

**Doctor Rocket's Last Night On Earth**  
or  
THE TRIAL OF  
WERNHER VON BRAUN

A Play in Two Acts

BY  
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A little background: Wernher von Braun was the central figure in the U.S. space program from the late 1940's through the 70's, culminating in the design and building of the Saturn V rocket that took the first humans to the moon. He also worked for the German Army during World War II, developing the V-2 rocket that reigned terror on England and Belgium, killing thousands. Although he was a known Nazi Party member and an SS official, and supervised the manufacture of his rockets by slave labor, he was never tried as a war criminal. He died of cancer in 1977.

Several characters in the play are based on actual people in von Braun's life; specifically Wehrmacht Captain William Dornberger, von Braun's mother Emmy von Braun, and SS chief Heinrich Himmler. Film actor Curt Jurgens, who played von Braun in the German/American film *I Aim At The Stars* is portrayed. The character of Lola is based on Marlene Dietrich, the German-born actress from films such as *The Blue Angel* and *Destry Rides Again*.

### THE PLAYERS

WERNHER VON BRAUN, *the famous German rocket scientist, in his late 60's, dying of cancer*

JURGENS, *Curt Jurgens, the German film actor, played by the actor who plays von Braun*

LOLA, *a cabaret singer, channeling Marlene Dietrich in the "Blue Angel"*

NURSE GRACE, *very Southern (played by the same actor who plays Lola)*

PIANO PLAYER

SS OFFICER, *stereotypical Nazi bully*

MALE TECHNICIAN, *Aryan-handsome, German*

FEMALE TECHNICIAN, *sexy blonde, also German*

JUDGE, *American*

DEFENSE, *German lawyer*

PROSECUTION, *American lawyer*

FILM DIRECTOR, *typical, over-the-top American film director*

VARIOUS FILM CREW

DORNEBERGER, *German Army Officer*

WATTS, *a hospital psychiatrist*

HEINRICH HIMMLER, *head of the SS, played by the actor who plays Watts*

PAJAMA MAN, *Polish, a specter from the past*

MOTHER, *von Braun's mother*

COURT RECORDER, *female*

LONDON MOTHER 1, *English, played by the actor playing Court Recorder*

LONDON MOTHER 2, *English*

LONDON MOTHER 3, *English*

HUGO, *a German scientist*

CARL, *a German scientist*

FRITZ, *a German scientist*

FOUR COWBOYS, *played by the actors who play German Scientists and SS Officer*

MAYOR, *Southern*

HUNTSVILLE ROCKETTES, *dancers*

WAGNERIAN MAIDEN

SLAVES/SLAVES, *pajama-clad prisoners who move the set pieces*

FOUR MOUSEKETEERS, *“children,” played by the actors who play German Scientists and Female Technician*

MAN IN SUIT, *NASA manager*

## ACT ONE

*The scenery is surrealistic, minimal, reminiscent of German Expressionist cinema, dreamlike, with high off-angled walls, uneven windows and dramatic shadows, colors are subtle, closer to black and white. The only instance when bright, intense color is used is when is lucid. Scene changes take place in low light, the pieces moved in full view of the audience by emaciated SLAVES, dressed in striped pajamas with matching caps, the garb inmates of a Nazi concentration camp.*

*Pronunciations: Wernher von Braun’s name is correctly pronounced “Vairner von Brown,” but it is repeatedly mispronounced throughout the play. Peenemünde is pronounced “Peen-ah-MOON-dah.” Die Frau Im Mond is pronounced “dee frau eem moand.” There are other German words too numerous to mention.*

*The set consists of a hospital room LEFT, which remains throughout the play. A staircase UP CENTER leads to a platform, behind which is a circular rear-projection screen, which has vertical slits, so as to allow characters to pass through. The other sets come and go as the action demands.*

*We hear introductory music. Instrumentation may be either a small instrumental combo of piano, tenor banjo and winds (in the style of Kurt Weill), or just solo piano. The solo pianist may be kept on stage when permissible, and may change costumes as the play progresses.*

*On the circular screen is the silhouette of a woman, sitting on a crescent moon. Through the slit screen emerges LOLA. The projection changes to a bright full moon. Lola wears the archetypal Marlene Dietrich “Blue Angel” outfit, black mesh stockings, short pants, a tuxedo jacket and top hat. She smokes from a cigarette holder. Any time she speaks or sings it is with a German accent.*

LOLA: Good evening, *Damen und herren*. My name is Lola. (*For a moment she stares back at the projection of the moon, then turns back to the audience.*) Ah, it's a full moon tonight. Lovely, isn't she? She inspires poetry and song. Sets the mood for young lovers. The moon provides illumination for the tiger as she hunts her prey. She pulls on the ocean tides. (*She straddles the chair with both legs.*) Yes I know, we've always told our children, "Look up there, it's the *man* in the moon." But I'm here to tell ya, darlings, that face up there . . . it's not a man's. It's a woman's.

(*She sings.*)

She sees you down there, gazing up into the night  
Your eyes big as saucers, her body a delight  
You look but cannot touch her; you try but nothin' doin'  
No one can possess her, she's the Woman in the Moon

Nearer, nearer to the shore, you hear the siren's call  
Just a little further now; come close, give her your all  
Too late! You're dashed upon the rock and left to ruin  
Don't say she didn't warn you, she's the Woman in the Moon  
The Woman in the Moon, the Woman in the Moon  
Don't say she didn't warn you, she's the Woman in the Moon

The Woman in the moon, she's more than you can handle  
You'll fall prey to her spell, like a moth unto a candle  
It's she who sings the siren song; it's she who calls the tune  
No use in resisting her, the Woman in the Moon

She'll pull your body closer, she'll blind you with her light  
And like a spider, traps you in her web of sweet delight  
Captured by her gravity you'll know that very soon  
You're just another prisoner of the Woman in the Moon  
The Woman in the Moon, the Woman in the Moon  
You're just another prisoner of the Woman in the Moon

The Woman in the Moon, the Woman in the Moon  
*Du bist ein Gefangener von Die Frau Im Mond*

(LOLA turns Stage Right, claps her hands loudly together and gives a command.)

LOLA: *Aktion!* (AHK-see-OWN)

*She exits. Lights up on a bunker control room in Peenemünde, on the Baltic coast of Germany, in the waning years of World War II. Lots of hokey "scientific" equipment fills the room. The actor CURT JURGENS is busy doing computations by hand, scribbling on a blackboard. In the background is a sinister looking SS OFFICER, wearing a black leather coat and sporting a black slouched hat. A FEMALE TECHNICIAN enters and exits several times while punching make-believe buttons and scribbling notes on a clipboard. A MALE TECHNICIAN, stands at the controls. On the large screen we see old*

*black and white footage from the 1940's of a German V-2 rocket on its pad, about to be launched. Everyone speaks with a German accent.)*

JURGENS: Set gyroscope at maximum.

MALE TECHNICIAN: Setting gyroscope at maximum.

JURGENS: Separate the retro oscillators to minus 3.

MALE TECHNICIAN: Separating retro oscillators to minus 3.

JURGENS: Klyster relay transmogrification to level A.

MALE TECHNICIAN: Klyster relay transmogrification to level A.

FEMALE TECHNICIAN: Pressure normal, Doctor.

JURGENS: Very well. Begin the count down.

*(The following dialogue is overlapping.)*

MALE TECHNICIAN: Count down beginning . . . 10 . . .

SS OFFICER: This had better work, von Braun.

MALE TECHNICIAN: 9 . . .

JURGENS: It will work because it must work.

MALE TECHNICIAN: 8 . . .

SS OFFICER: Rockets will never take the place of soldiers.

MALE TECHNICIAN: 7 . . .

JURGENS: One day rockets will circle the Earth.

MALE TECHNICIAN: 6 . . .

SS OFFICER: Don't be a fool.

MALE TECHNICIAN: 5 . . .

JURGENS: And from there to the other planets as well.

MALE TECHNICIAN: 4 . . .

SS OFFICER: So this is your mad dream!

MALE TECHNICIAN: 3 . . .

JURGENS: Not mad . . . inspired!

MALE TECHNICIAN: 2 . . .

SS OFFICER: What are you aiming for, von Braun?

MALE TECHNICIAN: 1 . . .

JURGENS: I aim . . . at the STARS!

MALE TECHNICIAN: FIRE!!!

*(On the screen the rocket lifts off a few promising feet, sickeningly slowing its ascent, finally keeling over and exploding in a fireball. The bunker shakes as if in an earthquake. Loud explosions split the air. There is smoke. Everyone in the bunker is thrown from side to side, but JURGENS stands firm and unmoving. He won't be beaten. The violent tremors stop and everyone gets up from the floor.)*

*(MALE TECHNICIAN helps up the FEMALE TECHNICIAN and, holding hands, they give us an inkling of their love for each other. The SS OFFICER steps forward, takes out a cigarette, lights it and blows smoke in Jurgen's face.)*

SS OFFICER: A bit short of the moon, eh, von Braun? It seems your toy rockets are just that . . . toys. This will look very bad on my report.

JURGENS: We are getting closer. Just a few more weeks and we will have success, I assure you.

SS OFFICER: It is not I who needs assurance, Dr. von Braun. The Fuehrer is another matter. He expects results. The enemy closes in on the Fatherland, and all you can show us is this pitiful display of fireworks.

JURGENS: A few more weeks, that's all I ask. You may tell the Fuehrer he will have his wonderful rocket . . . He will get his wondrous . . . wonder . . . *Scheiss!* What is my line?

DIRECTOR: CUT, CUT, CUT!

*(The DIRECTOR barges onto the set. A CREWPERSON snaps an oversized clapboard, on which we can make out the chalk-written words "I Aim at the Stars.")*

DIRECTOR: CURT, CURT, CURT! What's the matter this time?

JURGENS: *(Motioning to the SS actor)* I'm sorry. It's just that he keeps spitting on me. Can't we block him a few more feet away?

SS OFFICER: *(Minus his German accent now sounding more like a fashion designer.)* I heard that!

JURGENS: And his breath! What did he have for lunch?

SS OFFICER: Hey, I'm standing *right here!*

JURGENS: It's like acting with an onion sandwich.

SS OFFICER: I'm calling SAG! I'll be in someone's trailer if you need me.

DIRECTOR: Alright, alright, alright. We'll block him a few more feet away.

*The WARDROBE GIRL enters with Jurgen's bathrobe, and while the conversation continues, she changes out Jurgen's lab coat for the bathrobe. Underneath he is wearing dark blue pajamas. Instead of shoes he wears slippers. There is an IV port on his forearm.)*

DIRECTOR: Okay, everybody, TAKE FIVE.

VOICE: *(Off stage)* TAKE FIVE.

ANOTHER VOICE : *(Off stage)* TAKE FIVE.

STILL ANOTHER VOICE: *(Off stage)* TAKE FIVE.

DIRECTOR: What's the problem now, Curt?

JURGENS: Yesterday it was Limburger cheese.

DIRECTOR: Curt . . .

JURGENS: The day before that it was cooked cabbage . . .

DIRECTOR: Curt . . .

JURGENS: What will it be tomorrow, a garlic milk shake?

DIRECTOR: Curt, baby . . .

JURGENS: Don't call me "Curt baby!"

DIRECTOR: Curt, sweetheart . . .

JURGENS: I'm not your sweetheart!

DIRECTOR: Easy does it, Tiger. Save some of that rage for the camera. Now listen to me, you crazy Hessian, we're almost wrapped. "I Aim at the Stars" is going to snag Curt Jurgens an Oscar!

JURGENS: The only thing I'm going to snag is a one-way ticket back to Munich! The script is terrible, the props are laughable. And I'm not feeling this von Braun character at all.

DIRECTOR: Curt, Curt, Curt, it's *Hollywood*. We're not doing "Uncle Vanya" here. You can act this guy in your sleep. What's bugging you?

VON BRAUN: *(Feeling odd, a bit out of body, he holds his forehead.)* I—I guess I'm feeling a bit tired. I just need a few moments to collect my thoughts. Perhaps I need to lie down for a . . . *(Feeling faint)* I—

DIRECTOR: Come to think of it, you don't look so good there, baby. Sure, go lie down and get a few winks. We'll call you when we're ready. *(Turning back to the crew)*  
ALL RIGHT EVERYBODY! EARLY LUNCH! BACK AT ONE O'CLOCK!

VOICE: *(Off stage)* LUNCH!

ANOTHER VOICE : *(Off stage)* LUNCH!

STILL ANOTHER VOICE: *(Off stage)* LUNCH!

*(The lights on the set turn off one by one, audibly. Everyone exits except for JURGENS, who picks up a script off the control panel and thumbs through it.)*



JURGENS: *Ach!* Gone are the days of von Sternberg and Lang. They didn't make movies . . . they made FILM! There were giants on the Earth in those days. *Kacke!* I don't know what I'm doing. I should have done more research. I know nothing about this man. Who are you, Wernher von Braun? Who really knows you?

FIRST VOICE: *I* know you, von Braun.

JURGENS: *(Stops thumbing through the script and looks up.)* What?

SECOND VOICE: *(This voice coming from a different part of the audience.)* I know you, von Braun.

JURGENS: *(Looking over the audience)* What is that? Who said that? Is someone there?

THIRD VOICE: *(This time coming from the balcony.)* I know you, von Braun.

JURGENS: *(Walking away from the movie set and moving down stage.)* I am not von Braun. I am only an actor playing von Braun. What are you doing here? This is a closed set. You have no business being here.

FIRST VOICE: Do you remember?

JURGENS: I'm sorry, what did you say?

SECOND VOICE: Do you remember?

JURGENS: Do I remember what?

THIRD VOICE: Do you remember?

JURGENS: Why do you keep asking me that? Remember what?

FIRST VOICE: DO YOU REMEMBER?

ALL THREE VOICES: DORA. *(The word reverbs and fades.)*

JURGENS: Who?

ALL THREE VOICES: Do you remember . . . DORA?

JURGENS: Why should I? Dora who? Show yourself. I am not afraid of you! Who is this Dora?

*(Lights fade up on a hospital bed. Slowly, subtly, JURGENS becomes older, weaker, in fact deathly ill. He is now the real WERNHER VON BRAUN. The year is 1977, Alexandria, Virginia. He is being treated for pancreatic cancer.)*

VON BRAUN: *(Mumbling, breathing hard, taking up where Jurgens left off, repeating the name.)* Who is Dora . . . who is Dora . . . Dora . . . *(He staggers, dropping to his knees.)* DORA!

