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THE RIGHT STUFF

A Screenplay from
Tom Wolfe's book

by

Philip Kaufman

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TRIUMPHANT MUSIC SWELLS

STOCK

A VERY SMALL SCREEN IN BLACK AND WHITE. A CAMERA SWINGS AROUND, POINTS RIGHT AT US. WHY, IT'S THE EYES AND EARS OF THE WORLD, THE OLD NEWSREEL. AND THAT VOICE, IT'S EVER-OPTIMISTIC LOWELL THOMAS (or it's Alexander Scourby), and it's EXCITING, and it's positive, and WE WON, WE WON... (1)

1945, 46, 47, the golden years of boom, of wackiness, great sports, unlimited destiny...

BOBBY SOXERS MOB SINATRA. Hysteria is on the loose, sexual idolatry is unleashed, an adoring crowd surrounds its Hero (more on this later), and...

CLOSE SHOT. THE PRESS. They are there covering the event, and they have "cameras with the most protuberant lenses, and they had a way of squatting and crawling at the same time, like the hunkered down beggars you see all over the Far East...advancing toward us, elbowing and hipping one another out of the way... their cameras screwed into their eye sockets, like a swarm of root weevils..." (We fake this group into the old newsreels, but with wardrobe changes, this becomes our Permanent Press Corps, known to Tom Wolfe as The Animal, the Victorian Gent, etc.)

Also in the NEWSREEL:

1945. The German rocket experts give themselves up to American "Brain hunters" at Pennemunde. Von Braun has his broken arm. There's a wonderful shot of him arriving in the U.S. with his arm in a sling and a cigarette dangling from his lip.

Some amusing post-war experiments with flying (flying cars, etc.) and the following:

LOWELL THOMAS

Sky Streak -- Ace airplane of blinding speed with its power of jet propulsion. In California at Muroc Dry Lake, Major Carl of the Marines takes off to fly a one-mile measured course to try to break the record set by a Navy Pilot...Flashing over the course: the speed of a jet in sight and sound!

...The landing, after approaching the 750 miles an hour speed of sound...A new exploit for Major Carl who was an ace fighter pilot in the war...HERE HE IS WITH A PREVIOUS RECORD HOLDER. AND THERE'S A COMRADESHIP OF SPEED...

...The next great plateau will be the speed of sound, Mach One, though many say this is a barrier through which no man shall ever pass...But if they do, it will be here, in the high desert of California where the greatest test pilots in the world are gathered...

SHOT. THE HIGH DESERT.

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(And Migod, but it looks like a gnarled and forsaken spot).

LOWELL THOMAS

And here's a look at some of the men who will be attempting to break the record...it's all top secret, of course...

SHOT OF THREE MEN: YEAGER, SLICK GOODLIN, AND WAYNE.

We stage a stiff, 1947 version of the Old Farewell, as WAYNE gets into the cockpit (or into the B-29 Mother Ship), and those on the ground give him the old 'thumbs up' signal, and Lowell Thomas wraps it up with some light-hearted optimism and the MUSIC SWELLS with that old Saturday-afternoon good-to-be-alive-with-no-school-tomorrow feeling...and we

FADE OUT:

SCREEN IS TOTALLY BLACK. The Wonderful Music seems to have marched deeper into the screen and away forever. Now a distant wind is blowing.

CREDITS BEGIN. VERY SIMPLE WHITE LETTERS ON THE BLACKNESS.

A WIND IS BLOWING, ONLY SOUND IS HEARD THROUGHOUT THIS SEQUENCE:

The wind becomes the drone of the B-29.

The SOUND of the X-1 dropping down, and we hear the appropriate sound and crackling RADIO COMMUNICATIONS.

PILOT (WAYNE'S VOICE)

Roger, Ground Control, this is Whiskey Kilo Two Eight lowering and launching...now.

GROUND CONTROL

Roger, Whiskey Kilo Two Eight and...there you go !

SOUND INCREASES behind the black screen. And we learn: The Pilot is Going For It. Speed increases. At .93 MACH we hear buffeting sounds.

We hear the Pilot's rattling communications.

Buffeting grows louder.

And Something is going wrong with the controls.

GROUND CONTROL

We suggest you try (A).

PILOT

Roger, and...I've tried (A). Speed increasing... point 95 MACH.

Something is still wrong. Rattling sounds becoming louder.
Tension music joins in.

(4) CONT

GROUND CONTROL

We suggest you try (B).

PILOT

Trying (B).

Sound is becoming unbearably loud. (Credits End) One last
card announcing OCTOBER 12, 1947. MUROC CALIFORNIA.

GROUND CONTROL

Whiskey Kilo Two Eight, do you want to
declare an emergency ?

All theater speakers are rattling.

PILOT

Negative, Negative. Whiskey Kilo Two Eight is not
declaring an emergency. Repeat not declaring...

AND SUDDENLY THE ENTIRE SCREEN EXPLODES IN A BLINDING FLASH OF
FLAMES. THIS MOMENT OF CRASH. AND THIS IS NOT JUST THE LITTLE
NEWSREEL SCREEN WE HAVE FOCUSED ON, THIS IS THE BIG, WIDE SCREEN,
WITH BIG, WIDE SCREAMING SOUND..AND WHAT WE LIKE TO CALL REAL-
LIFE.

OR, IN THIS CASE, REAL-DEATH.

SIRENS WAILING, LIGHTS OF FIREFIGHTERS, AMBULANCES SURROUND
THE FLAMING OUTLINE OF THE CRASHED PLANE.

DISSOLVE TO: EXT DESERT HOUSING TRACT

(5)

A MAN DRESSED IN BLACK, RISING AS IF FROM THE FLAMES. He has a
somber, long face, a face of concern, lined...haunted by talk
of Death. It's suddenly very SILENT. He rises from his gray
Ford and squints at the gray post-war pre-fab high desert
wind-swept cluster of houses. VERY TIGHT ON HIS FACE: THE
MINISTER, the "Friend of Widows and Orphans."

CUT TO: INT BEDROOM

(6)

A WOMAN: She sleeps. She's young, pretty in a careworn way.
She wakes suddenly, the way you wake in a horror film.

CUT TO: EXT DESERT HOUSE

(7)

THE FRIEND OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS moves toward a house. Her house.
That desert wind flaps against his black suit.

And it flaps against the housedresses of the gaunt neighbors who stand in clusters on neighboring lawns, figures from a Dorothea Lange-scape: A death-watch.

And the WOMAN appears at the screen door of the house. A SMALL SAD CHILD at her side. She watches the figure in black approaching her.

He walks steadily forward, steadily past the tricycle on the front lawn, past the mangy dog, past the neighbor woman staring from her kitchen window.

MOVING STEADILY CLOSE IN on the YOUNG WOMAN'S FACE, the mouth opening as in a dream, frame by frame. (The way they later photographed the astronauts.)

AND THE FRIEND OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS COMING CLOSER AND CLOSER.

MOVING INTO: THE YOUNG WOMAN tears on her face, unearthly:

YOUNG WOMAN

(a whispered scream)

No ! Go Away !

VERY CLOSE SHOT ON THE FRIEND OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS. CUT TO
NEXT SCENE -- HE BEGINS TO SING:

②

FRIEND

Lord guard and guide the men who fly,
Through the great spaces in the sky,
Be with them always in the air,
In darkening storms or sunlight fair.

O hear us when we lift our prayer
For those in peril in the air ! AMEN

EXT. CEMETERY IN THE HIGH DESERT. DAY.

Godforsaken and barren, a cemetery amidst the Joshua trees. Signs that many of the graves are recently dug. A small group standing ALONE in the vast desert as the body is lowered into its grave.

THE YOUNG WOMAN standing with her two CHILDREN...THE NEIGHBORS... SOME PILOTS, CIVILIANS, OFFICERS. A small, lonely group in the middle of nowhere, heat waves rising.

YEAGER is there, and others we will soon meet: SLICK. PANCHO. RIDLEY. And a GLAMOROUS WOMAN.

CLOSE SHOT ON YEAGER. He glances from one face to the other. He has seen all this before. His eyes meet the Glamorous Woman's. They avert glances. Yeager looks up. A JET SQUADRON ROARS BY OVERHEAD. ONE PLANE IS MISSING IN THE FORMATION.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HIGH DESERT. DAY. (9)

A RIDER on horseback moves across the gnarled and twisted panorama of Joshua trees which stand out in silhouette on the fossil wasteland like some arthritic nightmare.

CLOSE UP. YEAGER. He's wearing a leather jacket. WWII pilot style, and the look is more John Garfield than John Wayne. Wind blows tumbleweed across his trail.

HE SEES: A lonely airbase: two quonset-style hangars, a couple gasoline pumps, a single concrete runway, a few tarpaper shacks, and some tents... There's something about the flapping tents, the howling wind...and the Small Evil Little Plane (the X-1 rocket: "looked like a fat orange swallow with white markings, but really just a length of pipe with four rocket chambers in it") that comes taxiing by that gives us the feeling something is about to happen here. And there's something in the way Yeager looks at the plane...and the plane seems almost to look at him (like the bronc that can't be broken)...that tells us that these two souls will meet again. The X-1's rockets are screaming. The sound growing louder, more ominous... louder and louder...

~~EXT DESERT NEAR PANCHO'S~~
CUT TO: Galloping across wasteland -- in the distance a lonely cantina, a cluster of small buildings absolutely in the middle of nowhere. Distant music. (9A)

INT. PANCHO'S. A rickety wind-blown 1930's style establishment with a weatherbeaten sign: PANCHO'S FLY INN. A Rat Shack. Juke box music is playing as Yeager walks through the banging screen door into the saloon, and every eye in the place checks him out. (10)

PANCHO BARNES herself is behind the bar wearing her flight jacket, jodhpurs and riding boots. She's forty and speaks with a vulcanized tongue:

PANCHO

Yeager, you ol' bastard ! Don't stand in the doorway like some lonesome lame goddamned mouseshit sheepherder! Get your ass on over here and have a drink! My God... You look awful !

So Yeager begins to drink, and this won't be his only drink tonight. And as he drinks, he takes out a knife and goes to work carving an old, leather football helmet into another shape. Pancho nods and Yeager looks into the shadows of the cantina and sees:

SIX MEN: TWO MILITARY OFFICERS, TWO CIVILIAN BUSINESSMEN (from Bell Aircraft) THE LIASON MAN and SLICK (GOODLIN). Yeager overhears snatches of the following:

BELL CIVILIAN

...You can be the first, Slick. The man who breaks the sound barrier will be on top. You'll be the one that's remembered !

A MAN IN A WHITE GROUNDCREW OUTFIT is hammering a picture on the wall behind the bar. There are many pictures already hanging there of planes and pilots, badly framed, crookedly hung.

And the picture he's hanging -- we've seen it before ! Remember that moment in the opening Newsreel when Wayne, the pilot, was giving the thumbs-up sign ? Well, there he is -- being hung up on the wall, thumbs up. We've just been to his funeral.

A YOUNG ROOKIE AT THE BAR, sitting with a PRETTY GIRL with that 40's if-you-want-me-just-whistle look.

ROOKIE

You know, Pancho, I was looking at your pictures and I was wonderin howcome a famous pilot like Slick over there did not have his picture up there on your wall. Just what do you have to do to get your picture up there anyways ?

PANCHO

You have to die, Sweetie.

Oh. Another song on the juke box, and everyone's having a good time -- despite (or in honor of) the True Brother whose picture is being hammered onto the wall. And everyone -- especially Yeager -- is pouring down the drinks.

GIRL AT BAR

Howcome they drink so much ?

PANCHO

Why, I suppose it's because the sun has gone down.

GIRL AT BAR

But the sun's still out.

PANCHO

Why so it is, Sweetie.

MOVE RIGHT IN ON SLICK, talking to the four men:

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⑩ CONT

SLICK

Waal, some say the sound barrier can't be broke. An Engineer'll tell you it is an absolute like the firmness of the earth. The sound barrier is a farm you can buy in the sky. They'll tell you the controls will freeze and you can't budge the stick. They'll tell you whoever tries to break it will auger in. Waal now, maybe it can't be broke...And maybe it can...And maybe it can only be broke for a specified sum...say, one hundred and fifty thousand.

Too much. No dice. Slick nods to the boys, gets up, and goes to the Woman at the Bar to discuss other serious business. And the Five Men are left with nothing...

Yeager's leaning back in his chair, working on modifying his football helmet. The Liason Man makes a sales pitch for the Air Force.

LIASON MAN (confidential tones)

That guy...Yeager's his name...He's had some experience testing the X-1. He was some kinda war hero, shot down five Germans in one day. They say he's a natural born stick 'n rudder man... As the Press Liason Man for the Air Force, I think...

MILITARY GUY

...Any problems with him ?

LIASON MAN

Only one. Holding him back.

MILITARY MAN

That shouldn't be a problem.

They all nod, the Military Guy clears his throat:

MILITARY GUY

Hey there, Yeager. Say, ah... we were just talking to...Slick about the sound barrier...?

Yeager looks at them slowly, half-smiling. His voice is Appalachian poker-hollow drawl:

YEAGER

Is that right ?

MILITARY GUY

Yes, that's right, and we feel...the X-1 is ready to have a go at it...

Yeager looks at them with that half-smile of his.

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⑩ CONT

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

We believe the X-1's got the answer to go beyond
Mach 1...

SECOND BELL GUY

(mumbling)

...If there is any beyond...

They give the Second Bell Guy a dirty look.

MILITARY GUY

...So what do you think, Yeager ?

YEAGER

Waal, y'know...Engineer'll tell yew that
sound barrier cain't be broke, he'll tell
yew your ears'll fall off if yew try to go
through the barrier...But I ain't no engine-
er. You ask me, I don't think the damn
sound barrier even exists.

No sound barrier ? Well now, this causes quite a stir
among the Five Men who have just been talking to Slick
about a hundred and fifty thousand 1947 dollar bills.

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

(hoarse, nervous)

Waitress, a drink for Mr. Yeager here !

Right about here the Glamorous Woman in slacks and a leather
jacket enters the bar. We've already seen her at the funeral
when her eyes met Yeager's. Their eyes meet again. Yeager
drinks.

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

So you think you might have a go at it ?

YEAGER

Might.

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

But of course...since, as you say, this sound
barrier doesn't really exist...we wonder just
how much...

YEAGER

You're already payin' me, aincha ?

MILITARY GUY

Why, sure, Yeager, but...

YEAGER

Then I'll see yew gentlemen tomorrow.

(10) CONT

Yeager gets up and on slightly shaky legs goes to the Glamorous Woman at the bar. As he leaves...

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

How much are you paying him ?

MILITARY GUY

I think it's two hundred and eighty-three dollars.

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

A week ?

'MILITARY GUY

A month.

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

That's not bad. Not bad.

AT THE BAR. Yeager and the Glamorous Woman. They just stand, eyeing -- or is it taunting, challenging ? -- one another. He signals Pancho for a couple more drinks.

YEAGER

Lady, you ever been caught alone in a desert before ?

GLAMOROUS

Never have. Don't think I ever will. Never did see the man who could catch me out there.

YEAGER

I'll give you a head start.

GLAMOROUS

Forget it, Flyboy. You'll never catch me.

YEAGER

I b'lieve I will.

GLAMOROUS

Can't be done, Flyboy.

She saunters out the door. Yeager downs a drink. The Pretty Girl at the Bar with (the now drunk) Slick and The Young Rookie touches his arm as he brushes past.

PANCHO

Forget it, Sweetie. She's his wife.

EXT. PANCHO'S NIGHT. (11)

Moon over Pancho's as Yeager swings onto his horse. He rides through the twisted Joshua shapes, shouting her name:

YEAGER

GLENNIS ! GLENNIS ! I'm gonna get ya lady.
Where the hell are you ?

She appears in the moonlight, he chases her, loses her -- a kind of horse-back hide and seek, a mounted sexual foreplay of flashes, shadows, laughter...He sees her and starts twirling a lasso, going to rope her...and galloping faster. WHAMMO ! Right into the hairy arm of a Joshua tree.

Yeager's thrown to the ground, almost unconscious. Glennis looks down at him. He groans with pain.

CUT TO: EXT EDWARDS AFB (12)

THE X-1 SCREAMING AND STEAMING as the LOX (Liquid Oxygen) is being put in. The sun is just beginning to cook up behind the rim of the horizon. Yeager arrives at the flight line carrying his football helmet under the crook of his right arm. Pancho is there with him, covering his right flank. When the guy from Bell Aviation tries to put his arm on Yeager, Pancho steers him clear. Yeager winces in pain.

YEAGER

Where's Ridley ? Ridley ?

Ridley's up on the side of the X-1 just putting the finishing touches on an inscription on the plane. It reads:
GLAMOROUS GLENNIS.

GLENNIS

(pleased as punch)

What're you doin' ?

YEAGER

Waal, you gotta do somethin. I kinda like the sound of it. Better'n callin it "X-1", ain't it ?

Yeager takes Ridley, the Flight Engineer, over to the side in the tin hangar and says:

YEAGER

Ridley, I got me a little ol' problem here. Over at Pancho's last night I sorta...dinged my goddamned ribs.

RIDLEY

Whattya mean...dinged ?

YEAGER

Well, I guess you might say I damned near like to...broke a coupla the sonsabitches. I gonna have a little trouble reachin' over t'shut the door, y'know.

EXT/INT HANGAR

CUT TO the janitor wondering what Ridley is doing with his broom, sawing about nine inches off the top. (13)

EXT HANGAR - EDWARDS

NEARBY. Pancho's last words to Yeager: (14)

PANCHO

Important thing to remember is first guy to break the sound barrier gets a free steak over at my place. With all the trimmins.

And the B-29 takes off with the X-1 tucked underneath. A small group stands watching in the morning light. Pancho, the Bell Aviation Guys, a few Air Force Personnel (and maybe, somewhere nearby, the Man in a Black Suit, the Friend, the Minister), all eyes to the sky.

INT YEAGER'S BEDROOM

And in her small high-desert un-glamorous pre-fab house, Glamorous Glennis hears the plane taking off. She's lying in bed listening and apprehensive, looking like the last woman we saw here. Not a lot of fun for her now. (15)

INT. B-29 IN THE SKIES.

Looking down through the open hatch at the little X-1: (16)

YEAGER

Say, Ridley, you got any Beemans ?

RIDLEY

Yeah, I got me a stick. Here.

YEAGER

Pay you back later.

RIDLEY

Fair nuff.

Ridley helps Yeager climb out into the breeze and down into the X-1 (through a 240-knot slipstream). Yeager clips on his hoses and lines, and manages to pull his pumpkin-shaped, hand-carved football helmet over his head.

RIDLEY

Yew jus' reach over an' whang that handle shut with it.

Ridley closes the door, Yeager nods, and -- hiding pain-- whangs it shut. Thumbs up.

THE MOMENT BUILDS WITH SHOTS OF: Yeager waiting,
Ridley waiting in the B-29 INT. (17)

Then the switches are hit inside the mother ship; then the breaking of the holding straps, the umbilicus cut...and the SUDDEN SENSATION OF FALLING as the X-1 drops like a bomb.

Yeager fires the rockets of his ship, and with a tremendous ROAR the tiny ship peels across the sky and up at a 45 degree angle.

CUTS OF: The machometer moving up, the buffeting beginning at MACH .87, growing stronger and stronger.

Yeager's face shows the strain...ribs buffeting...cheeks rippling. Move in tight on football helmet -- could his ears fall off? SOUND shatters.

MONTAGE

ON THE GROUND. All eyes to the skies. Pancho. Glennis. (18)

And groups around outdoor radios (as in "Test Pilot").
THE PICTURES OF THE HUNDRED DEAD PILOTS WAIT.

YEAGER'S VOICE (19)

Had a mild buffet there -- jest th' usual instability ...Say, Ridley...make a note here, will ya?... (if yew got nothing better to do)... elevator effectiveness regained...

IN THE B-29...Ridley. nodding, nodding. (19A)

YEAGER: RATTLED BY BUFFETING, WINCING WITH GROWING PAIN, MECHANICAL RATTLING SOUNDS GRATING THE NERVES...AND THROUGH THE COCKPIT, STRANGE STREAKING, STROBING OF SUNLIGHT -- something ahead of him, a siren call of swirling light and sound, luring him. At Mach .9 the plane is about to burst asunder. (NOTE: YEAGER KEEPS PULLING STICK BACKWARD ... keeps pushing it faster...) (19B)

MACHOMETER RIGHT UP TO MACH 1. NOTE: MACHOMETER ONLY WENT TO MACH 1.

ON THE GROUND, A SOUND THAT'S NEVER BEEN HEARD ON EARTH BEFORE... and the whole desert floor is racked. THE PICTURES ON THE WALL AT PANCHO'S RATTLE -- a strange SIGH from the hundred pilots who died bringing it to this moment. ROOKIE AT THE BAR IS SHOCKED. (20)

WITH YEAGER. THE MACHOMETER IS OVER MACH 1 -- INTO THE UNMARKED ZONE. (21)

YEAGER

Say Ridley, make another note, will ya? Must be something wrong with this ol' machometer (faint chuckle) ...it's gone kinda screwy on me...

RIDLEY IN THE B-29. Puts his thumbs up to the crew members. (21)

RIDLEY

If it is Yeager, we'll fix it. Personally,
I think you're seein things.

YEAGER

Well, I guess I am, Ridley...An' I'm still
goin' upstairs like a bat.

IN THE SKIES. Yeager flies right through the top of the sky. (21)
It turns a deep purple and all at once the stars and the moon
come out at noon. For a moment there is NO SENSATION OF MOTION !
A pilot's heaven, a king's solitude. HE IS LOOKING OUT INTO
SPACE. He's the Master of the Sky !

CUT TO: INT PANCHO'S - DAY (22)

PANCHO'S. A PHONE. THE LIASON MAN is quickly dialing a number.

MILITARY OFFICER

Who you calling ?

LIASON MAN

The Press. This is big news. The sound barrier's
finally been broken.

THE MILITARY OFFICER reaches over and clicks off the phone.

MILITARY OFFICER

Sorry. Security. No press. They don't want anyone
to know. No word of this goes beyond the flight line.

LIASON MAN

Come on, you got to be kidding. The war's over.
What's going on here ?

MILITARY OFFICER (shrugging)

Orders. National Security. Look...someone figured
it out that way and that's the way it is.

LIASON MAN looks frustrated and bewildered as across the room
Yeager enters with Ridley. Glennis is already at the bar,
smiling her sexy smile. Pancho is carrying out a steaming
platter.

PANCHO

Steak with all the trimmins ! Tell me Yeager, you
miserable peckerwood, how's it feel to be the fastest
man alive ?

YEAGER

Waal, I'll tell yew, Pancho -- feels just about right...
My ears didn't fall off neither.

Pancho laughs, and the Rookie with the Pretty Girl nearby, and Glennis and Ridley and everybody in the Rat Shack laughs. And Yeager lets out a silly laugh -- but his ribs hurt like hell.

OMIT (23)

DISSOLVE TO NIGHT.

INT/EXT PANCHO'S

As Liason Man watches Yeager and his buddies still drinking (Yeager dancing slowly with Glennis), enjoying modest rewards. (24)

AND OUTSIDE MOVING INTO the moon, round and full; pilots stumbling, groping girls, baying for glory at the moon; while from the jukebox:

JUKEBOX

They call me a dreamer
Well maybe I am
But I've got to see for myself
Those Faraway Places...

SUDDENLY CUT OFF BY BLARE OF THE MUSIC:

INT THEATER

SMALL SCREEN AGAIN. CARD: "LOS ANGELES, March 5, 1952" And onto the screen: "BREAKING THE SOUND BARRIER". It's the British film, just made, starring Ralph Richardson. (25)

INSIDE THE THEATER. Yeager is watching the film. It's six years later (more skies have burned his eyes), dressed in ill-fitting mufti in a row of important military types (including Military Officer from last scene). Pancho, Ridley, the Liason Man and Glennis sit nearby, flitting glances at him as he fidgets.

DISSOLVE TO: LATER IN THE FILM.

RALPH RICHARDSON

Can a vision be evil, Sue ? Can it ?
To make a man doubt ?

Yeager is sweating. He just doesn't like this film. Just then the young pilot announces he wants to take one more shot at the sound barrier.

PILOT

I think I can beat this nose-heavy business by reversing the controls ! I'm going to give it a try !

He begins to nose-dive, and it's exciting. At the crucial moment he reverses the controls and zips right on through Mach 1 as smooth as a bird, remaining in full control. Ridley thinks this is a comedy of some kind; but, Yeager's stunned. He can't believe what he's seeing. He looks around. The Liason Man shrugs.

PILOT

(on verge of hysteria)

I did it ! I did it ! One-four to tower. On the fourth run Mach Meter showed 1 point 0 - 1 ! (screaming). By putting the stick forward ! Have you got that ?! Stick forward!!

The Pilot's almost having an emotional breakdown as we

CUT TO: EXT THEATRE

(26)

OUTSIDE THE THEATRE, Yeager and the Brass move out. Yeager's bewildered. Then he hears that STRANGE BUBBLING SOUND like locusts or root weevils swarming. Flashbulbs pop all around him as men with camera faces move in around him.

REPORTERS

Is that him ? ...We're told you're the first American to break the sound barrier. Can you tell us how you felt at that moment ?

LIASON MAN

Fellas, we've got a little announcement to make here. Yeager was not just the first American to break the sound barrier, he was the first, period...

REPORTERS

Howcome you waited til now to tell us ?... How do we know he was the first ?

LIASON MAN

(trying to finish)

It's just that national security at the time prevented us from making a public announcement.

