

ARGO

by
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Based on true events

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Smoke House
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INT. BATHROOM STALL - DAY

LUKE KNOWLES, late 20s, a slight Texan drawl. His face is bruised and his mouth is swollen. He's cowering on the floor of the stall next to a toilet filled with vomit and shit. He speaks quietly and urgently.

KNOWLES

She's *looking* at me, is first of all, she's *staring* at me like a Chinese waiter and the *dress*, Shirley Temple, Good Ship Lollipop, she's *saying off*, take it off her, and I hear it, school p.a., Voice of America, and it's loud, it's saying, *This is not a clean world. This is a dirty world.* So I said it, I said, 'Here I am Lord. I got no strings to hold me down so You Show Me. You show me how to clean this dirt --

Someone -- and we can only see his back -- leans down, close to Knowles. Tries to pick him up. Knowles recoils. Then, a voice. It's quiet, and patient, and it feels like safety.

MENDEZ (O.S.)

Look at me. I will help you, but you need to trust me. This is what I do. I get people out.

A blank look on Knowles's face. Unclear whether he understands this, or anything.

The reverse: TONY MENDEZ, mid-40s, our hero. Fifth generation American. He's had 19 years with the CIA and he's the best exfiltration specialist the agency's ever had.

MENDEZ (CONT'D)

Take a minute.

And Knowles nods. Barely, but he nods.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Tony leaves the stall and closes the stall door. We're in an empty and decaying bathroom in need of a Five Year Plan.

Super: MOSCOW - March 6, 1979

And a MAN IN A BLACK COAT, 30s, enters. Goes to a rusty sink to wash his hands. Tony stands next to him, washing his own hands, and speaks, barely moving his lips.

MENDEZ

Who was she?

The man -- BURROUGHS -- answers, as quietly, and in American English.

BURROUGHS

A prostitute. He used her stockings. Around her neck.

MENDEZ

How the fuck did he get past O.M.S.?

BURROUGHS

Every screening with flying colors. No schizos in the family... Tony. Ops just gave a stand-down. Colman's saying give him up to the *ments*. Disown.

MENDEZ

He had full officer status. He comes out.

BURROUGHS

You're not authorized.

Mendez turns the faucet to full and leans in to Burroughs, holding his arm. Hard.

MENDEZ

(in Burroughs's ear)

In his rotting brain is the name of every embassy chauffeur and typing girl he's ever brought in for us. We disown, he talks, they die.

Mendez holds out his hand. Burroughs hesitates. Then hands over two PASSPORTS with burgundy covers.

Knowles, now standing, opens the stall door.

INT. LENINGRADSKY RAIL STATION - DAY

Mendez, guiding Knowles, who moves his lips like an autist. They walk out a door where a BATHROOM ATTENDANT, a pensioner in her 70s with an Eisenstein face, sits outside with a change cup.

And they move into the crowds of a busy Old World-style rail station with a drab Soviet make-over, a bust of Lenin on a pedestal.

Mendez leads Knowles past SOVIET GUARDS wearing shapkas and holding automatic weapons. Down a train platform where signs, in Cyrillic and Latin alphabet, show the destination: HELSINKI. To the second car of a boarding train.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

A KGB BORDER OFFICER waits inside the train, at the door to the cabin. Mendez gives him one of the burgundy passports. Knowles, on another planet.

 MENDEZ (RUSSIAN)
 My brother is ill. I'm taking him
 home to Helsinki.

Border Officer looks at Knowles, then at the passport -- it's a FINNISH PASSPORT with Knowles's picture. Border Officer waves Knowles into the car and Knowles goes. But he STOPS Mendez.

 BORDER OFFICER (RUSSIAN)
 Your passport.

Mendez looks into the crowded car where Knowles now moves down the crowded aisle. He gives the Border Officer another burgundy passport. Border Officer opens it: another FINNISH PASSPORT with Mendez's picture on it.

Now Knowles is invisible behind passengers jamming luggage into the overhead racks.

Border Officer feels the texture of Mendez's passport. Holds it up to light. Looks at the name and address again.

 BORDER OFFICER (CONT'D)
 (now, speaking in FINNISH)
 You live on Temple Street. Near the
 food stalls.

 MENDEZ
 (answering in FINNISH)
 No, sir. The food stalls are in
 Market Square. On the other side of
 the city.

It was a test. The Border Officer, satisfied, nods Mendez through.

Mendez, moving inside the railroad car, scanning the seats. No Knowles. Pushing past Russians in the aisles. Still, no Knowles.

Now Tony, on the opposite end of the cabin, goes to the door of the train looks out onto the platform. Hears a voice. In English.

KNOWLES (O.S.)

Look!

Knowles, standing at the edge of the track opposite.

KNOWLES (CONT'D)

(yelling to Tony)

I'M CLEAN NOW!

And with that, Knowles STEPS OFF THE PLATFORM AND IN FRONT OF A TRAIN that is pulling onto the opposite track.

A moment while this lands on Tony. Then, alarm sirens. Russians converging from all directions, rushing to the tracks.

Tony stands at the door, watching, as his train starts up and pulls away.

FADE TO BLACK.

WARNER BROS. presents (etc.)

An AMERICAN FLAG is burning in the street. We're watching ARCHIVE FOOTAGE of anti-American protests in Tehran, in front of the American Embassy. The long-accruing rage of a long-suffering population has found its outlet here, at a black gate on Avenue Taleghani.

Effigies of Jimmy Carter -- crowds chanting "Magbar Cartar! Magbar Ahmrika!" -- fists in the air.

Then, in a famous piece of archive footage, something simple happens. A YOUNG MAN IN A SWEATER climbs the gate and makes it to the other side. Maybe we see it happen twice or three times, or magnified.

Super: TEHRAN - NOVEMBER 4, 1979

And now, we see the REVERSE of that famous shot. This isn't archive footage any more. We're looking at the The P.O.V. of a MARINE from within the U.S. Embassy, from Guard Post Number One.

MAIN TITLE over a CLOSED-CIRCUIT TELEVISION image: IRANIAN PROTESTORS are coming over the fence.

VOICE OF MARINE

Fort Apache is breached. Fort Apache is BREACHED.

INT. U.S. EMBASSY, CHANCERY - MORNING

Total chaos inside the Chancery, the nerve center of the embassy. ANN SWIFT, 39, thick glasses, Deputy Political Officer.

ANN SWIFT

(on the phone)

... a dozen, a couple dozen ...

(she looks to an AIDE by
the window)

Okay now he's saying hundreds...
Bruce? He's saying hundreds.

EXT. U.S. EMBASSY GROUNDS - MORNING

YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN -- about 2/3 men 1/3 women -- the men dressed in sweaters, button down shirts, some with flak jackets; about half the Young Women wear full chador, the others sweaters, jeans, and veils. They are now screaming and shaking their fists at the doors to the Chancery Building. Many of them wear bibs with pictures of AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI.

When one YOUNG MAN wearing a green military field jacket raises his fist, we can see that he has a concealed AUTOMATIC WEAPON in his clothes.

INT. CHANCERY - MORNING

The noise of the crowd outside -- the sound of DOCUMENT SHREDDERS, everyone on a different phone. It's like an emergency room where the patient is the whole building.

ANN SWIFT

Now Al's ... Hello?

(on the phone)

Al's saying they just want to stage
a sit-in ... yeah, I think ... Does
Ed have the Ministry? Can we get
some fucking police please?

INT. MARINE GUARD POST 1 - MORNING

MARINE JIMMY GALLEGOS, 20s, hangs up a phone. To another Marine.

JIMMY GALLEGOS

(trying to process what he
just heard)

He says don't fire. He says open
the gates.

U.S. EMBASSY GROUNDS - MORNING

A WIDE of the gates opening and A FLOOD OF HUMAN BODIES entering the compound.

Then, the sound of women wailing and praying --

INT. U.S. EMBASSY, TEHRAN; CONSULATE BUILDING - MORNING

It's two IRANIAN WOMEN in chadors in the floor, praying for deliverance. This is the part of the Embassy that grants visas, and these people were applying this morning.

The LIGHTS in the building go out and there is a SCREAM from the women. Move past them to find...

SIX EMBASSY EMPLOYEES -- four men, two women (much more about them later) are in a kitchen area in the office.

One of the six, LEE SCHATZ, 33, has taken from his wallet a battered holy card with the Infant of Prague on it and is mouthing a prayer to himself.

MARK LIJEK, 29, is attending to his wife CORA LIJEK, 26, who is sitting on the floor, breathing heavily.

BOB ANDERS, 55, an embassy consular officer, on the kitchen phone.

BOB ANDERS
 (on the phone)
 ... yeah ... yes ...
 (to the others)
 Ann wants us to stay where we are.
 Police are coming --

EXT. U.S. EMBASSY GROUNDS - DAY

An IRANIAN POLICE OFFICER kisses one of the PROTESTORS on the cheek in a warm gesture. Another APPLAUDS.

Hell breaking loose. Now there must be a THOUSAND ANGRY PROTESTORS on the Embassy grounds. YOUNG MEN now carry AUTOMATIC WEAPONS openly. A YOUNG WOMAN IN A CHADOR speaks into a captured Marine walkie: the sight is bizarre, like seeing a nun with a gun. A BEARDED YOUNG MAN in a green jacket smashes a basement window on the Chancellery Building.

INT. CONSULATE BUILDING - MORNING

KATHY STAFFORD, 28, is now attending to Cora.

MARK LIJEK
Wolf-pack, Joe --

JOE STAFFORD
 Listen to me.

MARK LIJEK
 My wife is pregnant -- she can't
breathe -- I'm not taking her
 running through the goddamn --

JOE STAFFORD, 35, consular officer, choosing his words to the other five in his group.

JOE STAFFORD
 (interrupting)
 Listen to me. We are in the only
 building with an exit direct to the
 street, away from the riot. We are
going.

A hand on Mark Lijek's shoulder. He turns around. Cora, now standing up. She nods at her husband.

And we start to hear the sound of a CROWD shouting --

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE

The much-played clip of AL GOLACINSKI, embassy security chief, blindfolded, being prodded and led down the front stairs of the embassy. Angry Crowds jeering at him.

MALICK (V.O.)
 At least 60. They say they're not
 letting them go til we expel the
 shah.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS CENTER - 3:30 A.M.

All hell breaking loose here too -- telexes from all over the world -- KERRIGAN, MALICK, BRICE, 30s, State Department mid-level Aides entering the Ops Center.

KERRIGAN
 These fucks can hit us, we
 can't hit back?

MALICK
 Mossadeq -- Banquo's ghost --

BRICE
 (to Kerrigan)
 A fly can't bird but a bird can
 fly.

ANALYST
 (entering, to
 Lieutenant)
 We've got a red coming in
 from 0-12 -- Canada --

KERRIGAN
 Why'd we let the prick into
 the country?

MALICK

Things have consequences. We de-
balled an entire population --

SUPER: S/ES-0, STATE DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS CENTER

<p>ANALYST 2 Ah-yup, sombody's lobster trap drifted into their wah- tahs -- No doot about it --</p>	<p>KERRIGAN You think the fucking <u>Russians</u> would put up with this? I'm serious --</p>
---	--

BRICE
(to Analyst 2)
Get rid of it --

Analyst 2 picks up the ringing line.

ANALYST 2
(picking up phone)
Operations.

PUSH IN on Analyst 2 as he listens.

ANALYST 2 (CONT'D)
(to the others)
Shhhhhhhhh....
(then)
Hold on holdonholdonholdon --

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT, SEVENTH FLOOR - NIGHT

HICKEY, 40s, balding, skinny, perpetually stressed. He picks
up a phone.

HICKEY
... with the Canadians?
(he covers the phone, to
the room)
Five got out!

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT, SEVENTH FLOOR - NIGHT

Setting up a war room in the background. Fluid -- camera
seems to glide from scene to scene -- Hickey charges down a
hallway. Kerrigan and a couple of Hickey's guys, WEINER and
BATES, follow.

KERRIGAN
Six.

HICKEY
Gulden told me five.

BATES
 (turning behind him)
 Schafer! Schafer!

KERRIGAN
 (to Hickey)
Six now. Another one joined
 them. Six.

WEINER
 (entering)
 You still haven't found
 Schafer?

HICKEY
 How'd they get out?

BATES
 No, I was screaming his name
 cause cause I was fucking
 him.

KERRIGAN
 I guess they -- ran.

HICKEY (CONT'D)
 (to Brice)
 Oh, you think?

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS CENTER - NIGHT

SIX STAPLED PAGES with PHOTOGRAPHS. In the hands of SECRETARY OF STATE CYRUS VANCE, 62, a former Navy man who is used to telling important people what to do.

VANCE
 ... this is them?
 (to Hickey)
 Explain it to him...

Hickey speaks to a STATE UNDERSECRETARY as we begin to move down a line of panicked State Aides.

HICKEY
 Six Americans escaped the embassy
 during the takeover. They're hiding
 at the Canadian Ambassador's house.

KERRIGAN
 Do they stay put? Do they head for
 the border? Are we attempting
 rescue?

BRICE
 Hold for the Secretary --

VANCE
 (as he's handed another
 phone)
 -- there's no one -- hello?
 (into the phone)
 This is he ...
 (to an Aide)
 (MORE)

VANCE (CONT'D)
 Can we get Ottawa patched? That's
twice I asked, Jenny --

Coming back -- on phone --

VANCE (CONT'D)
 Is White House joining?

INT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

PUSH toward a door that opens and MEN IN SUITS. It's chaos in here. Maps of Iran. The big three plus foreign networks on the monitors.

HAMILTON JORDAN, 40s, Carter's White House Chief of Staff, comes into his office. Passing an AIDE who is putting oranges into a bowl on his desk as his office becomes a crisis center.

JORDAN
 (to Vance)
 We wish it was the fucking Den of Espionage.
 (to Aide; cross)
 Stop giving me fruit. I don't want fruit... C.I. had three people there, Lighthouse for the Blind, didn't see a revolution coming --

He's wearing a sweater and jeans, was pulled from a long weekend. A White House foreign policy ANALYST hangs on his words. JON TITTERTON, a WASP-y Aide to Jordan, is near.

TITTERTON
 The six with the Canadians --

JORDAN
 (to Aide)
 Bananas count. Bananas are fruit.

He throws the bananas across the room. Now Vance looks to a monitor among four, showing footage of a BLINDFOLDED HOSTAGE in front of the Embassy. In fact, all the networks are showing some variation on this shot.

AIDES everywhere on a staggering array of phones and a cat's-cradle of wires.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
 Sleeping dogs. We've got 60 with guns to their heads.

TITTERTON

-- who are safer than these six at this point. Rogue komiteh are out hunting, shooting first --

ANALYST

(hanging up a phone)
Bani-Sadr's saying it'll be over in 24 hours.

JORDAN

The six of them are safe for the moment. They're hiding. Let them hide.

CUT TO BLACK.

Hold on black for a breath. Then, the sound of cars.

EXT. GEORGE WASHINGTON PARKWAY - MORNING

Yellow ribbons along trees on the George Washington Parkway, which connects D.C. to Langley, Virginia. A Lincoln drives by.

Super: LANGLEY, VIRGINIA -- 69 DAYS LATER

EXT. PARKING LOT, CIA - MORNING

JACK O'DONNELL, 60s, gets out of his Lincoln and heads toward a white building that looks like a college campus. We're in the era of the Old Building of the CIA. Gleaming green glass is fifteen years away.

Jack is Boston Irish, ended up in the Company because he was Eisenhower's bodyguard in France during the War. He's a Second Deputy Chief of Operations.

INT. CIA DIRECTORATE OF OPERATIONS - MORNING

The 1979 CIA headquarters: nothing sleek or sexy about the interior either. An open area of desks where Woodward and Bernstein might be spilling coffee on their thick 70s ties. Papers and files everywhere. Trash emptying happens only once a week. Cigarette and cigar butts in ashtrays. Everything is perpetually a mess. And typewriters. The constant percussive sound of telexes and typing is the metronome that beats out the day here.

O'Donnell is passing JOEY SEGUNA, 50s, an analyst.

O'DONNELL
 Officer! Gambling on government
 property!

SEGUNA
 Packers at Detroit. Put you down?

O'DONNELL
 Saturday game, right?

SEGUNA
 Saturday.

O'DONNELL
 I'm lucky on Saturdays.

He goes to a small messy KITCHEN AREA to get coffee. On the coffeepot somebody's pinned a note: CHANGE FILTER IF YOU USE!
 DO UNTO OTHERS.

WIDE: A young AIDE comes almost running up to O'Donnell. Says something we can't hear. O'Donnell leaves his styrofoam coffee cup steaming and follows the Aide.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, LANGLEY - MORNING

O'DONNELL
Ten weeks State's sitting on this?

O'Donnell is sitting face to face with HAL SAUNDERS, State Department Iran Working Group, late 40s, bloodshot eyes. He looks exhausted. He hands O'Donnell pages with STAFF PHOTOGRAPHS of SIX PEOPLE.

SAUNDERS
 We got the call the day it went down. The six of them went out a back exit, *Brits* turned them away, *Kiwis* turned them away. The Canadians took them in. They've been there since.

O'DONNELL
 Black for the moment?

SAUNDERS
 For the moment. Trevor says we've got komiteh with guns going door-to-door like Jehovah's Witnesses looking for escapees. Executions on the spot for any they find.

A beat while that sinks in.

O'DONNELL

Carter?

SAUNDERS

Shitting enough bricks to build the pyramids. He wants them out. We want to set a meeting with your best exfil guy.

O'DONNELL

What you probably want is my second best. Upstairs tends not to like my best exfil guy.

SAUNDERS

Why? Who's your best exfil guy?

INT. O'TOOLE'S BAR - NIGHT

MENDEZ

Now O'Dooley himself was amazed at the sight/ Especially to see his own wife/ Attempting to steal Sergeant Henley's chapeau/ A woman at her time of life ...

Tony. Who is, at the moment, shitfaced. Singing into a microphone on a small stage used for events priced out of the Knights of Columbus Hall.

We're at a retirement party. Balloons and co-workers mixed with family. Mendez goes into the crowd and pulls JIMMY TOUZANI, 60s, the retiree, who kind of knows the words to the song, up from his table.