*(Lights on the hospital room come up full as NURSE GRACE rushes in. as VON BRAUN looks about the room wildly, attempting to stand. She is 30 to 40ish, and very Southern.)*

NURSE GRACE: What the hell you doin' out of your bed?

VON BRAUN: DORA!

NURSE GRACE: No, it's just me. Nurse Grace.

VON BRAUN: Who?

NURSE GRACE: It's all right, honey. It's all right.

VON BRAUN: It's not all right. Nothing is all right!

NURSE GRACE: Calm down now. I could hear you clean down to the nurses' station. *(She strains to help him up from the floor and into bed.)* You feel like a sack of rocks. Work with me a little, darlin'.

VON BRAUN: Where am I?

NURSE GRACE: Really? We're gonna go through all this again? You're in Alexandria Hospital.

VON BRAUN: Alexandria? Egypt?

NURSE GRACE: No, silly. Virginia.

VON BRAUN: Oh. Do . . . do you know my name?

NURSE GRACE: Know your name! Well I should hope so.

VON BRAUN: What is it?

NURSE GRACE: Boy, if you can't remember your own name you're sicker than I thought.

VON BRAUN: I'm not Curt?

NURSE GRACE: Well, sometimes you do get a little snippy.

VON BRAUN: No! MY NAME. Who am I?

NURSE GRACE: *(She mispronounces his name)* It's Doctor Wurner van Brawn.

VON BRAUN: *(Still confused, unsure)* Yes . . . yes, that's right.

NURSE GRACE: Whew! Glad we got that straight.

VON BRAUN: (*thrashing again*) Who are *you*? Do I know you?

NURSE GRACE: Jesus, here we go again. It's just me . . . Grace, the night nurse. Remember?

VON BRAUN: (*Slowly getting hold of himself*) Grace?

NURSE GRACE: Yeah. Nurse Grace. You've had another one of those dreams, that's all. (*She reattaches the IV line to a patch on his forearm.*)

VON BRAUN: (*Calming down but panting*) Yes . . . yes . . . one of those dreams. Just a dream. Thank God.

NURSE GRACE: You gave us quite a fright, *Wurnur*.

VON BRAUN: (*Laying back in his bed, gathering his wits*) How many times must I tell you, it's *Vairner*, not *Wurnur*.

NURSE GRACE: I'm sorry, baby, but I could never call you *Vairner*.

VON BRAUN: (*Still panting*) And why not, you horrible woman?

NURSE GRACE: When I call you *Vairner* it makes my nose itch.

VON BRAUN: (*Breathing heavily but almost smiling*) Yes, you do have a nose like an anteater.

NURSE GRACE: (*She shakes a thermometer*) Why, *Vairner*, I do believe you're flirtin' with me.

VON BRAUN: Oh get out of here, will you. Why don't you go suck on one of your cigarettes.

NURSE GRACE: (*She sticks the thermometer in his mouth*) Why don't you suck on this for a while.

(*She takes his pulse, looking at her wristwatch.*)

VON BRAUN: (*Mumbling with the thermometer*) So Nurse Grace, bane of my existence. Do I still have a pulse?

NURSE GRACE: Strong as an ox.

VON BRAUN: Liar.

NURSE GRACE: Doctor Hennessey is very pleased with your vitals.

VON BRAUN: Doctor Hennessey is an idiot.

NURSE GRACE: Strange, he has such lovely things to say about *you*. (*She takes the thermometer out of his mouth and checks it.*) You were talking crazy again when I came in.

VON BRAUN: God, what was I saying this time?

NURSE GRACE: Well, I musta missed all the juicy stuff, but you were babblin' about some girl.

VON BRAUN: A girl? Who?

NURSE GRACE: I dunno. Somebody named Doris or Dorothy. No wait . . . Dora. That was it, yeah. Dora.

VON BRAUN: (*His eyes opening wide, haunted*) Dora?

NURSE GRACE: Uh huh. So who's this Dora chick? The girl that got away?

VON BRAUN: (*Breathing hard again, angrily*) I don't know anyone named Dora.

NURSE GRACE: *Shh, shh*, okay. Just settle down now.

VON BRAUN: (*Settling down*) Tell me, Nurse Grace. Do you ever . . . do you ever . . . dream?

NURSE GRACE: Dream? Dream about what?

VON BRAUN: Things.

NURSE GRACE: What kinda things?

VON BRAUN. Just . . . things.

NURSE GRACE: Like winning the lottery? Marrying a movie star?

VON BRAUN: (*Staring into space*) No. I mean dreaming of events. Events from your past.

NURSE GRACE: (*Fluffing up the pillows*) Lord, no. Why would I want to dredge up all that old garbage? I don't remember any of my dreams and don't care to.

VON BRAUN: You are a lucky woman. I remember all my dreams.

NURSE GRACE: (*She proceeds to check his blood pressure.*) That's because you stay up so late watching those silly old black and white movies on TV. This Dora woman?

VON BRAUN: (*Angrily*) I told you. I don't know anyone named Dora!

NURSE GRACE: Alright, alright. Don't get your tighty whiteys in a tangle. Just asking. (*Writing his vitals on his chart.*) The last dream you had involved you and some cabaret singer. What did you dream about this time?

VON BRAUN: I . . . I was an actor playing the role of myself in a movie. I was having trouble understanding who I was. Then I . . . that's when I woke up. Silly, I suppose. Dreams can be so . . . silly.

NURSE GRACE: I still don't know why you don't talk to Doctor Watts.

VON BRAUN: I don't need a damned psychiatrist.

NURSE GRACE: But dream therapy is one of his specialties.

VON BRAUN: Freud . . . *ach!* You Americans can't get enough of Freud. I don't need therapy to help me remember. I need therapy to help me forget.

NURSE GRACE: (*Removing the blood pressure device*) Forget? Forget what? That you're the most famous scientist since Einstein? That you invented the rocket ship that put the first white man on the moon?

VON BRAUN: I would trade all of my fame for a peaceful, dreamless sleep.

NURSE GRACE: Why don't you let me bump up the morphine drip? It'll make you rest easier.

VON BRAUN: Morphine! Increase the morphine! You would like that wouldn't you, you terrible woman. Then I would be unable to wake up, trapped in my nightmares while you sneak out for another cigarette.

NURSE GRACE: (*Smiling sheepishly*) How did you know I smoked?

VON BRAUN: My brain and my pancreas may be failing, but my nose is as sharp as ever. You smell like an unfiltered Camel. What I wouldn't give for just one last drag. (*Wistfully*) When we were at Peenemünde I liked nothing better than to go outside after midnight to have a smoke alone, under the stars, smelling the sea air. I would gaze at the moon and think, and smoke. The moon, it looked so close up there. So close . . . so . . .

NURSE GRACE: Have you been smoking in the bathroom again?

VON BRAUN: (*Avoiding her eyes and speaking like a child*) I don't know what you mean.

NURSE GRACE: Don't play innocent with me. Honestly, you're going to kill yourself before the cancer does.

VON BRAUN: You can't talk to me like that. I'm a world famous scientist, remember?  
(*He suddenly winces in pain.*)

NURSE GRACE: Okay, Rocket Man. What you need is sleep.

VON BRAUN: (*Suddenly afraid*) Please . . . don't . . . don't make me sleep again.

NURSE GRACE: Say, you're serious, ain't you? That last dream must have been a doozy.

VON BRAUN: I am afraid I'll dream again. Please . . .

NURSE GRACE: Okay, okay, okay. (*She runs her hand gently over his forehead*) No sleep then. Just rest. You rest now.

VON BRAUN. (*Unable to keep his eyes open*) Very well . . . you wicked old witch.

NURSE GRACE: Yeah, but I'm *your* wicked old witch.

(*NURSE GRACE starts to leave when she hears VON BRAUN groaning in real pain. She hesitates and then stealthily adjusts the morphine drip.*)

NURSE GRACE: I'll be back to check on you. And be sure to Form the dar Miss Dora I said hello. *(No response.)* Doctor van Brawn?

*(She clicks off the light.)*

MAN'S VOICE: *(From the darkness.)* Doctor von Braun?

NURSE GRACE: Can I get you anything?

VOICE: Can I get you anything?

NURSE GRACE: Would you like some water? Doctor von Braun?

VOICE: Would you like some water? Doctor von Braun?

NURSE GRACE: *(Fading away as she exits)* Some water . . . some water . . . *ein Wasser?*

*(Nurse Grace backs into the darkness and disappears as von Braun becomes agitated again.)*

VOICE: Doctor von Braun?

VON BRAUN: *(Asleep, yet awake)* Who . . . who . . . who is there?

VOICE: Would you like some water? You seem to be having trouble speaking.

VON BRAUN: No . . . no . . . no water. I can speak.

VOICE: Will the court recorder please read back the question I just asked Doctor von Braun.

*(Lights up full on a surrealistic courtroom. Two LAWYERS enter, rolling their podiums before them. The DEFENSE is a German and the PROSECUTION is an American. Behind an elevated bench, the American JUDGE; before it a female COURT REORDER).*

RECORDER: *(Reading crisply and without emphasis)* Doctor von Braun, from the year 1936 until the end of the war in 1945, where were you employed?

VON BRAUN: *(Restlessly with his eyes closed, still in bed)* I was . . . during that time . . . I was employed at the Army Research Center at Peenemünde.

PROSECUTION: Objection, your Honor.

JUDGE: *(Wiping his neck with a white handkerchief)* What is your objection?

PROSECUTION: I object to the word "employed" as it implies a civilian status for Doctor von Braun. I need not remind the court that Doctor von Braun was a member of the Nazi Party and also the SS, Adolf Hitler's elite guard. One can hardly consider his position at Peenemünde as that of an "employee."

DEFENSE: Nevertheless, Doctor von Braun was not an army officer. He was under contract to build rockets *for* the Army.

PROSECUTION: Semantics. Mere words. He was a Nazi, building rockets for Nazis. Hardly a civilian, I would say.

DEFENSE: He was a contractor. The same as those who built cars and bridges and—

PROSECUTION: And bombs and poison gas and death camps.

DEFENSE: Objection!

JUDGE: Objection sustained. Proceed, counselor.

DEFENSE: Doctor von Braun, before we turn our attention to your *work* at Peenemünde, perhaps you would be good enough to enlighten the court as to how you first became interested in the development of rockets.

PROSECUTION: Your honor, I fail to see the significance of Doctor von Braun's *interest* in rockets prior to his duties for the *Wehrmacht*. One doesn't need to know where and when a murderer found the gun he killed with, it is enough to know that he fired it.

DEFENSE: It would seem that the prosecution has already decided this case even before cross-examining my client.

PROSECUTION: Facts are facts, your honor. They can't be ignored. The accused was a Nazi Party loyalist who's just as much a murderer as Doctor Mengele and all the other Nazi thugs.

DEFENSE: Oh, please! You can't compare my client with those sadistic, evil madmen!

JUDGE: Gentlemen . . .

PROSECUTION: A scalpel, a syringe, a rocket. What's the difference?

DEFENSE: Doctor von Braun is a scientist, not a psychotic killer.

JUDGE: Gentlemen, please . . .

PROSECUTION: Thousands died.

DEFENSE: It was war.

PROSECUTION: He created the rocket, stuck a bomb on top and aimed it. BOOM.  
Guilty! Case closed.

DEFENSE: Blame the Nazis for everything. Typical Jew.

PROSECUTION: Excuse me? What did you say?

JUDGE: I'm warning you both.

DEFENSE: You won't be happy until every German is wiped out, will you, Mr. *Goldstein*?

PROSECUTION: Maybe we should do a background check on you, *Herr Schicklgruber*. Any kin to a certain Fascist dictator?

JUDGE: (*Exploding as he bangs the gavel*) Gentlemen, GENTLEMEN ! (*Pause*) I warned both of you at the outset of this trial that I would not tolerate cheap name-calling in this court. I will not sit here and listen to you two fight the war all over

again. Frankly, I don't care if you beat your wives or cheat at solitaire. You will both conduct yourselves with courtesy and decorum or I'll have you replaced.  
*(Pause)* Am I clear?

*(During this exchange VON BRAUN has fully awakened and sits up in his bed, not believing what he is hearing.)*

VON BRAUN: What is this? Who is there?

DEFENSE: My apologies to the court, your honor.

PROSECUTION: My apologies as well, your honor.

JUDGE: Open up that window, for God's sake. It's stifling in here!

VON BRAUN: *(Looking about)* The window doesn't open in my room.

JUDGE: The court recorder will please read back the last question put to the defendant.

RECORDER: "Doctor von Braun, before we turn our attention to your work at Peenemünde, perhaps you would be good enough to enlighten the court as to how you first became interested in rockets."

PROSECUTION: My objection still stands, your honor.

JUDGE: So noted. *(Flaring up)* Can somebody please open up a damn window!  
*(Pouring himself a glass of water)* Proceed, counselor.

*VON BRAUN throws back the covers and slips out of bed, stands on unsteady legs in his bathrobe and slippers.)*

VON BRAUN. Who are you? What are you doing in my room?

DEFENSE: I'm sorry, Doctor von Braun?

VON BRAUN: This is madness! What sort of game is this?

*(He moves toward the court, stops at the end of is IV line.)*

PROSECUTION: I assure you sir, this is no game.

VON BRAUN: Am I dreaming again?

JUDGE: Doctor, would you like to take a moment and settle yourself?

VON BRAUN: I don't know you. I don't know any of you.

PROSECUTION: Your honor, the defendant has already signed a deposition waving all rights to an insanity defense.

VON BRAUN: *(Attempting to stand up straighter, he becomes belligerent.)* I am *not* insane.

DEFENSE: Of course you aren't, Doctor. You are just a bit confused. The heat and all. Now would you be kind enough to tell this court about your early work in rocketry?

VON BRAUN: Tell . . . tell the *court*?



DEFENSE: Yes, Doctor. We are all very interested to know about your early work.  
When you were younger.

VON BRAUN: Why, yes. I don't mind talking about it. If you really want to hear.

DEFENSE: (*Courteously*) If the prosecution has no further objections.