REPORTERS

(ignoring him)

Did you learn to break the sound barrier from the English ?

YEAGER

From the English ?

He tries to turn away, but another CLUMP of prodding REPORTERS confronts him every way he turns. Root Weevil sounds.

REPORTERS

How many of your buddies 'augured' in trying to break the barrier ? (He turns another way.) How did you like the movie ?

YEAGER

Dunno...it was okay, I guess...
kinda shuck...y'know...

REPORTERS

Whaaat ? What did he say ? Would you mind
speaking up ?

The Liason Man takes over:

LIASON MAN

What Yeager means is this picture is not a documentary,
and he understands what must be done to sell a few
tickets. But he knows, that if it's good for flying,
it's good for the Air Force.

YEAGER

That's ...right...right...

He tries to back away, but bumps into a guy who is 100% pure
spit and polished brass down to his very balls.

LIASON MAN

Yeager, you know the Secretary of the Air Force ?

SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

Sure. Say, Chuck, do you mind if I ask you something ?
Is it true that you broke the sound barrier by re-
versing the contols ?

Yeager looks at him, unable to believe he's hearing this.

YEAGER

No sir ! That is not correct. Anyone who reversed
the controls going transonic would be dead.

The Press bubbles and makes Root Weevil sounds. The Secretary
who has just seen the film looks at him with doubt.

SECRETARY

Are you sure, Chuck ?

YEAGER

Yes sir ! I am sure !

Not knowing which way to turn, Yeager retreats back into the
theater.

INT THEATER

GLENNIS STANDS in the back of the aisle, looking down at Yeager
seated near the front. He pretends to concentrate on the screen.

CLOSE ON YEAGER. THE NEWSREEL is on, but we stay on his face. Some ridiculous, cheery news item is followed by LOW, OMINOUS MUSIC: voices humming with barge-tugging bassos, babooshka music, Cold War music. There's only a brief cut to the screen as we hear: THE RUSSIANS HAVE EXPLODED AN ATOMIC BOMB ! And (using actual footage) the size of the explosion is superimposed over New York City.

Already overlapping is the soothing sound of:

THE CREWCUTS

Shhhboom, shhhhboom,
Yatatataboom,
Life would be a dream, Sweetheart...

PANCHO'S. Much more crowded than in the old days. Juicy young girls in pedalphushers have found their way up to this lonely cantina in the high desert and are trying to gyrate their way into pilot heaven. (28)

A huddle of drunk aviators includes (soon to be met): GUS, DEKE, PRINCE, AND BUD JENNINGS. ALSO THE ROOKIE FROM OPENING SCENE drinking heavily, still with same GIRL AT BAR.

IN YEAGER'S CORNER -- Yeager, Glennis, Ridley, Pancho and the Liason Man.

LIASON MAN

You need something more than speed records in this day and age...You need Coverage.

YEAGER

Cov-ridge ? What the hell's that ?

LIASON MAN

You know what I'm talking about.

Glennis doesn't want to go into it.

GLENNIS

Flyboy, let's dance.

YEAGER

You mean all them press guys who come crawlin' at you like a buncha little beggars poppin cameras in your face ?

RIDLEY

They sound like a buncha root weevils or somethin...

LIASON MAN

Those root weevils write history.

YEAGER

They write history an' pilots fly airplanes.
Fair nuff. Why not just leave it at that ?

18
28 CONT

Glennis gives him a sexy, insistent gesture and Yeager gets up to dance. He does a nice, stiff Tennessee Waltz.

LIASON MAN

Pilots ? You know what really makes your rocket ships go up ?

RIDLEY

You kiddin ? Do we know ? Why the aerodynamics alone would take so long to explain that...

LIASON MAN (stopping Ridley dead)

Funding...that's what makes your ships go up. Ridley, I'll tell you something -- no bucks, no Buck Rogers. Funding gets the technology, and whoever's got the technology's going to be on top...
...I just hope he does it right next time.

RIDLEY

You mean he done it wrong last time ?

LIASON MAN

Last time there was no coverage. The next barrier they're going to be interested in is twice the speed of sound, Mach 2. That's the one the press will cover.

RIDLEY

Mach 2 ? Real test may be just beyond Mach 2.
That's just a number.

LIASON MAN

That's the Magic Number. Like sixty homers, like batting 400, like the four-minute mile. The Press like a nice, round number. After that, they don't care. Until the next magic number.

FACES OF THE PILOTS IN THE ROOM, ROOKIES AND WIZENED STICK 'N RUDDER FIGHTER JOCKS, all pretending not to be sizing up Yeager as he and Glennis waltz by. Particularly hold on the group of pilots that includes the ROOKIE...He's changed over the years. He looks like a hardened veteran throwing back drinks.

LIASON MAN

And now that the word's out, and the record is ¹⁹(28) CONT
edging toward Mach 2, every rocket ace, every
fighter-jock, every rat-racer in the country is
gonna be headed this way. Every one of 'em wants
to push the outside of the envelope and be on top.

THE ROOKIE downs a drink and leaves on shaky legs with the
GIRL at BAR.

CUT TO:

EXT EDWARDS AFB
DAWN. THREE HOT CARS ROAR UP TO THE HANGAR. (29)

THE ROOKIE on the flight line gulps down oxygen. Gus, Deke,
Prince, and Bud Jennings are with him. It's freezing cold
in the dawn's early light.

INSIDE A CAR -- THROUGH A DUSTY WINDSHIELD. The Rookies watch (30)
as -- the plane begins to taxi -- and crashes. (STOCK-PROJECTION-
possibly "SABRE DANCE" footage of plane turning over and over.)

CUT TO: EXT/INT COOPER CAR -- TRACT HOUSING

EARLY ROCK N ROLL AND Gordo Cooper driving through gusty high
desert winds. He's a young guy with a friendly, easygoing (31)
manner--a combination of fireproof confidence and the ability
to be absolutely calm to the point of total relaxation. A no-
sweat kinda guy. Someday he knows he's gonna be at the top
of the pyramid.

Next to him is his wife, TRUDY. She's young, pretty, but looks
like she's slept less than most people her age. Careworn,
as we said before. With two kids in the back seat. An old
guard's shack marks the entrance to the airbase. A strange
guard waves them through.

GORDO

Edwards Air Force Base. This's the place to be,
hon. They're goin higher, faster, and farther here
than anywheres. I'll tell ya, hon, it's only a
matter of time til we get ourselves moved up the
ladder around here like we did back at Langley.

TRUDY

We ? You mean you.

GORDO

Heeeey, hon ! We're a team. I move up, you move
up. Right to the top of the pyramid.

Trudy looks out at the landscape, the gnarled Joshuas, the military truck ahead of them with it's flapping canvas. It all seems haunted to her.

GORDO

C'mon, Trudy, who's the best pilot you ever seen ?

Trudy knows the answer to this one -- she's heard it before. And you can't help but love Gordo's smile, a smile that will one day land him right on the cover of Life Magazine.

GORDO

Yer lookin at him. Hey, cheer up. Plenty of fresh air for the kids up here. And...no more nightmares.

TRUDY

I hope so Gordo, I really and truly do.

GORDO

Hey, I ever let you down ?

CUT TO: INT COOPER TRACT HOUSE

32

A THIN BROWN TRICKLE OF WATER as Trudy tries the tap. The pipes make a regurgitating sound; Trudy looks nauseous. The house looks familiar to us--our first widow lived here.

Trudy turns and walks through the depressing, furnished house. Through a doorway she sees: GORDO ASLEEP on a plastic couch, stacking Z's.

GORDO

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ

Suddenly a double sonic boom hits the house. Trudy--scared--looks out the window. Her two kids are just standing in the scruffy backyard gazing out at the empty desert. Nearby a tractor gnaws the earth.

Then, she sees off in the distance -- A THIN WISP OF SMOKE RISING.

EXT COOPER TRACT HOUSE

OUTSIDE. Trudy is taking some bags out of the car when she sees: ACROSS THE STREET. A GRAY FORD at the curb. THE MINISTER walking up the driveway of the house across the street. Wind flaps his black suit.

33

A YOUNG WOMAN OPENS THE DOOR. She looks familiar to us. The Minister nods. Tears stream down her face. The Messenger walks sadly away. Now we recognize her--The Girl at the Bar, the one with the Rookie. A child cries o.s.

CUT TO:

PANCHO'S. A PICTURE OF THAT VERY ROOKIE BEING POUNDED INTO THE WALL by the Hammering Man.

The screen door bangs open. Heads turn. Gordo and Trudy stand in the doorway, eyes focusing out of the bright desert glare. A smile comes over Gordo's face as he makes his way toward the ROOKIES at the bar. Trudy is left to fend for herself. TWO GIRLS at the bar give her the once-over.

GORDO

Is that Gus Grissom from Langley Field? What's an ace like you doin' in a place like this?

Gus Grissom is a gruff little guy, dour looks, who feels like talking only when he's at beer call. You can't tell if he's putting you on or inviting you to a fistfight.

GUS

Why if it ain't Hot Dawg! Gordo...(uh)...Cooper... right? Meet Deke Slayton, Prince...(he can't remember names too well). Gordo here thinks he is one of them hot dawg pilots you hear so much about.

GORDO

Gus, I am not one of them, I am The Hot Dog Man himself. Tell em how I used to wax your tail.

GUS

Wax my tail? Why, Hot Dawg, you were just in my shadow. And that's right where you'll always be.

PANCHO

What'll you rookies have?

GORDO

Rookies? Why, Sis, you are lookin at a whole new ballgame right here. In a few years, you'll probably immortalize us by puttin our pictures right up there on your wall...

Gordo wonders why everybody gets suddenly serious.

GORDO

What'd I say?

PANCHO

Y'know, we got two categories of pilot around here. There's your prime pilots--the ones who get the hot planes. And there's your pudknockers--the ones who dream about getting the hot ones. Now what'll you miserable pudknockers have?

TRUDY has made her way half-way across the crowded room when she overhears the conversation from a nearby table. LORETTA JENNINGS has been drinking heavily. Her husband BUD is trying to calm her down. He seems embarrassed by her outpourings:

LORETTA

...But that's sixty-two men in the last thirty-six weeks. Do you know what that averages?

BUD

(quietly, under control)

Loretta, averages apply only to those with average stuff.

LORETTA

Oh, my god! You know what happened -- the machine just broke!

BUD

(mumbling)

It's not the machine, it's the man. He was dead before he took off. Let's not go into it, Loretta.

Bud forcefully guides her toward the door. Loretta passes one last imploring look, wanting someone to agree with her. But she knows she's speaking about the unspeakable. HER EYES MEET TRUDY'S. It's as if for an instant they realize they share some sort of demonic possession.

HOLD ON TRUDY, slowing down to that frame-a-second quality, as IN A DREAM WE HEAR

TRUDY'S VOICE

I know your nightmare.
Sometimes...I...have...that, too...

INT COOPER PLANE / TRUDY'S DREAM
and IN A DREAM -- GORDO climbs into a cockpit. He gives the thumbs-up sign (as in the opening newsreel). His plane takes off into a troubled beyond. HEAVY, NIGHTMARE BREATHING SOUNDS (use later in Gordo's flight). (35)

Trudy stands on the ground alone, wind flapping her clothes, eyes to the sky. She hears scratchy communications chatter telling us Gordo's in trouble. (36)

EXT DESERT

GORDO'S VOICE

I've tried (A)...I've tried (B).

CHATTER OF CHASE PILOT

...Punch out, Gordo, Punch out!

GORDO'S (CALM) VOICE

Rog, and ...punching out...

INT COOPER PLANE/TRUDY'S DREAM

23

USE GRAINY EXISTING FTG.--EDWARDS EJECTION SEAT TESTS...
Gordo's head cracks against the cockpit, bursts through the
windshield in slow motion...As the strange figure is catapulted
into the sky in an orange cloud of smoke.

(37)

TIGHT ON GORDO'S HEAD...moving through the smoke...AND HE'S ON
FIRE. FLAMES INSIDE (?) THE HELMET (we will remember this
moment at the end of the film)...drifting through the sky.
Down toward the clouds below (existing shot).

INT COOPER BEDROOM

TRUDY WAKES IN BED (Just as wife at opening).

(38)

INT COOPER HOUSE

SHE OPENS THE FRONT DOOR. THE MINISTER IS STANDING THERE WITH
A SYMPATHETIC LOOK ON HIS FACE.

(39)

TRUDY

Go away...

THE PHONE RINGS LOUDLY, SHOCKING HER. SHE TURNS. WHEN SHE TURNS
BACK TO THE DOOR AGAIN, THE MINISTER'S GONE. IN THE DISTANCE
A PLUME OF SMOKE RISES.

INT COOPER KITCHEN

SOUNDS OF NIGHTMARE BREATHING AS TRUDY IS BY THE KITCHEN WINDOW.
A BRIEF CUT OF GORDO'S FLAMING FACE INSIDE HIS HELMET FILLS
THE WINDOW.

(40)

EXT COOPER BACKYARD

Then, in an instant, it's normal -- GORDO'S OUT IN THE BACK
YARD looking through the flames of his barbecue, burning hot
dogs, talking to Gus, Deke, Prince and Bud Jennings.

(41)

INT COOPER KITCHEN

TRUDY turns from the window. BETTY GRISSOM, and some other
WIVES, INCLUDING LORETTA JENNINGS. (Time has passed; the
Coopers are part of the Edwards community).

(42)

MARGE SLAYTON

Sometimes for me all it takes is a truck starting...
I think -- That's a crash truck...Anyway...I'm glad
we could talk. I thought only I had those nightmares.
Nobody ever wants to talk about anything around here.
Everyone's always trying to..."maintain an even strain."

TRUDY

I went back East to a reunion and all my friends
could talk about was their husbands' work, how
"dog eat dog" and "cutthroat" it was on Madison
Avenue, places like that. Cutthroat? What could
I say? I wondered how they would have felt if each
time their husband went in to make a deal there was
a one in four chance he might not come out of that
meeting...

BETTY GRISSOM

You marry a fighter jock and you marry the military.
I'll tell you one thing, though -- the military owes
me for all this. And some day I expect the military
to make good. Oh well...it sure ain't your usual
dull life.

LORETTA

Look at 'em out there. You'd think they were talking sports.

24
42 CONT

Betty comes to the window to watch the men outside. (Also, some kids nearby). She can read their hand gestures describing great airplane exploits and close calls. Then, Gordo spots the barbecue burning lunch. Smoke rises. Gordo rushes over to the rescue.

BETTY

Men! Sometimes they are such (looking for the right word) ...assholes.

Sometimes the nicest laughter comes out of sadness. Trudy is breaking up.

MARGE

Sometimes they sure are handy assholes though.

Gordo holds up a black and smoking hot dog.

TRUDY

Sometimes.

EXT COOPER HOUSE / YEAGER BACKYARD

OUTSIDE. Gordo and the Guys stop laughing to look at a nearby backyard. YEAGER is standing in his doorway, looking up at the sky. Glennis is nearby, and TWO SMALL KIDS play in the sparse backyard lawn. (43)

CLOSE ON YEAGER. He squints at the sky. He's waiting.

DEKE

Any day now.

CUT TO:

INT. HANGAR. DAY. (44)

As desert glare streams onto Yeager's plane. Carrying a wrench, looking up from underneath, Ridley pops out to look at Yeager. He shakes his head 'no.'

YEAGER TURNS. On the other side of the hangar, a new plane is sitting there. It's a beautiful little plane--and it's all white--the D-558-2. (Part of it is being frozen--to hold more gas; masking tape is being applied over the cracks. The plane makes an eerie, high-pitched whistle.)

OUTSIDE THE HANGAR. A BUS PULLS UP. THE PRESS begins to pile out. (45)

CUT TO:

EXT DESERT

HORIZON SHOT. THREE CARS wildly approaching, churning up a dust storm. (46)

INSIDE PANCHO'S. Yeager is throwing back a drink. He lifts an eyebrow. He feels Something is headed this way. Then, the SOUND of three cars skidding to a halt outside. (47)

The Two Civilian Types (Possibly one is NAVY) by the door are on their feet to meet them as the rat-racers enter. Heads turn. ALL except Yeager. FIRST GUY has a satin jacket, and on his back is written: (MACDONALL) DOUGLAS. SECOND GUY wears a leather jacket that's been through the wars -- "Korea" it says on the sleeve. THIRD GUY, Ice Eyes, wears the checkered sport coat and carries a little black doctor's bag. ROOKIES are at the bar in f.g.:

FIRST CIVILIAN
There they are!

GUS
Figured they'd be showin up here sooner or later.

SECOND CIVILIAN
You guys just fly in?

GORDO
Who are those guys?

GUY IN SATIN JACKET
Drove.

DEKE
Don't know the first guy. (Gus shakes his head, doesn't know him either). But the second guy's Joe Walker.

SECOND CIVILIAN
Drove? (looks at watch)
From L.A.? You're kidding.
Couldn'ta made it that fast.

PRINCE
Walker?

SATIN JACKET
Gotta give your engine a little chance to breathe.

DEKE
And that's Scott Crossfield.

FIRST CIVILIAN
How do you boys feel? Feel good? You look good. Don't they look good? (Fawning at the mouth). What'll you boys have? Oh, Miss Pancho (as in 'banjo')...

PRINCE
Oh, oh.

Then they all turn to watch the newcomers as Pancho serves up some beers and glasses. Crossfield lifts his glass up to the light before pouring. It's dirty. He flicks a look at Pancho, then pushes the glass aside. Germs take his edge off.

Then they watch as Crossfield looks across the room and sees Yeager. He raises his bottle and ever-so-slightly tips it toward Yeager. And the funny thing the Rookies notice is that Yeager has his back toward Crossfield, but at that moment he lifts his own glass and returns the gesture with an ever-so-slight tip; then he drinks.

And we MOVE IN TIGHT ON YEAGER -- and even tighter on his glass -- so that when the amber beer is EXACTLY HORIZONTAL, WE SUDDENLY --

CUT TO:

DAWN, smacking the desert runway -- that ominous screaming sound again -- the D-558-2 taxis with Crossfield inside -- and moves into the sky.

YEAGER TAKES A POST ON THE EDWARDS RADIO CIRCUIT AND WATCHES.

AS HIGH ABOVE A THIN WISP OF SMOKE SPROUTS ACROSS THE SKY.

AND SCRATCHY COMMUNICATIONS COME OVER LOUDSPEAKERS ON THE GROUND.

BOOM ! THE PICTURES ON THE WALL AT PANCHO'S RATTLE. (48A)

CHASE PLANE CHATTER

He's out of sight...getting smaller and smaller...
I've lost him in the sun... (48B)

CROSSFIELD'S VOICE

Buffeting...one point seven...one point eight...
one point nine...

MOVING INTO YEAGER WATCHING: RIDLEY WATCHES. AND THE ROOKIES WATCH THEM WATCHING.

CROSSFIELD'S VOICE

Mach two !

THE CIVILIANS FROM THE DOUGLAS COMPANY AND NAVY MEN ARE ECSTATIC.

DOUGLAS CIVILIANS

We made it! We did it!

CLOSE SHOT. YEAGER squinting at skies, no longer top of the pyramid. Ridley and THE ROOKIES look at him, (a special look in his face) knowing what's got to be next.

AS LATER ON THE GROUND. TRACKING WITH YEAGER AND RIDLEY followed by Gus, Gordo, Rookies, Liason Man, etc. Press members streak by them, running to get in on the story. ARRIVING AT THE HANGAR, THEY SEE: (48C)

IN THE GLARE OF THE DOORWAY, the PRESS is swarming around Crossfield's plane. WE HEAR: THEIR STRANGE SOUND -- buzzing, popping, chewing, like root weevils swarming.

And then a strange thing -- CROSSFIELD gets out of his cockpit and waves, then gets back in, then gets out again, and then he waves again. Bulbs pop. Then he climbs down.

Yeager is puzzled as the Liason Man pulls him into the swarm. Moving into Crossfield, we can see Crossfield making marks on the side of his ship and looking at his watch (copy newsreel).

CROSSFIELD

...And another mile...and another mile...
You can see that's pretty fast.

REPORTER

Is there a new barrier after MACH 2?

27
48C CONT

CROSSFIELD

Barrier? More like a Demon waiting there in the thin air at around 70,000 feet.

PRESS REPORTER (laughing)

A demon? What's it called?

CROSSFIELD

Supersonic Yaw is its name. You can get instability in the roll or yaw axis, followed by an uncontrollable tumble. You could "uncork" up there, and there'd be no way out.

PRESS REPORTER

What about bailing out?

CROSSFIELD

That would be like committing suicide to keep from getting killed.

The Liason Man pushes through the crowd, tugging Yeager behind him.

LIASON MAN

Let's get some coverage here. Boys, I've got something of interest here...

Suddenly Yeager is standing there confronting Crossfield. Crossfield has a confident top-of-the-pyramid look. As the PRESS moves around, Yeager wants to bolt out of there. MOVIE CAMERA SWINGS RIGHT AT HIM. AND MOVIE TONE MUSIC BLARES. BULBS FLASH IN FACES.

BECOMING A BLACK AND WHITE NEWSREEL OF CROSSFIELD AND YEAGER SHAKING HANDS.

48D

NARRATOR

All-around congratulations come from a previous record holder as Scott Crossfield sets a new world's speed record at MACH 2, TWICE THE SPEED OF SOUND, making him the fastest man alive! AND THERE'S A COMRADESHIP OF SPEED.

CUT TO: INT B-29

WE'RE ROARING THROUGH THE HIGH SKIES INSIDE THE MOTHER SHIP. FOCUS ON DETAILS OF YEAGER GETTING READY TO CLIMB DOWN. The new helmet being put on, the tightening of cinches, gloves going on -- TENSION OF PREPARATION.

49

Yeager begins to climb down,

YEAGER

Say, Ridley, you got any Beemans'?

RIDLEY

...Even before MACH 2 she's gonna be mighty unforgiving. Wring her out first. We'll push the outside of the envelope tomorrow...

YEAGER

You got some gum or doncha?

RIDLEY (giving up)

I think I got me a stick.

YEAGER

Loan it to me, will ya? Pay ya back later.

RIDLEY

Fair nuff.

SHOT. Yeager in plane, puts gum into his mouth. Then, suddenly HE DROPS. Sunlight bursts in his face, blinding him.

49A

FROM THE GROUND. GORDO AND GUS WATCH THE LAUNCH.

49B

AND YEAGER'S OFF. HE PULLS THE STICK. THE HORIZON DISAPPEARS FROM HIS WINDSHIELD. HE BUFFETS, HE HITS MACH 1.

49C

PICTURES ON THE WALL AT PANCHO'S SHAKE. PANCHO LOOKS TO THE SKY.

49D

CROSSFIELD IS STANDING NEAR THE RADIO COMMUNICATIONS LISTENING HIS BACKERS FROM NACA AND DOUGLAS ARE THERE.

49E

THE MACHOMETER MOUNTS. YEAGER BUFFETS.

49F

AS HE HITS MACH 2...and PUSHES ON! GROUND CONTROL URGES HIM TO STOP. BUT YEAGER KEEPS GOING...MACH 2. What's wrong with him?...

YEAGER HITS 2.3...AND HE KEEPS GOING. HE'S TAKING AN INCREDIBLE BEATING.

YEAGER'S POV: THE STRANGE LIGHT...THE RIGHTEOUS ZONE...THE SIREN CALL.

HE KEEPS GOING! GORDO, GUS, GROUND CONTROL CAN'T BELIEVE IT. STOP! someone shouts.

49G

YEAGER'S PLANE WHIPS THROUGH THE SKIES. Has he gone mad? THE SIREN CALL LURES HIM ON. "Yeager is the first man to go through a particular hole in the hypersonic envelope."



MACH 2.4...2.5...AND SUDDENLY...SUDDENLY... ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE. THE PLANE WHIPS AROUND THROUGH THE SKIES. HE'S "UNCORKED". TUMBLING wildly "like a leaf in a tempest, a cork in a flooding stream."

YEAGER'S HELMET POUNDS AGAINST THE CANOPY (See Mel Apt shots). YEAGER IS JERKED AND SPUN INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS.

THE PLANE ROLLS, YAWS, AND PITCHES. AND FALLS 51,000 FEET IN 50 SECONDS. WILD, TUMBLING P.O.V. THE GROUND IS CLOSER WITH EACH SPIN.

GROUND CONTROL
EJECT! PUNCH OUT! YEAGER??

(49J)

AND PANIC IN THE SKIES. HE'S STILL UNCONSCIOUS. VOICES HAVE NO REALITY -- A LOST MOMENT IN LIFE. EXTEND THIS MOMENT AS YEAGER FALLS DOWN, DOWN...

(49K)

GORDO
Eject! Eject!

(49L)

YEAGER OPENS HIS EYES. TREMENDOUS GASP OF AIR. HIS POV: MYSTERIOUS FORMS COAGULATE AS THE SPINNING SKY RETURNS. HE HITS THE CONTROL STICK.

(49M)

GROUND CONTROL
Yeager, you're spinning! Can you hear...?

(49N)

AND YEAGER PULLS IT OUT OF THE SPIN. THE GROUND STABILIZES

(49P)

YEAGER

I kin hear ye. No need to get worked up just 'cause it got a little choppy up here. Whyn't you boys get back to yer poker games down there...Might need a little...hose or somethin to cool her off when we come down...Mighta busted this canopy with my head...

EVERYONE GETS THE MESSAGE. HELICOPTERS TAKE OFF. GROUND CREWS SWING INTO ACTION.

