside. Evan walks

INTO THE WOMEN'S COURTYARD behind the mosque.

Waits anxiously. Two WOMEN stare at his clearly Caucasian and man-ish feet. He tries to rearrange the burka to hide them. Finally he sees

CHLOE. Framed by the mosque's entrance. Her Assistants are a step behind her. The Schoolgirl squints in. Points to Evan.

His pulse starts to race as Chloe comes into the courtyard, still trailed by her two female assistants.

Evan looks at her like she's one of the wonders of the world.

She addresses him in Amharic.

CHLOE

(Ma'am? The little girl said you wanted to talk to me...?)

Only Evan's eyes are visible. In them -- a cascade of emotions. *He's imagined this moment for so long.*

Chloe misinterprets his silence. She laughs, embarrassed.

CHLOE

(I guess the girl was wrong. Sorry--)

She turns to walk away. Evan grabs her arm.

EVAN

It's me. It's me, Chloe.

As her eyes meet his -- she freezes. *How could this be him?*

The world goes silent for them as he reaches out, his fingers tracing her cheekbone. She's overwhelmed. Barely reacts.

In the heat of the moment, neither of them notices:

The WOMEN who stared at Evan's feet approach with a MOSQUE ADMINISTRATOR. Chattering in Amharic. The Administrator lifts the bottom of Evan's burka. Sees his masculine feet.

Before Evan has time to react, the Administrator, yelling, angrily tears the burka off Evan's head.

And now Chloe sees him for the first time. He's a disaster. Gaunt. Scraped. Filthy. She gapes.

CHLOE

You son of a bitch.

The Administrator angrily shoves Evan toward the exit, but he resists. Starts talking. Fast. Intense.

EVAN

Chloe. You're being watched. That's why I brought you here. Somewhere you couldn't be followed...

Then he sees TWO WHITE MEN step into the WOMEN'S ENTRANCE. Shouting in Amharic. The IMAM and mosque visitors frantically try to stop the TWO MEN from entering the women's space.

EVAN

Shit!

He breaks free of the Administrator. Forces Chloe toward the courtyard's back wall -- out of sight of the TWO WHITE MEN.

EVAN

Chloe. We have to go!

CHLOE

Evan, stop!

Evan starts to push her over the wall, but she fights him. Her Assistants try to stop him, but he shoves them back.

EVAN

Get over!

CHLOE

Stop! Evan! Whatever you think is happening is not real --

INSIDE THE MOSQUE -- SIMULTANEOUS

The TWO WHITE MEN barrel past the Imam. Scan the mosque's dark interior -- don't catch sight of EVAN and CHLOE yet --

BACK AT THE COURTYARD WALL:

Evan pulls the GUN from his bundle. Points it at Chloe.

EVAN

This is real. Please. We have to go
now!

The TWO WHITE MEN hear Chloe SCREAM. They rush forward as --

Evan forces Chloe over the wall. They drop down into

A NARROW PASSAGE

CHLOE

Evan -- please -- don't hurt me --

He pulls her down the alley, still aiming the gun at her.

EVAN

We're too exposed!

Doors along the passage. Evan tries one. Locked. He lets go of
Chloe so he can

HURL himself at the wood door. It BREAKS DOWN.

Chloe is rushing off, yelling for help. He lurches after her.

EVAN

Chloe! No --

She sees the TWO MEN dropping over the mosque's wall. They're
drawing HAND GUNS. She gasps. Scared.

CHLOE

This is real.

He grabs her and SHOVES her through the KICKED-DOWN DOOR.

The TWO MEN see EVAN in the empty alley. They shoot --

Just as EVAN bursts through the doorway

AND INTO SOMEONE'S KITCHEN

A family inside. Screaming. Chaos. The HUSBAND grabs a lamp
and SWINGS it at them. Evan brandishes his gun. The Husband
throws up his hands, dropping the lamp -- it SHATTERS as Evan
pulls Chloe through the front door onto

THE STREET

Evan's STOLEN SEDAN is there, idling next to the mosque.

A ROAR behind them. Evan turns --

In the distance, a POLICE HUMMER turns onto the street. A MAN with an AUTOMATIC pops through its sunroof.

EVAN

Get in!

He pushes her into the car. Jumps in behind her and floors the accelerator. The car stalls.

EVAN

Fuck!

He leaps out. Throws open the car's hood. Pumps the throttle. The ENGINE ROARS to life as --

The POLICE HUMMER barrels toward them over ridiculously pot-holed ground. The COP standing through the sunroof aims his automatic at Evan. But he can't get a clear shot with all the bumps -- and there's too many people on the street.

Evan jumps back in the car and careens around the corner. Guns down the maze of medieval streets. The Hummer's on their tail.

CHLOE

(terrified)

Evan! What have you done?!

Improvising, he makes a SUDDEN TURN between two buildings. Blasts his horn. Pedestrians scatter. They plow through garbage. Laundry lines catch on the windshield.

They turn onto an EMPTY STREET. No pedestrians. No other cars.

BANG! BANG! The Cops OPEN FIRE. The back window explodes behind them. Glass everywhere. Chloe screams as Evan SWERVES

DOWN A MEDIEVAL ALLEY. SUPER NARROW.

His SIDE MIRRORS HIT THE WALLS. They CRACK and SNAP OFF.

The sides of his car SCRAPES LOUDLY against the ancient stone walls. It's like a funnel -- getting narrower and narrower. The doors warping inward. Crumbling toward Chloe. She screams.

The Cops SWERVE onto the ALLEY to follow them. CRASH! Their HUMMER hits the stone walls. Can't come after them...

Evan's sedan SLAMS against the alley's walls. They're stuck!

AT THE MOUTH OF THE ALLEY: the POLICE climb through their sunroof. Running on foot to catch up with Evan's crashed car.

Evan throws the car in reverse. Pulls back from the wall they're stuck on. Accidentally hits the wall behind them. Shifts to DRIVE -- and his BATTERED SEDAN lurches forward.

Before the Cops catch up, the sedan slips out of the alley. It looks like a crumpled soda can. A miracle it still drives.

EXT. ADDIS ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Chloe -- still unsure whether she should be more afraid of Evan or his pursuers -- snatches her phone from her bag.

CHLOE

I'm calling the police!

EVAN

You can't! They've been bought off.
Call Danny. We need to get to him
before those men do.

Chloe, horrified, is about to reply when her phone RINGS with a call from "Nobles Academy." She gasps.

CHLOE

It's his school!
(picking up, frazzled)
Danny? Hello?

MRS. WEBER (ON PHONE)

(scared)
Mrs. Lange, it's Mrs. Weber from
Nobles. The police are here looking
for Danny --

CHLOE

Oh my God. Why?

MRS. WEBER (ON PHONE)

Your husband is having a psychotic
episode and they're scared he might
hurt your son.

For a moment Chloe is paralyzed. Frightened. Confused.

MRS. WEBER (ON PHONE)

But Danny didn't show up at class
this morning and we can't find him.
Do you know where he is?

CHLOE

No, I thought he was at school!

MRS. WEBER (ON PHONE)

Hold on. The man with the officers
wants to speak to you --

A tiny pause as the phone is handed off. MISHA SURKOV, Russian
accent, comes onto the line.

SURKOV (ON PHONE)

Mrs. Lange, this is Misha Surkov.
Your husband's employer. If you're
with him now, say yes.

Chloe glances at the gun, still sitting on Evan's lap,
pointing at her as he drives.

CHLOE

Yes.

SURKOV (ON PHONE)

I'm sorry he dragged you into this. I
had a security team watching you in
case he tried to get to you. Tell us
where you are and we'll send help --

CHLOE

Why are you looking for him?

EVAN

(listening to Chloe's side
of the conversation)
What's wrong? Is Danny OK?

SURKOV (ON PHONE)

He's been working for my mining
company. At a deep-sea platform. Very
isolated. We believe he killed his
two co-workers and stole samples from
the mine.

Chloe looks at Evan. Stricken. Speechless.

SURKOV (ON PHONE)

Has he shown you any samples or
boxes?

CHLOE

No.

SURKOV (ON PHONE)

I want to protect you and your son.
Do you know where he is?

CHLOE
Why would he go to Danny?

SURKOV (ON PHONE)
Evan needs you two to help him hide --

EVAN
Chloe, who is that?!

SURKOV (ON PHONE)
If you care about your son -- and if
you care about Evan -- you'll bring
him here. To the school. I'll see
that he's taken care of...

Evan tries to snatch the phone from her, they struggle for it.
The car careens toward the side of the road.

CHLOE
STOP!

But Evan now has the phone.

EVAN (INTO PHONE)
Who is this?

SURKOV
Evan. Thank God. Don't hang up. Just
listen to me. You don't understand
what's really happening--

Evan blanches and throws the phone out the window. Meantime
Chloe opens her door and is about to jump out --

EVAN
Chloe, no!

He slams the brakes and grabs her. Cars swerve to avoid
hitting them.

She goes for the gun. He stops her from getting a full grip --
BANG! -- wild shot -- into the roof.

EVAN
Chloe! Stop!

They wrestle -- four hands, one gun and -- BANG! Another shot
tears through Evan's door. Suddenly he has the tighter grip.

He throws himself on top of her. Pinning her to her seat.
Pressing the gun to her chest.

EVAN

That man you spoke to -- he might hurt Danny. Or take him hostage and use him as bait to lure me out --

CHLOE

(overlapping)

You're crazy -- you need help --

EVAN

We have to get to Danny before Surkov. Where is he?

CHLOE

Leave my son alone, you crazy fuck!

EVAN

You have to trust me. It could mean Danny's life.

CHLOE

Evan. You see things that aren't real.

Beat.

EVAN

Just tell me where Danny is and I won't hurt you.

CHLOE

How can I trust you? You killed two people.

EVAN

(cut deep)

You believe a stranger over me?

CHLOE

You are a stranger.

He sees he's not getting anywhere. He leans in. Flat out now.

EVAN

Fine. You're gonna drive us to Danny. Then take us to the Embassy. Once we're safe there, I'll prove that Surkov planned the murders of two people -- and wants me dead as well. Danny's safety is now in your hands. OK?

