

THE RIGHT STUFF

Book: Tom Wolfe  
Screenplay: William Goldman

First Draft  
May, 1980

In the darkness, credits and music.

The credits should be plain, quick, without frills of any kind.

The music, on the other hand, is John Williams at his most symphonic. Huge, booming sound, building and building as the credits roll on.

What this music seems to be saying is: hold on to your popcorn, kids, this is going to be something. Something big. Something important. Something never before seen by the eyes of man. And now, as the credits come to an end and the music climaxes --

FADE IN ON

The first shot of the movie and it's a tiny circle in the center of the screen, and visible in that circle panting and adorable, is as cute a little black and white terrier as anyone's likely to come across. The terrier just stands there, sort of idly looking around -- a complete contrast to the music we've just finished listening to. Now --

CIRCLE WIDENS TO INCLUDE

A GUY. Nothing special about him. He picks up the terrier, pats it a few times, and then does a surprising thing: he begins attaching wires to the dog, and as the wiring goes on --

CUT TO

ANOTHER GUY. Nothing special about him either. He's standing in a place we've come to know: a blockhouse, a control center. And he's staring out a small window. It's dark out, but he keeps on staring and we at last begin to make out a vague shape out there, and we can't quite tell what it is exactly, but it sure isn't small, and now this second guy speaks a few words in a steady rhythm -- 'Three -- Two -- One --'

That's the meaning of the words anyway, but the words themselves are spoken in Russian and as he says one final word -- 'Liftoff' in his native tongue --

CUT TO

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW and where it was dark before there are now great sheets of flame, and that vague shape we saw, it was a giant rocket, and now, as it rises through the flames up and out of sight --

CUT TO

WASHINGTON D.C., a bitter November morning, 1957.

We're outside the Senate Office Building and it's the time the Important People come to work. Right now two tv units are set up. They are close to one another and one of them is in operation while the second waits its turn.

A UNITED STATES SENATOR is speaking into the camera of the first unit. And if there's something familiar about this man, it might just be that he's the quintessential Texan -- around 40, tall, big boned, dressed in clothes that are somewhere between Robert Hall and Saville Row.

CUT TO

THE TEXAS SENATOR as he speaks into the camera.

TEXAS SENATOR

The Roman Empire controlled the world because it could build roads and controlled the land. The British Empire controlled the world because it controlled the sea. In the air age, we were dominant because our planes were dominant. And...

(pause for emphasis)

...whoever controls the high ground of space will control the universe. And right now, the Russians are ahead.

(another pause -- but this time his voice has changed to a sharper tone as he addresses the tv director)

You get all that?

CUT TO

THE TV DIRECTOR, moving to the TEXAS SENATOR.

TV EDITOR

Yessir, thank you sir --

SECOND TV EDITOR

(from the second unit that is lighting up)

-- all set for you, Senator.

(leading TEXAS SENATOR the few steps to his equipment)

Why don't I just ask you how important you think the dog is.

## TEXAS SENATOR

Good, good; then I can go  
straight into my Roman Empire  
bit --

(as this is  
taking place --

## PULL BACK TO REVEAL

A VERY IMPRESSIVE FIGURE WATCHING THE TV FAWNERS. Oh, this guy doesn't look impressive -- mid-40's, smokes too much, drinks too much, lives on coffee and junk food. His name is Robert Lincoln Jones, but he is univerally known as LINK and he is one of the main characters of this piece.

LINK just might be the outstanding free lance reporter now operating. He writes for Harper's, the Atlantic, the New Yorker. He's constantly fighting with his editors as well as his friends. He was one of the first Nixon haters, but he never bought Adlai Stevenson 100 percent either. He never buys anyone 100 percent. He has covered wars as well as natural disasters, has gotten drunk with Judy Garland in Los Angeles, Ed Murrow in London. And nothing surprises him anymore.

Right now, LINK notices a TALL MAN heading into the Senate Building and he falls in step with him. The TALL MAN, by the way, is SENATOR PIERCE and if the first senator we met was the quintessential Texan, then PIERCE is the quintessential New Englander. Laconic, Brooks Brothers, thin, shrewd. He and LINK have had a good relationship for a long time.

## LINK

(indicating the  
tv cameras)

Hear the song LBJ's singing  
today?

(LYNDON JOHNSON is  
still back, talking  
to the cameras)

## SENATOR PIERCE

We spoke last night on the  
phone -- I'm aware of his  
feelings.

## LINK

Are you also aware that the  
New York Times has proclaimed  
this country is now in a  
'race for survival.'?

(PIERCE nods)

Doesn't this all sort of remind  
you of the Orson Welles Martian  
Broadcast?

CUT TO

PIERCE as he stops, looks at LINK.

SENATOR PIERCE

Link, the fact that we allow you to run around loose is a tribute to the free press of this country.

(serious now)

No, we have to give the Russians credit. It's a cute stunt --

(beat)

-- if they actually did it. I'm not sure it's true but in the event that it is, are you aware they admit they can't get the dog down? We Americans would never kill a dog --

LINK

-- Senator Pierce, please, I haven't had my breakfast --

SENATOR PIERCE

Are you going to be at Canaveral?

LINK

For the Vanguard launching? Yes.

SENATOR PIERCE

Well then you'll see our answer. The Russians work in secrecy, we work in the open. Our system is best. Next month at Canaveral, you'll see the American way...

(now on the words

'American way'

quickly --

CUT TO

A VANGUARD ROCKET pointing toward the heavens beneath the Florida mid-day sun. It's a pretty impressive piece of machinery, built in three stages and

CUT TO

THE IDENTICAL SHOT, only in black and white, and seen on a tv monitor. A WALTER CRONKITE type face is now superimposed on the screen with the Vanguard behind it. There is a tremendous sense of excitement and importance about what follows, and you can hear it in the CRONKITE TYPE's voice.

(It probably was Cronkite, by the way. His entire comeback -- he had been blitzed in the ratings by the Huntley-Brinkley combo -- was based on his closeness to the space program. So let's call him Cronkite here.)

# CRONKITE

Ladies and Gentlemen, the first nationally televised countdown is entering it's final moments.

## CUT TO

A series of quick shots, in color, as CRONKITE's voice goes on talking over. What we basically see are:

- a) bleachers filled with VIP types, SENATOR PIERCE clearly among them.
- b) Over one hundred journalists in an area near the VIP's. LINK, chain smoking as always, is in the front of the pack.
- c) A number of television crews, all cameras trained on the vanguard.
- d) The beaches, with a lot of people standing around, many with binoculars. Lots of children are present.

# CRONKITE (OVER)

The crowds on the beaches continue to build -- all schools in the Cape Canaveral area are closed for this event. Offices and factories, the same. Journalists from every free nation and --

(his voice changes here -- even more excitement)

-- and now here is Project Vanguard's Deputy Director J. Paul Walsh on an open wire --

## CUT TO

THE ROCKET, in black and white, as seen on the small tv monitor -- this is the view the nation got --

# WALSH (Over)

...five...four...three...two  
...one...zero...FIRE!

Now the thing about rockets when you launch them is they start verrrry slowly, because the pull of gravity is strongest at the start. Sometimes they look as if they're barely moving at all.

And the Vanguard looks that way too -- as if it were barely moving at all. Except that in the case of the Vanguard, that's all it did do -- barely move. One inch. Two. Maybe six. Then the lower stage exploded into flames and the whole rocket was enveloped in giant billowing fire and now suddenly

CUT TO

THE REAL THING IN GIANT LIVING COLOR as the upper two stages of the rocket slowly keel over and topple into the wet sand surrounding the launching pad and

CUT TO

THE VIP's, stunned and

CUT TO

THE REPORTERS, and they're surprised too, sure, but at least they've got a story and as they scribble furiously on their notebooks --

CUT TO

THE VANGUARD, as the flames mount higher and the sound of the burning is very loud and if you wanted to teach a course in public relations disasters, you couldn't do better than to start off with this baby and

CUT TO

LINK, making his way into the VIP area, moving to SENATOR PIERCE who sees him.

LINK

Any comments, Senator?

SENATOR PIERCE

(a bit shaken)

Well, clearly, we cannot claim a one hundred percent success.

LINK

(nods)

A hundred percent might be a bit much. It looked like a fat old geezer sinking into a barcalounger.

SENATOR PIERCE

But if you do things openly, you're bound to occasionally get egg on your face.

LINK  
(gesturing toward  
the burning rocket)  
This was an egg, then?

CUT TO

THE ROCKET lying there like some murdered prehistoric beast.

CUT TO

LINK and THE SENATOR.

SENATOR PIERCE  
It's a fucking omelet, Link,  
and you can find a family  
magazine to print that, you  
can quote me.  
(stronger now)  
But dammit, man, we'll get it  
to work --

LINK  
-- I don't see why not -- we've  
got just as many German rocket  
scientists as the Russians do --

SENATOR PIERCE  
(nods)  
-- absolutely, and just as good,  
too. Look -- they put a dog in  
space, clearly they're going to  
put a man up there. Well, so  
are we, only we'll do it first.  
There's only one question to  
answer now.

LINK  
And that is?  
(SENATOR PIERCE points  
to the Vanguard as we --

CUT TO

THE SHATTERED VANGUARD, the flames still leaping into the  
Florida sunshine.

CUT TO

SENATOR PIERCE AND LINK, staring at the inferno.

SENATOR PIERCE  
When we do get it all to  
working --

(MORE)

SENATOR PIERCE (contd)

(beat)

-- who sits on the candle...?

(now, as they stand  
there, watching the  
flames, we hear a  
NEW AND DIFFERENT  
VOICE)

NEW AND DIFFERENT VOICE (OVER)

I think it should be a scuba  
diver.

(now, very quickly --

CUT TO

WASHINGTON and a brainstorming session in full swing. We're in a large office and half a dozen men are sitting around with notebooks, etc. One air force officer, a young Colonel, the rest civilians.

VICKERS runs the meeting and we'll be seeing more of him. (Eventually, he will be in charge of Astronaut training.) A bright guy, early 30's.

VICKERS

Why a scuba diver?

FAT GUY

(his was the  
suggestion)

Well, they're used to danger  
and if they've had bathosphere  
work, they're used to compressed  
areas -- the capsule they're  
building isn't much bigger than  
a phone booth.

VICKERS

(writing)

Okay, scuba divers.

SKINNY GUY

(excited)

How 'bout those cliff jumpers  
from Acapulco?

VICKERS

(patiently)

Acapulco is in Mexico -- I don't  
think the American public is  
going to want to pay for putting  
a Mexican in space.

SKINNY GUY

Right, right.

(another idea)

Stunt men -- those Hollywood guys -- they're brave and they're American, you gotta admit that.

VICKERS

They're probably too flashy for President Eisenhower's taste, but...

(he writes the suggestion down)

Okay -- so far we've got stunt men, scuba divers, arctic explorers, bobsledders --

NEW VOICE (OVER)

-- forget everything.

(now, as the brain-stormers turn --

CUT TO

THE DOORWAY and an old Government type standing there shaking his head. He comes in, closes the door, sinks into a chair, talking as he does.

OLD GOVERNMENT GUY

Ike's decided it'd take too long to get security clearances on these job titles.

VICKERS

So who's going?

OLD GOVERNMENT GUY

Military test pilots, 'cause they've already been cleared and --

YOUNG COLONEL

(very quiet and controlled)

Did you say test pilots?

OLD GOVERNMENT GUY

(nods)

Just so they're short enough to fit in the capsule, college equivilency, under forty -- maybe a hundred fit the requirements and --

YOUNG COLONEL  
 (exploding like  
 a bomb)  
 -- and they won't do it!

CUT TO

THE YOUNG COLONEL, up and out of his seat, pacing like a leopard in a cage.