PROSECUTION: Oh, I'm all ears.

(VON BRAUN moves to center, awkwardly dragging the IV pole behind him through the rest of the scene.)

VON BRAUN: Well, I suppose it began . . . yes. Yes, it began with my mother.

DEFENSE: Your mother. The Baroness Emmy von Braun.

VON BRAUN: Yes. Yes, I was fourteen at the time.

(*MOTHER appears in front of the center screen, onto which a photo of a large German estate is projected. VON BRAUN has his back to her, and she doesn't look directly at him.*)

MOTHER: You were *thirteen* and already a man. And very clever.

VON BRAUN: (*In a higher, lighter tone, as if a boy again*) You really think so, Mother?

MOTHER: Your father says so.

VON BRAUN: But my brothers are so much more clever than I.

MOTHER: Your brothers are very clever, but they are *ordinary* clever people. Your father says, "Wernher is a genius."

VON BRAUN: He said that?

MOTHER: He said that. It was clear to us from the beginning. When you were only four years old you could read a whole newspaper . . . upside down.

(*They both laugh.*)

MOTHER: At six you could play "Moonlight Sonata" on the piano, flawlessly. And blindfolded!

(*Piano music, "Moonlight Sonata."*)

MOTHER: You can do anything you want, Wernher, anything you dream. You have the mind, the talent and the imagination.

VON BRAUN: You really think so?

MOTHER: Do you remember the present I gave you when you turned thirteen?

VON BRAUN: Of course I remember. I thought you were going to give me underwear and socks. Instead you gave me . . . a telescope.

(*The moon appears on the screen, with the silhouette of a boy peering through a telescope.*)

MOTHER: I thought it would be the perfect gift for you.

VON BRAUN: *(Now he addresses the court.)* And so it was. A king's ransom could not purchase what I saw when I looked through that eyepiece. Only a child's telescope, and yet more powerful than Galileo's. There it was.

*(Stars appear across the entire stage, rotating slowly, bathing VON BRAUN in their light.)*

VON BRAUN: The whole solar system competing for my attention. And the moon . . . so near . . . like a lantern held in the hand of God.

*(The stars fade. The moon projection glows more brightly. MOTHER is now just a silhouette. VON BRAUN still has his back to her.)*

VON BRAUN: Wait mother . . . please don't go.

MOTHER: I must, my darling boy.

VON BRAUN: But I am no longer a boy. I am an old man. I am dying.

MOTHER: *(She turns to walk into the projection screen)* You will never be old my child. Nor will you ever die. You are . . . stardust.

VON BRAUN: I will see you again, won't I?

MOTHER: Yes, Wernher, you will see me again.

VON BRAUN: When? Where?

MOTHER: On the moon, my son. I will be waiting for you on the moon. Look for me on the moon, *(fading)* on the moon, on the moon . . .

*(She steps backward into the moon and is gone.)*

VON BRAUN: That is how it began. With a child's telescope. *(He sits down on the foot of the bed.)* It was enough to thrill my young heart as nothing had ever thrilled it. I made up my mind. One day I would travel there, to the moon.

PROSECUTION: *(Laughing)* Your Honor, I'm sure we've all enjoyed Doctor von Braun's little trip to the moon on gossamer wings, but is it too much to ask that we come back down to Earth for a moment? The Prosecution concedes the fact that Doctor von Braun had a sweet old mother and a proud papa. We also concede that the defendant dreamed about sailing to the moon while lounging around his family's 600-acre estate. Now can we please get back to the crimes he's accused of?

DEFENSE: I object to the prosecution's sarcastic attempt to denigrate the humanity of my client.

PROSECUTION: Everyone has humanity when they're young. Adolf Hitler grew up painting watercolors. I'm sure his mama loved him too.

DEFENSE: Your honor, the defense has a very specific reason for exploring Doctor von Braun's early life. I beg the court's indulgence.

JUDGE: Counsel for the defense may proceed with this line of questioning, but let's move it along shall we?

DEFENSE: Yes, your honor. Doctor von Braun, by your early twenties you and a group of like-minded young men were successfully launching small rockets, isn't that so?

VON BRAUN: Yes, that is so. *(With difficulty he shuffles about the room, dragging his IV pole, warming to his newfound audience.)* Mind you, the early models were very crude, very unpredictable, and very dangerous. But we were all quite bright and we learned as we went along.

*(Early photos of 's rocket club are projected on the screen.)*

DEFENSE: How did you support your work?

VON BRAUN: *(a small laugh)* We barely survived. We were poor as church mice. Food was not a problem, because when young people fall in love they stop eating. So it was with our little Rocket Club. We were all in love with outer space and how to get there. Sometimes we charged admission for people to come and watch our rocket launches. They became quite popular. Still, we struggled.

DEFENSE: But your family was wealthy, surely you could have—

VON BRAUN: I was considered to be a man and I was expected to get by on my own. No, my family would not help, nor did I ask their help. I was determined to one day build a rocket capable of flying from the Earth to the moon. Nothing was more important to me than—

*(A voice from behind him, somewhere in the shadows R.)*

VOICE: Do you remember me, von Braun?

VON BRAUN: *(Startled out of his reminiscing)* What's that?

VOICE: Do you remember me, von Braun?

VON BRAUN: Who . . . where are you?

*(A special comes up on PAJAMA MAN, standing in the shadows. The light comes straight down on him, his cloth hat obscuring his facial features. He is dressed shabbily in tattered, filthy striped pajamas, which seem to melt off his small, emaciated frame.)*

VON BRAUN: *(His back turned to the man)* Are you an acquaintance of mine? I cannot place the voice. *(He starts to turn but is stopped by the IV in his arm.)* Are you one of the doctors?

PAJAMA MAN: Do you remember . . . ?

VON BRAUN: Do I remember—

PAJAMA MAN: Do you remember . . . Dora?

VON BRAUN: Stop saying that! You are speaking in riddles. Are you ill? Who are you?

PAJAMA MAN: You remember me, von Braun. *(His light slowly fades.)* You remember me. You remember me.

DEFENSE: Doctor von Braun? Are you all right?

VON BRAUN: Wait . . . tell me . . . how do I know you?

PROSECUTION: This is becoming tiresome. May we please skip the drama?

VON BRAUN: What? Who was that?

DEFENSE: Your honor, may we have a short recess so that my client might rest for a bit?

JUDGE: Doctor von Braun, do you need some time to get a cup of coffee and talk to your attorney?

VON BRAUN: No . . . no, I can go on. I want to continue. Sorry, where was I?

DEFENSE: You were talking about your early days in rocketry.

VON BRAUN: *(Still a bit shaken)* Yes, of course. In the late 1920's space travel was the stuff of science fiction and the cinema. One film in 1929 was particularly inspirational to us all. *Frau Im Mond . . . Woman in the Moon.*

*(The projection screen shows clips from Fritz Lang's silent German film, the blast off and landing on the moon. Silent movie piano music accompanies the film.)*

VON BRAUN: It actually depicted the very goal we had set for ourselves . . . a trip to the moon. To be the first human beings to get there and return. But we would need money, much more money than our meager efforts would ever make possible. And then one day Fate delivered to us the answer to our prayers.

*(The courtroom fades. A German army officer, DORNBERGER, enters from L. and looks about the hospital room as if he were inspecting barracks. He is in uniform and carries a riding crop under his arm. But instead of appearing as the rigid, stereotypical German officer, he seems more like a British Army caricature from a Monty Python sketch.)*

DORNBERGER: *(Speaking, strangely, in a British accent)* Yes, yes, yes. Very interesting. Very interesting indeed. *(Noticing VON BRAUN)* Ah, but you must be von Braun.

VON BRAUN: I am von Braun.

DORNBERGER: But of course you are! Captain William Dornberger at your service. *(He gives VON BRAUN a handshake that never seems to end, so firm that VON BRAUN winces from the pain.)* I was expecting a much younger man, not the relic I see before me. Nothing wrong with being a relic, of course. Being old, mind you. Happens to the best of us. *(He eyes VON BRAUN him curiously.)* I say, old chap, why are you wearing a bathrobe?

VON BRAUN: A bathrobe? Oh, yes. I have not been well. My pancreas . . .

DORNBERGER: Oh yes, yes, yes of course. Better have that looked at. Pancreas and all. Part of the gastrointestinal tract isn't it? Don't know much about anatomy you understand, colons and sphincters and such. Then again I don't pretend to know much about the body and all. Too many Latin words for my taste. Always thought that tibia and fibula were a waste of time. Call it a leg and be done with it, that's what I say.

VON BRAUN: *(A bit foggy from his dream state and confused by the captain's manner.)* You were here for the launch, Captain?

DORNBERGER: *(Correcting him.)* Major. Yes indeedly. Enjoyed your little rocket launch immensely. Took my breath away. I used to think it was a lot of hooey, you know. Rockets into space and all. "Kid's stuff," as the Americans say. But you, von Braun, you have captured our attention. Yes, yes, yes. This is something new. Something *different*.

VON BRAUN: You are very kind, Major.

DORNBERGER: General. *(He wanders about the room, looking things over.)* Yes and yes again, I say. This is something, this rocket business you have here. I imagine it's not cheap, firing off these things. Haven't the faintest idea how you do it, but I'm sure it takes a great deal of money, Deutschemarks and all.

VON BRAUN: *(warily)* Pardon me, but I can't help but notice you're speaking with a British accent.

DORNBERGER: *(As if suddenly aware of the fact.)* Why yes . . . yes, by George, I suppose I am. Does it bother you?

VON BRAUN: Certainly not. It's just that I assumed, since you were an officer in the German Army and all . . .

DORNBERGER: Well I am, old boy.

VON BRAUN: Then shouldn't you be speaking with a German accent?

DORNBERGER: I suppose I could if you'd like. Which do you prefer?

VON BRAUN: I . . . I don't know. Which do *you* prefer?

DORNBERGER: Well, I've got no say-so in the matter.

VON BRAUN: I'm . . . confused.

DORNBERGER: All right. How about this . . . *(Clears his throat and switches to a German accent.)* Vee have been vatching you for some time now, von Braun, und

vee are prepared to make you an offer for your services. Vee have ze money und you have ze rocket. *(Switching back to British again.)* How was that? Any better?

VON BRAUN: I suppose . . .

DORNBERGER: Excellent! Well, what do you say, von Braun? If you and your team come and work for the Army, I promise you not just thousands for research, but millions. Your rockets might be of some use to the military. You know, strap a stick of dynamite to one of them, or fill one up with nitroglycerin, that sort of thing. Fire it off into the enemy camp. Kill them by the hundreds. Well, what do you say?

VON BRAUN: But that's not why we are building our rockets.

DORNBERGER: Really? How extraordinary. Do tell me, why are you building rockets?

VON BRAUN: *(Reverently)* So that one day man can travel from the Earth to the moon.

DORNBERGER: The moon? How?

VON BRAUN: In a rocket ship.

DORNBERGER: *(Staring at as if he had the head of a rooster.)* Ah . . . well. Jolly good. You must tell me all about it one day over tea. *(Glancing at his wristwatch.)* Oh dear, must run. I've got a make-believe appointment at two, so I'd better pretend I'm going somewhere. Come around to my make-believe office tomorrow and we'll sign all the papers.

VON BRAUN: I'm afraid I don't know where your office is.

DORNBERGER: Come to think of it, neither do I. *(Another vigorous handshake.)* Awfully swell talking with you. Do find some clothes to put on, old boy, and remember, von Braun . . . every new discovery has always been a weapon before it was anything else. The caveman discovered the club, and before he used it for hunting he beat the brains out of his in-laws. The first fire was used to cook meat, but not until it was used to burn people alive. Electricity was used for the electric chair before it was used for the toaster. Weapons, von Braun. Weapons! That's what the world needs more of . . . weapons! *(fading away as he starts to leave)* Weapons, weapons . . .

*(DORNBERGER backs up into the darkness. Lights come back up on the courtroom.)*

PROSECUTION: So you took the money.

VON BRAUN: If we were to have any success in the near future we *had* to have money. Besides, wasn't it our duty to share our rockets with the country we loved for national security?

PROSECUTION: Come now, Doctor. You had to know where all this was leading.

VON BRAUN: No, I didn't. I couldn't! There was no war on the horizon. I had no concern our rockets would ever be used against anyone.

PROSECUTION: Are you really that naïve?

VON BRAUN: I was determined . . .

PROSECUTION: Delusional, you mean.

VON BRAUN: To make it to the moon . . .

PROSECUTION: To make it to the loony bin.

VON BRAUN: To travel to the STARS!

*(Lights down on the courtroom and up on the "I Aim at the Stars" film set. A FEMALE TECHNICIAN, MALE TECHNICIAN and DORNBERGER, along with the SS OFFICER watch through an imaginary window at an attempted launch of another V-2 rocket. We see what they see on the screen.)*

MALE TECHNICIAN: Three . . . two . . . one . . . fire!

*(Another launch, another failure. More rockets are fired, more crashes, on and on. With each crash the actors turn their backs to us and bow their heads.)*

VON BRAUN: Now Germany was at war, and the war was not going our way. The pressure was mounting to deliver a working weapon.

*(The film set fades, and LOLA appears, a Dominatrix Nazi, now dressed in black underwear, black fish net hose, black gloves, black boots, a black SS officer's hat and she carries a black riding crop. In her fingers she clutches a large lit cigar, which she puffs on and blows big clouds in 's face.)*

LOLA: Close but no cigar, eh Doc?

*(At first VON BRAUN doesn't look at her directly but feels her presence. She strolls behind him, running a long fingernail down his back. She spots the bag on his IV pole, caresses the plastic bag of clear liquid, runs her hand down VON BRAUN's arm and yanks the feeding tube out of his wrist. He yelps in pain.)*

LOLA: I'm thirsty. Mind if I have a sip?

*(She sucks on the tube like a straw, drinking in the morphine as she would an ice cream soda. She licks her lips as she sticks the IV back into his wrist. He winces with pain but seems to enjoy it in a perverse way. Now he sees her in the flesh.)*

LOLA: *(singing)*

They promised they would fly me to the moon and back again  
They'd give me all the stars that I could name  
But running low on fuel, their engine starts to cool  
And in the end, all smoke and little flame

They brag about their size, their thrust, and tell me, "hold on tight!"  
It'll be the greatest launch I've ever had  
I'm counting on a hero, but counting down to zero  
They never even make it off the pad

Give me a man, a missile man, who stands straight and tall  
Just show me you're the sort who never comes up short  
If you're a missile man, then we can have a blast  
As long as you can last. How I miss my missile man!

