

THE FLYING TORNADOS

A Feature Screenplay
Historical War Drama / Aviation Thriller

By Joe Murkijanian

THE FLYING TORNADO

FADE IN:

INT. ENGLISH ELECTRIC LIGHTNING - COCKPIT - DAY - 1969

Sky. Then violence. The horizon SNAPS vertical as the jet rolls - sea where the sun should be, sun where the sea should be.

WING COMMANDER JAMES HARRINGTON, 40, oxygen mask, eyes the only thing visible and they are not afraid. He is enjoying this.

A gloved hand eases the stick. The world keeps spinning. He is going to hold the roll past the point where a sane man rights it.

CONTROL (V.O.)
(filtered, tight)
Harrington, level her. You've made
your point.

He does not level her.

The altimeter unwinds. Six thousand. Five. The airframe begins to MOAN - a sound like the rivets are arguing.

JAMES
Not yet.

And then - for half a second - it happens.

His vision GREYS. Not blacks out. Greys, at the edges, like a photograph left in the sun. The instruments smear. His left hand, on the throttle, does not answer when he tells it to.

Half a second. No more.

He blinks it back by force of will. Slams the stick. The Lightning ROARS level, fifteen hundred feet over a grey Lancashire sea, so low the spray flattens beneath it.

His chest heaves. He looks at his left hand. Flexes it. It works again. Now it works.

CONTROL (V.O.)

...Confirm status.

A beat. He puts the grin back on before he keys the mic, the way a man straightens his tie.

JAMES

Status is she flies beautifully.
Bringing her home.

He banks toward the airfield. Behind the mask, the grin is already gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. WARTON AERODROME - APRON - DAY

The Lightning rolls to a stop. Ground crew swarm. James drops down the ladder and the instant his boots hit tarmac he is a different animal — loose, golden, a man who has never doubted anything.

A knot of SUITS and RAF BRASS waits. Applause. He works the line like a politician. Handshakes. A joke we don't hear that lands.

Only when he turns away, for one unguarded step, does the hand go to his temple. Press. Release. Gone.

DELACROIX (O.S.)

That was not a test.

James turns. DR. LUKAS ADLER, 38, German, neat, holding a clipboard like a man holding evidence. He does not offer his hand.

JAMES

(charm, full beam)
And you are?

LUKAS

The man who calculated that
airframe. That maneuver exceeds
its design envelope by eleven
percent.

JAMES

And yet here I am.

LUKAS

Yes. That is the problem.

The two men look at each other. Around them the applause is still going. Neither hears it.

LUKAS (CONT'D)

A test pilot proves what the aircraft can do. You proved what you can do. They are not the same thing. One day the difference will be a funeral.

James holds the smile. It costs him something now.

JAMES

Then it's fortunate, Doctor, that we'll never have to work together.

Off Lukas — who knows something James doesn't — we —

CUT TO:

INT. MINISTRY OF DEFENCE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - LATER

A MODEL of an aircraft that does not exist yet sits on a long table. Variable-sweep wings, swept back like a folded blade. Three flags behind it: Union Jack. West German. Italian.

James enters. Stops dead. Across the table, Lukas is already seated, clipboard squared to the table edge.

Between them, a BRITISH OFFICIAL beams.

OFFICIAL

Gentlemen. The two of you are going to build this together. Britain, Germany, Italy — one aircraft. The Ministry has made your pairing a condition of the contract.

Neither man looks at the official. They look at each other.

OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

Is there a problem?

A long beat.

JAMES
(not breaking the look)
No problem at all.

Under the table, out of sight, his left hand will not stop trembling. He covers it with his right.

SMASH CUT TO:

MAIN TITLE: THE FLYING TORNADO

CONTINUED...

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(filtered, tight)
Harrington. Level her. You've made
your point.

He does not level her.

The altimeter unwinds. Six thousand. Five. The airframe begins to MOAN -- a sound like the rivets are arguing with each other.

JAMES
Not yet.

And then -- for half a second -- it happens.

His vision GREYS. Not black. Grey, at the edges, like a photograph left too long in the sun. The instruments smear

into one another. His left hand, resting on the throttle, does not answer when he tells it to move.

Half a second. No more.

He blinks it back by force of will. SLAMS the stick. The Lightning ROARS level, fifteen hundred feet over a grey Lancashire sea, so low the spray flattens white beneath it.

His chest heaves inside the harness. He looks down at his left hand. Flexes the fingers. They work. Now they work.

CONTROL (V.O.)
...Confirm status.

A beat. He fits the grin back on before he keys the mic -- the way a man straightens his tie before a door opens.

JAMES
Status is she flies beautifully.
Bringing her home.

He banks toward the field. Behind the mask, the grin is already gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. WARTON AERODROME - APRON - DAY

The Lightning rolls to a stop. Ground crew swarm the airframe. James drops down the ladder, and the instant his boots strike tarmac he is a different animal -- loose, golden, a man who has never once doubted anything.

A knot of SUITS and RAF BRASS waits beyond the cordon. Applause. He works the line like a politician at a fete. Handshakes. A joke we don't quite hear that lands all the same.

Only when he turns away -- one unguarded step, his back to them -- does the hand go to his temple. Press. Release. Gone before anyone sees.

ADLER (O.S.)
That was not a test.

James turns. DR. LUKAS ADLER, 38, German, precise, a raincoat buttoned against weather that hasn't arrived. He

holds a clipboard the way another man might hold a subpoena. He does not offer his hand.

JAMES
(charm, full beam)
And you are?

LUKAS
The man who calculated that
airframe. The maneuver you just
flew exceeds its design envelope
by eleven percent.

JAMES
And yet here I am.

LUKAS
Yes. That is precisely the
problem.

The two men look at one another. Around them the applause
hasn't stopped. Neither one hears it.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
A test pilot proves what the
aircraft can do. You proved what
you can do. They are not the same
thing. One day the difference
between them will be a funeral.

James holds the smile. It costs him something now -- a
small, invisible tax.

JAMES
Then it's fortunate, Doctor, that
we'll never have to work together.

He walks. Lukas watches him go -- and there is something in
the watching that James can't see. The German has read the
half-second at the top of the roll off the telemetry
already. He knows. He just hasn't said.

CUT TO:

INT. HARRINGTON COTTAGE - STUDY - NIGHT

Small. Spartan. A officer's pension, not a hero's reward.
One framed photograph on the wall, and the room is arranged
so a man at the desk looks straight at it:

A young RAF BOMBER PILOT in flying kit, 1943, grinning at a camera he'll be dead within the year of facing. The resemblance to James is a quiet violence.

James sits at the desk in shirtsleeves. In front of him: an RAF MEDICAL CERTIFICATION FORM. Box after box. His pen moves down them, ticking.

He reaches the line that reads NEUROLOGICAL -- ANOMALIES OR EPISODES. His pen stops.

He looks at his own left hand. Lays it flat on the desk. Watches it. It is perfectly still.

He ticks NONE. Signs the bottom. JAMES HARRINGTON, in a hand that does not waver.

He sits with it a moment -- a man who has just told a lie in his own handwriting, in front of his father.

