

Launched (Pilot)

By

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INT. MISSION CONTROL

Computers and screens fill the frantic room.

(v.o.) Announcer

Heavy Cob Rocket is set to deliver  
her payload to the International  
Space Station. Launch in T-5, 4, 3,  
2, liftoff.

EXT. LAUNCH PAD

A rocket fires its thrusters and begins to move upwards. It  
sputters, turns off, and falls over. It explodes.

INT. MISSION CONTROL

Groans and cries fill the room. Then silence. ERNIE, the  
janitor, nods. JIMMY, the boss, slams his fist on the table.

ERNIE

Told you corn was a poor substitute  
for rocket fuel. Pay up.

JIMMY

(hands him a wad of bills)  
But they gave me such a good deal.

ERNIE

You can't cut corners in  
spaceflight.

JIMMY

But that's our motto.

He points to a sign up on the wall. Regional Air & Space:  
Cutting Corners to the Moon. It is faded and in a retro  
font. MISSION GUY comes up to the duo.

MISSION GUY

I can't run a space company if you  
keep insisting I use corn for  
everything. You have us eating with  
those corn-plastic forks that  
dissolve in your mouth, my tie has  
got bits of corn husk in it.

He shows them his tie, which is just a corn husk.

JIMMY

Hey, you don't gotta tell me. My  
kids won't even hug me anymore

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JIMMY (cont'd)  
because they say I stink like corn,  
but the Corn Industry is our number  
one sponsor.

ERNIE  
Only.

Ernie points to the sign again. Camera pans to another sign  
right next to: "POWERED BY CORN!" There is a picture of a  
cute corn cob mascot riding a rocket.

MISSION GUY  
We haven't had a successful rocket  
launch in three years. Well I quit.  
Good luck finding somebody else  
stupid enough to run this program.

EXT. GAS STATION

A sign says "Welcome to Woodrot, Nebraska." There is a  
dilapidated gas station with a luxury sedan parked at one of  
its rusty pumps. RUSS is filling BRIAN's car with gasoline,  
staring off into the distance. Gas flows out of the tank and  
onto his shoes, but he is unaware. He sniffs, look around,  
then down at his feet. He panics, trying to kick the spilled  
gas under the car to hide it. He also kicks the actual gas  
nozzle under. BRIAN looks out his window.

BRIAN  
Is there a problem?

RUSS  
No, I just uh, had a bug on me.  
It's gone now. That'll be (checks  
the price) \$107.

BRIAN  
How did you pump 37 gallons into a  
12 gallon tank?

RUSS  
Great service?

BRIAN  
I'm not paying for all that.

Russ shrugs.

BRIAN  
I want to speak to your manager.

(CONTINUED)

Russ turns to the gas console. There are three buttons. He hovers his finger over each of them: "Panic," "Call Manager," "Self-Destruct." He goes back and pushes call manager.

The manager, DAVID, comes out of the office and stomps over to the pair.

DAVID

What's the problem here? He throw up in your car again?

BRIAN

What? No, he's trying to rob me.

RUSS

No I'm not. I don't even get to keep the money, this darn robot steals it all.

Russ kicks the gas pump. It beeps.

RUSS

(to gas pump)

No, you're the jerk.

DAVID

Tell you what. Gas is on the house, and to make up for it, here's a coupon for a free car wash.

Brian looks at the car wash. It is obviously unused for years, there are like vines and shit on it. An old man with a beard and a cutoff belly shirt and drinking out of a hose. Brian doesn't take the card.

BRIAN

Are you kidding? This is a Lexus.

DAVID

Have it your way, Mr. pretentious.

BRIAN

Actually that's "Dr. Pretentious."

RUSS

Oh, ok. Why won't this heal?

Russ lifts up his shirt to reveal a large infected bite.

BRIAN

Dammit, I'm an astrophysicist. But you should see a real doctor. I mean, another doctor.

BRIAN  
(to self)  
you're a real doctor.

RUSS  
The rat was my doctor.