MENDEZ & TOUZANI

He soon smelled a rat! To the kettle he ran/He sniffed and "Begorra!" cried he/ I'll make it bad news for the man who put booze/ In the kettle of five o'clock tea!

Applause. Microphone screeches and a couple of the KIDS put their fingers in their ears.

MENDEZ

I just, I wanna say to Jimmy... we're gonna miss this sonofabitch. I wanna say -- Now this is a... This is a great American. 27 years this man gave his country, and --
(applause)
And what has got to show for it? Look. A trinket with a bird on it.

He holds up a SILVER CIA MEDAL. The medal engraved with a CIA eagle given to retiring officers. Mendez bites it. The crowd stirs a little. The fast dive from Amusing Drunk to something else begins.

 MENDEZ (CONT'D)

 Cause they don't knight men like
 this any more. They knight... where
 is he? Where's Engell? Assholes
 like this one...

He points into the crowd. An awkward silence. ADAM ENGELL,
40s, prematurely jowly, looks into his beer.

 MENDEZ (CONT'D)

 There he is. His Majesty the Deputy
 Chief, never did a day in the
 field. Took the Mayflower to Yale,
 his family tree's a wreath.

 (lifts his drink)

 That's what goes up in our
 organization. Shit floats to the
 top o'the bowl. Me and Jimmy, we...

Touzani puts his arm around Mendez to lead him away.

 TOUZANI

 C'mon, Tony.

 MENDEZ

 The mandarins are gone. This is the
 last white tiger, right here.
 You're the last white tiger,
 sweetheart.

He plants a kiss on Touzani's cheek. Another couple of guys
come to help Mendez down.

 MENDEZ (CONT'D)

 (half sung in an Irish
 brogue)

 O'Dooley got rich on an aqueduct
 job and he made a considerable pile

 --

Tony falls, his drink falling out of his hand. Is helped up.

INT. APARTMENT - LATE

Tony enters his apartment, turns on a light. The place is
full of unpacked boxes, like he's recently moved in.

Drunk is giving way to hung-over. He looks at a large telephone answering machine. No messages. He thinks. Then hits a button on it.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Hi, this is Christine, Tony, and Michael. Please leave us a message.

Tony thinks for a moment. Hits REWIND. Then he hits RECORD.

MENDEZ

Hi, this is Tony. Please leave me a message.

He hits PLAY.

VOICE OF MENDEZ

Hi, this is Tony. Please leave me a message.

He rewinds. Hits RECORD again.

MENDEZ

Hi, this is Tony. Please leave me a message.

Rewinds. But now the phone starts to RING.

INT. LANGLEY, N.E. DIVISION - MORNING

Mendez -- now wide-awake -- and O'Donnell walk fast down a hallway.

The CIA hallways: white concrete with large windows. People with laminated badges -- always visible on everyone -- and folders with red stripes on them, walk with purpose.

O'DONNELL

Canadian wire traffic calls them
The Houseguests. They were embassy
employees.

O'Donnell hands Mendez files with each of the people he mentions. Clipped to the files, their State Department photos.

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)

Mark and Cora Lijek.

When he names them, we cut quickly to the Houseguests getting their State Department staff photos taken. Getting a better look at them than we did at the embassy evacuation...

Mark Lijek, boyish, wearing thick 70s glasses. His wife Cora, also wearing glasses: short, pretty, hair pulled back in a headband. Camera FLASHES on them.

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)
Joe and Kathy Stafford.

Joe, a high forehead and serious eyes. Kathy, soft features, the good-mannered smile of her Southern upbringing. FLASH and FLASH.

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)
Lee Schatz.

Lee, Idaho native, thick moustache like the Brawny paper towel man. FLASH.

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)
Bob Anders.

Heavy-set. Could be a college professor, maybe one who hits on his students. FLASH.

MENDEZ
Are they being hunted?

O'DONNELL
We got Revolutionary Guards combing the city for anybody who ever looked at an American. Six Yankees are the jackpot.

MENDEZ
Canadian Ambassador's house?

O'DONNELL
But now the Canadians have had it. Foreign secretary thinks if they shelter them any longer, they're gonna be next. She cornered Vance in Brussels and told him she's serving eviction papers.

MENDEZ
Who else knows they're there?

Somebody gets into the elevator. The conversation STOPS DEAD.

INT. D.O. FLOOR - HALLWAY

Elevator doors open and the conversation continues.

O'DONNELL

Just the families. Meanwhile, some genius in the embassy was keeping a mug book of everybody who worked there.

MENDEZ

Jesus Christ.

O'DONNELL

We think it got shredded before they got in, but the pricks are re-assembling the shreds. They've got carpet-weaver sweatshop kids putting Humpty back together again.

(to an Aide)

Hold that!

(the door; they go through)

If the assholes can read OR add, any minute they're gonna figure out they're six short of a full deck. They're gonna make an example of anybody who escaped, Tony. Shot on sight or standing-room-only for six beheadings in the square.

They go into a room where a meeting is beginning at a long conference table.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

CHUCK COGAN, N.E./South Asia Division Chief, is in charge. At the meeting: HENRY DOWNING, 50s, a Directorate of Operations officer; and ROBERT PENDER, 40s, from the State Department.

COGAN

Okay?

DOWNING

Bob Pender from State O.S. He's been talking to Morgan and ExtAff. Bob.

PENDER

What we like for this are bicycles.

DOWNING

We've identified backroads from the Shemiran district -- a couple of rat lines through the mountains to the crossing at Tabriz --

PENDER

Cars are off the table because of the roadblocks. So we wait till the weather clears up then we deliver six bikes and provide maps to the Turkish border.

He goes to a map on an easel, indicating the north of Iran.

COGAN

Can they all-- I mean, can they ride bikes?

PENDER

We're prepared to send in somebody to teach them.

MENDEZ

Or you can send in training wheels and wait at the border with Gatorade.

COGAN

Sorry?

People shift in the room.

MENDEZ

It's 300 miles to the Turkish crossings. They'd need six months of decathlon training and a support crew behind them with a tire pump.

O'DONNELL

Tony's an exfil spesh.

Pender and Cole look at each other.

MENDEZ

The only way out's through the airport. You build them new identities, a moses goes in and takes them out on a commercial flight.

DOWNING

They wouldn't get through airport control. Komiteh own the place. The six of them have American accents.

Mendez takes a long pause. Massages the bridge of his nose.

MENDEZ

You know what the problem is here? Exfils are like abortions.

(MORE)

MENDEZ (CONT'D)

 You don't wanna need one, but when
 you do, you don't do the shit
 yourself. See, what you're doing is
 bending a clothes-hanger and
 sticking it up your cooch.

INT. OUTSIDE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The participants are leaving the meeting. Tony is standing in the hall smoking a cigarette. O'Donnell stops at the door, looks at Tony, shakes his head, walks on.

INT. MENDEZ APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mendez enters his dark apartment with a bag of Chinese takeout. He stands looking at the empty room. For a long beat.

INT. MENDEZ HOUSE - NIGHT (CROSS-CUTTING)

MICHAEL MENDEZ, 8 and about to turn 9, is watching a movie on the couch. He picks up on the second ring.

 MENDEZ (O.S.)

 Buddy-man.

 MICHAEL

 Mom's asleep.

INT. MENDEZ APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (CROSS-CUTTING)

Empty cans and Chinese food containers on a coffee table.

 MENDEZ

 You studying your words?

 MICHAEL

 Yeah.

But Tony can hear a television soundtrack with ominous electronic music.

 MENDEZ

 What do I hear?

 MICHAEL

 (coming clean)

Battlestar Galactica. Am I in
 trouble?

A beat.

MENDEZ
What channel?

 MICHAEL
Nine.

Mendez turns on his living room television to the three-hour BATTLESTAR GALACTICA made-for-tv movie plays. Dirk Benedict shoots laser beams at robot soldiers in a canyon landscape.

 MENDEZ
Catch me up.

 MICHAEL
Okay, so the Cylons are robots,
right? They were created by these
reptile people who are extinct
now...

CUT TO:

A HIGH ANGLE on Mendez, asleep, with the phone near his ear, a couple more empty cans near him. The last moments of the film playing on tv. Mendez half opens his eyes when he hears insistent knocking on the front door.

 MENDEZ
 (into the phone)
Michael?

INT. RURAL VIRGINIA HOUSE - NIGHT

Michael, on the couch, also asleep, also with the phone near his ear.

INT. MENDEZ APARTMENT - NIGHT

More knocking. Mendez puts the phone on the hook. Opens the door. O'Donnell.

 O'DONNELL
Two hours I'm getting busy signals.

Mendez gestures for O'Donnell to come inside, but he doesn't.

 O'DONNELL
I asked the Kids to meet you on C
Street in the morning. You work
with them on identities and cover
stories for the airport. Come up
with something we like and we'll go
pitch upstairs. You can run it. If
you wanna run it.
 (MORE)

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)
 (then, an afterthought)
 It's gonna take a miracle to get
 them out. And the Ayatollah's
 outlawed miracles.

O'Donnell turns and walks away. Mendez watches him go.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

At dinner around a dining room table: the SIX HOUSEGUESTS;
 KEN TAYLOR, 40s, Canadian ambassador. He has salt and pepper
 hair in a 70s permanent, thick glasses, does much to support
 the myth that Canadians are always in a good mood. Next to
 him is PAT TAYLOR, Filipino, 40s, a very good ambassador's
 wife and an even better doctor or microbiology. We're joining
 various conversations.

TAYLOR
 They say rain but it feels like
 snow to me.

PAT TAYLOR
 (to Lee Schatz)
 He looked like a cartoon witch
 doctor, everything but the bone
 through his nose, but he gave her
 this herbal stuff...

Mark Lijek starts to pour wine into Cora Lijek's glass. She
 puts her hand over the glass.

MARK LIJEK
 I forgot.

Joe Stafford, keeping to himself.

KATHY STAFFORD
 (to Joe Stafford)
 You ok?

MARK LIJEK
 (to Cora Lijek)
 Tell him what you said about
 Martin.

MARK LIJEK (CONT'D) CORA LIJEK
 (then, in Martin's Noel I said ...
 Coward voice)
 Mahhr-tin.

CORA LIJEK
 You're terrible. You're so bad.
 (then, to Bob Anders)
 (MORE)

CORA LIJEK (CONT'D)

I said he had a personality like a case of the clap. And he *heard* me.

Noooo.
BOB ANDERS

CORA LIJEK
He was coming out of the elevator, but it didn't -- that sound it makes, y'know -- *ding* --

BOB ANDERS
It didn't ding.

CORA LIJEK
It didn't ding. So I'm going on and on, no idea he's standing there --

The sound of a fork on a glass. Ken Taylor is standing up. Holding his wine glass.

TAYLOR
I read today that Tehran was voted the second most desirable city in the world to live in. Everywhere else tied for first.
(he's good at this)
To getting through ten weeks. To our guests.

LEE SCHATZ
(raising his glass)
Our hosts. Mr. Ambassador...

BOB ANDERS
Hear, hear ...

CORA LIJEK
And Mrs.

But the liquid in their wine glasses is beginning to shake. The noise of a HELICOPTER. It's abrupt and loud. Searchlights reflect of the china. The mood changes.

TAYLOR
(trying to still be pleasant)
You should get into the crawl space.

INT. CIA, O.T.S. DIVISION; FOGGY BOTTOM OFFICES - MORNING

ANGLE - An old black and white TV --

FRANK REYNOLDS
Today, a clear threat to place the remaining 50 Americans on trial as spies.*

Television cuts to NILOFUR EKTEBAR --- a.k.a., TEHRAN MARY - the Penn-educated Tokyo Rose of the hostage crisis, the spokeswoman for the hostage-takers. She's reading a statement to the camera. (*America Held Hostage broadcast, ABC News, 12/8/79)

In the room: the KIDS. Five analysts with the O.T.S. (Office of Technical Services) Division. MARIO MALINOV, early 30s, is Bulgarian and has an accent. Like many of the O.T.S. officers of the 70s, he was hired after emigrating from behind the Iron Curtain. Malinov is ambitious and speaks with the bluntness of Eastern Europe. LAMONT, late 20s, a Master's from the Woodrow Wilson School. ROSSI, SLAVIN, CREEELY -- 30s.

<p>TEHRAN MARY (on TV, perfect American English) Those who remain here are spies and will be treated as spies who have interfered with the sovereignty of the people of Iran.</p>	<p>LAMONT (watching) If you're gonna have a propaganda girl, get a cute one. She looks like a potato.</p>
---	---

Mendez enters the room where the tv sits on a shelf. It's a run-down conference room that's also the graveyard of a few vending machines. These are the oldest CIA offices, former OSS campus adjacent to the State Department.

MENDEZ
I'm Mendez. I'm in charge 'til they take their medication upstairs.

INT. CIA, O.T.S. WAR ROOM - AFTERNOON

The Kids function like a group of grad students at MIT trying to finish a problem set before the uppers wear off. Mendez is the oldest in the room by what feels like 200 years.

MALINOV
Reporters Option again. They issued 70-something --

<p>SLAVIN -- visas for American journalists.</p>	<p>74.</p>	<p>LAMONT</p>
--	------------	---------------

ROSSI
And the Revolutionary Guards keep them on 74 leashes.

Mendez is massaging his forehead.

MENDEZ

They get caught with journalist
creds, you've got Peter Jennings
with a noose around his neck in an
hour.

LAMONT

World Noose Tonight.

MALINOV

(almost singsong)
Again. North American accents
give us limited options. So
we get the Canadians to issue
them passports...

LAMONT

Oh, c'mon, that was funny.

ROSSI

You think they're gonna leave
Canadians alone?

MENDEZ

Nobody's chanting 'Death to
Canada.' More.

MALINOV

They're Do Gooders.

MENDEZ

More.

MALINOV

Six Canadians who've been over
there inspecting crops in the
countryside. Making sure the kids
get enough to eat. Get them creds
for an agricultural charity --

Malinov pulls from the binder a photograph of an emaciated
kid in Namibia.

Mendez starts to go through a newspaper on the table. As if
distracted by something.

MALINOV (CONT'D)

Feed the Children shit --
G.A.D. can make binders with
starving kids --

LAMONT

These kids are black. These
are African kids.

ROSSI

Are there starving kids in
Iran?

SLAVIN

We can get ethnically
appropriate
kids.

LAMONT
I'm sure there's skinny
kids..

MALINOV
A logo with... seeds. "Seeds
of Hope" ...

Mendez holds a page from the newspaper up to Malinov.

MENDEZ
What do you see in this picture?

A beat. Malinov doesn't like this, but he'll play.

MALINOV
Tehran.

MENDEZ
What's on the ground?

MALINOV
Snow.

MENDEZ
So what crops are the do-gooders
inspecting under Frosty?
(after a beat of silence)
Let's graduate from kindergarten.

MALINOV
Okay, three hours in here -- you
got any ideas? Or you just got
spitballs.

MENDEZ
I don't get paid to educate you.

And with that he picks up his stuff and goes. The room is
silent.

INT. CIA, CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Tony stands at a vending machine eyeing a 2-tablet pack of
Excedrin. He puts money in the machine. The Excedrin gets
stuck halfway down. He bangs on the machine. Hard. Harder.

INT. FORD BRONCO - NIGHT

Mendez listens to the radio as he drives home along the
Roosevelt Memorial Bridge, the Washington Monument beyond.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

For the first time in history, the White House Christmas tree was taken down today after never having been lit, as the cruel stalemate in Iran continues.

This is a montage that jumps around the world -- scenes of our principals and overlapping news accounts compete for attention.

INT. MUSHROOM INN - NIGHT

A dark room where most of the 53 AMERICAN HOSTAGES are kept. Separated by dividers that keep them in groups of two.

One of the HOSTAGE TAKERS -- a 21 year old with an automatic weapon -- plays with his gun.

INT. SMALL TOWN BAR - DAY

News footage of men inside a small-town bar. It's a broadcast of RON MILLER reporting from "barometer community" Pecatonica, Illinois, on ABC New's nightly program, America Held Hostage. (*11/21/79)

RON MILLER (V.O.)

So, like the government in Washington, the people in Pecatonica are grappling for solutions.

JACK STROUP, Vietnam vet, red beard, a cap with the Kenworth trucks logo, a denim jacket.* (*This, and all t.v. news footage in the script, is real and verbatim).

STROUP

Even in our little community here, people are drawn up, they're tight, they're tense.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, TEHRAN - NIGHT

CORA LIJEK (OVER)

It IS a word.

Celebratory noises from Bob Anders, one of the other Houseguests, as Cora reads from a dictionary.

CORA LIJEK (CONT'D)

"Opposite of postpone. To move a date forward in time."

MARK LIJEK

Lemme see that. You made that up...

Mark puts his hand over his wife's mouth in a mock gesture of silencing her. She hits him with the dictionary.

ANGLE ON -- A SCRABBLE BOARD and its letters, including the word PREPONE, spelled vertically in the middle.

VERY CLOSE ANGLE ON -- More letters. We're looking at pile of SHREDDED DOCUMENTS -- a hand pieces shreds together to form the words: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE - TEHRAN - CLASSIFIED. We're in a ...

INT. CARPET FACTORY - DAY

Kids at carpet shuttles working with the skill of a blindfolded child Mozart at the harpsichord. Beyond them, the giant pile of these SHREDDED DOCS where the document assembling kids work.

ANGLE -- CLOSE UP of AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI (Footage from a Mike Wallace interview. *60 MINUTES 11/18/79).

As Khomeini speaks, a Translator's voice is heard over his.

KHOMEINI (FARSI)*

Our young people have taken over
this nest of corruption. They have
captured the Americans there.
America can't do a damn thing about
it --

FRANK REYNOLDS (OVER)

They marched again today. They
march every day.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, TEHRAN - NIGHT

PAT TAYLOR

(entering)

Ken saw trucks on Tajik.

The Houseguests stop playing. Mark helps Cora to her feet. Kathy Stafford hesitates.

JOE STAFFORD

(to Pat Taylor)

Kathy doesn't want to go down
again.