He does not look at the photograph when he leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. ADLER APARTMENT - MUNICH - NIGHT

Modern. Warm. The opposite of James's cottage in every way except one -- here too, a man is alone in a room he has made into a fortress.

Lukas at a drafting table, a single lamp, the variable-sweep wing taking shape in pencil. Through the wall: the sounds of a household that does not include him. A child's bath. A woman's voice.

KARIN ADLER, 34, appears in the doorway. She does not come in. She has learned not to come in.

KARIN

Your daughter asked where you
were. I said Munich. She said
you're always in Munich.

Lukas doesn't look up from the wing.

LUKAS

Tell her I'll take her Sunday.

KARIN

You said Sunday last Sunday.

Now he looks up. And we see it -- not coldness. Something closer to drowning.

LUKAS

Karin. If we get this right, no pilot's wife waits up like you're waiting up. That is the entire point of it.

She studies him. She is the only person in this film who reads him as fast as he reads an airframe.

KARIN

No. The point of it is your father.

It lands like a slap. He says nothing. She has named the thing he has never said aloud. After a moment she steps back, and the door closes -- not slammed. Closed. Which is worse.

Lukas alone. His eyes go, despite himself, to a DRAWER in the table. Locked. He does not open it. We do not yet know what's inside.

He returns to the wing.

CUT TO:

INT. PANAVIA DESIGN FACILITY - DRAFTING FLOOR - DAY

Cavernous. Drawing boards to the horizon. Union Jacks and West German and Italian flags share the same wall and pretend not to mind. ENGINEERS of three nationalities cluster in language-knots that don't mix.

James enters in uniform -- a pilot on an engineer's ground, and he wears it like a man walking into the wrong pub. Heads turn. The famous Harrington.

At the center board: Lukas, and a full-scale rendering of the wing. A British program director, NIGEL COURTNEY, 50s, all teeth and treaty-language, steers James over.

COURTNEY

Wing Commander. You've met Dr. Adler.

JAMES

We've been introduced.

Lukas doesn't look up from the board.

LUKAS

The wing sweeps from twenty-five degrees to sixty-seven. Below the line I've marked, it carries the aircraft. Above the line, the aircraft carries it. The line is not a suggestion.

James leans over the board. Reads it the way a pilot reads weather -- for where the danger lives.

JAMES

Your line's drawn for the average man on an average day.

LUKAS

My line is drawn for the man's wife.

Beat. Courtney laughs too loudly, trying to make it collegial. Neither of them is laughing.

JAMES

Here's what your slide rule can't tell you, Doctor. There's a place past your line where the aircraft stops fighting you and starts flying. I've been there. Eleven percent past it, this morning. And I'm standing in front of you.

LUKAS

This morning you were lucky. Luck is not a flight characteristic. I cannot certify luck.

They are nose to nose over the board now. Two men, two faiths -- instinct against arithmetic -- and the terrible thing is that each of them is, in his own country, never wrong.

COURTNEY

(stepping in)

Gentlemen. The wing is a question
for committee.

JAMES

The wing is a question for
whoever's strapped to it.

He straightens. Looks at Lukas one beat longer than the
room is comfortable with.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Eleven percent, Doctor. Remember
the number. One of us is going to
be right about it.

He walks out. Lukas watches him go -- then, quietly, takes
a pencil and writes '11%' in the margin of the wing
drawing. Underlines it. A boundary line. A grave he doesn't
know he's drawing yet.

CUT TO:

INT. PANAIA FACILITY - CORRIDOR - DAY

James moves fast down a glass corridor, still hot. A
YOUNGER MAN falls into step beside him -- FLIGHT LIEUTENANT
TOM MILLER, 28, flying-school worship in his eyes. He has
clearly been waiting for this ambush.

MILLER

Sir. Tom Miller. I flew your
syllabus at Cranwell. The high-
roll entry -- the one they took
out of the manual after you --

JAMES

They took it out because it kills
people, Lieutenant.

MILLER

You're not dead, sir.

James stops. Looks at him. Sees -- unmistakably -- himself,
twenty years younger and twice as certain. It should be a
warning. He takes it as flattery. That is the flaw, in one
look.

JAMES

What do you want, Miller?

MILLER

On the test roster. Whatever
you're flying for this program, I
want to be the second man cleared
for it. I'll fly anything you sign
off.

'Anything you sign off.' The words sit in the air. James
doesn't hear the weight in them. We do.

JAMES

(a grin, almost paternal)
Fly two hundred clean hours on
type and we'll talk.

MILLER

I'll fly two-fifty.

He's gone, lit up. James watches him go -- and for just a
moment, the temple again. Press. Release. The cost of the
morning, still being paid.

CUT TO:

**INT. MINISTRY OF DEFENCE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - WEEKS
LATER**

A MODEL of an aircraft that does not exist yet sits on a
long table -- variable-sweep wings folded back like a blade
half-drawn. Three flags behind it.

James enters. Stops dead. Across the table, Lukas is
already seated, clipboard squared to the table's edge like
a man who arrived early to claim ground.

Between them, a BRITISH OFFICIAL, MINISTRY, beams the beam
of a man delivering news he thinks is good.

OFFICIAL

Gentlemen. The three governments
have agreed terms. One airframe.
Britain, Germany, Italy. The most
advanced strike aircraft in the
world, or the most expensive hole
any of us has ever dug.

He slides two folders across -- one to each man.

OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

There's a condition. The certification of the airframe requires both signatures. The pilot's and the engineer's. Yours, and yours. The Ministry has made the two of you... indivisible. Politically, it's the only way three former enemies sign the same cheque.

Neither man touches his folder. They look at each other across the model of the thing that has just chained them together.

OFFICIAL (CONT'D)
Is there a problem?

A long beat. The whole film hangs in it.

JAMES
(not breaking the look)
No problem at all.

LUKAS
(the same)
None.

Two lies, perfectly matched. The Official beams wider, hearing agreement where there is only a truce.

Under the table, out of every sightline, James's left hand has begun to tremble. He covers it with his right and holds it still by force -- the same force he used at five thousand feet. He signs nothing yet. But the pen is already in the room.

PUSH IN on the model aircraft between them -- folded wings, waiting -- as the lights of the room catch its edge like a blade.

SMASH CUT TO:

MAIN TITLE: THE FLYING TORNADO

END OF ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. PROTOTYPE AIRFIELD - DAY - 1972

A prototype on the runway -- the Tornado, real now, no longer a model on a treaty table. Wings spread wide for takeoff. It is beautiful and it is unproven and everyone watching knows both.

In a glass OBSERVATION ROOM above the field: Lukas, Courtney, BRASS, and a wall of telemetry screens. Lukas reads numbers the way other men read faces.

INT. TORNADO PROTOTYPE - COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

James, masked, alive in a way he only is up here. Below the visor, no tremor, no cost -- the air is the one place the body still obeys him. Or seems to.

LUKAS (V.O.)
 (radio, flat)
 Sweep to forty-five. Hold the
 envelope. We are gathering data
 today, not headlines.

