

"LAST FLIGHT"

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1. EXT. MARS—DAWN

BLACKNESS. Silence. Just the sound of a freezing wind blowing.

The sun rises over the dawn landscape of Mars: a rocky desert beneath a salmon-coloured sky.

The title LAST FLIGHT appears.

We cut to another shot, equally lonely and rock strewn. In the distance a wisp of smoke is curling up from the landscape, into the sky.

A third shot, as barren as the first. Footprints in the sand wind into the distance.

CU of a TRANSMITTER sitting amid the rocky rubble of the landscape. At the same time the silence is shattered by a burst of static and the voice of a NEWSREADER.

NEWSREADER (V.O.)

...unable to confirm reports...

(Static)

...strong evidence of two nuclear explosions in the Middle East. There is still no confirmation from the Pentagon or London, the...

(Static)

...in retaliation for the strike. Retreating soldiers are shooting their way through refugee...

(Static)

...which the President said yesterday would require a vigorous response.

(Static)

Now we see an ASTONAUT. She is kneeling, listening intently to the broadcast. She looks agitated and exhausted. Her lips are cracked and dry.

NEWSREADER (V.O.)

...garbled reports of
intense fighting
along the border
despite the news
embargo...

(Static)

...is an inferno. Fires
are raging though the
combat zone - and
whole cities are just
gone...

Abruptly the NEWSREADER's voice is lost in static. The ASTRONAUT slaps the TRANSMITTER angrily, and the transmissions resume.

NEWSREADER (V.O.)

...almost certainly due
to a nuclear
exchange. Cell phone
footage obtained by
this channel clearly
shows mushroom clouds
rising into the sky.
The Chinese
government has
withdrawn all...

The ASTRONAUT continues to listen, struggling to contain her fear and anger. We see a piece of jewelry - a SILVER BIRD - in her hands. She rubs it absent-mindedly between her fingers.

NEWSREADER (V.O.)

...when you hear the
air attack warning,
take cover at once.
If you are caught out
in the open, lie
down. If you are at

home, stay indoors.
You are better off at
home. Stay there.

Static. Again the ASTRONAUT slaps the TRANSMITTER, but the reception only improves for an instant before being swamped in noise. She considers it for a moment, wrestling to contain her horror. She breathes heavily, eventually bringing herself back under control.

The static continues. We can hear garbled voices, and occasional snippets of the broadcast still, but the static is nearly continuous now.

The screen on the TRANSMITTER reads: SIGNAL STRENGTH WEAK.

ASTRONAUT

Alright then..

She looks around at her surroundings. The desert landscape stretches off in all directions. She closes her eyes for a second, regrouping slightly, and then glances down at her WRIST COMPUTER DISPLAY. An alert is flashing on it. She lifts her arm to look.

The alert reads: HEATER FAIL (Underneath in smaller letters we see FROSTBITE WARNING CRITICAL)

She clicks a button and it changes to: CO2 SCRUBBERS FAIL. She clicks it again. This time REMANING AIR comes up: 11:56 MINUTES.

She regards the screen for a moment, considering this. Her face hardens.

She hesitates briefly, finding her strength, and then wobbles stiffly, awkwardly to her feet, pulling the TRANSMITTER over her shoulder.

Something wrapped in plastic falls at her feet - a packet of SEEDS? We barely catch a glimpse of it before her hand reaches into frame and snatches it up again.

ASTRONAUT
(Looking ahead)
Come on.

Her breathing strangled and attenuated, she shuffles off.

FADE TO BLACK
FADE INTO:

2. EXT. MARS--MORNING

Giant, rocky Martian landscape. The ASTRONAUT stumbles through it. She appears tiny.

She staggers to a halt and looks around. Her spacesuit is worn and dusty - covered in scratches and held together with duct tape. Although obviously a workaday suit, it's clearly seen better days.

She studies her location on a map on her WRIST DISPLAY. The signal is breaking up.

ASTRONAUT
(Mumbling under breath)
Piece of shit...

Abruptly the signal strengthens and coordinates flash up on the screen. She compares the landscape ahead of her with what appears on her wrist. Arrows point the way ahead. She grunts satisfaction, flicks a switch and staggers on again.

We watch her make her way past boulders and up hills. Shale slides down-slope beneath her ascent. We hear her labored breathing. Her face is determined, but the exhaustion is catching up with her: she is walking herself to death. She can't go on for much longer.

She reaches the top of a slope and pauses. The land stretches out before her, rugged and dangerous looking, and she shakes her head in disbelief.

ASTRONAUT
...more fucking rocks...

She surveys the view for a moment and then with a jolt, launches off again. Small in the landscape she makes her way down the slope.

FADE TO BLACK.
FADE INTO:

3. EXT. MARS--NOON

The wind whistles coldly. The ASTRONAUT is sitting in the shade of a rock. She is taping up where her boot connects to her suit.

We hear the TRANSMITTER in the background.

NEWSREADER (V.O.)