BOB ANDERS

Jesus Christ --

JOE STAFFORD

She's claustrophobic.

CUT TO:

Back to the ABC News report, the bar in Pecatonica.

STROUP

I'm like that guy screamin' in that movie-program *Network*, y'know? I've had it. And if need be, I'll bear arms again.

ANGLE ON

MARK LIJEK

You're putting us all at risk
--

JOE STAFFORD

They're not going to come
into the house.

LEE SCHATZ

Pfffft.

BOB ANDERS

(angry)
Reason with them. Put flowers
in their gun barrels--

Joe puts his arm around Kathy. But she looks at him, nods, then follows the other four Houseguests downstairs. Joe, after her.

CUT TO:

A CROWD SCENE in TEHRAN. Then, ABC News anchor Frank Reynolds addressing the camera (*11/24/79).

FRANK REYNOLDS

We know you are weary of seeing
them. So are we.

INT. MENDEZ APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mendez is watching Frank Reynolds on America Held Hostage on a small television in his kitchen, eating Campbell's soup with saltine crackers. On the table, stacks of documents. In front of him, a folder with xeroxed photographs of the HOUSEGUESTS.

Mendez changes the channel, switching from Frank Reynolds to a local station, where *Battle for Planet of the Apes*, acclaimed as the worst (or maybe second worst) in the series.

ON TV: A desert landscape dotted with technological garbage. CAESAR, an ape played by Roddy MacDowell, walks across the landscape with two other apes.

Mendez picks up the phone, connected to a long cord, in the living room.

INT. RURAL VIRGINIA HOUSE - NIGHT

CHRISTINE MENDEZ, late 30s, doing the dishes, answers. Her hair is pulled back. She's pretty. She's trying to hold on to the cheerful patience she had when she was a first grade teacher, but she's always a bit tired.

CHRISTINE
Hello?

MENDEZ (V.O.)
Hi.

A beat, then --

CHRISTINE
He's asleep. He sleeps all day at school when you do that.

INT. MENDEZ APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT (CROSS-CUTTING)

MENDEZ
I missed him.

CHRISTINE
If you want to see him, see him.

MENDEZ
I miss you.

He's waiting for a return of the serve, and he has to wait a long time.

CHRISTINE
(soft, sad)
I know.
(then, quietly, after a
beat)
Bye.

She hangs up. Mendez looks at the phone for a moment. Then, back up at the movie. Mendez starts to put the phone back but stops. He's staring at the television.

The Apes walk into the ruins of what was once a great city.

RODDY MACDOWELL (ON TV, AS CAESAR)
*This is the hell my forefathers
used to speak about. (etc).*

ON TONY STARING AT THE MOVIE. Wheels turning in his head.

He picks up the phone and dials a number.

ANGLE

From above, A DEAD BODY in a flophouse hotel -- a bullet hole in its head, a puddle of blood around it. A BLIND WOMAN with a German Shepherd Guide Dog walks into the shot.

The DOG goes to the dead body and starts to LICK the blood.

A.D. (O.S.)
WE'RE CUTTING!

WIDER reveals that we're on a ...

INT. WARNER BROTHERS SOUNDSTAGE - NIGHT

A DIRECTOR, 40s, shakes head at an A.D., mid-thirties.

A.D.
(into a walkie)
Anybody got eyes on Chambers?

CUT TO:

JOHN CHAMBERS, 57, walking onto set. Overweight, ruddy, a hypochondriac. A Chicago guy who spent his childhood in a tenement next to the El. Imagine Truman Capote as a straight man from the South Side and you're pretty close.

Chambers pops two Maalox into his mouth.

CHAMBERS
I'll tell you what this is. This is Retardo Dog.

Super: BURBANK, CALIFORNIA - JANUARY 19, 1980

CHAMBERS (CONT'D)
No dog who is not a mental defective drinks liquid with pepper in it.

Re-pouring the blood. Lacing it with pepper.

CHAMBERS (CONT'D)
(friendly, to the dog)
Yeah? You like that? How bout some roach powder?

A.D.
Going again please!

As Chambers walks away --

P.A.
Mr. Chambers, there's a Tony
calling for you.

CHAMBERS
Tony who?

P.A.
'Mendez,' I think?

Chambers's face changes from surprised to curious to annoyed.

CHAMBERS
Fuck me.

INT. CIA, CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

DOWNING
We're waiting on Mendez.

Downing, O'Donnell, Creely, Malinov in a conference room.
O'Donnell looks at the clock.

O'DONNELL
Start without him.

He nods at Malinov.

MALINOV
We've put together a Teachers
Option. It's possible the airport
guards won't know that the
international schools have been
shut down, so w--

The door swings open.

MENDEZ
Hi. Sorry. Hi.

O'DONNELL
(trying to figure out if
he's making a scene)
Have a seat, Tony.

He doesn't.

MENDEZ
They're a Canadian film crew on a
location scout for a Hollywood
movie in Tehran.

Shift in the room. Mendez is good at making a room
uncomfortable.

MENDEZ (CONT'D)

Science fiction -- *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*. They need an exotic place to shoot so they're looking at locations around the world. We put it out...

MALINOV

(half under his breath)

-- take our chances with the Schwinn --

MENDEZ

-- the Canadian producers put it out that they're looking at Turkey, Egypt, whatever -- Then we go to the consulate and say we wanna look at *Iran*. I fly in there to meet up with the six of them -- and then they've got a reason to be there. We fly out together as a film crew.

MALINOV

(weary)

"In an exfiltration, flamboyant cover identities are red-flags, as they increase operational exposure." Spy 101 --

MENDEZ

We trained Iranian intelligence. The bad guys took Spy 101.

(a beat)

That's the reason we're batting zip. The cover story to get them out has to be as far-fetched as the situation that put them there.

O'Donnell looks at Downing.

INT. G.A.D. DIVISION - DAY

Graphics and Authentication branch of the Company. Other parts of the organization look down on these guys. Treat them as service employees.

Mendez, at a desk, is using an exacto-knife to make passports. With a magnifying glass, he actually gets close enough to separate a single sheet of paper into its component two parts.

O'Donnell comes in. Sits at the end of Mendez's desk. Mendez doesn't look up. Neither says anything for a long time. Then--

MENDEZ

You're blocking my light.

O'DONNELL

Downing and I want you to go to
L.A.

Mendez looks up.

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)

If you can make the movie thing
credible, he wants you to pitch it
to the Director.

O'Donnell stands to go, then turns back.

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)

I got these people to trust you.
You fuck this up, it's not just you
that goes down.

INT. T.W.A. FLIGHT - AFTERNOON

Mendez sits in an aisle seat. The PASSENGER next to him is
looking at the headline of the New York Times: NEW THREATS
FOR HOSTAGE TRIBUNALS.

Mendez is reading FILM PRODUCTION HANDBOOK, Second Edition.

INT. MIDDLE-CLASS TEHRAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Six KOMITEH force their way into a house where a WOMAN
protests.

KOMITEH SOLDIER

SAVAK! SAVAK!

A Komiteh drags away a MAN in his forties while the man's
wife cries. Automatic weapons are aimed at him, point-blank.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Pat Taylor helps SHAHEEN, 20s, an Iranian cook/housekeeper,
clear the table. Echoing AUTOMATIC WEAPON FIRE in the far
distance.

SHAHEEN

Your friends from Canada, ma'am.
All this time. They never go out.

PAT TAYLOR

No. They prefer to stay in.

A significant moment of eye contact.

SHAHEEN

Yes, ma'am.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lee Schatz and Bob Anders play poker at the kitchen table. The gunfire audible here too. Staring at their cards.

LEE SCHATZ

50 calibur?

BOB ANDERS

Mmm. 50, 35.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - LATER

Kathy Stafford is roughly washing wine glasses at the sink.

JOE STAFFORD

You've washed them three times.

He puts his arm on her shoulder. She ignores his arm. Keeps scrubbing.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ken Taylor is brushing his teeth in the mirror. Pat comes in, closes the door.

PAT TAYLOR

Shaheen knows.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mark and Cora lie in bed in an upstairs bedroom. Another ROUND OF FIRE. Mark puts his arms around Cora. Nudges his face close to hers.

MARK LIJEK

It's far away.

CORA LIJEK

It's closer.

INT. CHAMBERS'S STUDIO, WB LOT - DAY

Stunt double-masks, deformed monster foreheads, dental implants on shelves. Planet of the Apes prosthetics.

Mr. Spock ears on styrofoam stands. (Chambers created all these -- really).

CHAMBERS

They don't open windows in here,
you get tuberculosis --

There are busts with prosthetics of women's breasts hanging off them near the door. As Chambers turns on lights, he names each.

CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

Candace Bergen and Tuesday Weld.

MENDEZ

Why do you have their tits?

CHAMBERS

Prosthetics to make them look like
tits.

(pointing to another set)
Elizabeth Taylor. Her tits face
apart like they just had a big
fight with each other.

Chambers closes the door.

MENDEZ

It's an exfil.

CHAMBERS

From where?

MENDEZ

Worst place you can think of.

CHAMBERS

Florida?

Mendez picks up a TIME Magazine under a can of Tab on a make-up table. It's the November 19, 1979 issue, with blindfolded Iran hostages on the cover. Chambers takes it in for a moment, then --

CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

How you getting in the embassy?

MENDEZ

Not the hostages. Six got away and
are hiding in the city. I'm going
over to get them.

CHAMBERS

What are the disguises?

MENDEZ

No disguises.

A beat.

CHAMBERS

Okay, me simple island girl, no understand. If there are no disguises, why do you need me?

INT. RAINBOW PANDA CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

We slowly move closer to Mendez and Chambers sit in a booth. Chambers is looking at PHOTOGRAPHS of the SIX. Mendez is taking notes. On a photo of Cora Lijek.

CHAMBERS

This one's got an M.A. in English. He should be your screenwriter. Sometimes they go on scouts cause they want the free meals.

(another photograph; Bob Anders)

This guy's the director.

MENDEZ

Can you teach a guy how to be a director in a day?

CHAMBERS

You can teach a rhesus monkey how to be a director in a day.

(re: something on his fork)

What does this look like to you? These waiters are V.C. They're trying to kill me.

(scrapes it off)

Look, if you're gonna do it, you've got to do it.

(to Chinese Waiter)

Can you take this away? I don't even... animal, vegetable, or mineral here...

(Waiter takes plate; back to Tony)

The Khomaniacs are crazy but they're not stupid. They have phones. They have relatives who live here. You can't build cover stories around a movie that doesn't exist. You need a script. You need a producer.

MENDEZ

I'm the producer.

CHAMBERS

Associate producer. At best. If it's a twenty-million dollar *Star Wars* rip-off, you need somebody who's a somebody to put his name on it.

The waiter brings fortune cookies.

CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

Somebody respectable. With credits. Who we can trust with classified information. Who'll produce a fake movie. For free.

INT. BEVERLY HILLS - EVENING

They walk up the driveway of a more modest version of the DeMille House.

CHAMBERS

You don't talk. I talk.

A Mexican Housekeeper answers the door of a house with white columns. A scotch terrier watches.

SIEGEL (O.S.)

Yeah, come in.

INT. SIEGEL HOUSE, HALLWAY - EVENING

And there's LESTER SIEGEL, a semi-legendary producer in his semi-legendary seventies. He's equal parts bookie and rabbi. His father sold perfume on the Lower East Side. Lester is halfway to dressed in a tuxedo.

SIEGEL

(shakes hands)

I only got a couple minutes. I'm getting an award from A.F.I. tonight.

CHAMBERS

Mazeltov, Lester.

SIEGEL

(leading them in)

Aaah, I'd rather stay home and count the wrinkles on my dog's balls.

(MORE)

SIEGEL (CONT'D)

These fuckin' things are like getting measured for your coffin. "He don't look so good, should we give him oxygen?" "Nah. Give him an honorary award."

CUT TO:

ANGLE - ON TV, Ted Koppel.

TED KOPPEL

It has become, in some respects, an international media carnival.*

The broadcast cuts to: a JAPANESE REPORTER, then a BRITISH one. Standing in front of the Embassy in a sea of cameras. (*ABC News, 12/20/79).

SIEGEL (O.S.)

A little experiment. You be me hearing you.

INT. SIEGEL'S DEN - EVENING

The t.v. we're watching sits in a room with a couple of Golden Globes and pictures of a younger Lester with Billy Wilder in Palm Springs with their thumbs turned up like hitchhikers.

Siegel is smoking a cigar. He turns down the volume.

SIEGEL

Six people in the middle of a city of, what, four million --

ON TV, a wild-eyed woman in the crowd (*in one of the most widely-played clips of the hostage crisis) makes an ax-falling gesture with her arm repeatedly.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)

-- who chant "Death to America" all the livelong day. You wanna set up a picture in a week. Lie to a whole town of people who lie to people for a living. And Iranian intelligence. Have Double-O Seven here sneak into a country that wants CIA blood with their breakfast cereal. Then walk six white faces out of the most watched city in the world...

MENDEZ

... past a hundred Revolutionary Guards with Kalashes at the airport.

SIEGEL

Look, I wanna help you, but... You know what our rule was in OSS.? You don't even think about a covert op if there's even a chance of failure. So lemme hit it again for the cheap seats: NO. You both belong in Cedars-Sinai, on the floor that don't allow shoelaces.

Chambers gives Mendez a look and gestures for Mendez to walk out with him.

CHAMBERS

(to Lester, as he gets up)
Enjoy your fish dinner tonight.

Chambers stops at the muted television. More images of angry crowds.

CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

You ever think, Lester, how it's all for the cameras?

Then the following builds as a crescendo of duelling pianos.

CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

It's all moving pictures. They're telling a story for the cameras and the whole world is watching it. You invented this shit, Lester.

SIEGEL

You're goddamn right I did --

CHAMBERS

They're making the movie, Lester.

SIEGEL

-- pioneered this shit, I was Lewis AND Clark out here --

CHAMBERS

They're making the movie.

SIEGEL

-- trading beads with savages!

A beat of silence. ON Mendez. Who are these men?

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
 C'mon, willya?! You think I can be
 manipulated that easy?

Siegel looks at the TV: at that moment, an image from the same ABC broadcast -- a HOSTAGE TAKER in a cardigan sweater holding up black and white photos of hostages for the SEA OF CAMERAS in front of him.

CHAMBERS (V.O.)
 How bout "The Horses of Achilles"?

INT. SIEGEL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Lester's new A.F.I. award sits under a spiked glass of Tropicana a coaster. Stacks of scripts on the table. Meanwhile, Chambers, on the hold on the phone, holds up the 'Horses of Achilles' script in a William Morris binder.

SIEGEL
 (moving stacks of scripts)
 Nobody makes Westerns any more.

CHAMBERS
 (looking through it)
 Ancient Troy.

SIEGEL
 If it's got "horses" in the title,
 it's a Western.

A MEXICAN MAID mouths "Lunch" to Lester and he nods.

CHAMBERS
 (then, into the phone)
 Hi, yeah, I'm calling about your ad
 in Variety -- the office space --

INT. SIEGEL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mendez, on the phone near a fully stocked bar that may have a couple of Emmy Awards on it.

O'DONNELL (O.S.)
 The Cardinal wants all cover
 options on his desk Friday morning.

INT. O'DONNELL'S OFFICE - DAY (CROSS-CUTTING)

O'DONNELL
 They're prepping the Bikes Option
 and the Teachers Option.
 (MORE)

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)
 You've got 72 hours to make yours
 better... You there?

Mendez is looking down at the SCRIPT in front of him. He
 opens to the first page. ANGLE on him reading, thinking.

ODONNELL (O.S.)
 Tony?

EXT. LESTER'S POOL - DAY

Mendez walks up to the table where Siegel and Chambers are
 already eating.

SIEGEL
 (giving Chambers a
 mozzarella ball)
 These are good. These come from a
 little place in New York.

MENDEZ
 (entering, reading)
 "Fade in on... An arch with a
 starship in bas-relief. We're in a
 temple. An exotic, Middle Eastern,
 vibe. Women dressed in the colors
 of their planetary tribes offer
 ecstatic libations to the sky
 gods."

SIEGEL
 Ecstatic *whats?*

Mendez throws down the script. Chambers reads the cover.

CHAMBERS
 "ARGO. A science-fantasy adventure
 by Timothy Harris."

SIEGEL
 (taking the script)
 I know this script. It's in
 turnaround. You wanna set it up, I
 can have the option by tomorrow.

MENDEZ
 Why do we need the option?

SIEGEL
 You're worried about the mullahs?
 Try the WGA. They'll shut you down
 before you've set it up.
 (reading)
 Mr. Timothy Harris.

Siegel picks up a huge cordless phone from the table. Starts to dial the number on the front of the script.

CHAMBERS

You think it's available?

SIEGEL

It's available. I've read it. It's shit on a soda-cracker.

INT. TOPANGA HOUSE - DAY

SIEGEL

It's a masterpiece.

Siegel, carrying the ARGO script. TIMOTHY HARRIS, 40s, a rolled cigarette in his hand (or a joint) leads Lester, Chambers, and Mendez into his house. The house: picture of the Maharishi with the Beatles, a Balinese drum. Harris himself: still on a drug trip that started in the summer of '69. An IRISH WOLFHOUND, about as big as a Clydesdale, follows, barking.

HARRIS

(to dog)

GRENDDEL, SHUT IT!

(to the others)

Well I'm not gonna say the name, but believe me, you'd -- you've seen his movies, so. Six months this goes on, and finally I had it, I said, 'Do I tell you how to direct? Do I tell the D.P. where to put the lights? How come everybody thinks they can give notes to the writer?'

SIEGEL

Awful business. Awful.

HARRIS

He says to me, 'If you don't wanna take notes, go home and write poetry and stick it in a drawer, Miss Emily Fucking Dickinson.'

MENDEZ

We love the script as is.

HARRIS

(to the dog)

GRENDDEL, DROP IT!

(to Mendez)

Hmmm?

SIEGEL

My mother's grave. We won't change
a word.

Harris takes a drag. Looks at them. Then he motions for the
option agreement from Siegel. Flips through.

HARRIS

I don't have my glasses. You gotta
show me where to sign.