YOUNG COLONEL  
 Because it isn't flying! Flying  
 is when you put your ass on the  
 line in a machine that you  
control. With your body and  
 your reflexes and your brains.  
 This --  
 (and he points to  
 the sheet of paper  
 with occupations  
 on it)  
 -- this is getting stuffed into  
 a capsule and lobbed like a  
 cannonball. This is Spam in a  
 can -- my God, aren't they  
 training apes for the preliminary  
 flights?

VICKERS  
 (nods)  
 I've heard talk.

YOUNG COLONEL  
 Oh, that'll go over big --  
 (giving a  
 speech now)  
 ' -- your country has chosen  
 you men because you are the  
best -- and by the way, an ape's  
 gonna go up first.'  
 (he sags back down  
 in his chair)

VICKERS  
 (dubious too)  
 And order's an order -- all we  
 can do is bring 'em up in groups  
 and sell like hell.  
 (he has been fiddling  
 with his paper list.  
 Now we see what he's  
 made: a paper air-  
 plane. As he sails  
 it across the room --

CUT TO

THE PAPER AIRPLANE. As it nosedives and crashes down --

CUT TO

THE STEPS OF THE PENTAGON. A winter morning. Thirty-six young men in crew cuts and cheap fitting civilian clothes walk toward an entrance. They all wear huge watches. And they look, by the way, all but indistinguishable, one for the other. As they move inside

CUT TO

A LARGE PENTAGON ROOM. The men in crew cuts sit listening while up front, VICKERS AND THE YOUNG COLONEL face them. VICKERS is finishing his pitch.

VICKERS

Gentlemen, we wouldn't have brought you here disguised as civilians if it weren't important. And Project Mercury, as I hope I've explained, is important.

CUT TO

THE MEN listening, as VICKERS goes on. None of them looks particularly rapturous. But they all still do look alike.

VICKERS (OVER)

You can ask questions in a moment, but let me sum up: We plan to put a man in space in fifteen months, by mid-1960. There will be first sub-orbital, then orbital flights.

CUT TO

VICKERS. He knows he's going over like a turd in a punchbowl but he keeps plugging away.

VICKERS

If you volunteer, let us know tomorrow. Selection will begin immediately and I must warn you all that testing will be rigorous.

(ONE PILOT raises his hand)

-- one moment more, please. I just want to re-emphasize that this has the highest national priority, comparable to a crash program in wartime.

(smiles at the PILOT)

Now.

CUT TO

SLIM, the pilot with his hand up, and an obvious natural leader. Handsome, fit, smart, the works.

SLIM  
Will we be flying?

CUT TO

VICKERS AND THE COLONEL, as their eyes flick toward each other, then away.

VICKERS  
I'll let the Colonel answer that.

YOUNG COLONEL  
(hearty as hell)  
Well, naturally, that depends  
on your particular definition  
of flying.

SLIM  
(like a shot)  
I mean control, sir. Will we  
control the capsule?

YOUNG COLONEL  
Listen, we're ready to spend a  
million dollars a man to train  
you, for that kind of money,  
who'd want a passenger?

SLIM  
(pressing)  
But will we be in control of  
the capsule, Colonel?

CUT TO

THE COLONEL. Voice up a notch now.

COLONEL  
This is still in the seat of  
the pants stage, no one can say  
for sure. But I can say this  
for sure --

CUT TO

THE COLONEL. CLOSE UP.

COLONEL  
-- it's going to involve risk.  
(MORE)

COLONEL (contd)

(beat)

So if you don't volunteer, that fact will not be entered on your record --

(long beat)

-- or held against you in any way...

(now, from that tense face --

CUT TO

THE BAR OF THE MARRIOTT near the Pentagon and three guys sitting around guzzling beer.

Not, by the way, three ordinary guys.

ALAN SHEPHERD graduated from Annapolis. A New Hampshire native and the son of an Army career officer. Funny and very quick, SHEPHERD could be both one of the boys and a spit-and-polish officer. A Navy Commander now, at 35, he was already marked by his superiors as Admiral material.

GUS GRISSOM was 32 and a Captain of the Air Force. Short and feisty, he was an Indiana boy with an Engineering degree from Purdue. He had won the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with Cluster from his Korean service.

WALLY SCHIRRA was almost 36 and like Shepherd, an Annapolis graduate and a Navy Commander. His father had been an ace in World War I and his father-in-law was an Admiral. He had won the Distinguished Flying Cross and two Air Medals for Korean action.

In other words, three career officers very much on the come.

SCHIRRA

I'm not saying Project Mercury will destroy our careers; 'cripple' might be a more accurate adjective.

SHEPHERD

It's a verb --

WAITRESS

-- another round, guys?

SCHIRRA

Many more rounds, my dear.

GRISSOM

(as the WAITRESS goes)  
If only I'd been born six inches taller I'd of been ineligible.

SHEPHERD

I think we ought to try and find  
the bright side --

SCHIRRA

-- what bright side? Jesus, forget  
that it's a civilian operation and  
forget there's no flying and forget  
the fact that every test pilot not  
in the program will be holding his  
nose when we pass by --

(big)

-- it's a Rube Goldberg scheme.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. He nods, finishes his beer; despite the air of  
banter, this is a major decision in their lives and they all  
know it.

CUT TO

SCHIRRA, staring at his beer glass.

SCHIRRA

What's the worst thing that can  
happen to a career officer.

GRISSOM

Being left behind.

SCHIRRA

So what happens if we volunteer  
and after three years they say,  
'oops, fellas, our rockets keep  
blowing up, thanks a bunch.'  
And we go back to our old jobs.  
Three years behind.

SHEPHERD

This Mercury really is a Larry  
Lightbulb scheme.

(and suddenly he  
is laughing)

My God, remember the Hummingbird?

(to GRISSOM)

That was the single engine plane  
with the twenty-five foot long  
propellor that was supposed to  
take off vertically.

CUT TO

THE WAITRESS, returning with six more beers, stopping and looking for a moment at the three men who are suddenly all roaring with laughter. She quickly puts the bottles down, moves away --

GRISSOM

-- don't forget The Sea Dart --  
     (he can hardly get  
     the words out)  
 -- that was the ten ton baby  
 that was supposed to take off  
 and land on water skiis...

CUT TO

THE THREE OF THEM, almost out of control with laughter now.

HOLD ON THE THREE OF THEM. And now, as we watch, the laughter dies.

SHEPHERD

Listen, we all have to volunteer  
 and we know it.

SCHIRRA

It won't go on our records if we  
 don't, they said that.

SHEPHERD

They said a lot of things --  
 'highest national priority' --  
 'risk' -- 'comparable to a crash  
 program in wartime.' Well, this  
 is wartime, only it's 'The Cold  
 War.' And a career officer never  
 refuses a combat assignment.

GRISSOM

That's right.

SHEPHERD

Not unless he wants to be left  
 behind...

(HOLD on the three of  
 them as they drink their  
 beer in silence. Then --

CUT TO

A CLOSE UP OF A HAND. That's all. Just a hand, it looks like it must belong to a man, but that's about all we can tell. The hand is resting on a table.

Now a pair of hands comes into view. The pair of hands

hold some straps. They turn the first hand so that the palm is facing up, and then, as they begin to strap the hand to the table top --

CUT TO

A MONSTER OF A NEEDLE. The needle is unusual not only in its size, but also by the fact that connected to it is an electrical wire.

Now the MONSTER NEEDLE is moved close to the STRAPPED HAND. And then zap without a seconds wait, the NEEDLE is driven right into the big muscle at the base of the thumb as we

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

ALAN SHEPHERD and a bunch of doctors and technicians. SHEPHERD is the owner of the strapped hand. The doctors all wear white coats and those reflectors strapped to their heads.

GLADYS LORING is the lead doctor and she could have been Lon Chaney's leading lady. Not that she's ugly or anything. It's just that she has an air of such superiority, such condescension that you absolutely hate her on sight.

SHEPHERD is more than a little interested in what's being done to his hand. The wire from the needle leads to what looks like a doorbell. The doorbell is connected to some sort of meter.

And now, DOCTOR LORING presses the doorbell and the instant she does --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD'S HAND and my God, it's balling up into a fist and then springing open and then bang, into a fist again, then open again, on and on, and the incredible thing is this -- it's going faster than you could possible do it yourself and

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, staring at his hand, and it's clear that he's just as surprised as we are at what's going on and

CUT TO

DOCTOR LORING and she's not even paying attention to SHEPHERD'S hand; no, she's looking at the meter and making copious notes. Everybody's studying the meter and taking notes. Now, Doctor Loring pauses, takes her hand off the doorbell looking thing.

SHEPHERD'S hand stops its mad movement.

SHEPHERD

Doctor Loring?  
(she glances briefly  
at him)  
What's this for?

DOCTOR LORING

It's not important for you to  
know that, is it?  
(and now, as she  
presses the doorbell  
again --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD'S HAND, opening and shutting involuntarily, out  
of all control. Now --

CUT TO

GUS GRISSOM, sitting in his shorts in a room, looking the  
least bit ticked.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

The reason for his mood: his bare feet are stuck into a  
large tub of water that is filled with ice water.

We're in a medium sized plain room, the door open to the hall.  
GUS just sits there until suddenly a face pops into the  
doorway. It's SLIM, the super leader pilot who asked the  
'Is it flying' questions at the pentagon briefing.

SLIM

Enjoying yourself?

GUS

(indicating the  
ice water)  
This is really one big load of  
crap, y'know that?

CUT TO

SLIM, quickly stepping into the room, talking fast and soft.

SLIM

You wanna get in the program,  
you watch that kind of talk.  
Don't you understand, these idiot  
reflector heads haven't ever sent  
(MORE)

SLIM (contd)  
 anyone into space so they don't  
 know what to test for. So  
 they're testing us for everything.  
 It's all loony tunes, but you  
 better show a positive attitude,  
 strive for the halo effect, just  
 copy me you'll do fine --  
 (and suddenly a  
   terrific sincere  
   smile hits his  
   face as we

CUT TO

DOCTOR LORING in the doorway.

SLIM  
 Just passing the time with Grissom  
 is all.  
 (and he leaves)

DOCTOR LORING  
 How are we coming thus far?

CUT TO

GUS. He would like to really let her have it but obviously  
 doesn't. Instead, he looks at the ice cubes.

GUS  
 I can't say I'm having fun,  
 Doctor, but I've had lots worse  
 experience --  
 (now quickly looking  
   at him)  
 -- and of course I know you have  
 good sound medical reasons for  
 the experiment.

DOCTOR LORING  
 Of course.  
 (nods, leaves)

GUS  
 (alone again)  
 Good sound crappy medical reasons...  
 (as he sits there,  
   glumly contemplating  
   the future --

CUT TO

SOMETHING NEVER SEEN BEFORE ON THIS OR ANY OTHER PLANET:  
 THE IDIOT BOX. (Also called by some, The Panic Box.)

This was a device which consisted of a series of displays and, beneath the displays, a series of controls. The Test Subject would sit in front of the box, and what he would try and do was keep the displays centered. In other words, there were dials, and the dials were supposed to remain in the center display area, which was green. But if the dial of the display wandered into the red, that was bad.

Which was where the controls came in. What you did, when the dial moved into the red, was adjust the control which moved the dial back into the green.

But the controls were not all the same: in fact, they were all different. Some were levers, and some were toggle switches, and others were push-pull devices and some were little wheels you spun right to left while others were little wheels you spun left to right.

After a dial moved into the red area for five seconds, a warning light began flashing in the middle of the machine. And five seconds later, a loud claxon began to wail. (This is legit folks. It existed and maybe still does.)