(Agitated)

...60 nuclear
explosions reported
over Beijing...
(Static)
...is being pummeled
with nuclear weapons...
(fades out)

It dissolves back into static and she squints at it irritably, anxious, and then stands, emerging from the shadows and blinking up at the sun. She raises a hand to shade her eyes.

ASTRONAUT POV

The tiny sun seems to blur and distort somewhat, like a desert mirage against the red sky.

BACK TO SCENE

There is an ALERT sound from the TRANSMITTER. She looks at it. It reads: PHOBOS BOOSTER STATION IN RANGE. ATTEMPT TRANSMISSION?

She clicks a button on the TRANSMITTER: CONNECTING.

An alert flashes, WARNING: POWER LOW.

She ignores it and clicks quickly to the next screen: CONNECTION ESTABLISHED. BEGIN MARS TO EARTH TRANSMISSION.

She clicks another button and begins to talk.

ASTRONAUT
(Voice cracking, tired, but
matter-of-fact)
X-Ray Zero One, This
is Mars Zero Zero
One... X-Ray Zero One,
This is Mars Zero
Zero One. The base is
gone. LaserSat. When
the shooting started...
four days now. I'm
the only one left.

She pauses for a moment, searching for the strength to
go on.

ASTRONAUT
I've got air for...

She checks her wrist: 7:45 MINUTES.

ASTRONAUT
Seven or eight hours.
Heading two six,
past... Melas... on foot.
We always talked
about making the
trip. Finally seeing
it.

(She smiles slightly at the
memory and then frowns)
And I've got nothing
else to do...
(She pauses and then nearly
chokes on her own words)
I hope someone can
hear this.

At that moment there is a burst of static and a beep
from the TRANSMITTER. It comes up with: BOOSTER SIGNAL
LOST. TRANSMISSION ENDS.

She glares at it in frustration and surprise and then
slaps it angrily.

ASTRONAUT

Oh, for fuck's sake!

For a moment she looks as if the frustration will almost make her cry. Then she looks away, out at the landscape.

WIDE SHOT.

ASTRONAUT small in the landscape. Just the sound of the wind for a beat.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE BACK INTO:

4. EXT. MARS--DAY

The Astronaut is singing to herself as she stumbles across a vast plain.

ASTRONAUT

...wind and clouds... in
his hands... ...got the
sun and the rain... in
his hands... ...got
everybody... in his
hands... got the whole
world... in my hands...
whole world... my
hands...

A beeping starts. For a time she seems indifferent to it. Finally she notices and glances down at her WRIST DISPLAY.

GPS LOCK FAIL flashes. The map of her location disintegrates. She pushes reset with frustration.

Further text appears: SAT FAILURE. CORRUPT-CORRUPT-CORRUPT.

She stares at it for a moment and then drops her wrist. She looks around, clearly unsure about which way to go.

ASTRONAUT

Fuck.

Finally she just makes a decision and strides off.

We watch her as she makes her way through one barren landscape after another. As she walks, we hear the TRANSMITTER through bursts of static.

NEWSREADER (V.O)

...reports of a
bloodbath in London...

But mostly it's just static now. The connection sounds worse and worse. LOSING SIGNAL flashes on its LCD, unnoticed as she lurches along. We catch a glimpse of the SILVER BIRD swinging on its chain next to the screen.

The ASTRONAUT comes to a steep incline. She sways in front of it for a moment and then starts down.

As she progresses, she has difficulty staying upright as rock and sand give way underfoot. She slips - and then catches her balance again.

ASTRONAUT

Shit.

Tentatively she tries again - but this time she trips and topples over! Unable to stop herself she tumbles down the hill, bouncing and rolling.

Finally she comes to a jarring rest in a pile of rubble at the base of the hill. Immediately her spacesuit ALARM sounds - sounding broken and raspy itself.

Blood sprays out of her nose against the helmet visor. Air is shooting out the side of her spacesuit from a tear in her leg.

PRESSURE DROP flashes on her wrist display.

She scrambles to seal up the hole, fumbling for her puncture repair kit. For a moment she struggles to unclip the small pump shaped device from her belt and eventually just yanks it free. We see the numbers on her wrist screen dropping in a blur.

She seals the pump over the tear and activates it. In a few seconds the leak is sealed and a light on the pump turns green. She stares at it, panting. Blood trickles from her nose.

She releases her leg, dropping the pump, and leans back, catching her breath.

Then she looks at her WRIST DISPLAY. It reads: 20 MINUTES. She breathes out in a whimper, her breath coming hard and fast.

She sits for a moment. Abruptly the TRANSMITTER lets out a long warning tone and she jumps at the sound, before glancing at it, sitting in the sand, where it's fallen.

She hesitates for a moment, searching for strength. Then, with an effort, she crawls over to the TRANSMITTER.

NO SIGNAL is flashing on the screen.

She swallows, shaken, frozen for a beat, and then clicks some buttons. We hear static, and SEARCHING appears on the TRANSMITTER screen. Then the dead tone sounds again.