He offers her the gun.

EVAN

This is to protect us from them. Not from each other. Take it.

She looks at him. Incredulous. She takes it.

EVAN

Get in the driver's seat.

The tension in the car is still sky high as they awkwardly switch seats. She keeps the gun on him.

CHLOE

How do I know you're not going to attack me again while I drive?

Evan spots a JUMP ROPE among the TOYS he threw onto the backseat. He grabs it. Knots his wrists together so his hands are tied in front of him.

EVAN

Tighten it.

Chloe's surprised again. As she leans over him to tighten it, he smells her hair. She notices. A intense look between them.

She starts driving.

CHLOE

If something's happened to him, I swear I'll fucking kill you.

EVAN

I'm scared too, Chloe.

CHLOE

You don't get to be scared. You haven't called your son in three years. He hates you. He won't want to see you, much less talk to you.

Evan swallows. This was his greatest fear.

CHLOE

We're finding him and then you're on your own.

They sit in furious silence. His eyes grow distant.

Suddenly -- he floats into the air. Losing gravity. He flies toward the backseat, which merges seamlessly into:

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE'S "KITCHEN" - **FLASHBACK**

Evan floating up to the shuttle's oven, which looks like a high-tech briefcase. Evan tears open his meal -- a little tray of chicken wings covered with plastic wrap. He starts eating.

DANNY (O.S.)
Dad, why are you eating out of a suitcase?

Evan looks over at DANNY (10), standing on the "floor" of the shuttle, pointing to the briefcase-like oven. What the hell is he doing there?

DANNY
(touching a chicken wing)
This is still frozen. Dad... You're eating raw frozen chicken.

Danny gapes at Evan a moment. Then he runs off, yelling.

DANNY
MOM! C'mere quick!

He exits Evan's POV. Evan continues to eat on the shuttle.

Suddenly -- a loud BEEP -- BEEP -- BEEP.

The shuttle's MASTER ALARM goes off. As Evan floats toward the navigation console to investigate the problem --

CUT TO:

EVAN'S EYES SNAP OPEN - **FLASHBACK**

He sees a HEART MONITOR. BEEP -- BEEP -- BEEP.

Danny leans in close.

DANNY
Mom! Look! He's awake.

Chloe (35 now) darts forward. Evan realizes he's in a HOSPITAL BED. Chloe brushes her hand through his hair.

CHLOE
How you feeling, sweetie?

EVAN
What's happening?

CHLOE
The doctor said it's delirium tremens. When did you last have a drink?

EVAN
Delirium what?

CHLOE
You were seeing things, Ev. They said
it's a symptom of withdrawal.

DANNY
(pushing forward)
You were standing naked in your
bedroom eating raw frozen chicken out
of a piece of carry-on luggage.

Evan takes in their worried faces. Sees his wife and son's
image of him is in jeopardy. He tries to preserve his dignity.

EVAN
I must've been sleepwalking or
something.

Chloe squeezes Evan's hand. Her face taut with emotion.

BACK TO:

Chloe's expression is similarly tense as she guns

THE STOLEN SEDAN

Through countryside. Evan peers suspiciously out the window.

CHLOE
I think I know where Danny is. I
overheard his friend talking about a
place they go when they ditch class.

EVAN
How come his school is way out here?

CHLOE
It's a boarding school.

EVAN
Boarding school? You sent him to
boarding school? How often do you see
him?

CHLOE
(hard and fast)
How often do you see him?

Evan squirms.

EVAN

Chloe, I have something important.
Something the American government
will pay a lot to get their hands
on...

CHLOE

What? Stolen minerals?

EVAN

There'll be enough money to go back
to the States. Get our lives back.

Chloe looks at him a moment. Surprised this is what he wants.
She laughs.

CHLOE

You think I've just been waiting for
you to come back? I've spent three
years building a life here. I'm not
going to throw it away. Especially
not for you.

EVAN

(taken aback)

You said all you wanted was a family.

CHLOE

When would I have said that?

Evan's surprised. She's changed so much, she doesn't even
remember who she used to be.

EVAN

At the bar that first night. That's
all you wanted. This time, we can do
it right.

For a second she looks like she wishes she could believe him.

CHLOE

I have two hundred people working on
my projects. Building homes for
almost a hundred thousand. Finally
I'm my own Goddamn hero. I need to
stay here. Big picture.

Sweating, she punches the air conditioner. It's broken.

She unbuttons several buttons of her formal shirt.

Evan glances sidelong. Catches a glimpse of her breast and
bra... Then, on her fingers, an ENGAGEMENT AND WEDDING BAND.

EVAN
(dumb-founded)
You've re-married?

CHLOE
(nods)
I finally found someone who puts me
and Danny first.

EVAN
But we're still married!

She looks at him. Years of anger and pain coming out.

CHLOE
On paper, maybe. But when I think
about you, I feel like there's a sock
in my throat.

This crushes him. He stares out the window.

The barren landscape on the outskirts of Addis becomes...

THE BARREN LANDSCAPE OUTSIDE HOUSTON.

We're at EVAN'S LITTLE RANCH HOUSE

Evan fixes the radio of his PROP PLANE. The wires inside the
cockpit's dashboard look like a bowl of spaghetti.

CHLOE pulls her car into the drive. Seeing Evan, she hops out
and hurries toward him, carrying papers. Big smile.

CHLOE
They offered me the Addis project.

She thrusts the contract toward him. He flips through it.

CHLOE
Eight years. Transforming a quarter
of the city.

Evan looks at the contract, clearly not into it.

EVAN
What am I gonna do in Africa?

CHLOE
(annoyed)
I don't know, Ev. What are you doing
here?

EVAN
Getting the mission reinstated.

It drives her crazy that he won't recognize reality.

EVAN

You want me to give up.

CHLOE

I want you to grow up.

EVAN

It's sad you think they're the same thing.

She starts walking back toward the house.

CHLOE

I'm gonna go make some calls. You have fun with Danny.

EVAN

That's it for me now, huh? You go to work, I have fun with Danny? You build a city, I baby-sit?

She stops. Looks back. Sees how lost he is.

EVAN

I was supposed to *be someone*, Chloe. Not just a husband. Not just a dad.

She steps toward him. Puts an arm around him. He resists momentarily. Then lets her get closer.

CHLOE

Come to Addis. Let's start over.

He looks at her. A chunk of hair from her messy blond braid has fallen over her face. He tucks it back behind her ear.

She leans in. About to kiss him...

Then, just as fast, she pulls away. Emotion floods her face.

EVAN

What?

CHLOE

You promised you'd quit.

Evan turns away, caught.

CHLOE

Do you seriously need to get fucked up to spend time with your son?

EVAN

I don't know. Maybe I need it for
when you get home.

Chloe stares Evan down. He stares back, not giving a shit.
She's about to say something when--

DANNY (11) arrives carrying a toolbox from the house. Chloe
angrily marches past him toward her car. Evan takes the tools
from Danny and goes back to repairing the radio.

DANNY

Can we go flying?

EVAN

Mom says no.

DANNY

Yeah but... she's leaving.

Evan notices Chloe's driving off. She guns her car down the
highway. A hint of remorse in Evan's eyes.

INT. TINY PROP PLANE IN EVAN'S BARN - MOMENTS LATER

Evan steers onto the driveway. Danny buckled in beside him.
They wear headsets so they can talk over the roaring engine.

EVAN

OK, so last time you were having
trouble lining up with the runway...

Evan slurs his words a little. It's unnerving, but Danny
doesn't pick up on it.

DANNY

(excited)

Can we fly all the way to Africa?

Evan stops the plane. Turns to Danny.

EVAN

Why Africa?

DANNY

Mom said we're gonna move there.

EVAN

When did she say that?

Danny flushes. Knows he said something he wasn't supposed to.

DANNY
Like...two weeks ago? I dunno.

EVAN
So Mom said not to tell me?

Danny's scared of his Dad's anger. Evan kills the engine.

DANNY
What are you doing?!

Evan huffs out of the plane. Danny screams as Evan walks away.

DANNY
You said we'd go flying!

EVAN
Well the mission got cancelled. Let's
go!

He tears off his headset and continues toward the house.
BEHIND HIM -- Danny switches into the pilot's seat.

Evan hears the ENGINE ROAR back on. He spins around.

EVAN
Danny! Turn the engine off! DANNY!

His eyes widen as Danny accelerates onto the empty road. Their
make-shift runway. Evan bolts after it.

EVAN
(screaming)
Wait! Danny, stop! Please, Danny!

He watches in horror as the plane TAKES FLIGHT.

The worst moment of Evan's life.

EVAN
DANNY! No, no, NO --

He shoves his headset back on. Yells into it. Wild-eyed.

EVAN
Danny? Can you hear me? I can help
guide you down.

Evan runs after the plane. Desperate to keep it in sight.

EVAN
I'm so sorry. Just talk to me, OK?

The prop plane turns back. DESCENDS toward the road.

EVAN

You're coming in too steep. Danny!

The plane -- a blur of motion -- about to crash -- becomes --

SMASH CUT TO:

The STOLEN SEDAN. SCREECHING to a sudden stop outside

A SOCCER FIELD - DIRE DAWA

Chloe jumps out, leaving Evan in the car with his hands still bound in front of him.

EVAN

Wait! Where're you going!

Chloe spots eight 14-year-old boys sprawled out across the grass fifty feet away. She sprints toward them.

CHLOE

Danny!

They sit up, bleary-eyed. Some hold joints and cans of beer.

BOY'S VOICE

Aw fuck. It's my mom!

The boys race toward their bikes, shouting "RUN! GO!"

BACK AT THE CAR: Evan struggles to unlock the door with his bound hands. He falls from the car as he awkwardly shoves open the door.

Meantime: DANNY (14, disaffected, scarred face) reaches for his bike when one of his FRIENDS overtakes him and rides off.

DANNY

Solomon! You dick!

But his friend is gone. Danny keeps running from Chloe.

CHLOE

Danny! You stop right now!

Desperate to stop him, she pulls out the gun and fires into the ground beneath her.

