

Celebrities in Space

by Jessica Moss

*No part of this play may be performed
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WHO

BLAKE – A NASA spacey type person guy, any gender

OLENDOWSKI – A NASA spacey type person guy, any gender

CALLAGHAN – a NASA spacey type person guy, any gender, likely a bit older than Blake or Olendowski, old guard, big George C. Scott or Ed Harris energy (not that they have to be male, that is, but those are the references that I have at the moment, you know?).

WHERE

Offices at NASA. Bleep bloop blorp.

WAIT

A ‘/’ marks point of interruption where the following line begins.

A frustrated office.

Probably machines that go BING!, if you have them? Or also nothing. Nothing works great.

CALLAGHAN and BLAKE pace, or sit, exhausted, frustrated, and completely out of ideas.

BLAKE opens their mouth as if they had an idea.

CALLAGHAN eagerly looks to BLAKE.

BLAKE pauses.... Closes their mouth. Shakes their head.

CALLAGHAN pounds their fist.

CALLAGHAN

Goddammit. Are we ever going to come up with an idea?

Well, Blake, /are we?

BLAKE

I don't know, boss.

CALLAGHAN

You don't know. Goddammit. Well we better figure it out, Blake.

BLAKE

I know, boss.

CALLAGHAN

Or it's curtains for us. Imagine. All these years I been at NASA. All these years, as a spacey type person guy, exploring the final frontier. Pushing science to the limits so that we could better understand our place in the universe. And now, declining interest. Declining funds. With earth going to shit, they say, "maybe we should spend the money here, on making lives better, more liveable on earth, instead of looking around in space". And if we don't come up with something that'll make space travel seem relevant, exciting, worthwhile...goddammit.

BLAKE

We'll be out to sea.

CALLAGHAN

Out to sea? We'll be out to space. Goddammit.

OLENDOWSKI bursts in.

OLENDOWSKI

I've got it. I've really got it.

BLAKE

No.

OLENDOWSKI

I do. I can hardly believe it, but -

CALLAGHAN

Don't toy with me, Olendowski, I can't take it.

OLENDOWSKI

I really think I've got it.

Celebrities. In space.

Beat.

BLAKE

My God –

CALLAGHAN

What the hell did you just say?

OLENDOWSKI

I said Celebrities. In space. We take celebrities. We send them to space.

Beat.

BLAKE

Boss, I think Olendowski's got it.

CALLAGHAN

It couldn't work.

BLAKE

Why not?

OLENDOWSKI

I know it sounds crazy. But these are crazy times, aren't they? In days like these you gotta think outside the box, you gotta shoot for the stars, but that's what we do, goddammit. We're NASA and we shoot for the stars.

BLAKE

Boss, we're dreamers.

CALLAGHAN

I know we're dreamers, goddammit, but we're also spacey type person guys, goddammit. We need to know our limitations. We have to be rational, goddamit, we've got to be practical.

BLAKE

Hear Olendowski out, at least, boss.

CALLAGHAN (...)

All right, Olendowski, I'll hear you out, what's the idea?

OLENDOWSKI

It's celebrities. In space.

CALLAGHAN (...)

My god.

BLAKE

What more do you need other than that? That's incredible, it tells you the whole thing.

CALLAGHAN

It's catchy, I'll give you that.

BLAKE

It sure could boost the profile of the space program. NASA sure could use something that got people's attention like that, boss. Could change everything for us, could be the answer we're looking for. Celebrities. Wow.

OLENDOWSKI

In space.

BLAKE

Wow.

CALLAGHAN

You can't let yourself get sucked in by flashy ideas, flashy ideas fizzle out, I just need to understand this, make sure I'm seeing all angles of the proposition. Walk me through it.

OLENDOWSKI

I gotcha, boss. So, we take celebrities, right?

CALLAGHAN

What kinda celebrities?

OLENDOWSKI

All kinds. Whatever kinds you like. Actors, rock stars, football players, billionaires-

BLAKE

Oprah?

OLENDOWSKI

We couldn't get /Oprah.

CALLAGHAN

We'd NEVER get Oprah, goddammit.

BLAKE

Goddammit.