NO SIGNAL.

A surge of panic wrenches her face.

ASTRONAUT

Hey...

Tears well up in her eyes. She flicks another switch. We see the screen: MADRID. It changes to: NO SIGNAL.

She throws more switches. We hear the dead tone again and again. She begins to shake badly, going into shock. Tears run down her face.

ASTRONAUT

No... no...

More clicking. We hear the NO SIGNAL tone. Then we see the screen: HOUSTON. It changes to: NO SIGNAL.

She is stricken, weeping. She bashes the buttons in frustration, but the tone continues and she pushes the TRANSMITTER away in defeat.

She looks around, clearly in shock and leans back, despairing, unable to believe, almost helpless with fear. She sways on her knees, sobbing, shuddering, unable to cope.

FADE TO BLACK
FADE INTO:

5. EXT. MARS—EVENING

The ASTRONAUT is lying in the sand, unmoving. It's impossible to tell whether she's dead or alive.

After a moment we see the legs of a BIRD as it hops onto a rock in extreme foreground.

The ASTRONAUT is staring into nothingness. She sees the BIRD.

ASTRONAUT POV
A seagull is perched on a rock not two metres away, watching her.

SPACESUIT CAMERA POV
The rock that the bird is sitting on is empty - there is no bird.

BACK TO SCENE
They watch each other for a moment. The ASTRONAUT doesn't react. She just stares at it. Then the BIRD opens its wings and lifts into the air.

She watches it for a little while. Then, slowly and painfully she hauls herself up and stumbles after it, leaving the TRANSMITTER behind.

Dazed, seemingly only half aware, she trips and staggers though the desert, following the BIRD.

WIDE SHOT
ASTRONAUT follows the gull as it wheels through the red sky.

BACK TO SCENE

Ahead of her, the BIRD disappears over a hill. The ASTRONAUT staggers up the slope after it, sliding and stumbling in the loose dirt. Her face is vacant, defeated. Nearly crawling as she reaches the top, she looks up, searching for the bird, and stops in her tracks.

Rising up with her as she pulls herself erect, we see the VALLES MARINERIS - a vast Martian canyon system spread before her. It dwarfs anything on Earth. She stands at the cliffs edge, blinking.

She closes her eyes for a moment and then opens them again. Slowly it begins to register through her exhaustion. She's done it.

ASTRONAUT

(Voice hollow, tiny and cracked)

There you are.

The ASTRONAUT stands before the canyons. They are spectacular.

The view begins to bring her out of her daze. After a moment she looks around and notices the BIRD - still there.

She blinks, as if trying to clear away the cobwebs.

ASTRONAUT

(Talking to BIRD, regretful)

I used to dream this.

Flying.

The gull cocks its head at her, seemingly disinterested.

Suddenly the suit alarm blares a warning. She looks at wrist reader: OXYGEN CRITICAL is flashing.

C02 LEVEL DANGEROUS

She stares at it and then taps a button. The alarm stops. 2 MINUTES appears.

The muscles in her face tug slightly as this cuts through her exhaustion and despair, finally bringing her

back out of herself. But she is largely resigned to death now; it doesn't scare her anymore.

She drops her arms and looks around. Then she remembers the SEEDS.

She pulls them out of a leg pocket. We see the label briefly:

BATCH 6. TEST SEEDS. HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT ENGINEERED,
GENETEK, ILLINOIS.

She pours a few into her hand and regards them for a moment. Then, kneeling down she scuffs out a hole for them and drops them in.

Back on her feet she looks down at where they're buried and struggles for a moment to find words.

ASTRONAUT

Good luck.

She turns away from seeds and breathes out. The bird hops over, seemingly interested. She kicks her boot at it and it hops backwards.

ASTRONAUT

(As if scolding a pet)

Get off! Bad bird!

The bird flutters back. The ASTRONAUT looks out at view. The sun, beginning to set, glints over the ranges. It is vast and deep. Breathtaking.

She looks back at the BIRD. It returns the glance and they regard each for a moment.

Then suddenly the BIRD flutters into the air, turns and soars out over the canyon.

The ASTRONAUT watches it for a moment and then nods. For the first time there is a sense of calmness about her. She scuffs her boot next to where the seeds are buried with a look of satisfaction in her eyes.

Then she stands for a moment, looking out into the distance. She walks over to the cliff and stops at the

edge. She glances down. Pebbles from her boots fall into the abyss. Looking back out at the view she closes her fist around the SILVER BIRD. Then she raises her arms into the air, like wings, as if glorying in the view before her. For a moment she stands frozen like this as the sun sinks down over the canyons.

Then she closes her eyes and something like a hint of a smile comes into her face. All the death, the struggling, is still a part of her, she's too exhausted to take another step, but despite everything, there's still something beautiful in the world. The universe will go on without her.

Then abruptly we cut to an explosion of BIRDS taking to the air in a loud clatter of wings.

We watch BIRDS fly into a great blue expanse of sky.

FADE TO BLACK.

END