DAVID  
TrumpCare is not very good. I bet a fancy man like you gets all sorts of checkups and pills and vaccines.

BRIAN  
The Regional Air & Space Agency has offered me a competitive package.

DAVID  
You work there?

RUSS  
Can you get us a job?

BRIAN  
Sure, you've done such a great job with this simple task of pumping gas, I'm sure you could handle rocket science. Just swing on by and I'll hook you up.

DAVID  
Really?

Brian rolls his eyes, rolls up his window, and drives away.

RUSS  
I've always wanted to poop in one of those space toilets with the seat belt.

DAVID  
Man, rocket science isn't that hard. Just put a cap on a tube, put some gas in it, and light it on fire.

RUSS  
Yeah. Let's do it!

David and Russ rip off their name tags and throw them on the ground.

DAVID

Find some new idiots to do your  
dirty work, Earl! We got planets to  
conquer.

RUSS

For America.

The old man at the car wash smiles and waves as they leave.

INT. REGIONAL AIR & SPACE OFFICE

David and Russ walk into a 70's throwback office. There is  
wood paneling on the walls, plastic chairs, and shaggy  
carpet. Brian is reading a paper. He covers his face with  
it. The receptionist, ANNIE looks up.

DAVID

Hi, we're here about the jobs.

RUSS

We would like one.

David hits him on the shoulder.

RUSS

Two? some. We would like an amount  
of jobs.

ANNIE

What position?

DAVID

Astronaut.

ANNIE

We launch unmanned rockets here.

DAVID

For now. But once you've hired two  
astronauts it'll seem a little  
silly not to send them to the moon.

ANNIE

We have an opening for a janitor.

She hands them a clipboard. Russ shrugs.

RUSS

Even Lance Armstrong had to start  
somewhere.

(CONTINUED)

ANNIE  
Do you mean Niel...

Russ turns away and covers his face. David angrily grabs the clipboard out of her hand.

DAVID  
What, we don't look like the kind  
of guys who can appreciate the tour  
de france?

ANNIE  
I didn't mean...

DAVID  
That's racist.

ANNIE  
I don't think...

David turns his nose up and walks away. They see Brian.

RUSS  
Oh hey, it's the guy. Hi guy, we  
took your advice.

They sit down across from him and start filling out forms whilst talking. He sinks into his seat.

BRIAN  
(muttering)  
It was sarcasm.

RUSS  
Well it was real good, because I  
didn't even notice.

DAVID  
Stop talking to him, he's being a  
jerk.

BRIAN  
Wow, you guys got a real  
George-and-Lenny thing going, don't  
you?

DAVID  
The two lamest the Beatles?

BRIAN  
I guess more of a  
Lenny-and-Lenny...

David shrugs.

(CONTINUED)

RUSS

I'm just putting N/A for everything. Makes me seem mysterious.

BRIAN

Good luck with that, I'm sure you're a perfect candidate.

DAVID

We have all the experience we need to be naturals at this.

BRIAN

I was being sarcastic again.

RUSS

You're really good at it. Congratulations.

BRIAN

Are you being... did...??

Russ has a blank look on his face.

BRIAN

That's one hell of a poker face.

RUSS

I understand about none percent of what you're saying.

DAVID

That's because he thinks he's so smart, but wait til we're all in space and his oxygen runs out but surprise, we packed extras and he is begging for them. Who is the smart one now?

RUSS

Also pretend we packed that dry astronaut ice cream, and he wants some, then we say no. Take *that!*

They continue filling out their forms.

RUSS

(talking to self)

Blood Type: N/A. Eye Color: N/A.

ANNIE

Ok, bring me your applications.

DAVID

But I've still got like, three pages of personality test.

ANNIE

The inside of my drawer doesn't care, and that's exactly where they're going. I just need your names for the computer system.

David and Russ bring their applications up to the desk.

RUSS

I like your plant.

He points to it, knocking it off the ledge with his finger. The pot shatters on the floor.

