

Prologue:

FADE UP FROM BLACK. We see beautiful, sunny day scenes from Juneau.

Narrator (VOICE OVER.):

Juneau. Located in Southeast Alaska, this state capital is a juxtaposition of a modern, teeming city and pristine wilderness.

Southeast Alaska has a stunning variety of wildlife. Summer announces the arrival of bald eagles, whales, bears, tourists, and insects.

The isolated city and outlying areas are home to some 30,000 people. Contrary to popular belief, Juneauites have long since traded in their sled dogs and igloos for the familiar modern conveniences of the western world. In fact, Juneau is home to the 3rd largest university in the entire state.

It's here, at the University of Alaska – Southeast, situated on the shore of Auke Lake in Juneau, overlooked by the Mendenhall Glacier, that three, seemingly normal students have openly challenged NASA to a first in the history of the space race.

FADE TO BLACK.

Act I. How it all began

FADE UP FROM BLACK to a black slate with white writing.

“The Beginning”

FADE TO BLACK.

I. Interior. Dormitory.

FADE UP FROM BLACK. A FISH TANK in background, COUCHES in corner. We see ARLO, MIKE, and JOE sitting.

Arlo

I don't quite remember how this all got started...

Mike (pondering)

Wasn't it something medical? Didn't we think we could work towards the cure of something?

Joe

No, no, don't you guys remember? It was after we saw that CNN story about... um...

Mike (snapping fingers)

Right! The _____. That guy's 15 minutes of fame.

Joe

That's the one! And Arlo got us going on how easy it would be to get on CNN.

Arlo

I did?

Joe

Yep.

Mike

I remember.

Arlo (directed at both)

You're sure?

We see JOE and MIKE nodding.

Arlo

I don't remember at all.

Joe (back to camera/narrator)

Well, anyway, we talked about it for a few minutes... How one could squander their fifteen minutes of fame. Then Arlo says, "I'll bet we could get on CNN in we did something outrageous."

Arlo

Wasn't that Mike?

Joe

No, it was you.

ARLO shrugs.

FADE TO BLACK.

II. Interior Dormitory.

We hear bubbles in water, then MIKE's voice. Camera FADES UP FROM BLACK focused on MIKE as seen through a fish tank.

Mike (tapping glass, peering in)

Hello, little fishy-doo! Are you hungry? Spit that out! That's poo! I'll give you some food.

MIKE reaches into cabinet, extracts FOOD and shakes it in front of fish tank. Then POURS some in. He watches for a moment, then POINTS to food floating on surface.

Mike

It's up here, fishies! No, no, Spike. That's a rock. Up here, up here...

CAMERA ZOOMS OUT and JOE and ARLO come into view. They are facing each other, situated on the couch beneath the fish tank. AUDIO UP on their conversation while AUDIO down on Mike's conversation with the fish. (MIKE continues through JOE and ARLO's scene.)

Arlo

So, you're giving me the credit for coming up with all this?

Joe

Well, no single one of us gets all that, but yeah, I suppose this is all your fault. (Smiling) You still don't remember?

Arlo

No.

Joe (sighing)

We were talking about how to get famous and you said, "I'll bet we could get onto CNN if we launched a fish into space."

ARLO, with dawning realization, turns towards fish tank and stares at fish for a few moments. We still hear MIKE cooing to fish (faintly).

Arlo (slowly)

That's riiiiight. I was watching Sheldon, there, and thinking about how he'd fare in zero gee. How any fish might swim without gravity.

Joe

Well, anyway, we decided on a salmon because of the attention it would generate. (Pauses and looks towards fish tank) Knock it off, Mike.

FADE TO BLACK.

III. Interior. ARLO's room.

FADE UP FROM BLACK. We see ARLO sitting in CHAIR. COMPUTER is positioned in front of him, and is turned on.

ARLO (to camera/narrator)

Actually, it's not going to be as difficult as it sounds. After researching the subject of space flight for a few hours, it became apparent that the resources need to launch a craft into space is not as expensive as NASA has let on. (ARLO reaches for mouse)

CUT TO:

A NETSCAPE SCREEN is showing an obviously amateurish WEB PAGE. Lots of flashy banners, blinking text, etc. HEADLINE on page reads: "NASA Covers up Accidental Discovery of 'Perfect' Rocket Fuel."

Web page scrolls down. More "Enquirer" HEADLINES appear.

CUT TO:

IV. Exterior. Gas Station. Daytime.

We see a dog's eye POINT OF VIEW from the CAMERA of a CAR pulling up. There are no visual nor aural clues that this is a gas station. CAR DOOR opens and MIKE's foot steps into view.