(49Q)

YEAGER FLIES OVER THE RUNWAY AND DOES A VICTORY ROLL (can we use any plane at that speed?), and his calm voice is heard by the Rookies in their planes:

YEAGER

Well, folks, we're comin over the runway just ta give you a chance for a little visual inspection... to see if the landin gear is down...And if everythin is copacetic, why we'll just take her right on in...

MOVE IN TO GORDO AND GUS looking at the rolling plane.

GORDO
You hear that, Gus?
Very righteous. Very righteous, indeed.

GUS
Yea, verily, Hot Dawg.

TIGHT ON GORDO. YEAGER HAS MADE A DEEP IMPRESSION.

Panic on the ground, helicopters lift off as Yeager lands in a long-lens ripple of desert heat.

CUT TO:

PANCHO'S. LATER. And it's another small celebration. No Press. The Rookies are all high, skunk as drunks, arms around each other, singing:

ROOKIES

Off we go, into the wild blue yonder,
Flying high, into the sky...

Pancho walks over with a steaming platter.

PANCHO

A steak with all the trimmins...for the fastest man alive! Hereyago, Yeager.

YEAGER

I just tried to push her a little faster 'cause I'se afraid I'd miss beer call.

Yeager's in his corner, his head bandaged, with Glennis and Ridley. Yeager's somewhat dazed, and from his POV people move by as in a dream. Pilots shake his hand. Then Crossfield appears:

CROSSFIELD

Yeager, that was the fastest and wildest ride in airplane history. (A sudden sense of camaraderie between rivals). My hat's off to you.

YEAGER

Thank ye, Scotty. Much oblige.

CROSSFIELD

I want to show you something.

He puts a model plane on the table next to Yeager's steak.

YEAGER

That's it?

Crossfield nods. Some of the prime pilots move in (Walker, etc.) Something about this plane mesmerizes them: A strange little black pipe in the beam of sunlight.

PANCHO

This the next fastest ship here?
It's just a little brick with fins.

YEAGER

It's fast, Pancho...but speed ain't what this's about. Space is what this one's about.

CROSSFIELD

This is the X-15. A pilot'll take it up into space where you are out of the earth's atmosphere...They

CROSSFIELD (cont.)

say something like this'll orbit the earth three or more times, and land right out there on the dry lake bed.

PANCHO

Okay, first man in space gets a steak. With all the trimmings. Which of you pudknockers is it gonna be?

Crossfield throws down a drink. Yeager throws back a drink. Pancho pours. They look at the little toy plane in silence. Rookies sing in b.g. Girls dance. But a soberness has come to Yeager's corner.

DISSOLVE TO:
INT PANCHO'S

NIGHT. The X-15 model in the foreground, standing there on the table like some totem, a presence from some future time.

Late night dancing in b.g. At a nearby table the Rookies are drunk and staring over at the model.

GORDO

I'd give anything to be the first guy to ride that rocket into space. Just gimme the ball, y'know what I mean, Gus?

GUS

Forget it, Hot Dawg. You got to get in line behind those shit hot aces over there.

CROSSFIELD AND YEAGER and some other prime pilots, still drinking, mesmerized by the small model.

CROSSFIELD

Wonder what new kinda demons they got lurkin up there in outer space.

YEAGER (riding him)

Scotty, I'm plannin ta let ya know.

CROSSFIELD

Don't bet on it, Yeager. Y'know somethin...? (Yeager raises an eyebrow). There's always another dawn.

YEAGER

When's it gonna be ready?

CROSSFIELD

Early '58, the soonest.

YEAGER

'58? (shaking head) Long time, ...long time. (Then, tilting head). Y' hear somethin?

They listen but no one hears. Yeager stands and shakily moves to the door. Maybe it's the booze...or the bandaged head...

EXT PANCHO'S
OUTSIDE. A FEW ROOKIES SING BENEATH THE FULL MOON.

(52)

ROOKIES

"And nothin can stop the Army Air Force..."

Yeager, outside alone and woozy, listens. Now we definitely hear it: a faint beep, beep...He looks at the black sky. Nothing is seen.

And back at Pancho's. It looks like a small cantina, fading in time. "The end of the Golden Era." Voices grow softer, more distant, a parade fading away.

IN THE CORRAL. A HORSE SNORTS. IT'S EYE SUDDENLY GLEAMS. It hears the sound: Beep...beep...

SPACE
And across the black sky a strange FACE flits. It almost seems to come from science fiction, and it seems to be smiling down at Yeager, at Pancho's, at the fifties' American night. Later we will come to identify him as the Russian Chief Designer.

(53)

And through the blackness of the night sky a tiny, hundred pound satellite BEEPS past the camera: BEEP...BEEP...BEEP.

CARD: OCTOBER 4, 1957.

FROM THIS LAST MOMENT OF QUIET -- CUT TO:

WASHINGTON. PANIC INT WASHINGTON CORRIDOR

(54)

A FIGURE is running like hell down a corridor of power. It's a guy in a suit, but it looks strange to see a guy in a suit and tie running like this. There's something scary about it. And then ANOTHER GUY is running. And ANOTHER. And we're running hand-held with them all. (A sense of war-like urgency)

INT EXEC GOST ROOM
The three open a DOOR. It's dark inside, but there's a sense of a lot of men sitting in the dark.

(55)

FIRST RUNNING MAN (gasping, scared)
It's called Sputnik!

VOICE FROM DARK
We know. Sit down!

SHADOWY FIGURES all facing the same direction sit in stony silence as the Senate Majority Leader, Name of L.B. Johnson, speaks:

LBJ
Whoever controls the high ground of space will control the world. The Roman Empire controlled the world because it could build roads. Later the British Empire was dominant because it had ships.

LBJ (cont.)

In the air stage, we were powerful because we had airplanes. Now the Communists have established a foothold in outer space. Pretty soon they'll have damn space platforms up there to drop nuclear bombs on us, like rocks from a highway overpass. I, for one, do not intend to go to sleep by the light of a Communist moon. Now what in hell is the matter here?

Two guys (The Recruiters) in the back of the room have been fiddling with a projector.

FIRST RECRUITER

Ah...would somebody check the plug over there?

SECOND RECRUITER

I'll get the lights.

A SENATOR

No, It's right here. I've got it...

As he begins groping around the floor in the darkness.

A SENATOR (cont.)

...This is Armageddon, the decisive battle between the forces of good and evil. We're engaged in a race for survival...(getting plug in)...There you go.

A BEAM OF LIGHT FLASHES as the projection begins. A nearby Senator pats him on the back. The Senator feels pleased about getting the show on the road.

ONCE AGAIN WE ARE LOOKING AT OUR SMALL, NEWSREEL-SIZED SCREEN. SPY FOOTAGE OF THE RUSSIAN SPACE PROGRAM. Grainy, black and white, and there's a feeling of "misty but stupendous and omnipotent dimensions--a gigantic fire-breathing, electric rocket ship poised to soar into cosmic space in order to subjugate the unknown beings who may still be living in the primitive condition of freedom." The camera nervously pans some faces...

FIRST RECRUITER

...That's Titov...the one on the left is named Gagarin. If they ever send a man up, it'll be one of them. And those are their German scientists they captured after the war...

LBJ

Was it them? Was it their German scientists who got them up there first?

And from the shadows of the room, a MAN SPEAKS. We have seen him before in the opening Newsreel -- Werner Von Braun.

VON BRAUN

No, it was not, Senator. Our Germans are better than their Germans.

ON THE SCREEN the camera is trying to get a shot of A Man in the Shadows. Mist rises around him; SMOKE from some unseen exhaust. Finally, a moment of his smiling face. "An aura of sorcery" about him, mysterious, anonymous but omnipotent.

SECOND RECRUITER

That's their Chief Designer. We don't know anything about him. We don't even know his name.

Von Braun is sitting forward, staring at the screen to study this brief glimpse of his counterpart.

VON BRAUN

Let us see him again. Had I been better informed as to precisely where they were in their program (CIA types squirm in darkness), we might have been up first. In any event, one of my -- one of our -- Vanguard rockets will be launched shortly. We will show them a little something of our own...

And as the FACE OF THE GRAND DESIGNER moves across the screen once more, A COUNTDOWN has begun:

COUNTDOWN VOICE

Three...two...one...

CUT TO: MONTAGE

SUDDENLY BRIGHT FULL SCREEN. A Vanguard Rocket. A LONG BONY FINGER presses a button. A mighty surge of noise and flames. The rocket lifts, some six inches. It sinks very slowly, like a fat old man collapsing into a Barca-lounger. (56)

USE ACTUAL FOOTAGE. CREATE MONTAGE OF CRASHING MISSILES. (Boosted Arcas, etc.)

THROUGH TV SCAN LINES: Headline circles into camera: KAPUTNIK: Then Krushchev laughs, pours out a stream of abuse.

LBJ'S v.o.

Get that derved asshole off there!

INT EXEC GOVT ROOM

TV SCREEN SHRINKS OFF and we are in ANOTHER MEETING ROOM: Essentially the same group -- plus A Man in the Shadows-- and his spokesman (a Sherman Adams). (57)

VON BRAUN

We learn from our failures, no? Might I now suggest what I call my quick and dirty approach? (Using diagrams.) By using available rockets such as the Redstone (70,000 pounds) and our just-developed Atlas (367,000 pounds) we will launch a pod...

LBJ

A pod?

MAN IN SHADOWS stirs restlessly.

VON BRAUN

A container. A capsule. We will be in full control of this pod which will go up...like a cannonball... and come down like a cannonball, splashing down in the ocean with a parachute to slow it down and spare the life of the specimen inside.

LBJ

Spaceman?

VON BRAUN

No, specimen!

LBJ

What kinda specimen?

VON BRAUN

A tough one, responsive to orders. I had in mind a jimp.

LBJ

A jimp? What in hell is a jimp?

VON BRAUN

A jimp? A jimpanzee, Senator! An ape!

THE MAN IN THE SHADOWS SLAMS down his fist on the table. His spokesman bends down, listens to his muttering and reports:

SHERMAN ADAMS

The first American into space is not going to be a Chimpanzee!

Everyone turns...And (I hope) we have found a good shot of IKE to fit into the shadows of this room. VON BRAUN seems skeptical, like he is adopting a wait-and-see attitude.

VON BRAUN

No? Who then would you suggest we send into space?

CUT TO:

INT GOVT EXEC ROOM

SMALL SCREEN AGAIN. A HUMAN CANNONBALL climbs into a cannon. BLAM. He sails through the air.

Sherman Adams looks at Ike, shakes his head 'no.' Von Braun looks like his good time is being wasted.

Then, a succession of the others who were actually considered: Submarine crew members, parachute jumpers, arctic explorers,

scuba divers, surfers, and -- women telephone operators.

FIRST RECRUITER

Very high skills in the manual dexterity area.
They can sit all day in one place. Better insulated
for outer space travel...

IKE'S HAND SLAMS THE TABLE AGAIN. Sherman Adams hears him mumble:

ADAMS

He says every damn lunatic in the USA will volunteer
for this thing! Every dingaling in the U.S. Congress
will tout a favorite son. And what about security
clearances?

FIRST RECRUITER

But who does he want?

Adams leans down and seems surprised at what the Man in the
Shadows mumbles.

ADAMS

(disbelief)

What?

MAN IN SHADOWS (IKE) (stock?)v.o.

I want test pilots!

VON BRAUN (nervously)

Mr. President, I'm sure we could do just as well
with some other type of man...any other type of
man...some types are more manageable, perhaps.

OTHER VOICES JOIN IN:

Test pilots, sir? But they are too hard to
deal with...Anyone but test pilots, sir...etc.

A cold, unmoveable shot of Ike in the shadows. Von Braun begins
to whisper to an aide.

SECOND RECRUITER (aside)

Looks like we're headed for some airbases.

FIRST RECRUITER

Not just some airbases. You want the great test
pilots there's just one place to go (sighing
because he knows the location)...

EXT / INT RECRUITERS' CAR IN DESERT
AND OVERLAP POV SHOT, IN CAR moving past Joshua trees through
the desert. Strange trucks, vehicles, broken houses... (59)

FIRST RECRUITER (cont.)

... a godforsaken spot up in the high desert of
California. They've got some sort of weird mad
monk squadron and they're all up there living in rat
shacks...

SECOND RECRUITER
They? Who's they?

FIRST RECRUITER
You know...the guys they say have the right stuff.

SECOND RECRUITER
What kinda 'stuff'? You mean heroism? Bravery?

FIRST RECRUITER
I don't know... Sort of ...But to them it means more than that...

SECOND RECRUITER
Well, what do they say it means?

FIRST RECRUITER
They don't say. One of the things about it is they never talk about it.

SECOND RECRUITER
You mean to outsiders?

FIRST RECRUITER
To each other. To outsiders they talk about it even less. Anyway, they're all up here including the ace of aces himself.

SECOND RECRUITER
Who's that?

FIRST RECRUITER
Yeager.

SECOND RECRUITER
Never heard of him.

Cars go rat-racing past them, totally covering their windshield with dust.

DISSOLVE TO: _____ (60)

EXT PANCHO'S
LONG SHOT. PANCHO'S. The whole place seems racked with LAUGHTER.

INT PANCHO'S
INSIDE. ALL THE FIGHTER JOCKS ARE LAUGHING. Near the doorway stand the Two Recruiters who are obviously the reason for the laughter. High ranking officers stand nearby. No women, except for Pancho. (60A)

SECOND RECRUITER
I...I'm sorry...I didn't quite get what you said.

YEAGER
I said lab rabbits.

Another roar of laughter.

FIRST RECRUITER

What's that supposed to mean?

YEAGER

It means you boys don't want no pilot. You want a lab rabbit to curl up in your damn capsule with his little heart goin pitter patter and a wire up the kazoo. I don't hold with it.

CROSSFIELD

I don't either. Besides it's needlessly dangerous. Are you suggesting a man be used as a ballistic missile and then splash down and possibly be lost at sea?

PANCHO AND OTHERS JOIN IN AS LIASON MAN AND FIRST RECRUITER, ASIDE:

JOE WALKER

Why don't they put the money here? What's the big deal with this Sputnik? Migod, we could have a fully orbiting ship by 1966 that would return to earth, piloted.

PANCHO

There's some things you can't change. Some peckerwood's gotta take the beast up, and some peckerwood's gotta push the outside of the envelope, and punch a hole in the sky, and hang it out over the edge, and haul it back in! And some peckerwood's gotta land the sonofabitch! And that peckerwood is called a PILOT, goddammit! Let the goddamn Russians do it their way, we'll do it our way...

LIASON MAN

These boys smell panic. That's one thing they won't respond to. Now look, maybe if we talked privately to Yeager.

FIRST RECRUITER

Yeager? Ah...there's something else. We're looking for a special kind of pilot. Good with the press, public image kind of thing...Besides, Yeager doesn't fit the profile.

LIASON MAN

Yeager doesn't fit?!

FIRST RECRUITER

Never went to college. We're only taking college guys. And forget Walker and Crossfield and the civilian pilots. Security clearance takes too long. Besides, they're too independent.

LIASON MAN

You mean for this Space Race you don't want our best pilots?

SECOND RECRUITER

(uneasy)

I didn't say that. We want the best pilots...we can get."

BACK IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM.

YEAGER

And another thing, whoever goes up in the capsule will be spam in a can.

They love that, and they howl and repeat that; while off on the side Gordo and Gus watch it all.

GORDO

Y'know, Gus, there's an old sayin that goes: Never refuse a combat assignment. Y'know, I was just thinking...there's a long line of those shit hot rocket aces around here, and these recruiters may just have something...

GUS

Hot Dawg, what the hell's 'astronaut' mean anyways?

GORDO

It means 'star-voyager'.

GUS

"Star Voyager Gus Grissom". I kinda like the sound of it.

CUT TO:

MOTEL ROOM. NIGHT.

(61)

THE TWO RECRUITERS looking pretty dejected.

SECOND RECRUITER

I don't know...I don't know who we're going to get to take on the Russians.

First Recruiter has been fiddling with the Philco. There, on tv, BILL DANA IS DOING HIS JOSE JIMENEZ RELUCTANT ASTRONAUT ROUTINE:

STRAIGHT MAN

...Tell me, is that what they call a crash helmet that you're wearing?

JOSE JIMENEZ

Oh, I hope not!

The audience is rolling in the aisles.

SECOND RECRUITER

Get that guy off! You see him everywhere. The whole country's already laughing at us.

First recruiter changes the station.

FIRST RECRUITER

This is the show I wanted you to see.

Music stops and they lean in to watch: "NAME THAT TUNE".
The M.C. is introducing the contestants:

M.C.

Back again for the sixth week in a row--that
wonderful child singer, Eddie Hodges...

SECOND RECRUITER

That kid ?

The audience applauds, First Recruiter shakes his head...wait.

M.C.

...and his partner, the winner of five distinguished
service flying crosses and holder of the cross country
coast-to-coast non-stop supersonic flight--from the
United States Marine Corps--John Glenn.

The audience doubles the applause.

FIRST RECRUITER

That guy.

M.C.

You've heard the tune, and now it's time to
NAME THAT TUNE !

JOHN GLENN

"Straighten Up and Fly Right", Nat King Cole.

The audience is going fucking wild. JOHN GLENN beams. He's
got a terrific smile and the sunniest face in ten counties.

FIRST RECRUITER

They love this guy !

TIGHT CLOSE UP ON GLENN. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT SMILE ?

SECOND RECRUITER

(smiling, moving in closer)

I gotta admit he's got a Certain Something. Who
else you got in mind ?

CUT TO: EXT AIRCRAFT CARRIER

(62)

A BLINDING STORM ON THE HIGH SEAS --ABOARD AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER.
(Hopefully piecing together doc. ftg. with our actors). The
TWO RECRUITERS, dressed in slickers, are on the windswept deck.
They are nearly vomiting with each word spoken as they SHOUT
against the howling wind:

SECOND RECRUITER

Tell the Ne...Navy I believe them. I kn...ow they
got good pilots...

FIRST RECRUITER

Aviators!

SECOND RECRUITER

What? I said that.

FIRST RECRUITER

You said pilots. The Navy calls them aviators.
They say they're better than pilots. Here he comes!

Now landing on this grim, gray slab, glistening with rain and pools of hydraulic fluid is an extraordinary feat. The aircraft carrier ROLLS. It HEAVES. It PITCHES. And the wind shrieks and howls. And FROM THE AIR, THE POV OF THE PILOT, it looks like a skillet, a frying pan...

SHOT OF THE PILOT. Why do some eyes blink much less than others?

VOICE FROM SHIP CONTROL

Okay, Shepard, time to hit the deck.

PILOT (SHEPARD)

Ho-kay, Jose, I'm on my way.

The LANDING IS INCREDIBLE because the plane doesn't slow down -- it just comes roaring in at this pitching brick on the high seas...

REACTION SHOT. THE RECRUITERS screaming: Look out!

and with a horrible smash! It hits the skillet, and with a blur of momentum as big as a freight train's it hurtles toward the far end of the deck...roars as the pilot pushes the throttle up to full military power...grabs onto the wire...and...

A FEW MINUTES LATER a NAVAL OFFICER leans down toward the camera, and speaks looking down.

NAVAL OFFICER

Gentlemen, I'd like you to meet Alan Shepard.

Shepard's already got a drink in his hand. He's got a smile that tells you he's the Icy Commander.

And see the Two Recruiters on their hands and knees trying to pretend they are not vomiting into the wind. They rise, regain composure.

FIRST RECRUITER

We thought you were...you know...goners...

Shepard just keeps smiling, Smilin' Al.

FIRST RECRUITER

You panic?

SHEPARD

Oh no, Senor, I am afraid to panic.

Recruiters look at Officer -- who is this guy? Officer shrugs.

NAVAL OFFICER

He thinks he's Jose Jiminez.

Recruiters look at each other -- another fighter-jock nut case? Let's try to discourage him:

SECOND RECRUITER

Well, you've heard about our project. It's got the highest national priority. It's a hazardous undertaking. In fact it is extremely hazardous, if you get my meaning.

FIRST RECRUITER

...So hazardous in fact that if you don't volunteer it won't be held against you...

Shepard's got that strange, wild smile. Now he speaks with no accent, just the Icy Voice you'd expect from an Icy Commander.

SHEPARD

Sounds dangerous.

SECOND RECRUITER

It is. Very.

SHEPARD

Count me in.

AND CUT TO:

A GILÅ MONSTER in the parched landscape. IN BACKGROUND a Greyhound Bus pulls away leaving FOUR FIGURES standing, carrying suitcases. (63)

CARD: ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO February, 1959

GORDO'S v.o.

I don't get it, sendin us down here on a bus like this disguised as civilians. I don't get it.

INT. MEXICAN CAFE. DAY. (64)

As GORDO, GUS, DEKE, AND PRINCE enter wearing ill-fitting suits, banging suitcases, completely out of place in the dark and sleepy atmosphere of the cafe. They pile into a booth, trying to look inconspicuous to the Western types who check them out for a moment, then turn away.

GORDO

I mean how come we gotta wear disguises like this? (Gus elbows him in the ribs). Hey, cut it out, Gus! What the hell?

GUS

(under his breath, looking around suspiciously)
Hot Dawg, this entire operation is all supposed to be hush-hush. We got top secret orders sayin we are supposed to blend in with patients in the clinic down here, now shut the fuck up, will ya?

GORDO

I still don't get it.

GUS

Might be Russians in here.

TWO INDIANS at the counter stare at them suspiciously.

IN THE ADJOINING BOOTH TWO GUYS barely flit an eye at them. They wear hats like Bogart wore in Sierra Madre and have a faintly "Mexican" look.

DEKE

Y'know, this competition is gonna be tough. I hear they got some fifty-some odd guys tryin out for just seven spots. And after they choose the four of us, there's only gonna be three openins left.

One of the Guys at the next booth reaches over and takes a bottle of jalapeno peppers from their table. We recognize ALAN SHEPARD.

SHEPARD

Heckskewse me, Senor.

Deke doesn't like the guy just reaching over like that. He's about to say something when Prince calms him down--keep the disguise going. (The "Other Mexican" who keeps glancing ferociously at them will later become known to us as WALLY SCHIRRA).

PRINCE

Wonder where we go from here?

SHEPARD

Hew go right across the street, Senor.

--Deke finds himself nose to nose with this Mexican guy who smiles right into his face.

SHEPARD

(as Jose Jimenez)

Hew are hairplane pilots from the Hair Force, no?

Deke and the others look around nervously. This place might be a Russian hell hole. The Two Indians don't look very friendly. Shepard is busy mixing an odd concoction in a dixie cup as he talks to them.

DEKE

What makes you say that?

SHEPARD

I see many such hairplane pilots come today--They all wear the Robert Hall suits and those big hwrist-watches. They all go across the street there to the Lovelace. They all go in looking the same, like you. And they all come out looking different.

SHOT: THROUGH THE WINDOW. LOVELACE CLINIC LOOKS OMINOUS. And just then a TOUGH LOOKING COWBOY TYPE stares in the window at them. Shepard just pours a little pepsi into the awful looking brew he's mixing in his Dixie cup.

PRINCE

In what way?

SHEPARD

When they come out, they look scared.

GORDO

Scared? What the hell goes on over there?

CUT TO: INT LOVELACE CLINIC

DOORS CLANG SHUT BEHIND THEM. They turn, startled. They are in a line of guys in Robert Hall suits. (65)

INT. LOVELACE CLINIC. DAY. A DIXIE CUP is being placed on the counter.

SHEPARD

(normal voice)

You want the specimens right here, nurse?

NURSE

Yes, Mr. Shepard, thank you.

(to others) These dixie cups are for stool specimens.

As Shepard passes the Four Rookies, he barely acknowledges them in his Icy Commander tone of voice:

SHEPARD

Gentlemen. Hope everything comes out all right.

Gordo smiles; then wilts as he notices STRANGE PEOPLE watching him. Who are these people with clipboards and reflectors strapped to their heads, wearing white SMOCKS?

CUT TO: INT EYE EXAM ROOM

(66)

GORDO'S HEAD in a strap, some sort of instrument clamped over his eyes -- and a HOSE stuck in his ear. Someone in a smock turns on the cold water. GORDO'S EYEBALLS flutter madly.

BLURRED SHOT. A GROUP OF SMOCKS WATCHING EVERY FLUTTER.

CUT TO: INT HAND REFLEX ROOM

(67)

GUS looking up, and he's sweating. He's trying not to look scared.

SOME SMOCK PEOPLE WITH REFLECTOR HEADS stare down at him. One of them holds an UGLY LOOKING NEEDLE -- a monster needle -- and he lowers it slowly and drives it into the big muscle at the base of Gus' thumb.

GUS

Hannnnh?

Gus looks up as if to say "What the hell's going on?" But they aren't even looking at him. They are looking at --

THE METER. A wire from the needle leads to what looks like a doorbell. They push the buzzer.

Gus looks down at his hand. It is balling up into a fist and springing open and balling up into a fist and springing open and balling up into a fist and springing open at an absolutely furious rate, faster than he could have ever made it do on his own.

GUS

Why...are...you...
doing...this?

REFLECTOR HEAD

I'm afraid there's no simple way to explain it to you...There's nothing to worry about. Nothing.

Suddenly the hand stops balling up. Gus looks down at it. It looks dead.

ANOTHER REFLECTOR HEAD

Thank you number Twenty-one. Number Twenty-two please.

And Gus is helped up as Deke comes in to take his place.

CUT TO: INT MOTOR EXAM ROOM

(68)

PRINCE'S FACE IS FULLSCREEN. HE'S STARING RIGHT INTO THE CAMERA.

PRINCE

I'd just like to know what this all has to do with flying.