*(As the music continues, LOLA circles around VON BRAUN, occasionally whipping him with her riding crop. He recoils in pain.)*

VON BRAUN: Please! I just need a little more time.

LOLA: That's what all you men say. Dance with me, Wernher. Dance with Lola.  
Maybe I'm just what the mad doctor ordered.

*(They dance a tango as the music builds to a crescendo, VON BRAUN circling with LOLA and the IV pole. Then she lets him go, leaving him somewhat weaker. She laughs.)*

LOLA: *(con't.)*

I've always heard this little saying and you know it's no lie  
What goes up is always bound to fall  
'Cause just when I start to fly, they all begin to rock-a-bye  
And down will come baby, cradle and all

Give me a man, a missile man, who stands straight and tall  
Just show me you're the sort who never comes up short  
If you're a missile man, then we can have a blast  
As long as you can last. How I miss my, miss my missile man!

*(spoken)*

Davy Crockett, where's your rocket?

*(LOLA disappears and lights come up on a research room at Peenemünde, where three SCIENTISTS with clipboards argue, pointing to obscure figures and computations on a chalkboard. VON BRAUN watches unobserved.)*

HUGO: It doesn't matter how much thrust we are able to attain if we can't keep the rocket on course.



FRITZ: More thrust equals a straighter trajectory. I've done the math.

CARL: They're just doodles on paper. Larger stabilizers will keep it on course.

HUGO: Larger stabilizers? What would you have us do, put wings on it like an aeroplane? The problem is in the guidance system.

CARL: Larger stabilizers will keep the airflow even, achieving better guidance control.

FRITZ: The answer is in the fuel system. You're starving the rocket, reducing thrust and causing the rocket to veer off course.

HUGO: Can we please address the problem at hand. The last three launches were a disaster. This next launch has got to work or all our efforts are for nothing.

FRITZ: More thrust is needed to achieve greater power. I've done the math!

CARL: Stabilizers are the key, not the fuel, fool!

HUGO: Without proper adjustments to the guidance system we might as well be lighting a candle, hoping it will somehow fly!

CARL: Stabilizers, dammit!

FRITZ: Thrust!

HUGO: Guidance!

*(The shouting escalates to maximum volume, overlapping until it is a jumble and devolves into a shoving, pointing, poking "Three Stooges" fight scene. )*

CARL: STABILIZERS!

FRITZ: THRUST!

HUGO: GUIDANCE!

CARL: ASSHOLE!

FRITZ: I'VE DONE THE MATH!

HUGO: SCREW THE MATH!

FRITZ: YOU CAN'T TALK TO ME LIKE THAT!

CARL: YES HE CAN AND SO CAN I! SCREW THE MATH!

FRITZ: SCREW YOU!

*(VON BRAUN charges into the center of the group.)*

VON BRAUN: Gentlemen, gentlemen, GENTLEMEN! They can hear you squabbling all the way to Berlin. You sound like American schoolboys trying to out-do each other. “It’s the Bat!” “No it’s the Ball!” “No it’s the glove!” Bat, Ball, Glove! They are all three important. The three must work together or there is no “ball game.” Carl . . . you have done brilliant work on the stabilizers. Why don’t you use that new wind tunnel and try using the rocket’s exhaust in the vanes to stabilize. Fritz . . . you are quite right about the fuel. See if you can’t get rid of impurities in the fuel and change the hydrogen peroxide mixture in the T-Stoff. Hugo . . . as usual you have put your finger on the problem. You know that system better than anyone. Work with Carl and use two gyroscopes in tandem with the steering vanes. Go to it. I will give you everything you need. Use your imaginations, gentlemen. Remember. The truth is always simple. Come now! Let’s play ball!

*(The SCIENTISTS bow to VON BRAUN and hurry off muttering.)*

HUGO: He’s right, of course. It is all three!

CARL: Damn.

FRITZ: The man is incredible!

HUGO: By the way, what’s with the bathrobe?

*(VON BRAUN wanders about the stage pulling his IV pole like a dog on a leash. Lights back up on the courtroom.)*

VON BRAUN: And so it would go. Genius can only take you so far. Someone must collect all these different talents and personalities and make them work together as one.

DEFENSE: *(encouraging)* Much like a symphony conductor, wouldn’t you say, Doctor von Braun?

VON BRAUN: Yes, I suppose that is so. They were the musicians and I was their conductor.

*(VON BRAUN dramatically raises his arms to give the downbeat to an invisible orchestra. The opening three measures of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony blare out.)*

PROSECUTION: But, “maestro,” your *music* was responsible for thousands of deaths.

DEFENSE: Objection!

PROSECUTION: Oh, very well, I'll get on with my line of questioning. Tell us please, Doctor, when exactly did you join the SS?

VON BRAUN: Uh, I don't think that has any bearing on—

PROSECUTION: Just answer the question.

VON BRAUN: Please, couldn't we just talk about my work—

PROSECUTION: Tell us, doctor.

DEFENSE: Objection! I don't see what this has to do with—

PROSECUTION: Now.

DEFENSE: Objection!

JUDGE: Order!

PROSECUTION: We're waiting.

VON BRAUN: STOP!

DEFENSE: Your honor, must we—

JUDGE: (*Pounding his gavel*) ORDER.

PROSECUTION: Are you ashamed?

VON BRAUN: Ashamed?

PROSECUTION: Ashamed to wear the uniform of the SS.

DEFENSE: We call for a mistrial!

JUDGE: (*Still pounding the gavel*) ORDER.

PROSECUTION: Black just not your color?

VON BRAUN: What?

PROSECUTION: Perhaps it fit a little too snugly?

VON BRAUN: No, I—

DEFENSE: Your honor!

PROSECUTION: Strangled you, did it?

JUDGE: *(Pounding)* Mister Prosecutor, I'm warning you!

PROSECUTION: A little too tight around the collar, eh Professor?

VON BRAUN: *(Becoming more angry)* I'm not a professor! I'm—

DEFENSE: Really, I must protest, your honor!

PROSECUTION: Dry cleaners couldn't get out the bloodstains?

VON BRAUN: Shut up!

PROSECUTION: Perhaps it still has a slight odor of rocket fuel and burning flesh.

VON BRAUN: *(Exploding)* SHUT UP YOU FILTHY JEWISH SWINE!

*(The JUDGE stops pounding his gavel. The COURT RECORDER stops typing. No one moves. You could hear a pin drop. Everyone looks at VON BRAUN.)*

VON BRAUN: *(deflated, spent)* I'm sorry, I . . . Please, I need a moment. Just a moment.

*(The courtroom fades. Suddenly a spotlight flashes on with an ominous electric hum. The spot is very bright, too bright. He shields his eyes, as if being interrogated.)*

VON BRAUN: *(staring up into the intense light)* What are you after? Why do you torture me so? Don't you know who I am, what I've been through? Don't you know the gifts I've given you? I'm tired. I'm so very tired.

*(LOLA enters his circle of light, still dressed as a Dominatrix Nazi. The light softens to a reddish hue.)*

LOLA: It's all too much, isn't it my darling? *Tch, tch, tch.* All these hard questions. Who can remember anything that happened during the war? We all did what we had to do, didn't we? To survive was to lie, and to lie was to finally believe those lies. I do not judge you, my dear one. Enough with the questions. Come, I'll put you to bed.

VON BRAUN: *(Exhausted, a bit delirious.)* Yes. Yes. Perhaps just an hour or two. Thank you, nurse.

*(Lights cross fade to the hospital room as they travel to his bed. LOLA tucks him in and lovingly pats him on the head.)*

VON BRAUN: *(His eyes closing.)* Nurse?

LOLA: *Ja, leibchen?*

VON BRAUN: Am I still dreaming?

LOLA: *(Fading into the darkness at the edge of the hospital room.)* You never stopped dreaming.

VON BRAUN: Nurse?

LOLA: Yes, my little *Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte*.

VON BRAUN: Am I dying?

LOLA: I'm afraid so, baby. Now try to get some sleep.

*(She goes to the door and pauses. VON BRAUN sleeps for a moment. DR. WATTS, a beady-eyed, slightly scrawny individual, wearing a lab coat and round wire-rimmed spectacles, appears at the door opening. LOLA nods and lets him through, then closes the door behind her. WATTS walks to the foot of the bed, picks up the clipboard and checks it. He's a soft-spoken man, given to soft-pedaling the gravity of 's condition.)*

WATTS: *(Glancing over a clipboard in is hands.)* Mmm-hmm . . . mmm-hmm . . . mmm-hmm?

VON BRAUN: *(Opening his eyes.)* Hello? Who are you?

WATTS: *(Still perusing the chart.)* I'm Dr. Watts, Doctor, the hospital psychiatrist. And how are we feeling today?

VON BRAUN: I . . . I'm not sure.

WATTS: Looking at your chart, I see you've been having trouble sleeping.

VON BRAUN: *(Still a bit confused)* Am I still asleep?

WATTS: Let's have a little chat, shall we? *(He paces around the bed as he speaks.)* Tell me about these dreams you've been having.

VON BRAUN: No . . . no, it's too . . . you'd think I am insane.

WATTS: *(Making scribbles in a notebook)* I'm the doctor now, Doctor. *(He smiles.)* I make no snap judgments. Go on please, tell me all about these dreams.

*(As VON BRAUN begins talking, WATTS sits beside him on the bed, listening intently, occasionally injecting "mm-hmms".)*

VON BRAUN: Well, I've been having this recurring dream, night after night. I can't seem to shake it.

WATTS: Yes? And what is the dream?

VON BRAUN: I'm in the midst of a trial.

WATTS: Mm-hmm. Interesting. What sort of trial?

VON BRAUN: *(He sits up and puts his feet on the floor.)* A trial in which I'm the defendant. *I'm* on trial.

WATTS: Mm-hmm, fascinating, fascinating. And what are you on trial for?

VON BRAUN: I'm accused of being . . . responsible.

WATTS: Responsible? For what?

VON BRAUN: My rockets. My rockets . . . that killed innocent civilians.

WATTS: Ohh . . . that old chestnut. Survivor's guilt. But that's war for you. In every war, someone has to kill, someone has to die. *(He puts his hand on 's shoulder.)* But someone has to survive, yes? Do you think you're any more guilty than the next man?

VON BRAUN: I don't know. I'm not sure. *(Covering his face with his hands.)* Maybe I should have died with the rest of them.

WATTS: But you survived, my friend. You survived because you were strong.

VON BRAUN: But it was my invention. My technology. *My* responsibility.

WATTS: *(Speaking softly with calm logic.)* You've got to let that go, von Braun. You survived because you were stronger than those who died. They were weak. The weak must die because they are inferior.

VON BRAUN: *(A long pause.)* I'm sorry. *(A short nervous laugh)* Wait . . . I thought you said . . . it sounded like you just said they were—

WATTS: *(Watts' voice becoming sharper, he rises and paces around the bed.)* Inferior. Precisely. The inferior are born to die. It is their destiny.

VON BRAUN: Their destiny?

WATTS: *(His voice gradually sounding more German, more menacing.)* But of course, von Braun. Their destiny. Hasn't the world been held back long enough because of the weak and the diseased?

*(The lighting slowly changes again, from warm to cool.)*

VON BRAUN: I thought we were discussing my dream . . .

WATTS: It is a new age, von Braun. There are many things to accomplish. How can we *ubermenschen* move forward with the *untermenschen* dragging the Fatherland down?

VON BRAUN: *(Wild-eyed, he sits up in bed and stares across the room.)* I feel like . . . like I felt in my dream. Before I woke up.

WATTS: What makes you think you woke up? What makes you think this is not still your dream?

*(WATTS rips open the front of his lab coat revealing his clothin underneath. He is dressed in the black uniform of the dreaded SS.)*

VON BRAUN: Oh dear Mother of Mercy.

*(WATTS walks to the center of the room. We see his black leather knee boots, polished and sleek. When he speaks, Watts is not a Hollywood parody of a Nazi monster. Rather, he is more soft-spoken, almost monotone, but sinister.)*

WATTS: *(His voice now completely accented in German.)* Come, come von Braun. Get up. Get up and join us.

VON BRAUN: No. It can't be . . .

WATTS: Of course it can. Why else do you think I invited you to my home? You would make a fine officer in the SS. You are, how do the Americans say it . . . "hot stuff."

VON BRAUN: *(Retreating under the covers, he pulls them up under his chin, his eyes disbelieving)* Himmler?

*(WATTS casually removes his lab coat and folds it very carefully as he talks.)*

WATTS/HIMMLER: Yes. Heinrich Himmler, in the flesh. *(He clicks his heels together, smartly.)* You have been avoiding me, Wernher. May I call you Wernher? Now I know what it must be like for a young girl to want a man who is not interested in her. I am deeply hurt, really I am. So to woo you, I must make myself more attractive. That is why I am wearing my formal SS uniform, in the hopes that I might *attract* you. *(He lays the folded lab coat on the foot of the bed, sits and rests his hand on 's leg.)* Are you . . . attracted to me, Wernher?

VON BRAUN: Please, God. Let me wake up.

WATTS/HIMMLER: *(Rising from the bed again, pacing, almost goose stepping.)* Yes. Wake up! Wake up and glimpse the future with me. A future where no man will fear suffering because we will teach every man to *enjoy* suffering, to relish agony, to love . . . death.

*(He does a short little tap dance and stops, as if to say “tah-dah.”)*

VON BRAUN: But . . . that makes no sense.

WATTS/HIMMLER: Precisely. And because it makes no sense it is the great secret of our Master Plan. Most people are raised to love things, to cherish things, to want things. Our elite Black Guards will not love, they will not cherish anything, they will not WANT anything. Except to serve . . . ME. *(Delighted with himself)* Isn't that something? The perfect warrior. The kind of soldier that will gladly give his life . . . for ME.

VON BRAUN: That isn't a dream. It's a nightmare.

WATTS/HIMMLER: No, it is a dream come true! It could be your dream too. I can make you very happy, Wernher. I can . . . give you things. Should you choose to join the SS, you will find me very generous.