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE, COLUMBIA LOT, SUNSET & GOWER - DAY

DOUG, a Maintenance Man in his 60s, black, soft-spoken,
showing them the office. Someone in his taking down signs:
PRODUCTION OFFICE - THE CHINA SYNDROME.

DOUG

This was his chair right here --
Michael Douglas's ass. This chair.
One week ago. I sweartagod.

CHAMBERS

What about phones?

DOUG

Already hooked up. 'Move-in-ready'
means 'move-in-ready.'

MENDEZ

Sold.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE, TONY'S OFFICE - DUSK

Mendez puts the Argo script on a desk and looks around the
empty office. Deep breath. Siegel pokes his head in.

SIEGEL

Okay?

INT. LESTER'S MERCEDES - NIGHT

Lester drives Mendez back to his hotel.

MENDEZ

You got kids, Lester?

SIEGEL

Two daughters. I talk to them once
a year, maybe.

MENDEZ

Why's that?

SIEGEL

When they were growing up, my fuck-ups were spectacular, both in number and quality.

(beat while he drives)

The bullshit business is like coal mining. You forget to wash it off before you kiss your wife and kids... You?

MENDEZ

A son. He's staying out in the country with his mother and his grandmother.

SIEGEL

You're divorced?

MENDEZ

Taking time off.

(then, quiet)

He loves the woods out there. He named every tree.

ANGLE ON

A POSTER. It's a space-scape that reads: Studio Six Productions presents: ARGO. A COSMIC WAR. We're in the ...

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY

Mendez and a Graphics Artist are looking at it on his desk. A phone rings.

MENDEZ

"War" sounds like *Star Wars*. Let's use a different word.

Graphics Artist nods.

WIDER reveals that the production office is being set up. A couple of FURNITURE GUYS move chairs in.

Chambers holds up a telephone to Mendez.

MENDEZ (CONT'D)

(to Chambers)

I'll take it in there.

Mendez goes into a private office, holding the poster.

O'DONNELL (V.O.)
 They caught one of the shah's
 enforcers two steps from an Air
 France plane, trying to get to
 Paris.

INT. O'DONNELL'S OFFICE - DAY

O'Donnell reads from the EYES ONLY document.

O'DONNELL
 Quote -- "Since the incident, the
 number of komiteh at the airport
 appears to have doubled. Background
 examinations of both nationals and
 foreigners should be expected." No
 cover's gonna stand up to that
 shit, Tony.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY (CROSS-CUTTING)

Mendez, on phone -

MENDEZ
 Stall the Cardinal. Get me more
 time.

Siegel, meanwhile, has entered Mendez's office. Mendez hangs
 up, sits in his chair looking at the Argo poster, the script.

MENDEZ (CONT'D)
 It's not enough.

Siegel picks up the Argo poster.

SIEGEL
 I'll tell you the lesson you learn
 when you've got an ingenue with a
 drug problem. You need to sell a
 lie, you get the press to sell it
 for you.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - MORNING

Noisy in here now -- ASSISTANTS and controlled chaos --

SIEGEL
 (on the phone)
 Crystal Ballroom, press event and
 reading... No, I promised Variety
 exclusive on that one ...

Mendez is making a list with a PUBLICIST.

MENDEZ

The Reporter, the Times, agents,
managers... "Biggest Canadian
production in history."

PUBLICIST

(getting into it)
Canadian 'Gone With the Wind.'

MENDEZ

Canadian *Sci-Fi* Gone With the Wind.

SIEGEL

I think I got us a --

Chambers, on the phone, hands Lester a written message slip.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)

I DID get us a storyboard artist
who draws for D.C. Comics. He'll
send some stuff today.

CHAMBERS

(on the phone)
I gotta let you know tomorrow,
Phil. I can't get my own mother a
ticket, I've had her crying into
the phone... Okay ...

Chambers hangs up.

MENDEZ

Why are you turning people away?

CHAMBERS

You know what gets more suckers
than a sign that says "Brooklyn
Bridge For Sale"? A sign that says,
"Brooklyn Bridge For Sale: Approved
Buyers Only."

Publicist walks in and puts down a newly-delivered copy of
VARIETY. Mendez flips through Variety and stops on a full-
page ad, modeled around an explosion in space. (*This is real
- Variety): STUDIO SIX PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS: ARGO: A COSMIC
CONFLAGRATION.

MENDEZ

(to himself)
Conflagration.

It's not a bad word.

INT. O'DONNELL'S OFFICE - DAY

O'Donnell sits down at his desk, reads a memo lying there. From the look on his face, it is bad news.

INT. TONY'S HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

Mendez, shirtless, wearing a towel, fresh out of the shower.

MELENDEZ

Why'd they do it?

INT. O'DONNELL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

O'DONNELL

They did it cause they did it. They don't need a reason. They're going with the bikes.

MELENDEZ

It's a death sentence.

ODONNELL

Well then it's on *them*. Wash your hands.

MELENDEZ

Are they out to help these people or are they out to fuck me?

O'DONNELL

They did fuck you. When they cut off the money that means they fucked you.

MELENDEZ

I'm making it work. You came to me.
(then, again, quietly)
You came to me.

O'Donnell, slumping in his chair.

A KNOCK on Mendez's hotel door.

MELENDEZ (CONT'D)

I'm going to continue to assume money will be there. Because I will assume you will find the money.

Mendez opens the door. A HOTEL VALET is holding a large folder wrapped in brown paper. Mendez grabs at his pants for a dollar.

MENDEZ (CONT'D)

(to Valet)

Thank you.

(closes the door)

Because I will make this work. You hear me, Jack? I will make this work.

Mendez tears open the brown paper and holds up a large COMIC PANEL - a woman in an elaborate anthropological-tech outfit on a desert planet. A label reads: ARGO CONCEPT DRAWINGS.

CUT TO:

ANGLE -- Moving over the storyboard drawings. Half a dozen renderings of a fantastical ARGO comic-book world. A MARKETPLACE selling spices exotic-looking vegetables; a Ben-Hur chariot race with airborne vehicles; etc.

MENDEZ (O.S.) (CONT'D)

What's happening now?

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Just turn on the tv.

MENDEZ (O.S.)

It's not the same channels where I am. You have to tell.

INT. TONY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mendez is lying on his bed, the storyboard drawings spread around the room, a phone near his ear.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

So the guy from NASA saw the meteorite that brought the spiders with it.

INT. RURAL VIRGINIA HOUSE - NIGHT

Michael is watching 1975 B-movie 'Giant Spider Invasion' on television. A Wisconsin town is being ransacked by a fiberglass spider the size of a U-Haul, and now the rednecks have had enough.

MICHAEL

So he measured the gamma rays at the crash site and figured out they must be from an interdimensional gateway.

SHERIFF

(into walkie, on t.v.)
I'm down here all by myself!
They're hell-bent on destroying that beast! Call the National Guard back...

MENDEZ
 What's that? Like a black hole?

 MICHAEL
 I think so, yeah. A black hole.

ANGLE - Christine, sitting on the floor in the hallway,
 listening.

INT. G.A.D. - DAY

O'Donnell, standing over a desk where a GRAPHICS SPECIALIST
 works, not far from Tony's desk.

 ODONNELL
 You're back in business.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - MORNING

 MENDEZ
 How'd you do it?

 O'DONNELL
 A tribe of Karubo Indians in the
 Amazon aren't getting their cash to
 resist Communist influence. I'm
 putting their money in your
 account.

 MENDEZ
 (on the phone)
 You're a great American, Jack.

 O'DONNELL (V.O.)
 I haven't told you the bad news.
 The Canadians will only give us
 fake passports for the Houseguests.
 Not for you.

INT. G.A.D. - DAY

 O'DONNELL
 (reading a memo)
 "Documents will be provided only on
 humanitarian grounds. Not for use
 by intelligence professionals."

 MENDEZ
 So get me a different passport.

O'Donnell picks up the passport that a Graphics Specialist is
 working on.

O'DONNELL
Yeah, well. We looked at your alias
and did what we could do.

The passport: REPUBLIC OF IRELAND.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - MORNING

Mendez, dressed in a shirt and tie, stands front of a mirror.

MENDEZ
Hiii, how are youu. Yeeaouuuu. How
arrr yeaouuu? Jaysus.

Siegel and Chambers, dressed similarly, nearby.

SIEGEL
(to Chambers)
Did he have a stroke?

CHAMBERS
(to Mendez)
Kevin. How about you're an Irish
national who was raised in Canada?

MENDEZ
(normal accent again)
Yeah, I think I was raised in
Candada.

CHAMBERS
I think so.

EXT./INT. BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - MORNING

A black sedan pulls up to the hotel. A Driver opens the back door. Mendez, Siegel, and Chambers get out of the car. They're wearing dark business suits and sunglasses.

They walk past a sign that reads: -- PRESS EVENT and READING FOR 'ARGO' -- REGISTER IN LOBBY. A couple of posters with the explosion-in-space ARGO: A COSMIC CONFLAGRATION logo.

IN THE LOBBY - The three standing in front of the double doors to the Crystal Ballroom.

Mendez opens the door, the noise floods out, and we follow the three into ...

INT. CRYSTAL BALLROOM, BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - MORNING

Storyboard drawings throughout the room. Four or five ACTORS IN SCI-FI COSTUMES.

Camera flashes. Publicist immediately goes to Mendez and his two producers.

PUBLICIST

Janet from the *Times* -- You know Johnny Chambers and Lester Siegel. This is Kevin Harkins. He'll tell you a bit about the film --

We leave Mendez with the L.A. Times -- following Siegel --

WOMAN (O.S.)

Lester.

He turns around. NINA, a woman in her early sixties, made up to look younger.

SIEGEL

Nina. You're gorgeous. You're in the reading?

NINA

I'm playing Serksi the Ancient Galactic Witch.

Catching Chambers, who has been grabbed by JASON TROOB, an agent --

TROOB

-- and she's got chops, she's Juilliard, same as Meryl --

CHAMBERS

I think Meryl was Yale --

Siegel, passing Chambers.

SIEGEL

Keep that fucking galactic witch away from me.

CHAMBERS

You know her?

SIEGEL

I was *married* to her.

Publicist guiding Mendez toward an anemic-looking man --

PUBLICIST
 (to Mendez, introducing)
 Rodd from Variety. Kevin Costa
 Harkins.

Now following Mendez and Rodd, who has a reporter's pad.
 Publicist hands Mendez a LASER GUN and a Photographer snaps
 his picture. Siegel walks by, downing one from the bar.

SIEGEL
 -- Serksi the Ancient Galactic
Bitch --

CHAMBERS
 (to a reporter)
 ...the ship that Jason used to
 rescue the Golden Fleece from the
 dragon, the 'Argo' --

Picking up Nina, who is talking to an attractive young Actor.

NINA
 -- *Awake and Sing* together at the
 Group. Back when Lester had self-
 respect --

MENDEZ
 (to Rodd)
 Irish films, mostly. You Irish?
 (Rodd shakes his head)
 Big releases over there.

<p>SIEGEL Clurman, Kazan -- she fucked <i>Tennessee Williams</i> for Christ's sake --</p>	<p>PUBLICIST Let's all take our places for the reading, please! We're starting the reading!</p>
--	--

RODD
 (to Mendez)
 You said shooting in *Iran*? You ever
 watch the news?

Nina is walking arm-in-arm to the table with the Young Actor.
 She looks at one of the Droids, who waves to her.

NINA
 You wanna know something about this
 business? Art has lost. In a
 landslide. Wasn't even close.

And we settle on MENDEZ. He takes a glass of wine from a
 passing waiter's tray, downs it, and puts it on another
 WAITER'S tray. We follow that Waiter through a swinging door,
 into the Kitchen and Prep area, where a small black and white
 t.v. plays ...

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE -- Tehran Mary speaks into a microphone.

TEHRAN MARY (ON T.V.)
As the Imam Khomeini said, we have
found no evidence that proves that
these people are diplomats.

INT. O'DONNELL'S OFFICE - DAY

O'Donnell, watching the same footage on the News at Noon.

TEHRAN MARY (ON T.V.)
All evidence proves that these
people are spies.

The ARRAY OF VIDEO CAMERAS on tripods recording her.

NINA (V.O.)
(as Serksi)
This man you call a hero is a death-
bringer. Mirror-bright stars tell
truth, and clouds are coming.

INT. BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL, CRYSTAL BALLROOM - MORNING

The reading of Argo is happening around a table.

NINA
This Daughter of Light is a fool to
believe the fire of hope yet burns.

INT. AROUND THE CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, TEHRAN - DAY

MARK LIJEK (OVER)
-- fifty-seven -- fifty-eight --

Mark counts out as Lee Schatz does push ups. Bob Anders
watches a television in the background, subtitled in Farsi.

JIMMY CARTER (ON T.V.)
We will not yield to international
terror or to blackmail.

INT. MUSHROOM INN, AMERICAN EMBASSY, TEHRAN - MORNING

Five of the EMBASSY HOSTAGES -- men from their 20s to their
50s -- are roused from their sleeping mats by Komiteh. Hoods
are put over their heads.

ACTRESS (V.O.)
 (as Queen Aleppa)
 One hope. And that is the man who
 left this place long ago.

EXT. AMERICAN EMBASSY, TEHRAN - MORNING

A handmade sign that reads: CIA PENTAGON UNCLE SAM - VIETNAM
 WOUNDED YOU - IRAN WILL BURY YOU. The usual crowds of
 PROTESTORS outside the gates.

PROTESTORS
 Magbar Cartar! Magbar Ahmrika!

TEHRAN MARY
 We will begin the trials and will
 carry out the sentences.

This MONTAGE should give some sense of the chaos, the
 theatrical chaos, in Iran, and of the waves of that chaos
 spreading 7000 miles away to the U.S. Voice upon voice, image
 upon image, landing on television sets.

INT. BASEMENT, AMERICAN EMBASSY, TEHRAN - MORNING

The four hostages, hoods on their heads, placed against the
 wall. HOSTAGE TAKERS raise their guns at the men.

GREEN JACKET (FARSI)	ACTRESS (V.O.)
Fire!	If we find his ship, we will find him. Aboard the Argo lies my hope. My hero. My husband.

They pull their triggers. But nothing happens. It's a mock
 execution (actually occurred -- February 5, 1980). The five
 hostages, after a beat, either scream or take deep breaths or
 collapse.

EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

MARK LIJEK
 A hundred and twelve --

Lee Schatz collapses from his push-ups. Breathing heavily.

MARK LIJEK (CONT'D)
 And we have a new champion.

Bob Anders looks up from Jimmy Carter, who keeps talking in
 the background, and applauds.

SHAHEEN quietly cleans a table. She's watching the Houseguests.

 MENDEZ (O.S.)
 (reading stage directions)
 Crane down over the battlefield and
 hold there ...

INT. BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - DAY

Mendez, at the table, flanked by Siegel and Chambers.

 MENDEZ
 (reading stage directions)
 ... on a single red flower growing
 from the ruins of the starship in
 the desert sands. Fade to black.
 The End.

INT. TONY'S HOTEL ROOM - LATE

Mendez, Siegel, Chambers in their clothes from the press event. They're lying on the floor. A pizza box and a couple of open beers near them. Hold for a long time without anyone saying anything.

 MENDEZ
 (from the floor)
 Knock knock.

No one responds.

 MENDEZ (CONT'D)
 Knock knock.

 CHAMBERS
 Who's there?

 MENDEZ
 Argo.

 CHAMBERS
 Argo who?

 MENDEZ
 Argo fuck yourself.

A beat, then peals of laughter. They're exhausted. This counts for hilarious.

INT. O'DONNELL'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

NATHAN COX, 28, intercepts O'Donnell coming back from the coffee machine. Cox has rehearsed this confrontation for the last seven minutes.

COX

I just hung up with a Brazil station chief having a seizure. The money for his Amazon project went missing.

O'DONNELL

(not stopping)

I borrowed it.

COX

That's the Karubo money. We've got Marxist guerillas 500 miles away. We made a deal with their chief --

O'DONNELL

They're a Stone Age tribe, Nathan. They don't know what money is. You give them money, they try to eat it.

O'Donnell goes off with his coffee and cheese danish.

Waiting in front of O'Donnell's office is ENGELL. His arms are folded. He's O'Donnell's boss, and he's not happy.

O'DONNELL

Yessir, can I help you?

INT. BEVERLY WILSHIRE HOTEL, LOBBY - MORNING

A display of newspapers and trade dailies on a table near a breakfast buffet. Mendez picks up the Hollywood Reporter.

'ARGO' TO BEGIN SHOOTING IN MARCH. Oscar-winner Chambers, Siegel Among Producers." And there is a photo of Mendez from the press event. He heads out.

INT. RURAL VIRGINIA HOUSE - DAY

CHRISTINE

(picking up the phone)

Hello?

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY

Mendez holds the Hollywood Reporter with his picture as Kevin Harkins.

MENDEZ
Good morning.

CHRISTINE
You sound good.

MENDEZ
I am.
(simply and meaning it)
I think I'm doing something good.

A beat. She softens.

CHRISTINE
We're gonna have his birthday party
at a bowling alley. You should
come.

MENDEZ
I'm gonna try.

CHRISTINE
Try.
(listen I-gotta-go)
My mother's driving us to school.
She's got the snow-tires, so.

MENDEZ
Okay, yeah.

CHRISTINE
Try, though.

Another line starts ringing. Christine hangs up and Mendez picks up the second line.

MENDEZ
Yeah.

O'DONNELL
It's me.

MENDEZ
Go buy the Hollywood trades, Jack.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - DAY (CROSS-CUTTING)

O'DONNELL (VOICE)
It hit the fan. You gotta come
back.

And hold on Tony, looking out the window at the backlot.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - MORNING

While Tony packs a bag of papers from his desk.

SIEGEL
I made thirty pictures and every
one of them got shut down by pricks
in the upstairs office at least
once. You always gotta go around
them.

Mendez finishes packing, zips up the bag.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
I'll tellya one thing -- my ass is
staying right here and running a
movie company.

Siegel takes a bottle of Jack and three shot glasses from a
drawer.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
(pours)
Fort Sumter. The first shot of the
picture.

Chambers holds up his glass.