FOCUS CHANGES so we can see a Reflector head standing over Prince, putting a rubber sleeve on a finger and jabbing it up the kazoo. Prince leaps up in pain and has to be restrained by a HUGE ORDERLY (GONZALES).

PRINCE
Sadistic little pervert!

Gonzales has him so that he can't move. The doctor looks at him blankly, as if he's a vet and Prince is a barking dog. OTHER SMOCKS are suddenly there, just staring and scribbling on clipboards.

OMIT (69)
CUT TO: INT ANOTHER EXAM ROOM

70

GORDO AND GUS IN A ROW OF TEN GUYS SITTING AT A TABLE, GLENN AND CARPENTER are there. In front of each guy there's a tube leading to an instrument with a column of mercury. A BRACE OF SMOCKS stands watching with clipboards as the OLD GENERAL SCHWICHTENBERG speaks to the men:

GENERAL
I'm General Schwichtenberg. This is probably the only time we'll actually meet. I just want to welcome you all here, wish you all luck. You may proceed.

They insert the tubes in their mouths and as the red light goes on they begin to blow into the tubes. The mercury rises in each tube to the red line.

GENERAL
The record is ninety-one seconds.

COMPRESS TIME BY CUTS OF: Smocks watching, clock ticking, General watching, eyes popping, cheeks bursting, sweat trickling.

And the contestants begin to drop out, gasping for air.

MOVE IN TIGHT ON GORDO. He's still going. His bulging eyes glance over at the clock. Ninety, ninety-one, ninety-two, ninety-three...And Gordo jumps up like he's the new world's middleweight champ.

Then he notices two guys are still sitting with the tubes in their mouths, the mercury up at the red line, and the clock still ticking. Glenn and Carpenter don't even seem to be pushing yet.

At 150 seconds Glenn gives up. And at 170 Carpenter finally gasps. Glenn reaches over and shakes his hand.

GLENN
Terrific, Scott. Darned good, darned good.

(70) CONT

CARPENTER

You were probably just getting warmed up, John.
Next time I doubt I'd be the one to win.

Off to the side Gordo and Gus can't believe this.

GUS

Who in hell are these fuckin assholes?

CUT TO: INT MILKSHAKE

THE HUMAN MILKSHAKE. We can see ALAN SHEPARD inside looking like a banana in a blender, vibrated up and down and bombarded with high energy sound. (71)

Among the Smocks watching we now focus on DR. GLADYS J. LORING -- from the nametag on her smock -- the only clue to her gender-- as she coldly lays out tests to men watching, Gordo and Glenn among them. (NOTE: Must have other women Smocks.)

DR. LORING

You can see there are a series of numbered dots. Please take a pencil and connect the dots so that the numbers add up to thirty-five. When you get out of the machine, we will again ask you to do the same test so that we may determine if the physical experience has impaired your ability to calculate.

The Milkshake Machine stops, the door pops open, and Shepard flops out onto the floor. A HAND reaches down and lifts him up. Shepard finds himself staring into the smiling face of John Glenn.

GLENN

Hi. I'm John Glenn.

Shepard is woozy, nauseous, and his mean-streak is showing:

SHEPARD

Fuck off, pal.

Glenn just smiles back. He may talk like a Boy Scout, but smiling, he can sure look tough. Glenn climbs into the Milkshake Machine.

Shepard sits down next to Gordo, his hands shaking, trying to do the numbers-connecting test.

GORDO LOOKS AT THE SMOCKS. They are scribbling away, taking note of Shepard's breach of cool. ESPECIALLY TIGHT SHOT ON DR. GLADYS LORING... She's watching SHEPARD'S EVERY MOVE. Shepard musters up a smile for her.

CUT TO: EXT/INT COOPER HOTEL ROOM (72)

GLENN AND CARPENTER JOGGING--OUTSIDE HOTEL.

GORDO'S VOICE OVER

This Navy guy Shepard started strong, but he's had it. He screwed the pooch today when he got mad at that Glenn. I don't blame him. Who the hell does Glenn think he is?...

PULL BACK INTO THE MOTEL ROOM. Gordo is continuing his analysis with his pals.

GORDO

...The whole thing is figuring out what the drill is. These Smocks are watching every gesture, every tic, every twitch, smile, stare, frown, every time you rub your nose...

GUS

I hate that.

GORDO

Just listen, Gus. What I'm saying is this whole thing here calls for a little second-convolution thinking...Deke,

INT DR. LORING'S OFFICE
CUT TO: DEKE IN FRONT OF GLADYS LORING.

73

GORDO'S VOICE

...When Dr. Gladys Loring asks you about the hazards of the assignment...

DR. LORING

...how you feel about facing the unknown, how you feel about the potentially high risk of this operation.

GORDO'S VOICE

...What do you say?

DEKE

'Oh, I rather enjoy the risks. I enjoy hanging my hide out over the edge, day in and day out, because that is what a fighter jock like me does.'

Gladys Loring is scribbling like mad.

GORDO'S VOICE OVER

You can't say that! They'll stamp you as reckless. They'll say you have got the death wish. What you say is second convolution - it goes something like this:

DEKE is saying it all over again, as if he never said it at all:

DEKE

Oh I don't regard this as a particularly high risk proposition, certainly not compared to some of the test work I've been doing for the Air Force. Since this project has a high national priority, I'm

DEKE (cont.)

sure the safety precautions will be far more thorough than when I had the F-100 in the test stage. (He smiles slightly and rolls his eyes heavenward -- a "halo effect.")

CUT TO BACK IN MOTEL ROOM.

(74)

GORDO

That's it, Deke! Beautiful stuff! That shows 'em that you're a rational test pilot, as concerned about safety as any sensible professional. Create the Halo Effect. Sell 'em the saint.

PRINCE

But it's bullshit! This Mercury Project is spam in a can, we all know that. It's gonna be dangerous as hell! Maybe that is why we're here.

GUS

You mean we gotta fuckin' lie to prove we are rational?

GORDO

Prudent lying, Gus. And figuring out the drill.

THE IDIOT BOX. It's like a trainer in which you respond to different signals by pressing buttons or throwing switches. Lights keep coming on. IF POSSIBLE -- Glenn and Shepard are side by side -- competing. And the pace is...furious. SMOCKS are watching every move. Rookies watch from outside glass partition. (75)

GORDO

What do you think the drill is here?

GUS

Testing reaction times.

GORDO

Gus, think "second convolution". They're also looking for perseverance. Ability to cope with frustration.

DEKE

Neither of these two guys is cracking.

GORDO

Strange. Figured they would.

GUS

And that guy Glenn, you know what he's doing?

Gordo

What?

Gordo blinks; then the old smile returns, and the fighter-jock gleam reappears.

GORDO

Sure. I'll do it if...you'll help me along if I get stuck.

NO RESPONSE FROM DR. LORING. Those eyes could shrivel marble.

INT. BATHROOM

(18)

One stall is occupied; Gordo goes into the second one and closes the door. Now we see two sets of feet with the pants bunched. And we become conscious of something we've been hearing since Gordo entered--A HUMMING SOUND. SOMEONE IS HUMMING FROM THE NEXT STALL - "MR. SANDMAN".

GORDO

Hey, knock it off!

The humming changes--the Marine Hymn--"From the Halls of Mon-te-zu-e-ma..."

GORDO

Okay, Glenn! I know it's you! Now knock it off! I'm tryin to concentrate in here.

LATER. CORRIDOR.

(18A)

Gordo leaves Dr. Loring's office, meets Gus. It's after hours, the corridor is lit in spots.

GUS

How you doin, Hot Dawg?

GORDO

I feel drained. I have tried to help her, but it's impossible. Let's face it, Gus, some women just have a problem with men....

Along the corridor, Glenn and Carpenter are using the pay phone. Shepard nods to them as he enters a room.

CUT TO: LATER. CORRIDOR.

(19)

DR. GLADYS LORING is leaving her office. MOVE WITH HER in her pale smock. She passes the pay phone. CARPENTER is now talking to his wife, Glenn waiting, smiling as she goes by...

INT HUMAN MILKSHAKE ROOM

DR. LORING enters a room. It's very dimly lit. A dull light highlights the object in the center of the room. We recognize THE HUMAN MILKSHAKE MACHINE. Dr. Loring stands in front of the machine; then strangely, she puts down her clipboard.

(20)

And she unbuttons her pale smock. And when it falls to the ground, we see she's wearing something in the way of a garter belt that we were not led to expect. Nor were we led to expect the glow that seems to emanate from her wonderful pale smockless body as she...FLIPS A SWITCH...and the MILKSHAKE MACHINE BEGINS A SLOW AND STEADY MILKSHAKING MOTION..and she opens the hatch... and climbs inside.

INT RADIOLOGY ROOM

CAMERA HAS BEEN MOVING EVER SO CURIOUSLY AROUND TO WHERE THE WINDOW ON THE HATCH REVEALS...TWO LARGE YELLOW ARGYLL SOCKS PRESSED FIRMLY UP AGAINST THE WINDOW. AND WE CUT QUICKLY TO:

A LONG, FLAMINGO-PINK TUBE into which a milky substance is being pumped. PAN DOWN to find Shepard in a contorted position, discretely receiving an enema. And--what do you know?--he's wearing YELLOW ARGYLLS.

SHEPARD

What's that?

SMOCK

Barium.

Shepard looks like the barium is sloshing behind his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

Finishing the radiologist's examination -- RADIOLOGIST just gives him the end of his tube to hold.

RADIOLOGIST

When you release the clamp, the balloon inside you deflates.

SHEPARD

Deflates? Where's the john?

RADIOLOGIST

It's two floors up. Gonzales will take you there. Wait here with him.

GONZALES, the huge orderly, wears red cowboy boots and smiles down at Shepard. SHEPARD IS HUNCHED OVER LIKE A CRAB, his face red, about to explode.

SHEPARD

Let's go, Gonzales! Andiamo!...Forward!... To the john!!! Please...Por favor!

GONZALES

We must wait.

Then another DOOR OPENS and there's PRINCE! HE'S BUNCHED OVER LIKE A CRAB! And he's holding the end of his tube, about to burst. They look at each other, tears about to flow.

SHEPARD

Gonzales...in the name of humanity...man...please...
take us to...the toi...toi...

INT

MAIN CORRIDOR OF HOSPITAL. Doors are thrown open and Gonzales (82) strides down the center of the corridor with a hunched over crab on either side. Both are wearing a standard bed patient's tunic, the angel robes, open at the back, tail flapping in the breeze with the tube coming out of it.

It's the public corridor -- filled with MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN, NURSES, NUNS, DELINQUENTS, THE LOT. And they scuttle quickly like two Grouchos after the red cowboy boots.

THE ELEVATOR. Prince is punching the button furiously. Other people are waiting. Then, SHEPARD NOTICES:

SMOCK PEOPLE, Reflector Heads, Orderlies with clipboards who are pretending not to be watching them, but they are!

INT ELEVATOR

They are inside the crowded elevator, and Shepard notices they (83) are still being watched. Prince has turned green. There is the distinct possibility that he will let go right there in the elevator.

GONZALES

You know, Mr. Shepard, I don' wanna say nothin',
but I an' my frens don' exactly like those
Mexican imitations you do.

Everyone in the elevator looks like Gonzales' friends.

SHEPARD

(feigning calm, turning green)
You'rerightyou'rerightyou're...unggh..
absolutely right.

INT 3RD FLOOR CORRIDOR

The door opens and Prince is out, doing a crazy tango quickly (84) down another crowded hallway to the john.

But Shepard, somehow, manages to straighten up and walk with a certain dignity, tail in hand, like the Cowardly Lion, strolling with Gonzales, talking out of the side of his mouth.

SHEPARD

Tell me something, Mr. Gonzales, ever have any...
"explosions" doing this?

GONZALES

All the time. It's a mess, man.

SHEPARD

Tell me something else, Mr. Gonzales.
How'm I doin?

GONZALES

(confidentially)

I think you gonna make it, man.

I think you gonna be a astronaut.

Shepard glances back -- sees SMOCKS pretending not to watch him -- and bolts into the john.

CUT TO: INT CORRIDOR + GENERAL'S OFFICE

(85)

PRINCE running down a corridor, past a secretary and right into the office of General Schwichtenberg.

SECRETARY

Hey, you can't go in there!

The General is taken by surprise as Prince waves the great flaccid flamingo-pink enema bag and hose like some sort of obese whip. He slams it down on the General's desk.

PRINCE

General Schwichtenberg, you're looking at a man who has had his last enema. I am a pilot, sir. If you want enemas from me from now on you can come and get 'em yourself. Either things shape up here or I ship out.

The General looks at him with the same dispassionate attitude the Smocks had. Prince turns and storms out.

The General picks up a stamp, wets it on the pad, and stamps Prince's file:

SHOT: "Not Suitable for Long Duration Flight". Next to the file the enema bag lays wheezing and heaving. AND NOW THAT SOUND GROWS LOUDER AND IS BLENDED WITH A CACOPHONY OF OTHER SOUNDS AS WE CUT TO:

INT PRESS CONF ROOM

THE RAVENOUS ANIMAL - The Press. And THE SOUND is coming from THEM - bubble, bubble, toil and trouble, steam and scream in the most excited way. Some climb ladders under huge lights.

(86)

THE SEVEN ASTRONAUTS BEGIN TO WALK ONSTAGE AND A SHEET OF LIGHT HITS THEM, BLINDING THEM. A NASA MAN leads them to a long table, and in the middle of the table is a model of the Mercury Capsule atop the Atlas rocket.

NASA MAN

Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention, please. In about sixty seconds we will give you the announcement you have all been waiting for: the names of the seven volunteers who will become the Mercury astronaut team. Following the distribution of the kit those of you who have p.m. deadline problems better dash for your phones.

Kits are being grabbed and reporters are bolting from the room.
THE PRESS IS SWARMING IN ON THEM. Bulbs are flashing.

GUS

Holy shit!

GORDO (aside to Gus)

Easy, Gus! Smile, man, smile! We're heroes--

GUS

But we ain't done anything yet.

"Ravenous they were! -- these swarming photographers who could grunt but not speak, who crawled all over them". The other guys are equally terrified.

NASA MAN

Ladies and gentlemen, today we are introducing to you and to the world these seven men who have been selected to begin training for orbital space flight. These men are here after a long and unprecedented series of evaluations which told our medical consultants and scientists of their superb adaptability to their upcoming flight...

And the crowd noise is growing and growing...

NASA MAN

It is my pleasure to introduce to you--and I consider it a very real honor, seven Americans. Gentlemen -- Malcom S. Carpenter, Leroy G. Cooper, John H. Glenn, Jr., Virgil I. Grissom, Walter M. Schirra, Jr., Alan B. Shepard, Jr., and Donald K. Slayton -- AMERICA'S Mercury Astronauts!

Applause of the most fervent sort, amazing applause. Reporters rise to their feet, photographers straighten out of their beggars' crouches, smiles of weepy and grateful sympathy wash across their faces.

IN THE AUDIENCE, THE TWO RECRUITERS. THEY NOD AT - THE AIR FORCE LIASON MAN AND TWO AIR FORCE HIGH RANKERS. As the audience settles into seats:

NOW A SERIES OF DISSOLVES: REPORTERS RAISE HANDS. ASK QUESTIONS, AND VARIOUS ASTRONAUTS ANSWER.

FIRST REPORTER

I'd like to know from each of you whether your wife and children had anything to say about this?

DEKE

(awkward, hates this stuff)

Ah... Mine think it's ...fine.

SCHIRRA

Ah...they...they're all for it...

Light smiles, light applause, light interest, until:

GLENN

You know, I don't think any of us could really go on with something like this if we didn't have pretty good backing at home, really. My wife's attitude toward this has been the same as it has been all along through my flying. If it is what I want to do, she is behind it, and the kids are, too, a hunnert per cent.

And during this, Gordo has leaned over to Gus and whispered:

GORDO

I don't believe this.

GUS

But look at them out there. They're fuckin eatin it up.

And it's true. The Press is beaming ear to ear.

DISSOLVE TO: GLENN, AND HE'S ON ANOTHER TIRADE.

GLENN

...And I was brought up believing that you are placed on earth here more or less with sort of a fifty-fifty proposition, and this is what I still believe. We are placed here with certain talents and capabilities...

And all the other guys are cutting glances from either end of the table up at this Flying Churchman who sits in the middle near the model of the capsule. On the other side of the table Shepard rolls his eyes skyward.

GLENN (cont'd)

...It is up to each of us to use those talents and capabilities as best you can. If you do that, I think there is a power greater than any of us that will place the opportunities in our way...

IN THE AUDIENCE A WOMAN breaks out in SOBS.

GLENN (cont'd)

...and if we use our talents properly, we will be living the kind of life we should live...

DISSOLVE TO: MORE PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE ARE CRYING. MANY ARE NODDING. AND MORE AND MORE ARE CHEERING. AND GLENN IS TALKING ON AND ON:

GLENN

And when I think of Orville and Wilbur Wright standing on a hill at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, tossing a coin to see which one would take the first airplane flight, and I think of us here today...

AND RIGHT ABOUT THEN, JUST AS GLENN'S RAMBLING ON, Gordo mumbles to Gus:

GORDO

Gus, time for some prudent lying. (And then aloud): You know, I'd like to second some things that Mr. Glenn has said here today. I think we are very fortunate that we have, should we say, been blessed with the talents that have been picked for something like this...

LIASON MAN smiles, nods. And the audience applauds. Now the other guys are catching on.

GORDO

I think we would be most remiss in our duty if we didn't make the fullest use of our talents in volunteering for something that is as important as this is to our country and to the world in general right now...

And the Hallelujah Chorus can begin right about here, faintly at first:

DEKE

(almost to himself)

...The Halo Effect. So this is it!

GORDO

This can mean an awful lot to this country, of course. Don't you agree...Deke?

DEKE

(catching the ball, rolling his eyes heavenward as he does some 'second convolution' thinking)
I agree absolutely with Gordo, and I don't feel that we are saying anything new here. I think we are just saying all the old things that need to be said with fierce conviction.

DISSOLVE TO:

The assembled press smiling and nodding. CLOSE SHOT on pad on which reporter is writing: "Duty", "Faith", and "Country". And Shepard is just finishing, and we look down the line of Astronauts and they are bathed in a golden haze.

SHEPARD

...And as far as church goes, I attend it regularly...

Applause. And the Hallelujah Chorus plays.

DISSOLVE TO:

2ND REPORTER

Who will be the first to go into space?

The guys all flash competitive smiles. Each wants to leap up as if in answer to 'will the real spaceman please stand up'.

NASA MAN

Whoever performs best in the upcoming tests. The best will be first!

TREMENDOUS OVATION.

The Liason Man leans over to the Air Force guy next to him:

LIASON MAN

Yeager should see this. Seven rookies being installed as the hottest numbers in flying -- and they haven't done a goddamn thing yet but turn up at a press conference.

DISSOLVE TO:

Reporter asking the last question.

3RD REPORTER

Could I ask for a show of hands of how many are confident that they will come back from outer space?

And all the brave lads raise their hands. And the audience goes wild, cheering, laughing, blowing teary noses.

GORDO

Share it, brother!

GUS

(waving hand in air)

Fuckin A!

And the camera arrives on John Glenn -- who has BOTH HANDS UP IN THE AIR.

CUT TO: INT PHOTO SESSION ROOM

87

THE SEVEN GUYS in a wreath formation, staring right into the camera and smiling. The pop, sizzle, and FLASH of a camera. The Hallelujah Chorus continues: Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

AND SEVEN WOMEN -- THE WIVES -- now in the wreath formation. Smile right into the camera. FLASH. Hallelujah.

INT
 AND IN THE RETOUCH ROOM OF LIFE. The picture of the wives is being retouched by artists and airbrushes: (88)

A hickie is removed: Hallelujah.
 A crack in lipstick smoothed: Hallelujah.
 A furze of mustache zipped away: Hallelujah.
 A forehead pimple blotted out: Hal-le-lu-jah.

AND THE MUSIC ENDS ABRUPTLY.

INT LUCE OFFICE (89)

ALL SEVEN ASTRONAUTS AND THEIR WIVES SIT IN A HUGE OFFICE. They seem like they are in an audience, just sitting quietly, staring forward.

AND NOW MEET HENRY LUCE. He's behind his huge desk, in shadows (something like the special lighting we have given the Press), and he's attended to by various secretaries and underlings. Framed Life Magazine covers hang on the walls. The man near him (who is DE ORSEY, agent of Astronauts) leans in at Luce's summoning. Luce speaks loudly enough to be heard by all.

LUCE

What do they make, seven, eight thousand dollars a year?

DE ORSEY

Tops.

LUCE

With this one deal, I'll be giving them \$500,000 split seven ways over three years. How does that sound?

The Magnificent Seven Brothers and their Seven Brides beam from ear to ear.

LUCE

Now I want them all to meet my people who will write their True Stories. Naturally these stories will appear in Life under their own by-lines, for example, "by (he searches for one of their names) ...Betty Grissom or by Virgil Grissom"...

GUS

Gus.

You don't interrupt Luce when he's holding court.

LUCE

What's that?

GUS

Gus. Nobody calls me by...that other name.

Luce is not used to looking at a gruff face in his office. In this office all is Seemly, all has the Proper Tone, all has Good Feeling. Luce looks at Gus like he's about to feature the name "Virgil" on the next cover of Life.

LUCE

Gus??? An Astronaut named 'Gus'? What's your middle name?

GUS

Ivan.

LUCE

Ivan? Hmmm. Maybe Gus isn't too bad. Might be something there. All right, all right, you can be Gus.

Gus scowls, Luce nods, the meeting ends. Reporters begin to POP PICTURES.

INT CORRIDOR AT 'LIFE'
LEAVING LUCE'S OFFICE. INTO CORRIDOR.

(90)

Trudy coming out next to ANNIE GLENN.

TRUDY

I bet for all that money they could call you Virgil, couldn't they? They sure could me.

ANNIE GLENN just smiles and there's an awkward beat as Trudy waits for contact to be made. Then Glenn comes by and takes her arm as they walk down the hall.

TRUDY

What's with her? She seems snobby. I don't get it.

GORDO

I get it. She's Mrs. Klean Marine.

BULBS POP all over them, dappling them with light, and CUT TO:

INT LUCE'S OFFICE
BACK IN LUCE'S OFFICE. PICTURE OF ANNIE GLENN IN LUCE'S HANDS.

(91)

LUCE

...What's this?

1ST REPORTER

Well, the poop on her is that she's protecting something...A ferocious...jackhammer...stutter... the kind where she gets hung up on almost every syllable... and

Luce's brow darkens. The Reporter wants to run for cover.

LUCE

I don't care what she's got! We're in a war here, a battle for the heavens, and there'll be no stutterer on the homefront in my magazine. In a matter of such national importance we will see to it that the Proper Emotion and Fitting Moral Tone prevails. -- And what are these?

OTHER PHOTOS: THE RUSSIAN SPACE PROGRAM, A CHIMPANZEE, AND A SHOT OF YEAGER AND CROSSFIELD.

ANOTHER REPORTER (2nd)

These are the contestants in the race for space. Question is, who will get up there first.

LUCE

I think you're missing something here-- we have the exclusive stories on the astronauts. We are backing the astronauts. They will be the first ones into space and I don't think we should have any questions on that score. These are the greatest pilots in America....

He tosses down the YEAGER PHOTO, and picks up one of the astronauts.

LUCE (cont'd)

...We will read their backgrounds and see only wholesome circumstances: small towns, Protestant values, strong families, the simple life....

FAMILY SHOTS. Gordo playing with his kids, etc. Movietone music begins to build as Luce pursues his vision:

LUCE (cont'd)

These are our Davids, up against the Russian Goliath, matched in single combat in a deadly duel in the heavens. And soon these Davids will embark on THE GREATEST ADVENTURE MAN HAS EVER DARED TO MAKE....

CUT TO: MONTAGE / TESTS

(92)

MONTAGE OF TESTS WITH THE GUYS GRUNTING, PUFFING, WHEEZING, CHORTLING as they jog, shake, steam in the devices they were subjected to (Note: Most of these tests are no longer in use and were later found to be of no real value. In retrospect they seem--and we might take some liberties in creating them if they cannot be found--like torture devices from some past era).

THE PROCEDURES TRAINER.

(93)

Constant flashing red warning lights. A voice SCREAMS;

MAYDAY VOICE

Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Abort! Abort!

Gus is trying to maintain an even strain inside this madhouse.

GUS GOES GREEN. And we view him THROUGH SMALL OBSERVATION WINDOW WHICH IS TINTED GREEN. In the corridor, observing him, a GROUP OF SMOCKS, FOLLOWED BY THE LIFE PRESS SWARM:

A SCIENTIST

I think it is safe to say no group of men in history will ever have undergone such a rigorous physical preparedness. In addition, this series of tests is designed to de-condition, de-sensitise, and adapt out fears....

THE SCIENTIST LEADS THE PROCESSION. THE CORRIDOR IS LINED WITH DOORS WITH GREEN OBSERVATION WINDOWS.

A SCIENTIST (cont'd)

A graded series of exposures to anxiety arousing stimuli....

AN INCREDIBLE RATTLING SOUND. SHEPARD is inside an ALFA TRAINER in the green light.

A SCIENTIST (cont'd)

...Of course, as a Scientist, I can assure you that biomedical research is the sole purpose of the ride they will take.

As they pass the green tinted windows they can observe THE WILD MASTIFF (STOCK FTG: REASON FOR TINT IS PROCESS SCREEN). From other windows figures whirl by, Schirrah is seen UPSIDE DOWN and shaking on a table. CARPENTER jogs like a rat on a treadmill at double speed.

