



LOST
IN OUTER SPACE

**THE
INCREDIBLE JOURNEY
of APOLLO 13**

TOD OLSON

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Charlie Bassett, had just crashed and burned in their T-38 trainer jet. NASA was sending someone to tell Mr. See's wife what had happened. In the meantime, they wanted Barbara's mother to go down the street and keep Mrs. See company—without announcing that her husband had just died. The Sees had two daughters who were nine and ten, only a couple of years younger than Barbara. When they found out, one of them asked her mother, "Are we still an astronaut family?"

That haunted Barbara, the thought of those kids being left without their dad.

But it wasn't as bad as when Eddie White's father burned to death inside his space capsule.



On January 27, 1967, Barbara was at home in Houston. Her father was in Washington, D.C., at a White House dinner, shaking hands with important people.

At Cape Kennedy in Florida, astronauts Gus Grissom, Ed White, and Roger Chaffee climbed into the first Apollo command module for a test run of the liftoff procedures. The Apollo program followed Gemini, and if everything went according to plan, its missions would finally reach the moon. Its first capsule had twice been blasted into space empty, and everything had gone well. A month from

now, Grissom, White, and Chaffee were going to fly the first mission with a crew aboard.

Despite the two successful launches without a crew, the astronauts weren't happy with the ship. It had logged about 20,000 different failures in testing. An important nozzle had shattered when the engine was fired. The heat shield cracked during a simulated landing in a pool. Wally Schirra, a backup pilot for the mission, told Grissom the day before the test run that the ship didn't "ring right."

"If you have any problem," Schirra said, "I'd get out."



Chaffee, White, and Grissom train in a model of the command module just a week before the test launch.

There were plenty of problems during the test, right from the start. The oxygen filling the astronauts' masks smelled like sour milk. The audio link from the capsule to the test controllers sounded terrible.

"How are we going to get to the moon if we can't talk between two or three buildings," Grissom growled into his headset.

At 6:20 p.m., the controllers put the countdown on hold while they tried to fix the audio. Eleven minutes later, they saw a figure move urgently inside the window of the capsule. A voice came crackling through the bad audio link: "Fire in the spacecraft!"

Technicians on the tower rushed across a gangway toward the spacecraft hatch. Flames shot from a vent in the capsule. A wicked orange glow flashed behind the capsule window.

In the control room, they heard Roger Chaffee's voice: "We've got a bad fire in here. We're burning up!"

On the video screen, controllers saw a pair of arms reaching past the capsule window for the bolts on the hatch. The flight surgeon, who was monitoring the astronauts' vital signs, noticed Ed White's heart rate jump.

A giant cloud of smoke erupted from the side of the capsule, and someone on the tower yelled, "She's going to blow!"