James's eyes flick to the wing-sweep gauge. Forty-five. Then to the throttle. Then to nothing -- the look of a man deciding.

JAMES
 Understood.

He sweeps to fifty-eight.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

An ALARM chirps. Heads snap to Lukas's screen. Numbers climbing past the marked line.

LUKAS
 (into mic, controlled fury)
 Harrington. Forty-five. That is
 not a request.

INT. TORNADO COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

James doesn't answer the radio. He answers the aircraft. Sweeps to sixty-two -- past the line, into Lukas's forbidden country -- and the Tornado, which by every calculation should shudder and depart controlled flight --

-- settles. Smooths. Flies like it was waiting to be asked.

James exhales. A small, private smile. He was right.

JAMES

(radio, light)

She likes it up here, Doctor. You
should try it sometime.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room exhales -- relief curdling instantly into something worse: the brass are grinning. The cowboy was right. Courtney claps a hand on Lukas's shoulder.

COURTNEY

Well. Perhaps the envelope's got
some give in it after all, eh?

Lukas says nothing. He is looking at the telemetry trace -- the spike, the recovery -- and his face is not the face of a man who's been proven wrong. It's the face of a man who's seen a coin land heads and knows the coin is still a coin.

On the screen, frozen: the moment of recovery. He touches it with one finger. Eleven percent past the line. Survived.

LUKAS

(quiet, to no one)

Once.

CUT TO:

INT. ADLER APARTMENT - MUNICH - NIGHT

Lukas at the drafting table. The telemetry trace from the flight is pinned above the wing drawing now -- he has brought the work home, into the room where the marriage lives, and the marriage notices.

Karin sets a plate beside him. He doesn't look at it. She doesn't leave.

KARIN

You won today. Courtney
telephoned. He said the Englishman
flew past your line and lived, and
you should be -- his word --
gracious.

LUKAS

I should be gracious.

KARIN

You're not eating, so I assume you disagree.

He finally looks up. With her -- only with her -- he says the true thing.

LUKAS

An aircraft that kills you the second time you try something is not a safe aircraft that got unlucky. It is a dangerous aircraft that got lucky. He doesn't see the difference. The brass don't want to see it. I am the only man in the building counting the second time.

KARIN

Then count it louder.

LUKAS

If I count it louder, they replace me with an engineer who counts it quieter. There is always one available.

Karin sits. This is the closest they've been in months.

KARIN

Lukas. When the second time comes -- and you've just told me it will -- whose name is on the clearance that let him fly it?

Beat. He hasn't let himself think it through to that line.

LUKAS

The pilot's. And mine. Both signatures. That is the rule they wrote.

KARIN

(gently, lethally)

So you already know you're going
to sign something that kills a
man. You're just hoping it isn't
you who has to.

She has done it again -- read the board faster than he can.
He has no answer. She takes the untouched plate away. The
small mercy and the small judgment in the same gesture.

CUT TO:

INT. PANAIA FACILITY - JAMES'S OFFICE - DAY

Cramped, a pilot's office, more logbooks than paper. Miller
stands across the desk -- two hundred and fifty hours on
type now, exactly as promised, and burning to collect.

MILLER

Two-fifty-one, sir. Clean. I want
the high-sweep entry. The one you
flew. I want to be the second man
to take her past the line.

James leans back. There it is again -- himself, younger,
certain. He should say no. Everything in the morning's
mirror says no.

JAMES

Adler's data says the line holds
for one man on one good day. It
held for me. That's a sample of
one, Tom.

MILLER

It's a sample of you. That's good
enough for me.

And that -- that flattery, that worship -- is the thing
James cannot refuse, because refusing it means admitting
the line is real, which means admitting the morning, the
temple, the hand. To keep his own secret, he must give the
kid what he wants.

James pulls a CLEARANCE FORM from the drawer. The same
drawer the medical came from. The pen is the same pen.

JAMES

Sweep sixty. Not a degree past.
 You feel anything strange in the
 airframe, you bring her straight
 back and you don't argue with me
 about it.

MILLER

Sixty. Not a degree past. Yes,
 sir.

James signs. JAMES HARRINGTON, in a hand that does not
 waver -- the second time in this film we have watched that
 signature go onto a page it should never have touched.

He slides it across. Miller takes it like a man being
 knighted.

CUT TO:

EXT. PROTOTYPE AIRFIELD - OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY

Lukas, at the telemetry wall, looks up as the prototype
 lines up on the runway. He checks the day's flight card.
 Frowns. Reads a name that isn't James's.

LUKAS

Who cleared a second pilot for the
 high-sweep profile?

A TECHNICIAN shrugs. Lukas's eyes go to the signature block
 on the card. He goes very still.

INT. TORNADO COCKPIT - FLYING - CONTINUOUS

MILLER, masked, alive with it, James's faith strapped to
 his chest like armor. The wing-sweep gauge climbs. Fifty.
 Fifty-five. Sixty.

He should stop at sixty.

But he is flying James Harrington's roll, and somewhere in
 the worship is the belief that the line is for other men,
 and his hand -- young, certain, wrong -- carries the sweep
 to sixty-two.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lukas sees the number cross the line on his screen and he
 is already on his feet, already reaching for the mic --

LUKAS
(into mic)
Bring the sweep back -- forty-
five, NOW, bring her --

INT. TORNADO COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

The airframe does not settle this time. The coin lands tails. A wing-root SHUDDER becomes a SNAP becomes the horizon tearing loose, and Miller's certainty turns to nothing in his eyes in the half-second he has left to feel it.

EXT. AIRFIELD - CONTINUOUS

A column of black climbs off the far end of the field. Silence in the observation room. The kind of silence that has a body in it.

Lukas stands at the glass. He does not look at the smoke. He looks down at the flight card still in his hand -- at the signature on it. JAMES HARRINGTON.

He does not say it aloud. He folds the card once and puts it inside his jacket, against his chest. The first secret he chooses to keep.

CUT TO:

INT. BOARD OF INQUIRY - HEARING ROOM - DAY

Wood panels. A long table of UNIFORMS and MINISTRY GREY. James sits alone at the witness end, dress uniform, the golden man with ash on him now. Lukas sits along the board's side -- not judge, not accused. Witness. The worst seat in the room, because it's the seat with a choice in it.

BOARD PRESIDENT
Wing Commander. Lieutenant Miller exceeded the sweep envelope. The aircraft failed. The question before this board is whether the profile he was cleared to fly was itself unsafe -- or whether the pilot disobeyed it.

A beat. James knows the truth: the profile was a sample of one, and he sold it as a doctrine. He says none of that.

JAMES

The clearance specified sixty degrees. He flew sixty-two. The aircraft is not at fault for a pilot who exceeds his clearance.

It is technically true. It is also a man hiding behind two degrees while a coffin waits outside. The board writes.

BOARD PRESIDENT

Dr. Adler. You authored the envelope. In your engineering judgment -- was the cleared profile safe?

Everything stops. This is the moment. Lukas has the flight card against his chest. He has his own telemetry from Scene 7 -- the survival that was luck, not margin. He could say: the profile was never safe, it survived once by chance, and the man who cleared a second pilot for it knew that. He could end James Harrington in one sentence, and the engineering would back every word.