AND THE SOUNDS from other doors: Banging, whirring, chopping like carrots being diced.

PSYCHOLOGIST SMOCK

What is required here is a man whose main talent is for doing nothing under stress. Therefore we must remove some of his...pilot's highly competitive qualities, quell the desire to excel, drain any obsession they have with control.

3RD REPORTER

Sounds like you would be happy with an experienced zombie.

SMOCK

(German accent)

You laugh, but do you realize we have created a capsule that is a fully automated vehicle in which the astronaut does not need to turn a hand?

They walk past a doorway. As they pass GORDO, DEKE AND SCHIRRA emerge, sweating, looking brutalized from some WEIRD TESTING APPARATUS. Photographers begin taking pictures.

SMOCK (GERMAN ACCENT)
(fading down corridor)

...the astronaut has been added to the system as a redundant component....

PSYCHOLOGIST

...Yes, mainly to see how a human being responds to the stress of flight.

SMOCK (GERMAN ACCENT)

In fact, since all we need is the data, the astronaut may be put to sleep during the ride.

As they round a corner,

GORDO

Sleep? Bull-sheerit. This is one pilot who is not going to be sleeping during his ride.

But they look too exhausted to fight back. Things are not going well as we:

CUT TO: EXT PANCHO'S DAY

(94)

FIRE. RESCUE TRUCK POURING WATER INTO BLACK SMOKE. THROUGH THE FLAMES WE SEE YEAGER WILD-EYED, ON HORSEBACK. The horse rears up; Yeager fights him down. Glennis is nearby on another horse, leading horses from the flames.

PANCHO'S IS BURNING DOWN. PICTURES OF THE PILOTS ON THE WALL CHAR AND SHRIVEL. OTHERWORLDLY MOANS mixed with FIREFIGHTING SOUNDS.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT PANCHO'S

AFTER THE FIRE (You can still see the remains of Pancho's, recently made an Historical Site). Some onlookers; GIRLS exhausted from the battle climb into cars and begin to drive away; horses are being led away. Pancho is picking up the remains of pictures:

(95)

PANCHO

This's one of me 'n Amelia Erhart right after I broke her speed record. I could always understand speed...You just went faster...But once they started with space....Hell, the space race around here means they start takin up every bit of space they can get their hands on. The Air Force wants us off this land so they can build a new runway on this space. I think the damn peckerwoods accidentally-on-purpose napalmed us.

YEAGER

I kinda doubt it, Pancho.

PANCHO

Yeager, they tried to call this place a whorehouse. It wasn't a whorehouse, was it?

YEAGER

People who was never here, Pancho, they mighta called it that. But not those of us who was here.

PANCHO

What the girls did after hours was their own business.

YEAGER

Pancho, what they did after hours was their business.

Pancho begins to chuckle. Yeager lets out his strange, knowing laugh. Pancho climbs into a car. There's a GUY sitting next to her who we've seen in all the bar scenes, just sitting there-- A HAYSEED (see photos).

GLENNIS

Where you goin Pancho?

PANCHO

Goin to visit some Yaqui Indian friends of mine down in Mexico. Me and Fred here's gonna get married. He'll be my sixth.

FRED

Seventh.

PANCHO

Right. (She looks around at the ruins, blinks back a would-be tear). Well, got to maintain an even strain, I spose. Let's go, Fred, you miserable pudknocker.

FRED

Don't call me that.

Pancho looks up at Glennis and Yeager, and they all chuckle. As they chuckle, Yeager sees PRINCE standing there in the smoking ruins.

YEAGER

Hey, look. It's one of them astronauts. What're you doin back here, son?

PRINCE

Well...they said I wasn't suitable...for long-duration flight.

YEAGER

Flight? They call that flyin? There won't be any flyin' to do over there. Once they put you in that capsule, it's the last you got to say on the subject. Asides, I hear a monkey's gonna make the first flight, anyways.

PRINCE

A monkey? You're kidding.

YEAGER

I ain't kiddin. You don't want to fly anythin where you have to sweep the monkey crap off the seat before you sit down, do ye, son?

They all begin to chuckle, and Prince begins to feel better, catching the post-disaster euphoria.

YEAGER

Hell, son, you was never an astronaut. Yer a pilot, ain't ya.

PRINCE

Yes, sir. I am.

YEAGER

Then join us. Pancho is about to tell us about how she useta fly guns down to them Mexican revolutionaries.

PANCHO

Another time, Yeager. Step on the gas, Fred, you miserable peckerwood--and no lip.

Fred steps on the gas, and they go driving off into the desert sunset.

INT CHIMP EXAM ROOM (MONTAGE/STOCK)

CUT TO: CARD: HOLLOMAN AIR FORCE BASE, NEW MEXICO. MAY 1960 (96)

APE SHRIEKS. THIS IS THE AIR FORCE CHIMPANZEE COLONY. A GROUP OF CHIMPS COMPETE AT THE IDIOT BOX. They're as fast as Glenn and Shepard.

OTHER CHIMPS are inside GONDOLAS OF CENTRIFUGES. Tapes are piping in the SOUND of a Redstone rocket launch. G-forces are building up.

Chimps whose feet are rigged with sensors are getting zapped through the soles of their feet for screwing up.

Chimps who are getting fed little pellets as rewards, little chimp crunchies.

There's even a chimp climbing into the backseat of a fighter plane and taking off.

In short, chimps are being given the full treatment of all our Astronauts are getting in the way of flight training.

INT CHIMP CENTRIFUGE ROOM
 AND ALL THIS IS BEING WATCHED (of course) BY SMOCKS. REFLECTOR HEADS. AND SOME OF VON BRAUN'S ASSISTANTS. (97)

A chimp leaps at a Smock and bites him in the ass.

Another Smock presses a button.

The chimp is outlined in a stunning blue light and goes limp.

VON BRAUN'S ASSISTANT

Good. We are right on schedule.

CLOSE SHOT ON CHIMP IN CENTRIFUGE. And the CHIMP IS WHIRLING.

LONG DISSOLVE INTO;

INT CENTRIFUGE ROOM (98)

JOHN GLENN in exactly the same position -- THIS SHOULD HAVE THE FEELING OF DR. JECKYLL EMERGING FROM MR. HYDE...Astronaut emerging from Ape...Glenn's face is flapping and contorted from the G-forces. The machine slows down.

AND WE NOTICE PHOTOGRAPHERS, bulbs flashing. THE REPORTER is there, too.

1ST REPORTER

How do you feel ?

GLENN

A hunnert percent. A-okay.

Reporters smile and write that down. From a faltering moment, we know Glenn has just been through a wringer. But he pulls it together for the Press as the Other Astronauts look on.

2ND REPORTER

You think you're going to be the first one into space ?

GLENN

Well, we're sure as heck going to give it all we've got.

CUT TO:

EXT COCOA BEACH

TRACKING REAR VIEW -- TWO GUYS JOGGING steadily on the endless beach. (99)

CARD: COCOA BEACH. CAPE CANAVERAL. DATE:

And as they jog people watch them, cheering them on: NUBILES, LOCAL OLDSTERS, TOOTHLESS FLORIDIANS, ETC. Music has a steady, pounding beat...the time is getting close at hand.

As they pass, WE HOLD ON SOME HOT CARS with hoods up, right there on the hardtack beach. The Other Five Astronauts are there, dressed in Florida finery, surrounded by pretty girls. A Car Dealer is slipping a jacket onto one of them that says: Chevrolet (Dealer's name).

CAR DEALER

Gets a little chilly here at night. Just figger folks'll want to rat race in what the astronauts rat-race in.

Gordo pokes Shepard as they watch the joggers getting in shape.

BACK TO GLENN AND CARPENTER, jogging steadily. Behind them O.S. we can HEAR REVVING SOUNDS.

MOVE TO REVEAL -- A rat-race is beginning behind them, a wild, screeching proficiency run. Three cars are bearing down on them, music coming louder and louder. It looks like they are going to run right over the joggers. Cars whip by on either side, throw sand in their faces.

Carpenter looks perturbed, but Glenn is unfazed. They keep jogging.

Glenn notices one of the cars has backed up and is now moving slowly alongside him, keeping pace. He keeps running, trying not to notice this tracking car. He glances out the corner of his eye and SEES: Two long, lovely legs propped up on the dashboard.

GIRL IN CAR

Hi. You're John Glenn aren't you ?

GLENN
(huffing)

Th...that's right.

GIRL

Need a lift ?

GLENN

No, thanks.

MAN'S VOICE

Gettin in shape, John ?

And we notice next to the girl, driving the car, a guy with YELLOW ARGYLLS. We don't see the face, but we recognize the Voice. Glenn nods.

VOICE

That's good, John. Fine work. Got to get in shape so's we can show those Russians. Good goin', John. And good luck to ya. Remember John, you got to try to keep it up around here. You too, Scott.

The girl giggles, and the car digs in and peels away. Sand hits the joggers, but they keep on, steadily onward.

CUT TO: INT COCOA BEACH BAR

ALAN SHEPARD. He's crying. Tears are pouring down his cheeks.

SHEPARD

Oh, God. I can't take it. This guy kills me.

He's sitting at a bar. On the TV is Bill Dana doing his Jose Jimenez routine. After another line, Shepard whoops with laughter and more tears pour down his face.

SHEPARD

I theenk I gonna die from thees.

At the other end of the bar, Carpenter is with Shirra. Other guys sprinkled around the room. Some reporters in a dark clump drinking. And near the piano -- THE GERMANS, soused, are singing:

TWO BEAUTIFUL GIRLS enter the bar and stand in the shadows.

Carpenter feels a hand on his back, and hears Gordo's voice.

GORDO'S VOICE

Say, Scotty ole buddy. You know, if I remember right, the room they gave to me has got two twin beds in it, whereas the room they gave to you has got a nice double bed in it...and...

Carpenter tosses his keys up in the air as Gordo's hand grabs them...

The FIRST GIRL in the shadows smiles.

FIRST GIRL

Four down, three to go.

CUT TO: EXT/INT COCOA BEACH MOTEL SUITE

(101)

GORDO entering MOTEL SUITE. A SECRETARY OUTSIDE nods. PRESS takes his picture.

INSIDE. PANNING WITH JOHN GLENN. He's got his back up; and when he's angry, he's formidable. Gordo enters in mid-speech.

JOHN GLENN

...I don't want anything to put this program in a bad light. And things are going on that could put the program in a bad light. We have got the opportunity of a lifetime, and I'm sorry, but I'm just not going to stand by and let other people compromise the whole darn thing...

Gordo flops down next to Carpenter. All the other guys are there.

GORDO

What's ticking him off ?

Carpenter looks a little sheepish, shrugs and looks at Glenn.

GLENN

...You know and I know that this could blow up into something very unfortunate. . .

Gordo leans over to Shepard to ask him, but he sees something that

halts him dead: THE LOOK ON SHEPARD'S FACE --the Icy Commander staring volt for volt back at Glenn.

GLENN

...I'm talking about the playing around that's going on. I'm talking about the young girls, I'm talking about the cookies. I'm talking about keeping our pants zipped and our wicks dry around here.

Gordo can't help but snicker a little at John, but it's Shepard who rises. We haven't seen this side of him yet, and it's as if he's put on all the armor of military correctness in the stern old-fashioned way:

SHEPARD

Mr. Glenn, you are way out of line. I would advise you not to try to foist your view of morality on anybody else in this group. Each man here has volunteered to do a job, and each man here is devoting long hours of training to prepare for it and is doing many things above and beyond the strict call of duty...

Most of the boys are absolutely in accord with Shepard.

SHEPARD (Cont'd)

...such as the morale tours of factories, and foregoing any semblance of an orderly family life. And, Mr. Glenn, as long as a man uses good sense, what he does with his zipper and his wick is his own business!

And now it begins to heat up:

SHIRRA

(to Glenn)

Yeah, who the hell do you think you are ?

Carpenter rises to Glenn's defense:

CARPENTER

Just a minute, John's right. Whether we like it or not we're public figures. Whether we deserve it or not, people look up to us.

And then ALL TALKING AT ONCE:

CARPENTER AND GLENN

We've got a terrific responsibility... It's not enough not to get caught... It's not enough to know to your own satisfaction that you've done nothing wrong...We've got to be like Caesar's wife...We've got to be above even the appearance of doing wrong !!!

SHEPARD AND THE REST

You can't tell us what a pilot does when he's not flying... Just get the damn thing up there, then move over, pal... I don't believe it...You tellin us to keep our hands clean and our peckers stowed!!

Just as hostility between the boys reaches a feverish pitch,

EXT

OUTSIDE THE MOTEL ROOM, A SECRETARY IS HOLDING THE PRESS AT BAY, (102)

dark figures with their cameras at the ready are waiting to get at the Boys.

SECRETARY

They're just having a little seance in there.
(We hear muffled shouts, something crashing).
You know, just trying to come up with answers to complicated technical problems. It's in their scientific natures...

INT COCOA BEACH HOTEL
BACK INSIDE THE SEANCE.

(103)

GUS

You got it all wrong ! (Everyone stops). The issue here ain't pussy. The issue here is monkey!

GLENN

What ?

GUS

Us ! We are the monkey.

DEKE

What Gus is saying is that we've all heard the rumors that they want to send a monkey up first. And we just don't want to believe they would send a monkey up to do a man's work. And what Gus is sayin is what they are tryin to do is send a man up to do a monkey's work.
Us ! College trained chimpanzees !

GUS

Fuckin-A right, bubba !

DEKE

And what Gus is sayin is what we've got to do is change things around here. We got to alter the experiment. And that comes down to who controls things from here on in, and...

GLENN

I just want to say one thing.

SHEPARD

Oh yeah ? What's that ?

GLENN

Gus is right !

CUT TO: INT COCOA BEACH HANGAR

(104)

A HUGE, STRANGE HULK OF CONE-SHAPED TIN THUDDING ON THE FLOOR.
An angry Smock yells at the crane operator.

SMOCK (GERMAN)

Take it easy with that !

And we see---the MERCURY CAPSULE. It's just been plopped down in a hangar in front of the Seven Guys and a gathering of Smocks.

VON BRAUN ASSISTANT

Wonderful, no ?

The Seven Guys are speechless for a moment.

GORDO

Ah...where you planning to put the window ?

VON BRAUN ASSISTANT

Window ? There is no window.

GUS

No window ? What about the hatch ?

ENGINEER

Hatch ?

GUS

Yeah, we'll need a hatch with explosive bolts that we can open by ourselves. We ain't waitin for any swabbos (shrugs at Navy guys) to come along and pry us out.

VON BRAUN ASSISTANT

I think there is something you do not understand. This is the final form of the capsule. No hatch.

DEKE

What would happen if the automatic controls went out ?

ASSISTANT

With backups, checks, etcetera, this would not happen.

DEKE

But... just in case it did ?

CARPENTER

A pilot would have to fly it down...

ASSISTANT

He could not...

SCHIRRA

Wait a second. We're pilots, and...

ENGINEER

It's settled ! This is it !

The engineers and Smocks busy themselves with slide-rule things, indicating the meeting is over.

GLENN

I wonder how Life Magazine is going to feel about this ?...

Smocks pretend not to hear. Gordo looks across the hangar and

sees what Glenn sees: THE PRESS, waiting in the shadows, for anything the Boys will give them.

GLENN

I mean what I was thinking is that those fellows over there have been making us out as the seven finest and bravest pilots in all America. And I would say that we have a fair amount of prestige around the country. I was wondering how a story in Life Magazine might look saying that we were not being allowed to fly as pilots.

Gordo gets that "second convolution" look in his eye. Deke catches on too.

GORDO

You mean one saying that we were just being treated like spam in a can ?

DEKE

(doing an interview)

"Yes, we're trying to challenge the Russians for the heavens, but honestly it's difficult when you've been trained as a pilot and you're treated like a lab rabbit."

GLENN

(the Boy Scout smile)

We really do want a window.

ENGINEER

Absolutely out of the question.

GLENN

We'll see about that.

DISSOLVE TO: INT COCA BEACH HANGAR

(105)

THE CAPSULE still standing there. But now flashbulbs are popping all around it. The Press is crawling all around. Engineers and Astronauts stand facing each other. The Engineer is having a tough time talking.

ENGINEER

And, well, we are seriously considering... a window...

GLENN

Seriously considering ?

ENGINEER

Uh...there will be a window on future capsules... Right here.

GUS

That's where the hatch goes.

ENGINEER

The hatch?...Oh...yes...There will be a hatch on the capsule, and...

SHEPARD

Spacecraft.

ENGINEER

I beg your pardon.

SHEPARD

That is a spacecraft, sir! We do not refer to it as a capsule.

ENGINEER

Yes. A hatch on the spacecraft here...And there will be pitch and yaw thrusters to enable the astronaut-occupant to...

DEKE (to the Press)

Pilot. The astronaut-pilot....

ENGINEER

(he hates this)

Yes...the...astronaut...pilot to have some... have control...of the re-entry procedure.

Engineers and Smocks are wincing. The Seven Pilots smile as they pose for photographers in front of the capsule.

CUT TO: INT PADDED PLANE

(107)

GORDO LAUGHING. SUDDENLY HE RISES UP, AND HE...BEGINS TO FLOAT.

The other Guys begin floating through the air, spinning around in space--THEY ARE WEIGHTLESS and celebrating their victory. A JOYOUS FLOATING, CAREENING OFF WALLS IN THE PADDED PLANE.

CUT TO: EXT EDWARDS AFB

(108)

A BLACK TARPULIN FLAPPING FURIOUSLY IN THE STRONG DESERT WIND.

WIND BLOWS ACROSS THE PRESS CORPS AS THE LIASON MAN STEPS FORWARD, like a ringmaster, waving his arm at the crew that pulls back the tarpaulin revealing the X-15, "the most evil looking beast ever put into the air." In the howling wind we can barely hear his voice as he speaks:

LIASON MAN

...And the Prime Pilots for the X-15, the prototype of the piloted man in space program.

The Edwards wind is howling as three men step forward. The Press is almost being blown away.

LIASON MAN

...Scott Crossfield...Joe Walker...Bob White...

As Crossfield climbs into the X-15, a MEMBER OF THE PRESS CORPS SHOUTS:

MEMBER OF PRESS
Yeager...? Where's Yeager ?

But the Liason Man seems unable to hear him. He just shrugs as the X-15, tucked under the bomber's wing, takes off.

Music begins: "Three coins in a Fountain...
...which one will the Fountain choose?"

STOCK X-15
(CARD: EDWARDS AFB.) Using the excellent X-15 stock footage: (109)

NARRATOR
World altitude record set at Edwards Air Force Base as American pilots near outer space.

CUT TO: INT HOLLOMAN CHIMP IDIOT BOX ROOM

(CARD: HOLLOMAN AIR FORCE BASE.) The monkey in space program has picked up momentum. A chimp is punching the Idiot Box dressed in a pressure suit. (110)

CUT TO: RUSSIAN STOCK FOOTAGE

(CARD: VLADIVOSTOK? AIR FORCE BASE, RUSSIA) Use shots from Russian training program. These guys don't fool around. They grimly rock back and forth in their training devices. THE GRAND DESIGNER watches from the shadows. (111)

INT CAPE CANAVERAL COMMAND ROOM
AND FINALLY, (CARD: CAPE CANAVERAL, FLORIDA. JULY 29, 1960). (112)

COUNTDOWN
Four, three, two, one...

A LONG, BONY FINGER PRESSES A BUTTON.

EXT CAPE CANAVERAL
THERE'S A ROCKET EXPLOSION. After a few seconds it rises directly overhead. ASTRONAUTS AND EVERYBODY ELSE LOOK UP. (113)

KABOOM ! IT BLOWS UP !

ANOTHER COUNTDOWN BEGINS. (CARD: CAPE CANAVERAL. TWO MONTHS LATER)

INT CAPE COMMAND ROOM
THE BONY FINGER PRESSES AGAIN. (114)

EXT CAPE
AND AGAIN, THE MIGHTY BELCH OF FLAMES. But then the flames cut off, the rocket settles down on the pad, and there's a little POP (115)
A cap on top of the rocket comes off, and it goes shooting up in the air, a tiny little thing with a needle nose...It looks like a pretty party favor.

STOCK MONTAGE
AND CONTINUE THE MONTAGE OF EXPLODING AMERICAN ROCKETS, and the (116)

bony finger pressing the buttons, and the Seven Astronauts looking to the sky--and the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air lighting their faces....

A SLOW FADE. DISTANT TRUMPET MUSIC IS HEARD.

INT. GLENN'S BEDROOM.

John Glenn at home with Annie, lying head-to-head on the beds in the corner. (116)

ANNIE GLENN smiling in the dim light. She's learned to talk by gesture, by glance, by shrug and silence. And John Glenn has learned to understand. He stops playing...

GLENN

Well, I did it again...There was an emergency meeting today, and they asked us: "If you can't make the first flight yourself...then which man would you vote for to make it?"

ANNIE

A vv...vote ?

GLENN

(He still can't believe it)

A peer vote. I said I thought this was going to be based on ability, not be a darned popularity contest. It's just not right, Annie, not after all we've been through, not when we're so close... I guess I got pretty hot under the collar.

Annie's eyes sparkle in the darkness. She sighs, and Glenn plays a few more notes on the trumpet.

GLENN

Perfect time to get indignant, huh ?
Right before they take a vote like that ?

He's amused by himself, and so is Annie.

ANNIE

W...were y..ou...a...lone...agg...ain ?

GLENN

No. Scott Carpenter took my side. He's a good man. Real philosophical about it all. You know he's got a telescope and he looks up at the sky every night. He thinks there's Something out there.

ANNIE

Whhhh...?

GLENN

I don't know. He thinks the Unknown is Known by Those Unknown to us.

Annie laughs, soft and sweet. Glenn silently fingers his trumpet as they talk.

ANNIE

And thh...othhrrs ?

GLENN

The others just want to get up there and get the job done and keep the Mickey Mouse down to a minimum. They're good men, good men. They'll all give a hunnert percent when the time comes. Guess they think I'm kind of...a gung-ho type. Eddie Attaboy. Harry Hairshirt.

Annie is smiling wider and wider. She's nodding her head. Glenn starts chuckling.

GLENN

You agree ? You agree ? My own wife ? You think I'm Dudley Doright ? (laughing at her laughing). That's me, I guess. A lonely beacon of restraint and self-sacrifice in a...squall of car-crazies....(They laugh). Annie...?

ANNIE

Huh ?

GLENN

It shouldn't come down to a darn cosmetic contest, who goes first. I'm going to call some people in the hierarchy to see what they can do. (sigh). Migosh, the first one in space will be famous throughout eternity.

ANNIE

N...not nnnesssissarily.

GLENN

Annie, I've always believed one thing--the Best should be First !

CUT TO: STOCK FOOTAGE - HAM'S FLIGHT

SHOT OF A PARACHUTE CAPSULE DESCENDING. PARACHUTE OPENING. (117)

STOCK SHOTS: Helicopter closing in on capsule.

ABOARD A RECOVERY SHIP. The capsule is opened. Ham is lying there with his arms crossed. He seems gloriously bored.

THE PRESS CLOSES IN. That BUZZING, YAMMERING, ROOT-WEEVIL sound and those exploding camera lights, the shoving, groaning, cursing --the usual yahoo sprawl,

PRESS

Let us get a picture...There he is...the first American into outer space...

AND THE CAPSULE IS OPENED -- A CHIMP PEERS OUT.

PRESS

What's his name? Ham! Ham? Ham!
Over here, Ham! Smile Ham!

And the ape comes unglued: He bares his teeth and begins snapping at the bastards. Bulbs flash. On a particularly VICIOUS APE SCREAM...

CUT TO: INSERT - HAM ON LIFE

HAM ON THE COVER OF LIFE MAGAZINE, and it looks like he's LAUGHING. (118)

CUT FROM COVER OF LIFE TO: INT YEAGER HOME (117)

YEAGER HOLDING COVER AND LAUGHING his wild laugh TO:

INT LUCE OFFICE
LUCE LAUGHING; holding the magazine: (120)

LUCE

Adorable. What a nice, fat, happy grin! If this is the joy he feels on returning from outer space -- imagine the joy the first man will feel.

CAMERA MOVES OVER THE POLISHED TABLE IN FRONT OF LUCE around which his reporters sit in audience. And as they all LAUGH they stare into the polished walnut surface...and THEY SEE:

THE LAUGHING FACE OF THE RUSSIAN GRAND DESIGNER. And they HEAR: (121)
Faint babooshka music, a distant hum, growing louder.

And a RUSSIAN ROCKET IS LAUNCHED, and the humming grows louder. (122)

CUT TO: CARD: WASHINGTON, April 12, 1961

INT
PANIC IN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER -- AGAIN. Guys in suits running, (123)
again.

INT EXEC GOVT ROOM
Again, they enter a dark conference room filled again with high-ranking government people. And a runner gasps out: (124)

RUNNER

They got a man up there! His name's Gagarin!
He's orbiting!

OFFICIAL

We know! Sit down!

STOCK RUSSIAN FOOTAGE
AGAIN THE BLACK & WHITE FILM, as the OFFICIALS WATCH FOOTAGE of (125)
the Russian rocket orbiting in space. Victory lights flashing
all around the Kremlin. A shot of Krushchev LAUGHING And it's scary.

CUT TO: INT PRESS ROOM

THE PRESS SWARM, the angry, buzzing mob closing in on the Seven (125)

Astronauts at a Press Conference. CAMERA SWINGING FROM THEM and MOVING IN ON JOHN GLENN:

GLENN

Well, I guess we ought to be forthright, gracious and magnanimous and say, well, they just beat the pants off us, that's all. And there's no use kidding ourselves about that. But now that the space age has begun, there's going to be plenty of work for everybody.