RUSS

You'll see I put N/A for depth perception.

Annie rolls her eyes and takes their forms.

ANNIE

Do you have resumes you want to attach to your application?

DAVID

My love of the moon is the only resume I need.

RUSS

(looking through wallet)  
I just have this receipt for a slice of pizza. But really I think it says a lot about me.

Russ hands Annie the receipt. She staples it to his application.

ANNIE

Ok, follow me.

She leads them to Jimmy's office.

INT. JIMMY'S OFFICE

Jimmy is sitting at his large, cluttered desk. He has some models of corn and rockets on it. Annie walks up and hands him a folder. He stands up to shake David and Russ' hands. Jimmy motion for them to sits and opens the folder. Annie leaves.

JIMMY

Oh, they didn't tell me you'd be bringing your own assistant. That's ok, we can get rid of what's her name. Take a seat. I've looked through your application, and frankly it's impressive.

He flips through some papers.

JIMMY

Ph.D. from Stanford, post-doc at MIT and lead project engineer at NASA. Wow.

RUSS

Oh, I don't think--

David elbows him.

DAVID

Oh yes. That was a good project. Blasted that sucker straight into the sun.

JIMMY

Says here it was a rover.

DAVID

It got too cocky.

JIMMY

See, that's the sort of out-of-the-box thinking we haven't had around here for a while. When can you start?

DAVID

Tomorrow?

Jimmy stands and shakes their hands.

JIMMY

Welcome to the Regional Air & Space Administration.

(CONTINUED)

RUSS

Thank you sir, we're excited to learn all about rockets.

JIMMY

(beat)

Hm?

DAVID

To learn about YOUR rockets.

David and Russ walk to the door. Annie pokes her head in.

JIMMY

Ernie called out sick, so he can't interview for janitor positions today. Just tell the man he got the job. I'm gonna go home early.

ANNIE

But sir--

JIMMY

--Annie, you can't keep interrupting me when I'm on my way out. It makes it much harder for me to avoid my responsibilities.

Jimmy walks over and gently closes the door, pushing Annie's head out of the way, then locks it.

INT. RECEPTION

Annie looks over at Brian.

ANNIE

Um. He said you got the job.

BRIAN

What? I'm not leaving until he comes out to speak to me.

ANNIE

You can't, he'll just wait you out. He's got a bathroom and a whole case of freeze dried yogurts in there.

Jimmy peaks out of the blinds. Brian sees him and stands up. Jimmy lets go and goes back to hiding in the dark.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

This is not a normal job hiring process. This whole place is not normal.

ANNIE

Come back tomorrow if you want the job. Or don't come back. I don't care. I've been going to night classes for Space Agency Management

BRIAN

Those are a thing?

ANNIE

Yeah, and when I take over this place, I'm firing everybody anyway.

She storms off. Brian looks around and gathers his things.

INT. PARKING LOT

Brian is sitting on the hood of his car, looking upset. David and Russ come out of the building. Brian comes up to them, holding a jumpsuit in his hand.

BRIAN

What the hell did you guys do?

DAVID

It's not against the law to turn your basement into a pool.

BRIAN

I got here this morning and they handed me a jumpsuit with my ID. It says I'm a janitor.

Russ leans in closer to look at the ID badge clipped to his chest.

RUSS

Lucky. We just got this dumb "Mission Control" job.

He holds up his ID.

BRIAN

Yeah, that's *my* job.

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

Then why does your ID say janitor?

The tram pulls up. There are several other employees already in the tram. Annie leans out.

ANNIE

Jump in.

BRIAN

There's been some sort of mixup.  
This isn't mine.

He holds up his jumpsuit.

ANNIE

But it's got your name on it.

DAVID

That's what I said.

ANNIE

Just get on and we'll get  
everything sorted at mission  
control.

David and Russ get on eagerly. Brian thinks it over for a second and gets onto the tram, dejected.