BANG!

Danny stops and spins around. He gapes at the gun.

DANNY

Oh my God.

And now, brandishing it, she gets to ask the question all mothers wish they could ask:

CHLOE
Why do you never pick up my fucking calls?!

DANNY
Mom! What the fuck?!

Chloe softens, lowers the gun, and approaches her son.

CHLOE
I'm sorry. You had me so worried.
C'mere...

She tries to hug him, but he backs away. Scared.

DANNY
Why do you have a gun?

CHLOE
Something terrible has happened.

DANNY
What?

CHLOE
Your father came back.

Danny finally looks past her and sees EVAN approaching.

Evan stops short as he sees his son. So much older now. White splotches of hair grow from burn scars on his scalp.

Danny, in turn, realizes that he's looking at his own father, who looks like a shipwreck survivor. Danny looks a little disoriented... is it the weed?

DANNY
What happened to you?

He takes a step toward Evan. His voice sounds dazed.

CHLOE
Don't get too close, Danny --

DANNY
You're all messed up...

He reaches down and ties Evan's untied shoe. He dusts off Evan's shirt. Trying to clean him up. Trying to make him look more like the father he remembers.

DANNY
(his voice breaking)
What happened to you?

Danny seizes Evan's shoulders and hugs tight. Nearly squeezes the breath out of him.

FLASH TO: Evan pulls Danny (11) out of the crashed prop plane's burning wreckage. Danny is unconscious. Blackened.

Evan wants to hug Danny back but can't with his hands tied. He buries his face in his son's hair.

Chloe -- affected by it. Says nothing. Just watches.

EVAN
You smell a little more like pot than
I remember.

Danny's crying. Tears of joy.

DANNY
I'm sorry. Dad. I'm so sorry.

EVAN
For what?

DANNY
That we left you behind.

As Danny hugs him, Evan awkwardly glances at Chloe. She looks hurt and conflicted.

INT. HOSPITAL - HOUSTON

Evan, clothes blackened from the burning plane, approaches a room. Through a glass wall he can see DANNY, lying in a hospital bed with an oxygen mask. Chloe's hunched over him.

He knocks on the door. Chloe looks back. Her face is swollen and red from crying. She comes to the door. Opens it a crack.

Evan is about to apologize, but Chloe doesn't give him time. Her eyes are as sharp as broken glass.

CHLOE
Stay away from us. If you don't, I'll
press charges of endangerment and
neglect and get you in jail, where
you probably belong.

She starts to shut the door. Evan stops it.

EVAN

Wait, Chloe, I --

CHLOE

-- I don't want to hear another word
from you. Ever. Do you understand,
you selfish piece of shit? ...Do you?

A beat. Then finally he nods -- barely breathing.

She shuts the door hard. He slowly walks away. His expression
blank. Whatever fire was driving him has completely gone out.

BACK TO:

Danny starts untying Evan's hands. Chloe springs forward.

CHLOE

Stop! Danny, he's committed some kind
of crime. The police are after him --

DANNY

You said he was never coming back.
You're such a fucking liar!

Evan is startled by his harshness toward his mother.

EVAN

She's trying to look out for you.

DANNY

(finishes untying him)
She's crazy. I haven't seen her in
months.

Evan shepherds Danny to the car. Chloe clutches the gun. Not
sure what to do.

EVAN

Your Mom's telling the truth -- the
police are looking for us. We have to
get to the Embassy and then
everything will be fine --

Evan and Danny get in back as Chloe gets in the driver's seat.
Chloe tries to turn the engine on, but the car stalls.

CHLOE

Shit!

They look around... stuck in the middle of nowhere.

EVAN

Okay. We're gonna be fine. Can you call your husband?

DANNY

Husband? She's not married. She doesn't even have a boyfriend.

Chloe looks embarrassed.

EVAN

Then what are the rings --

DANNY

She just wears those to stop guys from hitting on her.

Evan looks relieved despite himself.

DANNY

(to Chloe)

Did you tell him you were married?
Why are you so fucking crazy?

CHLOE

Everybody shut up! We need to find someone to take us to the Embassy.

Danny sees an ONCOMING CAR driving toward them. He leaps out, practically jumping right in front of the car.

CHLOE AND EVAN

(horrified)

DANNY!

The oncoming car stops just inches before hitting him. Danny yells at the WOMAN behind the wheel in Amharic. The WOMAN shakes her head and keeps driving.

CHLOE

What are you doing?!

DANNY

Getting us a ride.

Danny waves down a PICK-UP TRUCK. Exchanges Amharic with the sharp-eyed DRIVER.

DANNY

He says he'll take us to the Embassy.

EVAN

What if he knows the police are looking for us? He'll turn us in.

Chloe pulls out her wallet and thrusts money into the Driver's hands. Evan hesitantly climbs into the bed of the pick up.

EVAN

Lie down. We can't let anyone see us.

As the family lies in the truck bed -- with Danny between Chloe and Evan -- the Driver guns the TRUCK back toward Addis.

DANNY

Why are the police looking for us?

Evan hesitates. Scared they won't believe him. Then:

CUT TO:

INT. NONDESCRIPT OFFICE BUILDING - MOSCOW - **FLASHBACK**

Evan walks in wearing a rumpled suit. He straightens his hair as he approaches the RECEPTIONIST.

EVAN

I'm Evan Lange. I was hired to do some consulting for Mr. Surkov.

INT. SMALL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

An ASSISTANT (early 30s) shows Evan in. Inside is just a desk, with a large sealed package on it.

ASSISTANT

First -- you must sign a non-disclosure agreement.

She hands him an NDA. Evan skims it. Signs.

ASSISTANT

You may open the package now.

Evan, confused, tears it open. Finds several packs of origami paper and instructions for how to fold a paper crane.

ASSISTANT

Mr. Surkov would like to you try to fold one thousand paper cranes in ninety minutes. After you make each one, you will drop it in here.

She shows him a CHUTE built into the wall.

ASSISTANT

For this, Mr. Surkov is willing to pay you two thousand dollars, in addition to reimbursing all travel expenses, of course.

EVAN

So I signed a non-disclosure agreement. And now I make swans.

ASSISTANT

This is what Mr. Surkov flew you to Moscow to do. Do you accept or not?

Evan relents. Sits down at the desk.

EVAN

Kooky billionaires, huh? Must be fun being his assistant.

The assistant looks at the clock on the wall.

ASSISTANT

Your ninety minutes starts now.

She exits. Evan reads the origami instructions. Starts folding with his obsessive precision. He drops each crane into the chute as he goes.

90 MINUTES LATER

A timer buzzes. Evan drops his last crane into the chute.

A BEAT. Evan wipes the sweat off his face.

The door opens. A MAN (mid-40s) enters in an understated suit. The same man Evan almost shot outside Chloe's office in Addis.

In his hands are TWO of Evan's ORIGAMI CRANES. He's excited and warm -- a fan meeting a rock star.

SURKOV

Colonel Lange! I'm Misha. Misha Surkov. Thank you for coming all this way.

He gives Evan a hug. A long hug. *One Mississippi -- two Mississippi --* Evan's wondering what the fuck is going on -- *three --*

Surkov finally releases him.

SURKOV

Unfortunately you only made 433
little birds. I asked for a thousand.

EVAN

The astronaut's union only allows me
to make 433 origami swans a day. Take
it up with them.

Surkov unfolds the two cranes, flattening the papers onto the
table. He examines them admiringly.

SURKOV

This is your first bird, and this is
your last. The folds are just as
precise on the last one as on the
first. Most people get sloppy as they
run out of time.

(smiles)

But you do well under pressure. And
imagine if you were sober!

Evan ignores the remark.

EVAN

So you're some kind of origami
forensic?

SURKOV

I am the owner of this museum.

He opens another door. Through it Evan can see: A PRIVATE
MUSEUM filled with artifacts from the Soviet space program.

INT. SURKOV'S PRIVATE COLLECTION - MINUTES LATER

Evan and Surkov, each holding a glass of vodka, meander past
glass display cases, old Soyuz capsules, rocket parts...

SURKOV

-- So the police raid my party in
Paris... full of whores. None of them
were even for me!

Evan laughs. Surkov's energy is infectious.

SURKOV

So the Siberian Minerals board forced
me to cash out. Now I focus on my own
company. Quartus. Have you heard of
it?

EVAN
 (trying to be polite)
 No, but that doesn't mean --

SURKOV
 (cutting him off)
 Good. I don't want anyone knowing
 about us. The best way to come in
 first is for no one to know there's a
 race...

Evan isn't sure what he's talking about. Before he can ask,
 Surkov points to a strange contraption:

SURKOV
 You know what this is?
 (Evan shakes his head, no)
 In the '60s, the Soviet Space Program
 wondered what cosmonauts should eat
 on the journey to Mars. Just one more
 pound of food or water adds tens of
 thousands of dollars to the mission
 cost. So the scientists hoped to have
 cosmonauts raise their own meat on
 the journey. This is the mouse farm.

Evan smiles.

EVAN
 I've read the reports. They also
 recommended the astronauts eat all
 the paper onboard after they were
 done with it.

They're like history buffs -- men who bond over facts not
 feelings. Comparing notes on a mutual obsession.

SURKOV
 I want to do something with my money,
 Colonel. Jeff Bezos spent 42 million
 dollars building a clock in the
 desert that will run forever. Fucking
 stupid, right? We're going to one-up
 him. Him and Neil Armstrong and
 Leonardo da Vinci and...
 (smiles)
 Everybody else who's ever lived,
 basically.

EVAN
 (beginning to have an
 inkling, stares)
 How?

SURKOV

By sending you to a place only God
has seen.

Surkov's been looking forward to this moment and watches
Evan's eyes widen. Surkov smiles.

EVAN

Why?

SURKOV

The greatest fortunes the world has
ever know will be made mining space.

EVAN

No. I mean -- why me?

SURKOV

I bribed someone at NASA to get their
records. I found out about your
special skill.

(off Evan's confusion)

Most people show signs of mental
deterioration after just a few weeks
of isolation. But that doesn't happen
to you, does it? You like being
alone. This mission will be two years
with Zero contact with Earth.
Otherwise we run the risk of people
finding out what we're doing.