3RD REPORTER

Who's going to be the second man in space ?

NASA MAN

You mean, who's going to be the FIRST FREE MAN INTO SPACE. That's still a secret.

CUT TO:

WT

LONG CORRIDOR UNDER THE PRESS CONFERENCE. Behind them the Press is being kept back by guards: the Seven Astronauts are alone, walking in a group; walking QUIETLY...and QUICKLY. You can see they are pissed off. Finally,

GLENN

You know, I'm tired of being forthright, gracious and magnanimous. I'm tired of being big about this thing...

GUS

Amen, bubba.

GLENN

And I'm tired of being second to those Russians...

SHEPARD

Damn right !

GLENN

I'm tired of those stupid questions from the press. And I'm tired of those people in smocks, those engineers, and the others who think we are not pilots...

GORDO

Tell it, John !

GLENN

And I'm tired of monkeys.

Deke and Wally and Carpenter are grunting approvals. And the pace is picking up.

GLENN

And you know what else ? I think we should...We should start (He gestures, but can't quite say it).

GUS

...We should start stompin some ass !

DEKE

Fuckin A !

GLENN

That's right -- Fu...fu...exactly !

And the Seven Astrosamurai, almost running, move into the blinding light of day.

CUT TO: DARKNESS INSIDE VAN -- Man in a silver suit moving in darkness like a gladiator about to face the lions. (126 A)

EXT
CARD: CAPE CANAVERAL. May 5, 1961.

LAUNCH AREA (127)
THE SILVER TRAILER DOOR OPENS. And the SOUNDS AND MUSIC have a sense of impending battle. A SILVER BOOT DESCENDS.

A MAN IN A SILVER SUIT WITH HIS HELMET ON AND HIS VISOR SEALED STEPS DOWN. The Man in the Silver Suit begins to walk.

And as he walks the crowds of people part. We don't see his face, but the HAND HELD CAMERA moves with him through the parting sea of faces: TECHNICIANS, NASA MEN, GROUND CREW, PRESS.

P.O.V. -- INSIDE HELMET

And as the Man in the Silver Suit moves among them, a warm and humid smile does cross their faces, their countenance gleams, and tears do flow. Silently he walks among them, and they do bang their hands together, for all their hopes seem to ride with this Silver Man.

AS THE ENTOURAGE moves through adoring faces, the CAMERA HOLDS ON ONE -- he looks familiar -- IT'S THE MINISTER FROM EDWARDS (with THE AIRFORCE CONTINGENT -- LIASON MAN, ETC.)! What's he doing here? He watches the Man in the Silver Suit, and his face and all the others look up as The Man in the Silver Suit rides up the gantry.

EXT/INT CAPSULE
THE MAN IN THE SILVER SUIT slides into the capsule. Another Man dressed in white, rises above him. IT'S JOHN GLENN ! He's not first ! (A107)

THE MAN IN THE SILVER SUIT IS ALAN SHEPARD ! Glenn has placed a sign on the instrument panel that says, "No Handball Playing in this Area". Shepard hands it back to Glenn:

SHEPARD
(smiling)

Not very funny, John.

GLENN
No ? I thought...

SHEPARD
But I sure appreciate it, John.
(A look of Dawn Patrol camaraderie) I surely do.

GLENN (warmly)
Vaya con Dios, Jose.

THE HATCH IS CLOSED. Shepard sits in the greenish glow of the capsule. Through the periscope window we can see other Astronauts and groundcrew smiling in through WIDE ANGLE DISTORTION. Shepard mumbles to himself:

SHEPARD
Please, dear Lord, don't let me fuck up !

Suddenly GORDO'S VOICE speaks to him:

GORDO'S VOICE
Would you repeat that, please ?

Shepard realizes he's being broadcast to the control tower.
(AN IRRITATING TONE, very high up in the audible range is coming into his headset, some sort of feedback sound.)

SHEPARD
I said, "Everything's A-Okay."

INT CONTROL ROOM. Hundreds of people are hanging on his every word. Gordo is acting as the "capcom" in the blockhouse. IN THOSE DAYS IT WAS ONLY A HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE DAMN ROCKET !

GORDO
(To Shepard) I thought that's what you said, (ALoud):
-- He said "Everything's A-Okay."

EXT CAPE VIEWING STAND
THE PRESS AREA. Walter Cronkite is on camera, talking to the nation:

CRONKITE
He says, "Everything is A-okay."
And there you have it in a nutshell...etc.

INT CAPSULE
SHEPARD waits. See his rocket THROUGH THE BLOCKHOUSE WINDOW,

IN THE CONTROL ROOM. Von Braun and his Boys are nervous. They want this to go exactly right.

VON BRAUN
We go over the checklist again. We will hold until we are absolutely certain.

LEADER OF LAUNCH PAD TEAM
Auto retro jettison switch. Arm ?

His voice comes through to Shepard with that shrill feedback sound.

SHEPARD
Roger. Auto retro jettison switch. Arm.

VOICE
Retro heater switch. Off ?

SHEPARD

Roger. Retro heater switch. Off.

INT SHEPARD HOME
NOW SEE ROCKET ON TV SCREEN.

(131)

YOUNG GIRL'S SCREAMING VOICE

Mommy ! Look out here !

INSIDE SMALL HOUSE WITH LOUISE SHEPARD AND OTHER WIVES. HER DAUGHTER IS AT THE WINDOW. Louise has been watching the proceedings on TV; now she moves quickly to the window.

LOUISE

Oh, Lord !

EXT SHEPARD HOUSE
THE FIRST THING SHE SEES: NEIGHBORS ON A DEATH WATCH ON HER LAWN, along with the usual rabble of gawkers who materialize for car wrecks or roof jumps or traffic arguments. Then, SHE SEES: (132)

THE ANIMAL-- Mobs of REPORTERS AND CAMERAMEN AND OTHER BIG-TIMERS out there on the lawn "wearing bush jackets...and knocking back their Pepsi Colas and Nehis and yelling to each other...crazy with the excitement of being on the scene, bawling for news of the anguished sound of Louise Shepard."

INT SHEPARD HOUSE
LOUISE
They're tearing up the lawn ! (133)

The Other Wives look up. MOVE IN ON ANNIE GLENN; She's scared!

ANNIE GLENN
Whhat ddddooo thhey w...want...?

TRUDY
Anything they can get. And interview for the entire nation with the anguished wife of...

THEN THE PHONE RINGS. All the wives freeze. Louise Shepard picks it up quickly, moves to see the TV -- Is he still there ?

LOUISE

Yes ?

INT CAPE CONTROL
NASA MAN on the phone to her from Control Central. (134)

NASA MAN
Just wanted to keep you informed, Mrs. Shepard. Everything's A-okay. Just some delays. Nothing to worry about.

But on the other side of the room, VON BRAUN looks worried. In b.g. a countdown has started.

VON BRAUN
Stop countdown. There is a bad inverter. We cannot have a 'go' until all systems are absolutely free from malfunction.

OUTSIDE. WALTER CRONKITE.

(135)

CRONKITE

There have been some delays, and Alan Shepard sits there, patiently waiting. What can be going through his mind at this moment ?

CLOSE ON SHEPARD IN CAPSULE.

(136)

SHEPARD

Gordo ? (The answer is a loud hum).
Gordo, I have to urinate.

CUTS OF MEN AT CONTROL CENTRAL. A STATE OF PANIC.

(137)

SCIENTIST (SMOCK)

We never thought of that. It's just a fifteen minute flight.

ANOTHER SMOCK

Could he just do it in his suit ?

GORDO

The man's been sitting there for hours !

VON BRAUN

There might be a danger in introducing liquid into the pure-oxygen environment of the capsule and pressure suit and causing an electrical short that might start a fire. Tell him he cannot.

GORDO

(to Shepard)

Say, ole buddy, they promise that we'll stop at the next gas station. They request that you hold it until then.

SHEPARD

Ho-kay.

(137A)

TIME DISSOLVE. Clocks show hours going by. Technicians fooling with buttons, levers. A countdown starting.

(137B)

VON BRAUN

Stop countdown.

SHEPARD, fidgeting, squirming.

SHEPARD

Request permission to relieve bladder !

(137C)

Von Braun nods to Gordo -- almost a shrug -- let's see what happens.

(137D)

GORDO

Do it in the suit.

SHOT. SHEPARD CLOSES HIS EYES. 137E SO DOES VON BRAUN. HE'S NERVOUS. 137F

SHOT. THE DIALS FOLLOW FLOW OF URINE UP HIS BACK.

FIRST TECHNICIAN

Suit thermometer shows freon flow jumped from 30 to 45.

SECOND TECHNICIAN

Left lower chest sensor...no shortout so far... moving up to recording electrocardiogram... malfunction.

Life Science Specialists and suit technicians are in a tither. WILL HE BE ELECTROCUTED ? ANXIETY, as:

THIRD TECHNICIAN

It's pooling up in the middle of the back.

SHEPARD'S VOICE

Weh-ayl...I'm a wetback now.

Gordo turns to Deke and they laugh. Technicians don't see what's so funny.

VON BRAUN

It is questionable whether we can proceed.

He looks nervously at his frazzled crew of Technicians. Then they all hear an ICY VOICE.

SHEPARD (The Icy Commander)

All right, I'm cooler than you are. Why don't you fix your little problem...and LIGHT THIS CANDLE !

Everyong freezes for an instant. Looks exchanged, then:

GORDO

He's right !

DEKE

He surely is !!

CLOSE ON VON BRAUN. A moment's hesitation.

VON BRAUN

Begin countdown !

Cheers. That was all they needed. HEROIC MUSIC BEGINS, an incredible moment of camaraderie. All right ! Let's go !

MONTAGE OF EVERYONE SWINGING INTO ACTION. Ten, nine, eight...

Including CUTS OF: THE FRIEND OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS STEPPING UP FORWARD. (next to Cronkite?). AND THE SAME TWO GUYS WHO WILL PUSH THE FINAL BUTTON who have pushed the buttons on all the

failures before ! The same bony finger reaching in to release the rocket.

DEKE SLAYTON, now on the microphone to Shepard:

DEKE

Fire ! You're on your way, Jose !

AND THE WHOLE PLACE BEGINS TO RUMBLE. THIS TIME WE'RE RIGHT UP CLOSE AND WE SEE AND WE FEEL THE MAXIMUM POSSIBLE EXPLOSION IN THE THEATER AS SOUND CRACKS THROUGH AND FLAMES FILL THE SCREEN.

CUT TO: INT SHEPARD HOME (138)

THE TELEVISION COVERAGE: The wisp of vanishing smoke.

LOUISE SHEPARD'S LITTLE HOUSE. And all hell has broken loose outside. Trudy is at the window.

TRUDY

Louise, migod, they're going after your diaper service man.

LOUISE

We don't have a diaper service man.

EXT SHEPARD HOME

OUTSIDE the Press is chasing a diaper service man carrying his big plastic bags. (139)

REPORTERS

Do you actually know the Shepards ?...Have you been in the house ?...Can you tell us the layout of the house ?

The Laundry Man is running, locking himself in his panel truck.

INT SHEPARD HOME
ANNIE GLENN AND TRUDY AT THE WINDOW ARE SUDDENLY TERRIFIED BY A HAND, A FACE, A TERRIFYING LOOKING CAMERA THAT POPS IN FRONT OF THEM (AS IN A HORROR FILM). (140)

PRESS

Let us in! We want to see!
What are you feeling?

Trudy pulls the curtains shut. Annie's scared.

TRUDY

They're interviewing anything that walks out there-- the dog, the cat. They're even interviewing the rhododendrons.

CUT TO: INT SHEPARD CAPSULE

SHEPARD, HE'S UP THERE IN SPACE, if only for a few moments, and he sees, through a darkened screen, "the sensation of shooting right through the top of the sky". The Awe, the Wonder, the Siren call: (141)

SHEPARD
It's incredible !

BACK TO SHEPARD'S HOUSE. (142)

Louise Shepard is so busy carrying in coffee for her guests, she doesn't have time to watch the t.v.

BETTY GRISSOM
He's coming down !

CUT TO: INT SHEPARD CAPSULE

SHEPARD feeling the tremendous pull of the g-forces. THE SOUND IS BUILDING INCREDIBLY, and he forces his breath out in grunts. (143)

SHEPARD
Uhhhsix...uh seven...uhhh eight...
unhhhh nine...Ohhhhkay...ohhhkay....
ohhhkay...ohhhkay...ohhhkay.

^{Stock}
And the capsule hits the water. (143A)

CUT TO: EXT AIRCRAFT CARRIER (144)

A BAND PLAYING on the aircraft carrier as the capsule, swaying beneath the helicopter, approaches.

The entire crew is turned toward Shepard in the sunlight.

As his silver foot descends onto the deck, someone outlines the spot where This Man in the Silver Suit Walked.

CUT TO: INT WHITE HOUSE (145)

THE WHITE HOUSE. PRESIDENT KENNEDY is giving Shepard his award. All the Astronauts and wives are in attendance -- Explore possibilities of "doctoring" our actors back into that time and place in History -- split screen, front projection, rotoscoping, etc. -- So that when Kennedy drops the medal, as he did, and picks it up:

KENNEDY
(ad libbing)
This medal has traveled from the ground up...

It is our Alan Shepard who accepts it, smiling. As the Press closes in, Sinatra never had it so good.

CUT TO: A portion of Kennedy's "space speech".

KENNEDY
I believe this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth.

CUT TO:

^{EXT}
OUTSIDE THE WHITE HOUSE. The wives are walking away. (146)

BETTY GRISSOM
What was Jackie like ?

LOUISE SHEPARD
She was nice. We talked about all sorts of things.

BETTY GRISSOM
My Gus goes up next. I can't wait to talk
to Jackie after that.

CUT TO: ^{EXT} HOLIDAY INN BAR (147)

FACES OF GIRLS LOOKING THROUGH WINDOW. They're wearing bathing suits and looking in at something important from the pool area:

^{INT}
INSIDE THE HOLIDAY INN BAR, Gordo and Gus nod back at the astro-groupies as they toss back a few. In b.g. Shepard signs autographs, talks to Texans with attache cases. (148)

GORDO
Gus, I never realized a gruff, mean son-of-a-bitch like you was so popular. How'd you get to go up before me and even before Mr. Klean, the Marine ?

GUS
Charm, Hot Dawg, pure charm. Watch this. (To waitress):
How you doin', Sis ?

The WAITRESS is not as awed as the girls outside.

WAITRESS
So-so. How you doin' ?

GUS
I ain't doin' any more. Damn thing is draggin in the mud, and it won't come up.

Gordo likes the line but the waitress looks absolutely bored.

GORDO
That's charm, Gus. Pure Charm.

GUS
(trying again)
I said it's draggin in the mud...Hey, miss,
how'd you like one of these ?

GUS lifts a tiny model of the capsule from a pile of little models on the table in front of him. (He's also been rolling up dimes.)

WAITRESS
I can get one of them from a dime store.

GUS

Not one that's been up into outer space, you can't. I'm takin these up there with me tomorrow. Think you might like a little souvenir after I get into the history books ?

WAITRESS

Well...I might...if it's been into outer space....

GUS

See you after outer space; Miss. (as she leaves) Hot Dawg, you got to think ahead to the future. Folks got a taste for things that have actually been there. I'm even gonna give you one of these dimes I'm takin with me so's you can play with it in your pocket and dream about outer space.

GORDO

Gus, just watch it you don't screw the pooch.

CUT TO: INT GRISSOM CAPSULE

A ROCKET WAITING IN THE DAWN. (149)

GUS IS INSIDE. Waiting...waiting.

INT CAPSULE CONTROL
A THIN FINGER TOUCHES A BUTTON: BLAST OFF ! (149A)

CUT TO: INT GRISSOM HOUSE

BETTY GRISSOM; she's all dolled-up, and very excited. She's watching it on t.v., and she can hear the PRESS NOISE OUTSIDE. (150)

BETTY GRISSOM

This is it ! Do you think I should go outside to just say a few words to those nice press fellas outside. It wouldn't hurt, and they've been waiting so long.

TRUDY

I'd wait, Betty. Til Gus is down.

BETTY

Oh, well. Maybe you're right.

CUT TO:

INT CAPSULE
Gus in the throes of g-force shuddering. (151)

STOCK (?)
THEN A PARACHUTE OPENING, and the capsule slowly descending into the ocean. (151A)

INT CAPSULE
INSIDE WITH GUS. The water's getting closer and closer. Gus is BREATHING FASTER AND FASTER. (151B)

STOCK (?)
THE CAPSULE hits the water, keels over on one side. A GURGLING (151C)

SOUND of water. The camera in the capsule emphasizes the claustrophobia. LOUDER and FASTER breathing.

151D

Gus can see the helicopter swirling overhead. The yellow dye marker spreads over the waters and he looks through yellow water at the sky.

VOICE

This is Hunt Club One. We are in orbit at this time around the capsule.

GUS

Gimme about another five minutes here, to mark these positions here, before I give you a call to come in and hook on. (Almost shouting) Are you ready to come in and hook on at any time ?

HELICOPTER

Hunt Club 1, roger, we are ready any time you are.

CUT TO:

INT CAPE

CONTROL CENTRAL. There's celebrating going on, but THE LIFE SYSTEMS MONITORS look concerned. Gordo slides in next to them to watch the dials.

152

LIFE SYSTEMS MONITOR

His pulse rate is way up there. It's been high all along, but now it's way up there, 171

GORDO

No sweat. It's all over. He's made it !
(softly) Hang in there, Gus.

CUT BACK TO:

INT CAPSULE

GUS, breathing hard, making marks on charts in the bobbing capsule.

153

AND IN THE HELICOPTER WATCHING THE CAPSULE:

EXT SEA RECOVERY

HELICOPTER PILOT

This is Hunt Club, we are ready for pickup.

154

INT HELICOPTER

GUS

Roger, I've unplugged my suit so I'm kinda warm now...so...

INT CAPSULE

HELICOPTER PILOT

One, roger.

INT HELICOPTER

GUS

One...roger...Now if you tell me to, ah, you're ready for me to blow, I'll have to take my helmet off...there... (Heavy breathing).

INT CAPSULE

The Helicopter Pilot looks at his Co-pilot kinda funny.
Something going on down there ?

INT HELICOPTER

GUS

And now power down...there...and then I'll
blow the hatch when you're ready.

INT CAPSULE

HELICOPTER PILOT

One, roger, and when you do blow the hatch,
the collar will be down there waiting for you.

INT HELICOPTER

GUS

Ah, roger...roger.

INT CAPSULE

And the Helicopter Pilot turns to his Co-pilot, signalling
him to lower the collar.

INT HELICOPTER

Just then, BALOOM ! Gus blows the hatch.

INT / EXT CAPSULE

Gus scrambles out of the hatch and plops into the water without
even looking up. He starts swimming like mad.

Water is pouring into the capsule, and it's sinking.

HELICOPTER PILOT

What happened ?! Go after the capsule ! He's got
that suit on. It'll float him.

INT / EXT
HELICOPTER

He guns the helicopter down to the level of the water, desper-
ately trying to hook the capsule. Finally, he hooks it.

But the capsule sinks under the water and starts sinking like
a brick. Three wheels of the helicopter are touching the water.

A red light goes on in the helicopter panel.

INT HELICOPTER

PILOT

We can't pull this much weight !

AND GUS ! He's flopping and floundering, waving his arms.

GUS AT SEA

GUS

Help me ! I'm drowning ! I'm drowning !
You bastards -- I'm drowning !

A Second Helicopter arrives, it's blades flattening out the
sea around Gus. His head is popping in and out.

GUS

Not the capsule ! Me ! Here ! Help me !

And his head goes under again.

The First Helicopter lifts the capsule out of the water, but
he can't make the helicopter move forward. It just hangs there
like a hummingbird. Red lights flash all over the control panel.

EXT
INT

The Co-pilot finally cuts the capsule loose. It disappears forever.

TIGHT ON GUS. Water in his mouth. He suddenly feels the horse collar around himself. He flops through the hole like a dead flounder landing on the fishmarket scales. They lift him into the sky.

GUS AT
SEA

CUT TO: INT CARRIER EXAM ROOM

(155)

ABCARD THE CARRIER. The little MODELS OF THE CAPSULE COME TUMBLING ONTO THE FLOOR ALONG WITH THE ROLLS OF DIMES.

A DOCTOR -- wearing a smock -- picks him up and looks at --

GUS, his suit still dripping with water. He's shaking, and he's got a strange look on his face.

GUS
I didn't do anything. I was just lying there
-- and it just blew.

DISSOLVE TO: INT ASHORE EXAM ROOM

(156)

Gus is ashore, still being tested by DOCTORS who look suspiciously at his rapid pulse rate.

DOCTOR
Ninety. Normally, at rest, it's sixty-eight.

GUS
I didn't panic. I didn't touch the button.
I was just lying there -- and it blew.

DISSOLVE TO: INT DE-BRIEFING ROOM

(157)

Gus being de-briefed before MILITARY AND ENGINEERING BRASS. Their looks are not friendly.

GUS
The capsule was rocking around a little, but there weren't any loose items in the capsule, so I don't see how I could have hit that button...No, I was just lying there, flat on my back --and it just blew.

OFFICER
Thank you, Mr. Grissom.

Gus leaves the room.

OFFICER
What do you think ?

ENGINEER
Explosive hatches have been on jet fighters for ten years. The damned things have been wrung inside out, subjected to trial by heat, by water, by shaking,

ENGINEER (Cont.)

pounding. We even dropped them from a height of a hundred feet onto concrete -- and none have ever just blown !

CUT TO:

EXT PATRICK AFB (158)

A SMALL, TACKY FLORIDA MILITARY BAND PLAYING out on some brain-frying slab of cement under a big canopy at Patrick Air Force Base near Cocoa Beach.

Betty comes off a plane with their TWO KIDS and is met by Gus. He can hardly even look at her as someone he knows.

BETTY

Aren't we going to the White House, Gus ?

GUS

Naw.

UNDER THE CANOPY. A NASA MAN is giving Gus his medal.

NASA MAN

...And the Distinguished Service Medal I am about to award to Virgil I. Grissom, Jr...etc.

BETTY

(aside to Gus)

Isn't the President coming, Gus ?

GUS

Naw.

BETTY

And no ticker-tape parade in New York ?

GUS

Un-unh.

BETTY

Not even one in Mitchell, Indiana ?

Gus doesn't want to talk...to anyone.

BETTY

(on verge of tears)

And no Jackie ?

INT. MUSTY CABIN COURT-TYPE ROOM. DAY. (158A)

Out the window cars are roaring by on the highway. On the other side of the highway is amazing brick-hot Cocoa Beach. Betty and Gus, continuing:

BETTY

These are what they call the VIP rooms here ?
But isn't there even a TV ? Or a pool ?

Gus looks around, shrugs. That's right, no TV, no pool. What do you want me to do about it? He opens the refrigerator. He smiles a little.

GUS

Hey, look. They filled up the refrigerator. Pretty good, huh?

Betty can't take it. The full refrigerator starts the SCREAMING:

BETTY

Pretty good? A full refrigerator?! I can see the afternoon shaping up just great. And the rest of the day tomorrow, too. What do they want me to do in here? Cook?! And then risk my life and the kids' by dragging them across that highway to the worst beach in Florida? Gus, I want to eat in the White House! I wanted to talk to Jackie about...things!

GUS

Listen Hon, I gotta get over to the Holiday Inn, y'know, for some...ah...beer call with the guys, and...

BETTY

NOOOO! GUS! All those years of test flying, all those times I waited, all those times you weren't there. The Military promised. They are welshing on their damn compact, Gus...Finally, I am Mrs. Honorable Astronaut. But they are treating me like the Honorable Mrs. Squirming Hatch Blower!

GUS

(screaming back, furious)

I did not do anything wrong! The hatch just blew! It was a glitch, a technical malfunction. Why in hey-al don't anyone believe me?

BETTY

I know that. But are these the goodies, Gus? Is this how the military pays off? They owe you, Gus. But they owe me too, Gus. THEY OWE ME. THEY OWE ME. A LOT!

Gus's eyes are actually tearing up. They are both on the edge of an hysterical outburst. Just as they reach this emotional peak, THEY HEAR A RAPPING AT THE DOOR. THE BUZZING, CHURNING SOUND, o.s. Gus looks through the curtains and sees: THE PRESS.

Gus and Betty look at one another. They know they must face them. This is a critical moment--what will happen out there? Is the hatch-blower story going to be all over the papers? Betty wipes aside a tear. Gus takes a deep breath. He nods to her, a half-smile of bravery, AND AS GUS OPENS THE DOOR...NEWSREEL MUSIC BLARES, AND...

CUT TO:

EXT COURT MOTEL

93

159

BLACK AND WHITE NEWSREEL OF GUS AND BETTY COMING OUT AND SMILING, surrounded by the yammering cameras. And the story is about "our newest hero--brave, small Gus. So brave and we almost lost him through drowning." AND USING THE SAME SHOTS FROM GUS'S RESCUE DEBACLE:

NARRATOR

Here we see him shouting to the helicopter to save the capsule first !

EDWARDS

INT. OFFICERS' CLUB. DAY.

160

The image of Gus is still on the t.v. screen. Prince, Ridley, Liason Man among Young Officers watching.

PRINCE

(laughing incredulously)

Migod, he lost his capsule...But he's sticking to his story. Way to go, Gus. Do something like that in flight test and it'd be all over. He just screwed the pooch, plain and simple.