CHAMBERS
Argo fuck yourself.

They raise to that. They each do a shot. Then Tony picks up
his bag and heads out. Before he goes --

MENDEZ
Lester. How'd you always get around
the pricks upstairs?

SIEGEL
I went over their heads. You can
always find *another* prick one floor
higher up.

EXT. CIA, LANGLEY - DAY

To establish. The sound of footsteps --

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - DAY

Down a hallway. Mendez, coming from an adjacent hallway, putting on a tie, joins O'Donnell hurrying through the building.

O'DONNELL
How'd you get the meeting?

MENDEZ
I pissed off the guys who sign my check and yours.

O'DONNELL
I oughta slit your throat.

MENDEZ
You can forget about buying the time-share in Ocean City, for starters.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT, SEVENTH FLOOR; RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

CIA DIRECTOR ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER, 50s, and SECRETARY OF STATE CYRUS VANCE walk down the hall together, discussing something in hushed tones.

O'DONNELL
(under his breath)
Brace yourself. It's like talking to those two old fucks on The Muppets.

MENDEZ
You watch The Muppets.

O'DONNELL
Don't be a moron. Everybody watches The Muppets.

Vance and Turner enter the room. Mendez and O'Donnell stand up.

ANGLE - A concept drawing from Argo.

TURNER (O.S.)
Aliens and robots.

MENDEZ (O.S.)

Yes sir.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT, SEVENTH FLOOR - DAY

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER, 50s, Director of Central Intelligence and not the most popular man ever to hold that office, is looking at the storyboard.

TURNER

You're telling me there's a movie office in Hollywood right now that's funded by the Central Intelligence Agency.

MENDEZ

Yes sir.

VANCE

What's wrong with the bikes again?

TURNER

... you think this --

O'DONNELL

We tried to get the message upstairs --

TURNER

-- you think this is more plausible than teachers?

O'DONNELL

One, there are no foreign teachers in Iran any more. Two, we think everybody knows Hollywood people. And everybody thinks they would shoot during Stalingrad with Pol Pot directing if it'd sell tickets.

Turner and Vance look at each other.

TURNER

Run it by me again.

INT. D.C. BAR - NIGHT

ANGLE - Mike Wallace speaks with the Ayatollah Khomeini. Wallace: deferential but he has just enough asshole in his voice to indicate he's an important old man, too.

MIKE WALLACE

What can be the answer?*

A Translator conveys this to Khomeini; Khomeini speaks. A clock says it's getting late.

Mendez is watching half-watching a t.v. above the bar. (*60 Minutes, first broadcast 11/18/79).

KHOMEINI/TRANSLATOR
He's not even going to listen.*

O'DONNELL (O.S.)
Scotch, any kind.

O'Donnell sits next to Tony and puts a FOLDER.

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)
They want you to take them through the airport in three days. You get your visa with your Irish passport in Bonn.

O'Donnell pulls from the folder a Lufthansa ticket.

MENDEZ
How?

O'DONNELL
His Eminence decided *Argo* is credible.

Mendez, looking at the ticket. Barely believing it.

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)
His twelve year-old grandson is a science fiction nerd. Tonight he told Grandpa Turner about a movie he wants to see.

O'Donnell slaps down a copy of *Comics Week*.

THE NEXT STAR WARS? Next to it, a photograph from the press event: Mendez holding a laser gun. CANADIAN EPIC WILL BE FILMED IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

Bartender brings a glass of scotch.

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)
(lifts his glass)
The United States government just officially sanctioned your science fiction movie.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Chambers and Lester are sitting in a pitch meeting with a couple of writers, JESSE and FRANK, early 30s.

CHAMBERS

Is there anybody else who knows
they've switched bodies?

JESSE

Just the old lady, the nosy
neighbor --

SIEGEL

The mute one.

FRANK

Boo Radley, but a woman, and
old --

JESSE

Can't talk but she can write.

Chambers gets up to answer the phone.

JESSE

So she writes in the fog on her
window -- y'know, backwards, she's
inside -- to tell Caroline --

SIEGEL

Sally Field --

JESSE

Sally Field.

FRANK

Margot Kidder maybe --

JESSE

(annoyed; they *discussed*
this)

Sally Field.

INT. MENDEZ APARTMENT - NIGHT

VOICE OF CHAMBERS

Studio Six.

MENDEZ

Green light. Keep the office
running till you hear otherwise.

(then, this means thank
you)

Argo fuck yourself.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - AFTERNOON

CHAMBERS

(quiet and worried)

Take care of yourself.

Chambers comes back to his chair. Raises his eyebrows at
Lester. Then --

SIEGEL

I'll tellya right now, you're not gonna get Kate Hepburn to play a mute. You're talking No Lines At All?

FRANK

Well maybe she's *not* mute. She could be --

FRANK (CONT'D)

Foreign.

JESSE

SHY. Maybe She's shy.

INT. RURAL VIRGINIA HOUSE - MORNING

The phone in the living room rings. No one is home.

INT. DULLES - MORNING

Tony hangs up an airport payphone.

CUT TO:

He sits near a mailbox inside the terminal writing on a postcard with the Washington Monument on it.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO THE BUDDY-MAN. NO PHONE FOR A WHILE. JACK WILL CALL. LOVE YOU BOTH. Then he adds: SO MUCH.

He drops the card in the box and heads toward a gate marked LUFTHANSA.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, DINING ROOM - EVENING

Pat Taylor helps LEYLA, an Iranian housekeeper, clear dishes.

PAT TAYLOR

Did Shaheen not come in today?

Leyla shakes her head.

PAT TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Did she call?

Leyla shakes her head again.

ON PAT -- very troubled -- as Leyla heads into the kitchen.

IN THE LIVING ROOM, NEARBY -- The Houseguests are playing Scrabble. Again. The sound of footsteps down the hall.

BOB ANDERS

Dad's home.

Ken comes in, carrying his briefcase. To the Houseguests --

TAYLOR

You're getting a visitor.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - MORNING

O'Donnell and Lamont are standing at a desk reading cables as they come through. Malinov, his eyes glazed over with Eastern European fatalism, walks up to O'Donnell.

O'DONNELL

(barely looking up)

Just *one time*, can you bring me good news? Anything. Your cat's tumor is benign.

MALINOV

Vance just qualified his go-ahead. He says execution of Hollywood Option waits for Carter's ok.

LAMONT

Fig leaf to cover his ass.

This really isn't good news. O'Donnell hates assholes micromanaging.

O'DONNELL

So we light a candle and pray Mr. Peanut doesn't get nervous.

(going back to his office;
kicks a mail cart)

Move this shit. Clean up your playroom.

EXT. BONN, WEST GERMANY - DAY

A tram that indicates the cold efficiency of Cold War Germany.

Mendez, wearing a green turtleneck, walks near Hauptbahnhof, in the center of the city.

Super: BONN -- JANUARY 25

INT. IRANIAN EMBASSY, BONN - DAY

Mendez sits in a reception room with a few VISA APPLICANTS. Photographs of the Ayatollah Khomeini hang on the wall. Two REVOLUTIONARY GUARD OFFICIALS in ill-fitting suits sit at a desk.

INT. IRANIAN EMBASSY, BONN; VISA OFFICE - DAY

The Iranian Consul Official, late 30s, is smoking.

CONSUL OFFICIAL (GERMAN)
What will be the purpose of your
visit to Iran?

MENDEZ (GERMAN)
Business. Film production.

The Consul Official looks at the Irish passport.

CONSUL OFFICIAL (GERMAN)
Why didn't you get your visa in
Ireland?

MENDEZ (GERMAN)
My boss waited until I was in
Germany to send the telex.
(lighting cigarette)
If he had a thought in his head, it
would die of loneliness.

Pointed look from Mendez. The universal condition of boss hatred almost always works for him, and it does now. Consul nods. Stamps the passport. KINGDOM OF IRAN -- He crosses out KINGDOM and writes by hand: ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF.

EXT. BENCH BY THE RIVER - AFTERNOON

Tony is staring at the cold January Rhine from a bench.

MAN'S VOICE
I'll tell you the recipe for
extremism in all its forms...

Mendez looks up. A man in his 60s slaps a TIME MAGAZINE with its 1979 MAN OF THE YEAR* -- AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI -- on the cover. (*1/7/80).

MAN
Take bunch of 22 year-old men who
can't get laid. Hook them up with a
geriatric with big ideas who can't
get laid either.
(MORE)

MAN (CONT'D)
 And together they start a
 revolution, cause they've got the
time to. Mr. Harkins.

The Man is PETER NICHOLLS, late 40s, a Skull and Bones type
 and a very good spy.

CUT TO:

As they walk by the Rhine.

NICHOLLS
 I'd like to see your day-pass from
 a psych ward. You're alone on this?
 (Mendez nods)
 It's Dodge City, Kansas.

MENDEZ
 What were you doing over there?

NICHOLLS
 Metal detecting. Carter's gonna
 freeze their assets.

MENDEZ
 You find anything?

NICHOLLS
 What's left. The Shah fled in a 747
 so loaded down with gold bars it
 barely got off the ground.

INT. CAFE - NIGHT

Nicholls has WHITE AND YELLOW SLIPS OF PAPER with Farsi
 writing on them in hand.

NICHOLLS
 Here's the rub. Everybody who lands
 at Mehrabad now fills out one of
 these.

(a WHITE one)
 That slip makes a copy to this one
 underneath.

(the YELLOW one)
 Passenger keeps Yellow, Airport
 keeps White. When you leave the
 country, the match them up to
 verify you came into the country
 when you said you did.

MENDEZ
 So if they look, they'll know six
 people didn't come in with me.

NICHOLLS

If they look. N.E. says when you get there, you should go straight to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to kiss the ring and pitch your movie. Get on record as having applied for permission to film. If they catch you later, they'll at least be confused while they're torturing you... Your biggest problem may be convincing the six of them to go with you. They're State Department. They're willful.

The Waitress brings two shots to the table.

MENDEZ

You look like dogshit, Peter.

NICHOLLS

June left.

MENDEZ

I'm sorry.

NICHOLLS

She gave me a choice. A Ring or Curtains. She's a Chinese national. If I married her I'd have to resign, so... You and Christine?

MENDEZ

Good. Yeah.

He said that without hesitation. Maybe here we realize that Mendez is a very good liar.

NICHOLLS

Nice work if you can get it.
(doing a shot)
Salut... Have an extra for the plane.

INT. RURAL VIRGINIA HOUSE - NIGHT

Phone ringing. Christine, carrying a laundry basket.

CHRISTINE

(yelling upstairs)
I got it! ... Hello?

O'DONNELL (V.O.)

Christine. Jack O'Donnell.

INT. O'DONNELL'S OFFICE - NIGHT (CROSS-CUTTING)

O'DONNELL

Tony wanted me to let you know he's gonna be away. He won't be able to call for a while.

CHRISTINE

Where is he going?

O'DONNELL

I can't tell you, love.

CHRISTINE

Is he safe?

O'DONNELL

Yes.

(a beat)

Of course he's safe.

The "of course" part didn't come out right and they both know it.

CHRISTINE

You should have stopped talking after "yes."

INT. SWISSAIR DC 10 - MORNING

Mendez sits in a window seat.

CAPTAIN (V.O.)

From the flightdeck, we will be landing in Tehran shortly.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - DAY

Mendez walks through the terminal of a crowded 1960s-era airport. Newly-hung portraits of the Ayatollah Khomeini watch over the duty-free shops.

Super: TEHRAN - JANUARY 26

AT IMMIGRATION

Tony fills out a white form. It makes an impression on a YELLOW form.

Tony presents his Irish passport to a REVOLUTIONARY GUARD IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL. Official looks at it, Tony hears the sound of a woman screaming in Farsi.

Three lanes away, at the outgoing immigration station, a Revolutionary Guard is dragging away the woman's HUSBAND.

The Immigration Official stamps Tony's passport -- takes the white form, gives Tony the yellow one -- and waves him through.

EXT. TEHRAN - DAY

Archive footage may be mixed with new footage. Normal city life mixed with men with automatic weapons. The contradictions of Tehran at this moment. Women in chadors shaking their fists; a crowd at Kentucky Fried Chicken.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Mendez sits in the back of a taxi in the Tehran traffic, the worst traffic in the world, losing only to Bangkok, in a photo finish.

ANGLES OUT HIS WINDOWS: the Ayatollah looks down from everywhere with eyeballs you expect to move and follow you. An ARMED GANG in the back of pick-up truck pulls up near his taxi.

TAXI DRIVER (FARSI)
416 Varasteh Road.

The driver stops. They've arrived.

INT. MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND ISLAMIC GUIDANCE - DAY

A large photograph of the Ayatollah stares down from above a desk. His picture is everywhere inside as well as out.

MEHDI BEHROUZ, 33, is the newly appointed Deputy Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Like many of the stars of the Revolution, he was educated in the U.S. In his case, University of Chicago. Right now he's looking at the ARGO script.

BEHROUZ
This film crew is just yourself?

MENDEZ
Six more are joining me today.
They're coming from Canada. They'll
be staying with the Canadian
Ambassador.

BEHROUZ
You'd like to film at the Bazaar?

MENDEZ

The Bazaar, maybe the Palace.

BEHROUZ

(not particularly
friendly)

The exotic Orient. Snake charmers
and flying carpets.

(a beat)

I'll review the script and speak
with the Minister... You come to us
at a complicated time. Before the
Revolution, 40 percent of the movie
theaters in Tehran were showing
pornography. The function of this
office is *purification* as well as
promotion of the arts.

EXT. CANADIAN EMBASSY - DAY

Mendez, carrying his luggage, stands at a wrought iron gate
with MAPLE LEAVES worked into the iron. Ken Taylor comes out
of the building, opens the gate himself.

MENDEZ

Mr. Ambassador.

TAYLOR

Ken Taylor.

(shakes hands)

I was expecting more of a G-Man
look.

MENDEZ

You're thinking of FBI, sir.

INT. CANADIAN EMBASSY, TAYLOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Taylor gives Tony EIGHT BLANK CANADIAN PASSPORTS.

TAYLOR

These are blank, y'know. The
stamps?

MENDEZ

I'll take care of that.

TAYLOR

How long?

MENDEZ

A day to prep them with their cover
stories. Two if they need it.

TAYLOR

And you'll fly out with them?

Tony nods. A distant sound of a crowd outside.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

There's something you should know... There's a reward out for information about foreigners at large in the country. One of our housekeepers stopped showing up for work a couple of days ago. She knew about the Houseguests.

Now the noise outside is louder. Taylor turns to the window. Tony joins him.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

So sooner is better.

They stand watching a LARGE DEMONSTRATION passing the Sheraton beneath. There must be a thousand protestors. At the front, the burning of an American flag.

A puppet of CARTER with devil horns. Signs with the Ayatollah Khomeini. An effigy of the SHAH with a noose around his neck.

CUT TO:

NEWS FOOTAGE

Hodding Carter, boyish early 40s, State Department Press Secretary. (Briefing, *11/14/79)

REPORTER

Hodding, have you had a chance to talk to this chap Kim King who told the story of his escape from the embassy after it was seized and his reference to Americans who escaped?

O'Donnell and Malinov are watching.

ROSSI

(entering)

Mendez got to the Canadians.

HODDING CARTER (ON T.V.)

... let me deal with that one by saying this. If there are any Americans who are at large in Tehran or elsewhere, who belong to the official party, the most irresponsible thing I could do would be to confirm it.

MALINOV

They ran out of news. They're going fishing.

HODDING CARTER (O.S.)

I'm simply not going to deal with the question under any of these guises.

LAMONT

And they can see his nose growing.

LAMONT

If the story breaks while he's over there, we'll have armageddon.

ODONNELL

(eyes on the tv)

What we'll have is a drag show. Tony's body. Dragged through the streets. For the benefit of the cameras.

INT. CAR - EVENING

Ken Taylor drives up to a two-story white house behind a gate with a sloping lawn and a Canadian flag in front of it. Automatic gates open.

EXT./INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - EVENING

Taylor leads Mendez inside. Pat Taylor waits for them in the hall. Takes Tony's hand.

PAT TAYLOR

Just tell me you're not going to get them killed.

(takes his hand)

Pat Taylor.

MENDEZ

Kevin Harkins.

PAT TAYLOR

(leading them inside)

Is that your real name?

MENDEZ

I'm not allowed to say my real name.

PAT TAYLOR

I should have made one up too. I am Electra, Warrior Queen. They're in here.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, TEHRAN - EVENING

They enter the DINING ROOM... and here are the SIX HOUSEGUESTS. They're looking at Mendez like kids waiting to be told the lesson plan.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - MORNING

Siegel puts the key in the door. Stares at the lock. Turns to Chambers.

SIEGEL

You didn't lock the office last night?

CHAMBERS

I did lock it.

They enter and look at the empty Argo office. No one's here. No visible signs of disturbance. They're spooked.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Each Houseguest has a copy of the ARGO script.

BOB ANDERS

It's theater of the absurd.

MARK LIJEK

What are the chances?

MENDEZ

The chances are good.

MARK LIJEK

What's the number value of "good"? 30 percent chance of success? 80 percent?

CORA LIJEK

We just ...

MARK LIJEK

Cora's pregnant. We decided we weren't leaving under risky circumstances. We'd rather risk staying.

BOB ANDERS

What was the objection to picking normal cover identities?

MENDEZ

There are no Canadians in the country for normal reasons.

KATHY STAFFORD

They'll sniff us out regardless.

MARK LIJEK

The Swedish consul said they accused him of being an American at the airport and held him for an hour.

BOB ANDERS

We can't stand up to that. We don't know what the hell movie people do.

MENDEZ

That's why I'm here. I'll be with you. This is what I do.

(a beat)

I'd like you to take a vote.

CORA LIJEK

Have you gotten people out this way before?

MENDEZ

This would be a first.

ANGLE on the one Houseguest who hasn't spoken. JOE STAFFORD

CUT TO:

The Houseguests, minus Joe and Kathy Stafford, go into the living room. Mendez stays in his seat.

JOE STAFFORD

You should read this.

The puts the TEHRAN TIMES, the English language Iranian newspaper, in front of Mendez.