EVAN

(surprised)

You want to go there in secret?

SURKOV

(nods)

If other companies hear of our
mission, they might try to beat us
there.

(quiet, almost seductive)

Can you keep your mouth shut until
you get home? Then -- once you've
gone and come back safe -- we tell
the entire world.

Evan can't help but smile. Stars in his eyes.

SURKOV

But before that... not even your
family.

Surkov looks meaningfully at Evan's wedding ring. Evan takes
it off and tucks it in his coat pocket.

SURKOV

(smiles)

I'm not a family man myself. Family is small business. I don't do small business.

Evan takes another sip of his vodka.

SURKOV

Another promise. That drink in your hand will be your last --

Evan whirls the liquid around in his glass, still half-full. Resolved, Evan puts the glass down on top of a display case.

Surkov smiles. Picks up Evan's glass. Raises it to Evan in a "cheers." Then downs the remaining vodka.

BACK TO:

INT. PICK UP TRUCK EN ROUTE BACK TO ADDIS

Danny (still stoned) and Chloe stare at Evan.

EVAN

Right now, I'm the only one who knows where the capsule is. But Surkov is searching the desert for it. If he gets it before we do with all the samples inside, I have nothing, except for this...

He pulls the LEAD BOX from his purse.

EVAN

Inside here... is something that doesn't exist on Earth.

DANNY

(rapt)

What is it?

EVAN

I don't know. I never tested any of the samples we collected myself. And we left all the testing equipment behind to lighten the load for departure. But after the other astronauts died --

FLASH TO: Evan cutting the throat of the other astronaut. Blood exploding from his throat into zero gravity.

EVAN

-- I went through their notes. Yuri, the exo-geologist on board, wrote about this one again and again. He called it *nezemnoy*.

DANNY

What's that mean?

EVAN

Unearthly. Alien.

Danny gazes at Evan with awe-inspired reverence.

DANNY

Holy shit. Dad... that's awesome.

Evan gasps as he realizes Chloe is using the stolen phone.

EVAN

Wait -- don't call the police!

But she's only Googling "Misha Surkov."

CHLOE

Surkov is only worth three billion. NASA always projected the mission would cost at least ten.

EVAN

There's a lot of billionaires in Russia. I'm sure other mining interests invested with him.

CHLOE

Then prove it. Prove what you have in that box is really from Mars.

EVAN

I can't. It's locked.
(he shows them the complex lock on the box --)
And I wouldn't open it anyway. It has to be analyzed and quarantined to make sure it doesn't contain deadly pathogens. That's why we're going to the embassy. Then you'll have more proof than you can handle.

Chloe obviously doesn't believe a word of it.

CHLOE

Why would Surkov hire an alcoholic?

EVAN

He wanted astronauts with no families.

DANNY

But you had us.

EVAN

(awkward)

But we weren't talking. He wanted people who wouldn't be missed... I stopped drinking two and a half years ago.

DANNY

For the mission?

Evan nods.

CHLOE

(hurt, disgusted)

You stopped for that, but you wouldn't stop for us?

A pained look between Evan and Chloe.

EVAN

Remember how NASA worried about the effects of spending two years in zero-G?

He crawls closer to her in the truck bed. Chloe backs into the corner --

CHLOE

Stay away. Don't try to touch us.

EVAN

(still coming closer)

-- and how the spine might expand with water? How do you explain the fact I'm two inches taller than when you last saw me? Lie down next to me and you'll see I'm telling the truth.

He lies down straight in the truck bed. Skeptical, she straightens out beside him. Trying to measure him.

Chloe stares at Evan... amazed. It's clear from her reaction that he DOES seem taller.

DANNY

See? He's not lying.
(to Evan)

Holy shit. You're gonna be the most famous person ever.

Evan can't help it... He smiles a little. A glimmer of his old cockiness from Houston.

EVAN
(to Chloe)
Impressed?

CHLOE
What if you had just landed this "capsule" where Surkov told you to?

EVAN
He would have killed me.

CHLOE
So now he can kill all three of us?
Is that what you wanted?

Evan gathers himself.

EVAN
It was never my plan to put you in danger. I thought I'd land in Addis, get you and Danny, be at the Embassy in an hour. I wanted to keep you safe. But things went wrong--

The PICK UP truck peels off the highway in front of a couple of ramshackle buildings.

EVAN
(anxious)
Why're we stopping?

Chloe and Danny stiffen. They don't know either. Evan snatches the gun from Chloe. Before Chloe can protest --

EVAN
Stay down!

Chloe isn't sure what to do as Evan peers over the side of the truck bed. Readyng himself for the worst.

But they're pulled up in front of a gas pump. The DRIVER begins pumping gas.

Evan's still tense...

EXT. PICK UP TRUCK - STREETS OF ADDIS - AFTERNOON

Weaving through traffic. Chloe, Danny, and Evan still lie in the truck bed. Evan tries to appear calm for Danny's sake.

DANNY

Now that you're back, can we move
back to Houston?

EVAN

(smiles)

If your mother agrees to it.

DANNY

I've asked her a million times. She
only cares about her job. She can
stay here and I'll go back with you.

Evan glances at Chloe, who's lying behind Danny. He can see how hurt she is by what Danny's saying.

CHLOE

Danny, give me a moment to speak to
your dad.

But they're crammed into the pick-up truck's bed.

DANNY

...Where am I supposed to go?

Chloe climbs over between Evan and Danny. She whispers to Evan. His face right up to hers. Lying next to each other like lovers.

CHLOE

I told you I'm not leaving Addis. And
certainly not with you. Please don't
turn him against me.

EVAN

Seems like it's a little late for
that.

CHLOE

He blames me for leaving you, Evan.

It's obviously painful for her. He swallows, surprised how broken his family is.

CHLOE

I don't know how to win him back.

Her lips brushing his ear as she whispers --

CHLOE

I lost you, then I lost him.

He swallows. He wants to apologize. Isn't sure how.

EVAN

(awkward)

I came back to try to these fix things.

CHLOE

You're too late.

A chunk of her hair has fallen in front of her face. He reaches out to tuck it back in her ear, but she rolls the other way. Tucks the hair back herself.

Evan turns to Danny.

EVAN

I'm not taking you from your mom, D.

DANNY

Why not? She took me away from you --

EVAN

I left.

DANNY

What?

EVAN

I left, Danny. I left.

It hits Danny like salt in a wound. Evan sees it.

Chloe looks at him. Stunned by the lie.

EVAN

I put your mom through hell.

DANNY

But then you looked for us...

EVAN

...I was never looking for you.

Danny freezes. Turns pale. Devastated.

EVAN

Don't blame her for anything.

He reaches for Danny to hug him, but Danny pulls away. His image of his father shattered.

Brutal silence between them.

They feel the truck slowing. Chloe and Evan peer over the edge of the truck bed. They're approaching --

THE U.S. EMBASSY COMPOUND

Imposing marble edifice. Giant gates. Huge American flag waving briskly in the breeze.

EVAN

We're safe, guys. We're safe.

He takes Chloe's hand -- and for a moment she lets him. Caught up in how elated he is.

But Chloe stiffens as she sees between them and the embassy:

A perimeter of POLICE CHECKPOINTS.

CHLOE

I've never seen these checkpoints before..

Cops are checking all cars and IDs. No way to bypass them.

CHLOE

Looks like they're searching anyone going to the Embassy.

EVAN

(panicking)

They'll arrest us before we can get inside.

Among the checkpoints, he sees A WHITE JEEP. Like the ones that pursued them earlier. Then he spots --

NOVAK. The man with the white blond hair from the Saba camp.

Evan's horrified. *This was his whole plan. Now what?*

EVAN

Tell the driver to turn around!

Chloe quietly says a few words to the driver, who tries to make a U-Turn. But they're stuck in the traffic.

Worse -- A PASSERBY spots them lying in the truck bed.

EVAN

Shit.

The PASSERBY runs toward the nearest POLICE OFFICER, yelling.

EVAN
Get out of the truck!

The family leaps out. Sprint away down --

A CONGESTED STREET

Chloe YELLS in Amharic. We don't know what she's saying, but the pedestrians make way for them to sprint through.

Danny's TERRIFIED. On the verge of tears.

HALF A BLOCK BEHIND THEM: the COP fights his way through the crowd. BEGGAR CHILDREN accost him, slowing him down.

The COP FIRES into the air. The crowd panics and scatters.

AHEAD: The family realize they're running down a DEAD END. They try to turn back -- too late --

The COP is coming straight toward them. Gun raised.

Evan pulls his gun from the stolen purse --

CHLOE
DROP IT, EVAN! OR HE'LL SHOOT US NOW!

Evan realizes she's right. It's hopeless. He drops the gun.

Puts his hands up. Chloe follows suit.

The COP throws FLEXCUFFS around Evan. Danny, yelling in Amharic, tries to stop him. Grabbing the Cop from the back. The COP PISTOL WHIPS him in the face. Chloe SCREAMS.

EVAN
STOP!

An ETHIOPIAN POLICE CAR pulls up. COP #2 jumps out from behind the wheel, gun drawn. They put flexcuffs on Chloe and Danny --

EVAN
LET THEM GO! You don't need them!

Chloe never stops yelling in Amharic as the Police violently shove them into the car.

EVAN
I have valuable information! Please --
just take us go to the Embassy! The
American government will reward --

The Cops root through Evan's bundle, talking among themselves.

DANNY
(listening; translating)
They're looking for something, Dad.
They're saying you stole something...

Evan blanches as they pull his LEAD BOX from the stolen purse.

EVAN
Don't touch that! We don't know what
it is --

The First Cop removes a FLYER from his pocket. Identical to the one Novak gave the Saba tribe, it reads "WANTED: STOLEN MINING EQUIPMENT". They see the locked box in their hands matches the ones on the flyer.

The Cops share an excited look as Evan continues yelling --

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. "NEW COLONY" SLUM - MINUTES LATER

The COP CAR speeds past lepers, donkeys, and shacks. It pulls up to a DILAPIDATED BUILDING with pineapples painted on the side and the words "TAFARA PRODUCE."