Now the final little gimmick of the Idiot Box was this -- the shrinks who stood behind the Test Subject would let you get your confidence going good, all the dials in the green, and then they would speed up the malfunctions. They kept on speeding it up to see what would happen to you -- no one could keep up with the Idiot Box when it was going full out, it was simply not humanly possible. Okay. Now that we've looked at this machine with the dials and controls for a moment --

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

THE TEST SUBJECT. He another guy, the same age as GRISSOM OR SHEPHERD, crew cut, another fighter jock in other words. And he's going good. Now --

PULL FURTHER BACK TO REVEAL

DOCTOR LORING AND THE OTHER REFLECTOR HEADS, watching and taking notes.

Other men were allowed to watch the Idiot Box in action, and in the rear of the room are SHEPHERD AND SLIM, standing silently. From them --

CUT TO

DOCTOR LORING, her hand on the Idiot Box Controls. As she moves them up a notch --

CUT TO

THE TEST SUBJECT, and now the dials are going from the green into the red more rapidly so he works the controls more rapidly, trying to keep up. He'll pull this control, spin that one, and dammit but he's keeping the dials in the green areas as well as you could expect and

CUT TO

DOCTOR LORING, moving the speed up another notch and

CUT TO

THE TEST SUBJECT, sweating now, his hands moving as fast as he can and

CUT TO

THE IDIOT BOX, and now two dials are in the red and as they move back into the green three more dials are in the red and

CUT TO

THE TEST SUBJECT, holding his breath and

CUT TO

THE IDIOT BOX as now a big light begins flashing because five seconds have elapsed and

CUT TO

THE TEST SUBJECT, swearing to himself, trying to get the dials into the green but he's spun a wheel the wrong way and now half a dozen dials are in the red and

CUT TO

THE IDIOT BOX AS THE CLAXON begins to sound, loud and it keeps right on, getting louder and louder and

CUT TO

SHEPHERD AND SLIM, watching in silence and

CUT TO

THE TEST SUBJECT and suddenly he begins to hit the Idiot Box with his fists, but the claxon goes right on and then he pushes his chair back hard so it falls over and he stands and whirls and

CUT TO

DOCTOR LORING, quietly taking notes, watching as we

CUT TO

THE TEST SUBJECT, storming out of the room.

SLIM  
 (quietly, to SHEPHERD,  
 watching the TEST  
 SUBJECT leave)  
 ...he just blew it...  
 (as the Idiot Box  
 blasts on --

CUT TO

A LARGISH LAB ROOM. Cubicles are visible. ALL SIX GUYS are present: SHEPHERD, GRISSOM, SCHIRRA, SLIM, the guy who went to pieces on the Idiot Box, and another fighter jock. They stand in their shorts as DOCTOR LORING hands out test tubes. Finished, she points to the cubicles.

DOCTOR LORING  
 Sperm.

GRISSOM  
 (not sure he got  
 it right)  
 Didn't hear you.

DOCTOR LORING  
 Have you children?

GRISSOM  
 Two.

DOCTOR LORING  
 Then you heard me.  
 (again pointing to  
 the cubicles)  
 Place your sperm in the test tube.

IDIOT BOX GUY  
 (embarrassed -- all  
 are embarrassed,  
 except SLIM)  
 How?

DOCTOR LORING  
 Masturbation is customary.

CUT TO

THE GUYS; they just stand there in their shorts holding the test tubes, glancing at the cubicles, then at DOCTOR LORING. SLIM leaves the rest and heads for the first cubicle, then stops, turns.

SLIM  
Doctor Loring?

DOCTOR LORING  
Yes, Slim.

SLIM  
If I've forgotten how, will you  
come in and give me some hints?  
(and as he flashes  
his great smile

CUT TO

DOCTOR LORING, and almost before she can stop herself, a smile starts. Quickly, she turns away and busies herself with her note taking as we

CUT TO

NIGHT and a plain barracks type room in the clinic area. GRISSOM AND SHEPHERD are getting ready for bed when SCHIRRA scurries in.

SCHIRRA  
I got a quick glimpse of  
tomorrow's stuff -- right off  
there's the D.A.P.

SHEPHERD  
What's that mean?

SCHIRRA  
(worried)  
Draw A Person.

SHEPHERD  
(worried too now)  
Damn.

GRISSOM  
(not worried at all)  
I always drew good.

SHEPHERD  
(whirling on him)  
These shrinks don't wanna know  
if we can draw -- they're after  
what's inside here --  
(MORE)

SHEPHERD (contd)

(and he touches  
his forehead)

-- the bastards.

(to SCHIRRA)

Do we draw a man or a woman?

(SCHIRRA doesn't  
know)

Oh, are they tricky -- how do  
we out fake 'em, that's the  
problem. I mean, if we draw  
a woman do we give her boobs?  
And how big? Marilyn Monroe  
has gotta be a no-no, I don't  
want 'em thinking I'm not  
happily married.

SCHIRRA

If we drew 'em droopy, wouldn't  
that mean we loved our mother?  
That'd be good.

SHEPHERD

Not if it makes 'em think we're  
mama's boys.

GRISSOM

What about a dong?

SHEPHERD

(furious)

A dong on a woman? --

GRISSOM

(furious right back)

I'm not any mama's boy, I'm  
drawing a man.

(beat -- and now  
he's worried too)

But if I do, do you think  
they'll think I'm gay?

SCHIRRA

I just hate Sigmund Freud.

GRISSOM

What can we draw that's safe?  
(and on that --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. Triumphant.

SHEPHERD

Got it!

(MORE)

SHEPHERD (contd)  
 (they look at him)  
 I'm drawing a religious figure.  
 (beat)  
 But with hair on his chest.  
 (and now, from  
 there --

CUT TO

A PLAIN DINING ROOM. Cafeteria style. Half a dozen tables, no more. At one, the Six Test Persons sit SHEPHERD, GRISSOM, etc. Or actually five are seated with SLIM just joining them, straddling his chair gracefully, putting his tray down.

At a neighboring table sit the reflector heads, led, as always, by DOCTOR LORING. The shrinks are eating, but they are also not unaware of the chit-chat at the potential astronauts table.

This is toward the end of the test period, they've been at it for days, and everybody seems just a bit tired. There's almost a feel of tension in the air.

CUT TO

DOCTOR LORING. She eats precisely; you get the impression food means little or nothing to her. Her clipboard is on the table by her plate.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD SCHIRRA AND GRISSOM. The food ain't so hot; they stuff it in in silence.

CUT TO

SLIM, he reaches out for the salt cellar on the table, shakes some salt on his food. Shake. Shake a little harder. The thing is empty. He makes a face, reaches over to the next table, swipes the salt cellar. Shake. Shake. It's empty too. This time he says 'shit' quietly, has to get up to reach the third table.

CUT TO

THE THIRD TABLE as SLIM grabs the salt cellar, heads back to his tray, sits. Shake. A little salt. Shake again. A little less. Shake. Now there's none.

SLIM  
 (holding the salt  
 cellar in one hand)  
 Not one of you thought to leave  
 any for me, right?

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, looking at SLIM. What is this?

SLIM

You get poked all day long  
and then there's no salt, is  
that it?

CUT TO

DOCTOR LORING, interested now. She keeps on eating but  
her eyes are flicking to SLIM now.

CUT TO

SLIM.

SLIM

I mean, shit.

(and he shoves his  
tray away)

You can't eat this crap without  
salt, who can eat crap like  
this without salt on it?

(beat)

I mean, shit.

(and he slams his  
fist down on the  
table)

CUT TO

DOCTOR LORING. She has her clipboard now and is commencing  
to write.

CUT TO

SLIM. Punctuating each word with a shaking motion of the  
cellar toward his plate.

SLIM

It's -- goddam -- empty!  
There's -- no --

(and now suddenly  
he's aware of  
LORING and

SHEPHERD AND GRISSOM, taking it all in as SLIM flashes his  
great smile toward the DOCTOR.

SLIM

(expansive)

Hey, no big deal or anything --  
(MORE)

SLIM (contd)

(shrug)

-- I just sometimes like a little salt, that's all.

DOCTOR LORING'S eyes flick to SLIM, back to her clipboard, back to SLIM, flick to the clipboard as she writes.

SHEPHERD

(very low, to GRISSOM)

...he just blew it...

(he and GUS stare at their trays, continuing to eat; SLIM looks around, continuing to smile his great smile. There is silence. But now a new sound starts. It's crazy, like the bubbling of a thousand voices, but you can't make it out, it's all muffled, and as that sound increases --

CUT TO

A PIECE OF FABRIC. We're close to it, can't remotely tell what it is but that bubbling boiling human sound is louder still and now suddenly

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

That the fabric was a piece of a curtain and now the curtain parts and bright lights hit us hard and beyond the lights we can make out a large room crammed with people. Hundreds of people, some with notebooks, some with cameras, some standing, some sitting, some squatting, some up on ladders and

CUT TO

A NASA PUBLIC RELATIONS GUY we're going to see again -- PETERSON is his name -- speaking quite loudly over the din.

PETERSON

Ladies and gentlemen: in about sixty seconds we will give you what you've all been waiting for: the names of the seven volunteers of the Mercury Astronaut Team.

CUT TO

THE STAGE OF THE ROOM -- we're in NASA D.C. Headquarters, it's April of '59 and the press conference is about to begin. SEVEN MEN are guided out to a long table on the stage. We recognize three: SHEPHERD, GRISSOM AND SCHIRRA. ALL SEVEN seem blinded by the lights and confused by the tumult. On the table is a model of the Mercury capsule mounted on an Atlas rocket. As the SEVEN sit --

PETERSON

Take your pictures as you will,  
gentlemen.  
(and on that

CUT TO

Bedlam -- it looks like full moon time in a loony bin as photographers, dozens and dozens of them, begin advancing -- they look like beggars from an Asiatic slum -- creeping forward, clicking away, elbowing each other, muttering and hipping one another, swarming forward, never once looking at each other but only forward at their subjects, their cameras screwed into their eyes and

CUT TO

GUS AND THE OTHERS -- this is not their kind of scene -- my God, it's not anybody's vision of Heaven -- and you almost sense he wants to bolt until the craziness is over and

CUT TO

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS, more like beggars than ever, muscling each other harder as they close in, clicking like madmen, grunting, crawling closer and closer until they're right on top of the SEVEN, cameras only inches away from the faces of men whose names they've never heard and

CUT TO

THE TABLE and some of the SEVEN are trying to handle it with dignity but it's hard and

CUT TO

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS, still none of them speaking to each other, just fighting for position and just as it seems that they're going to climb over the table and attack the SEVEN, a bunch of NASA men move in and wave the photographers back and

CUT TO

PETERSON, a few minutes later; the photographers are cleared now.

PETERSON

Ladies and gentlemen, these seven, the Project Mercury Astronauts, have been selected to begin training for orbital space flight. It's my please -- no -- -- it is my honor, to have you meet --  
(he gestures toward the table as we

CUT TO

THE SEVEN MEN. They were seated alphabetically and the CAMERA moves as the names are spoken, but we don't linger.

PETERSON (OVER)

Malcolm S. Carpenter, Leroy G. Cooper, John H. Glenn Jr., Virgil I. Grissom, Walter M. Schirra, Jr., Alan B. Shepherd, Jr., and Donald K. Slayton --  
(and now there is this loud sound and we

CUT TO

THE ROOM AND ALL THE PHOTOGRAPHERS are applauding wildly. All but LINK, who stands with his peers, glancing at them, shaking his head in wonder. Next to LINK, an older REPORTER looks positively weepy. LINK moves away as we

CUT TO

PETERSON, to the first questioner, who has raised a hand.

PETERSON

Yes?

1ST REPORTER

Could you just tell us what your wives have to say about this?

As has been stated, they are seated alphabetically, so that GRISSOM is next to SCHIRRA who is next to SHEPHERD. GLENN is more or less in the center.

