

What A View
By Gabriella Malone

The sun illuminated the charcoal grey room, and finally the astronauts could see each others faces. None had been in contact with anyone other than their trainers until this very moment, and it excited them all greatly. They rushed towards the center of the room in a whirlwind of orange, emitting from their Extravehicular Mobility Units. The sparkle in their eyes was evident and bright. They had all been selected to go on the first manned mission to mars, and were ecstatic at the thought.

Over the past two years, all ten of them had been rigorously training for this exact moment. They learned the basics of the Space Shuttle and International Space Station, took classes in science, medical procedures, public speaking, and survival training, as well as language classes for talking to the Russian Mission Control Center. To experience how they would move in space, they practiced on the Space Vehicle Mockup Facility, and used the space orbiter, along with parts of the ISS, or International Space Shuttle. The Precision Air-Bearing Floor helped them to move large objects, as they may have to do in space. Finally, to simulate space walks, they went underwater. The Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory, which was essentially a huge swimming pool, guided them in floating while they maneuvered full-size models of space vehicles. This was only a portion of what each of them endured to get where they were.

The light seeped in from the small window in the corner of the room, just adjacent to Kennedy Space Center, the place that inspired them for those two, long years. As

they spoke to one another about how hard they had worked, they started to slowly glance at the room around them. The walls were covered top to bottom with gear they would need on their trip. Dehydrated foods, shampoos and conditioners that didn't require any water, sponges, exercise machines such as cycle ergometers and Advanced Resistive Exercise Machines to keep them strong, various musical instruments, books, and CD's to keep things normalized, and everything they needed to keep them safe in the outer atmosphere. The parts of the suits they so anticipated being in, laid in various spots around the facility. Helmets, cooling garments, radios, backpacks, oxygen cylinders, pumps, specially designed undergarments, tubing, insulated boots, overshoes, gloves, control boxes, visors, hats, and headsets all sat calmly waiting to be assembled and put to use.

The wide, argentum plaques engraved for their respective owners shone in the light, and inspired further the wandering thoughts and elation. As they wandered slowly to their individual spaces, it felt almost unearthly to them. The dedication, blood, sweat, and tears that they all put into getting where they were, spilled over, and a few tears were shed. They were then quickly collected, as their ears perked sharply to an announcement via intercom that informed them it was time to prepare. First, their specified undergarments, liquid cooling garment, biobelt, electronic life support such as their electrocardiograph signal conditioner, impedance pneumograph signal conditioner, and current converter. Next, the Integrated Thermal Micrometeoroid Garment was connected to the Liquid Cooling Garment, biobelt, and interior of the suit. They then

sealed their suits by doing up the pressure zipper with a long extension ribbon that pulled from the front of the groin to the back of the neck. Finally, the final components were added. The Communications Carrier Assembly, which held both a microphone and headset close to the head, was attached and connected to a plug on the main suit. The Intra Vehicular Gloves, pressure helmet, and necessary baggage were on their bodies at last, and they were complete. The suit itself weighed around 110 pounds, and they were feeling the weight, but they didn't care.

Leaving the space center and going to the shuttle was nerve racking for all of them. Hearts were beating quickly, and they were all shaking with anticipation. There were crowds of people all around them, cameras flashing and blinding their vision. This event was being broadcasted all around the world, and on top of being sent to mars, they had to worry about millions of people watching their every move. Marching down the gravel walkway, all they could think about was getting inside that shuttle and getting away from the crowd. They had all previously said goodbye to their families previous to entering the space center, and were now content with leaving.

The year 2030 was a revolutionary year, and this was a huge accomplishment. An enormous amount of men and women had worked for years to make this happen, and the astronauts chosen were the fortunate ones that got to perform the task. It was an honor to each and every one of them, and deep down they knew it wasn't just about them, but about the individual people behind every equation, every graph, every map,

every visual that helped to make this happen. The astronauts knew they had to live up to what those people expected from them, as well as the rest of the world. Most of all, they knew that they had to be brave.

They reached the shuttle with quick, long strides. They ascended the stairs to the launch tower and stepped into a large, white room with a circular hatch to the right. The declamatory and intimidating hatch leered over them as they glanced around. They knew from their training that the room they were in was called the orbiter, and that it would be used for them to enter and, eventually, exit the shuttle. The orbiter stirred and started to move, and suddenly the hatch hissed, and unfastened to reveal the inside of the shuttle, where they would be spending their time for quite a while.

As they stepped inside, they saw their future. They sat in their chairs and looked up, fearful of what they were about to experience. All the training in the world couldn't have prepared them for something like this. After securing themselves and everything being checked over, they made the call, and every one of them held onto themselves like they were scared children again. They felt the intense rumble of the engines, and could only imagine what it looked like from the outside.

Suddenly, they were shoved back, hard, into their seats. They had been taught that they were now experiencing a g-force of 3gs, which is equivalent to three times the force of gravity humans are normally exposed to when on earth. It felt as if their brain

was going to sink back into the padded seat, but suddenly, it stopped. They opened their eyes, and they could see nebulas and galaxies in front of their very faces.

Everyone had told them when training that they wouldn't be able to believe what they were experiencing, and they were right. They were headed to Mars, a place where they would make history for humankind, and the only thing any one of them could say was, "Wow, what a view".