The Cops drag the family, now gagged, still in flexcuffs, into

INT. TAFARA PRODUCE STORE - CONTINUOUS

It's dank. Lamp-lit. The air is thick with flies, sucking on the overripe pineapples that fill the store.

The TAFARA TWINS (28), one a MAN, one a WOMAN with a shaved head, sit behind an old cash register. Both are shitfaced. But in a really creepy, numb kind of way.

There's instant trouble --

Seeing the Cops, the Tafaras raise GUNS from behind the counter. The Cops throw up their hands. Screaming at them.

The Cops offer the Tafaras the LEAD BOX. The TAFARA SISTER takes it. Opens it. She stares at it quietly.

Evan tries to shout from behind his gag, but is too muffled.

The Tafara Brother opens a door behind the register. Inside, a staircase seems to lead down into total darkness.

As the Tafaras and Cops force the family down the stairs --

MATCH TO:

Evan, in a pressure suit, descending the ladder onto

THE HELLAS PLANITIA CRATER ON MARS - FLASHBACK

The two other astronauts, YURI GERSHKOVICH (late-40s, Russian) and KEIJU SASAKI (early-50s), follow him onto the Martian surface in their pressure suits.

A tiny, misshapen moon, Deimos, casts the scene in pale light. The astronauts appear ghostly as they take their first buoyant steps. Dancing as much as walking. A magic moment.

The first human shoe-prints in the red dust.

They look around in awe.

YURI

*By eighteen, I was already 194
centimeters. Too big to fit in the
Soyuz. I went to the surgeon. He
sawed through my shin. Cut two inches
of bone out. Otherwise I would have
had no hope of becoming an astronaut.
(taking it in, looking
around)
This was all I ever wanted.*

From Evan's face, we know it's all he ever wanted too.

BACK TO:

DARKNESS. The Tafaras turn on a generator and lights flicker on. Evan sees they're in

A STRANGE BASEMENT LAB. Full of rusting equipment.

The Sister says a word to the Cops, who pull the family behind piles of equipment and rotting fruit.

The Tafaras don lead-lined smocks plus breathing masks. They examine the LEAD BOX. See the strange, complicated lock on it. They remove WELDING EQUIPMENT from their cabinets.

Evan screams at them -- but is unintelligibly from behind his gag.

He signals for his family to get down... Chloe and Danny huddle with their heads down as Evan peers out --

The Tafaras are WELDING OFF the lock from the box.

They carefully open it. From it, they pour onto a sample plate
A strange DUST. It seems to absorb all light.

Touching the warm air, the DUST starts to move.

The Tafarias gasp.

TAFARA BROTHER
Yihe mindin new?

Evan's face -- *holy shit, is it alive?*

The dust is melting as it touches the warm air. It now looks like a LIQUID MIRROR. Highly reflective though it's still pitch black.

The Tafarias quickly pour the element onto a spectrometer. They set the dials. And the numbers on the device's gauges RACE UP.

The oozing element SPARKS as it reacts to the air. Bubbling. There's loud POPPING noises -- as if it's about to combust.

Evan is screaming from behind the gag. The frightened Cops yell at the Tafarias to put the material away -- but the Tafarias eyes are glued on the spectrometer's readings: its dials are still RACING UP.

Even Chloe and Danny are staring with horror now as --

The spectrometer itself begins rattling. Louder and louder --

TAFARA SISTER
Temelket!

Just when it seems like the whole place is about to explode --

The Tafarias hurriedly pull the MELTED DUST out of the device. They pour it into another LEAD SAMPLE BOX and seal it shut...

The Tafarias can't believe what they've just seen.

But Evan's awe is turning to panic. The Sister approaches him and pulls down his gag. Stunned, he blurts out.

EVAN
 What is it?

The Tafarias are taken aback by his question. They have the British inflected-accent of African university graduates.

TAFARA SISTER
 You tell us.

EVAN

What did your readings show?

TAFARA BROTHER

That it's denser than osmium, heavier than francium... and more radioactive than uranium...

(this catches Evan totally off guard --)

Even though it's unrefined. It could be the most dangerous thing on Earth.

TAFARA SISTER

How did you make it?

Evan is reeling. *What the hell have I brought back?*

EVAN

Please -- just take us to the American Embassy. I can help you sell it to our government --

TAFARA BROTHER

How'd you make the dust?

EVAN

I didn't. I found it.

TAFARA SISTER

You're lying.

TAFARA BROTHER

(hard and fast)

What is it?

Evan gathers himself.

EVAN

It doesn't have a name yet.

CUT TO:

EXT. HELLAS PLANITIA - CAVE'S MOUTH

Evan, Keiju, an Yuri descend in pressure suits into

A VERTICAL CAVE SHAFT

They collecting samples and carefully store them in lead boxes. It's frightening work. When Evan beams his powerful light down, the cave appears bottomless.

As he climbs further down, he suddenly hits --

SOLID GROUND. So pitch black that it looked like vacant space. The white "shoes" of his pressure suit are now covered in the black DUST.

He pushes a button on his fishbowl's touchscreen. It picks up wavelengths that can't be seen by the naked eye.

In his helmet's display, the DUST now appears freckled with green fluorescence.

EVAN

(amazed)

Yuri! What is this?

Yuri struggles down to where Evan is. Sees the strange dust below them that seems to absorb all light.

Yuri scoops up a bit of the DUST and places it onto a tiny scale. It measures the element's mass and weight.

Because they're suspended on ropes, only Yuri can see the readings. He looks at them for a long moment.

EVAN

What is it? Something new?

YURI

*It's nothing. Just concentrated ore.
Still, Surkov might be interested. If
you see more deposits of it, tell me.*

Evan's disappointed. Yuri carefully pours the dust into a sample box and labels it LANA TUBE #97.

BACK TO:

INT. TAFARAS "PRODUCE STORE"

The Tafaras squint skeptically at Evan, so he babbles -- desperate to explain --

EVAN

We brought it back here for a company.

TAFARA SISTER

And why would anyone go to Mars in secret?

EVAN

In twenty, thirty years, Mars will be what Africa is today. The world's minefield.

I think the company that sent us
 wanted to know where to stake their
 claim when the gold rush starts...
 (nodding to the lead box)
 The Americans will give you millions
 for that. More than you'd ever make
 selling it on the blackmarket. You'll
 be heroes for saving us. And famous --

His bravado builds. Really selling it --

EVAN
 They'll want it for energy. You could
 power a city with just what you're
 holding in --

TAFARA BROTHER
 (cutting him off)
 Or blow up a city.

Evan's stopped cold by this. The Brother, holding the box,
 squats in front of Evan. Looks into his eyes. Measuring him.

TAFARA BROTHER
 Where does the dust really come from?

EVAN
 I'm telling you the truth --

But the Tafaras still think he's lying. The Sister suddenly
 yanks down Danny's gag and says to him.

TAFARA SISTER
 Maybe your father needs to hear you
 scream.

She picks up a KNIFE and grabs DANNY by the collar.

DANNY
 Dad! HELP!

A change in EVAN as his eyes meet Danny's. A moment of truth.

EVAN
 Stop! There's more dust! I can give
 you more!

The Tafaras freeze.

EVAN
 It's in the desert. I'll take you if
 you let my family go. Right now.

TAFARA BROTHER

You give us more of the dust, then we
take you to the Embassy.

EVAN

(emphatic; explodes)

No! You take my wife and son there
now.

TAFARA BROTHER

Show us where the minerals are, or...

He nods to Danny. Evan registers the threat.

TAFARA BROTHER

We are reasonable people. After we go
to desert, we sell you and the
minerals to the Americans. Everyone
wins. OK?

He motions to the stolen purse, which the Cops are still
holding. Finally, Evan nods.

Off his nod, the Sister pulls a gun and SHOOTs BOTH COPS.
Danny SCREAMS. The Brother picks up Evan's stolen purse.

TAFARA BROTHER

OK? We go now.

As the dying Cops bleed out --

CUT TO:

YURI. Covered in blood. Delusional. His back arching in agony.
Screaming. It's horrific. He's inside

THE SPACE SHUTTLE

Mars is still large out the window as the shuttle floats back
toward earth. Evan and Keiju inject morphine into YURI.

EVAN

(quietly, to Keiju)

What do you think it is? An allergic
reaction? Maybe we were exposed to
something down there...

Yuri vomits. Gooey strings of bile -- red with blood -- wind
through the air like a spider web.

Evan sucks it up from the air with a vacuum.

KEIJU

We need to talk to a doctor. We need to make contact with home.

EVAN

(shaking his head)

The laser communication system only works if Surkov activates it from the ground. He won't do that until landing procedures are underway.

Yuri is in so much pain that his voice is barely audible.

YURI

He said I would be the one who lived.

EVAN

(not sure he heard right)

What?

But Yuri's eyes are freezing in place. Out from the morphine.

EVAN

Shit! Keiju, how do we revive him?

But Keiju has a hand on Yuri's pulse. *It's too late.*

CUT TO:

I/E. TAFARA'S VAN - ETHIOPIAN DESERT - NIGHT

Speeding through the night. The exterior reads "TAFARAS!" It has badly-painted pineapples all over it plus a portrait of a Tafara twin on each door.

Evan, Danny, and Chloe are in back. They're still flexcuffed.

The Sister, sitting shotgun, shows Evan a map on her phone. Evan glances out the window, partly navigating by starlight.

EVAN

Keep heading north.

TAFARA BROTHER

How much more dust is out here?

EVAN

At least three kilograms. I can help you sell to Americans.

TAFARA BROTHER

(shaking his head)

We know how Americans work.

TAFARA SISTER
Leave Africans with nothing.

EVAN
(trying to sound
confident)
No. The Americans want to beat the
Russians to Mars. They'll pay
anything to do it.

The Tafarias confer in Amharic. Their voices increasingly
excited. They seem to believe him.

CHLOE
(quietly)
We can't trust them. We need a plan.

EVAN
Getting them to cooperate is the
plan.