GRISSOM

(whispered, to SCHIRRA)  
Our wives? -- what the hell have they got to do with anything.

GLENN'S VOICE (OVER)

My wife Annie and I didn't  
start going together til we  
were six --  
(and on that --

CUT TO

JOHN HERSCHEL GLENN JR. IN EXTREME CLOSE UP. Short red hair and green eyes and a smile that could light up any room of any size anywhere. He speaks well and warmly and his charm and sincerity you can't buy at Bergdorf's. The lone Marine of the group and from this day forth, the star.

GLENN

-- but we didn't get serious  
til our teens.

(a nice appreciative  
reaction from the  
reporters. GLENN  
looks at his fellow  
flyers -- )

I don't think any of us could  
go on with something like this  
if we didn't have pretty good  
backing at home. My wife is my  
rock, and I'm sure the same goes  
for the rest of the guys.

CUT TO

GRISSOM. He shoots SHEPHERD a look. What's with this Glenn?

CUT TO

ANOTHER REPORTER.

REPORTER

Could you tell us please about  
your religious affiliations.  
(this has been  
directed to  
GRISSOM)

CUT TO

GUS. When it comes to public speaking, he has never been Norman Peale; oh sure, get him after a few beers on the subject of jet engines and he can give it a decent whack, but religion? --

GRISSOM

(finally)  
I guess you could say I'm a  
Protestant.

(MORE)

GRISSOM (contd)

(quick)

I am a Protestant, absolutely,  
I belong to the Church of Christ.

(beat)

But I'm not what you'd call real  
active.

CUT TO

SLAYTON. DEKE was, along with GLENN, one of the two hottest  
pilots of the group. He also was, along with GRISSOM, one  
of the least happy public speakers.

SLAYTON

(swallows)

I'm a Lutheran.

(trying to keep  
it honest)

And I go to church...uh....  
periodically.

SHEPHERD

(seated alongside)

I attend the Christian Science  
Church regularly, but I am not  
a member of any church.

CUT TO

THE REPORTERS. RAPT AND SILENT. Listening as we hear --

GLENN'S VOICE (OVER)

Before I entered this program,  
I had long discussions with my  
minister about possible ethical  
objections.

CUT TO

JOHN HERSCHEL GLENN JR. IN EXTREME CLOSE UP.

GLENN

(the man is a spellbinder)

I am a Presbyterian, a Protestant  
Presbyterian, and I take my religion  
very seriously, as a matter of fact.  
I live it every day of my life.  
For me, God is not an ace-in-the-  
hole, to be used only in case of  
emergency.

(and as he finishes --

CUT TO

THE PRESS, clapping again, louder than ever as we

CUT TO

A DOORWAY in the rear of the room. VICKERS, the guy we met in the discussion scene about who would go, stands in the rear, watching it all. LINK comes alongside. They know and like each other. This next is fast and quiet --

LINK

Hey Vickers, you're gonna be their training officer, so lend a hand, ok?

(VICKERS nods)

-- well, there's interest in a book if there's a decent book to be done. You helped select these guys, true?

(another nod)

Okay; Glenn I know you got from Central Casting, but where'd you find the other six?

VICKERS

(laughs)

Hard to believe, but he's legit. War hero, two wars. Try Three D.F.C.'s and seventeen Air Medals.

LINK

Then why does he set my teeth on edge? Why does this whole thing set my teeth on edge?

(loud clapping again  
in the room)

Jesus, these aren't Sandra Dee groupies, they're supposed to be reporters. They're going whacko and your seven haven't done anything yet.

(as he shakes his  
head --

CUT TO

INSIDE THE PRYSS CONFERENCE. It's coming to an end now, people are starting to close their notebooks. One final question --

LAST REPORTER

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

CUT TO

THE SEVEN as they look sheepishly at each other for a moment. Then CARPENTER raises his hand in the air. And COOPER raises his hand in the air. And so does GRISSOM and

CUT TO

SCHIRRA AND SHEPHERD AND SLAYTON, as they all raise a hand in the air. Now --

CUT TO

GLENN. Smiling. With both of his hands held high in the air. And from that --

CUT TO

AN ATTRACTIVE BRUNETTE IN HER MID 30's. She is sitting at a small electric organ in the game room of an unpretentious but pleasant house.

And she is playing and singing one of the glorious songs of Western civilization, 'Amazing Grace.' The woman's name, we will find out shortly, is ANNIE GLENN. She plays, by the way, quite well, but she sings beautifully, her voice high and pure and true.

ANNIE

(singing)

'Amazing grace

How sweet the sound...

(from somewhere now,

a phone rings and

is picked up after

the first ring)

...that saved a wretch like me...'

YOUNG GIRL'S VOICE (OVER)

Mom -- phone.

ANNIE

(gets up, goes to phone  
on far wall, singing as  
she goes. It's really  
a lovely sound)

'I once was lost

but now I'm found,

I was blind

but now I see...'

(as she picks up  
the phone

CUT TO

JOHN GLENN in a small room near the backstage area where the press conference was held. People from the conference can be seen milling around beyond the door.

GLENN

Annie? It's over and guess  
what -- I think I did us proud.

CUT TO

ANNIE GLENN. Smiles, as she holds the phone. Then --

ANNIE

(into phone)

You always duh -- duh -- duh --

(and now her face

is starting to

contort with the

effort of speech)

-- duh -- duh --

(finally)

-- do us pruh -- pruh --

(and again the face

contorts and one thing

is very clear -- ANNIE

is cursed with one of

the classic stutters)

CUT TO

JOHN GLENN. Holding the phone. Patiently. His wonderful smile is visible.

ANNIE'S VOICE (OVER)

-- pruh -- pruh -- pruh --

(it's getting worse --

he's still as patient

as before)

-- pruh -- pruh --

CUT TO

ANNIE. CLOSE UP. The effort of getting the word out is terrible. She holds the phone very tightly now, as if it were a lifeline.

ANNIE GLENN

-- pruh -- pruh --

(a final desperate try)

-- proud...

(HOLD on her sweet

contorted face for

a moment. Then --

CUT TO

THE CONTORTED FACE OF GUS GRISSOM.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

The reason: he is being tattooed. The guy doing the job is a terrific young medical man named DICKENS, but universally referred to as DOC. He is their medical adviser, and crucial to them, just as VICKERS is crucial in his role as their training officer. VICKERS AND DOC are around constantly.

DOC

You're a national hero, quit  
snivelling.

We are in DOC'S medical office and the other SIX are waiting their turn. DOC throughout this scene works on their upper torsos with a hypodermic needle and a bottle of india ink. What he's making are really small circular black marks on various spots along their bodies.

This takes place at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, 150 miles south of Washington. The official name of their area is The Headquarters of the NASA Space Task Group for Project Mercury.

That name sounds very important but here's the thing: at this time, it was a terribly small operation. All of Project Mercury was just a few crummy small buildings and offices at Langley. Later, of course, it grew like Topsy, but right now it's very unpretentious, and the attitude could not be more casual. The men, by the way, are in civilian clothes (since this was a civilian operation) short sleeve shirts and slacks more often than not being the uniform of the day.

GUS

(to SHEPHERD AND  
SCHIRRA)

If I'd wanted to be tattooed  
I'd of joined the Navy like  
those retards.

DOC

Look, one of the main reasons  
for this is we're all scared  
about what weightlessness may do  
to you. So they're gonna run  
E.K.G.'s on your hearts from  
coast to coast. And we have to  
be sure that the E.K.G. terminals  
are all placed in the same spots

(MORE)

DOC (contd)  
so the results can be compared.  
Now stand still.

(as he dips the hypo  
needle into the ink,  
scratches away at GUS --

CUT TO

VICKERS, walking in with another man who he obviously holds in a great deal of respect. The other man, GILROY, is older than the others. And very very bright.

VICKERS  
(to DOC)  
Little interruption okay?  
(DOC nods, goes on  
scratching away)  
Fellas, this is Mr. Michael  
Gilroy, who not only has two  
Doctorates, he also is going  
to run things for NASA from here,  
and when we go to Canaveral,  
from there too.

CUT TO

THE SEVEN. They know a superior when they see one.

CUT TO

GILROY. He is a brilliant engineer. Not so hot with people but terrific with numbers.

GILROY  
Three little things:  
(ticking them off)  
(a) Hello. (b) I'm going to  
arrange to meet at greater  
length over the next several  
days. (c) I thought you might  
want to know who goes up in  
space first.

CUT TO

THE SEVEN. Silent. All watching and waiting.

CUT TO

GILROY, looking from one to the next as he speaks.

GILROY  
Your order will be chosen in  
one way and one way only:  
(MORE)

GILROY (contd)  
performance. Whichever of you  
performs best during training  
over the coming months, will  
go first. I and your other  
superiors will decide. Clear?  
(obviously, it is)  
Simply put then: best goes first.  
(now, from GILROY --

CUT TO

GRISSOM AND SCHIRRA, standing in the shade of some trees on  
a hot morning. They are smoking, staring off in the distance  
at something.

GRISSOM  
(sour)  
Will you just look at that bastard.

SCHIRRA  
How dare you defame the Deacon  
like that?  
(now on that --

CUT TO

GLENN, his freckled face flaming red and glistening with sweat  
as, clad in a heavy sweatsuit, he runs around this driveway in  
the middle of the Space Task Force area.

CUT TO

GRISSOM AND SCHIRRA, watching from a distance in the shade.

GRISSOM  
I understand Doc said we should  
exercise and all, but does he have  
to do it in front of everybody?

SCHIRRA  
First of all, remember what the  
Bible says: 'Any exercise except  
maybe waterskiing is bad for the  
nervous system.' And second, my  
God, nobody jogs.

CUT TO

GLENN. Running on and on, pounding away at a good steady  
rhythm, the sweat pouring off him.

CUT TO

GRISSOM AND SCHIRRA.

SCHIRRA

He's just so sincere and --  
(he makes this next  
sound like a curse-  
word)  
-- and good. Living alone here;  
only visiting family on weekends.  
(shaking his head)  
Doesn't he know goodness is out  
of fashion?

GRISSOM

He wants to be first, that's all.

SCHIRRA

He has an excellent chance.  
(beat)  
Of course, I'd have to drop out  
of the program for that to happen.  
(as he smiles and  
they turn toward  
a building --

CUT TO

GLENN. His face looks on fire. And he will not stop running  
...Now

CUT TO

NIGHT, and a super fancy country club outside Washington.  
A long curving driveway. A jazzy white Corvette pulls up.  
ALAN SHEPHERD gets out, goes inside, as an attendant drives  
his car away.

CUT TO

ANOTHER ATTENDANT, watching as ancient heap of a Peugeot  
chugs up. It is such a nothing vehicle that probably if you  
gave it to the attendant as a gift he'd give it back.

CUT TO

THE OLD PEUGEOT, stopping, and as GLENN gets out from behind  
the wheel. SCOTT CARPENTER gets out the passenger side and  
as they head into the club --

CUT TO

THE LOBBY. Verrrrrry fancy and chic. Now an elderly and  
distinguished gentleman stops them. Old money.

RICH GUY

(pointing)

I think your party is the room  
at the end of the hall.

(takes their hands)

The club is proud to have you  
here this evening. Just so  
proud...

(they smile at him  
as we

CUT TO

GLENN AND CARPENTER, walking down the corridor.

CARPENTER

I don't mean to sound ungrateful,  
but why is everyone so nice to us?

GLENN

Because they think we're going to  
die.

(beat)

Our rockets always blow up...

(as they continue on --

CUT TO

A PRIVATE ROOM in the club. An elegant meal is just ending.  
Lots of fine wine. We're into cognac time now. THE SEVEN  
are seated around a table, dressed in their best civilian  
attire. PETERSON, the NASA public relations guy who ran the  
press conference is there too.