OLENDOWSKI

But there's bunches of 'em, and they all have a following. So we take those celebrities....

BLAKE

Yeah? Yeah?

OLENDOWSKI

And we send 'em to space.

BLAKE

Wow.

CALLAGHAN

All right, all right. Don't get your hopes up. You got something there, Olendowski, you got something, but I got a lot of questions. First off, where in space do we send 'em?

OLENDOWSKI

Just.... Space.

OLENDOWSKI makes sound effect like: "out there"

CALLAGHAN

All right, all right. Do we train 'em?

OLENDOWSKI (...)

Kinda.

CALLAGHAN

Kinda.

OLENDOWSKI

Yeah, like we train 'em, but we don't *train* 'em.

CALLAGHAN

All right, all right.

BLAKE

This is genius! You've really done it, Olendowski!

CALLAGHAN

Now goddammit, Blake, don't go getting excited. It solves our problem, sure, but it's so crazy, how could it work?

BLAKE

Or... it's so crazy it just might work?

CALLAGHAN

Goddammit, Blake. You just blew this wide open. All right, all right, how do we get the celebrities to do this?

OLENDOWSKI

Here's the thing, Boss: they want to do it. They're signing up left, right, and center. They all want a piece of the pie. And here's the thing, Boss: we can charge 'em

BLAKE

Wow!

CALLAGHAN

Charge 'em?

OLENDOWSKI

Millions of dollars for the privilege.

BLAKE

My god, we could fund new explorations.

OLENDOWSKI

New explorations, improved technology, state-of-the-art innovations-

BLAKE

New chairs in the computer /room?

OLENDOWSKI

And new chairs in the computer room.

CALLAGHAN

GODDAMMIT, I don't want us getting excited about new chairs in the computer room, we've all had our hearts broken too much.

BLAKE

Ah, but, boss, you gotta see that this is a sure thing. This really could make it all happen for us. The attention, the money, I could meet Oprah.

CALLAGHAN

OPRAH ISN'T GONNA /DO IT.

OLENDOWSKI

Oprah isn't gonna /do it.

BLAKE

She might! We're talking about a world where the richest more privileged people get to hop in a rocket and go into space, with no education or business being there. Anything is possible!

CALLAGHAN

My goddammit.

OLENDOWSKI
Whaddaya think, boss?

CALLAGHAN (...)
In my many years here at NASA in the Spacity-Space program, I never saw times as hard as these. I never thought that the farther we'd be able to travel, the more we'd have to go. The more we learned, the more we'd have to learn.

But you, Olendowski. You come in here with a plan that can save us all.

Goddammit, kid. Goddammit.

OLENDOWSKI
You like it, boss?

CALLAGHAN
Like it? I love it. Celebrities into space. What an idea. What an achievement. The most beautiful and famous among us riding around in a little space suit. And when they come back, the stories they'll be able to tell, and the more we'll be able to grow our little program. You've really done it, Olendowski.

OLENDOWSKI (...)
Come back?

CALLAGHAN
Yeah, you know. When they come back from space.

OLENDOWSKI
Oh. Uh. Hm.

I mean.... Uhhhh. Uh. *Uhhhhh*.

Yeah, interesting.

CALLAGHAN
Well, surely we'd... we'd bring them back.

OLENDOWSKI
Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh. Definitely an idea there. Definitely a possibility. Not really what I was thinking, but –

BLAKE
You were suggesting we just sorta.... Launch them out there?

OLENDOWSKI
Yeah, you know. (*OLENDOWSKI does a little mime of chucking someone out into space*) Hwup. Off ya go. Enjoy!

CALLAGHAN
And then... just....

OLENDOWSKI
Yeah, I dunno, float? What really happens up there, anyway, we ever been able to figure that out? They'll, you know, chill. Post a selfie. And then

BLAKE
And then what?

OLENDOWSKI
Well I don't know, but.... (*OLENDOWSKI does a little mime like, "they would disappear"*). What, I thought you guys were onboard.

CALLAGHAN
I just assumed they would be coming back.

OLENDOWSKI
But why would we do that, what good would that do?