CUT TO:

LONG SHOT of MIKE getting out of car. He walks around it while talking to camera.

Mike

A cheaper alternative than rocket fuel? In the beginning we didn't have any idea something like that existed. In fact, because of the excessive costs, I never considered this a viable project from the start.

While continuing to talk, MIKE opens gas tank and unscrews gas cap OFF CAMERA.

Mike

All that changed when ARLO showed us the fruits of his research...

MIKE picks up gas pump (OFF CAMERA) and brings it into view.

Mike

...GASOLINE!

MIKE stylishly (like a gunslinger) SHOVS nozzle into car's tank.

CUT TO:

V. Interior. Dormitory Kitchen.

We see JOE by counter. Counter is filled with apparatus: POTS, COLLANDER, MEASURING CUPS, GAS CAN, GUNPOWDER, Kerosine, etc.

Joe

We've actually been able to improve on the formula with very few incidents.

JOE pauses to mix a few ingredients.

Joe

You may have heard of the fact that a single cup of gasoline can explode with as much force as a stick of dynamite. Well, we've been able to increase that to... one-AND-A-QUARTER sticks of dynamite!

JOE finishes mixing proportions, picks up a BOX OF KITCHEN MATCHES, draws a match across the striking surface...

CUT TO:

V. Exterior. Dormitory.

LONG SHOT. CAMERA VIEW shows the windows of the dorm as seen from the outside. LONG SHOT holds for three seconds.

CUT BACK TO:

VI. Interior. Dormitory Kitchen.

CLOSE UP of JOE. He blows out MATCH. JOE grins as smoke drifts up from extinguished match.

CUT TO:

VII. Exterior. Gas Station.

GAS PUMP COUNTER is going up, up, up... (in the \$50 range)

CUT TO:

MIKE is topping off a red, plastic GAS CAN. He moves to the open TRUNK and we see an assortment of containers – all full. MIKE places newly filled container in with others. During this process, MIKE tells CAMERA/NARRATOR:

Mike (with enthusiasm)

It's really amazing! Why does NASA spend so much money when we've almost achieved the same results with so little? We're shaving *millions* of dollars off what it costs for NASA to send up a shuttle. In fact, by using gasoline, I, myself, will be able to fund this entire project!

CUT TO:

VIII. Exterior. Bank ATM (drive -thru)

OUTSIDE SHOT of CAR. We see ARLO in CAR. He's withdrawing money from the ATM.

CUT TO:

Interior of CAR.

We see ARLO completing his transaction through window.

Arlo

If Mike doesn't bring anything else to our venture, I'll still be completely satisfied with his contribution. He's already taken out six student loans totaling over seventeen thousand... (pondering briefly) Twenty-seven thousand..? No. (nodding) It's seventeen thousand dollars. (Pauses a beat) I think.

ARLO is understandably confused because he's counting \$300 dollars worth of bills from the ATM.

CUT TO:

Captured video is displayed of THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY. The "showdown" scene is playing.

CUT TO:

IX. Interior. Dormitory.

MIKE is relaxing on the couch, arms propped behind his head. He just glances at the CAMERA/NARRATOR as he begins talking.

Mike

Money? No, I'm not worried. Why should I be? Once we get our sponsor, I'll pay back my loans. (He pauses.) It's strange... Everyone we've approached has turned us down... Hold on.

MIKE sits up – leans forward to watch the (OFF CAMERA) television.

CUT TO:

Captured video is displayed of Clint Eastwood's "Power line." AUDIO of MIKE saying, "Oh, YEAH!" barely proceeds a

CUT BACK TO:

MIKE again watching TV.

Mike (sighing in awe)

Clint Eastwood is *so* cool. Where was I? Oh, yeah. I think NASA's paid off all of the obvious, potential sponsors. We'll have to find some non-traditional sources of money.

X. Interior. Dormitory dining table.

JOE is sitting at the TABLE. PAPERS are spread out in front of him.

Joe

No, I don't know what's wrong. (Takes off GLASSES and rubs his eyes) Well, that's not completely true... I got nominated to give the sales pitches to prospective clients – all because I once took a business class. (Pauses) I think I'm conveying my, OUR, enthusiasm well, but most prospects reject us because we "have no idea what we're getting into."

CUT TO:

XI. Interior. Spike's Café (when closed).

ARLO is sitting at a TABLE facing CAMERA/NARRATOR. JOE is facing ARLO with his back to the camera.