But the star of the evening, seated at the head of the table  
is a tubby little man whose real name, incidentally, was  
LEO DEORSEY. Middle aged, very rich, very smart. And tough  
-- one look and you know he gives away ice in the winter.

DEORSEY

(ringing his cognac  
glass with a knife)

Okay, let's cut the prelims.

(points to PETERSON)

Peterson here said there's this  
frenzy building about you, and  
could I help. You need protection  
from the media, that kind of thing.

(PETERSON nods)

I could agent you but it's gonna  
involve a lot of hassle for me,  
a lot of travelling, a lot of time  
away from my law office. So I'll  
represent you, but up front you've  
gotta accept my conditions.

CUT TO

THE SEVEN. Braced -- they are about to get skinned, and they know it.

CUT TO

DEORSEY. Glaring at them.

DEORSEY

One, I will accept no fee.  
Two, I will not be reimbursed  
for expenses.

(and now he can't  
help smiling)

Hey guys, for me to represent you,  
that's some kind of honor.

CUT TO

THE SEVEN, watching him; no one's very unhappy.

DEORSEY

(to CARPENTER)

What'd'ya make, five, six? Seven  
thousand?

CARPENTER

In a good year.

DEORSEY

Then maybe you all wouldn't  
mind splitting up half a  
million?

They are just stunned. He goes on.

DEORSEY

What I'm looking for is an  
exclusive deal -- you and your  
wives -- all the personal stuff.

(to PETERSON)

NASA'll like it because it'll  
protect them from the media and  
they can concentrate on their  
training.

(PETERSON nods)

And Eisenhower's gotta like it  
since he's made more out of this  
kind of deal than anybody.

SHEPHERD

You think you can get that much?  
Five hundred thousand dollars?

DEORSEY. CLOSE UP. He says nothing in reply; rather, he just pulls out a cigar that Churchill would have been impressed by, smiles, lights it, and as he blows a huge cloud of smoke --

CUT TO

THE SKYLINE OF MANHATTAN. Dusk. And every bit as glorious as the songwriters have always said it was.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

A WALL OF LARGE FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS. These are some of the most famous shots of the century, some in color, some black and white -- but all are from Life Magazine. There is Capa's picture of the soldier dying in the Spanish Civil War next to the legendary shot of Rita Hayworth kneeling on the bed in the black nightgown. There is Marilyn Monroe looking young, Franklin Roosevelt looking old.

We are in a large corner office in the Time-Life Building, a high floor. And a man named BROWNELL works at his desk. Mid 50's, he is important and shrewd, and reminds you a lot of Hume Cronyn. As he looks up, smiles --

CUT TO

HERBIE WEDMAN entering the room. WEDMAN is a sweet bear of a guy, rumpled and young, maybe late 20's. He carries papers, notes, etc.

BROWNELL

Back from Langley already?

WEDMAN

(sitting across from  
BROWNELL)

It just went so great. I interviewed all seven and their wives and did some background research of my own.

BROWNELL

Tell me about the men.

WEDMAN

Well, I expected them to be attractive and charming and all -- what surprised me was how bright they are -- I.Q.'s in the 130-135 range; 99th percentile.

BROWNELL

They're the best in the world at their business, I'm not the least surprised.

WEDMAN

That's one of the reasons I  
dropped in on you, Mr. Brownell  
-- to talk about point of view,  
I mean.

CUT TO

BROWNELL. He sits back watching the younger man, who  
suddenly starts talking very fast.

WEDMAN

They're not the best pilots in  
the world, sir. And they're not  
the best in America. Frankly, I  
doubt they're the best in the  
state of Virginia --

BROWNELL

-- Herbie, you're the last person  
I would have expected a negative  
attitude from.

WEDMAN

I'm not, sir, I genuinely liked  
them -- but you've assigned me to  
write their autobiographies for  
the magazine, and I'm a little  
uncertain as to how some things  
should be treated.

BROWNELL

Example?

WEDMAN

(glancing at his papers)  
Well, take Cooper -- the world  
thinks these are seven blissfully  
married guys, but Cooper was split  
from his wife before Mercury came  
along -- he talked her into coming  
back so he could join the program.

BROWNELL

(rising now)

More?

WEDMAN

Well, take Annie Glenn.

BROWNELL

(by his wall of  
photos now)

She's supposed to be lovely.

WEDMAN

She is lovely, sir. And she also has a clock-stopper of a speech impediment.

BROWNELL

A slight hesitation.

WEDMAN

No-no -- this is a world class stutter.

CUT TO

BROWNELL. CLOSE UP.

BROWNELL

If it is referred to at all, it will be termed 'a slight hesitation of speech.'

(indicating the wall  
of pictures)

Life is a great magazine, Herbie, not just because of our popularity, but because of our influence. And we have a grave duty.

CUT TO

WEDMAN, looking at his boss; nods.

WEDMAN

To our readers, I understand.

BROWNELL

No -- our readers will always be loyal, they'll love us whatever we do. I'm talking of our duty to our country. There is panic in America today because for years we've been number one, and now the Soviets are trying to pass us.

(louder)

Those seven lads are battling the Russians in the heavens, and they're doing it for you and for me. To these ancient eyes, Herbie, those are seven heroes, which is precisely what America needs.

(now, as he points to  
one particular photo --

CUT TO

The impossibly glorious photo by Halsman of ELIZABETH TAYLOR just before she turned seventeen, in a low cut gold silk

dress. She was simply a perfect looking human being.

BROWNELL  
 (moving close to  
 the photo)  
 For me, Herbie, the most beautiful  
 woman ever born.  
 (smiles)  
 And just like every other woman  
 ever born, she had a perfectly  
 standard supply of facial  
 blemishes...  
 (a long pause)  
 ...and we airbrushed them away...  
 (now, from her famous  
 face --

CUT TO

SEVEN SOON TO BE FAMOUS FACES -- it's the Life Magazine cover announcing the first person reports by THE ASTRONAUTS would be starting exclusively with this the September 14, 1959 issue. The men are kind of in a circle, six of them around Scott Carpenter. And all of their faces, by the way, are air-brushed. Not a hickey anywhere in sight. Now, from the seven smiling and perfect looking --

CUT TO

THE SEVEN OF THEM NOT SMILING and looking like extras from David Lean's Lawrence of Arabia.

THEY are wearing burnooses cut from parachute material and they all hold extra material in their hands. We are in the Nevada desert, and it's murderous. DOC stands by a jeep, giving final instructions. In all directions, nothing but sand and cactus.

DOC  
 (holds a piece of  
 parachute fabric he's  
 filling with sand; it's  
 brick sized)  
 Once you got the sand wall built,  
 you just lie under the parachute  
 fabric. No extra moment -- it's  
 145 degrees on the sand. And  
 don't stint on the water.

CUT TO

GRISSOM, under his burnoose. You can't really see any of them clearly and they all look, undeniably, just the least bit silly.

GRISSOM

What if we're bit by a rattler or  
scorpion while we're lying there?

DOC

Just your basic first aid -- I'll  
be circling by every two hours so  
don't get to worrying.

(beat)

And scorpions don't bite, they  
sting --

(to the group)

-- it's crucial you don't get to  
worrying -- you're gonna be alone  
thirty-six hours out there and  
(now suddenly)

CUT TO

GRISSOM IN CLOSE UP, as he begins dancing madly around --

GRISSOM

(hollering it out)

-- sumbitch, sumbitch -- shitttttt --

(and as he whirls  
and spins

CUT TO

THE OTHERS, SHEPHERD closest, as they break out laughing while  
GUS whirls and curses and it really is funny -- it's like  
some mad virus has entered his bloodstream as we

CUT TO

GRISSOM, flopping onto the burning sand, pulling up his  
trousers as we

CUT TO

A SMALL SCORPION slithering down his leg onto the sand,  
scurrying away and

CUT TO

GUS, kicking at it with his other leg, missing, kicking  
again, missing again and

CUT TO

THE GROUP, SHEPHERD still laughing the hardest. As DOC goes  
to GRISSOM, kneels down, starts to tend him --

GRISSOM  
 (more angry than hurt)  
 -- it's not funny! --  
 (softer now)  
 -- naw, maybe it is funny, it's  
 just not funny when it happens  
 to you.  
 (looking dead at SHEPHERD)  
 You were never in combat, were you,  
 Al?

SHEPHERD  
 That's right.

CUT TO

GRISSOM, talking on, quickly, most of this directed in  
 SHEPHERD'S direction.

GRISSOM  
 God, I remember my first morning  
 in Korea, and they bussed us out  
 to our F-86's and I was sitting  
 there when this Captain came over  
 and said, 'you, stand up!' and I  
 asked why and he said, 'nobody  
 sits on these buses unless you've  
 been fired at by a MiG in combat.'  
 (pauses)  
 That day I went up toward the Yalu  
 and I didn't come back till I found  
 me a MiG.  
 (smiles)  
 The next morning I had me my seat  
 on the bus.

CUT TO

THE GROUP, as GRISSOM stands.

GRISSOM  
 That's enough, Doc, I'm okay.  
 (and as he starts to  
 limp into the desert --

CUT TO

GLENN AND CARPENTER, watching him.

CARPENTER  
 What the hell was that about?

GLENN  
 You can laugh at Gus if you want --  
 (beat)  
 (MORE)

GLENN (contd)  
-- but you're not going to leave  
him behind...  
(HOLD on GRISSOM limping  
into the desert. The sun  
is simply blinding. Now --

CUT TO

A ROOM. Looks like an ordinary room. Twenty feet square. Dimly lit. VICKERS sits in a chair in one corner. In the middle of the room is an ordinary wastebasket.

JOHN GLENN sits in the opposite corner from VICKERS. Next to GLENN is a wooden bench. Beneath the bench is some kind of device with dials and panels.

All is very strange, eerie almost, and silent. GLENN is clearly upset about something. Finally, VICKERS speaks.

VICKERS  
Do you feel up to trying it again  
John? Or shall we bag it for today?

GLENN  
I'm not done.

VICKERS  
All right then, let's get started.  
(GLENN nods)  
Stand up, John. Now.  
(on the word 'now')

CUT TO

GLENN. He stands up and immediately falls back down, mutters angrily to himself. Then he takes a deep breath, stands up again, immediately falls back down. What the hell is this place? -- what's going on?

CUT TO

VICKERS, watching him carefully.

VICKERS  
Let's try another exercise this  
time -- check the dials, John.  
(and he points to the  
machine beneath the bench)

CUT TO

GLENN. He nods, starts to bend down toward the machine but as he does, he loses his balance and his head slams hard into the wooden bench.

GLENN  
I really enjoy doing that.  
(he rubs his head  
where it hit)

VOICE (OVER)  
(it comes from outside  
the room)  
Mr. Vickers? Phone.

VICKERS  
(calling out)  
Right there.  
(to GLENN)  
Practice pitching cards why don't  
you -- this falling isn't doing  
you much good.

CUT TO

VICKERS as he rises. He holds a deck of cards and very carefully, walking in a stiff way, he crosses the room, hands the cards to GLENN. We still can't figure quite what's going on. But something sure is.

GLENN  
Now why can't I do that?

VICKERS  
You will, you'll get it.  
(and now as he opens  
the door to the room --

CUT TO

The view outside and we see why everything has been so strange: the room is revolving. At ten miles per hour. The room has been built on a large turning arm. When you're inside the room, there is absolutely no visual indication that you're turning. But your sense of balance is all screwed up.

VICKERS closes the door, goes toward the phone that a lab assistant holds out to him. Behind him, from the outside, we can see the room silently and endlessly revolving.

CUT TO

GLENN inside the room -- as seen from behind the wastebasket in the center. He's pitching the cards toward the basket. Or rather, he's attempting to pitch the cards toward the basket. In reality, the cards leave his hands and veer 90 degrees into the wall. He tries to adjust the angle. It still goes straight into the wall.