VON BRAUN: *(Cringing away, his knees drawn up to his chin.)* Please God, no, please!

WATTS/HIMMLER: *(Turning away and taking center stage)* I find your reference to God distasteful. There is no *God*. We have proven that. Would a real God allow me to kill twenty thousand Jews a day? Would a real God let his chosen people be burned like so much cordwood? Would not a real God strike me down at this moment, blind me, curse me with some incurable disease? *(He slowly turns his head to look at .)* Punish me? *(He smiles.)* But no. I am not punished. I am in the best of health, I sleep very well at night. And I'll let you in on a little secret . . . I love my work. *(He strolls across the room, stops at an invisible bar, and pantomimes the pouring of two tall drinks.)* We will drink now . . . together. You will begin to, how do they say . . . “See things my way.” *(Keeping his back to VON BRAUN, he explodes.)* GET OUT OF THAT BED!

*(VON BRAUN scrambles out of the bed and steps toward WATTS/HIMMLER in fear and in awe. WATTS/HIMMLER smiles warmly, his back still turned to VON BRAUN, as he mixes the drinks.)*

WATTS/HIMMLER: You don't want to hurt my feelings do you, Wernher?

VON BRAUN: Why no, I would never—



WATTS/HIMMLER: Good. Good. I have always been very sensitive about what people think of me. If they only knew how hard I have worked to be where I am today. *(He sighs longingly.)* I am so lonely. It is not good that one should be lonely. But you know . . . all I have to do is visit one of our training camps and watch the young boys working out, stripped of their clothing, running, climbing, crawling, their perfect bodies dripping with sweat, untouched by the filthy, poisonous hands of women. Women . . . with their corruption and their faithless love. They shall not touch my boys. And you know something? At the end of a long day I can stand in the showers with them and I don't feel so lonely anymore. *(A pause as he stares into space)* Come . . . let us drink together. *(He turns to VON BRAUN, hands a make-believe drink to VON BRAUN, and raises his own in a toast.)* To the only god the world will ever worship. To Adolf Hitler.

*(Reluctantly VON BRAUN raises his glass. WATTS/HIMMLER downs his drink in one long swallow. VON BRAUN timidly sips his drink.)*

WATTS/HIMMLER: Drink, von Braun, drink. *(Smiling.)* It's not hemlock. *(A snicker, a wink.)* Drink . . . *(An order.)* ALL OF IT.

*(VON BRAUN lifts the invisible glass to his lips and drinks it all down, spilling some of the invisible liquor on his chin.)*

WATTS/HIMMLER: *(Cheerfully)* Very good. Now, don't you feel better?

VON BRAUN: Yes, I . . . I do feel better now.

WATTS/HIMMLER: Your A-4 rockets will fall upon the enemy like the thunderbolts from Zeus. In vain will they seek to surrender to us as we rain death upon them from the skies. We'll turn their bones into bracelets, we'll use their skin to make pocket books. We'll stuff them and hang them on the walls of our living rooms. Magnificent masterpieces of death. *(A long pause.)* There will be plenty of time for trips to the moon later, after we have established our thousand year Reich on the Earth. Who knows, perhaps you will even be the first German to plant a flag on the moon. But for now . . . *(VON BRAUN gropes for his bed, falls to one knee. WATTS/HIMMLER goes to him and gently hugs his shoulders. There is something tender and merciful about this moment. For an instant one glimpses the kindly man that Himmler might have been in another time, another life.)* There, there. You are a kind man, Wernher. But I don't need you to be kind. I need you . . . to kill. Every night the enemy drops tons of firebombs on sleeping German mothers and children. Our beautiful cities lie in ruin. The heart's blood of the Fatherland is draining away. *(He helps him up.)* Wernher von Braun, open your heart to the God of War and build us a weapon of terror, of vengeance. Your A-4 rocket . . . much too timid a name, don't you think? My good friend, Doctor Goebbels calls it the V-2. V for vengeance. It has a nice ring to it, don't you agree? *(VON BRAUN stares with both exhaustion and understanding. WATTS/HIMMLER grasps his hand, shaking it firmly.)* Welcome to the club, Wernher.

*(WATTS/HIMMLER slowly releases his grip. VON BRAUN sits on the edge of his bed, drained. Watts/Himmler takes his doctor's lab coat from the bed and puts it back on. The lighting changes once again from cool to warm.)*

WATTS: *(Returning to the American accent and the psychiatrist mode.)* Do try and get some rest, my friend. And try not to dwell so much on the past. I'll see you again tomorrow.

*(WATTS smiles benignly and exits.)*

*(Crossfade to the movie set. The CAST watches as a successful V-2 rocket flies skyward. VON BRAUN rises from his bed and rushes into the "scene." Watching the successful rocket disappear into the sky, a MALE TECHNICIAN takes out a cigarette, the FEMALE TECHNICIAN takes out a cigarette, and finally DORNBERGER takes out a cigarette. They all light their cigarettes simultaneously, take a deep drag and exhale at the same time, as if they have all just had group sex.)*

DORNBERGER: *(Still in British accent.)* Congratulations, old boy. You've done it!

SS OFFICER: A great day for the Fatherland!

*(In comes the DIRECTOR once more.)*

DIRECTOR: Cut! Print! Check the gate! Moving on!

*(The CAST breaks up, the CREW leaves. The stage goes dark, except for VON BRAUN. He walks to C., looking out at the audience, which has now become the jury.)*

VON BRAUN: And so the Vengeance Weapons rained down by the hundreds, striking—

*(PAJAMA MAN suddenly appears UC in front of the screen, on which we see a photo of the Dora concentration camp projected.)*

PAJAMA MAN: Who built those hundreds of weapons, von Braun?

*(VON BRAUN tries not to notice the interruption.)*

VON BRAUN: Uh . . . striking terror into the hearts of London and Antwerp, but—

PAJAMA MAN: I know who built them.

VON BRAUN: . . . but getting me no closer to my dream. *(Finally angered.)* Who the hell are you? Why can't you leave me alone?

PAJAMA MAN: Dora.

VON BRAUN: Dora. Who is Dora?

*(Lights back up in the courtroom.)*

JUDGE: Yes, Doctor? You said something?

PAJAMA MAN: *We are Dora. (He fades into the background.)*

VON BRAUN: Make him stop!

JUDGE: Doctor von Braun, is there something you wish to tell us?

VON BRAUN: *(Getting a grip.)* No. No.

JUDGE: May we continue then?

VON BRAUN: Yes. Sorry. Please, continue.

JUDGE: Mr. Prosecutor, do you have any further questions?

PROSECUTION: Yes, your honor. If the recorder will please read back the last question posed to Dr. von Braun.

RECORDER: “Doctor von Braun, how was German Intelligence able to determine the amount of damage brought upon London following the attacks from your V-2 rockets? How could you be sure that your rockets were being effective? And do you have any idea how many . . . *(a strange pause)* . . . how many people were . . . *(she stops again, looking up from her notes)* . . . killed . . .”

*(She suddenly throws her head back with a loud gasp as if all the air was being sucked out of her lungs. Out of breath, she stands. She moves DC, gasping again in an almost spiritual state of ecstasy. Her body shakes as she falls to her knees. She throws her head back again and speaks. It is not her normal voice though, but the voice of an English woman, an ordinary London housewife. The projection screen shows a serene 1945 London city scene.)*

RECORDER/LONDON MOTHER 1: I was ‘appy . . . once. I ‘ad a child . . . once. Jenn, me baby. She weren’t but six month old, pretty little thing. I had just put her in the pram for a walk. The weather was fair. For months there weren’t no worries about no air raids, what with the war windin’ down and all. Neighbors were out with their children too. Folks were going about their shopping, just glad to be out, back to normal like. No more bombers. No more Blitz. I looked down at me little Jenn. Her name was Jennifer, but we called her Jenn for short. She’d stopped her happy babblin’ for some reason. She was always babblin’ her baby talk. She ‘ad this queer look on her face, as if she knew somethin’ weren’t quite right. She weren’t smilin’ no more. She—

LONDON MOTHER 2: *(Entering from stage R.)* I was working in the hospital and I was just finishing the bandages on an elderly man, when I thought to myself—

LONDON MOTHER 3: *(Entering from stage L.)* And I thought to myself, how quiet it had got all of a sudden.

RECORDER/LONDON MOTHER 1: There weren't no airplane sound overhead, no air raid siren, nothin'. Just a quiet English street. That's when it hit. Bricks, glass, fire, flesh, bone.

LONDON MOTHER 2: That's when it hit. The whole floor gave way underneath me and I could see clear down to the ground, six floors underneath me as I fell. Bricks, glass, fire, flesh, bone.

LONDON MOTHER 3: That's when it hit. I was riding my bicycle on the way home, and the road in front of me lifted itself up and buried me in tons of brick and stone. Like a mountain falling on top of me.

ALL THREE WOMEN: Bricks, glass, fire, flesh, bone.

*(The projections change to scenes of destruction, piles of rubble where buildings had been, a double-decker tram swallowed by a crater.)*

RECORDER/LONDON MOTHER 1: That's when I seen all the people flyin'. They all flew up at once in a great cloud of blood and dust. I was knocked off me feet and flung half a block before I come to rest.

LONDON MOTHER 3: It was a sweet little bicycle. I'd only had it for a couple of weeks. It had three speeds and a little silver bell. Such a pretty bicycle. Such a shame.

LONDON MOTHER 2: That elderly patient of mine, he fell with me, and it seemed the two of us fell forever, so long, down and down, passing each floor while I tried to scream and nothing would come out my throat. We just kept falling and falling and knowing all along what was waiting for us.

RECORDER/LONDON MOTHER 1: I couldn't see the pram no more. Jenn were gone too. Our home were gone. The street were gone . . . and it got real quiet like again, for a moment. And then the strangest thing 'appened. I 'eard a big boom from up in the sky where the bomb had come from . . .

LONDON MOTHER 2: Boom.

LONDON MOTHER 3: Boom.

RECORDER/LONDON MOTHER 1: Kind of like when you're at the cinema and the projectionist gets the sound behind the picture for a bit. But it weren't no picture show. I knew what it was. As I lay there dyin', lookin' at the stumps where me legs 'ad been . . .

LONDON MOTHER 3: As I lay there dying, still holding the handlebars of my bicycle.

LONDON MOTHER 2: I knew what it was that killed the old man.

RECORDER/LONDON MOTHER 1: I knew what it was what killed me little girl.

LONDON MOTHER 3: I knew what it was that killed me, all right.

ALL THREE WOMEN: It was one of your rockets, Doctor von Braun. It was one of your rockets. It was one of your rockets.

*(All three women back up into the darkness, their voices fading, and are gone. A special comes up on VON BRAUN. He composes himself, then speaks to the audience.)*

VON BRAUN: And so I became . . . famous.

*(LOLA enters through the projection screen and makes her way down the steps, singing. She is dressed in a man's white tuxedo, top hat and tails, with a red carnation. A cigarette dangles from her hand. As she descends the steps, the courtroom disappears. VON BRAUN freezes in the spotlight, staring up into the void.)*

LOLA: (singing)

If you want an omelet for breakfast  
Some eggs will have to go CRACK!  
And it's dog eat dog, *meine Kinder*  
To get to the front of the pack

No guts, no glory. No pain, no gain  
Many will be made to suffer  
When the going gets tough, the tough get going  
And it's only going get rougher

There's an old Roman motto, worthy of praise  
It's served me well to this day  
On the tongue trippingly, this Latin phrase  
When in Rome the Romans say . . .

*Per astra ad aspera, per astra ad aspera*  
That's what Julius Caesar gabbed  
At the top of his game, everyone knew his name  
Of course, he ended up stabbed

*(As the music continues. LOLA walks up to VON BRAUN who still stares into the sky, motionless, full of awe and trepidation. She hooks her arm in his and looks up in the same direction. They both watch, as the projection screen shows launch after launch of the V-2. Explosions, fire, carnage.)*

LOLA: Look at them fly, Wernher. Beautiful, aren't they? With tails like dragon fire.  
Loud as hell. Quick as lightning. Beautiful, just beautiful.

*(VON BRAUN lowers his head, turns and exits. LOLA continues singing.)*

LOLA:

Mussolini, he knew a good thing or two  
To gain his fascist crown  
His people all thought he had hung the moon

Instead he was hanged upside down

Adolf, the old führer, a thinker and doer  
 Said, "you'll run on time, German trains"  
 When the trains left the station he pulled out his Luger  
 And scattered his drug-addled brains

*Per astra ad aspera, per astra ad aspera*  
 Though my Latin's a little rusty  
 For those who slept through Latin class  
 Allow me to translate thusly:

No matter what you shoot for  
 The moon or far off Mars  
*Per astra ad aspera, per astra ad aspera*  
 A rough road leads to the stars

*Per astra ad aspera, per astra ad aspera*  
 A rough road leads to the stars

*(spoken)*  
 Fasten your seat belts  
 It's gonna be a bumpy night!

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

## ACT TWO

*A happy, Disneyesque musical theme plays. The projection screen comes alive with animated sequence depicting a cartoon Bavarian castle, similar to the iconic Cinderella's castle in the 50's Disneyland TV show open. A squadron of cartoon Allied bombers reduce the castle to smoke and rubble. A graphic title is superimposed over the desolate scene: "Von Braun's Dreamland."*

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE: Von Braun's Dreamland! A place where dreams really do come true! This week we'll visit Frontierland. Tall tales and short memories from the legendary past.

SINGERS: *(offstage, to the tune of "The Ballad of Davy Crockett")*  
 Doctor, Doctor Rocket  
 The King of Outer Space!

*(The PIANO PLAYER plays something with a Western cowboy feel. LOLA emerges from the projection screen, carrying a lasso. She is dressed in a bejeweled cowgirl outfit, boots and a large cowboy hat, similar to Marlene Dietrich's outfit in "Destry Rides Again." Lights up on a stylized Western saloon, complete with swinging doors, a bar, four COWBOYS, a BARKEEP and the PIANO PLAYER. The PIANO PLAYER tickles the ivories in the background. It's as if the whole scene were a typical American Western movie, badly acted and directed by Germans. The COWBOYS, smoking and drinking play at Go Fish. Off to one side, almost hidden at his own table, is PAJAMA MAN, who sits out of place and time, silent and grim.*

LOLA: "Go west, young man." That's what a great American author said. So that's what we did. Yup, we done lost the war. So we surrendered up to the enemy, and they said, "How'd you boys like to partner up? Bed and board and plenty of fresh air. And best of all, no jail time."

