

NEIL BEFORE ME

Written by

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Amidst the space race in 1969, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin compete to be the first to land on the moon.

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INT/EXT. THE MOON - NIGHT? IS THERE NIGHT IN SPACE?

The Apollo 11 spacecraft is parked on the surface of the moon. MICHEAL COLLINS (30s, only in it for the check) sits in the cockpit whistling along to a parody of "Fly Me to The Moon" by *the* Frank Sinatra.

In the back of the shuttle is BUZZ ALDRIN (30s, asks himself what his country can do for him, not what he can do for his country) and NEIL ARMSTRONG (30s, not the brightest star in the solar system). Neil proudly holds an American flag.

They're about to jump, making history as the first men on the Moon! As Neil's about to jump, Buzz hesitates.

NEIL

Wait... what's your line?

BUZZ

Dude... we rehearsed this! After you plant the flag, I say something smart about the force of gravity...

NEIL

No! I mean... we're about to land on the Moon, man! We gotta say something groovy for people to quote! Like when Dr. King said "I wish I could dream--

BUZZ

WOOAHHHH! Don't go quoting the commies on me, Armstrong! You think a guy could escape politics in the vacuum of space...

Buzz checks his watch.

BUZZ (CONT'D)

We gotta hurry! We were supposed to jump a minute ago!

Neil rubs his helmet like he's scratching his head.

NEIL

OK, Sorry! What about:
"Moonwalkin's what men were made for!"

BUZZ

Just forget it! Uh... You do the line, I'll plant the flag. JUMP!

Buzz YANKS the flag out of Neil's hands and LEAPS off of the shuttle!

NEIL

What? No fair! I wanna do the flag!

Neil jumps after him! On the surface of the Moon, as Neil and Buzz wrestle over the American flag like children, we pan out: revealing something's off about this mission...

VOICE (O.S)

CUT! GET OFF OF EACH OTHER!

We pull further and further back to see huge OVERHEAD LIGHTS, a BOOM OPERATOR, and a TRIPOD holding a CAMERA... It's a FILM SET. The Moon landing was a sham after all!

The DIRECTOR (40s, didn't go to film school for this shit) RACES over to break up the two tussling astronauts.

DIRECTOR

What is wrong with you two? Do you know how important this is? You're lucky this was just a rehearsal, or we'd be up a creek!

Neil straightens up and salutes like he's back in the army.

NEIL

YES. GENERAL. DIRECTOR. SIR. Won't happen again!

DIRECTOR

SHUT IT! Listen to me! After lunch we're going LIVE! That means we only get one chance to pull this off and make people believe we actually sent you two ding-dongs to the moon. So until then, I need you two focused on memorizing your lines. No more funny business. Got it?

Neil and Buzz look at each other and then back to the director. They nod.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

At a lunch table, Collins glares at Neil and Buzz as they talk LOUDLY with food in their mouths.

NEIL

How about: "NEIL before me, Moon!"

BUZZ

Eh... What about: "Who knew space
would be so BUZZARE!"

They snicker. Collins rolls his eyes.

COLLINS

Swallow your food and get a clue!
We're about to win the space race
for America! The whole country,
shit, the whole world is gonna be
watching!

Buzz and Neil stop laughing. The camera pushes in on Collins
as he speaks. PATRIOTIC MUSIC starts to play.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

When you plant the stars and
stripes on the surface of the Moon,
whatever you say next will
automatically go down in history.
Forever. Your statement needs to be
something profound like... One
small step for a man... one giant
leap for mankind!

Beat. Neil and Buzz slowly turn to face each other. After a
moment, they BURST OUT LAUGHING.

NEIL

BOORRRING!

BUZZ

Ugh, that BLOWS!..

COLLINS

Oh, forget it! Say whatever stupid
catchphrase you want!

Collins picks up his meal tray and storms off. Neil nudges
Buzz.

NEIL

No wonder he got cast as the pilot!

Suddenly, the Director frantically enters the room, carrying
a stack of papers.

DIRECTOR

Boys, I've been sending NASA the
dailies and they are not happy with
our progress. So they've decided
the two of you are gonna land
separately...

The astronauts makes expressions like they were just told
they have two months to live.

NEIL AND BUZZ

WHAT!

He slams two copies of the new script onto the table.

THE DIRECTOR

And this time.. STICK TO THE
SCRIPT!

The Director storms off. Neil frantically flips through his script.

NEIL

Apollo #1 and Apollo #2? They
didn't even bother to include our
names! DAMN YOU NASA!

Neil looks up as if NASA is somewhere in the sky. Buzz's eyes go WIDE as he looks down at his script.

BUZZ

Wait... who's gonna be Apollo #1?!

Neil frowns.

NEIL

I guess I'll play #1. I'm just
bummed we're not jumping together
anymore-

BUZZ

WOAHH! Not so fast Armstrong, this
says Apollo #1 jumps first.

Beat. Neil shrugs.

NEIL

Oh? Well... it doesn't matter who
goes first, right? The other will
come out right after... and either
way, we're still the first two men
on the moon!