But Chloe eyes the KNIFE strapped to the Sister's belt. She
quietly reaches toward it. Closer and closer...

EVAN
(whispering)
No... don't...

Chloe SPRINGS forward. The Sister whips around.

TAFARA SISTER
Aydelem!

She pulls the knife before Chloe can get to it. GOES FOR
CHLOE'S FACE. Chloe throws up her hands. The Sister slashes
her FOREARM and HAND. Blood spurts out. Chloe SCREAMS.

EVAN
CHLOE!

Danny, enraged, throws himself toward the Tafarias.

DANNY
You fucking --

Danny BITES the Brother's arm. The Brother shrieks. Slams the
brakes. Throws Danny in a chokehold.

Meantime the Sister pulls out a PIECE OF FOIL full of a WHITE
POWDER from the glove compartment.

EVAN
Don't touch my son! PLEASE!

There's chaos in the car as Evan tries to pull Danny away.

The Sister holds a flame under the foil, producing smoke... then abruptly COVERS DANNY'S MOUTH with her hand. Holding the smoke under his nose. Danny struggles... but inhales.

EVAN

NO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

Evan swings -- two-hands -- still cuffed -- at the smoking foil. Instead the Sister thrusts the foil into Evan's face.

CHLOE

DANNY!

Chloe looks into Danny's vacant pupils as he passes out. Then she realizes Evan's inhaled some too. His eyes glazing over.

CHLOE

EVAN? EVAN!

He's too drugged to process the worry in her face. That she really cares about him.

She checks her wound. Sees the knife made a tear in the plastic flexcuffs around her wrists. Not all the way. But it's a start.

As the Tafaras free-base in the front, Chloe furtively rubs the cuffs against the door. Hoping to tear them further...

MEANTIME -- Evan's eyes fall shut.

CUT TO BLACK:

KEIJU (O.S.)

(weakly)

Evan? Help me...

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - A FEW DAYS LATER

Evan awakens in his sleep sack, which is tethered to the wall like a chrysalis. He gasps when he sees Keiju vomiting red globules of BLOOD, which fill the air.

KEIJU

Same thing Yuri had...

Evan springs into action. Scrambles out of his sack. Flies to Keiju, who can barely speak. The pain unbearable.

KEIJU

What did Yuri mean -- "I thought you would be the ones to die"?

He puts a hand on Evan's arm. Even this slight movement knocks off one of Keiju's fingernails. It floats into the air. Pearly and delicate, like a seashell. Evan gapes at it.

KEIJU

What if... he's killing us?

Evan tears the medical kit from the wall. Fumbles through it as they talk --

EVAN

Who?

KEIJU

Getting an astronaut home costs millions. Surkov saved a fortune by getting rid of us.

EVAN

Surkov wouldn't kill us. Bad PR.

Keiju is having trouble getting the breath to speak.

KEIJU

He's decades ahead of his competition. And he can stay that way -- if he keeps it all secret.

A chill runs through Evan as he pieces it together.

EVAN

Yuri tested all the samples. We don't even know for sure what we really brought back with us...

Keiju coughs more blood.

KEIJU

Maybe he'll keep you alive to navigate back. But then you'll have served your purpose.

Evan stares. *Could this be true?* Keiju wheezes.

KEIJU

You must get back. The world has to know.

He struggles to search through the medical kit.

KEIJU

We used all our opiates on Yuri.

(loaded)

I don't want to suffer like he did.

Keiju finds a SCALPEL in the medical kit. Their eyes meet and Evan realizes what Keiju is asking.

KEIJU

Cut the carotid artery. That'll be fastest.

Evan is sickened by the idea. He turns away from him.

EVAN

Maybe we're going nuts from isolation. Maybe you're sick from natural causes...

He kicks off the wall and floats further down the main galley.

KEIJU

(faint, desperate)

Evan, help me --

Evan opens a cupboard containing their RATION PACKS, which are labelled with their NAMES and the date they are to be eaten. He tears open KEIJU'S next ration packs. Food flies into the air. Then he tears open the pack for three days later...

It's EMPTY. He tears open Keiju's next one. It's EMPTY too.

There are hundreds more ration packs for Keiju. But they're just props to hide the truth. *Surkov knew the other astronauts would die.*

EVAN

Oh my God.

A HORRIFIC SOUND.

Evan whips around and sees --

Blood exploding into the air from Keiju's neck. He slit his own throat. But he missed the main artery. He moans in agony.

Evan kicks off the wall to rush back toward Keiju.

He grabs the scalpel. Digs it into Keiju's carotid artery. Finishing the job as fast as he can. He closes his eyes until Keiju goes limp.

Evan finally opens his eyes. And can't believe what he's done.

CUT TO:

DAWN. Undulating sand horizon to horizon. It looks like Mars. As the Tafara truck crosses it, we realize it's

THE VAST ETHIOPIAN DESERT - HOURS LATER

The Tafaras pull up under the MESA. The family gets out. Evan recognizes the parched honeycomb of the mud flat below.

EVAN

It's just over this hill.

He strides off with unexpected energy. Adrenalized by the chance to prove himself to the Tafaras and his family.

Everyone's hurrying to follow him. The Tafaras take their phones out and begin FILMING, excitedly talking amongst themselves.

Finally, they reach the crest... and look out.

REVEAL: THERE IS NO CAPSULE.

No tracks. Nothing. Evan's stunned. His eyes everywhere.

TAFARA SISTER

Where is it?

An awful silence.

CHLOE

(anxious)

What's going on, Evan? Where is it?

EVAN

I buried it right here... There was a mound...

He starts swiping away sand with his cuffed hands. He looks like a madman.

CHLOE

Oh my god. There's nothing here.
We're alone in the desert with these
crazy people and there's nothing!

The TAFARAS talk angrily amongst themselves as Danny stares at Evan. As if seeing Evan for the first time. No faith left.

DANNY

Did you know there was no capsule
this whole time?

The Brother is raising his gun toward Evan -- eyes gone dead --

EVAN

WAIT! This must be the wrong place --
I was disoriented -- it must be
farther down!

He rushes down the steep hill. Looking for any sign of it.

The Brother chases Evan, YELLING in Amharic. Meantime --

The Sister pulls her gun on Chloe and Danny. Danny's starting to cry -- hands over his face -- bracing for the bullet he knows is coming. Chloe steps between Danny and the gun --

CHLOE

EVAN! Stop! They're telling you to
stop or they'll shoot!

But Evan races desperately down the hill.

EVAN

(anguished, freaking out)
I swear it's here! I'm telling the
truth!

Suddenly --

A GUNSHOT rings out from where Evan left Chloe and Danny with the Sister. Followed by SCREAMING and YELLING.

Evan, horrified, turns.

EVAN

Chloe!?

TAFARA BROTHER

Wend-em?!

Evan starts running back up the slope as the Brother raises his automatic toward Evan --

In that split second, Evan doesn't know what to do -- has to do something --

He lunges at the Brother. The Brother fires --

BANG!

The bullet hits the sand as Evan knocks him to the ground.

They roll down the hill. Coming to a stop against a BOULDER.

CRACK! The Brother hits his head. Evan hits his KNEE. Hard.

With the Brother momentarily dazed, Evan throws himself on top of him. Suffocating him face-down in the sand. The Brother flails like a fish out of water. Until he finally goes still.

Evan -- panting -- barely able to believe what just happened --

EVAN

CHLOE?!

He manages to pick it up the Tafara Brother's gun with his cuffed hands. His knee is bleeding. It's excruciating to walk. He forces himself up the steep slope.

EVAN

CHLOE! DANNY!

As he crests the hill, he takes in:

The Tafara Sister is dead on the ground. A bullet to the head.

Meantime CHLOE is in the TAFARA'S VAN. Danny sits beside her. Evan rushes toward them, overwhelmed with relief --

EVAN

I thought...

Danny looks back at Evan through the open window.

DANNY

Hurry! He's coming! Go! Go!

Chloe FLOORS it. The Van careens down the hill.

EVAN

(shocked)

CHLOE!

Evan tries to run after them but his knee buckles. He falls. Watches, stunned and horrified, as they abandon him.

The Van becomes a dust cloud in the distance.

He struggles to get up. Look a wreck. Covered in dirt. Blood. His clothes ripped to shreds.

Then suddenly, in the distance -- the HYENA -- the same hyena who stalked Evan when he landed -- darts in front of the VAN.

Evan gasps as he watches the van SWERVE. The vehicle TIPS SIDEWAYS as it slides down

A SHALLOW DRY CREEK BED.

CRASH!

EVAN

NO!

He stumbles after them, clutching his knee.

MOMENTS LATER

Evan catches up to the tipped-over van. He sees Chloe, sitting on the ground behind it. She holds Danny in her arms. He's not moving. Is he dead?

Evan's face -- panic.

He moves forward. Realizes -- Danny isn't seriously injured at all. Just totally overwhelmed. Terrified. He lets his mother hold him as he breaks down, sobbing.

Seeing Evan, Chloe shields Danny and raises the Tafara Sister's gun. Danny peeks out from behind her.

CHLOE

Stay back!

Evan drops the Tafara Brother's gun.

EVAN

OK... OK. Let's just get out of here.
Have you tried the Tafara's phone?
Maybe we can call for help.

Beat. Chloe and Danny seem to be deciding whether to cooperate with him.

DANNY

We tried. It doesn't get reception
out here.

Evan goes to the car. He finds his LEAD BOX that had been sitting on the dash. He checks that it's properly shut, then tucks it in his pocket. Chloe watches.

CHLOE

Why would you bring something so
dangerous around our son?

EVAN

If I'd known what it was, I wouldn't
have brought it here.

(then)

There's a tribe to the south. I can
guide us to their camp.

CHLOE

(fighting back tears)
How are we supposed to believe you?

EVAN

You don't understand. Surkov must've gotten the capsule --

DANNY

Stop it! STOP SAYING THAT. You're fucking crazy, OK? I should have listened to mom...

(eyes wet)

I wish you hadn't come back.

Evan swallows this hard. When he finally speaks, he keeps his eyes on the horizon.