And it would also end the program. And the German stake in it. And the airframe his father's name might finally be redeemed by.

Lukas looks at James. James looks back -- and for the first time, the two men are not fighting. James is simply waiting to learn whether this is the day he's destroyed. He does not ask for mercy. He would not.

LUKAS

(every word measured)

The cleared profile, flown as cleared, was within tolerance. The aircraft failed because it was taken beyond the clearance.

True. And a lie of omission so large you could fly a prototype through it. He has not said the profile was lethal. He has not said one survival is not a margin. He has not produced the card.

The board nods, satisfied. Pilot error. Case closing.

BOARD PRESIDENT

Thank you, Doctor. The board finds
the loss attributable to pilot
deviation. We are adjourned.

Uniforms rise. James closes his eyes one instant --
retrieved, and sick with it.

Lukas does not rise. He sits, looking at nothing, a man who
has just spent something he will not get back. He kept the
secret. And in keeping it, he stepped into the grave next
to James -- because now Lukas, too, has signed his name to
the lie. Just not in ink.

CUT TO:

**INT. PANAIA FACILITY - CORRIDOR OUTSIDE HEARING ROOM -
CONTINUOUS**

James intercepts Lukas in the emptying corridor. For once
James has no charm loaded. He is raw.

JAMES

You could have buried me in there.

LUKAS

Yes.

JAMES

Why didn't you?

Lukas regards him. The honest answer -- the program, my
father, the airframe -- is too large for a corridor. He
gives the smaller true one.

LUKAS

Because I have not yet decided
what you are. A coward who hides
behind two degrees. Or a man who
is hiding something worse than
cowardice.

It lands precisely on the wound. James doesn't flinch --
which is, itself, a flinch.

LUKAS (CONT'D)

When I decide, Wing Commander,
you'll be the second to know.

He walks. James watches him go, and now something has changed in James's face too: not gratitude. Suspicion. Why would a man like Adler protect a man like me -- unless he's protecting something of his own?

Two men, each now certain the other is hiding something. Each right. Each about to go looking.

CUT TO:

INT. RAF RECORDS OFFICE - DAY

James, in civvies, at a counter. A CLERK slides a file across.

JAMES

Everything you have on the Adler family. Munich. The father -- he'd have been of service age in the war.

The clerk frowns at the request, then goes. James waits, jaw tight, a man who has decided that the way to feel safe again is to find the other man's secret first.

INT. PANAIA - MEDICAL RECORDS - NIGHT

Lukas, alone, after hours, a drawer of FLIGHT MEDICALS open under a single lamp. He pulls Harrington's file. Pages of NONE. NONE. NONE -- a man with no anomalies, ever, across twenty years of the most punishing flying in the service.

Lukas, who does not believe in men without anomalies, lays the telemetry trace from Scene 1 beside it -- the half-second grey-out he read off the data and never reported. The trace says one thing. The medical says NONE.

He sets them side by side. Two documents that cannot both be true.

LUKAS

(to himself)

There you are.

PUSH IN on the two pages, contradiction blooming between them -- as we --

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO-A

FADE IN:

INT. HARRINGTON COTTAGE - STUDY - NIGHT

The father's photograph on the wall. The desk. And spread across it now: the RAF file on the Adler family that James requested. Pages in German and English. Service records. A war that ended before either of these men could vote.

James reads by lamplight, a glass of something untouched beside him. He is looking for a weapon -- something on Adler he can hold the way Adler is holding whatever he's holding.

He finds it. And it is so much heavier than a weapon.

INSERT -- a service document. A name: ADLER, WILHELM. A rank. And a posting that stops James's hand on the page: a LUFTWAFFE AIRCRAFT DESIGN BUREAU. Dates spanning the war. Wilhelm Adler did not fly the bombers. He drew them.

James's eyes lift -- slowly -- from the document to the photograph on the wall. His father. 1943. Grinning at a camera he'd be dead within the year of facing. Dead over Germany. Dead under aircraft that men like Wilhelm Adler designed.

He looks back at the file. Then up at his father. The arithmetic assembles itself in his face with no words at all: the man I have been chained to, the man who just chose not to destroy me, is the son of the men who killed you.

James does not shout. He does not move. He sits with the photograph and the file in the same eyeline, and the lamp, and the long silence of a man whose entire grievance has just found an address.

He picks up the telephone. Dials. We hear it ring on the other end -- once, twice. He looks at his father while it rings.

Then he sets the receiver down without speaking. Whatever he was going to do, he is not ready to do it. Or he has understood, dimly, that the weapon cuts both ways and he cannot yet see how.

He turns the lamp off. The photograph goes dark last.

CUT TO:

INT. PANAIA - MEDICAL RECORDS - NIGHT

The single lamp. The two documents from the end of the last act, still side by side: the telemetry trace of James's grey-out, and the medical certification that reads NONE.

Lukas now has a third document between them. Hospital letterhead -- a private clinic, Harley Street, the kind of place a man pays cash to be unrecorded. He has done what an engineer does: he has gathered data until the system is determined.

INSERT -- the clinic letter. Words visible in fragments as Lukas's eye moves: PROGRESSIVE. NEUROLOGICAL. RECOMMEND IMMEDIATE CESSATION OF FLYING DUTIES. And a date -- eighteen months ago. Before the program. Before Miller.

Lukas sits back. The whole shape of it arrives at once, the way a solved equation does.

James has been grounding-out for eighteen months. He forged the medical to keep flying. The grey-out at the top of the roll was not a fluke -- it was a symptom. And the profile James swore was safe, the sample of one he sold to a worshipping boy -- James may not even have flown it cleanly himself. He may have greyed out and recovered by luck and called it skill.

Lukas lays the clinic letter over the telemetry trace. The grey-out. The recommendation to stop. Eighteen months. Miller, three weeks dead.

And here is the thing the audience sees land on Lukas's face -- not triumph. Horror. Because Lukas kept the flight card. Lukas sat in the inquiry and said within tolerance. Lukas protected this man -- and now learns he protected a man who should never have been in a cockpit at all, who got a boy killed partly because James himself could no longer safely demonstrate the thing he was selling.

Lukas's mercy was not just a compromise. It may have been an accessory.

He puts his head in his hands. Then, slowly, he gathers the three documents -- the trace, the forged NONE, the clinic letter -- and squares them. He does not destroy them. He does not file them. He puts them in his jacket, against his chest, in the same pocket where the flight card already sits.

Two men's secrets, now both carried over Lukas's heart. He has become the vault.

CUT TO:

INT. PANAIA DESIGN FACILITY - DRAFTING FLOOR - MORNING

Daylight. The wing drawing. The engineers in their language-knots. Ordinary.

James enters from one end. Lukas from the other. They see each other across the length of the floor.

And they both know.

It is in the way James does not perform -- no charm comes up, the politician stays in its holster. It is in the way Lukas does not look away, the way a man holds a gaze only when looking away would be the lie.

They cross the floor toward each other. The engineers part without understanding why. Courtney calls a greeting from somewhere -- 'Gentlemen --' and it dies unanswered in the air.