Now he puts the cards down, takes a breath, stands. He falls.

GLENN

(muttered)

I'm gonna get it.

(he tries to lean down  
to see the dials. His  
head slams hard again  
into the bench)

I'm gonna get it.

(he tries to stand again,  
falls again)

...I'm gonna get it...I'm gonna  
get it...

(beat)

...if it kills me...

(as he stands and  
falls a final time --

CUT TO

ALAN SHEPHERD being strapped into a couch. DOC is with him. SHEPHERD is seated, his right hand gripping a control stick. Ready, SHEPHERD nods and as DOC moves some control switches, suddenly two things happen: explosive sounds are heard and ALAN SHEPHERD'S body suddenly begins spinning around and around as we

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

THE MASTIF. We're in a giant wind tunnel and we're looking at something that could have come from Mars. Briefly, the MASTIF consisted of three tubular cages, one inside the other. They were capable of moving independently, or all together. The outermost cage pitched you like a barrel tumbling end over end. The middle cage spins you like an ice skater doing turns. The inside one spins like a spiralling football.

The explosive sounds are from tanks of oxygen that spurt out streams of high pressure gas that turns the cages.

SHEPHERD can control the machine with the stick in his hand. Two feet in front of him are three dials, one for each of the three cages. What you do is, when the cage spins, if you move the control stick properly, it will counter balance the gas and bring the machine to a halt. So the better you are at the MASTIF, the quicker you make it stop turning.

Beside the dials is a panic button you can push at any time that brings the machine to a halt.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD in his couch, calmly moving the stick in just the right way and the cage stops spinning. This, by the way, was the outer cage. He nods to DOC and we

CUT TO

DOC, moving another switch and now the inner cage spins and

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, faster than before, he stops the machine.

DOC

Damn good.

SHEPHERD

This thing is a breeze.  
(he nods and as  
DOC hits the  
third switch --

CUT TO

THE MIDDLE CAGE spinning and SHEPHERD, cool as always,  
moves the control stick and

CUT TO

THE MIDDLE DIAL, going straight up and

CUT TO

THE MIDDLE CAGE, stopping.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD AND DOC

SHEPHERD

Let's shoot the works.

DOC

(nods)

Okay -- it's my duty to remind  
you that the panic button in the  
middle there is always available  
to you, not that you'd ever use it.

SHEPHERD

How fast you wanna go?

DOC

We can go up to 50 revolutions per  
minute but that's way too much the  
first time out. Twenty at the  
outside today.

SHEPHERD

Chicken.

CUT TO

DOC. He smiles, hits the three switches that control the three cages and

CUT TO

THE GIANT TANKS OF NITROGEN spurting out gas and

CUT TO

THE MACHINE, all three cages turning, picking up speed and

CUT TO

ALAN SHEPHERD, hitting the panic button.

CUT TO

DOC, by the controls, watching as the machine stops.  
SHEPHERD, a light green in color, stares wide eyed at him.

SHEPHERD  
I didn't like that much.  
(DOC says nothing)  
I almost vomited.

DOC  
You wouldn't be the first.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, sitting there, rubbing his stomach, trying to relax.

DOC  
If the capsule does this in space, you're going to have to be able to control it. So we may as well get going.  
(SHEPHERD nods)  
Look on the bright side -- next week we'll be at Canaveral.

SHEPHERD  
You may be -- I plan on being dead next week.  
(he flashes his good quick smile. Then --)  
Hit it!

CUT TO

DOC, starting the machine and

CUT TO

THE GAS TANKS, starting their explosive sounds and

CUT TO

THE MASTIF, spinning faster and faster and as it picks up speed --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, sucking it up, working the control stick and

CUT TO

THE DIALS, clear and easy to see and

CUT TO

THE GAS TANKS, blasting now and

CUT TO

DOC, waiting, watching and

CUT TO

THE MASTIF, whirling the man in all three directions like a son of a bitch and

CUT TO

ALAN SHEPHERD IN CLOSE UP and something is starting to happen now: his eyeballs are vibrating wildly, all out of control and

CUT TO

THE DIALS, blurred and

CUT TO

THE CONTROL STICK as he tries to move it properly and

CUT TO

HIS EYES IN CLOSE UP, and there's a medical term for this, vestibular nystagmus, and it's what happens when your balance mechanism is all messed up and

CUT TO

THE MASTIF, roaring around and around and

CUT TO

THE TANKS OF GAS, deafening and

CUT TO

SHEPHERD'S EYES, vibrating insanely, totally beyond control. Hold on his eyes. Keep holding. Keeeeeeeeeeep holding on those eyes until we

CUT TO

The door to the wind tunnel opening and GUS GRISSOM standing there. SHEPHERD moves toward him.

GRISSOM  
My turn, huh?  
(SHEPHERD nods)  
How was it?

SHEPHERD  
Kind of fun, actually.

GRISSOM  
Fun, huh? Good.  
(and as he walks toward  
the giant MASTIF --)

HOLD on the door as SHEPHERD exits, closes the door behind him. A brief pause as we look at the closed door. Then as the sound of SHEPHERD upchucking is heard --

CUT TO

GRISSOM, all smiles, hurrying toward the machine...Now, from that ghastly machine of torment --

CUT TO

A GLORIOUS MACHINE OF PLEASURE -- AL SHEPHERD'S white Corvette with SHEPHERD gunning it along as we

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

that he's driving on a beach. That's right -- the beach in the Canaveral area, Cocoa Beach more precisely -- was several hundred feet wide when the tide was high and also hard as a brick.

There is a rope attached to the rear of the Corvette and it leads out into the Atlantic where WALLY SCHIRRA is water-skiing, getting the tow of his life, and as they move along, SHEPHERD pulling SCHIRRA --

who do they pass jogging along, plodding along, head down, shoulders working steadily, but JOHN GLENN doing his daily jogging.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD as he passes GLENN. It is as if they don't know each other at all. No wave, no sign of recognition, nothing.

HOLD ON GLENN. Running. Running. Now --

CUT TO

A LOW RENT TYPE BAR IN COCOA BEACH. A bunch of guys are half loaded, sitting around a piano, singing a song. Nothing unusual about that except the guys are all German and the song is the 'Horst Wessel' song. GRISSOM is with them, happily humming along. As he looks around --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD AND SCHIRRA walking in. Tanned and terrific looking. They go to the bar, order brews, sit. GRISSOM comes over and sits with them.

GRISSOM  
(indicating the sloshed  
Germans)  
I just hope our rocket scientists  
can lick their rocket scientists.

FEMALE VOICE (OVER)  
Hey you three?  
(And as they turn --

CUT TO

A STUNNINGLY SEXY COOKIE of maybe twenty or so. She is dressed inexpensively, but you can tell that even if she was rich, she would still have no taste. She probably has an I.Q. of nine-- but a body that's a ten.

GIRL  
Just wanted you to meet me, I'm  
Donna and I'm new in town.

SHEPHERD  
(to SCHIRRA)  
Probably the local museum curator.

DONNA  
Just wanted you to know one thing:  
before it's over, I'm having all  
seven of you.

SHEPHERD  
That's certainly a lofty ambition,  
my child.  
(swigs on his beer)  
Almost Biblical, wouldn't you say?  
(as SCHIRRA AND GRISSOM  
nod sagely --

CUT TO

GLENN alone on the beach. Dawn. Running alone...

CUT TO

Something entirely different from anything any of us have ever seen before -- and what should be the single most exhilarating sequence in the entire movie. There should be music with it, because there is nothing spoken for the next minute -- Vivaldi maybe; The Four Seasons. Or a Mozart theme when he was really happy.

What we are looking at just now, in close up are the faces of two men: GLENN AND SCHIRRA. Now, we already know they don't like each other but you sure couldn't tell that at the present -- because they are smiling and laughing like schoolkids and

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

That they are weightless. GLENN does a lazy double spin in the air that would make Nureyev cry. SCHIRRA jumps up to the ceiling, spreads his arms out, lies full on the ceiling for a moment as we

CONTINUE PULLING BACK TO

Where we are and we're inside a C-135 plane, and it's all been padded for just this: weightless training and as GLENN does a one finger push up --

-- a sound is heard, kind of a sharp warning buzzer and

CUT TO

THE C-135 from outside. The weightlessness is achieved by the plane's pulling up from a fast dive into a steep climb and then arcing over.

CUT TO

SCHIRRA AND GLENN, as the weightless period comes to an end and they slowly sink to the floor and wait there until we

CUT TO

THE PLANE, climbing steeply and as it goes into its arc --

CUT TO

SCHIRRA AND GLENN floating again, loving it, because they did, all the Astronauts did, because it was so goddam much fun (which is why the troubles with weightlessness we come to later were so frustrating to the seven). They careen off the padded walls, crawl along the ceiling, goofing around, having more goddam fun and so are we, watching them, until the weightlessness section comes to an end and we

CUT TO

THE PARKING LOT OUTSIDE THE HOLIDAY INN. We are looking at an obviously expensive foreign car. SHEPHERD AND GRISSOM are with SCHIRRA, who is pointing at the vehicle.

SCHIRRA

A Maserati, for chrissakes. He leased me a Maserati, for nothing per year, practically.

SHEPHERD

This heap can't touch my Corvette.

GRISSOM

I got my order in for a Shelby Cobra and --  
(notices SHEPHERD looking off)

CUT TO

WHAT SHEPHERD'S looking at: two young stunners, in shorts and sandals and torn T-shirts and no bras. They are staring at the three men. Suddenly, they giggle, hurry into the bar.

CUT TO

THE THREE MEN.

SHEPHERD

Canaveral is replacing California as the cookie capital of the world.  
(shakes head)  
My God, where do they all come from?

GRISSOM

Ours not to reason why.  
(and on that, he leaves them, and as he saunters toward the bar where the girls had gone --

CUT TO

GLENN, alone on the beach at dawn. Running. His red face made redder by the rising sun. Hold on GLENN a moment.  
Then --

CUT TO

OUTSIDE A CRUMMY LOOKING BAR. Night. Suddenly, from inside, gunshots are heard, gunshots and screaming and quickly

CUT TO

INSIDE THE CRUMMY PLACE, as a BEEFY BARTENDER hurtles through

the air and tackles an old drunk, grabbing a gun from his hand as a SKINNY BARTENDER races up to lend a hand --

SKINNY BARTENDER

Okay?

BEEFY BARTENDER

Just a couple old drunks fighting over a whore -- nobody's hurt bad -- make sure everyone stays put and call the cops --

SKINNY BARTENDER

(pointing to the next booth -- we cannot see clearly who he's indicating)

What about him?

BEEFY BARTENDER

What about who?

SKINNY BARTENDER

(low)

That's an astronaut --

(beat)

-- and that ain't his wife he's with.

BEEFY BARTENDER

Sneak him the hell out the back.

Then call the cops...

(and from inside this very crummy dump --

CUT TO

OUTSIDE A VERY FANCY HOTEL. It's the Konakai, a fancy Polynesian style place. Beyond is the Pacific. A large banner is across the front: 'SAN DIEGO WELCOMES THE MERCURY SEVEN.' Now --

CUT TO

JOHN GLENN alone in his hotel room, reading. It's well into afternoon. Outside, the Pacific glistens. There's a knock on the door.

GLENN

It's open.

CUT TO

PETERSON, the NASA Public Relations guy who ran the original

press conference and set them up for the Life deal. He's cheery as usual. Except he isn't. You can tell, after a little, that it's all front.

PETERSON

How'd the meeting with the engineers go?

GLENN

It's never ideal -- they keep wanting us to be guinea pigs and we keep telling us we're pilots. They didn't even design a window for the capsule so we could see out. But we're getting them to change that. And you don't care at all about this.