JOE STAFFORD (CONT'D)

Do you know that every day...

KATHY STAFFORD

... Joe, don't.

JOE STAFFORD (CONT'D)

... every day they catch another friend of the shah at the airport. Midnight trials then the firing squad. Just for having American names in their phone books.

He puts the paper down. Goes into the living room, followed by Kathy.

ANGLE ON - The PHOTOGRAPH in the Tehran Times. A MAN IN A SUIT at Mehrabad Airport. Confused and terrified. Being led out at gunpoint.

EXT. BACK VERANDA - NIGHT

Mendez comes out and lights a cigarette. Ken Taylor is already there, also smoking.

TAYLOR

They don't really have the option of staying, you know. We've got orders to close our embassy and go back. There's nowhere for them to stay.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

JOE STAFFORD

I'm serious too. This is what?

BOB ANDERS

Don't do this, Joe ...

JOE STAFFORD

... the part where we say "That's so crazy it just might work"? C'mon ...

BOB ANDERS

I saw it in Burma. They get people out. They know how.

JOE STAFFORD

... snitches in banana republics. They get them over the border after the coup...

BOB ANDERS

That's your opinion.

JOE STAFFORD

... pay the guards at the crossing a hundred bucks to look the other way...

LEE SCHATZ

His opinion got us out of the embassy in the first place.

EXT. VERANDA - NIGHT

MENDEZ

If we go, you should plan to be on the next flight. There's a danger--

TAYLOR

Pat and I discussed it. If they catch you at the airport, they come here and we go on trial for harboring the enemy. It's a risk we took.

(after a moment)

Can you pull this off?

MENDEZ

I don't know.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

JOE STAFFORD

That man out there, he's got bad cards, he's gonna lose. If he loses, it's our lives.

KATHY STAFFORD

(after a beat)

And his own.

Another beat. Angles on the Houseguests. Then Mark Lijek takes a piece of paper and rips it into six pieces. He takes an antique BOWL from an end table and puts it on the coffee table in the center of the room. Then, handing a piece to each Houseguest.

MARK LIJEK

Write 'yes' or 'no.'

CUT TO:

Mark Lijek takes a piece of paper out of the antique bowl and unfolds it. He lays it on the coffee table with five other unfolded pieces of paper. The Houseguests look at the papers and at each other. We can't see what the papers say.

EXT. VERANDA - NIGHT

Mendez stands alone, looking into the night. The back door opens. He turns.

LEE SCHATZ

It's yes.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Siegel is watching television when suddenly, a DOOR SLAMS behind him. He flinches, turns. It's just Chambers.

SIEGEL

Jesus.

Chambers joins Siegel, who is watching Jimmy Carter on t.v.

JIMMY CARTER (ON T.V.)

I never forget one moment that I'm
awake about the hostages whose
lives and safety depends on me.

Carter is speaking at a White House press conference on
television. (*1/18/80). After a beat.

SIEGEL

John Wayne's in the ground six
months and there's no more MEN in
this country, y'know what I mean?
He's like evolution's perfect
animal for delivering bad news.
Look at his eyes, he don't even
have to talk and you know there's
bad news... Forget the politics,
just gimme Eisenhower, gimme
MacArthur. Gimme Gregory Peck
playing MacArthur. The country's
tired of bad news.

INT. SHERATON HOTEL - NIGHT

A TELEFAX MACHINE spells out a message, letter by letter.

MR KEVIN HARKINS - CARE OF HOTEL SHERATON

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Mendez holds a passport and some papers in front of Bob
Anders's face. It's late now. The Houseguests are tired,
sweating, sitting around a dining room. Mendez, sleeves
rolled up. The ARGO STORYBOARDS are scattered around the
room.

MENDEZ

You're not a film director.

BOB ANDERS

I am a film director.

MENDEZ

What's the name of the first film
you directed?

Bob Anders is silent. He doesn't know.

MENDEZ (CONT'D)
 He's an American spy. Shoot him.

Mendez throws down the passport. ANGLES on the Houseguests. Pale, sweating. They've been at this a while.

 MENDEZ (CONT'D)
 You've got to know your résumé
 front and back. They'll try to
 break you by getting you agitated.

Mendez moves on around the table to Kathy Stafford.

 MENDEZ (CONT'D)
 Where was your passport issued?

 KATHY STAFFORD
 Vancouver.

 MENDEZ
 Where were you born?

 KATHY STAFFORD
 Toronto.

 MENDEZ
 Toronno. Canadians don't pronounce
 the T.

 JOE STAFFORD
 (getting fed up)
 The border guard won't know that.

 MENDEZ
 If we're held for questioning,
 they'll bring in somebody who knows
 that.

The Houseguests look at each other.

 MENDEZ (CONT'D)
 We'll go again in the morning.

Tony has a new heaviness in his eyes. Maybe he can't pull this off.

INT. SHERATON ROOM - LATE

Tony is PREPPING the CANADIAN PASSPORTS -- expertly copying Farsi stamps with a very thin paintbrush. A KNOCK on the door. Tony hides the passports. Answers the door.

 BELLHOP
 Sir, a telex arrived earlier.

The Bellhop hands Tony a piece of paper.

 MENDEZ (V.O.)
 "The Minister of Culture and
 Guidance has approved your location
 scout.

INT. SHERATON ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Mendez, on the phone --

 MENDEZ
 (reading the telefax)
 "He will send a representative to
 meet you and your crew at the
 Khayyam entrance to the Grand
 Bazaar tomorrow at 3 p.m."

INT. O'DONNELL'S OFFICE - DAY

O'Donnell on the phone -- an IRAN EXPERT from NEAR EASTERN
 Bureau, 30s, is in his office with him.

 O'DONNELL
 They called your bluff.

 MENDEZ
 Or maybe they're cooperating.

 O'DONNELL
 N.E.'s saying absolutely not. You
 cannot take those people scouting a
 Western film at the bazaar. It's
 the hive. It's Khomeini's support
 base.

 MENDEZ
 Refusing confirms we're not who we
 say we are. Refusing brings the
 hive to *us*.

 O'DONNELL
 Are they ready with their covers?

 MENDEZ
 They're getting there.

 O'DONNELL
 There's no prize for Most Improved.
 Are they ready?

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mark Lijek and Joe Stafford are sitting up watching a press conference of the Ayatollah speaking.* (*11/12/79). Mark Lijek translates for Joe.

MARK LIJEK

'We are a nation of 35 million
and... many of these people are
looking forward to martyrdom. We--'

Kathy Stafford looks into the room. Mark stops talking -- Joe looks up.

JOE STAFFORD

(to Kathy)

Five minutes?

He smiles at her. Kathy, who looks like she hasn't been sleeping, nods and leaves. After a moment --

JOE STAFFORD (CONT'D)

She pleaded with me.

Mark, looking to Joe. This is new.

JOE STAFFORD (CONT'D)

When the shit in the streets
started nine months ago. She begged
for us to leave. She packed our
bags. I said, 'A little longer.'
And what I was thinking was, 'This
is a good thing. Stay. Show Newsom
you've got the balls. Grab for the
ring.'

(a beat)

I think we're gonna die here.

INT. KOMITEH HEADQUARTERS, AMIR ABAD DISTRICT - NIGHT

The feeling here is dangerous. Young Men carrying automatic weapons casually. The exhilaration of young men who have turned the world upside down.

Behrouz stands next to ALI KHALKALI, 30s, a Revolutionary Committee security official. He is looking at Tony's STUDIO SIX business card and the ARGO script.

INT. SHERATON BALCONY - MORNING

Tony looks at one of the Argo storyboards -- one depicting an EXTOTIC SPICE MARKET, a BAZAR -- in the light.

CORA LIJEK (V.O.)
This isn't what we voted on.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - MORNING

The Houseguests are gathered in the kitchen. Cora hands the telefax to Bob Anders. Joe Stafford, looking on.

CORA LIJEK
You said "straight to the airport."
You said that.

BOB ANDERS
It's because they suspect?

MENDEZ
What I know is we need to act like
a movie crew. We go to the bazaar
today, we fly out tomorrow.

Silent assent among the group. Then Joe Stafford, sitting
with his wife, speaks up --

JOE STAFFORD
We won't do it.

MARK LIJEK
He told them there were six of us.
They're expecting six.

JOE STAFFORD
(to Mendez)
You are about to show the only card
we're holding. Which is that they
don't know we're here.

MENDEZ
I'm asking you to trust me.

JOE STAFFORD
I *don't* trust you.

BOB ANDERS
(fed up, to Joe)
Do you have an alternative? This is
the ball game, Joe. For Christ's
sake, what world are you living in?

JOE STAFFORD
The real world.

Joe takes Kathy's hand and goes, leaving Mendez with the
others. After a moment --

MARK LIJEK
 (to Mendez)
 So we'll see you at two?

INT. CARPET FACTORY - MORNING

A KOMITEH BOSS inspects the work of the carpet weaving kids, who labor quietly. Dozens of documents are now complete, sitting on the floor in rows. Some pages from the EMBASSY MUG BOOK are now re-assembled. The Boss picks one of the pages up.

EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - DAY

PAT TAYLOR
 This one.

Pat Taylor gives Cora Lijek a Candian maple-leaf lapel pin. Cora pins it to her shirt, looks in the mirror. Joe and Kathy Stafford look to each other. Sitting reading newspapers while the other Houseguests dress for the scout. The PHONE starts ringing.

PAT TAYLOR (CONT'D)
 (answering the phone)
 Hello?

A cloud comes over Pat as she listens.

PAT TAYLOR (CONT'D)
 No, there's no one like that here.

She hangs up the phone fast, as if it were hot to the touch.

PAT TAYLOR (CONT'D)
 He asked to speak to the Americans.

CORA LIJEK
 Who was it?

Pat shakes her head. ON Joe Stafford listening. Kathy takes his hand.

KATHY STAFFORD
 (to Joe)
 Somebody knows.

INT. SHERATON ROOM - DAY

Tony sits on his bed, next to the phone. Thinking.

He gets up and leaves, and we start to hear the sound of a man talking fast in Farsi.

EXT. CAR RENTAL - DAY

It's a CAR RENTAL MAN, 60s, speaking. Tony is looking at a MINI-VAN on a lot of beaten-up rental cars.

MENDEZ

This one, how much? One day, how much?

EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - DAY

Four of Houseguests are waiting out front, dressed in their best approximation of the clothes of a movie scout crew. Cora has the maple leaf flag pin on her shirt.

They turn when they see the mini-van that Tony was looking at pull up to the residence. Mendez gets out.

LEE SCHATZ

(here we are)

One two three four.

While the Houseguests board the van, Bob Anders takes Tony aside.

BOB ANDERS

Somebody called the house asking for us.

MENDEZ

Who?

Bob Anders shrugs. Tony heads into the house...

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - DAY

... to find Joe Stafford sitting at the table. Kathy has her hand on his. They are badly shaken.

MENDEZ

I promise you that if you will play along today, I will get you out tomorrow.

JOE STAFFORD

We have a family at home, Mr. Harkins.

MENDEZ

Mr. Mendez.

(a beat)

I have a family at home too.

Mendez goes back out to the mini-van. Stay with Joe and Kathy.

INT. MINI-VAN - DAY

Mendez, in the driver's seat, looks at the house, then at his watch. He starts up the van, filled with four of the Houseguests. Then he looks in the rear-view and sees one of the back doors open. Joe and Kathy Stafford board.

EXT. TEHRAN - DAY

Tony drives the mini-van through streets of Tehran. The Houseguests sit in silence, looking out the windows. It's the first time they've been out in the city since the embassy siege. There is a vehement DEMONSTRATION going on -- stars-and-stripes burning in Molavi Square.

MENDEZ

Tell me who you are.

This recalls attention from the windows.

LEE SCHATZ

Mike McEwan, cameraman.

BOB ANDERS

Robert Baker, director.

MARK LIJEK

Timothy Harris, screenwriter.

CORA LIJEK

Mary Ann Boyd, location manager.

KATHY STAFFORD

Rachel Dewart, set designer.

Kathy looks at her husband.

JOE STAFFORD

Sean Bissett, associate producer.

MENDEZ

Let's make a movie.

EXT. STREET NEAR THE BAZAAR - DAY

The mini-van double parks on Musavi Street. Taxis, men loading and unloading rolled-up carpets onto pickup trucks, chaos.

A YOUNG MAN IN A TIE waits. This is REZA, mid 20s, a low-level administrator in the Ministry of Guidance.

Mendez gets out and they speak and shake hands. The image FREEZES. In a BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH. And, in the REVERSE, we realize that we've been watching from the perspective of a REVOLUTIONARY GUARD PHOTOGRAPHER across the street.

He takes another photograph. This time focusing on the distinctive moustached face of LEE SCHATZ.

EXT./INT. TEHRAN BAZAAR - DAY

Reza is leading Mendez and the group of Houseguests through the Tehran Bazaar. A word about the place: the world's largest bazaar. 10 kilometers of narrow alleys. Chinese-made Swiss watches, banks, mosques, butchers, fabric stores, gold stands. Boys with hand-trucks loaded down with piles of fabric cut through the crowd. It's not a Marrakesh timeless kind of place: older Islamic architecture elbows up against neon signs and rickety wooden stands with second story balconies like Bourbon Street.

Bob Anders walks toward the front.

REZA

You are the director?

BOB ANDERS

Yes.

REZA

(pleasant)

Is this film a foreign bride film?

BOB ANDERS

I'm sorry?

REZA

A film where a foreign bride is brought to Iran, but she doesn't understand the language and customs and there are misunderstandings and laughs.

BOB ANDERS

No.

REZA
 (not happy with that
 answer)

Mmmm.

Mendez walking toward the back of the group. Lee, the cameraman, is looking through a viewfinder down the alley of the bazaar.

MENDEZ
 (quiet)
 Mike?

LEE SCHATZ
 (not looking up)
 Yeh.

MENDEZ
 If I said you were looking through
 the wrong end of that viewfinder,
 would I be right?

Lee turns the viewfinder around and looks through it again.

ANGLE

Mendez talking to Lee from a distance. A zoom, a closer snapshot of LEE. Then of CORA LIJEK, who walks through the bazaar with an open ARGO SCRIPT in her hand.

The Revolutionary Guard photographer is taking pictures of each of the Houseguests, picking their portraits off one by one like a sniper.

Now, a black and white still of MENDEZ. The still returns to life, and a beat on Mendez. Looking in the direction of the photographer. He knows something's up.

INT. TEHRAN BAZAAR - DAY

Reza leads the Houseguests Mendez and the Houseguests deeper into this city within a city. The bazaar should seem more forbidding and than even the rest of revolutionary Tehran, fundamentalist ground zero. Now they're at a street dedicated to gold and jewelry. BAZAARIS stand at their shop doors; puzzled; unfriendly; some with their arms akimbo; watching the visitors.

Kathy Stafford, the production designer on the scout, takes a Polaroid of a window adorned in gold. The SHOPKEEPER, a 70-ish bazaari, sees her do so.

He hurries out of his store, speaking in rapid-fire Farsi at her. The Houseguests stop. Reza speaks to the Shopkeeper in Farsi, then --

REZA
(to Kathy)
He wants the photograph you took.

MENDEZ
She's the production designer. Her job is to take photographs.

SHOPKEEPER getting more and more heated in Farsi.

REZA
He says he did not give you permission to take a photograph of his store.

Other BAZAARIS and SHOPPERS are starting to gather. Kathy holds out the Polaroid toward the Shopkeeper.

KATHY STAFFORD
He can have the photograph. Tell him --

The Shopkeeper knocks the Polaroid out of her hand.

IN THE BAZAAR

People are now starting to surround Mendez and Reza and the Houseguests. Bazaaris more and more heated. Women in chadors are screaming and finger-pointing.

ANGRY MAN
(in English)
America NO! ... NO!

Then he speaks in Farsi and makes shooting gestures with his hand.

LEE SCHATZ
(quiet, to Mendez)
He's saying the shah killed his son with an American gun.

Cauldron is getting warmer. ANGLES ON: more and more Bazaaris start to gather around the group. ON Kathy -- her claustrophobia as the crowd closes in -- a WOMAN sticks her finger in Kathy's face --

CORA LIJEK
(to one of the Women)
Canada... Ca-na-da ...

She shows a Canadian flag lapel button.

LEE SCHATZ

(quiet, to Mendez)

He says we're the CIA taking photographs to plan the bombing of the city.

REZA

I would like to suggest that we end our visit?

MENDEZ

We think that's a good idea.

Reza indicates an exit to the street. The CROWD heckles the Houseguests as they walk toward the exit. One or two might even spit on them.

INT. MINI-VAN - AFTERNOON

The aftermath: headed back to the Ambassador's. The Houseguests, badly shaken. Catching their breath. Mark Lijek has his arm around Cora. She wants to cry, but is determined not to be That Girl Who Cries, so she bites her cheek. Kathy still in shock from the Polaroid incident. Anders, adrenaline flowing. Joe, stewing.

MENDEZ

You did well. You did very well.

INT. O'DONNELL'S OFFICE - MORNING

Coffee mug on the desk. O'Donnell's there late.

O'DONNELL

They drew you out there to take your picture. They could have melted.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - AFTERNOON (CROSS-CUTTING)

Mendez is in the phone in Ken Taylor's home office.

MENDEZ

They didn't.

O'DONNELL

You got lucky. The cover story's too hard. They can't hold it at the airport.

MENDEZ

They'll hold it.

O'DONNELL

They'll blow themselves and you.

You gotta call the game.

(after a beat)

There are already 50 at the embassy. There'll be six more.

ON Mendez, not believing what he's hearing.

ODONNELL

There's been a development. You on scrambler?

MENDEZ

What do you think?

ODONNELL

(quiet, fast, clear)

Joint Chiefs are planning a military rescue of the hostages in a month. Delta Force started training to storm the grounds. So if the six of them get brought there, they won't be held for long.

MENDEZ

If I leave, they'll be found here. I never would have exposed them if I wasn't authorized to take them out.