They stop, a yard apart, over the wing drawing with the 11% still underlined in the margin where Lukas wrote it -- the grave-line, with Miller in it now.

Neither speaks. There is nothing to negotiate and everything to understand. Each looks at the other and sees, for the first time, the whole man: not the cowboy, not the German, but the exact shape of what the other is carrying, and the exact weight of what he could do with it.

James could end the German stake -- the son of the men who killed his father, exposed. Lukas could end the pilot -- the forged medical, the clinic letter, the boy who died for a maneuver James could no longer fly. Each holds the other's destruction in a jacket pocket. Each knows the other knows.

A long, held silence -- the icy stillness, the unspoken leverage, the audience choking on it.

Then James, very slightly, nods. Not friendship. Acknowledgment. I see my gun in your hand. I see yours in mine.

Lukas returns it. The same fractional nod. A truce with no terms, between two men who have just become each other's hostage.

James reaches past Lukas, picks up a pencil, and -- without a word -- corrects a line on the wing drawing. A small technical mark. The work continues. It has to. That is the only thing keeping either of them alive.

Lukas looks at the correction. After a moment, he picks up his own pencil and adjusts it half a millimetre. Agreeing. Disagreeing. Collaborating. Hating it.

PULL BACK -- two men bent over a drawing, building the most advanced aircraft in the world together, each with the other's ruin folded over his heart -- as we --

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

END OF MIDPOINT

FADE IN:

INT. PANAVIA DESIGN FACILITY - DRAFTING FLOOR - DAY - 1974

A MONTAGE, but a cold one -- no music swell, no triumph. The work of two men who cannot afford to stop and cannot bear to continue.

The wing matures across the boards. Terrain-following radar schematics. Engine cross-sections. And always, in frame, the two of them -- close enough to build, far enough to survive.

They have developed a language with no warmth in it. James points; Lukas calculates. Lukas marks a tolerance; James flies it in the simulator and reports back in clipped numbers. They are, function by function, the best partnership in the building. Anyone watching would call it respect. We know it is a ceasefire.

INT. PANAIA - SIMULATOR BAY - NIGHT

James in the simulator shell. Lukas at the console behind him, the only two people in the building this late. On the glass between them, both their reflections.

LUKAS

Sweep sixty-three. Tell me what she does.

James flies it. The sim shudders, holds.

JAMES

She holds. Soft at the edges but she holds.

LUKAS

'Soft at the edges.' Define it in numbers.

A beat. The real question under the question. Lukas is always, now, taking James's neurological temperature through the language of the airframe -- because he cannot ask the true question without firing his gun.

JAMES

(he hears it)

The aircraft is soft at the edges, Doctor. Not the pilot. If that's what you're measuring.

LUKAS

I measure everything. It's the only honest thing I do anymore.

That lands on both of them. The closest either has come to naming the bargain they're in. James climbs out of the sim. They stand a moment in the dark bay, two reflections in the glass.

JAMES

You haven't used it. Whatever you think you have on me. Two years now. Why.

LUKAS

Because the day I use it, the program dies. And I find I want

the program to live more than I want you destroyed. I am... still deciding whether that is mercy or cowardice.

JAMES

Welcome to my life, Doctor. I've been deciding the same thing about myself since 1943.

He leaves. Lukas alone with the simulator and the dark.

CUT TO:

INT. ADLER APARTMENT - MUNICH - NIGHT

James at the door of Lukas's home -- a place he has never been. Karin answers. She takes one look at the Englishman on her step and understands more than she should.

KARIN

You're the pilot.

JAMES

He's expecting me. Work.

KARIN

(a sad, accurate smile)

No one comes to this house for work. They come because the work has become something else. Go up.

INT. ADLER APARTMENT - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Lukas at the drafting table. He is not surprised James has come. Between them on the table: a single bottle, two glasses. A negotiation, then. James sits.

JAMES

I know what your father was. I've known for two years. I want to know who he was. Before I decide what to do with the first thing.

A long silence. Then Lukas does the thing he has not done in the entire film. He takes a key from his pocket and opens the LOCKED DRAWER.

He lifts out a stack of WARTIME NOTEBOOKS. German engineering hand, 1940s. He sets them in front of James -- the most defenceless act of the film, a man handing his enemy the ammunition.

LUKAS

My father designed bombers for a government I will not defend. This is the part the record does not hold.

INSERT -- the notebooks under James's hands. Page after page of corrections. Crossings-out. Margins crowded with a man arguing with himself. And -- circled, returned to, underlined -- calculations beside small notations in German.

LUKAS (CONT'D)

Crew survivability. He calculated it on every airframe. Not how many bombs. How many of his own men came home. He was told to stop -- it was 'defeatist arithmetic.' He did not stop. He hid it. In these.

James turns a page. Then another. He came here holding a weapon -- the son of the men who killed my father -- and the weapon is dissolving in his hands into something unbearably like the thing he himself is.

LUKAS (CONT'D)

I did not enter this program to honour a Nazi, Wing Commander. I entered it to finish a calculation my father was forbidden to finish. How many of our own men come home. That is the entire Adler inheritance. That is the eleven percent. That is why I will not move my line.

James closes the notebook. He looks at the man across the table -- and for the first time sees not a German, not a son, but the only other person alive carrying the same impossible thing: a dead father, a debt of survival, a refusal to let the arithmetic lie.

But James's lane is not absolution. He does not forgive. He cannot yet.

JAMES

My father went down over Hamburg.
Maybe under something your father
drew. Maybe your father's little
numbers in the margin are the
reason the man who shot him down
came home and mine didn't.

It is cruel and it is possibly true and it sits in the room
like a third presence.

LUKAS

(quietly)

Yes. Maybe. I have considered it.
I consider it every day. And I
still think the arithmetic of who
comes home is the only prayer an
engineer is allowed.

James stands. He does not shake the man's hand. But at the
door he stops.

JAMES

Keep your notebooks locked,
Doctor. Not for me. For you. A man
shouldn't have to look at his
father every time he opens a
drawer.

It is the first kindness between them. It costs James
something to give it. He leaves. Lukas sits alone with the
open drawer and the two glasses, one untouched.

CUT TO:

INT. ADLER APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT - LATER

Karin with a single suitcase. Not a dramatic flight -- a
decision long since made, finally executed. Lukas comes out
of the study and finds her there. He does not ask where she
is going. He already knows there is no answer that would be
a question.

LUKAS

Stay until the morning. The roads
--

KARIN

The roads are fine, Lukas. I have
been driving on them to your
daughter's school for nine years
alone.

He has no answer. She sets the case down -- not to stay. To
say the thing properly.

KARIN

I used to think you were married
to the work. I was jealous of
blueprints. How stupid. You were
never married to the work.

LUKAS

Karin --

KARIN

You're married to a dead man's
permission. You think if you build
the aircraft that brings every
pilot home, your father is finally
allowed to have been good. That's
not a marriage I can compete with.
He's never going to grant it,
Lukas. The dead don't issue
pardons. They just leave you the
arithmetic.