Arlo (agitated)

I don't know *what's* up with that...!

AUDIO continues as we CUT TO:

XII. Exterior. Daytime. Eagle Beach.

ARLO, JOE, and MIKE are standing to the side of JOE NELL who is getting ready to launch a modest (3-4 ft) MODEL ROCKET. While we hear ARLO continue (VOICE OVER), JOE NELL launches the rocket. CAMERA ON all four people as rocket streaks skyward. JOE NELL is excited, dancing around a little. JOE NELL looks up and a little down the beach – MIKE, ARLO and JOE go running off down the beach.

Arlo

...A friend of ours, Joe Nell, goes out every weekend and launches some model rockets and we went out every weekend with him for *three weeks!*

(Barely audible speaking is heard from OFF CAMERA)

Arlo

Right, *okay*. Every *sunny* weekend. What's the difference? We can *do* this! This isn't exactly rocket science, you know... (hastily) I mean, well, it *is* rocket science, but –

CUT TO:

XIII. Interior. Cafeteria at UAS.

Cafeteria is half-full with students. In the foreground, JOE has books spread out on TABLE and is eating some FOOD. MIKE and ARLO sit down at his table with more FOOD.

Joe

It's really not like we have a lot of options here at UAS. With only 600 or so full-time students, they can't afford to offer many specialized degree programs.

JOE takes a bit of food.

Arlo

The University of Alaska in Fairbanks has some sort of rocketry program, but it's too damn cold up there.

Mike

Less salmon, too.

Arlo

True. At any rate, we do what we can. There's an astronomy course offered here, and Mike got an "A" in that.

Mike

"A-minus"

Arlo (A little exasperated at being interrupted again)

Whatever!

Joe

And I'm taking math and meteorology next semester.

Arlo

Yeah, who knows? They may be useful, too...

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT II. Early Concepts and Failures

FADE UP FROM BLACK to a black slate with white writing.

“If at first you don’t succeed...”

FADE TO BLACK.

I. Interior. Classroom.

FADE UP FROM BLACK. We see a BLACKBOARD covered with diagrams of projected flight paths, tons of irrelevant math equations, etc. JOE is standing next to the board looking confused and dejected at the same time.

Joe

I can’t understand why we’re having such a problem getting the fish into space. You’d think getting it back down would be something that would take a lot of planning, not shooting it up!

CUT TO:

II. Exterior. Bike path.

ARLO is seen walking. He has a BACKPACK slung over one shoulder. CAMERA dollies backward.

Arlo

Problems? (sighing) Yeah, I suppose we have to admit to having a couple problems. I prefer to call them temporary setbacks or learning experiences, though.

CUT TO:

III. Interior. Mike’s Room.

MIKE is sitting in a BLUE CHAIR, facing CAMERA/NARRATOR. After the first three sentences, we CUT TO different scenes of MIKE working with salmon.

Mike

Well, let me tell you something. Catching and keeping a salmon alive for a space launch is no small task. They’re not like goldfish, you know. Besides the fact that they’re hard to catch with your hands, (MIKE starts to tick items off on his fingers) they usually live in saltwater, they’re bigger, they don’t eat fish flakes, they have sharp teeth, they jump and flop around a lot, and they’re just generally hard to catch without damaging them. I keep trying to tell them that we could get just as much coverage if we used a goldfish, placostamus, or even a few neons, but they won’t have it. So I have to live with it and get us a salmon.

IV. Exterior. Stream.

MIKE is seen chasing salmon up a shallow stream. He runs with his arms hanging down, and we can see at least one salmon wriggling upstream out of his reach.

CUT TO:

V. Exterior. Skiff in Auke Bay.

MIKE is seen looking over the edge of a SKIFF into the water. There is a DIP NET next to him, unused. MIKE looks back and forth and then looks over the other side of the skiff.

CUT TO:

VI. Interior. Science lab (Anderson building).

A large LIVE SALMON is in a 10 GALLON AQUARIUM. MIKE is tapping in a small amount of FISH FLAKES into the aquarium. Suddenly the whole canister empties into the water. MIKE shows surprise and immediately reaches for a small DIP NET to get them out of the water.

CUT TO:

MIKE trying to pick the salmon up off the floor of the SCIENCE LAB. The fish is flopping around and MIKE can't get a grip on it.

CUT TO:

VII. Interior. JOE's Apartment.

JOE is sitting at his dining room TABLE. There are many PAPERS spread out in front of him. He is showing signs of stress (rubbing temples, etc.)