ODONNELL

Tony --

MENDEZ

They will be taken. Probably not ALIVE --

ODONNELL

For one fucking minute, LISTEN TO ME. The thinking's changed upstairs. Six Americans get pulled out of a Canadian diplomat's house and executed, it's another world outrage. Six Americans get caught *playing movie make-believe with the CIA at the airport* and executed, it's a national embarrassment. They're calling the operation.

MENDEZ

We're responsible for those people.

ODONNELL
 (genuinely sad)
 What we are is required to follow
 my orders. I'm sorry.

Mendez has hung up. O'Donnell sits listening to the dial tone for a moment, then puts the phone on the receiver. Then, very suddenly, he looks at his coffee cup, half full, and backhands it off his desk.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Bob Anders, a handful of liquor bottles in his arms, walks by Mendez, who has a scotch in his hand. Music plays on a record player.

BOB ANDERS
 Scorched earth policy tonight.
 Nothing gets left behind.

Taylor, drink in hand, thoughts heavy, looks at Tony.

MENDEZ
 So you know?

TAYLOR
 (nods)
 ExtAff wants you burn their
 passports before you leave. Don't
 get caught with them in your bag.

Mendez looks at the Houseguests, prepping dinner.

MENDEZ
 Will you tell them?

TAYLOR
 If I do, they'll panic. It's better
 if you just don't show.
 (a beat)
 It was always a fucked mission. You
 came closer than anybody else.

Kathy and Cora are cracking each other up -- a mini flour-fight at the sink. There's hope in them.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Mendez drives through nighttime Tehran, back to the hotel.

Then, as if saying something to test a recording device or to hear what his own voice sounds like for the first time.

MENDEZ

That's all, folks... That's all,
folks. That's all, folks. That's
all, folks.

Mendez keeps repeating it to himself. Hitting the steering wheel. He's very very low.

EXT. RURAL VIRGINIA ROAD - AFTERNOON

Christine driving, Michael in the passenger seat. She pulls up to the roadside mailbox outside the passenger side at the entrance to a dirt road.

MICHAEL

More ... more ... more ... STOP.

She's inching the car forward. It's their ritual. Christine pulls the car close enough to the box that Michael can open it the window without getting out of the car.

Michael opens the box pulls a stack of mail. He flips through. Catalogs for his grandmother... Bills ... then, Tony's postcard with the Washington monument on it. LOVE YOU BOTH SO MUCH. He shows it to his mother.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Chambers, listening on a phone, shakes his head at Siegel. He hangs up.

CHAMBERS

It's off. They want us to pack up
the office.

EXT. TEHRAN - DAWN

The city waking up.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - DAWN

The Houseguests, getting dressed. Suiting up for the airport. Ken Taylor watches in the hall. He looks at Pat. Sad, silent.

EXT. SHERATON ROOM - DAWN

Tony sits a a table looking out the window.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - MORNING

Lee Schatz puts his Infant of Prague holy card into an Argo script. Packs the script.

Cora Lijek is sitting on the stairs next to her husband. One of his arms is around her. His other hand rubs her stomach.

Kathy Stafford looks at the clock.

KATHY STAFFORD
(to Joe Stafford)
He's late.

EXT. SHERATON BALCONY - EARLY MORNING

Tony comes out to the balcony with a hotel ice bucket in one hand and the Canadian passports in the other. He puts the passports in the bucket, LIGHTS A MATCH.

He looks down at the match, at the passports. The first stirrings of the morning calls-to-prayer echo in the distance.

HOLD for a long beat on Tony. Thinking.

Then, HE BLOWS OUT THE MATCH.

INT. O'DONNELL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

O'Donnell is packing up for the night. Paper towels sit on top of the coffee spill on his rug.

His phone rings. He picks up.

O'DONNELL
Yeah.

INT. SHERATON ROOM - EARLY MORNING

MENDEZ
I am RESPONSIBLE. Somebody is
RESPONSIBLE for things when things
happen, Jack. A PERSON.
(a beat)
I'm taking them through.

And before Jack can answer, Tony hangs up. Stands. A duffel bag over his shoulder, Tony turns out the light in the hotel room. Goes.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - NIGHT

O'Donnell, thinking. Looking at the phone. Then, with a sudden decision, he gets up.

Rushing out of his office. To ALAN FRANKLIN, a Directorate of Support officer, the guy who allocates the money, one of the few black employees we've seen at the CIA.

O'DONNELL

We need to confirm those seven tickets out of Tehran on Swissair--

FRANKLIN

N.E. shut that down.

O'DONNELL

I'm saying it's back on!

FRANKLIN

I can't do it. It's backstopped pending Executive Branch GO.

O'DONNELL

What the fuck does that mean?

FRANKLIN

Carter's got to say yes for us to get the tickets.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - MORNING

Pat Taylor, wearing a bathrobe, heads downstairs to answer the insistent knocking on her front door. She opens it.

PAT TAYLOR

Kevin.

She's shocked to see him. Ken Taylor now appears behind Pat. In the hall behind him: The Houseguests are assembled, waiting to go. They look their parts -- or, much more so than they did on the scout. Bob Anders looks like Fellini, or someone playing Marcello playing Fellini. Cora Lijek has darker hair. The Staffords look on, fully dressed.

INT. OUTSIDE ENGELL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

O'DONNELL

Where's Engell?

SECRETARY

He's in a meeting.

O'DONNELL
 Pull him out.
 (she hesitates)
 PULL HIM OUT!

EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - DAWN

Pat Taylor is embracing the Houseguests, saying goodbye as they get into the mini-van.

MENDEZ
 (to Ken Taylor)
 You go now too.

Ken Taylor nods. Mendez shakes his hand, hurries to the van.

INT./EXT. MINI-VAN - DAWN

Mendez gets into the driver's seat. Lee Schatz, on the passenger side.

LEE SCHATZ
 Switch. I know how to get there.

Mendez takes the passenger seat and Lee climbs into the driver's seat. Pulls away.

INT. OUTSIDE ENGELL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

ENGELL
 N.E. said NO, this is not a long-leasher ...

O'DONNELL
 ... watching the show behind
 a one-way whorehouse
 mirror...

ENGELL
 ... and it never has been.
 YOU don't decide if it goes
 ...

O'DONNELL
 It is going.

ENGELL
 You're goddamn close ...

O'DONNELL
 Am I goddamn close?

ENGELL
 You're goddamn close to the line
 with me.

O'DONNELL
 (interrupting)
 I'm not leaving him at the airport
 with six people and his dick in his
hand. Tell the Director to call the
 White House. DO YOUR FUCKING JOB.

Engell just stares O'Donnell down. Then O'Donnell storms out
 of the office.

EXT./INT. MINI-VAN - MORNING

The van speeds down the hills of the Shemiran district.

MENDEZ
 The first checkpoint is just to
 look at your passport. Your
 passports came straight from the
 Canadians, so you're gonna be fine.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - A MOMENT LATER

O'Donnell, charging in --

O'DONNELL
 Where's the Director?

MALINOV
 He's on a plane.

O'DONNELL
 Find White House Chief of Staff.

MALINOV
 How would I find him?

O'DONNELL
 We're a fucking SPY AGENCY! FIND
 HIM!

INT. CANADIAN EMBASSY VAN - MORNING

MENDEZ
 The second checkpoint --

Lee Schatz brakes hard as he almost hits a MAN ON A MOPED.
 Mendez and the Houseguests hold on.

INT. CIA, WAR ROOM - NIGHT

MALINOV

Jordan's in the West Wing. He's not taking calls.

A beat on O'Donnell.

O'DONNELL

Where do his kids go to school?

LAMONT

WHAT?

O'DONNELL

Find out where his kids go to school!

INT. MINI-VAN - MORNING

MENDEZ

The second is immigration. You'll hand them these. They say you landed two days ago.

He gives out yellow immigration forms to the Houseguests.

MENDEZ (CONT'D)

These guys are bureaucrats left over from the shah. They can't be bothered to second-guess you.

INT. CIA, WAR ROOM - NIGHT

Malinov slams a phone down.

MALINOV

Georgetown Day!

O'Donnell dials a number.

O'DONNELL

Yes, this is Mr. Murphy from Georgetown Day School for Mr. Jordan... I'm afraid IS an emergency...

INT. WHITE HOUSE OPERATOR ROOM - DAY

WHITE HOUSE OPERATOR

Hold just a moment.

She plugs a wire into an old-fashioned Ma Bell switchboard.

 MENDEZ (V.O.)
Third checkpoint is the trap.

INT. MINI-VAN - MORNING

 MENDEZ
It's manned by Revolutionaries
who've appointed themselves
guardians of the republic. The same
people who took the embassy. Most
of them were educated in the U.S.
or Europe.

 BOB ANDERS
Or Canada?

 MENDEZ
They know how many Ts are in
Toronto.

INT. WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF OFFICE - NIGHT

Jordan is in a meeting with two staffers, his feet up on the desk. His Secretary opens the door without knocking, hurries to Jordan, whispers something in his ear. He immediately grabs the phone.

 JORDAN
Hello?

 O'DONNELL
Jack O'Donnell from C.I.

 JORDAN
Wait... WHO?

 O'DONNELL
Tehran Houseguest operation is
ready NOW. We don't have the
president's go-ahead. They are
going to be captured.

Jordan stands up with the phone.

 JORDAN
 (yelling out his door)
BEN! Pick up!

INT. KOMITEH OFFICE - MORNING

The office we visited earlier. Two YOUNG KOMITEH wearing open collar shirts look at BLACK AND WHITE 8 by 10s of the photographs of the Houseguests from the bazaar in front of them and are comparing the photographs to xeroxes of a reconstructed U.S. Embassy ledger.

In front of the komiteh: on one side, copies of diplomatic photographs of Americans -- like the ones of the Houseguests we saw early in the film -- and, on the other side, the candid photographs from the bazaar.

INT. CIA, WAR ROOM - NIGHT

AIDE
Telex on Flash.

The telex begins to print, line by line ...

EYES ONLY -- OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES --
HOLLYWOOD OPTION APPROVED -- GOOD LUCK. (*Carter White House
telex, 1/29/1980).

O'DONNELL
Copy D.S.! Confirm the tickets! GO!

INT. SWISSAIR COUNTER, MEHRABAD - MORNING

Mendez's Irish passports and the Houseguests' Canadian passports sit on the counter.

SWISSAIR REP
I'm sorry, sir. I don't have those
reservations ...

Swissair Rep looks at some green text on her screen, hits another button.

SWISSAIR REP (CONT'D)
My apologies. They just came
through.

She hits another button and tickets start to print on a slow printer under the counter.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - NIGHT

MALINOV
(to O'Donnell, holding a
phone)
(MORE)

MALINOV (CONT'D)

Swissair says they've picked up the tickets.

O'DONNELL

They're heading to the checkpoints. Get the L.A. office -- tell them to be ready in case they call.

MALINOV

We told them to shut that down!

He RUNS toward a phone --

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, FIRST CHECKPOINT - MORNING

The Passport Official is looking at the Canadian passports of the six and waving them through. Mendez has already passed. Everyone except Kathy Stafford.

The Passport Official looks at Kathy, who is doing his best to look friendly and casual. Then he looks at Kathy's passport, in which she looks stern and angry.

PASSPORT OFFICIAL

Is this you?

Kathy Stafford smooths down her hair frowns like she does in the passport photo. The Passport Official half smiles and waves her through. They've all cleared the first checkpoint.

BOB ANDERS

(to Lee Schatz)

One down, two to go.

INT. KOMITEH OFFICE - MORNING

One of the Young Komiteh -- one with a Moustache -- comes upon a diplomatic photograph of a Man With Glasses.

He starts to leaf through the photographs from the bazaar.

QUICK CUT TO:

POV of the Revolutionary Guard Photographer -- Mark Lijek being photographed at the bazaar the previous day

QUICK CUT BACK:

Moustache looks at the black and white still of Mark Lijek, compares it to his diplomatic picture, the first portrait we saw of Mark toward the beginning of the film. MATCH.

Moustache stands up. SHOUTS in Farsi to another Komiteh --

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, SECOND CHECKPOINT - MORNING

Bob Anders presents a YELLOW ENTRY FORM to a rough-voiced Immigration Officer.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
(to Bob Anders)
When did you arrive in Iran?

BOB ANDERS
Two days ago.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
What was the purpose of your visit?

BOB ANDERS
We were looking at locations to
make a film. I'm the director.

Immigration Officer pauses and looks up. Looks at the six other faces. He looks every bit as confrontational as Tony acted in rehearsal.

BOB ANDERS (CONT'D)
(very calm)
We have a letter from the Minister
of Culture, if you'd like to see
it.

The Immigration Officer gestures for the letter. Bob takes the letter inviting them on their location scout out of a folder. Tony, barely perceptibly, nods.

INT. KOMITEH OFFICE - MORNING

Moustache is now speaking with Khalkali. They speak Farsi and it's untranslated, but we get it. He is showing the photograph of Mark Lijek from the bazaar and comparing it to the U.S. diplomatic photograph.

Khalkali picks up the phone.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, SECOND CHECKPOINT - MORNING

Immigration Official is conferring with Immigration Official 2 as they look at the letter from the Minister of Culture. The Houseguests and Mendez wait.

Cora Lijek breathes carefully, trying to stay composed. She's twisting her wedding ring. She's four months. It's getting tight.

Finally Immigration Official 2 shrugs.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
Okay -- Yes -- Okay --

He waves them through. Second checkpoint done.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - NIGHT

Malinov, a phone to his ear. Ringing.

MALINOV
C'mon c'mon c'mon --

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

The phone in the office rings. No one is there.

EXT. COLUMBIA STUDIOS, SUNSET AND GOWER - EVENING

Siegel and Chambers are walking back to the office carrying coffee, or maybe In and Out burger bags.

The artificial glow of Hollywood light in the near distance. They are within sight of the Argo bungalow, but a P.A. steps in front of them.

P.A.
(a stage whisper)
I'm sorry, we're shooting.

He motions for them to wait. A movie -- it looks like a police procedural: a drunk cop, a redemption story -- is shooting on the lot between Siegel, Chambers, and the Argo office.

INT. AIRPORT GATE - MORNING

ANNOUNCEMENT
SwissAir announces general boarding
for Flight 363 to Zurich.

Passengers, mostly European businessmen, get up and approach the gate.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, THIRD CHECKPOINT - MORNING

Mendez checks in with the Houseguests with his eyes. They are now in sight of the airport gates. And here are six Komiteh. Young men -- none more than 33 or so -- holding automatic weapons.

They have created their own checkpoint. It looks recent, like the makeshift checkpoints after September 11th, A SCREENED-OFF AREA WITH TABLES.

KOMITEH 1
(in Farsi, then in
English)
Passports.

He looks at the Canadian passports and then almost immediately speaks.

KOMITEH 1 (CONT'D)
You come.

He directs Mendez and the Houseguests into the screened-off area. Speaks in Farsi to another Komiteh.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - NIGHT

LAMONT
(holding the phone)
Purser's telling Swissair they're
not on the plane.

O'DONNELL
They should have boarded already.

MALINOV
(on another phone)
Still no answer in the L.A. office.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, THIRD CHECKPOINT - MORNING

MARK LIJEK
A film.

Mark mimes the Charlie Chaplin universal signal of turning the rotor of a movie camera. But it's not universal. Komiteh 1 doesn't understand.

BEARDED KOMITEH (O.S.)
Sit down.

A young man with a beard -- probably late 20s -- speaks in very good American English. He looks at the six and the face he singles out is Joe Stafford's.

BEARDED KOMITEH (CONT'D)
(harsh, icy)
You. You had no business in Iran.

He motions for JOE STAFFORD to step forward. Mendez shifts. A tense moment.

JOE STAFFORD

We did. We were preparing to make a movie here, sir.

BEARDED KOMITEH

You don't have journalist visas.

JOE STAFFORD

Not a documentary. A movie.

Joe Stafford reaches into his pocket and gives Bearded Komiteh a copy of the Argo Variety ad.

JOE STAFFORD (CONT'D)

You see?

(to Mendez)

Kevin, where's your briefcase?

A beat on Mendez. Who then opens his accordion folder and takes from it the ARGO STORYBOARDS. Joe Stafford spreads them out on the table.

Three other Komiteh in the room -- who are about 21 -- lean forward, their AUTOMATIC WEAPONS at their sides, and look at the STORYBOARD DRAWINGS. The Persian Empire futurism of Jack Kirby's drawings.

JOE STAFFORD (CONT'D)

These are the villains. Y'see these guys here? And these are the heroes... in the spice market...

Joe Stafford points at the various drawings. He speaks with an ease and confidence that we didn't know he had. Kathy Stafford stares at her husband.

JOE STAFFORD (CONT'D)

They're trying to get past the towers and into the city. They have these chariots ... like this one ... they go like this ... whoooosh, hmm? They can fly ...

Mendez watches. It's a performance. The three young Komiteh are now wide-eyed, pointing, whispering in Farsi, like teenagers around a comic book.

Bearded Komiteh says something to another Komiteh in the room. Then --

BEARDED KOMITEH
 (to Joe Stafford)
 You don't go until we verify.

MENDEZ
 You can call our office.

Mendez hands Bearded Komiteh his card. STUDIO SIX FILMS.
 Kevin Harkins. A 213 phone number.

ANGLES on the Houseguests as Bearded Komiteh leaves the room
 with the business card and three young Komiteh barely look up
 from the drawings --

EXT. COLUMBIA STUDIOS, SUNSET AND GOWER - LATE AFTERNOON

P.A., with one eye on the A.D., still holding Chambers and
 Siegel. The ACTOR playing the cop is conferring with the
 director. He's not happy with something. They're holding
 everyone until the next take, and --

P.A.
 Going again please! We're rolling --

EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - MORNING

A PICK-UP TRUCK with 5 Komiteh -- automatic weapons out --
 drives up to the Canadian Ambassador's residence.

Someone uses clippers to force the gate open.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, KOMITEH STATION - MORNING

Bearded Komiteh, who apparently has some authority here,
 enters, telling another Komiteh in Farsi to get off the
 phone. Bearded Komiteh looks at the Studio Six business card
 and picks up the receiver.

EXT. COLUMBIA STUDIOS, SUNSET AND GOWER - LATE AFTERNOON

SIEGEL
 I'm sorry, pally. We're just gonna
 be in the movie. Call my agent.