EXT. R.A.S. CAMPUS

The tram takes off and passes through a security checkpoint. The small asphalt path winds through a few trees and then opens up to the RSA campus. There are several launchpads, one with a rocket loaded up, and a large glass building in the center. David and Russ look around in awe. Even Brian seems a little impressed. Automatic doors open on the side, and the tram enters a tunnel. It winds its way to the center of the building and then stops at the employee drop off zone and everybody gets out.

RUSS

How far underground do you think we  
are?

BRIAN

There are windows right there.

RUSS

So like, 20 feet?

Jimmy and Ernie walk up to three new employees.

(CONTINUED)

ERNIE  
(to Brian)  
You're with me.

He motions to follow, and then turns around. Brian chases after him.

BRIAN  
Wait, there's been some sort of mixup.

They exit down a hallway.

JIMMY  
Usually the new janitors don't get second thoughts until they see sublevel 7. Anyway, let's introduce you to your team.

They take a quick escalator ride up to Mission Control, it's sprawling floor and busy desks. Jimmy points to clusters of people as he walks.

JIMMY  
We have engineering, navigation, avionics, maintenance. You will oversee all of them. And this is you.

He stops in front of a door labeled "Director." He opens it to an empty office. Russ spots his desk sitting outside the door and picks up his name placard:

Russ  
Assistant

RUSS  
Look, I have my own thing.

He covers up "istant"

RUSS  
Haha. Russ Butt.

DAVID  
So is there any sort of like, orientation?

JIMMY  
Nah, we used to have one, but it was more of a company sponsored nap time, so I axed that sucker. Like hell I'm going to pay for a bunch  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JIMMY (cont'd)  
of newbies to sit around and sleep  
through 40 hours of quality VHS  
movies about the fine intricacies  
of international space law.

DAVID  
That does seem pretty wasteful.

JIMMY  
We find things just sort of work  
out when you don't fuss over  
trifles. So welcome, and I'll leave  
you to get settled in. Just let us  
know what you need and Annie will  
order it.

Jimmy shakes David's hand and leaves. Russ waits until he's  
gone and runs around to sit in the chair and picks up the  
phone, mocking a phone call.

RUSS  
No, sorry, he's busy at meeting.

Dave gives him a thumbs up.

INT. JANITOR BREAK ROOM

Brian is pleading with Ernie, who hasn't stopped.

BRIAN  
I went to Stanford. I have a Ph.D.

Brian stops when he see's the janitor break room. There are  
all sorts of neat science things: robots, computers,  
quadcopters, whatever.

BRIAN  
Whoa, what is this?

ERNIE  
I was like you once: motivated,  
thought I was important. Went to a  
top engineering school and applied  
to an exciting new upstart private  
space company.

BRIAN  
Why are you a janitor then?

(CONTINUED)

ERNIE

Coincidence? Fate? Or just a computer glitch? The point is, look around you. As long as the trash gets taken out and the floor gets mopped, nobody asks where the janitor is. The freedom to tinker, think, live your life without distraction and nobody to answer to.

Ernie sits down in his lazy boy and turns on his massive TV screen.

BRIAN

But this place is enormous, it'd take hours to clean it.

Ernie snorts, pushes a button, and a ROBOT comes to life.

ERNIE

Take care of floor three.

ROBOT

Yes master.

It grabs a mop and wheels away. Ernie pulls out a large bound book and puts on his glasses.

ERNIE

Now sit down, and lets talk about your dissertation.

INT. MISSION CONTROL

Dave and Russ sit in the empty office. David is flipping through a catalog: 1970s FutureTech

DAVID

I had no idea you could put wood paneling on so many things. What we really need in here is one of those basketball machines...

RUSS

And a pizza.

DAVID

We're only allowed to order from this catalog, and I don't think they're going to have--

He turns the page

(CONTINUED)

DAVID

(cont)

Oh, they do have pizza.

Russ runs over to see. He reads aloud:

RUSS

"Crate of 500 freeze-dried pizzas."  
Oh my god, Dave, SPACE PIZZA.

DAVID

I already wrote it on the order  
form.