*(Reacting to the last line, they snap out of their melancholia.)*

COWBOYS: YEE-HAH!

*(They return to their game and depression.)*

LOLA: “What’s the catch?” we asked. And they said, “We just want your brains.” Well, who could resist an offer like that? So heck, we signed up! Now here we are, camped out in the Wild Frontier!

COWBOYS: *(singing a reprise)*  
 Doctor, Doctor Rocket  
 American as he can be!

*LOLA glides from table to table, watching over the game.*

LOLA: *(singing)*  
 There was a dark stranger from way back East  
 Who rode into town one dry day  
 He looked right near parched to say the least  
 And he didn’t have too much to say

But he stepped to the bar, put down his coin  
 He knocked back a whisky or three  
 Then he said to the singer, “Before I get goin’  
 “Can you sing me an old melody?”

Sing me that song from the Old Country  
 Make it soft, make it slow, make it sweet  
 The one about the boy and the gal left behind  
 Gosh, that would make life complete

I remember her there by the garden gate  
 Her gold hair shone like the sun  
 Sing me that song from the Old Country  
 I’m sure you all know the one . . .

*(Everyone but Pajama Man sings the old German folk song, beer steins in hand.)*

Du, du leigst mir im Herzen  
 Du, du liegst mir im Sinn.  
 Du, du machst mir viel Schmerzen,  
 Weißt nicht wie gut ich dir bin.  
 Ja, ja, ja, ja, weißt nicht wie gut ich dir bin.  
 Ja, ja, ja, ja, weißt nicht wie gut ich dir bin

LOLA: *(to the PIANO PLAYER)* All right, Jimmy, enough sad songs. How ‘bout a snappy tune!

*(The PIANO PLAYER launches into some upbeat background music. The COWBOYS perk up. They speak Western lingo with a German accent.)*



COWBOY 1: *(to COWBOY 2)* Gimme all yer threes.

COWBOY 2: Go fish.

COWBOY 1: Aw shoot!

COWBOY 2: *(to COWBOY 3)* Gimme all your yer kings.

*COWBOY 3: (With disgust, he throws down three cards.)* Dang it!

COWBOY 2: Ha! Got me another gol'dern book!

LOLA: Look at you, the lot of you! Playing cards and gettin' fat, while your pals are off working for the Red Gang. Soon they'll be ahead in the Wide Open Space Race. And you call yourselves scientists.

COWBOY 1: Oh Lola, we miss home.

LOLA: *Ja*, well maybe you shouldn't have signed on Uncle Sam's dotted line.

COWBOY 4: Maybe we shoulda gone over to the Russkies' side. I'll wager they'd pay a heap better.

COWBOY 2: And go agin' the boss? Go agin' Tex von Braun? *(Again, to COWBOY 3)* Gimme all yer sevens.

COWBOY 3: Go fish!

LOLA: How long you sad sacks been here, just firin' off the same old firecrackers day after day? When are you gonna do some real research?

COWBOY 1: She's right! Here on the desert, we're just slowly wasting away.

COWBOY 4: Maybe we should go back to Berlin. At least we could get some decent beer.

COWBOY 2: P'shaw, they'd hang ya fer sure.

COWBOY 3: *(to COWBOY 4)* Gimme all yer fives.

COWBOY 4: Go fish.

COWBOY 3: *(suspicious)* Now wait just a cotton pickin' minute. I know dang well you got a five in your hand.

COWBOY 4: You accusin' me of cheatin'?

COWBOY 3: Maybe I am.

*(The two abruptly stand and draw their pistols on each other. The piano music abruptly stops. For a tense moment it looks like there will be blood. Finally the tension eases. COWBOY 4 smiles, holsters his Colt and picks up his cards.)*

COWBOY 4: Well looky here. There was a five. Reckon it was hidin' from me all along.

COWBOY 3: Yeah, reckon so.

*(The two sit back down and resume play. The music resumes also.)*

COWBOY 3: *Ach*, we'll never get to the moon at this rate.

COWBOY 1: Maybe we should go rob a stage or somethin'.

COWBOY 4: Boys, I think it's time fer a change.

COWBOY 1: What are you sayin'?

COWBOY 4: There's others that'll pay fer what we know.

*(A figure appears at the saloon door.)*

COWBOY 2: *Shhh!* It's the boss.

*(“TEX” VON BRAUN, dressed in dusty chaps, boots and a ten-gallon hat, enters through the saloon doors, causing a hush over the card game.)*

TEX VON BRAUN: Schnapps. And don't be stingy.

*(The BARKEEP pours him a drink. He notices LOLA.)*

TEX VON BRAUN: Lola.

LOLA: Tex.

*(TEX looks over at the cowboys. He knows they're disgruntled.)*

COWBOY 2: Afternoon, boss.

TEX VON BRAUN: *(If it's possible to speak in a German-Texas accent)* Gunther, Slim, boys. You seem all jumpy like. Anything I should know?

COWBOY 2: Oh, it ain't nothin'. Not really.

TEX VON BRAUN: That so?

COWBOY 1: What he means is . . . Well, the truth is we're all a little tired of sitting on our *Arschbacken*.

COWBOY 3: Yeah. We've been stuck here in El Paso for four long years.

COWBOY 1: Our talents are being wasted.

COWBOY 2: Is it too late to send a wire to Big Joe Stalin?

TEX VON BRAUN: *(to COWBOY 4)* That the way you feel too, Wolfgang?

COWBOY 4: 'Fraid so, boss.

*(TEX downs the last of his schnapps and walks over to the card table.)*

TEX VON BRAUN: Well boys, you won't have to wait any longer. We're pullin' out.

*(The COWBOYS react with excitement.)*

COWBOY 4: Where we headed, boss?

TEX VON BRAUN: We're heading East, to Huntsville, Alabama.

COWBOY 3: Something new?

COWBOY 2: Something big?

TEX VON BRAUN: It's big, all right. Bigger than big. It's called Redstone.

COWBOYS (ALL): *(With awe)* Redstone.

TEX VON BRAUN: Yup. We're one step closer to the moon, boys. So start packing yer duds. We leave on the next train.

*(The COWBOYS excitedly jump up, fire off their pistols into the air and exit through the swinging doors.)*

TEX VON BRAUN: Well Lola, you gonna miss me?

LOLA: Like I'll miss a toothache. *(She motions to the table where PAJAMA MAN sits alone, staring at Tex.)* Say, see that stranger over there, the one who dresses kinda funny?

TEX VON BRAUN: *(Rattled, averting his gaze)* What about him?

LOLA: You seen him before?

TEX VON BRAUN: Nope. Never laid eyes on him.

LOLA: Well, he says he knows you.

TEX VON BRAUN: *(Eyeing the stranger again)* That so?

LOLA: Says you and he go way back. Some gal named Dora.

*(The music stops. Tex's reacts with fear. He turns away from the stranger's table.)*

LOLA: Who was she, Tex? Did she break your heart?

TEX VON BRAUN: I—I gotta get movin'. *Adios*, Lola.

LOLA: *Auf Wiedersehen*, Tex.

*(TEX walks down to Center Stage and freezes like a statue. LOLA smiles, knocks back a whiskey and exits. The expressionless PAJAMA MAN slowly rises, then exits through the swinging doors. Lights fade from the saloon to the courtroom.)*

JUDGE: Court will now resume. Doctor von Braun, you were saying . . .

VON BRAUN: Thank you, your honor. The people of Huntsville welcomed us as heroes. They were very impressed by the presence of so many brilliant scientists. At last, we could do real research. And I was closer to my goal of reaching outer space.

PROSECUTION: Closer to your goal of escaping your criminal Nazi past, you mean.

DEFENSE: Objection! Again with the Nazis! We were talking about Dr. von Braun's development of the Redstone rocket and getting America into the space race.

PROSECUTION: He was racing his big American Buick down the streets of Huntsville while he and his fellow Nazi scientists were escaping punishment for war crimes.

DEFENSE: Objection!

JUDGE: Sustained. The accused will continue.

VON BRAUN: Thank you, your honor. We were doing good work. The Russians had beaten us into space with Sputnik. But now my Redstone rocket was about to up the ante.

PROSECUTION: Up your income, you mean.

DEFENSE: Objection!

JUDGE: Sustained.

VON BRAUN: I became an American citizen.

PROSECUTION: And thus escaped the fates of Goering, Bormann and Hess.

DEFENSE: Objection! Objection! Objection!

VON BRAUN: *(angrily)* I took America to the moon!

PROSECUTION: You took America to the cleaners!

DEFENSE: You honor, the prosecution is turning this courtroom into a CIRCUS !

*(Circus music. Sounds of cheering crowds and laughter. Lights out on the courtroom and up on a circus scene at R. The MAYOR, a politician full of cornpone and bluster, is dressed in a ringmaster's suit and top hat. VON BRAUN walks up to the Mayor, beaming, holding his clasped hands above his head like a boxing champ.)*

MAYOR: Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, children of all ages, welcome to the greatest show on Earth! If you will kindly direct your attention to the center ring, we are proud to present, all the way from Nazi Germany, the man behind the rocket that put a man on the moon. The man who turned our fair city of Huntsville into Rocket City USA. The man who turned barbecue into bratwurst . . . Wurnur Van Brawn!

*(Wild applause.)*

VON BRAUN: Thank you, mayor. Thank you, my friends. Thank you for welcoming me into your homes and your hearts. I share a genuine kinship with you, my fellow Americans. In fact, I feel as American as apple pie.

*(More applause.)*

MAYOR: *(aside, to VON BRAUN)* More like apple strudel, right Doc? Ha ha! *(To all)* Well, that's swell, just swell. Doctor Van Brawn, in keeping with the significance of this auspicious occasion, we now wanna present you with the key to Huntsville . . . Rocket City USA!

*(MAYOR hands him an oversized key.)*

VON BRAUN: A very great honor. I am deeply touched.

MAYOR: Not that you need this key. You've already won the key to our hearts. Why, Huntsville was just another dirt water town when you and your gang of eggheads flew in. And whoever'd thought all that rocket ship technology that rained death and agony on helpless English people would end up here in little 'ol Huntsville,

where you could use it to model your ultimate creation, the rocket that put an American on the moon!

*(The MAYOR motions to the screen, where we see the Saturn V rocket climbing into space, the sound roaring at maximum volume. We hear the sounds of cheering throngs, intermixed with the famous sound bite, "Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed." The CIRCUS CROWD whoops and applauds. The screen goes to black. The CROWD turns back to the proceedings.)*

MAYOR: Magnificent! And now, Doctor, we've prepared a special entertainment. Ladies and gentlemen, kindly direct your attention to the center ring. They've been practicing for weeks, our very own Huntsville Rockettes!

*(Music from Offenbach's "Can Can" played by the piano/band. DANCERS, women and/or men, dressed as cheerleaders enter and perform an exaggerated simulation of man landing on the moon, using papier-mâché rocket and moon followed by dancing, à la Radio City Rockettes. Music ends. They exit.)*

MAYOR: Let's hear it for 'em folks! *(Applause.)* Mighty fine! Mighty fine! *(Aside, to )* By the way, Doc, is it true you married your cousin?

VON BRAUN: I . . . well, yes . . . I—

MAYOR: Well alrighty then! *(He punches VON BRAUN's shoulder, hard.)* I guess we have more in common with you Gerries than I thought.

*(Back to his blustery ringmaster voice.)*

MAYOR: And now, specially flown in from the Fatherland at great expense, the Mittelwerk Precision Pickaxe and Shovel Drill Team! Take it away, boys!

*(Music plays, a very slow, morose version of Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries." SLAVES, including PAJAMA MAN, dressed in striped pajamas, carrying pickaxes and shovels, enter and march in a slow, sluggish rhythm, goaded to perform like circus elephants by HIMMLER, who cracks a whip. PAJAMA MAN steps out of the circle and stares at VON BRAUN. Finally, a WAGNERIAN MAIDEN, dressed in horned helmet and chest piece, and carrying a cardboard V-2 rocket model, enters the center of their circle. The SLAVES, except for PAJAMA MAN, bow down as if praying to a god. The rocket rises, by way of a rope lowered from the fly space. Wild applause. Music ends. The performers exit quietly, heads bowed. PAJAMA MAN is the last to leave.)*

MAYOR: Wonderful! Wonderful! *(to )* Well, what do you think, Doc?

VON BRAUN: *(confused, disturbed)* I'm not really sure I understood that last act. Why were those men dressed like that . . . ?

MAYOR: Well now, just think of it as *art*. You know Doc, with art sometimes you just have to lose yourself in it. You don't wanna overthink it. One man's death is another man's future. Kinda like you, Doctor Van Brawn. It took a lot of hard workin' people to hide them rockets from the Allies. How many poor souls you

reckon you left in those secret tunnels . . . dead I mean. Oh hell, it ain't important. *(He pats him hard on his back.)* Water under the bridge. The important thing is you got out alive and brought your rocket pals to the good ol' U.S. of A!

VON BRAUN: I suppose. Still, it struck me as odd. Couldn't we have the Rockettes back again? I liked them very much, especially those short skirts.

MAYOR: *(He laughs and looks at his watch.)* Nope. Time to move on. The race to the moon is over. The money's all dried up. Time for Huntsville to revert back to the Watercress Capital of the World. Time for us to idolize some other celebrity like Elvis or Michael Jackson. 'Course they never killed nobody like you did, but at least they could sing. Oh yeah, I'll be needin' that key back, Doc. *(He snatches the big the key from and walks away.)* Ausveederzay.

*(The crowd thins and disappears. VON BRAUN is left alone to walk back to his hospital bed. He stands there, looking back and forth, holding his head, then his stomach. He feels faint.)*

VON BRAUN: *(to himself)* I gave them the moon. I gave them pride. What did I get? Cancer!

*(NURSE GRACE enters from L. She runs to him as he falters.)*

NURSE GRACE: What are you doing out of bed again, fool? You know you're supposed to ring for me.

VON BRAUN: I . . . I gave them the moon!