P.A.
 Sir. SIR!

Siegel and Chambers walk through the shot toward the Argo
 office.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, KOMITEH STATION - MORNING

Bearded Komiteh dials the long international number. And it is a DIAL, so this takes a long time.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, THIRD CHECKPOINT - MORNING

One of the young Komiteh is loudly debating with another Komiteh the air-worthiness of a futuristic desert glider in the storyboards. He's miming the thing crashing.

Joe Stafford and the Houseguests are silent. Mendez can see the line of passengers on their Swissair flight dwindling.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, KOMITEH STATION - MORNING

Bearded Komiteh rings the phone three times -- four times -- he's going to hang up --

CHAMBERS (V.O.)
(out of breath)
Studio Six films.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

A beat of silence. Chambers catching his breath, listening. The door to the office wide open.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, KOMITEH STATION - MORNING

BEARDED KOMITEH
May I speak to Mr. Kevin Harkins--

CHAMBERS (O.S.)
He's out of the country on a
location scout. May I take a
message?

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Chambers listens for a response. Siegel now catches up.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, KOMITEH STATION - MORNING

BEARDED KOMITEH
No message.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - MORNING

ANNOUNCEMENT

Swissair announces final boarding of Flight 363 to Zurich. All passengers should be at the gate at this time.

EXT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - MORNING

Komiteh are forcing the front door of the house open.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, THIRD CHECKPOINT - MORNING

Bearded Komiteh comes back into the screened-off area. Looks at Joe Stafford, then at Mendez. Then says something in Farsi to the three Komiteh in the holding area. Then he leaves.

The three Young Komiteh look at the drawings, then at Joe Stafford. Silence for a moment.

MENDEZ

(he pushes the storyboards toward them)

Our gift to you. From our film.

Komiteh 1, who speaks enough English to understand, translates to the others. They forget their revolutionary mission for a second, happy with their gift. They'd high-five if they could. They're kids.

Komiteh 1 motions for the Houseguests to go.

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - MORNING

A dozen Komiteh, guns drawn, rush into the residence. Empty liquor bottles. The remains of what looks like breakfast for a group of people.

But the place is empty. The Komiteh in a Jacket, who seems to be in charge, sends someone to check upstairs.

INT./EXT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, FLIGHT GATE - MORNING

Outside, a BUSLOAD of passengers about to be ferried to the airplane.

A Swissair Rep is closing the gate to Flight 363. She looks up to see the Houseguests and Mendez hurrying through the terminal, headed toward her. She holds the gate, speaks in German into a walkie, and --

INT. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - MORNING

A Komiteh, upstairs, comes to the foyer balcony and shouts something in Farsi down to the Komiteh in a Jacket. Who picks up a phone on a hallway table and dials a number.

ANGLE ON

A SwissAir ticket is torn.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, FLIGHT GATE - MORNING

Cora Lijek's ticket is taken and she walks through the door. Hurries toward the transport bus. The other five Houseguests and Mendez behind her and --

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, KOMITEH STATION - MORNING

A phone rings and a Young Komiteh picks up the call. He listens for a moment. Then he drops the phone and RUNS into the airport terminal and --

INT. RUNWAY TRANSPORT BUS - MORNING

The Houseguests sit aboard the bus, headed to a waiting DC-10.

The DRIVER puts the bus into gear. It doesn't go. He shakes his head. This goddamn thing. Shifts gears again. Now it goes.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT - MORNING

Young Komiteh RUNNING through the terminal, pushing through a crowd, making a Woman drop her suitcase, contents scattering. An automatic weapon at his side.

The three Komiteh from the Third Checkpoint stand up from the table with the Argo storyboards. Young Komiteh shouts at them and they take up their weapons and join him, running --

EXT. SWISSAIR DC 10 - MORNING

The Housguests head up the stairs to the plane.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, FLIGHT GATE - MORNING

The Young Komiteh arrives at Flight 363's gate. The door is CLOSED.

INT. SWISSAIR DC 10 - MORNING

The Houseguests put their carry-on luggage into the overhead bins. A Flight Attendant is already holding a detached seatbelt preparing to do her safety mime.

ANNOUNCEMENT (GERMAN)

Please direct your attention to the flight attendants for some important safety information.

Mendez is sitting looking out the window toward the terminal.

ANGLE ON

The wheel of the DC-10. The airplane has now pulled away from the gate and is backing up toward the runway -- slowly -- maddeningly slow --

INT. SWISSAIR DC 10 - MORNING

Passengers read paperbacks or International Herald Tribunes. Mark Lijek's arm is around Cora. Lee Schatz is moving his mouth in what looks like a prayer. Kathy Stafford's fingers shake as she holds an arm rest. Joe Stafford tries to stay her hand.

INT. MEHRABAD AIRPORT, FLIGHT GATE - MORNING

The Young Komiteh yells to a Swissair Rep, dragging her back toward the gate. We can't hear what she says back, but she's shaking her head.

Young Komiteh goes to the WINDOW. He can see the Swissair plane slowly turning onto the runway. He picks up a walkie and pushes through the flight gate door, setting off an alarm, followed by the two other Komiteh.

INT. MEHRABAD FLIGHT TOWER - MORNING

An Iranian FLIGHT TRAFFIC CONTROLLER calmly speaks into his radio in British-accented English.

FLIGHT TRAFFIC CONTROLLER

SwissAir 363, you are Number 2 for departure.

INT. SWISSAIR DC 10 - MORNING

Out the window of the plane. Two IRANIAN POLICE CARS and a CANVAS-TOPPED TRUCK are headed down the runway toward the plane.

It's the POV of MENDEZ. Looking out from his window seat.

EXT. AIRPORT RUNWAY - MORNING

An IRAN AIRLINES 747 takes off, revealing the Swissair jet behind it. Only empty runway ahead of Swissair 363 now and --

ANGLE ON

Boots taking stairs two at a time.

INT. MEHRABAD FLIGHT TOWER - MORNING

Three Komiteh with automatics rush up the tower stairs --

EXT. AIRPORT RUNWAY - MORNING

We're speeding behind two Iranian Police Cars and a Canvas Topped Jeep as they speed toward the Swissair plane. In the back of the jeep we can see half a dozen Komiteh, weapons drawn and --

INT. SWISSAIR DC 10, COCKPIT - MORNING

A SWISSAIR PILOT, 50s, at the controls.

VOICE OF FLIGHT CONTROLLER
Swissair 363 --

The Pilot puts his hand on the throttle control.

INT. MEHRABAD FLIGHT TOWER - MORNING

FLIGHT TRAFFIC CONTROLLER
-- you are cleared for take-off.

The Flight Traffic Controller moves his head-set mic away from his mouth to take a drink of very strong Iranian tea, and -- the door to the Control Room BURSTS OPEN. Three Komiteh with automatics, shouting instructions to the Traffic Controller, who spills his tea --

INT. SWISSAIR DC 10 - MORNING

Mendez looking out the window -- the three Iranian vehicles speeding ahead -- they're gaining on us -- but now we start to pull away from them -- leaving them behind -- beginning to RISE UP --

INT. MEHRABAD FLIGHT TOWER - MORNING

The Flight Controller has his arms up... through the floor-to-ceiling windows of the tower, as three Komiteh watch a Swissair DC 10 angle upward and leave the ground ...

EXT. AIRPORT RUNWAY - MORNING

The Komiteh from the jeep are now standing on the runway watching the plane disappear.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - NIGHT

LAMONT

(taking off headphones)

We have wheels up. It's --

He starts to punch the air. O'Donnell stays his arm.

ODONNELL

Not till they've cleared the border.

INT. SWISSAIR DC 10 - MORNING

The Houseguests -- holding their breath --

Mendez -- looking out the window -- scanning the air around the plane -- behind every cloud --

ANNOUNCEMENT

Ladies and gentlemen, it is our pleasure to announce that alcoholic beverages are now available, as we have cleared Iranian airspace.

A high pitched scream --

The Houseguests, who shout and embrace and celebrate. Bob Anders high-fives Lee Schatz, then the other Houseguests. Mark Lijek, crying, embraces Cora.

Kathy Stafford is laughing. She kisses her husband's hand.

Some of the other passengers look up from their newspapers, annoyed at this Canadian fuss.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - NIGHT

All eyes watch Malinov, listening, headphone to one ear...

MALINOV
They're CLEAR!

Cheers in the CIA. O'Donnell throws papers in the air and embraces Malinov.

INT./EXT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - NIGHT

Siegel throws down a phone and rushes outside ... to where Chambers smokes.

SIEGEL
OUUUT! THEY'RE OUT!

Chambers and Lester scream like kids who've just scored the game-winning touchdown. The P.A. tries to shush them.

INT. SWISSAIR DC 10 - MORNING

A mini-champagne bottle pops. The Houseguests are celebrating: New Year's Eve and a Super Bowl victory party in a DC-10 aisle.

FIND Mendez, sitting alone, apart from the celebration. Looking out the window. Mendez turns to see that someone is standing in the aisle next to him. Joe Stafford. Tony looks up at Joe.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (O.S.)
I'm sorry, sir. You need to sit
down.

But Joe doesn't pay attention to the Flight Attendant tapping him on the shoulder. He extends his hand to Mendez. Who takes it. A moment between them. Stafford nods at Mendez, and what he means is "You're a good man." Mendez nods back to him.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
Sir?

Joe goes back to his seat.

HOLD on Tony Mendez. For a long time.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - NIGHT

Drinking straight from a bottle of Beefeater. Pauses between each of these lines.

SIEGEL

It's history, is what it is.
"History plays out first as farce,
then as tragedy."

CHAMBERS

The quote's the other way around.

SIEGEL

Who said that again?

CHAMBERS

Marx.

SIEGEL

Groucho?

CHAMBERS

Karl.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - NIGHT

The celebration is quieter and drunker now.

LAMONT

(a couple of beers along)
WE are the good guys!

ROSSI

Six down, fifty to go.

LAMONT

Call the New York Fucking
Times. The CIA are the good
guys.

MALINOV

The Canadians are the good guys.

LAMONT

-- we're not greedy -- them too --

MALINOV

Only. Canada takes the credit, or
they'll retaliate against the
hostages. Great Satan wasn't
involved. No CIA.

LAMONT

Is that right, Jack?

O'DONNELL
Involved in what? We're as surprised as anybody that the Canadians got our people out. Thank you, Canada.

Jack raises a glass of scotch and takes a drink.

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE

A homemade sign that reads: THANK YOU CANADA!* (*homecoming ceremony for Houseguests 2/1980). Hundreds are gathered to welcome the six back.

TED KOPPEL
Finally, a sliver of really good news. Not, unfortunately, related to the 50 hostages but to six other Americans who've been hiding in the Canadian Embassy in Tehran for almost three months now.

*AMERICA HELD HOSTAGE, DAY 87, BROADCAST (1/29/80).

CUT TO:

CANADIAN MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS FLORA MACDONALD, late 60s. (*A.H.H. 1/29/80)

FLORA MACDONALD
It was a simple operation, really.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT, LOBBY - DAY

The Houseguests -- the ones we've seen throughout the film, not the real ones -- arrive in the State Department lobby. Television lights everywhere.

TED KOPPEL (V.O.)
The six fled the country posing as Canadian diplomats. They simply walked away.

Camera flashes, wild cheers. Banners: WELCOME HOME CORA AND MARK! IDAHO LOVES YOU, LEE! It's the first moment of national celebration since the beginning of the crisis.

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE

IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SADEQ GHOTBZADEH speaks angrily into a microphone.

SADEQ GHOTBZADEH*
 Sooner or later, here or anywhere
 in the world, Canada will pay for
 this violation of the sovereignty
 of Iran. (*News conference
 1/29/80).

MORE ARCHIVE FOOTAGE. (*1/30/1980) of the State Department
 WELCOME HOME CEREMONY. Ambassador KEN TAYLOR is presented
 with a HUGE FLORAL BOUQUET. Cheering crowds all around him.

INT. RURAL VIRGINIA HOUSE - DAY

Christine Mendez is watching the scene on t.v. Michael next
 to her reading a Choose Your Own Adventure book.

HOLD on Christine watching the celebration. She doesn't know
 her husband was involved. Or maybe she does know.

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - DAY

Mendez walks down the long windowed hall of the first floor.

SIEGEL (V.O.)
 This morning my waitress at Jerry's
 said to me, "You hear what those
 Canadians did?"

INT. SIEGEL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lester in a bathrobe. The New York Times in front of him: SIX
 U.S. DIPLOMATS, HIDDEN BY CANADA, LEAVE IRAN SAFELY. Next to
 that, an article about Ken Taylor: DIPLOMAT DIRECTED ESCAPE
 IN IRAN. (Front page, *NYT 1/30/80).

SIEGEL
 She said, "Why couldn't we pull off
 something like that?" You know what
 I said to her?

INT. CIA, LANGLEY - DAY

Mendez at his desk, a pile of messages near him.

MENDEZ
 Wha'd you say to her?

INT. SIEGEL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

SIEGEL
I said "Argo fuck yourself."

INT. CIA ARCHIVES - DAY

And suddenly it's dead-quiet. We're in a vault inside a vault in the basement of the main building.

Mendez's suitcase is lying on a low counter, an ARCHIVES OFFICER toe-tagging and cataloging various items. Separating Mendez's personal things from material related to the operation.

Mendez empties his briefcase and Officer puts a sticker on the VARIETY featuring the ARGO ad. Another on the ARGO script. He's putting things into a box that reads: USCIA CLASSIFIED MATERIAL.

Mendez opens his accordion folder -- flips through it -- it's empty -- no. There's something inside.

In one of the compartments is a STORYBOARD FROM ARGO.

One that the komiteh missed. While the Archives Officer is turned around, Mendez slips the storyboard back into the accordion folder and puts it back with his personal things.

INT. CIA, HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

O'Donnell is on his way out. Seeing Mendez, he stops dead.

O'DONNELL
And I sent my autograph book to the cleaners.

EXT. CIA, PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

O'DONNELL
His Eminence called me. He wants to see you.

MENDEZ
He wants to fire me himself.

O'DONNELL
He wants to give you the Intelligence Star.

(MORE)

O'DONNELL (CONT'D)
You're getting the highest award of
merit of the Clandestine Services
of these fifty United States.
Ceremony's two weeks from today.

Mendez stops walking. A beat.

MENDEZ
If they do it next week, Michael
will be on winter break.

O'DONNELL
The op was classified so the
ceremony's classified. He can't
know about it. Nobody can know
about it.

MENDEZ
They're gonna hand me an award,
then they're gonna take it back?

O'DONNELL
If we wanted applause, we would
have joined the circus.

MENDEZ
I thought that's what we did.

O'Donnell claps Tony on the shoulder. They walk toward their
separate cars.

O'DONNELL
(yelling to Tony; an
afterthought)
Carter said you were a great
American.

MENDEZ
(yelling back)
A great American what?

O'DONNELL
That he didn't say.

ANGLE ON

A POSTER on the wall. ARGO: A COSMIC CONFLAGRATION.

INT. ARGO PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY

A hand takes the poster down. Chambers is disassembling the
office. Boxes packed. Everything now off the walls.

He turns out the lights.

EXT. COLUMBIA BACKLOT, SUNSET AND GOWER - AFTERNOON

Doug, the maintenance man who rented them the place, is watering a planter. He spots Chambers walking past with arms full of boxes, posters, an unopened bottle of Beefeater.

DOUG
You're moving out?

Chambers gives the bottle to Doug, slaps his back.

DOUG (CONT'D)
What happened to *Argo*?

CHAMBERS
It's in turnaround.

He's walking away from us, through the backlot where a crane is moving into place for a night shoot.

EXT. ROAD UP TO RURAL VIRGINIA HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

A Ford Bronco heads up the road, past a mailbox, toward a 1920s farmhouse at the edge of the woods.

EXT. RURAL VIRGINIA HOUSE -

Mendez, a duffel bag on his shoulder, knocks on the door. He waits. After a moment, Christine -- red sauce on her hands, in the middle of making dinner -- opens the door with a dish towel.

MENDEZ
Hi.

CHRISTINE
Hi.

They look at each other.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)
My hands are d--

Before she can finish, he's embraced her. Holds tight. It's something in between romantic and fraternal. Not reconciliation, necessarily, but warmth. She reciprocates. It feels right, and good.

WIDEN to hold on them holding each other in dark the hall of the very American, even Hummel-kitschy, house. HOLD there for a while.

ANGLE ON

A scene of the Old West on a television.

INT. RURAL VIRGINIA HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael is watching 1973's sci-fi Western 'Westworld' in the living room. Michael doesn't have to describe the scene to his father this time. Widen to see that his head is on a pillow on Tony's lap.

Card 1: THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS ENDED ON JANUARY 20, 1981, WHEN THE REMAINING EMBASSY HOSTAGES WERE RELEASED AFTER 444 DAYS IN CAPTIVITY.

INT. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

We can faintly hear the sounds of gunslinging from the living room movie in here. Glow-in-the-dark stars on the wall. A Star Wars X-Wing fighter. A couple of rubber Planet of the Apes figures that look like they've been chewed by a dog.

Card 2: OSCAR-WINNING MAKE-UP ARTIST JOHN CHAMBERS WAS AWARDED THE CIA'S INTELLIGENCE MEDAL OF MERIT, ITS HIGHEST CIVILIAN HONOR. HE REMAINED FRIENDS WITH TONY UNTIL CHAMBERS DIED IN 2001.

The camera moves over the dresser of Michael's toys until we find, almost unnoticeable among his science fiction collection, a piece of cardboard behind Captain Kirk and Han Solo figures.

It's a STORYBOARD FROM ARGO. The one missed by the komiteh at the airport.

Card 3: TONY MENDEZ WAS NOT GIVEN BACK HIS INTELLIGENCE STAR UNTIL 1997, WHEN THE 'ARGO' OPERATION WAS DECLASSIFIED BY PRESIDENT CLINTON.

Linger on the ARGO STORYBOARD. A MAN in a futuristic chariot sheltering a KID from what look like laser beams.

Card 4: HE LIVES IN RURAL MARYLAND WITH HIS FAMILY.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.