Jimmy pops his head in.

JIMMY

Mr. Director?

RUSS

That's Dr. Director to you!

JIMMY

Yes, of course. Sorry. Dr.  
Director? The crew have prepared  
something special for your first  
day, if you'd like to come see it.

DAVID

Is it in an alleyway?

JIMMY

Um, no?

DAVID

Ok then.

David and Russ follow Jimmy out to Mission Control. A bunch of technicians and engineers stand around a button, giddy. Sherman is the lead engineer.

SHERMAN

On behalf of all of us at Regional  
Air and Space, thank you for  
agreeing to be our new dad.

Jimmy elbows him.

SHERMAN

New boss. Earlier this week, we had  
a bit of a minor mishap with the  
Heavy Cob rocket.

(CONTINUED)

JIMMY  
It exploded.

SHERMAN  
I present to you: the heavy cob II.

DAVID  
Nice. I like how it's... heavier?

SHERMAN  
The problem with ethanol as a fuel source is that it just doesn't provide enough thrust. So we thought, why not stack two of them on top of each other?

RUSS  
You're already twice as close to space as you used to be.

SHERMAN  
Will you do the honor of pushing the launch button?

David reaches out a finger and pushes the button.

SHERMAN  
(dejected)  
We were going to do the countdown thing.

David shrugs. Through the window, the rocket fires up. All eyes in Mission Control turn to watch the rocket. Ernie and Brian arrive on the balcony that overlooks mission control. Nobody notices them. The rocket lifts off the ground, then stops. It's hovering about 5 feet, swaying back and forth, circling the platform. It falls over and explodes, like the last one.

SHERMAN  
Dammit!

He hands another tech a wad of cash from his pocket. They all shrug and return to their respective desks. Only Jimmy, Russ, and Dave are left standing by the button.

DAVID  
Is that it?

JIMMY  
Yeah. That's as far as we ever get. Good thing we hired ourselves a genius to get us to the next step!

(CONTINUED)

Jimmy slaps Dave on the back and walks away, laughing.

DAVE

Well that's not good.

RUSS

Do you think we could still get our old jobs at the gas station back?

DAVID

Do you know who invented rockets Russ? Nazis. Evil, twisted nazis. And if a bunch of pointy-helmet train spergs can figure it out, then we owe it to America to try.

RUSS

Hey, let's not bring trains into this.

DAVID

Our whole lives we've just been running back to that gas station every time things get hard. Me, with my marriage and kids, you from Juliard. Well I say this time we stay and fight, until they realize we're extremely unqualified and fire us for gross negligence.

RUSS

Yeah!

DAVID

Now let's go Wikipedia what the hell ethanol is.

They turn to leave. Russ bumps into the janitor robot.

RUSS

Watch it, dumb robot.

David and Russ leave. The robot narrows his eyes and beeps. Brian and Ernie watch David and Russ leave mission control.

BRIAN

I'm trapped in a nightmare.

ERNIE

I don't see any snake people.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

In first grade I ditched my best friend's birthday part to study for a spelling test. I turned down camping with my dad to do the extra problems in my algebra textbook. I said no when Stacy Smith asked me to the Said Hawkin's dance so I could work on my physics report. I never dated in college, hell I didn't even lose my virginity until I was 24, which I still consider an anomaly. I've kept my nose to the grindstone through college and graduate school. I've worked my whole life to prove to the world who I am.

ERNIE

Maybe you've been focusing on the wrong thing.

BRIAN

What's that mean?

ERNIE

I don't know. I'm just the janitor. You're the smart one.

Ernie walks away. Brian pauses for a second, then follows him down the hallway.

The end

David and Russ are in their office. David is busy reading something on the computer. Russ is leaning back in his chair, slowly swiveling back and forth. This goes on for like 30 seconds.

DAVID

Wait, they're using booze to power the rockets?

Russ doesn't respond. David goes back to reading. Russ stops and sits up.

RUSS

Oh, I did mean Niel Armstrong.