It is the same word -- arithmetic -- and it lands harder
from her than from anyone, because she is the one person
who loved him while he did the sums.

She picks up the case.

KARIN (CONT'D)

When you finish it -- and you
will, you and your Englishman,
I've seen how you build -- it
won't bring the one pilot home
you're actually doing this for. He
went home in 1945. Without you.

She opens the door.

KARIN (CONT'D)

Bring the living ones home
instead. It's the only version of
this that ends with you in a room
with people in it.

The door closes. Not slammed -- closed, the way it closed
in Act One, except this time she is on the other side of it
for good. Lukas stands in the hallway of a home that is now
just a building. He does not weep. He goes back to the
study. To the work. Because she is right, and the work is
all the room he has left.

CUT TO:

INT. MINISTRY OF DEFENCE - CORRIDOR - DAY - 1976

Courtney walks James down a corridor fast, briefing him on
the move. The program is over budget, behind schedule, and
circling a cancellation vote.

COURTNEY

The Treasury wants blood. The only
thing that saves the program now
is the full-envelope demonstration
-- the high-sweep profile, flown
clean, in front of the three
governments. They want to see the
impossible done before they sign
another cheque.

JAMES

Then put a pilot in it.

COURTNEY

They want you in it, James. The
name. Harrington flies the profile
that killed Miller and walks away
from it -- that's the headline
that keeps three parliaments in
the room. No one else's name does
that.

James stops walking. Because he knows what Courtney does
not: he cannot fly that profile clean. Not anymore. Maybe
not for a year. The grey-out has been coming faster. To fly
it is to die in front of three governments, or worse -- to

grey out, recover by luck, and become Miller's killer twice.

He has one exit. The medical board. Declare himself unfit - come clean -- and the demonstration goes to another pilot. But the same act that saves him exposes everything: the forged certificate, eighteen months of lying, and on the way out the door he could take Lukas down too -- the Luftwaffe father, the buried inquiry. Scorched earth. He could end them both and call it honesty.

INT. MOD - MEDICAL BOARD ANTEROOM - LATER

James sits outside the medical board's door. In his hand: his own flight medical, the forged NONE. He has come to confess. The door is right there.

A SECRETARY looks up.

SECRETARY

The board can see you now, Wing
Commander. You requested an urgent
fitness review?

James looks at the door. Everything he has to do is on the other side of it. Stand up. Walk in. Tell the truth. Save his own life. Maybe burn the German on the way for a grievance three decades old.

He thinks of the notebooks. Crew survivability. How many of our own men come home.

He thinks of the program dying. The one thing he and Lukas have built that might mean a pilot's wife doesn't wait up.

He stands --

-- and he does not walk through the door.

JAMES

Tell them I withdraw the request.
False alarm. A flyer's nerves
before a big show.

He walks out. He has chosen the program over his own life. It is not nobility -- it is the same disease that killed Miller, the inability to stop being the irreplaceable man, wearing a nobler coat. The want still owns him. He is going to fly the profile that cannot be flown.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEMONSTRATION AIRFIELD - DAY

Flags of three nations. A reviewing stand of MINISTERS and BRASS and PRESS. The Tornado on the runway, wings wide, the most expensive question in Europe waiting to be answered.

In the control room above: Lukas, headset on, at the telemetry wall. He does not know James cannot fly this. He only knows James is about to fly the profile that killed Miller, and every instrument Lukas trusts is screaming that something is wrong with the man, not the machine.

INT. TORNADO - COCKPIT - FLYING

James, masked, climbing out over the field. He looks, for one moment, at his own left hand on the throttle. He flexes it. It answers. For now.

JAMES
(radio, the old charm,
performing for three
parliaments)
Stand by, gentlemen. Let's show
them what former enemies can
build.

He rolls into the entry. Sweep climbing. Forty-five. Fifty-five. Sixty. The airframe singing. The reviewing stand holding its breath.

Sixty-three. Into the country where Miller died.

And then -- the thing he came here unable to outrun --

His vision GREYS. Not half a second this time. It floods. The instruments smear into light. His left hand falls off the throttle and will not come back when he calls it. The horizon is gone. He is flying the most advanced aircraft in the world blind, at the edge of its envelope, with a hand that will not answer.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lukas sees it on the telemetry before anyone sees it in the sky -- the inputs going wrong, the same neurological signature he read off the trace eighteen months of secrets

ago. He does not need to ask what is happening. He is the only man on earth who already knows.

Every alarm in the room. Brass surging to the glass. Courtney shouting. And Lukas --

Lukas has a choice, in two seconds, and it is the whole film. He can let the aircraft go in -- and James dies, and the secret dies with him, and Lukas's gun is fired by God instead of by his own hand, and he is free. Or he can save the man who got Miller killed, the man whose father may have killed his father's enemy's son, the man he has every right under heaven to let fall.

Lukas keys the mic. And what comes out is not panic. It is arithmetic -- the only prayer an engineer is allowed.

LUKAS

(radio, flat, fast, total)

James. You cannot see. I know.

Listen to my voice and do exactly what the numbers say. Sweep to forty-five -- the lever is under your right hand, your right hand is fine, pull it back two stops. Now.

INT. TORNADO - COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Blind, greyed, James's RIGHT hand -- the one that still works -- finds the lever. Pulls. Two stops.

LUKAS (V.O.)

Stick centred. Do not fight her, she wants to fly straight, let her. Throttle back one quarter, right hand, you do not need to see the gauge, I am the gauge. Quarter back. Good.

James, a man who has trusted nothing but his own instinct his entire life, flies on another man's voice. On the German's arithmetic. Eyes useless, instinct useless, alive only because he is finally, for ninety seconds, doing exactly what Lukas Adler tells him.

LUKAS (V.O.)

Your sight comes back at lower G.
We are reducing it now. Nose level
-- you'll feel the horizon before
you see it. Wait for it. Wait.
...There. Tell me when you see the
field.

A long, terrible silence on the radio.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lukas, white-knuckled on the console, the entire reviewing stand behind him, no one breathing.

INT. TORNADO - COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Grey thinning. Light resolving into shapes. Shapes into ground. Ground into runway. James's sight crawls back. His left hand, slowly, returns to the throttle and grips.

JAMES
(barely)
...I see the field.

EXT. DEMONSTRATION AIRFIELD - CONTINUOUS

The Tornado settles onto the runway -- wings sweeping forward, gear down, a clean landing the reviewing stand reads as triumph. APPLAUSE. Ministers on their feet. The headline that saves three parliaments, delivered.

They are applauding a man who was blind ninety seconds ago, brought home by a voice they cannot hear.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lukas takes off the headset. His hands are shaking now -- the calm spent. Courtney pumps his hand, babbling about the demonstration, the vote, the triumph. Lukas does not hear a word of it. He is looking down at the runway, at the aircraft, at the man inside it he just chose to save.

EXT. AIRFIELD - APRON - LATER

The crowd gone. James, out of the flight suit, finds Lukas alone by the hangar. The two men, no audience now. James does not perform. He cannot. There is nothing left to perform with.