EVAN

Maybe I'm crazy. I don't know... But I know I've been stuck in this desert before. I know there's no water here. And it'll be 120 degrees soon. And if we don't move, we'll die.

Danny looks at Chloe. Unsure what they should do.

CHLOE

(to Danny)

Walk on the other side of me. Stay as far from him as you can.

Evan starts limping toward the south. Chloe and Danny trudge behind him. Eyeing him with suspicion.

EVAN

Well, at least you two are getting along.

CUT TO:

INT. SPACESHIP

It's months after Keiju and Yuri died: Evan has stopped taking care of himself. His fingernails are so long they're curling.

His long-johns are filthy from months without washing. He notices mold growing on the fabric under his armpits.

Disgusted, he uses a baby wipe to try to clean them. Loses patience. He tears his clothes off --

Flies naked through the spaceship.

Mad with boredom, he absently folds every piece of paper on board into origami cranes. The birds swirl through the air around him.

He folds up equipment manuals, food packaging, photos Keiju brought with him, Yuri's photos, then he comes across

The photo of CHLOE (33) and DANNY (8) hugging him in front of the Christmas tree. Buried deep in his Personal Cubby. He stares at it.

Then he folds the photo into an origami crane.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - BLISTERINGLY HOT - LATER

Bleak horizon under a glazed sky, red desert scarred by the occasional butte and hill. Evan crosses the desert as before, but this time with his family beside him.

Evan lags behind Chloe and Danny with his wounded leg. Every step is a battle.

He looks at them with remorse. Chloe's suit is now torn, dirty, blood-stained. Danny's school uniform is ripped. They're utterly transformed from when he first saw them.

But the greatest transformation is that she and Danny are now walking close together. Chloe protecting Danny. Danny wanting to be protected.

CHLOE

If we get through this... Let's go
back to Houston.

Evan turns -- thinking she's talking to her. But she's addressing Danny.

Danny looks at her. Surprised.

She takes his hand and they stumble onward.

As they crest a dune, Evan sees --

An astronaut in a white pressure suit walking across a far sand dune.

He says nothing. Keeps walking. Telling himself it's a hallucination.

But Chloe and Danny stop short.

CHLOE

Oh my God.

They see

THE CAPSULE DRAGGED BY DOZENS OF MASSIVE CATTLE.

SABA WARRIORS, armed with machine guns, guide the cattle team.

The world's most advanced spacecraft slides slowly across the sand. The ropes that connected it to its parachute are now connecting it to the Ankole cattle.

A couple tribesmen follow behind, sweeping up the tracks they're leaving with palm fronds.

One tribesman is WEARING THE PRESSURE SUIT.

Danny and Chloe stare at the scene in stunned silence.

DANNY

It's real...

Only now does Evan let himself believe what he's seeing. He's overwhelmed with relief.

Chloe starts to sob. Grabs Evan. Holds him.

After a moment, Evan's head clears. And he becomes aware of her embrace. Something he hasn't felt in a long time. He hugs her back tighter.

CHLOE

I'm sorry. I'm sorry...

EVAN

It's OK. We're going to be OK now...

CHLOE

(still holding him,
distraught)

They told me to stay with you.

EVAN

Who?

CHLOE

They said we should do whatever you told us to. Just to stay with you and they would find us.

This sinks in. Evan pulls away. Looks at her.

EVAN

Who?

Chloe looks like death.

Danny too.

DANNY

We called them from the car.

From the stolen purse, he pulls out the Tafaras' PHONE and the folded-up WANTED AD that Evan got from the Saba women.

For a moment Evan can't process the betrayal. Then he snatches the phone from Danny and breaks it in half.

DANNY

(tearing up)

It's too late. They said they started tracking it as soon as we called.

Evan staggers away for a moment. Enraged. Helpless.

He turns toward the capsule.

EVAN

We have to hurry. Come on!

He bolts toward it. Chloe and Danny rush after him.

Meantime -- the Saba see the figures approaching and raise their weapons. Evan waves his arms, yelling --

EVAN

IT'S ME! IT'S ME!

The Saba slowly lower their guns. Chloe and Danny gape as they get closer -- shocked by the capsule, the tribesmen, their enormous cattle... The whole surreal scene.

Through the fishbowl helmet, Evan sees it's the YOUNGEST of the THREE HEAD WOMEN in the pressure suit. She has a Kalashnikov slung over her back.

EVAN

What are you doing?

YOUNGEST

Sell.

She holds out the "WANTED: STOLEN MINING EQUIPMENT" flyer that Novak gave her back in the Saba camp.

He peers inside the capsule -- Yuri and Keiju's two pressure suits lie empty on the floor.

EVAN

What happened to bodies? The two men--

DANNY

DAD!

Danny points at SUVs in the distance. Rapidly approaching.

Evan turns to the Youngest and the tribesmen.

EVAN

Those men will kill you all. Unless
you listen to me --

Chloe, panicking, grabs his hand.

CHLOE

Evan -- we should run.

EVAN

I have a plan. We're going to live.
Trust me.

She stares at the Jeeps moving toward them, and grips his hand harder.

CUT TO:

MOMENTS LATER

FIVE WHITE SUVS approach the CAPSULE. The family is nowhere in sight.

Doors POP open. Novak and Mercenaries emerge with weapons drawn.

SURKOV excitedly slides out like it's Christmas morning. He's dressed in white as if he's summering in Sochi.

He flashes a mega-watt smile as he takes in the capsule.

In the distance, he sees TRIBE FLEEING with their cattle.
They've seemingly abandoned the capsule. Until --

The WHITE GLOVE of a space suit is waved in the capsule doorway. The Youngest peers out, still in her pressure suit. A Kalashnikov in her other hand.

YOUNGEST

Agree deal.

SURKOV

What do you want?

YOUNGEST

I give you boat. You give me money.

SURKOV

(grins)

How much you want for the "boat"?

YOUNGEST
Four million.

SURKOV
Excuse me?

YOUNGEST
Four million dollar. Buy Saba land
from cops.

Beat.

SURKOV
First I need to make sure you didn't
steal anything from in there.

YOUNGEST
You come now.

NOVAK
(to Surkov, American
accent)
Don't go in there. She'll kill you.

SURKOV
No she won't. She probably thinks I'm
some sort of god.

Surkov slowly starts crossing the sand. Still smiling.

He steps inside the dim windowless capsule. Gasps as he sees

EVAN, CHLOE, and DANNY inside, hiding against the wall. Evan
has a Kalashnikov aimed at him.

EVAN
Don't call for help. Take one more
step so they can't see you.

NOVAK
(alarmed)
Surkov! Gimme your status!

Evan keeps the gun on Surkov as Chloe ties him up. Surkov
looks sadly at her and Danny.

SURKOV
Why'd you drag your family into this?

EVAN
Tell them you're checking the
samples.

SURKOV

(quietly)

You wanted to show them what you did,
didn't you? You cared more about them
knowing than about them.

Evan looks at Chloe and Danny. Wishes he hadn't.

SURKOV

(shouting to Novak)

I'm just making sure everything is
here!

(then, to Evan)

Why didn't you let me help you
sooner? I wanted to protect you.

EVAN

Don't lie to me. I know you killed
Yuri and Keiju.

SURKOV

Big picture. We had to protect the
secret. The funders wouldn't let me
go public.

EVAN

...What funders?

Surkov is surprised Evan hasn't guessed.

SURKOV

You don't know? They said it was your
idea.

(Evan is just staring--)

When your Congress voted against the
mission, you said you wanted to go
around them. That's why you were
chosen.

Evan lowers the gun -- head swimming --

EVAN

...The D.O.D. was involved in this?

SURKOV

I'm just the handsome face of it all.

It hits Evan like a body blow. He turns to Chloe and Danny.
Too stunned to hide the fact he has no fucking idea who they
can turn to now.

SURKOV

The only reason they haven't gotten you so far is I convinced them to let me find you. Outside are my men. But the D.O.D. will be here any minute. With soldiers. Helicopters. An army. Give yourself up now -- and my men can try to hide you.

EVAN

What about my family?

SURKOV

You'll have to leave them.

(as Evan reacts --)

As long as you're with them, they're targets. They'll be safer without you... Like they were yesterday.

That hits him. He looks at his wife and son. Considering it.

CHLOE

Evan, no! He's trying to trick you!

EVAN

(to Surkov)

If I let you go... how do I know you won't kill them? Why should I trust you?

SURKOV

You don't have a choice. For you, this is the only way out.

EVAN

(turns on him, furious)

I'm asking about them. Not me.

Surkov looks at him. Like this is an act he can see through.

SURKOV

Most people wouldn't have survived alone up there. You did.

(warming to this)

I chose you because you're selfish. And selfish people make the best survivors.

(then)

Let me go. I'm the only one who can save you.

Evan studies Surkov.

Then looks at his family.

Forging something within.

He presses the Kalashnikov against Surkov's chest.

EVAN
(resolved)
Tell your men to drive up one of the
Jeeps. Leave it outside.

SURKOV
(thrown, hesitates)
What are you going to do?

Evan drives the gun harder into Surkov's ribs. He's so ready to kill him. Surkov shouts --

SURKOV
NOVAK! Leave a Jeep outside the door.
Then retreat!

The Youngest, still guarding the hatch, watches the Mercenaries exchange looks in the distance. Finally Novak gets in one of the Jeeps.

Evan turns to Chloe and Danny.

EVAN
You're gonna go with her.
(he nods to the Youngest)
She'll help you get to Addis.

DANNY
What are you gonna do?

EVAN
I need to get rid of this.
(he pulls the lead box out
of his pocket)
All of it. I should never have
brought it back.

SURKOV
(realizing his plan)
No. No -- Evan -- you can't blow up
the capsule or you're throwing away
everything you --

Evan throws a rope around Surkov's mouth. Gagging him. Surkov struggles. He tries to scream for help, but it's too late.

MEANTIME -- Novak pulls the Jeep up to the capsule.

He has a gun in one hand. Keeping it below what the Youngest can see through the window.

But she has him in her Kalashnikov sights.

YOUNGEST

Stay far or we kill him.