BUZZ

No, Neil... history doesn't work
that way. Think about any of your
life's milestones. First words,
first day of school, first car,
first date...

NEIL

First time she finally let me stick
it in the rear...

BUZZ

Exactly. Firsts are special. They're the only one that really counts. Even if we land seconds apart, only one of us will be the first man on the moon. And to the rest of the world, that's the only one who will matter.

Neil frowns. They sit in silence for a moment.

BUZZ (CONT'D)

Well, Neil, I know it's always been your dream to land on the moon. So, as your pal... I think I'll just let you go first.

NEIL

What?! Thanks Buzz! I'll go tell the Director!

Neil gets up and starts to walk off. Buzz calls after him.

BUZZ

Wait, Neil! Before you go... there's something you should know...

Neil turns around. Buzz smirks.

INT. MOON LANDING SET - DAY

Neil and Collins watch Buzz on the Moon set, practicing his superhero pose.

COLLINS

So, you really just gave the job over to Aldrin, huh? I can't believe you two were actually able to agree on something.

NEIL

Yeah. It was a tough decision. But after he warned me about the Russian hitman...

COLLINS

Russian hitman?

NEIL

Dude... think about it! The Moon landing won't make Buzz a hero, it'll make him a target.

INT. RUSSIAN HITMAN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

A TV screen displays Buzz, triumphantly landing on the moon. On a couch, THE RUSSIAN MAN (50's, soviet haircut) smokes a cigar as he watches in disgust.

NEIL (O.S)

After this tape airs, the whole world is gonna think we won the space race. Russia will be furious we beat them. And you know who they oughta blame? The dirty Yankee who planted the American flag on the Moon's surface.

The Russian Man glares at the sight of Buzz. He leans over to his coffee table and picks up a RED PHONE.

INT. BUZZ'S ROOM - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Buzz is sound asleep in his bed. The door creeps open...

NEIL (O.S.)

And Russia always gets their revenge.

A man with a PISTOL slowly enters the room, walks over to Buzz, and.... BAM! A GUNSHOT and a FLASH OF LIGHT take us back into reality.

INT. MOON LANDING SET - DAY

As he finishes the story, Neil looks HORRIFIED. Collins rolls his eyes.

COLLINS

(sarcastically)

Wow... Buzz is so... brave to sacrifice himself for our country!

NEIL

I know... I just can't believe he has to die so we can win the space race...

COLLINS

Well at least he'll die happy right?

They look over to see Buzz waving the American flag. Neil forces a bittersweet smile.

INT/EXT. SHUTTLE LANDING RAMP - DAY

Buzz stands on the landing ramp, ready to jump.

THE DIRECTOR (O.S)
 Apollo 11, this is mission control.
 It's time for you to land on the
 surface of the moon!

Just as Buzz is about to jump... Neil grabs him!

NEIL
 I'm sorry Buzz, but I can't let you
 die for me.

BUZZ
 What?! Neil... No, I wanna go
 first!

NEIL
 You can still jump, you just have
 to be second, that way the Russians
 won't come after you!

BUZZ
 No! No one cares about a baby's
 second steps! This is my moment!

Neil's expression shifts.

NEIL
 Your moment? Wait... there is no
 Russian hitman, is there?

INT. MOON LANDING SET - DAY

The director whispers from behind the camera.

THE DIRECTOR
 Buzz, that's was your cue! Jump!
 WE'RE LIVE!

INT. SHUTTLE LANDING RAMP - DAY

Buzz shouts at Neil, waving the American flag in his face!

BUZZ
 I'm sorry I lied, OK? But I flew 66
 combat missions in the war,
 graduated third in my class at West
 Point, and I'm studying for a PHD!
 (MORE)

BUZZ (CONT'D)

If anyone deserves to be the first man on the moon, it's me! You're just another astronaut. But I'm a star!

NEIL

You're right Buzz. You are better than me. You're a star... It should be you.

Buzz nods, relieved he's finally come around.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Astro-NOT!

ENTER SLOW MOTION: Neil yanks the flag from Buzz, whacking him over the head with it before JUMPING off of the ramp! Buzz lets out an inaudible SCREAM as Neil lands on the surface of the "MOON"!

NEIL (CONT'D)

Uhhh-ooOne small step for man, one giant LEAP for mankind!

INT/EXT. APOLLO 11 - DAY

In the corner of the set, Collins sits in the pilot chair of the Apollo 11, DISTRAUGHT.

COLLINS

I should've auditioned for Gilligan's Island...

CUT TO BLACK.

POST CREDIT'S SCENE:

FADE IN:

INT. RUSSIAN HITWOMAN'S LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

A TV screen displays Neil landing on the moon. On a couch, someone smokes a cigar. A RUSSIAN WOMAN (40's, similar soviet haircut) She watches in disgust. After a moment, she leans over to her coffee table and picks up a RED PHONE.

THE RUSSIAN WOMAN

Da! Yes. You know what to do.
Russia always gets its revenge.