BLAKE
We're trying to bring awareness to space travel so that we can keep going as a company!

OLENDOWSKI
And I told you, they'd pay! Tons of revenue coming in, plus, the press before? Pfft. It'd be great. Today Show, CNN, get people from the networks, I'm sure some of 'em would love it. It would definitely bring awareness. We're gonna launch Kanye into space? Who doesn't watch that?

BLAKE
Ye.

OLENDOSKI
Yay, exactly! It solves our problem. It solves *most* problems.

BLAKE
Who'd do this once they realize what was going on?

OLENDOWSKI
You can make literally anything popular these days! People are paying millions for NFTs! Y'know what those are?

BLAKE
I've heard of them but I don't understand them.

OLENDOWSKI
Exactly! That's what they are. Things you hear about but don't understand, and they are selling them for millions! And I mean, maybe we'd have to clump 'em together, make a day of it! Cause, yeah, I could see interest declining at a certain point, BUT STILL!

BLAKE

No, but... but you'd be killing people.

OLENDOWSKI (...)

We'd be killing celebrities. Not exactly the same thing.

BLAKE

Some of the most beloved people -

OLENDOWSKI

Who control the vast majority of wealth, continue to increase that incredible wealth by throwing balls or playing pretend, or getting to live out their wildest dreams and fulfill their creative potential while the rest of us play basketball on the weekends or do community theatre and work our bodies to complete collapse to be able to afford a completely sub-optimal existence?

Look Blake. You work here every day. You've worked here every day for years. Do you get paid enough?

BLAKE

I -

OLENDOWSKI

You live in a studio apartment with a hotplate.

BLAKE

I'm saving for an Oculus.

OLENDOWSKI

Did you think you'd be down here, in the offices, with the fluorescent lights and the no windows? Didn't you think, when you devoted your life to astrospace, that that meant you'd spend your entire life on the ground floor? Didn't you want to be the one actually going to space? Didn't you want to soar, Blake? Didn't you want to soar?

BLAKE (...)

Yeah.

OLENDOWSKI

And if some idiot billionaire, who has done nothing but pollute the world that the rest of us are stuck on while it turns and burns, who has created something that makes your life a living hell, that is designed to make you hate yourself, but is also designed to be so addictive and foundational to our interactions that you literally can't leave even though you develop this small pain in your lower stomach that never goes away because of it, if that billionaire, with his billions decides that he should be lucky enough to participate in the miracle of space travel, for NO reason other than his ill-gotten wealth, how does that make you feel.

BLAKE (...)

Bad....

OLENDOWSKI

And so should we let that billionaire return to the planet that he was largely responsible for destroying?

BLAKE (...)

No.

OLENDOWSKI

No. No we should not, Blake.

BLAKE

Screw him.

OLENDOWSKI

Exactly. Exactly, Blake, screw him.

BLAKE

Launch him up there. Launch 'em all up there.

OLENDOWSKI

And you see, it's self-selecting. The only celebrities who are going to think that this program is for them, is something they're worthy of, are the most selfish, self-aggrandizing, worst people on earth.

BLAKE

BUT NOT FOR LONG!

OLENDOWSKI

EXACTLY! Exactly!

CALLAGHAN

Goddammit!

OLENDOWSKI (...)

Boss?

CALLAGHAN

Goddammit, Olendowski... you're a genius.

OLENDOWSKI

Really, boss?

CALLAGHAN

You think you've done all you can. You think there must be a limit at some point. To the universe, sure. To the limits of space travel. But also to human ingenuity: to how much we can come up with, how much we can do. And then, an idea like this comes in. To launch famous people into space and leave 'em up there. And it's humbling, really. It makes you feel big, and oh so small. It makes you shocked at how much we're capable of, and makes you wonder who else we can throw into the

void for a few extra dollars? It's remarkable. It makes me proud to be a spacey type person guy. You did it, Olendowski.

OLENDOWSKI

No. We did it.

They all shake hands.

They shake hands again.

They slap each other's backs.

CALLAGHAN picks up a phone, and dials.

CALLAGHAN

Houston? We have a solution.

(beat)

Oh, I'm sorry, hit 9 first to dial out?

End of play.