A long beat. James owes a debt that cannot be said. Lukas holds a truth that can no longer be a weapon -- because you cannot point a gun at a man whose life you are still warm from saving.

JAMES

You could have let me go in. It would have solved everything you've got folded in that jacket. Why didn't you.

LUKAS

I told myself for ninety seconds it was the arithmetic. Bring the living one home. My father's prayer.

JAMES

And the truth?

Lukas looks at him. The last wall.

LUKAS

I have been carrying your death in my pocket for two years, James. And when it finally came for you on its own -- I found I could not bear to spend it. That is not arithmetic. I do not have a number for it.

James has no charm for this. No deflection. He simply nods -- the way you nod to the man who has just become the only person alive who knows all of you and chose you anyway.

JAMES

(quiet)

Neither do I.

Two men by a hangar in the failing light. The truce is over. Something with no name has replaced it. The debt is blood now, not paper -- and paper was the only thing keeping them apart.

PULL BACK -- the Tornado behind them, cooling, ticking, the thing they built, witness to the thing they've become -- as we --

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO-B

FADE IN:

INT. PANAUIA - SIMULATOR BAY - NIGHT - 1979

The same dark bay where the Cold War talks happened. But everything between these two men is different now. James sits on the lip of the simulator shell, not in it. Lukas stands at the console, not behind it. The geometry of equals.

Between them on the console: the final CERTIFICATION DOCUMENT for the airframe. The thing the whole program has driven toward. It requires two signatures -- the pilot's and the engineer's -- and the final flight test it certifies is the full-envelope profile. The 11%. Flown clean. Signed off as safe for the fleet, for every pilot who will ever strap into a Tornado.

LUKAS

They want the certification flight
in three weeks. The full profile.
And they want the name on the
airframe to be the name in the
cockpit. They want you to fly it,
James. The man who survived it
twice becomes the man who proves
it's safe forever.

A long silence. James looks at the document. At the profile written into it. At his own left hand, resting on the console -- which, even now, in this still room, has the faintest tremor in it.

And then James Harrington does the bravest thing in the film. Braver than any roll. He tells the truth.

JAMES

I can't fly it, Lukas.

He says it plainly. No deflection. No charm. The four words he has spent the entire film, the entire eighteen months, his entire career, unable to say.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Not 'I'd rather not.' Not 'find someone younger.' I can't. The grey comes faster every month. On the demonstration you didn't save a pilot having a bad day. You saved a blind man. I have flown my last profile and we both know it and I am done -- I am done -- pretending I am the only man who can do this. It got a boy killed. I won't let it kill the fleet.

It is the surrender of the only identity he has ever had: the irreplaceable man. He lays it down on the console next to the certification, and the room is quiet with the weight of it.

Lukas does not gloat. He does not say 'I knew.' He looks at James with something that has taken two years and a dead boy and a saved life to earn: respect, fully, finally, unguarded.

LUKAS

I have known for two years. I have waited for you to say it for two years. Not to win. So that you would still be alive on the day you did.

James almost breaks at that. He doesn't. But almost.

JAMES

Then we have a problem, Doctor. The certification needs a pilot who can fly the profile clean. And it needs both our signatures. And I will not put my name on a lie again. Not one more. The last two signatures I forged are both attached to coffins -- mine nearly, and Miller's for real. I'm finished signing things that aren't true.

He has named the three-signature arc himself, without knowing it is one. Two corrupt signatures behind him. One honest refusal in front of him.

LUKAS

Then we find a pilot who can fly it. And I certify it. And you sign nothing you do not believe.

JAMES

And if there's no pilot alive who can fly your 11% clean? If it really was only ever luck -- mine, and never a margin at all?

The question hangs. It is the question the whole film has been asking. Is the 11% a real place a real pilot can live -- or was it always a grave dressed as an achievement?

LUKAS

(quietly)

Then I will have spent my life finishing a calculation that proves my father right -- that the arithmetic of who comes home cannot be cheated. And I will tear up the certification, and the program will die, and I will be able to look at the notebooks in the drawer.

Two men, and a document with two empty signature lines, and three weeks.

CUT TO:

INT. PANAUIA - FLIGHT TEST OFFICE - DAY

A YOUNG PILOT stands at attention -- FLIGHT LIEUTENANT SARAH BRENNAN, late 20s, the best of the new test cadre. Where Miller was worship, Brennan is something else: discipline, precision, a flier who reads the numbers. She is, in temperament, more Lukas than James -- which is the point.

James and Lukas review her. James runs the flying; Lukas runs the data. For the first time, the two faiths -- instinct and arithmetic -- are pointed the same direction, at the same pilot.

JAMES

The profile killed a better-than-average pilot who thought he was me. It nearly killed me, who actually am. I'm not going to tell you it's safe. I'm going to tell you exactly what it does and exactly where it lies to you, and then you decide.

BRENNAN

That's more than they told Miller, sir.

It lands on James like a stone. She doesn't know what she's said. He absorbs it -- the truth of it, the indictment in it -- and nods.

JAMES

Yes. It is. That's the only reason I'll let you near it.

Lukas spreads the data. And here is the transformation made technical: James, the instinct man, defers to the arithmetic; Lukas, the arithmetic man, asks James to translate the numbers into what the airframe will FEEL like -- trusting the pilot's instinct as data. Each gives the other the thing he spent the film refusing to give.

LUKAS

Wing Commander. Tell her what sixty-three degrees feels like in the half-second before it bites. Not the number. The feeling. She needs your instinct as much as my margins.

James looks at him -- the German asking, out loud, for the thing he called 'luck' for two years. The truce is not just over. It has become its opposite.

JAMES

(to Brennan)

She goes light. Right before the edge, the stick goes light, like she's forgiving you. That's the lie. The lightness is her telling you everything's fine in the exact second it stops being fine. When

you feel forgiven -- that's when
you bring the sweep back. Don't
wait for the gauge. The gauge is
half a second behind your hands.

Brennan takes it in -- pilot's instinct and engineer's
margin, fused into one instruction. She nods.

INT. PANAUIA - SIMULATOR BAY - NIGHT

The certification document. Two signature lines. Lukas sits
before it with a pen. This is his moment -- the third
signature, the one that redeems the two James forged.

He does not sign lightly. He looks at it a long time. To
sign is to put the Adler name -- Wilhelm's name, the name
that built bombers -- onto a document whose entire purpose
is to bring pilots home. To complete, in ink, the
calculation his father was forbidden to finish.

INSERT -- Lukas's hand. The pen. The signature line. And he
signs: L. ADLER. Firm. Final. A name reclaimed.

He sits back. For the first time in the film, Lukas Adler
looks like a man who is not carrying something. He has put
it down. Onto the page, where it belongs.

Beside his signature: the pilot's line. Not James's. It
will be Brennan's. James will sign nothing. And that
absence -- the irreplaceable man's name, finally not
required -- is its own kind of grace.

CUT TO:

EXT. CERTIFICATION AIRFIELD - DAY

No reviewing stand of ministers this time. No press. Just
the program: James, Lukas, the test crew, and the Tornado
on the runway. The flight that matters is never the one
with the audience.

