

Ascension

ACT I

INT - LAUNCHPAD - NIGHT

A lighter flickers.

We hear something begin to burn and crackle.

An unseen flame begins to light the words "ASCENSION" which appear in front of us.

Behind us, a single glimmering light rises up from the darkness. Another follows.

We hear a low humming rumble.

As the words become completely lit, we see them start to glitter away and lose color, tiny ashes flying around us.

The words blur out of focus and suddenly, two giant flames silently burst downwards.

They fade away and we are left with just a faint outline of a giant structure.

Behind us, the planet Earth slowly rises from the darkness.

One by one, lights turn on in front of us, leading upwards towards the heavens. Each light comes on with a shuttering sound, picking up in pace while turning on.

When finally, all the lights are on, we see a towering space shuttle before us.

We are on a launch pad.

Behind us, we see the little glimmers were in fact stars. and we are surrounded by planets.

A figure approaches from the darkness.

It wears a blue, well tailored suit with shiny leather dress shoes. What little we can see of its face is distorted and fleshy, and moves in way that is not quite human when it speaks. The rest of it is hidden away in a worn black mask, the tight leather straps lightly bouncing in response to each syllable. This is MAXWELL (Late 30s).

MAXWELL
Welcome, Investigator.

His voice is deep and gravelly. It echoes around the launch pad. Out from the darkness beneath you, books begin to float up. There are 3 books total. Two are blank. The

center book however, has an icon of a shuttle on its cover. Above the shuttle are the words Ascension: The Doomed Space Shuttle. As you gaze at it for longer than 3 seconds, Maxwell takes a step closer to you.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)
Read the title for me, friend.

You say the words aloud. You hear your voice echo into the vast darkness surrounding you.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)
Good. Let's begin the countdown.

The lights slowly dim, the planets fading away along with them. Two long slivers of spotlights with no apparent source shine on you and Maxwell, respectively, with pinpoint accuracy. Maxwell is holding up 3 fingers, gently waving his slightly outstretched arm back and forth towards you.

You say 'three.'

Maxwell nods in encouragement.

You hear heavy gigantic pieces of metal shift and whirring servos motors intermittently whine.

Maxwell is now holding up 2 fingers.

You say 'two.'

More mechanical sounds. A final low heavy thunk is followed by an ever-ascending pitch.

Maxwell is holding up 1 finger.

You say 'one.'

MAXWELL (CONT'D)
Lift off.

The Space Shuttle's engines roar and ignite and the room is flooded with a blinding light. The sounds is overbearing and the controllers are shaking.

The screen fades to white.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II

INT - SPACE SHUTTLE ASCENSION - SPACE

When the blinding lights recede, you are in the cockpit of a space shuttle. There are low hums and gentle beeps that fill the environment around you. A mechanical forest, whose fireflies are lights on giant control boards and whose trees are screens that stretch out above our heads.

MAXWELL

The Space Shuttle Ascension on its 2034 journey to orbit and land on Mars. It has detached from the Ares Station, to begin it's research descent onto Mars.

Maxwell points to a nearby screen. The screen fizzes out and we see a news report. A teary-eyed news anchor appears.

ANCHOR

In its descent to mars the shuttle disintegrated, killing the astronauts on board and halting the space exploration program.

The screen shows an image of the astronauts on board, there are 5 total.

ANCHOR (CONT'D)

The Administration says that it is still working to understand the cause of the accident though some authorities have anonymously tipped that it was an accident caused by a piece of the shuttle protecting the inside of the ship from the extreme temperatures of the entry and descent sequence.

The image fades and we see the news anchor once more.

ANCHOR (CONT'D)

It's a dark day for space exploration and an even darker day for our nation.

Her voice fades away and echoes around the cock pit. The screen returns to normal, showing a projection of the path of the space shuttle.

MAXWELL

Later this same day, this shuttle will fail. That news report is from one day in the future.

Maxwell gestures at your hands.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)
You have the power of time in your hands.

You look down. Your controllers are lit with a gold outline. A button is highlighted in red. Above it is a rewind symbol.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)
Take us back in time,
investigator.

You hit the rewind button and the space outside moves, visible through small windows. Items float in reverse through the shuttle. You begin to see ghostly outlines of people in the seats of the cockpit.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)
We are here to find out what happened.

The rewinding of time is halted and the world is frozen.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)
Take a second to explore the area, if you would like. Move things around, look under things... Treat it like a crime scene.

He points towards the ghostly astronauts.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)
Ask them questions. They can answer you. Talk to them. Yours is the last voice they will ever hear.

(BEAT)
You can talk to me too. I want to help in any way I can.

Sheepishly he takes a step away.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)
It doesn't even have to be about the shuttle. You can ask me anything.

He looks out of a window to the space beyond.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)
When you're ready to start time, simply use your hands.

You look down to your hands and see that a start button is now highlighted.