Joe (sighing)

Our first test launch was a disaster. First, the rocket didn't go up. We had plenty of fire, but not enough thrust. The burners fired for about 10 seconds before the fuselage started to lean to one side and eventually it fell over. Lucky for us, the body of the rocket was recovered intact. Unfortunately, the rocket skidded along the ground in a zigzag path for a couple hundred yards.

Continue as VOICE OVER and CUT TO:

VIII. Exterior. Mendenhall Glacier, in front of lookout point.

Static shot of Arctic Tern Nesting Ground sign at the Mendenhall Glacier. We see COMPUTER GENERATED SMOKE far in the background (and possibly torn up ground in the foreground).

Joe (continuing)

Worse still, we apparently took out a major portion of some protected Arctic Tern nesting grounds. Those eco-freaks had a hay-day with us...

CUT TO:

IX. Exterior. UAS Campus.

We see KARL in a MEDIUM SHOT. Classic opinion poll situation – his name is printed briefly across the bottom of the screen identifying him as JOE's brother.

Karl

Hey, I'm no tree-hugger, but I have to tell you that what those boys did is wrong. Birds like them can't defend themselves against rockets, you know. If I ever see one of them around town...

KARL clenches his fist at the camera while simultaneously shaking his head and pursing his lips.

CUT TO:

X. Interior. JOE's Apartment.

JOE is still situated at TABLE as above.

Joe

...And then we tried a launch last winter. With the Tern Disaster in mind we thought that launching from a frozen lake would minimize the potential of another wildlife disaster as well as give us the perfect flat surface. It did both, but we lost the rocket *and* the launch structure when the fire melted through the ice. (JOE takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes) At least no one found any evidence of that mishap and threw it back in our faces.

CUT TO:

XI. Interior. Russ' garage.

HANDHELD CAMERA ON ARLO who is standing in a (Russ') garage with TOOLS in the background. RUSS is to ARLO's left (camera right) OFF CAMERA is a CAPSULE with open door. Inside the capsule is an empty AQUARIUM held in place by a web of BUNGEE CORDS. There is a LID on the aquarium.

Arlo

Oh, we were having quite a bit of trouble at first getting our vehicle off the ground. The size and weight of the rocket itself seem to be very important factors to consider – not just the weight of the payload. We spent too much time and energy on the fish apparatus in the early stages, but that effort will pay off later. Here with me is Russell Beal, our chief engineer on this project. Russ, care to explain the fish capsule?

CAMERA moves so that we can see into the capsule. ARLO moves OFF CAMERA. RUSS begins pointing out elements and explaining them.

Russ

Sure, Arlo. As you can see, we have the aquarium supported by approximately 25 bungee cords. This is very important because without them, we expect that the stresses of the launch might damage the structural integrity of the glass.

RUSS begins to push down on the aquarium to demonstrate that it bounces.

Russ (continuing)

As you can see, the bungee cords do a remarkable job of absorbing any shock that might otherwise break the glass.

RUSS, as he finishes moving the aquarium, reaches for the LID on it and peels off the tab of duct tape that secures it to the top. The lid opens on HINGES in the back.

Russ (continuing)

Also, thinking ahead, we decided to invest in a sturdy cover for our aquarium to make sure that the salmon doesn't jump out during the flight. We were able to save a some money by cutting some corners, too. If you'll notice, there is no filter on this tank to oxygenate the water. We believe that we could do without one because the flight will only last a few minutes – not long enough to worry about fish asphyxiation.

XII. Interior. Mike's room.

MIKE is sitting in his BLUE CHAIR.

Mike

We had to make some adjustments to insure the safety of the fish. Our whole goal here is to be the first to launch a *live* salmon into space. When we were finally able to get the first rocket to leave the ground, it didn't reach orbit – actually it didn't even get out of our sight. When we got to the crash site we saw just what had happened to the poor fish inside (shaking his head). Well, you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, right?

CUT TO:

XIII. Interior. Joe's apartment.

JOE is sitting at his TABLE with PAPERS.

Joe

The ruins of that crash gave us something else to think about. How were we to prove that we had actually got our salmon into space? Nothing in the wreckage of our equipment indicated how high the fish had gone... On our next attempt we installed an altimeter and a video camera – both secured with bungee cords – so that we'd have proof of our success to show to CNN.

XIV. Exterior. Upstairs walkway behind Novatney and Whitehead buildings.

MIKE is walking to class with BOOKS under his arm. He is speaking to CAMERA/NARRATOR in front of him.