NURSE GRACE: *(Taking his arm to help him back into bed.)* Yes, yes, you gave them the moon. Now let me give you an enema. It's been three days since—

VON BRAUN: Oh leave me alone, you horrible woman. Let me die in peace.

NURSE GRACE: Sorry, darlin', but my job is to keep you alive and if at all possible, regular. Can I get you anything?

VON BRAUN: Just leave. *(She turns to go. He panics.)* No, stay. Please. I—I'm afraid they will come for me again.

NURSE GRACE: Who? Who's comin' after you?

VON BRAUN: Them. The spirits.

NURSE GRACE: Spirits, huh? You mean like dead people?

VON BRAUN: Yes. The dead.

NURSE GRACE: Mm-hmm welcome to the club, honey. I been haunted by my dead mama for fifteen years. Always naggin' me. Always sayin', "Get rid of that no good boyfriend of yours. He just draggin' you down. Drinkin', cheatin', no good—"

VON BRAUN: You're lucky to have only one ghost. I have thousands.

NURSE GRACE: Yeah, well you never knew my mama.

*(He winces in pain again.)*

VON BRAUN: I—I'm afraid, Grace. I'm afraid to die.

NURSE GRACE: You want me to get the doctor?

VON BRAUN: No. No more doctors.

NURSE GRACE: Well, I need to go check on my other patients. I'll turn on the TV set. What you wanna watch?

VON BRAUN: I don't care.

NURSE GRACE: Okay, let's see what's on.

*(As she turns on the TV across from his bed, we see the silhouette of a cartoon mouse on the center screen.)*

NURSE GRACE: Oh my, will you look at that.

*(NURSE GRACE starts singing the theme from Disney's Mickey Mouse Club TV show, the logo of which appears on the projection screen. As she sings, she surreptitiously adjusts his IV flow.)*

NURSE GRACE: I remember this old show from when I was little. Wouldn't you know it, not one single little black mouse in the bunch. *(Singing)* M-I-C. *(She slips toward the door.)* See you real soon.

VON BRAUN: *(groggily)* Don't leave me, Grace.

NURSE GRACE: *(singing)* K-E-Y. *(speaking)* Why? Because we like you.

VON BRAUN: I like you too.

NURSE GRACE: *(Singing.)* M-O-U-S-Eeeeeee. *(She turns down the lights, watches VON BRAUN drift off to sleep, then cues the MOUSKETEERS. He's all yours, children.*



*(A quartet of MOUSEKETEERS emerges, chanting, through the silver screen. They wear Mickey Mouse ear caps but are dressed like children in a Hitler youth group, with shorts, black belts, knee socks and mouse armbands.)*

MOUSEKETEERS: Meeska mooska mouseketeer . . .

VON BRAUN: *(half awake)* What?

*(They hold hands and dance around VON BRAUN, still chanting.)*

MOUSEKETEERS: . . . mouse cartoon time now is here!

VON BRAUN: *(Startled, he sits upright)* Who are you? What is this?

*(They stop dancing.)*

MOUSEKETEER ONE: *(singing)* Now it's time to turn the dial . . .

*(He twists the morphine IV valve.)*

VON BRAUN: Are you people or rats?

*(MOUSEKETEER TWO gives the valve another turn.)*

MOUSEKETEER TWO: *(singing)* . . . to the right and the left with a great big smile . . .

VON BRAUN: Why are you here? *(to the door)* Nurse! Nurse!

MOUSEKETEER ONE: *(Ominously)* She can't hear you.

MOUSEKETEER TWO: *(Sounding very adult, ominous)* No one can hear you.

MOUSEKETEER THREE: *(More like a little kid)* Tell us about going to outer space, Uncle Wernher.

MOUSEKETEER FOUR: *(A female)* Yeah, show us how your rockets will take us to the moon!

MOUSEKETEER ONE: Like you did on TV for Disney.

VON BRAUN: I . . . I don't remember.

MOUSEKETEER TWO: Gosh, you're awfully forgetful about things.

MOUSEKETEER THREE: Maybe he doesn't want to remember.

MOUSEKETEER FOUR: Maybe he wants to forget.

MOUSEKETEER ONE: You remember being on the Disneyland TV show, don'tcha?  
You were Walt's favorite space guy.

MOUSEKETEER ONE: Come on, Doc, show us how it's gonna be.

*(VON BRAUN rises, fully conscious.)*

VON BRAUN: Oh, very well. Come over to this table and I will show you.

*(Upbeat “documentary music” comes up, the kind that used to accompany shows like “Industry On Parade” in the 50’s. Two SLAVES wheel out a table topped with several rocket models of different sizes. He picks up the models and demonstrates.)*

VON BRAUN: One day, man will blast off in a large rocket ship, using liquid fuel to free itself from the gravity of the Earth. Once in space, the ship will rendezvous with a space station, where it will refuel and continue on to the moon.

MOUSEKETEER FOUR: *(Seductively)* Ooo! Your rocket, it’s so big!

MOUSEKETEER THREE: It’s beautiful! I love the tail fins!

VON BRAUN: After several days the rocket will reach the moon and become captured in its orbit.

MOUSEKETEER TWO: Wow!

VON BRAUN: Finally the rocket lands safely and our astronauts plant a flag, claiming the moon and all of its minerals for the United States.

*(The up-beat documentary music continues to breeze along in the background.)*

MOUSEKETEER ONE: Gee whiz!

VON BRAUN. And then, boys and girls, we will begin building a base on the moon where men will live.

MOUSEKETEER THREE: Golly!

VON BRAUN: From that base we can launch our satellites that will encircle the Earth.

MOUSEKETEER ONE: Shazam!

VON BRAUN: Each satellite will be equipped with an atomic bomb that can easily be launched and directed toward our enemies on Earth.

MOUSEKETEER TWO: Boy oh boy!

VON BRAUN: While we are safe and unharmed on the moon the evil nations of the world will be in flames.

MOUSEKETEER THREE: Jiminy Cricket!

VON BRAUN: Then we can begin to rebuild the world as we wish it to be. A world free from hunger, poverty and colored people.

*(The music ends.)*

MOUSEKETEER ONE: Maybe I can be the first man on the moon!

VON BRAUN: Perhaps you will, my son.

MOUSEKETEER FOUR: Yeah, and maybe I can be the first *woman* on the moon!

VON BRAUN: Let’s not get too crazy.

MOUSEKETEER FOUR: Aw gee!

MOUSEKETEER THREE: Doctor, would you like to go to the moon one day?

VON BRAUN: Oh yes. That has always been my dream.

MOUSEKETEER ONE: Well, we can't give you the moon . . .

MOUSEKETEER TWO: . . . but we can give you something better.

MOUSEKETEER THREE: Yeah, a *lot* better.

MOUSEKETEER FOUR: Okay, close your eyes.

MOUSEKETEER ONE: Reach right out!

MOUSEKETEER TWO: Time is here!

MOUSEKETEERS (ALL): (*singing*) You're an honorary . . . Mouseketeer!

*(They put a mouse ears hat on VON BRAUN's head.)*

VON BRAUN: Uh, I really don't know what to say. Would you like to hear my plan for going to Mars?

*(Suddenly the MOUSEKETEERS lose interest.)*

MOUSEKETEER ONE: Mars? That's science fiction stuff! It'll never happen!

MOUSEKETEER TWO: Yeah. Hey gang, let's go watch Davy Crockett kill some Mexicans!

MOUSEKETEER ONE: Right! To the Alamo, men!

MOUSEKETEER FOUR: Hey, don't forget ME!

*(They run off stage.)*

VON BRAUN: Wait! This isn't science fiction! This could be real. All I need is a little more money. Come back !

MOUSEKETEER ONE: *(Off stage)* To the Alamo! *(They all cheer.)*

VON BRAUN: *(Removing his mouse hat, he addresses the audience.)* How quickly you Americans lose interest.

*(Lights crossfade to the courtroom.)*

JUDGE: I've always wanted to go to Disneyland. *(To VON BRAUN)* Is Walt as nice as he appears on television?

PROSECUTOR: Well, you've spun quite a tale for a gullible American public, haven't you, Doctor? Fantasyland, pure and simple.

VON BRAUN: No! It wasn't Fantasyland. It was *Tomorrowland!* I was looking to the future.

PROSECUTOR: You were looking to make a buck.

DEFENDER: Ladies and gentlemen of the court, Doctor von Braun brought physics and space travel to a huge television audience. He sold the space program to America. He was an inspiration for a nation tired of war, ready to seek out and explore other worlds, to—

PROSECUTOR: Boldly go where no man has gone before. Blah blah blah.

JUDGE: Gentlemen, gentlemen, please!

PROSECUTOR: Your honor, we are simply stating that Doctor von Braun was delusional. While he was playing with cartoon moon rockets he was developing an intercontinental ballistic missile to reach the Soviet Union.

DEFENSE: If it please the court, may we move on?

JUDGE: Does the prosecution wish to call any final witnesses?

PROSECUTION: Just one, your honor.

*(PAJAMA MAN takes the witness stand.)*

PROSECUTION: Do you know this man, Dr. von Braun?

*(Lights dim on all but VON BRAUN and PAJAMA MAN, who is bathed in a cold, blue spotlight.)*

VON BRAUN: *(Trying to hide his unease)* I . . . I can't say that I do.

PAJAMA MAN. But I know *you*.

VON BRAUN: Who are you? Who *are* you? LEAVE ME ALONE! WHY DON'T YOU—

PAJAMA MAN: Do you remember Dora?

VON BRAUN. Who is this Dora? STOP TALKING TO ME ABOUT DORA!

PAJAMA MAN: No, I must speak now. I will remind you about Dora, von Braun. Are you ready?

VON BRAUN: I . . . I don't believe I am.

PAJAMA MAN: No?

VON BRAUN: No, I don't think I want to know anything about . . . *her*.

PAJAMA MAN: *(Laughing, almost in a monotone)* But don't you see? Don't you see what a funny joke that is? Dora was not a person. Dora was a place. The Dora Concentration Camp. You remember. You were there. Surely you know the prison

camp we lived in, near the tunnels where I worked. The Mittelwerk factory tunnels, where we made your rockets. Ring any bells?

VON BRAUN: *(Clearly frightened, almost nauseous)* I . . . I can't think about that right now.

PAJAMA MAN: They woke me up one morning where I had fallen asleep. They hanged me, von Braun. Did you know that? They took a piece of barbed wire and they hanged me from a crane . . . because I fell asleep. Oh, you know me, all right. My name was Fredek. I was a librarian once, before they brought me to the mountains, to carry heavy stones and breathe the poison air, to dig the tunnels, to hide your rockets. You never thanked me, von Braun. You never put your hand on my shoulder and said to me, "Good job, Fredek. You have done well to hide my rocket factory." You never helped me to pick the maggots out of the rotting sores in my legs. You never brought me water to wash the blood from my eyes or food to ease the hunger that chewed my insides like the claws of a crab. *(He rises from the witness stand and approaches, but does not touch him.)* It is too late to thank me now. Too late to thank me for helping build your flying weapons. Who is Fredek? Fredek is a ghost who walks the long, cold tunnels. The tunnels where men went mad and swallowed dirt to choke themselves to death rather than face another day. *(He steps toward VON BRAUN and puts his hand on his shoulder.)* Go. Go to the tunnels now and see . . . We are there, von Braun. Thousands of us. We are still there. We will always be there. *(Pause)* Waiting . . . for you.

*(PAJAMA MAN turns to walk away, his head down.)*

VON BRAUN: Wait! Come back! You cannot judge me. I WILL NOT BE JUDGED BY YOU! Do you hear? *(He approaches the court.)* You think I am a FOOL? Do you think this cardboard set and these high school costumes and your outrageous accents have deceived me for one moment? What kind of judge talks like a farmer from Kansas? Choir robes for the prosecution and the defense, like something out of a high school play. Nonsense! I knew this was a dream from the beginning. It is a DREAM.

*(No one in the courtroom moves as the light on them begins to go out.)*

VON BRAUN: I did what I had to do. I have done nothing wrong. I walk away from you, I turn my back to you. I disown you. I deny you! Do you hear me? I DID WHAT I HAD TO DO. Do you . . . hear?

*(Lights cross fade to an office down R. Behind a desk sits a corporate figurehead, MAN IN SUIT. On the desk is a nameplate inscribed with "Man In Suit", a telephone and a small model of the Space Shuttle. LOLA, now dressed as a sexy secretary, lounging on his desk seductively, rises and approaches VON BRAUN.)*

LOLA: Doctor von Braun, he will see you know.

VON BRAUN: Who? Who is he?

LOLA: The director of NASA. He asked to see you.

VON BRAUN: *(excited, with renewed energy)* Ah yes! Of course, of course!

*(VON BRAUN crosses and walks through the “door” into the office. The MAN mispronounces ’s first name as “Wurnur”.)*

MAN IN SUIT: Ah, Doctor! Come in, come in! You know, I’ve been at NASA for years and this is the first time I’ve actually ever met you, Doctor. You’re a legend around here. It’s kind of like meeting Santa Claus or the guy that invented the Mister Coffee machine. May I call you Wurnur?

VON BRAUN: Well actually it’s pronounced—

MAN IN SUIT: I suppose you’re wondering why I called you here.

VON BRAUN: You said on the phone that you had some sort of surprise for me.

MAN IN SUIT: That’s right, Wurnur. And guess what that surprise is.

VON BRAUN: Well, I really don’t—

MAN IN SUIT: Go on . . . guess.

VON BRAUN: I really have no idea.

MAN IN SUIT: Come on, guess.

VON BRAUN: Well, I’d have to say—

MAN IN SUIT: You’ll never guess.

VON BRAUN: Well, I was going to say—

MAN IN SUIT: You have no idea.

VON BRAUN: I assumed it was—

MAN IN SUIT: Thank you.

VON BRAUN: I’m sorry?

MAN IN SUIT: Thank you.

VON BRAUN: I'm not sure I understand.

*(The MAN gets up and casually walks around the desk. He is wearing a green jacket, red vest and tie, but as he comes out from behind the desk we see that instead of slacks he is wearing lederhosen, long white socks and buckled shoes. He takes the green cap with white feather from a hat rack and puts it on. Perhaps he spans his hands on his legs and ass and does a little Bavarian two-step before he sits on the edge of the desk and addresses VON BRAUN seriously.)*

MAN IN SUIT: *(folding his arms)* I was in the commissary the other afternoon, and just as I was digging into my General Tso's chicken I thought to myself, "You know, it's high time that I, or I should say we here at NASA, thank Wurnur van Brawn officially." That's why I asked you here. You got us to the moon before the Russkies. You made us look like we knew what we were doing. That's why I called you. To thank you officially. So . . . thank you.