PETERSON

I don't, John.  
(looks at GLENN)  
Want to hear a rumor?

CUT TO

GLENN. He nods. Waits. Something is obvious very much up.

CUT TO

PETERSON, and he's a charming fellow, like most public relations guys. Lots of quick smiles, fingers snaps.

PETERSON

Well, here the seven of you are in San Diego, which is right across the border from Tijuana, and, word has reached me -- totally unofficial, obviously none of it true -- but there's this weird tale that one of you went into Mexico. And visited one of those famous houses of ill repute. And not only that, he had his way with a woman.

GLENN

Few virgins in Project Mercury, Pete.

PETERSON

True. However, this particular non-virgin, so the weird tale goes, had his picture taken. With this scarlet woman. And nobody was

(MORE)

PETERSON (contd)  
wearing a whole lot of clothes at  
the time.

CUT TO

GLENN. Says nothing, shakes his head, rubs his eyes. Then --

GLENN  
Let's go to Mexico.  
(and suddenly --

CUT TO

JOHN GLENN walking quietly through a Tijuana slum. It's dusk, and ordinarily that's a pretty time, but nothing makes this place pretty. Selling your sister would rank as one of the more honorable occupations in this part of the world.

PETERSON, nervous as hell, follows half a step behind GLENN.

CUT TO

THE CORNER up ahead. GLENN reaches it, hesitates, turns right. If anything, the new street is worse than the one before. And it's darker. PETERSON moves right up alongside GLENN now, like a shadow.

CUT TO

ANOTHER CORNER. We're going steadily into a deeper and deeper slum. And now the sun is gone. Halfway up the block, beside an alley, is a crummy sign that says, in Spanish, 'Photographer.'

GLENN  
(nodding toward  
the sign)  
That the name?

PETERSON  
I guess. What now?

GLENN  
(he glances around  
-- the street is  
pretty busy)  
We wait awhile...  
(now --

CUT TO

THE SAME SHOT OF THE STREET. Night now. Quiet.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

PETERSON. Alone and not bothering to hide the fact that he's scared. As he lights a cigarette from the butt that was in his mouth --

CUT TO

THE ALLEY ACROSS THE STREET as GLENN forces a side window open. Or tries to. It doesn't give. He bunches his body, forces again, giving it all he's got and as the window gives --

CUT TO

GLENN, inside the dark photographer's shop, by the window. He takes a flashlight out of his pocket, shines it around --

CUT TO

THE SHOP. Not Karsh of Ottowa. He shines the light deeper into the shop. There's another room; he heads toward it as quietly. From outside, noises occasionally drift in from the street: the breaking of bottles, violent cursing.

CUT TO

GLENN in the back room; he shines the light around. In the corner is what passes for a filing cabinet.

CUT TO

AN OPEN CABINET DRAWER. It's filled with manila envelopes.

GLENN stands by the drawer. He takes out an envelope, opens it, shakes out the negatives inside, holds them up, looks at them using his flashlight, puts them back into the envelope, puts the envelope back in the drawer.

CUT TO

ANOTHER ENVELOPE, being lifted out of the drawer.

CUT TO

GLENN, studying negatives.

CUT TO

GLENN, pulling out another envelope.

CUT TO

A BUNCH OF NEGATIVES. Nothing.

CUT TO

ANOTHER BUNCH OF NEGATIVES. Nothing.

CUT TO

GLENN'S FACE, CLOSE UP, and you can't tell remotely what he's thinking. Then --

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

GLENN, with a book of matches in one hand. As he strikes one, gets it lit --

CUT TO

THE NEGATIVES in GLENN'S other hand. The instant the lit match hits the negatives, there is a burst of flame and we

CUT TO

PETERSON, hurrying across the street as GLENN exits via the window he forced.

PETERSON

Find anything?

GLENN

(impassive)

No.

(and as he turns,  
starts out of the  
Mexican slum --

CUT TO

A GLORIOUS SUITE IN THE KONAKAI HOTEL THE NEXT MORNING.

CUT TO

INSIDE THE SUITE. SHEPHERD AND SCHIRRA sit together on a couch. Silent. Staring.

GRISSOM AND SLAYTON sit on the next couch. Silent. Staring. Like the first two, they are smoking.

COOPER sits by himself in a chair. Silent, smoking, staring dead ahead.

CARPENTER sits alone too. He's the only friend JOHN GLENN has in this room. And that's who all the men are staring at: John Glenn.

CARPENTER

(quietly)

You got us all here, John. If  
you don't start talking soon,  
you'll lose your audience.

CUT TO

GLENN. Standing in front of the others by the windows. He is nervous as he nods. Throughout this, his tone is ringing, not all that far from the early Protestant Reformers.

GLENN

Look -- whatever we are, we are,  
but the public thinks we're different  
and extra-ordinary. And what I  
think is this: we are a new branch  
of service, the seven of us, and no  
one outranks us, not any admiral or  
general. We are special!

(beat)

And the business with the cookies  
is getting out of hand --

(louder)

-- and the rumors are starting to  
be dangerous.

CUT TO

THE SIX, as GLENN paces in front of them, in effect like a professor lecturing a class.

GLENN

Last month's rumor: a shoot out  
in a sleazy Canaveral bar and one  
of us there with a woman not his  
wife. Yesterday's rumor: a Mexican  
whore and an astronaut had their  
pictures taken together without  
benefit of clothing.

SCHIRRA

(to the group)

And all you guys told me you were  
going to church.

CUT TO

GLENN. Eyes blazing --

GLENN

Not funny dammit -- think if such  
a photo had existed and it got in  
the American press. It could have  
damaged the whole program. Now,  
obviously, none of this happened,  
but if it had --

SCHIRRA

-- drop the other shoe --

GLENN

Okay: from now on, keep your  
pants zipped, all of you --  
(and the instant  
that's said --

CUT TO

AL SHEPHERD. CLOSE UP and if GLENN'S eyes are blazing, well,  
so are SHEPHERD'S.

SHEPHERD

How many wives do you have, Mister,  
'cause I've had one and I still  
have her and my father was a career  
officer so I think I know a little  
about proper military behavior and  
I-am-so-sick of you forcing your  
morality on the rest of us --

GLENN

-- I'm not --

SHEPHERD

-- you've wrapped us in the flag  
and mom and stinking apple pie  
since that first press conference --

GLENN

-- I meant every word and you know  
it --

(to the GROUP)

-- you think I'm enjoying this? --  
we have to be above suspicion or  
this can blow at any seam -- so hear  
me good -- watch your zippers from  
now on --

SHEPHERD

(not backing down  
one step)

-- and you, from now on: watch your  
mouth.

CUT TO

THE SEVEN. Not much love lost here. No one is smiling as we

CUT TO

THE SEVEN and everyone is smiling as we

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

CANAVERAL, a dark rainy day and we're in the V.I.P. section.

Obviously, the SEVEN are there for public relations reasons, as all kinds of people surround them, shake their hands. THE SEVEN, by the way, seem like the happiest Boy Scout troop in history.

PETERSON, the NASA P.R. guy gives a signal and now the sound of the countdown can be heard over a loudspeaker as for the first time we

CUT TO

A ROCKET on a launching pad, maybe a mile or two away.

CUT TO

SENATOR PIERCE, the New England gentleman we met early on, most recently at the Vanguard disaster.

VOICE OVER MIKE  
...seven...six...five...

CUT TO

THE SEVEN, intently studying the rocket in the distance.

CUT TO

THE STANDS. Maybe a hundred people or so watching.

VOICE OVER MIKE  
...four...three...two...one...

CUT TO

THE ROCKET.

VOICE OVER MIKE  
...we have ignition...

And this is what it's all about, folks, this now, as the giant brute gracefully begins its ascent, slowly at first, flames all around, then faster as it climbs in to the dark sky and

CUT TO

SENATOR PIERCE, proud as hell, coming to THE SEVEN.

SENATOR PIERCE  
...we get there...that's the great  
thing about America...we may be slow,  
but we are sure...  
(THE SEVEN nod as we

CUT TO

THE ROCKET, glorious in the sky as PIERCE goes on.

SENATOR PIERCE (OVER)  
...one of you will ride one of  
those and soon...my God, what a  
glorious day that will be...

CUT TO

THE SEVEN, watching the rocket, kind of nodding as PIERCE goes on and we

CUT TO

THE ROCKET, mighty and soaring true and fast: a wonder.

SENATOR PIERCE (OVER)  
...a glorious day for you, and  
your program, but perhaps an even  
more glorious day for the people  
of our country...

And now the rocket explodes into a million pieces, brilliant fiery pieces against the dark sky. The sight is awesome and awful, the sound tremendous. As the fire starts to fall back to earth --

CUT TO

THE SEVEN. Dazed. Staring. Because one of them will ride one of those. Drained, they can say nothing but just fixate on the disaster above them...HOLD on the SEVEN. Then --

CUT TO

GILROY'S OFFICE AT LANGLEY. GILROY, clearly under pressure, sits nervously at his desk. THE SEVEN troop in, stand loosely around. There are a few crummy Christmas type decorations -- wreaths, etc. visible. DOC AND VICKERS stand quietly in the doorway.

GILROY  
We've been together now a long  
time now, and we're coming down  
to the wire -- I want you all to  
do a little thinking about some-  
thing.  
(beat -- then)  
If you can't make the first flight  
yourself, which man do you think  
should take it?

GRISSOM  
You want us to answer now?

GILROY

No -- I want to take a peer vote  
and --

GLENN

(cutting in)

A peer vote?

GILROY

I know, I know, I told you back  
in the beginning you'd be judged  
strictly by performance, but hell,  
you all know each other damn well  
by now, better maybe in some ways  
than we do -- so unless there's  
objections, just drop your vote on  
my desk tomorrow morning. Objections?

CUT TO

GLENN, dazed, says nothing. Behind him, SCHIRRA is smiling...  
Hold briefly, then

CUT TO

ANNIE GLENN in her bedroom. She puts on a robe, crosses to  
the door.

It's night, and the only sound is that of a muted trumpet  
being played. Slow and sad. 'Taps' is being blown.

ANNIE moves toward the family room, and as she does, the  
muted trumpet is coming closer.

CUT TO

GLENN, lying on the floor of the family room, playing the  
muted trumpet quite well. His head is propped on a sofa  
cushion. A bottle of beer is alongside him. It's very late.  
He looks up, sees her, goes on playing his mournful music.

GLENN

(indicating his trumpet)

This keeping you up?

(she shakes her head;

sits on the couch)

Gilroy gives us the word tomorrow  
and I'm going to be left behind.  
For the first time in my career,  
left behind.

ANNIE

Muh -- maybe not.

CUT TO

GLENN. He was really rocked by all this, and he's not listening to anyone closely.

GLENN

I've just got to behave well when it happens.

(beat)

A peer vote!

(swigs some beer)

Twenty one months I thought we were slugging it out to see who was gonna be class valedictorian when it was really junior prom queen we were after all the time.

(more beer)

Peer votes are popularity contests and I am not a popular figure.

No, I am the religious zealot who drives an old car and runs in the morning and suggested zippers to be kept shut. Early Christian Martyrs are not beloved among fighter jocks.

(beat)

I've just got to behave well when it happens, that's all.

CUT TO

ANNIE, watching her husband. She has never seen him like this for the simple reason that he has never been like this. She reaches down, takes a swig of beer herself.

GLENN

(it bursts out of him)

I was the best, Annie.

ANNIE

Certainly the muh -- muh -- the most modest...

(she smiles, tries to get him to. No go.

Now --

CUT TO

GILROY'S OFFICE THE NEXT MORNING. ALL SEVEN are present, DOC AND VICKERS TOO. You could eat the tension with a spoon.