Mike

We still had one more problem to conquer. It seemed that our rockets just weren't getting high enough. We made it to the height of one mile, at least, but I'm pretty sure that that's not even half-way to achieving orbit. Arlo had some creative ideas about how we could use a balloon...

CUT TO:

XV. Interior. Joe's apartment.

JOE is sitting at his TABLE with PAPERS.

Joe

The Helium Assisted Launch, or HAL, looked good at first, but it just involved too many more materials than we have at our disposal.

While JOE continues as a VOICE OVER, CUT TO:

ARLO is at BLACKBOARD. He is drawing and gesturing wildly (and his enthusiasm shows) in a large, erased section of the previous mathematical symbols. There is a DIAGRAM of a huge, helium balloon with a rocket attached to the bottom high over the picture of the Earth.

Joe (continuing)

It's too bad, really, because Arlo was really into this new idea. He even went so far as to create a great computer animation to demonstrate how it would work...

While JOE continues as a VOICE OVER, CUT TO:

XVI. COMPUTER ANIMATION of H.A.L.

We see a 16 color, jerky-motion representation of a H.A.L.

Joe (continues)

...But I just couldn't see us coming up with a balloon big enough to lift our whole rocket. That's not to mention all the helium we'd need or even how we'd trigger the launch once everything was ready.

CUT BACK TO:

XVII. Interior. Joe's apartment.

JOE is sitting at his TABLE with PAPERS.

Joe

So... I suppose it's back to the drawing board. (Joe pauses, then smiles) So to speak.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT III. Fame

FADE UP FROM BLACK to a black slate with white writing.

“Support and opposition.”

FADE TO BLACK.

I. Exterior. UAS Campus.

FADE UP FROM BLACK. ARLO is interrupted from his answering of another question by a couple of STUDENTS who walk past.

Students (flirting)

“Hiiii, Arlo.”

ARLO smiling, acknowledges their salutation and continues on, changing the subject.

Arlo

Ladies. (nods head) That’s another thing: We’ve gained a bit of notoriety on campus with this project. I suppose that’s to be expected when the student body is so small – word definitely gets around – but it’s a mixed bag. Some people offer nothing but encouragement and advice, while others give constructive criticism that borders on outright insults.

CUT TO:

II. Exterior. UAS Campus (different angle)

We see a LONG SHOT of a STUDENT across the lawn. He is looking toward the CAMERA/NARRATOR.

Abusive Student (cupping hands to mouth, then pointing)

Hey, Midgett! You SUUUUUUCK!

CUT TO:

III. Interior. Anderson Building science lab.

MIKE has his attention focused on live salmon in an AQUARIUM. His attention is split between the antics of the fish, and the CAMERA/NARRATOR.

Mike

Oh, well, obviously we like the positive attention better than the negative – although I suppose you could make an argument that the negative behavior only reinforces the drive and determination that we have to be the first to put a salmon into space. You want to hear something interesting? We’ve all noticed that we get far more criticism from the guys than we do from the girls... Now why do you suppose that is?

CUT TO:

IV. Exterior. UAS Campus – picnic table.

JOE is sitting at a PICNIC TABLE on a sunny day. He has many BOOKS stacked in front of him and a NOTEBOOK in front of him. We can see that there is WRITING on the page. The books’ titles tell us that he is studying math, biology (ichthyology), and astronomy as well as other project related study (perhaps FTL, or something else outlandish as well).

Joe

I have a theory. Each and every one of us with a stake in this project has noticed a sharp increase in the, shall we say: “dating quotient.” I believe that the girls know that we’re going to be

famous, and that they might get a piece of it. The guys, on the other hand, are quite jealous that we're getting all the babes. What else can explain why we nerds are getting so much action?

CUT TO:

V. Interior. ARLO's house.

Arlo

I'm a jock.

VI.

This section is included AFTER the script above so that readers will approach the story unbiased by what my goals were in writing it. Did I succeed? You be the judge.

Goal: 22 minute documentary

Vision: "Mock-umentary" of three college students who attempt to launch a salmon into space. Starts very seriously and while interviewer stays serious, it's apparent by the end that it's a farce.

Audience: College students with a sense of humor (especially UAS students). They should end up with the statement/question: "That wasn't real... was it?!"

Plot:

- I. Idea**
- II. Failures**
- III. Opinions of others**
- IV. Optimism for the future**

Characters:

Arlo: The Idea guy. Naïve, he doesn't really rely much on logic.

Joe: The Make It Happen guy. Trusts Arlo until failure. He's the guy who actually does all the work.

Mike: The Why Do We Have Him guy. Total trust in project.

Narrator: Impartial, disembodied.