Yeager has entered unnoticed.

YEAGER

Sometimes you get a pooch that can't be screwed.

LIASON

Exactly. Right now the President's got his own problems with the Bay of Pigs. He doesn't want the astronauts' image tarnished. Nothing these guys do will be called a failure. But you'd think the public would know they are just doing what monkeys have done.

YEAGER

(irked)

Monkeys ? Yew think them monkeys knew they were sittin on top of rockets that always blow up ? Those Astronaut boys know that. I'll tell yew somethin -- it takes some special for a man to volunteer for a suicide mission, especially one that's on t.v. Nosir, Gus did alright.

As Yeager walks off:

LIASON MAN

But I thought we...(Confused by Yeager, then with a certain bitterness). You know, it looks to me like the era of the fly boys -- the stick n rudder pilots--is just about over. You know what I'd do if I were a hot, young fighter jock right now ?... I'd apply for astronaut.

Prince and the others pretend not to hear as they watch t.v. (Possibly NEWSREEL).

CUT TO: INT

YEAGER'S HOUSE. Time hasn't changed much, just made the landscape more barren. The house is a little Contractor Suburban near the highway. GLENNIS is watching a cheerful Betty Grissom interview in b.g. as she hears the front screen door slam. (161)

She doesn't turn around, but she knows Yeager is passing through the room (maybe a shadow across the t.v. screen). TWO KIDS turn, but say nothing.

EXT

YEAGER BACKYARD. Yeager sits in a chair, pretending to sleep. Glennis comes across the scrubby yard and sits in a deck chair near him. For a long moment, nobody says anything; then: (161A)

GLENNIS

You know...I always hated flying. (No answer from Yeager)...But when I met you, you were already a pilot, so I never had a complaint comin. And when you went up in those planes, me and the kids never had any insurance except for a couple months pay in case...anything happened. But I always hated insurance. I hated that kinda talk. Y'know, the government spends lots of time and money teaching test pilots to be fearless. But they don't spend a damn penny teachin you how to be the fearless wife of a test pilot. Some wives...they had all kindsa nightmares...But...(just realizing)...I guess I liked it...I guess I liked a man who could push the outside of the envelope, Flyboy...(Yeager turns an eye slowly toward her) But I never could stand a man who was one of those Remember-whens, you know, those bitter guys who just sit around in backyards...If that ever happens, Flyboy, I'm goin out that front door...and you'll never catch me.

She stands over him.

YEAGER (beginning a smile)

Y'know...ah'm a fearless man....But I'm a 'scaird of you...

GLENNIS

(smiling to herself)

No, yer not....But you oughta be.

A DISTANT TRUMPET SOUND FADES OVER THEM:

FADING TO: INT GLENN HOME (162)

JOHN GLENN AT HOME. He tries to play a few more notes, but the spirit seems to have gone out of him. Annie looks at him sympathetically, NO DIALOGUE, but it's clear that Glenn feels it's

all over. History's written. That's all she wrote. He closes his eyes.

Annie shuts the lights out.

IN DARKNESS, THE CAMERA DRIFTS OVER GLENN, his music still faintly lingering in the night air. But then ANOTHER MUSIC, ever so faint--THAT LOW HUMMING SOUND.

SUBLIMINAL FLASH. THE GRAND DESIGNER. He smiles: Is it an evil 162A smile ? Or is it just History smiling down on John Glenn ?

CAMERA MOVES OVER GLENN. SUBLIMINAL FLASH: A RUSSIAN COSMONAUT 162B GETTING INTO A CAPSULE. This is Glenn's own Nightmare Newsreel as there's smoke and flashing light, and in the smudged darkness a capsule comes hurling right at him.

HIS EYES POP OPEN. A BREEZE BLOWS THE CURTAINS. He falls back to sleep.

THE CAPSULE DRIFTS TOWARD THE CAMERA.

162C

THE BACK OF A MAN IN A SUIT RUNS IN PANIC DOWN AN ECHOING CORRIDOR. 162D

A DOOR OPENS, HEADS TURN, AND MEN OF POWER AND DIGNITY SIT THERE. 162E

HOLLOW VOICE

We know ! Sit down !

JFK TURNS IN HIS DREAM. KENNEDY SMILES. Some voice, Somewhere, 162F is trying to speak: Ti...ti...ti...

SUDDENLY HIS EYES OPEN AGAIN. ANNIE IS STANDING OVER HIM, light from the other room haloing her in the darkness. She holds the phone out toward him.

ANNIE

(stammering, excited)

Ti...ti...Titov. Orbi...tngg...T'Russns...
overrr...(without stuttering) John, wake up !

Glenn sits bolt upright, and grabs the phone.

VOICE ON PHONE

John, the Russians have sent Titov up and he's been orbiting for almost a day now, going over our country, John...

THE HEAD NASA MAN is sitting around that table with government men, talking to Glenn:

NASA MAN (Cont'd)

...And we've got to put a man in orbit right away. We've got to close the space gap or the ballgame's all over. No more twelve minute flights. The Free World needs a man in orbit...

NASA MAN (Cont'd)

We're scrapping the Redstone and going with the Atlas Rocket. And you know what that means. The magic word is "orbit," John.

JOHN GLENN is getting dressed as fast as he can with the phone tucked under his neck. Annie's running in with his shoes.

NASA MAN'S VOICE

...We haven't been too lucky with that rocket. And we're not going to be able to take all the precautions we'd like. It's going to be extremely...

GLENN has a huge smile on his face. His shoes are on.

GLENN

I'm ready !

NASA MAN'S VOICE

...dangerous...What's that ?

His face is glistening. This is the fighter-jock's idea of what it's all about.

GLENN

I'm ready ! A hunnert per cent !

CUT TO:

EXT LAUNCH PAD (STOCK)

THE ROCKET ON THE PAD. (CARD: Jan. 27, 1961. CAPE CANAVERAL.)

(163)

INT CAPE CONTROL

THE MEN WAITING IN CONTROL CENTRAL. Familiar faces; HEAD NASA MAN, VON BRAUN, DEKE, CARPENTER, THE GUYS WHO PRESS THE FINAL BUTTONS. They all look nervous. 163A

LINING THE SHORE. TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE. (Use actual shots). 163B

WALKER CRONKITE AND THE PRESS HOARDS. 163C

CRONKITE

We've been told there's another delay and there's yet another hold in the countdown. Something to do with the weather, we are told. Astronaut John Glenn has been in there for four hours already, and...

INSIDE THE CAPSULE. JOHN GLENN SITS PATIENTLY, looking at the sky. 163D

THE SKY--IT'S CLOUDING OVER.

CUT TO: INT GLENN HOME

(164)

ANNIE GLENN, watching the t.v. coverage. The other wives are there. There's also the LIFE REPORTER AND A PHOTOGRAPHER who keeps snapping pictures, trying not to be as annoying as he is.

ON THE TV. A WOMAN WITH A MICROPHONE is talking:

WOMAN REPORTER

Inside this trim, modest suburban home is Annie Glenn, wife of Astronaut John Glenn, sharing the anxiety and pride of the entire world at this tense moment, but in a very private and crucial way that only she can understand...

There's a GUY TAPPING AT THE WINDOW. TRUDY goes to the window to speak to him. Outside IT'S NUT CITY. THE PRESS IS HELD BACK, but four giant mobile units that look like toasters are on the lawn.

WOMAN REPORTER (Cont'd)

...And we understand that the Vice President is nearby, waiting to come and speak with her.

Trudy comes over to Annie, Annie's very nervous.

TRUDY

He's asking again.

ANNIE

Nnno.

CUT TO: EXT GLENN HOME

GUY FROM WINDOW running around a corner. In b.g. we can see the chaos around John Glenn's home.

INT/EXT INSIDE A LIMOUSINE, a man in a big, Texas cowboy hat is talking to TWO REPORTERS, who seem trapped on the drop seats.

LBJ

You know what the Russians want ?

REPORTER

Nosir.

LBJ

They want our peckers in their pockets.

LBJ finds that more amusing than does the woman reporter.

THE GUY FROM THE WINDOW--JOHNSON'S AIDE--pokes his head in the limo window.

AIDE

She still says no.

LBJ

(his gracious smile)

NO ? Did you tell her I will bring in ABC-TV, NBC-TV, and CBS-TV, and her words--and mine--will be heard by millions ?

OUTSIDE THE LIMO, A MAD RUSH is on. Reporters are scrambling around the corner towards the Glenn house.

AIDE

Yes, sir. I told her that.

The two reporters in the car get out and begin to run with the other reporters.

LBJ

Hey, come back here ! Where in hay-ell are they going ?

AIDE

I think the flight's been cancelled.

LBJ

Cancelled ? Why...that's perfect ! I'll go in there and console her...on nationwide TV. I'll pay her a sympathy call.

AIDE

Yes, sir.

CUT TO: INT GLENN CAPSULE

(166)

THE CAPSULE. THE HATCH IS THROWN BACK. CARPENTER LOOKS DOWN AT GLENN. HE LOOKS EXHAUSTED, EMOTIONALLY SPENT. As he climbs out, he looks angrily at the sky.

CUT TO: INT GLENN HOME

(167)

Annie Glenn, and she looks more nervous than ever. In b.g. the AIDE is at the window again.

ANNIE

T...tell him nno !

CUT TO: EXT/INT LIMO

(168)

LBJ in his limo, SCREAMING.

LBJ

What do you mean, no ? I want somebody to get NASA on the line. I want to lean on NASA, I want to buck this problem right on up the chain to the top. Right away.

AIDE

To the top ?

LBJ

Damn right ! They better get someone to tell her to play ball.

CUT TO:

INT

HANGAR AT CAPE CANAVERAL. John Glenn is covered with sweat, drawn, deflated, and beginning to feel very tired after waiting for five hours. He's still got half his mesh underlining hanging off his body and bio-sensor wires sprouting from out his thoracic cage. Carpenter, Gus, Deke, and Shepard are walking with him when they see the head NASA MAN and his entourage approaching.

NASA MAN

John, there's a problem with your wife.

GLENN

My wife ? Is it serious ?

NASA MAN

We think it is. There's a phone hookup here. We've got her on it.

'Serious' could mean a lot of things at this point. Glenn picks up the phone in an agitated state.

GLENN

Annie ? Are you all right ? (He listens)...
The Vice President ?

NASA MAN

(whispering)

Tell her to let him in with the networks.
Coverage, John. You know.

John Glenn has his back up.

GLENN

(into phone)

Annie, if you don't want the Vice President or the TV networks or anybody else to come into the house, then that's it as far as I'm concerned ! They are not coming in-- and I will back you up all the way, a hundred percent, and you tell them that. I don't want Johnson or any of the rest of them to put so much as one toe inside our house !

INT GLENN TALKS

ANNIE'S FACE--brightens with strength.

THE NASA MEN are horrified.

NASA MAN

John, you can't do that. That is the Vice President and head of the program--You have got to think of the broader interests of the program !

GLENN

You're way out of line !

NASA MAN

I'm out of line ? I'm running this show here.

169

169A

GLENN

We'll see about that.

NASA MAN

And I'm thinking of changing the order of flight assignments.

THE OTHER ASTRONAUTS CROWD IN AROUND GLENN. They look like a tough and angry bunch of muthas.

DEKE

Oh yeah, who you gonna get ?

The Nasa Man gets the message. He tries to soften.

NASA MAN

Now wait a second, fellas.

SHEPARD

Step aside, pal.

CARPENTER

Make way, buddy.

And they all brush by the NASA hierarchy, protecting John Glenn.

CUT TO: INT/EXT LIMO

(170)

Johnson's limo, and it's ROCKING with anger. A small crowd of aides backs off.

LBJ

Pansies ! Cows ! Gladiolas ! Why the fuck isn't there anyone who can deal with a housewife ?

(OMIT 171)

CUT TO: EXT AUSTRALIA BUSH

(172)

A HERD OF KANGAROO LEAPING ACROSS THE ROAD. GORDO IS IN A LAND ROVER, DRIVING WITH AUSTRALIANS IN BUSH HATS, ETC., blowing car horns at kangaroo:

DRIVER

Come on, mates ! Move along there !

EXT AUSTRALIA

A BLOCKHOUSE IN THE WILDERNESS. CARD: Muchea, Australia. Feb.20,1961.

(173)

Gordo is walking toward the blockhouse when he sees a GROUP OF MEN in baggy brown suits, their hair hanging down in Shirley Temple ringlets. Dark-skinned, scary looking. Especially the Old Guy in b.g. with the bone in his nose.

MAN

Hi, mon.

GORDO

Hiya. Who are you guys ?

MAN

Aborigines, mon. Who you be ?

GORDO

I'm an astronaut.

Glances pass around. The aborigines murmur the word 'astronaut' a few times. The Australians wait patiently by the blockhouse--we can see the elaborate instruments inside.

ABORIGINE

What you do here, astronaut ?

GORDO

A friend of mine is gonna fly overhead, and I'm gonna help him.

ABORIGINE

Fly overhead ? You blokes know how to do that too ?

GORDO

You mean you know how to do that ?

ABORIGINE

Not me, mon. But that old bloke over there, he know. I seen him do that many times. Maybe he can give you a hand if you get in trouble. He is real good at it. What time is your friend gonna fly by ?

GORDO

He should be by tonight, but you never know. These things have a way of being late.

ABORIGINE

We know that, mon. These things are hard. People don't know that. They think you are a fake if your magic do not happen just so, right away.

CUT TO: INT GLENN CAPSULE

JOHN GLENN in the capsule. He's just sitting there. Then, HE STARTS SHAKING (We're using the one-frame per second technique they actually used to photograph the astronauts in the capsule)--

GLENN

The clock is operating. We're underway.

EXT. THE BLAST FROM THE ROCKET IS TREMENDOUS.

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE SHIELD THEIR EYES AND LOOK TO THE SKIES. CHEERING.

THIS TIME WE SEE THE HIGHPOINTS OF THE LAUNCH FROM INSIDE.

THE ATLAS BOOSTER IS JETTISONED and through a circle of fire we can see the earth receding below.

QUICK CUTS FROM ACTUAL FOOTAGE of the horizon coming into view, of the capsule going into orbit.

MINIATURE SHOT. THE CAPSULE TURNING AROUND. (175A)

INT CAPSULE

GLENN

Zero-g and I feel fine. Capsule is turning around. Oh ! That view is...tremendous ! Flying backwards. (176)

You can feel the blue and white planet moving below.

INT
AT CONTROL CENTRAL. Shepard is capcom. (177)

SHEPARD

Roger, Friendship 7. You have a Go, at least seven orbits.

GLENN

Roger. Understand. Go for at least seven orbits... This is Friendship 7. Can see clear back, a big cloud pattern way back across toward the Cape. Beautiful sight.

CELEBRATION, CHEERING -- THIS IS IT ! A MAN IN ORBIT !

DISSOLVE FROM SHOT TO SHOT. MOVING INTO NIGHT.

INT GLENN CAPSULE

GLENN

Speed is 17,500 miles per hour, and we are moving into night. (178)

And the earth begins to dim, like on a rheostat. Then a tremendous band of orange light stretches from one side of the horizon to the other, as if the sun were a molten liquid that had emptied into a tube along the horizon.

CUT TO:

INT
THE TRACKING STATION IN AUSTRALIA. NIGHT. GORDO'S INSIDE WITH HIS AUSSIE TEAM. (179)

OUTSIDE. THE ABORIGINE SHAMAN is chanting in the night. Other aborigines sit on their haunches watching. They've got a huge bonfire going. The SHAMAN grunts something, and his eyes roll to the skies. (180)

FIRST ABORIGINE

Somethin' is comin by up there, mon.

INSIDE. THERE'S A PAUSE BEFORE THE LIGHT ON THE PANEL INDICATES: (181)

AUSSIE ENGINEER

'e's comin', lads.

And Gordo swings into action.

GORDO
Hey there, Friendship Seven.

GLENN
That sure was a short day.

GORDO
Say again, Friendship Seven.

GLENN
That was the shortest day I've run into.

GORDO
Kinda passes rapidly, huh ?

GLENN
Yessir...I can see lights down there in Australia, Gordo. Where are they from ?

GORDO
Well John, all of Perth and all of Rockingham got their lights on. (And he looks out the window at the bonfire). And we got a few more lit here and there.

GLENN
Well, they show up very well, and thank everybody for turning them on, will you ?

GORDO
We sure will, John.

Gordo waves out the window. The aborigines wave back. SPARKS fly out from the bonfire and UP INTO THE SKY.

UP IN THE SKY. GLENN IS HEADING TOWARD THE BLUE BAND OF DAWN. (182)

GLENN
Wait a second. I see something strange out here. Sparks. Needles of some kind...all over the sky...

AND WE SEE A DAZZLING DISPLAY OF THOUSANDS OF TINY NEEDLES GLEAMING IN THE SUN OUTSIDE THE CAPSULE. LIKE SPARKS.

GLENN
This is Friendship 7. I'll try to describe what I'm in up here. I am in a big mass of some very small particles that are brilliantly lit up like they're luminescent. I never saw anything like it ! They're round. They're coming by the capsule, and they look like little stars. A whole shower of them coming by ! They swirl around the capsule and go in front of the window and they're brilliantly lighted. They probably average maybe seven or eight feet apart, but I can see them all down below me also.

CAPCOM (SHEPARD)

Roger, Friendship 7. Can you hear any impact with the capsule? Over.

GLENN

Negative, negative. They're very slow. They're not going away from me more than maybe three or four miles per hour.

No answer from Capcom. The lights outside are swirling around, and they really look incredible...almost alive.

GLENN

Don't think they could be any kind of organism... Unless some Air Force communications experiment went amok? ...Or our astronomers have been wrong?... Hello, Capcom, do you read me? (Silence) There's some swirling over me now...over? (More Silence). Over?!

IN CONTROL CENTRAL

(183)

Grim looking faces. Something's wrong that Glenn doesn't know about.

NASA MAN

Could it be those fireflies or whatever they are?

VON BRAUN

I doubt it. It's the heat shield. It's loose. If it comes off...he...will...

SHEPARD

If the heat shield comes off, he'll burn up... he'll fry...When he tries to re-enter.

VON BRAUN just looks at him, and the meaning of the look is clear--it's extremely dangerous--OR WORSE.

GLENN'S VOICE

Do you read me? Over...?

NASA MAN grabs the microphone.

NASA MAN

Let's try something. Anything. (Then over intercom). Roger, Friendship Seven. Will you correlate the actions of the particles surrounding your spacecraft with the actions of your control jets? Do you read? Over.

GLENN'S VOICE

Roger. I do not think they were from my control jets, Negative. Over.

BACK TO GLENN. A CAMERA IS FLOATING IN THE CABIN NEXT TO HIM. HE REACHES TO GRAB IT.

(184)

GLENN

I'm going to try to get some pictures of those little guys.

CAPCOM VOICE

Sounds like a good idea, Friendship Seven.

GLENN BEGINS SNAPPING PICTURES. NOTE - HIS CAMERA-WEIGHTLESS EFFECT

DISSOLVE TO: NIGHT FALL

(185)

AND DISSOLVE TO: DAWN.

(186)

GLENN LOOKS DOWN. Little flashes are all over the place below.

GLENN

Looks like lightning down below. Like flashlights underneath a blanket. Kinda extraordinary. Here come the little guys again. Fireflies.

And they swirl up around his capsule. Glenn laughs.

GLENN

Get outta here.

Then he sees something on the other window--BLOOD. It's all over the window, blood and dirt, a real mess.

GLENN

Here's something on the other window. Blood ? Blood and dirt. Dirt could be from firing of escape tower. Blood, maybe from bugs...No...Or birds ...Or maybe it's just the sun diffusing...Or from the fireflies ? Do you read ? Over ?...Whoa! There they go again.

The fireflies swirl up and around him. No answer from below.

CONTROL CENTRAL. Tremendous activity.

(187)

SHEPARD

He's going into his third orbit. How long you gonna keep him up there ?

NASA MAN

What am I going to tell him ?

SHEPARD

He's a pilot! You tell him about the condition of his craft!

NASA MAN

Okay. Three complete orbits. Then we give him the bad news.

INT GLENN HOME
CUTS OF ANNIE WATCHING.

(188)

BACK INSIDE THE CONTROL ROOM. A DIAGRAM BEING PORED OVER.

(189)

NASA MAN

(carefully explaining each technical term)
 There's one hope. We've decided it may be possible to leave the retrorocket package that covers the heat shield on instead of blowing it off as planned. The straps may be strong enough to hold the head shield in place. Maybe it'll protect the loose heat shield. If it fails...

UP WITH GLENN. Sailing along.

(190)

CAPCOM VOICE

Friendship Seven. We have been reading an indication on the ground of segment 5-1, which is Landing Bag Deploy. We suspect this an erroneous signal. Cape would like you to check by putting the landing-bag switch in auto position.

GLENN

You have been reading....?

CAPCOM

Over ?

GLENN

Do I understand you have been reading this all along ?

CAPCOM

That's correct, over.

GLENN

(suddenly suspicious, but always cool)
 Okay, if that's what you recommend, we'll go ahead and try it. (He switches). Negative. Over.

CAPCOM

Roger, that's fine. In this case, we'll go ahead, and re-entry will be normal.

GLENN

Re-entry ? Only three orbits ? Over.

CAPCOM

That is correct....

Glenn knows he's in trouble, but what is remarkable when we look at the actual film on his face is the calmness with which he faces this danger.

CAPCOM

John, leave your retro pack on through your pass over Texas. Do you read ?

GLENN

Roger. What is the reason for this ? Over.

No answer.

GLENN

Do you have a time for going to Jettison retro ?
Over.

CAPCOM

Texas will give you that message. Over.

TEXAS

This is Texas, Friendship Seven, howyreyouall ?
Ah...we are recommending that you leave the
retropackage on through the entire re-entry...

Shepard's voice breaks in.

SHEPARD

John, retract your periscope manually. Listen,
John, we are not sure whether or not your landing
bag has deployed. We feel it is possible to re-enter
with the retropackage on. We see no difficulty at
this time with that type of re-entry. Do you read ?

Glenn understands now. He knows the heat shield is loose and
they are trying to protect it with the retropack.

GLENN

Roger, understand.

And his hands begin to fly as he begins to flip switches,
(He comes down backwards) to put some things on automatic,
to retract his periscope, as he looks out the window, HE SEES:

FLAMES...The strap from the retropack is on fire. A thumping
sound on the window, the strap is coming apart. It breaks.
Then it's gone! The heat shield is beginning to burn. John
Glenn hangs on.

IN CONTROL ROOM. A STRANGE SOUND COMES OVER THE SPEAKERS, low
at first, crackling, then beginning to rise... (191)

CAPCOM

What's that ? That sound...?

SHEPARD

Humming. It's him. (Engineers look like he's crazy)
It's alright. He does that.

And Shepard leans forward prayerfully. Humming grows louder.

AND JOHN GLENN INSIDE THE CAPSULE BEGINS TO BUFFET. HE FIGHTS
WITH THE CONTROLS as the humming grows louder and louder: "Mmmmine (192)
eyes have seen the Glory of the Coming of the Lord..."

THE HEAT SHIELD IS ABLATING, SENDING OFF A CORONA OF FLAMES. THUDS. THE CAPSULE IS ROCKING. BUFFETING GROWS. HUGE CHUNKS OF THE CAPSULE ARE FLYING AWAY IN FLAMES. INCREDIBLE RACKING. "He is tramping out the fields where the grapes of wrath are stored."

THE BLACK SKY TURNS PALE ORANGE. FUEL GAUGE SHOWS EMPTY. "His Truth is marching on..." AND HE'S HUMMING LOUDER AND MUSIC JOINS IN, RISING...AS FIRE IS ALL AROUND HIM AND EVERYTHING IS RATTLING AND HE'S JUST A FLAMING BALL HURLING THROUGH THE SKY..."Glory, Glory..." and then...NOTHING ! TOTAL, ABSOLUTE SILENCE.

IN CONTROL ROOM. SHEPARD LEANS FORWARD TO MICROPHONE. (192 A)

SHEPARD

John...??

CAPCOM

He can't hear you. He's hit the ionization layer...No communications are possible for a few minutes. Then...we'll... know...

Schirra moves up next to Shepard, they wait...

In the Control Room everything seems agitated by the sudden silence that fills the room. Strange details: The lights moving down the huge location map in silence. Every bit of motion stops: a tapping finger stops; a messenger stops; a hundred tops of heads seem to be staring upward, mesmerized, waiting for some word from Above.

OUTSIDE. (DOCUMENTARY). CROWDS WAIT IN SILENCE. 192 B

THE PRESS CORPS SEEMS FROZEN, LOOKING UPWARD. 192 C

ANNIE GLENN WAITING NEAR A TV SET, THE OTHER WIVES NEARBY. 192 D
AND REPORTERS WAITING OUTSIDE.

CAPCOM (CAPE)

Ah, Friendship Seven, this is Cape. Do you read ? 192 E
(Silence). Ah, Friendship Seven, this is Cape.
Do you read ? (Silence). Friendship Seven this is
Cape. DO YOU READ ?

Suddenly it seems hopeless. He must be lost. Shrugs, bowed heads.

GLENN'S VOICE

Ah, loud and clear. How me ?

Sudden elation grips the Cape.

CAPE

Reading you loud and clear. How you doin ?

GLENN

Oh, pretty good....

They love that line --'pretty good'--Cheering in the control room as sound returns in a massive burst. Schirrah lights up a cigar for Shepard, and the music rises up.

GLENN (Cont.)

My condition is good (slightly guarded), but that was a real fireball, boy, I had great chunks of that retropack breaking off all the way through....