Brennan walks to the aircraft. James and Lukas watch from
the control room -- side by side at the glass, the two of
them, where for the whole film they stood on opposite sides
of every line.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

James on the radio for the feel. Lukas on the telemetry for the margin. One voice each, into one cockpit. The fusion made literal.

JAMES

(radio)

Brennan. When she forgives you --

BRENNAN (V.O.)

-- that's when I don't believe her. Bringing the sweep back early. I remember.

INT. TORNADO - COCKPIT - FLYING

Brennan, masked, climbing into the profile. Calm. Reading. Sweep climbing. Forty-five. Fifty-five. Sixty.

Sixty-three. The country where Miller died and James nearly died twice.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lukas's eyes on the trace. James's eyes on the sky. Neither breathing.

INT. TORNADO - COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

And Brennan feels it -- the stick going light. The lie. The forgiveness.

She does not wait for the gauge. Half a second before the airframe would bite, on the pilot's instinct James gave her, she brings the sweep back -- and the Tornado, at the edge of the envelope, in the exact place it has killed and nearly killed --

-- flies. Clean. Smooth. Through the profile and out the other side, level and alive, the 11% crossed and survived not by luck but by margin, the way Lukas always said it could be if instinct and arithmetic ever stopped fighting.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The trace levels. Lukas closes his eyes. James puts a hand flat on the console -- the left hand, the traitor hand -- and for once it is steady, because for once it is not his life riding on the glass.

They do not cheer. They look at each other. Two men who built a thing that finally did what they swore it could -- bring the pilot home.

JAMES

(quiet)

She was right about the lightness.

LUKAS

You were right about the lightness. I only counted it. You felt it. We needed both. We always needed both. It only took us ten years and two graves to build the second signature.

The aircraft taxis in below, whole, the pilot inside it alive.

CUT TO:

EXT. CERTIFICATION AIRFIELD - DUSK

The crew gone. The Tornado cooling on the apron. James and Lukas, two men, the light going. No triumph montage. No swelling strings. Just the after.

They are not friends in the warm sense. They never will be. They are something the language does not quite have a word for: two men who saw each other's worst, held each other's ruin, and chose, in the end, not to fire. That is the only reconciliation the story allows them. It is enough. It is also not absolution, and they both know the difference.

LUKAS

You'll retire now. Before the grey takes a fleet pilot's flight you're sitting in as a passenger.

JAMES

I'll retire now. And you?

LUKAS

I will keep building. There are always more pilots. There is always more arithmetic.

Beat.

JAMES

Will you put it right with her?
Karin?

Lukas looks out at the aircraft.

LUKAS

No. Some things you finish too late to keep. She was right about all of it. I built the thing that brings the living ones home. It is nine years too late to be the kind of man who comes home himself. I made my choice at a drafting table a long time ago. The aircraft is the family I have. That is the bill for it.

James says nothing. There is nothing to say that isn't a lie, and they are finished lying to each other.

They stand and watch the Tornado go dark in the dusk -- the thing they built, whole, certified, ready. They built it to bring pilots home. The Cold War is ending. Both of them, in this moment, dare to hope it will never have to.

PULL BACK -- two small figures against a great machine, in the last light -- as we --

DISSOLVE TO:

Coda

INT. TORNADO - COCKPIT - NIGHT - 1991

The hardware echo -- and the rupture. The SAME cockpit architecture James and Lukas labored over: the sweep lever, the throttle, the analog gauges, recognizably the machine from the drafting floor. But everything around it has changed. A HUD glows green over the glass. The night outside is not a grey Lancashire sea -- it is the black desert of Iraq, lit from below by tracer fire and burning airfields.

And the pilot in the seat is BRENNAN -- older, harder, a decade on. The pilot they certified. The living one they built the aircraft to bring home.

She flies the machine at fifty feet in the dark, terrain-following radar doing the thing Lukas drew on a board twenty years ago, threading her under the guns toward a defended airfield. The most dangerous mission of the war. The aircraft doing exactly what it was built to do.

The hardware is continuous. The meaning is not. They built it to bring pilots home. Tonight it is carrying one into the most heavily defended airspace on earth, to drop ordnance on men in the dark. The machine kept its promise. History changed the question.

MISSILE WARNING. The cockpit screams -- the same audio architecture, the same warning tone, the analog heart of the thing they built, now sounding in a war neither of them imagined.

Brennan works the aircraft -- sweep, throttle, instinct and margin, James's lightness and Lukas's numbers -- flying for her life through a sky full of fire.

We do not see whether she comes home. The screen goes to the warning tone, and the green of the HUD, and then --

CUT TO:

INT. AVIATION MUSEUM - DAY - PRESENT

Silence. The opposite of the cockpit. A preserved TORNADO hangs from the ceiling of a great hall, wings spread, clean, beautiful, dead -- a machine that will never fly again, lit like a relic.

Two OLD MEN stand beneath it. JAMES, 80s now, a cane, the body that betrayed him at forty having finally taken the rest. LUKAS, 80s, smaller, an engineer to the end, reading the aircraft above him the way he always read it -- for where the truth lives.

They do not speak for a long moment. This is not the scene where two old men explain to the audience what it all meant. They have earned the right not to.

JAMES

They've got the placard wrong. It says the variable-sweep was a German innovation. It was an argument. Between a man who flew

and a man who counted. The placard always wants it to be one country's idea. It was never one country's anything.

LUKAS

Leave it. Let them have the clean version. The true one doesn't fit on a placard.

A beat. James looks up at the machine.

JAMES

Brennan came home that night. Did you know? Eighty-nine missions across the whole war, and every Tornado crew that flew them, and some of them didn't, and the ones that didn't --

LUKAS

-- I know exactly how many didn't. I have always known the number. It is the only prayer I was ever allowed.

The two men stand with the dead machine above them and the number between them. Here is where a lesser film gives them the speech: it was more than a weapon, it was proof former enemies could build something extraordinary. Neither man says it. Because it is not true, or it is not the whole truth, and they are too old and have buried too many to lie to each other now.

JAMES

We built it to bring them home.

LUKAS

We built it to bring them home. And then we handed it to history, and history sent it where it wished, and some of them did not come home, and that was never ours to decide and always ours to carry. Both. At once. Forever.

That is the verdict. No absolution. No clean meaning. The machine was true to its promise; the world was not bound by

it. They built a thing to redeem their fathers, and history -- not them -- decided what it was for, and the deciding included funerals. They do not get to resolve it. They only get to stand under it.

James puts a hand on Lukas's shoulder -- the first time in fifty years either has touched the other. Not forgiveness. Not friendship. Witness. We were both here. We both carry it. No one else can.

They turn and walk out of frame, two old men, slow, under the great machine that outlived their fathers and will outlive them -- built to bring the living home, and unable, in the end, to bring home the two dead men who started the whole thing.

HOLD on the empty cockpit above -- the sweep lever, the throttle, the analog gauges, the place where a pilot's hands and an engineer's numbers once had to learn to trust each other -- now still. Now silent. Now a relic of a promise the world only half kept.

The cockpit tells the whole story. No one needs to say it.

FADE OUT.

THE END