VON BRAUN: Well . . . thank *you*. You are very kind.

MAN IN SUIT: *(Smiling)* Oh, kindness had nothing to do with it.

*(Both men sit smiling at each other for what seems an uncomfortably awkward time.)*

VON BRAUN: So . . .

MAN IN SUIT: So . . .

VON BRAUN: So . . . when do we go?

MAN IN SUIT: When do we what?

VON BRAUN: When do we go?

MAN IN SUIT: *(Still smiling)* Go where?

VON BRAUN: To Mars, of course.

MAN IN SUIT: Mars? You mean the planet?

VON BRAUN: Well . . . yes . . . that's what I thought your surprise was going to be. That at last we were going to Mars.

MAN IN SUIT: That wasn't the surprise.

VON BRAUN: Oh, I'm sorry. What was the surprise?

MAN IN SUIT: "Thank you."

VON BRAUN: You're welcome. And the surprise?

MAN IN SUIT: "Thank you."

VON BRAUN: I'm still not sure I—

MAN IN SUIT: Thank you. "Thank you" was the surprise. I thought that I'd surprise you by saying "thank you." Weren't you listening?

VON BRAUN: Oh, I see. Very good. Well . . . *(Rubbing his hands together in anticipation)* What about going to Mars?

MAN IN SUIT: Who's going to Mars?

VON BRAUN: *We* are.

MAN IN SUIT: *I'm* not.

VON BRAUN: *(Smiling good naturedly)* I'm a bit confused . . .

MAN IN SUIT: Wait a minute. I know what it is. I was talking about the candy bar and you were talking about the planet. Isn't it funny how two people can be talking to each other about two different things and not even know it. *(Standing up and checking his watch)* Once again, Wurnur. Thank you. Officially.

VON BRAUN: *(Standing up)* Wait, please . . . a moment please. Has something happened? Has NASA postponed the Mars program?

MAN IN SUIT: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. We haven't postponed it. We're shutting it down.

VON BRAUN: Shutting it down? How can you—

MAN IN SUIT: *(Sitting back down behind the desk)* Not that we aren't pleased as punch about going to the moon. Gosh, we were all just pleased as punch. We sure caught those Commies with their pants around their ankles. *(Laughs)* But Mars? Goodness gracious, it's awfully far away and colder than a well digger's ass.

VON BRAUN: *(Still smiling, still trying to understand)* But we can't just keep going to the moon.

MAN IN SUIT: I completely agree, Wurnur, and so does NASA. That's why we're shutting down the moon program too.

*(LOLA, outside the "office" filing her nails, begins to sing.)*

LOLA: *(singing, almost under her breath)* Ka-boom.



VON BRAUN: I'm sorry, what?

MAN IN SUIT: *(Smiling and chiding him a bit)* You know, you really ought to have your hearing checked.

VON BRAUN: But what about outer space . . . traveling to other worlds?

MAN IN SUIT: Well, when you say it like that it sounds kind of silly doesn't it? Not that I'm not a science fiction fan. I love Star Trek. Why just the other day I was at a budget cutting conference and I actually turned to the boys and said . . . get this . . . you're gonna love it, "Beam me up, Scottie. There's no intelligent life down here." *(He chuckles)* Got quite a laugh.

VON BRAUN: But if we aren't going anywhere, what will become of the space program?

MAN IN SUIT: I'm glad you asked that question. Take a look at this.

*(The MAN picks up the space shuttle model from the desk and holds it in both palms, presenting it proudly to von Braun.)*

VON BRAUN: *(Staring at it)* What is this?

MAN IN SUIT: What *is* this? Why, this is the future of your rocket program, Wurnur. It's called a space shuttle. Neat, huh?

VON BRAUN: A space shuttle? What does it do?

MAN IN SUIT: Well it . . . uh . . . it . . . shuttles. It goes back and forth between the Earth and other stuff circling the Earth. *(Like an excited kid talking about firecrackers)* We've already got it scheduled to haul cargo to the new space station for the Russians!

VON BRAUN: *(Holding the little model in his hands)* We're *helping* the Russians?

MAN IN SUIT: I know, I know, it's crazy. But we here at NASA feel that it's high time we all just learn to get along. The Russians are just like us, only with more facial hair. Besides, because of budgeting problems, NASA's decided that this is as far as we go, Wurnur. Enough's enough. Don't you agree? I mean going to the moon is kinda like going to the Grand Canyon. When you've seen it once you've seen it. Time to come back down to Earth and work on more important goals, like self-driving cars and helping impotent men get it up.

LOLA: *(singing)* Ka-boom.

VON BRAUN: *(He gives the MAN the model back)* So . . . this is as far as we go? The moon and no further? The greatest achievement in the history of mankind and you have decided to turn it into a pick-up truck to haul garbage for the Russians?

*(MAN IN SUIT sits impassively, his fingers poised fingertip to fingertip like a patient Oxford elitist.)*

VON BRAUN: Where would we be if Columbus had stopped in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and said, "This is as far as we go. Enough is enough?"

*(SLAVES begin removing items from the desk and carting them off. MAN IN SUIT remains, unmoved and unmovable.)*

VON BRAUN: America would not even exist. *(He turns and walks DS, appealing to the audience.)* Kitty Hawk was not the end of flight, but the beginning. The moon is not the end of space travel, it is the beginning. We've barely scratched the surface. We are just getting started. The whole galaxy is waiting for us, beckoning. *(SLAVES remove the space shuttle model and desk. The MAN still doesn't move or react.)* Don't you know what happens when men stop and declare "Enough! This is as far as I go." *(Almost to himself)* They retire. That's what they do. They quit dreaming. They sit alone, all through the day and into the night, comfortable. *Comfortable.* *(His voice rising in anger)* The triumph of human history was not won by being COMFORTABLE. Mankind was created by God to strive for greater things! *(SLAVES wheel chair with MAN IN SUIT off stage. VON BRAUN, unaware he is alone, continues.)* Everyone must challenge himself with a mission. Our mission is outer space! God has given us a gift, a pathway to the stars. Do we now refuse his gift and retire? The time to go is now! The technicians are ready, the scientists are ready, and the astronauts are ready . . . eager to sacrifice their lives for the chance to be the first to step foot on the surface of Mars. And that is only the beginning. Don't you understand? It is written in the Bible. *World without end.* But I say to you, it also means *worlds* without end. We are meant to go on. We must! We *must* go on!

*(VON BRAUN stands alone in limbo. LOLA sings under a cold spotlight.)*

LOLA: *(singing)*

Ka-boom,  
My whole world has gone ka-boom.  
I'm doomed  
I've finally run out of room  
In the twilight's last gleam  
The world melts just like ice cream  
And it's over all too soon  
Ka-boom

Ka-pow  
I'm taking that final bow

Oh wow  
 So who can I turn to now?  
 The world ends with a blast  
 Well, we knew it couldn't last  
 A fitting end somehow  
 Ka-pow

Ka-blam  
 The ending is where I am  
 God damn  
 I'm hearing the cell door slam  
 My world has gone to hell  
 There's really nothing left to tell  
 And no one gives a damn  
 Ka-blam

*(Lights crossfade to the courtroom come up. The usual COURT members are in attendance, along with PAJAMA MAN. Each person has a blindfold and covers his ears with his hands. VON BRAUN delivers a final soliloquy, but it falls on deaf ears.)*

VON BRAUN: Oh, I see how it is now. This isn't what you want to hear. It has nothing to do with the moon, or Mars or going on with the space program at all, has it? I know what you want. You want Wernher von Braun to admit that he is as guilty as those others. The ones who enslaved and tortured and murdered millions. Well, I cannot do that. I *will* not do that. Look at my work! Where would you be without me and my knowledge? Still sitting on your fat asses, weighed down by gravity, still believing the world is flat. *(Coughing, holding his abdomen, he is beginning to feel death nearing. The COURT remains silent, unmoving.)* You ungrateful sloths. I gave you a precious gift and you're wasting it. *(Weakening, he struggles to make his way back to his bed.)* There is an ocean of stars waiting for you to explore! I have given you the power to reach them! And what do you do with that power? Put up a hundred satellites so you can watch French sex on television and call your uncle in Bratislava. *(The moon is projected on the screen. VON BRAUN gazes at it longingly.)* Ah, there you are. My muse. My Woman in the Moon. I never got to touch your face. My rockets made it possible for other men to touch you. But I always was watching from a distance. A voyeur. Never a voyager. *(He makes it to his bed and pulls the sheet up to his neck. Near death now, he looks out toward the audience.)* I ask you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, is that fair? I ask you. *(Fading, almost silent) . . . I . . .*

*(Just as he starts to slip away, he suddenly comes to, wide awake, as if out of a dream, back to another reality. He looks around for a moment. He slaps his forehead. Like a stage actor, he has "gone up.")*

VON BRAUN: Line?

*(The DIRECTOR barges onto the “set,” as does the FILM CREW. The CLAPPER/LOADER snaps the slate with “I Aim at the Stars” written on it.)*

DIRECTOR: Cut! Print it! That’s a wrap!

VON BRAUN: But I didn’t finish the scene!

DIRECTOR: No, no, it was great! The best yet!

VON BRAUN: I had another two pages left.

DIRECTOR: It was perfect! Besides, we’re out of time and over budget.

VON BRAUN: You’re just going to leave it hanging like this? No ending?

DIRECTOR: Don’t worry, we’ll fix it in post.

VON BRAUN: Fix it? How? There was no verdict! There was no resolution!

DIRECTOR: Uh . . . *(thinking hard, grasping at straws)* I know! Before the credits roll, we’ll flash a few sentences like, “Years after the death of space pioneer Wernher von Braun, the world continues to ponder his guilt or innocence.”

VON BRAUN: *(Burying his face in his hands)* God, no.

DIRECTOR: *(continuing to improvise)* “Was he a war criminal, a mad Nazi genius who would stop at nothing to achieve his dream?”

VON BRAUN: Please.

DIRECTOR: “Or was he God’s gift to mankind, bringing us ever closer to the stars?”

VON BRAUN: Jesus.

DIRECTOR: No, I’ve got it! We’ll just dissolve to stock footage of a Saturn rocket climbing, climbing into the sky . . .

*(The screen erupts with the sound and sight of a Saturn V rocket lifting off.)*

DIRECTOR: . . . coming closer and closer to the moon, until finally . . .

*(The rocket footage ceases abruptly.)*

DIRECTOR: Ah, what the hell. It’ll bomb. The audience will stay away in droves. No one cares about space anymore. No one will even remember who Wernher von Braun was.

*(The DIRECTOR starts for the exit. The film studio lights turn off one by one.)*

DIRECTOR: See you at the wrap party?

VON BRAUN: No. I think I'll stay here a little while longer.

DIRECTOR: *Ciao.*

*(The DIRECTOR exits. VON BRAUN is left alone again. He rises from his bed. He looks to the screen where the full moon shines brightly. An ASTRONAUT appears in front of the projection. The space outfit is a fanciful reimagining of what a space suit should be, more like something from Buck Rogers, very feminine, with sequins. A helmet conceals the wearer, but the giveaway is a pair of legs that can only belong to LOLA. Slowly, the astronaut descends the steps. VON BRAUN watches with curiosity and a little fear. Midway down the steps, the astronaut stops and removes her helmet)*

LOLA: Are you ready?

VON BRAUN: Ready? For what?

LOLA: Your trip, of course.

VON BRAUN: Where am I going?

LOLA: *(Motioning behind her)* Where you've always wanted to go, Wernher.

VON BRAUN: But . . . I'm not suitably dressed. I haven't packed. My wife, my children. I—

LOLA: Hurry now. We don't have much time.

*(VON BRAUN walks toward the foot of the stairs. We hear the opening strains of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" on the piano.)*

VON BRAUN: Who are you? Don't I know you from somewhere?

LOLA: Sure you do. My name is Lola. Or Marlene. Or Grace. Or Dora. But you may call me *Die Frau Im Mond*.

VON BRAUN: Oh yes. I'd know you anywhere.

*(VON BRAUN very slowly begins climbing the stairs, while Lola descends past him.)*

LOLA: *(singing)*

Moonlight, you beckon  
Seducing me, touching me  
Moonlight, you temptress

Confusing me, using me

Pulling me into your  
Bosom so cold, yet I  
Can't keep from longing  
Your body to hold

Moonlight, you siren  
Your song irresistible  
Flesh white as porcelain  
Skin cold as snow

One look, I'm ruined  
I'm storm tossed and shipwrecked  
Forever your castaway  
Don't let me go

*(Half way up the steps VON BRAUN turns and looks back at the audience.)*

VON BRAUN: You understand . . . I did what I had to do. It was my dream. It was your dream too. *(He turns to the moon, then looks back again at the audience.)* Wasn't it?

*(Receiving no answer he turns and continues walking slowly up the steps.)*

LOLA:

The pull of your gravity  
Danger, depravity  
No use in fighting  
I'm bound to give in

Ravished and raptured  
My soul you have captured  
I give you my essence  
Oh, moonlight, you win

Take my hand  
Take my heart  
Take my soul  
Oh moonlight, you win

*(By the end of the song, VON BRAUN has disappeared into the projection screen. The moon projection glows blindingly bright, giving the illusion he has passed into the moon itself, perhaps into a star. LOLA, at the bottom of the stairs, walks to the edge of the stage, into a spotlight, and addresses the audience, once again with a German accent.)*

LOLA: Well, what are you waiting for? Go home. The dream is over. I have no more songs to sing. *(She starts to exit the circle of light, but turns with one last thought.)* Oh, if there's a moon out tonight, look up and give a wink. And if the Woman in the Moon winks back . . . well, you'll know who she is. *Gut nacht.*

*(The music rises in volume, ending in the last strains of "Moonlight Sonata." LOLA very slowly dons her helmet. Her spotlight fades, leaving only the full moon projection, now slowly going through an eclipse, dimming, dimming, until it too has faded completely.)*

END OF PLAY