STOCK

And over the ocean, a BEAUTIFUL PARACHUTE BLOOMS, DANGLING A TINY SEED--A CAPSULE. HE'S ALIVE...DRUMS ARE BEATING....

(192F)

CUT TO: EXT NY TICKER TAPE PARADE

(193)

A SNOWSTORM OF TICKER TAPE. A GIGANTIC PARADE. MARCHING BANDS. AND MOVE INTO OUR INSERT: Our Glenn, Our Annie, and Our LBJ-- finally getting his moment of glory--all together in the same car.

Grown men, grown policemen, are crying in the streets (Shoot as insert).

CUT TO: INT CONGRESS

193A

CONGRESS. Glenn on the podium with LBJ and McCormack behind him. (Use actual pan over the room as he waves his arm and says:)

GLENN

...And I'd like to introduce the real rock in our family...My wife, ANNIE !...

CLOSE SHOT. THE BALCONY. TEARS ARE IN ANNIE'S EYES, AND IN THE EYES OF ALL AROUND HER.

AND IN JOHN GLENN'S EYES, A PROUD, TRIUMPHANT TWINKLE.

CUT TO: EDWARDS CLASSROOM

(194)

YEAGER IS AT A BLACKBOARD in a classroom. He's teaching a class. Diagrams are all over the board. The students are all young, shiny pilots. Yeager's puzzling over some chart he doesn't understand.

STUDENT PILOT

Sir, could you tell us some more about anisotropic functions and multiple-encounter trajectories...?

YEAGER

Yeah...well...uh...first you got to learn to be good flyers. Wax each others tails a few times up there, and...

ANOTHER STUDENT PILOT

Is that gonna get us to Houston ?

YEAGER

Houston ?

ANOTHER STUDENT PILOT

Yeah, that's where they are moving the Astronauts to. That's where all the goodies are going to be.

STUDENT PILOT

Yeah, and all the nookie.

YEAGER

(as they laugh)

Is that right ?

INT

CORRIDOR OF EDWARDS BUILDING & CLASSROOM

195

Yeager stops at an open door. PRINCE is inside with another group of young pilots, and they are sitting on a row of chairs. A NASA MAN is talking to them.

NASA MAN

Now cross your legs. Look, you see how sloppy those short socks look ? Wear 'em long like this...

All the pilots have crossed legs, and it's Prince who has the long knee-length socks. His eyes meet Yeager's. He feels embarrassed and looks back at the NASA MAN.

NASA MAN

...From now on you wear knee-length socks so that no bare flesh shows. If you get to be an Astronaut, you are going to be on stage a lot and in the public eye a lot, and you have to look sharp. And another thing, when you put your hands on your hips...(he demonstrates)...The thumbs should be to the rear and the fingers forward. Only women and interior decorators put the thumbs forward and the fingers back, like this.

The Astronaut-hopefuls laugh.

VOICE BEHIND YEAGER

I predicted it, didn't I ?

IT'S THE LIASON MAN, with his little pork-pie hat. The two of them begin to walk out of the building.

LIASON MAN

I was right all along. I knew what would happen without the coverage and the funding. In my line of work, it's important to feel you can predict the future. Yeah...I was right all along....

YEAGER

Is that right ?

LIASON MAN

Yes. I'm moving on to Houston, too. I guess they understood and appreciated the problems I had here...Did pretty well, considering....

EXT

OUTSIDE THE BUILDING.

196

LIASON MAN

Well, there's the good news...It's finally showed up....

The NF-104 is being towed into a hangar nearby. Yeager is mesmerized by the new beast's beauty. A glint from the plane's window.

LIASON MAN (Cont.)

...the one we had been waiting for, with the big rocket. Boy, if we'da only had those a few years back....Anyway, the bad news is that the entire program is probably going to be scrapped. From now on the Astronaut Boys in Houston have got the only ticket...Barring, of course, some... unforeseen...event....

CUT TO:

197

FULL SCREEN, TV SCAN. WALTER CRONKITE.

CRONKITE

Astronaut Gordon Cooper has been in orbit for some time now, and if he is able to complete his scheduled twenty-two orbit mission, there's no doubt about it--the United States will be right back in the ballgame with the Soviet Union. You can't help wondering what goes through a man's mind at a time like this ?

ON SAME TV, MOVING INTO CONTROL CENTRAL. A LIFE SCIENCES ENGINEER monitoring the biomedical telemetry suddenly notices something funny:

LIFE SCIENCES ENGINEER

Migod ! Look at this !

INT

AT CONTROL CENTRAL everything stops for a moment. Chill of panic. Then, relief as:

198

LIFE SCIENCES ENGINEER (Cont.)

Every objective reading and the calibrations and printout indicate...The guy's stacking Z's...The astronaut has gone to sleep up there !

CUT TO: INT GORDO COOPER

Gordo asleep in his capsule, drifting through space.

199

GORDO

ZZZZZZZZzzzzzzZZZZZZZ

SCHIRRA'S VOICE

Oh, Gordo ? Gordo ? We...ah...hate to disturb you.

GORDO

Huh ? Whuzzit ?

SCHIRRA'S VOICE

But millions of Americans were wondering what's going through your mind at a time like this, what you're seeing.

GORDO

Hey, no sweat. What I'm seeing is...Wey-al, I am seeing two things right now, Capcom. First thing is down there's the Himmuh-lay-yus...which look real fine from up here...Tells you just how small the world is...

Far down, the incredibly tiny mountains....

(199A)

GORDO

And second thing, Capcom, is a little tiny green light on the control panel which would indicate a malfunction of the electrical system....

The little tiny green light is on...And then some SPARKS begin to fly over the panel, fireworks.

GORDO

...Yeah, that's what it looks like, Capcom. And it appears the G-forces are beginnin to build pretty heavily...even though we are not beginning re-entry as yet....And we're rolling around here a certain amount....Things are beginnin to stack up here a little bit....

And he's really rolling around. All hell is breaking loose up there.

WT

CONTROL CENTRAL.

(200)

Panic, as one Engineer after another begins to report in:

FIRST ENGINEER

The electrical malfunction has done something to the oxygen balance. Carbon dioxide is building up in the capsule and in his suit and helmet.

SECOND ENGINEER

The automatic control system has begun re-entry sequence.

VON BRAUN

But he's not re-entering ! He's still orbiting and hasn't slowed down at all !

BACK TO: GORDO. Sparks shoot off control panel.

(201)

GORDO

Wey-ah, it looks like we have lost control of the altitude readings. In fact, it appears the automatic control system has gone out completely (he tries something). A-yep, that's what it has done. I guess we got about twenty-one orbits so far, so we'll just go for the twenty-two that are on the program....

CONTROL CENTRAL. Panic

VON BRAUN (202)

The function of the automatic system is to line up the capsule and fire the retro-rockets for re-entry into the earth's atmosphere. Without the automatic system, if his angle of attack is too shallow, he will skip off the top of the earth's atmosphere and be lost in space, forever. It's impossible to bring it in....

SHEPARD

Almost impossible.

VON BRAUN

What ?

SHEPARD

Well, you boys were kind enough to give us some control over the vehicle. Maybe he can do it by hand. Like a pilot.

VON BRAUN

Impossible.

SCHIRRA (Capcom)

We'll see. Gordo ? Faith Seven, do you read ? Over ?

GORDO'S VOICE

Loud and clear, Jose. Over.

SCHIRRA (Capcom)

You're going to have to establish the capsule's angle of attack by hand, using the horizon as your point of reference. In other words--bring her in by hand. What do you say to that, Gordo?

GORDO'S VOICE

(Chimpanzee sounds coming over the intercom: screeches, grunts, shrieks).

SHEPARD

Whaddy know--we only got a chimp up there. What do we do now ?

VON BRAUN

How can you joke at a time like this ?

SHEPARD
Got anything better to do ?

CUT TO:

TRUDY inside a small house. Other WIVES in b.g. All silent. They are waiting, waiting. (203)

OUTSIDE. SOUNDS OF THE PRESS SWARM. They are moving into position on the Danger Wake, they sense the story here. (204)

SUDDENLY THE PHONE RINGS. Trudy looks at Betty, and at the other wives--this is it ! The phone tolls for thee. It rings again. Trudy picks it up. Her voice is desiccated. (205)

TRUDY

Hello.

DEKE'S VOICE

Trudy ? This is Deke. You probably heard there were problems...

Trudy nods, but cannot speak.

DEKE'S VOICE

Don't worry. He's practiced this one on the procedures trainer....Trudy, this is what we wanted to do anyway.

Trudy just holds the phone, frozen....It's like one of her dreams....

CUT TO: INT/EXT CAPSULE

THE INCREDIBLE HORIZON FROM OUTER SPACE. It begins to rock; then it begins to shudder. (206)

INSIDE. Gordo is smiling his rat-racer's smile, using a gentle stick n rudder touch on the controls. (207)

THE CAPSULE GOES HURLING TOWARD THE HORIZON, jet streams squirting. AND USING NASA SHOTS--Create the dizzying montage of return to earth from Gordo's POV: Continents whirl and slide by, waters strobe, and as the capsule falls from the sky and begins to burn, Gordo's voice is over it all, with Yeageresque calm: (208)

GORDO

Well, ladies and gentlemen, we'll be busy up here in the cockpit makin our final approach into Pittsburgh, so we want to thank you all for flyin American and we sure do hope we'll see you again real soon....And it looks like we're gonna bring her in right on the ole Bazoo ! (209)

As the strange parachute unfurls and below is an aircraft carrier.

AT CONTROL CENTRAL. Schirra lights up a cigar for Shepard, the match burning. AS THE SCREEN GOES BLACK EXCEPT FOR THE FLAME... (210)

AND IN THE BLACKNESS, A SENSE OF MOVING QUICKLY THROUGH A TUNNEL TOWARD A DISTANT OPENING. SMOKE AND FIRE IN THE OPENING (Where the match was--a match cut) As in a dream of death...or of birth, speeding quickly toward the light--

LBJ'S VOICE

And here they come...Looky here what I brought you!

THEY BURST INTO THE HOUSTON COLISEUM where thousands of people mill around and stare down at them from the stands. The band bursts out: THE EYES OF TEXAS ARE UPON YOU.

GORDO AND TRUDY have been riding side by side, sitting on the back of a Caddie convertible. Behind them, the other astronauts are sitting on the backs of their convertibles as the motorcade makes its way onto the floor where in TEN HUGE PITS THEY ARE ROASTING THIRTY COWS ON SPITS, LIGHTS CUTTING THROUGH SMOKE. LBJ is on the podium wearing a cowboy hat with the microphone.

LBJ

Welcome to Houston! Your new home! Your neighbors here--and me--we'd like to give you this little barbecue here, Texas style!

A GIANT PAPER PLATE. As a big chunk of black beef is dropped onto it next to a peck of kidney beans, sinking in gravy. Trudy smiles weakly as she looks down at the plate and up at a Texas Woman.

TEXAS WOMAN

Eat some, honey, you deserve it.
You musta been through a lot.

Trudy smiles, nods, sees Gordo beaming a smile at her through the smoke. Around them and the others--A RING OF TEXAS RANGERS with their huge, white hats, facing outward. Beyond them the thousands of onlookers in the grandstands--The Eyes of Texas are Upon Them, watching them eat amid the burning cattle. A long line of Houston VIP's are giving them all the Big Howdy.

CUT TO: INT HANGAR AT EDWARDS

A HANGAR AT EDWARDS. TOTAL SILENCE. THE NEW PLANE (NF-104) with the huge rocket mounted on it sits silently in the hangar. (212)

YEAGER STANDS WATCHING IT. The plane glares back...like the bronc that can't be broken.

RIDLEY moves up behind him, silently. (Ridley's been working on a nearby plane, a wrench in his hand.) Yeager knows he's there:

YEAGER

Ridley, I hear the Russians set a record of goin up 114,000 feet startin from the ground.

RIDLEY

Somethin like that. Nobody seems to care about that kinda record no more. All they seem to want now's capsules n' outer space.

YEAGER

(as if he didn't hear)

Y'know, I think this plane could top that Russian record.

RIDLEY

(looks at him oddly)

Maybe. (He starts to walk away.) Too bad they cancelled this one. It looks like it woulda been a good one.

He leaves Yeager alone, squinting at the plane.

CUT TO: HOUSTON.

(213)

SMOKE IS RISING FROM THE BARBECUES. Texans stare down from the stands.

Lines of dignitaries wait to meet the seated astronauts and wives, who are trying to eat off paper plates awkwardly balanced on their laps. BRIEF SNATCHES OF CONVERSATIONS:

TEXAN (TO SHEPARD)

Since you boys will be re-locatin here in Houston to show our appreciation for what you've done, Mr. Sharp here will contribute the land in Sharpsville; the contractors will contribute the houses; and the furniture and department stores will furnish the furnishins, from top to bottom...

ANOTHER TEXAN (to Annie Glenn)

Hi, there, little lady! Just damned glad to see you, too! We've heard a lot of good things about you gals, a lot of good things (huge Karo-syrup grin).

Annie laughs, looks across the room at her husband, surrounded by Texans. He nods to her and smiles, ever watchful. The Texan moves to Alan Shepard.

ANOTHER TEXAN

Hiya. Which one are you?

SHEPARD

Shepard.

ANOTHER

Oh, yeah? Which one's Glenn? He's the one I wanta meet.

IN ANOTHER AREA. GORDO, GUS, AND WIVES shaking hands, when suddenly they hear the SOUND--root weevils. And through the smoke, THE PRESS is bobbing and weaving in their direction.

GORDO

Oh, oh. Time to get adorable, Gus.

And they advance toward Gordo and Gus with their cameras with the most protuberant lenses, screwed into their eye sockets, elbowing and hiping one another out of the way.

ONE MEMBER OF THE PRESS, A T.V. HEAVYWEIGHT TYPE(OUR CRONKITE) barges right into the front with his camera crew.

TV HEAVY

We're talking to Gordon Cooper who has just proved himself to be America's top pilot. He's gone higher, faster, and farther than anyone else. I'd just like to ask you who was the best pilot you ever saw?

GORDO

Who's the best pilot I ever saw?

He's laughing, looking at Trudy--she knows his answer to that one--and it hadn't dawned on them til now that he is the top of the pyramid. But then he looks at Gus, gruff, little Gus sitting there scowling at the press, and Gordo's mood changes. We haven't seen this side of Gordo before:

GORDO

(quietly)

I seen a lot of em. Most of em were pictures on a wall....

PRESS

What?...Speak up! ...Can't hear you... Whereabouts?

GORDO

...back at some place...that doesn't exist anymore. Some of em...are right here in this room...and some of em, they're still out there somewhere, doin what they always do, goin up each day in a hurtlin piece of machinery, puttin their hides on the line, hangin it out over the edge, pushin the outside of the envelope, then haulin it back... But there was one pilot I seen who truly had the right....

He's cut off right there by the Press as they crawl, hunker, elbow, shove and scrape their way toward him, bulbs popping, sound growing:

PRESS

Slow down...What did he say?...Could you speak up, please?...What's an envelope?....etc.

And Gordo suddenly comes to his senses. What do they care, anyway? This is not something to be talked about here. The fighter-jock in Gordo rises up again and that cocky smile returns.

GORDO

Who's the best pilot I ever saw?
...Why, yer lookin at him!

And Gus laughs, and Trudy laughs, and the bulbs pop the screen WHITE.

CUT TO: EXT EDWARDS AFB

AND OUT OF THE WHITENESS, THE DESERT GLARE. AND IN THAT DESERT GLARE AN INCREDIBLE FIGURE STANDS. He's wearing a glistening silver space suit, and he carries a gleaming helmet. The sunlight halos his head: (214)

FIGURE

Ridley!

Ridley has been working under a plane. As he steps out from underneath, the sun blinds his eyes. He sees the Incredible Figure.

RIDLEY

Yeah?

FIGURE

You got any Beemans?

Ridley's eyes light up. He's been waiting for this day, for those words again, for ten years.

RIDLEY

Yeah. Matter of fact, I think I got me a stick.

FIGURE

Loan it to me, will ye? Pay you back later.

RIDLEY

Fair nuff.

FIGURE

I think I see a new plane over there with my name on it.

Overjoyed, Ridley throws his wrench back over his shoulder and runs into the sun after the spaceman walking toward the new plane.

INT
CONTROL TOWER. EDWARDS.

118

215

TWO CONTROLLERS, half-drowsing, suddenly notice a PLANE taxiing down the runway.

FIRST CONTROLLER

Hey, what's that? Anyone got clearance?

SECOND CONTROLLER

What kind of plane is that? (into communications.. appropriate comm. inquiries). Do you have clearance?

YEAGER'S VOICE

Ah'm just takin her up to wring her out, boys.
Any objections?

YEAGER ROLLS BY ON THE RUNWAY AND TAKES OFF.

FIRST CONTROLLER

It's Yeager! No sir, no objections. All clear.
He must have clearance, right?

SECOND CONTROLLER

Sure, he must.

EXT EDWARDS

Ridley standing on the ground with a couple of pilots and engineers -- they're all shielding their eyes, looking to the skies. THEY SEE:

216

INT/EXT NF 104

A distant, tiny plane streaking upward.

217

YEAGER IN THE SKY. He's going up at a 50-degree angle.

UP AND UP. THE ALTIMETER is at 40,000 feet and the MACHOMETER already at 2.2. HE PULLS BACK THE STICK. STEEPER, HIGHER, FASTER.

HE CUTS IN THE AFTERBURNER AND IT SLAMS HIM BACK INTO HIS SEAT.

UP AND UP. HE THROWS THE SWITCH ON HIS ROCKET ENGINE AND IT SLAMS HIM BACK AGAIN.

THE NOSE PITCHES UP TO 70 degrees.

THE G-forces are rising, shaking Yeager back into his seat.

THE SKY CHANGES TO INDIGO AS THE PLANE ROARS UP AND UP.

A LIGHT ON THE CONSOLE. HE THROWS A SWITCH. THE LIGHT GOES OUT. 78,000 feet. MACHOMETER MOVES UP... 2.3, 2.4...CLIMBING. Like he wants to poke a hole in the sky and climb right on up to Heaven!

90,000...95,000...100,000 feet and STILL CLIMBING. THE SKY IS ALMOST BLACK. HIS EYES ARE RED, ANGRY. PUSH IT HIGHER. HE SLAMS ANOTHER SWITCH. HE SEES: A STRANGE SKY, STREAKING AND STROBING AHEAD OF HIM. FLASHING FORMS OF LIGHT IN THE COCKPIT: THE SIREN CALL.

104,000 FEET. He pushes another control. NOTHING HAPPENS. HE PUSHES again. NOTHING. AGAIN. NOTHING AGAIN. Something floats by, weightless.

YEAGER

(talking to his horse)

Just a little bit more. I know you got it in ye...Another few thousand feet... Just gimme a little more...a little more...

STRANGE NOISE IN THE PLANE. He's gently trying to coax more out of the beast. His voice is calm, but there's a strange look in his eye.

YEAGER

Stretch a little more...What're you doin ?

THEN THE PLANE STOPS CLIMBING. IT JUST HANGS THERE IN SPACE: THEN IT BEGINS TO GO BACK DOWN, TAIL FIRST, NOSE UP IN THE AIR.

YEAGER HITS A THRUSTER. HYDROGEN PEROXIDE SQUIRTS OUT OF THE JET ON THE NOSE OF THE SHIP...AND DOESN'T DO A GODDAMN THING.

THE ALTIMETER IS DROPPING...93,000....92,000...NOSE STILL UP IN THE AIR....

HE HITS A THRUSTER. THE SHIP SNAPS INTO A FLAT SPIN, spinning right over its center of gravity, like a pinwheel on a stick.

YEAGER

Now you got it...Okay, now let's get yer nose down, like you're sponse to...

YEAGER'S HEAD IS ON THE OUTER EDGE OF THE CIRCLE, SPINNING AROUND...HE HITS THE SIDEARM CONTROL AGAIN. NO MORE HYROGEN PEROXIDE. EMPTY.

HE CAN'T LIGHT UP THE ENGINE AGAIN UNLESS THE NOSE IS DOWN...

YEAGER (hard breathing, soft voice)

Say, Christamighty, whatsamatter ?.... Howcome yore nose won't stay down. Gotta light up your engine again. I cain't getcha goin without yore nose down...We got to get some air...We got problems...ole buddy....

HE'S IN A STEADY STATE FLAT SPIN AND DROPPING...THE ALTIMETER IS DROPPING...81,000....80,000.....R.P.M.'S ARE AT DEAD ZERO.

HE'S FALLING, FALLING...AND THE DAMNED BEAST ISN'T MAKING A SOUND. JUST SPINNING AROUND LIKE A LENGTH OF PIPE IN THE SKY...

BARELY ABLE TO STRUGGLE AGAINST THE CENTRIFUGAL FORCE, HE HITS THE SPEED BRAKES...

YEAGER

Put...some brakes...on ye....
Hold on, there...hold....

BANGO ! THE CHUTE CATCHES WITH A JOLT ! It pulls the tail up. Now he's going straight down...15,000...12,000 feet.

He jettisons the chute. THE BEAST HEAVES UP AGAIN ! THE NOSE GOES BACK TO THE AIR !

IT BEGINS TO SPIN AND SPIN. 8,000 feet. We can see the earth spinning toward us.

HE HUNCHES HIMSELF INTO A BALL, AND REACHES UNDER THE SEAT FOR A CINCH RING. WHAM ! HE'S EXPLODED OUT OF THE COCKPIT WITH TREMENDOUS FORCE. IT'S LIKE A CONCUSSION. HE'S HURLED INTO SPACE.

AND YEAGER BEGINS TO SLOWLY FLOAT AND FALL THROUGH THE SKY. LIKE AN ANGEL...A FALLING ANGEL.

AND AS HE FALLS...HIS CHUTE OPENS...THE EJECTION SEAT BECOMES ENTANGLED IN THE CHUTE...AND THE SEAT CRASHES INTO HIS VISOR. HIS FACE IS ON FIRE AS HE FALLS...

CUT BACK TO:

^{INT} HOUSTON. THE DOME. Smoke is rising around the Politician. 218

POLITICIAN

And now, in honor of the Most Important Pilots in the History of Mankind, and our new neighbors, we are real proud to present...MISS SALLY RAND !

THE BAND STRIKES UP "SUGAR BLUES" ...and out prances Sally Rand carrying her enormous plumed fans, winking and mincing about... and she knew things about moving pelvises and about moving fans that may never be known again...as she shakes and wags and fans for the Seven Brave Brothers and their Seven Brave Brides through the smoke of the burning cows.

And then, a strange thing happens. We're on a CLOSE SHOT OF ALAN SHEPARD, sitting next to Louise, his wife, and they have bemused smiles that tell us they are being cordial enough... but right then, THE MUSIC FADES. It's still there, of course, because Sally Rand is bumping and grinding away; but now we're in another dimension, as it were, and SHEPARD LOOKS ACROSS THE CROWD AT GLENN. And Glenn feels his gaze and there's the slightest of nods.

AND GLENN LOOKS AT GUS. AND GUS AT WALLY, and so on. And the WIVES, TOO, are part of this perception that takes place in the silence that occurs amidst this cacaphony of sound. They all feel it as they look across this place filled with car salesmen and roasting cows, with hunkered down photographers and swarming pressmen...and they know something no one else there knows.

In the silence there's the faint music of a long-lost Pancho's playing, of a time of flyboys and pictures on the wall...BUT THE MAIN SOUND, THE SOUND THAT GROWS LOUDER AND LOUDER...AND LOUDER...IS OF A PLANE SCREAMING DOWN AND DOWN THROUGH THE SKIES (as under the opening credits, where we did not see it), UNTIL SUDDENLY...THE SCREEN EXPLODES IN FIRE.

BLACK SMOKE RISES IN THE DESERT.

220

LONG SHOT. THE SMOKE IN THE DISTANCE. A plane is burning out there, alone, in the twisted Joshua tree landscape.

THEN, IN THE FOREGROUND, AN INCREDIBLE APPARITION RISES UP IN SMOKE--

A BURNING HELMET -- WITH A MAN INSIDE ! Blood is pouring out of the man's left eye and there's smoke inside the helmet. He's trying to jam his hand through the hole in the visor...the oxygen is burning...he's gulping smoke...he's struggling...

With tremendous effort he lifts the broken visor. Salvation ! Like a sea the air carries it all away -- the smoke, the flames... The fire is out. YEAGER STANDS ALONE IN THE DESERT. Joshua trees all around. In the distance, black smoke rises from his crashed plane.

Some drops of blood fall from his hand onto the chute as he rolls it up. And he lifts the chute up and puts it under one arm, and picks up his helmet and puts it under the crook of the other arm. He turns, and we see: his eye socket is slashed, swollen, caked shut, and covered with a crust of burned blood. He looks around...And he begins to walk.

A lone figure in a pressure suit walking across the face of a planet -- it could be a moon, any moon at all. And he walks on and on.

THE AMBULANCE is roaring through the nightmare of gnarled and twisted Joshua trees searching for any semblance of a human form. RIDLEY'S inside along with the two drivers.

221

DRIVER

Over there ! Is that a man ?

RIDLEY

Yer damn right it is !

They head off the road, tumbling across the desert toward the distant figure, walking in the setting sun.

Yeager walks with a steady pace, still carrying his rolled up parachute and the helmet in the crook of his arm...

And there's some MUSIC THAT SAYS...SOME MEN...SOME THINGS... NEVER DIE...

THEY'RE STILL OUT THERE IN THE HIGH DESERT...HEADED THIS WAY.

END.