Beat. Novak debates what to do. Slowly, tensely, he gets out of the car. Retreats back toward the other Mercenaries.

INSIDE THE CAPSULE:

Evan's ripping panels from the walls.

DANNY

Dad, wait! If you blow up the samples, how will anyone know what you did?

EVAN

You know. That's enough.

Evan's assembling WIRES from the wall into a makeshift explosive. Attaching them to the battery and fuel tank.

DANNY

Everyone needs to know! You did something important.

Evan shakes his head. Danny looks at Evan like he's lost his mind.

DANNY

But what you've done changes everything. Dad -- big picture!

EVAN

You're the big picture. Get in the car. I'll wait until you're far enough. The mineral's unrefined -- the blast shouldn't go more than a mile.

He nods to the two empty PRESSURE SUITS on the capsule floor.

EVAN

Put those on. That'll protect you from any radiation.

DANNY

Wait, we're going without you? How will you get out?

Evan's eyes meet Chloe's. Finally she understands his plan.

EVAN

No one else can pay for what I've done.

DANNY

What are you saying?

Beat.

EVAN

You're gonna leave me this time.

Chloe is fighting back tears.

DANNY

(aghast)

What?

EVAN

This is the only way I can be sure you'll be safe...

DANNY

(empathic)

No, no -- you have to come with us!

He grabs Evan. Evan sweeps his son into his arms. Both wishing this moment could last forever.

EVAN

If I come with you, they'll just hunt us down.

Finally Evan forces himself to push Danny away.

CHLOE

Is this really happening?

EVAN

I should never be the one to answer that.

She tries to smile. Can't. She reaches out to him. Puts a hand on his cheek.

He leans in close. His lips touching her ear -- words pouring out -- no time for thought --

EVAN

I know I don't deserve to ask for promises, but don't make the mistake I made... Be there for him.

He reaches out and tucks the hair in her eyes back behind her ear. This time, she lets him.

CHLOE
(the tears finally coming)
We just got you back. Today.

EVAN
Best day of my life.

She's struggling to keep it together.

EVAN
You got by without me before.

CHLOE
That was easy. I was mad at you.
This... I can't do this...

Surkov is desperately trying to scream through the gag. Evan takes Surkov's phone from his pocket. Holds it out to Danny.

EVAN
D, I need you to help me do something
that will keep you and your mother
safe.

CUT TO:

MOMENTS LATER

Evan shoves a TIED-UP SURKOV into the capsule's doorway, so the Mercenaries can see him bound and gagged.

EVAN
(shouting)
You're gonna let my wife and son
drive away. Then I'll release Surkov
and you can take me prisoner.
(then)
If one of you fires at my family, I'm
gonna kill him.

INSIDE THE CAPSULE: Evan's makeshift bomb is spread across the floor.

Evan turns to Chloe, Danny, and the Youngest. All three are in pressure suits.

The moment. The big deep breath.

EVAN
Go! Go now!

But Chloe and Danny don't move. Tears stream down their faces inside their helmets.

DANNY

(raw)

Dad, you're giving up.

Evan shakes his head.

EVAN

Maybe I'm about to do is the only
really good thing I've ever done.

Even Surkov, helpless behind his gag, can feel their anguish as he watches them.

Danny grabs Evan and tries to yank him out the door with them.

DANNY

COME WITH US!

Chloe pulls Danny away. She looks at Evan -- grateful. Scared. And desperately in love with him.

Evan's fighting back emotions. Can barely get the word out.

EVAN

Go!

The Youngest shoves Chloe and Danny out.

They SPRINT TOWARD THE IDLING CAR in their space suits. The Youngest cradles her Kalashnikov in her gloves. Their fishbowl helmets gleam in the sun.

For a split second -- with the red desert behind them -- it looks like they're on Mars.

They leap into the car. Chloe FLOORS IT. The Jeep roars off.

EVAN

LET THEM GO!

Through the capsule door, the Mercenaries can see the Kalashnikov pressed against Surkov's head.

Surkov is distraught. Hyperventilating behind his gag as he takes in the make-shift bomb that's about to destroy everything he's worked for.

Evan zips the cell phone back into Surkov's pocket.

EVAN

Make sure that gets into the right hands.

NOVAK, armed with an automatic, approaches the capsule.

NOVAK

Lange! Come out with your hands up!

Evan looks out -- Chloe and Danny's Jeep is already just a tiny dust-cloud in the distance.

Evan's face -- they've gotten away! In spite of what's about to happen to himself -- he's elated.

EVAN

(shouting at Novak and the
Merces)

The capsule's about to explode. Get
back! ALL OF YOU! GET AWAY!

Novak stops. Unsure if Evan's bluffing. So Evan pulls the gag from Surkov's mouth.

SURKOV

(screaming to Novak)

HE'S GOING TO BLOW IT UP! STOP HIM!

EVAN

THE BLAST WILL BE RADIOACTIVE! IF YOU
WANT TO LIVE, DRIVE AWAY!

Momentary confusion on the Mercenaries' faces.

Either way -- they're hearing it's going to blow.

Novak SPRINTS BACK toward the other Mercenaries. Abandoning Surkov and the capsule.

NOVAK

Retreat! PULL OUT! PULL OUT!

The Mercenaries dash into their cars.

SURKOV

STOP! STOP!

As the Mercenaries drive AWAY, Evan yanks the binding off Surkov's legs and kicks him onto the ground outside.

EVAN

Run. Or you'll go to a place only God
has seen.

Evan slams the hatch shut again.

LOCKS HIMSELF IN.

Surkov -- beyond desperate to stop him -- claws at the capsule hatch with his still-bound hands. But it's impossible.

SURKOV

EVAN! STOP! This is madness!

INSIDE THE CAPSULE:

Evan hurriedly opens the sample boxes, dumping box after box of the Martian element onto the capsule floor.

FLASH TO: Evan submerged in a swimming pool in Houston. He can see DANNY (7) above him, sitting in an innertube. Danny's voice is muffled by the water as he counts out the seconds that Evan holds his breath.

DANNY

10 more seconds and you'll break your
record! 10 -- 9 --

INTERCUT Evan finishing the bomb with *Evan crash-landing in the desert.*

DANNY (O.S.)

8 -- 7 --

INTERCUT Evan lighting the fuse with *the Saba forcing Evan to his knees next to their bonfire.*

DANNY (O.S.)

6 -- 5 --

BACK IN THE CAPSULE

INTERCUT Surkov running for his life away from the capsule with *Evan, Chloe, and Danny running from the police in Addis.*

DANNY (O.S.)

4 -- 3--

INTERCUT The bomb's fuse catching with *Chloe taking Danny's hand as they cross the desert.*

DANNY (O.S.)

2 -- 1 --

INTERCUT Evan preparing to die -- accepting it -- with *Evan tucking Chloe's hair behind her ear in the capsule. The final goodbye.*

A BURST OF UNBELIEVABLY BRIGHT LIGHT.

As the capsule IMPLODES.

Surkov -- running -- is knocked to the ground as the implosion sucks everything toward it.

He gapes at a WALL OF SAND -- 30 feet high -- approaching.

The DUST CLOUD momentarily swallows up the MERCENARIES' JEEPS as they try to flee. The men inside choking on sand as it coats their bodies, their faces, their tongues -- everything.

INT. CHLOE AND DANNY'S JEEP - DRIVING AWAY

A loud HISS all around them as sand is sucked into the implosion. Erasing the tracks of their Jeep's wheels.

CHLOE

Don't look back, Danny. Don't look back.

Their eyes are wet inside their helmets. Danny grips Chloe tightly as she drives.

But the Youngest is staring back in awed wonder at --

The eerie and beautiful BUBBLY SAND surrounding the MOLTEN SHAPE that was, a second ago, the capsule.

The glowing blob slowly cools...

Sinking into the sand around it...

The sand around it turns to glass. Solidifying into unearthly, sculptural shapes...

MINUTES LATER:

D.O.D. HELICOPTERS land on the blackened sand around what was the capsule. Soldiers pour out, searching for survivors.

MCMURTRY, the D.O.D. Official, emerges. He still looks ridiculously boyish.

The soldiers quickly find SURKOV and untie him. He's barely alive. Hacking up sand and blood.

SURKOV

(weakly)

It's over.

He holds out his cell phone to McMurtry. McMurtry sees there's a video file on it. His face is impassive.

MCMURTRY

You let the family get away. They're witnesses.

SURKOV

They won't say anything. The woman wants to keep her son alive. And no one will believe them anyway.

(nodding to the video)

You can release that if you have to.

McMurtry frowns and hits play. On the cell phone's horribly cracked screen, he can just make out:

The CLOSE UP of EVAN. Against the white background of the capsule wall. Danny's voice comes from behind the camera.

DANNY

Please state your name.

EVAN

Evan Lange.

DANNY

Are you currently of sound mind and body?

EVAN

Yes.

The video that opened the movie. As the audio continues, we cut ahead to images:

- The D.O.D. gathers up all the debris from the implosion. Erasing all hint that anything happened.

- McMurtry shoots Surkov in the head. Surkov falls. As the sand around him turns RED with his blood --

DANNY (O.S.)

Can you please explain the problems you've been suffering from?

EVAN

Whenever I try to stop drinking, I have delusions. Hallucinations. Doctors told me it's delirium tremens.

- Another OFFICIAL approaches McMurtry.

OFFICIAL
What about the natives?

McMurtry eyes the THREE WOMEN, BAULU, and SABA WARRIORS
lingering on the nearest hill. All armed with Kalashnikovs.

MCMURTRY
Pay them.

- Surkov's body is put in a bag and loaded onto a helicopter.

DANNY (O.S.)
*Do you agree that if people hear you
making strange claims, they should
call the police?*

EVAN (O.S.)
(with difficulty)
Yes. For their safety. And mine.

Chloe and Danny get on a "HEART OF DARKNESS TOURS" BUS from
the Saba camp.

Chloe scans the evening sky. Sees a red star glittering.

Stares at it quietly. Refusing to cry. But --

She pulls her son closer.

FADE TO BLACK.