GILROY

All right, we're going to do a little charade for the public. I'm going to tell the media that one of three is going first. If

(MORE)

GILROY (contd)  
I just announced the prime pilot,  
I think the pressure on that man  
would be inhuman. John --

CUT TO

GLENN, waiting, as the others look at him.

GILROY  
-- John -- you'll be back up --  
very important job.  
(GLENN nods)  
Gus -- the second flight's yours.

CUT TO

GRISSOM. He almost looks embarrassed.

CUT TO

GILROY.

GILROY  
(smiles)  
Al -- congratulations.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. He is staring at the floor. Slowly he raises his eyes, looks at GLENN. SHEPHERD'S eyes are gleaming, but there is no smile as we

CUT TO

GLENN, the first to congratulate SHEPHERD; GLENN'S smile has never been more in evidence.

HOLD ON GLENN AND SHEPHERD. It's hard to tell from their faces just now who won and who didn't... As they shake hands --

CUT TO

GILROY, watching them.

GILROY  
Now of course, I'll have to choose  
the proper moment to tell the public  
who the three of you are. And I've  
decided that, assuming all goes  
well, the proper moment will be  
during the press conference for  
Ham.

GRISSOM  
 (it's like he didn't hear)  
 For who? Ham? Who's Ham?  
 (from his puzzled face --

CUT TO

THIS CHIMPANZEE sitting in a chair working a bunch of levers.  
 His hands are flying --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, GRISSOM AND GLENN standing with a WHITE COATED  
 VETERINARIAN, watching.

We are in a trailer area in Hangar S at CANAVERAL. A couple  
 of other VETS are visible in the background, a couple of other  
 CHIMPS too. All are doing the same kind of lever pulling.

GRISSOM  
 (he can't believe how  
 good HAM is)  
 That little bugger's fast --

VET  
 (tiny little man;  
 very proud)  
 Ham once pulled seven thousand  
levers in seventy minutes, which  
 is far more than you can do.  
 (embarrassed laugh)  
 By 'you' I didn't mean you --  
 (he points to them)  
 I meant humans.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, GRISSOM AND GLENN. They don't smile. They really  
 aren't crazy about the Chimp experiment.

SHEPHERD  
 And they're sending him up in  
 the rocket tomorrow?  
 (THE VET nods)

CUT TO

HAM, happily whipping through his tasks. This particular one  
 involves him staring at three square black window like areas  
 above the three levers. Various shapes appear in the window  
 like areas. Two of the shapes are the same -- such as two  
 squares. The third is not the same -- such as a triangle.  
 HAM'S chore is to pull the lever under the unmatched symbol.  
 He does it easily and as three more symbols appear, he does  
 it again perfectly, then leans forward --

CUT TO

An opening by the levers which now contains a small object.  
HAM grabs it, stuffs it into his mouth, starts to chew.

CUT TO

THE THREE ASTRONAUTS watching the chimp eat.

THE VET  
(explaining)  
That's a banana pellet. A reward  
for fine work.

CUT TO

GRISSOM, whispering to GLENN.

GRISSOM  
If only they'd given us banana  
pellets, we might have been first.  
(GLENN nods)

CUT TO

ALL OF THEM watching HAM as he picks up speed even more.

GLENN  
Ham volunteer for the program?

SHEPHERD  
He was a circus chimp, right?

CUT TO

THE VET. Happily explaining.

THE TINY VET  
No, Ham is the product of 'operant  
conditioning.' Purely based on  
the principles of Mr. B.F. Skinner --  
(suddenly now, a horrible  
scream and we

CUT TO

HAM, as an electric shock zaps his foot -- we see now, that  
he is wired, pads on the feet.

TINY VET  
(to HAM)  
You know what happens when you go  
too fast -- sloppy, sloppy --  
(HAM makes another mistake,  
another foot zap, another  
scream)

CUT TO

THE ASTRONAUTS watching.

SHEPHERD

I understand 'operant conditioning'  
now. It means 'torture.'

THE VET

(a bit ruffled)

Not at all -- although the avoidance  
of pain is involved.

(looks at the three)

Have you seen the cartoon?

(they haven't)

These two apes are talking after  
one of them has finished a space  
flight and the ape who's just  
landed says, 'Well, we're a little  
behind the Russians but we're still  
ahead of the Americans.'

(as he laughs --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD GRISSOM AND GLENN. They don't think it's very funny.

CUT TO

HAM, back in stride again, his hands playing the levers like  
a concert virtuoso. He leans forward, grabs another banana  
pellet, munches happily away --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD AND GRISSOM, shaking their heads, walking away.  
GLENN points to another chimp, off by itself at another  
machine.

GLENN

(pointing)

What's that one?

TINY VET

Oh, that's our back-up ape.

CUT TO

GLENN. He walks to the back up APE, stops.

CUT TO

THE BACK UP APE. Quiet and sweet. Just adorable.

GLENN

(reaching toward him)

May I?

TINY VET

Of course.

(drops his voice)

Mr. Glenn, I know nothing official's been announced, but I have a friend very high at NASA.

(whispers)

You're going first. But act surprised.

CUT TO

GLENN. He makes a smile.

GLENN

Thanks -- a lot of people tell me that --

(and now the ape is in his arms)

CUT TO

GLENN AND THE BACK UP APE. It appears lost and unhappy. As it hugs GLENN --

GLENN

(soft)

I know how you feel, babe...

(HOLD for a moment.

Then --

CUT TO

THE LIFE MAGAZINE COVER OF HAM with his arms crossed. The headline reads: BACK FROM SPACE: A CONFIDENT HAM.

Now, from that Life cover of HAM

DISSOLVE TO

ANOTHER LIFE COVER; it's the one of GLENN GRISSOM AND SHEPHERD, and their headline reads: ASTRONAUTS FIRST TEAM. If the dissolve is done properly, HAM'S expression for the Three ASTRONAUTS should look like one of absolute superiority. Now --

CUT TO

A MAN WE'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE drinking alone in a bar near LANGLEY. This man is named FOLSOM and he's an Air Force Colonel. He wears his blue uniform and is flipping through the pages of a magazine that could be Life. FOLSOM is very much a force -- like the young Mitchum or George Scott or Lancaster.

SHEPHERD'S VOICE (OVER)

Colonel Folsom?

(as FOLSOM looks up

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, GRISSOM AND GLENN. Behind them, the place is setting up for lunch. But it's quiet and pretty much empty now.

SHEPHERD

We're just going to have a little lunch and we wondered if you'd like to join us.

FOLSOM

Thank ya kindly, but I've had lunch.

(pause)

Naw, that's bull. I haven't had lunch, I just don't want to have lunch with you.

(and now as he closes  
the magazine sharply --

CUT TO

THE MAGAZINE. It is Life, the one with their faces on the cover.

CUT TO

FOLSOM, looking at them a moment.

FOLSOM

The cover boys. The five hundred thousand dollar beauties.

CUT TO

FOLSOM. CLOSE UP. Studying them. And he's not envious and he's not nasty. He's just speaking what for him is true.

FOLSOM

When Chuck Yeager broke the sound barrier -- and remember when he did it everyone in the world thought he was killing himself cause back then they knew the sound barrier was a wall -- when he did it, he did it for \$283 dollars a month and the blue of the uniform. When I did what I did with the X-15, I did it for my salary and the blue of the uniform.

CUT TO

GLENN GRISSOM AND SHEPHERD, standing there, as his eyes move from one of them to the next.

FOLSOM

I been to thirty-four funerals  
in my time, thirty-four test pilots  
dead, some of 'em great; nobody  
ever heard of any of 'em, but  
everybody's sure heard of you.

CUT TO

FOLSOM. CLOSE UP.

FOLSOM

I just pray one thing -- that  
when you get your chance, you  
got the right stuff -- that when  
your ass is finally on the line,  
you don't fuck up...

(HOLD on the gentleman  
a moment. Then --

CUT TO

THE ROOM IN LANGLEY where DOC tattooed the SEVEN. SHEPHERD,  
very upset, is talking with GILROY AND VICKERS AND DOC.

SHEPHERD

-- it's crazy to wait 'til May  
-- I'm ready now -- let me go  
now, before the end of March --

VICKERS

-- we'd like to --

SHEPHERD

(to GILROY)

-- you've got the influence --  
use it for chrissakes --

GILROY

-- the White House is jittery --  
nobody's sure what weightless'll  
do to you --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. Exploding --

SHEPHERD

Weightlessness is the most fun  
we've had -- put it in Disneyland  
you'll make a fortune, I promise  
you --

GILROY

-- we'll go when they tell us to  
go -- which happens to be May --

SHEPHERD

-- and if the Russians put a man  
up first? --

CUT TO

GILROY.

GILROY

-- trust us -- we've got our contacts  
-- the Russians aren't going anywhere  
just now...  
(now, from GILROY --

CUT TO

ALAN SHEPHERD'S BELOVED WHITE CORVETTE. It's in the driveway of his Virginia house. The radio is on. SHEPHERD stands by the car doing something very unlike him: he is beating it with his fists. Now he kicks it. Now he beats it again. All this time, the car radio has been audible.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

...Gagarin's space flight of less than two hours is a great triumph for the Soviet and something of a disappointment for the American space program. And it makes this date, April 12, 1961, a memorable one in the history of exploration...

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. In wild fury. He continues to pound his white fists against his car. HOLD on SHEPHERD. Raging...

CUT TO

Of all things, a Los Angeles freeway around dawn. Lots of cars driving along, going to work, that's what you'd expect to see.

Except there's something very weird going on. There's lots of cars, all right. And they should be driving along. But they're not. Instead, as we watch, they pull off the freeway and stop on the side of the road.

Car after car slows, pulls off the freeway, stops on the side of the road. Some of the drivers stay inside, some get out, walk around nervously. Now --

CUT TO

A LOS ANGELES HIGHWAY PATROL CAR, driving along the freeway. TWO PATROL COPS are inside. They both look like Erik Estrada.

CUT TO

INSIDE THE PATROL CAR.

FIRST ESTRADA CLONE  
(watching as the  
cars pull over)  
Hey, even for L.A. this is markedly  
unusual behavior.

SECOND ESTRADA CLONE  
It's like the Martians had taken over.  
(thinking it over)  
But why would the Martians want them  
to pull off the highway?

FIRST ESTRADA CLONE  
(he's driving -- now he  
pulls off, stops by a  
woman standing by her  
car door)  
What's up, lady?

CUT TO

THE LADY. Normal enough person. Middle aged. Well dressed.  
Except right now, she is drained and pale and a mass of tics.  
She doesn't even try to talk, just points to her car and we  
hear her car radio blasting with the volume up full.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER)  
-- it's official -- there's going  
to be another hold -- Alan Shepherd  
has now been waiting in the capsule  
for over three hours and --

CUT TO

THE PATROL CAR as the first ESTRADA CLONE drives slowly forward  
to the next car.

CUT TO

THE NEXT CAR and TWO GUYS just sitting riveted inside, staring  
dead front.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER)  
-- minor technical problem, ladies  
and gentlemen -- this latest holdup  
is not serious. Let me repeat, our  
information is that it is not a  
serious problem --

CUT TO

THE PATROL CAR, driving slowly forward to the next vehicle.  
THREE MEN walk around and around the car, almost as if they

were doing some kind of mystic dance. They too are terribly nervous and their radio blasts away.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (OVER)

-- it was 5:20 Cape Canaveral  
time when he entered the capsule  
and with 8:30 just a few moments  
away, one has to wonder --

CUT TO

INSIDE THE CAR.

FIRST ESTRADA CLONE

-- they got AM radios and we don't --

SECOND ESTRADA CLONE

-- you think they're too panicked  
to drive?

FIRST ESTRADA CLONE

(nods)

I do, I do.

CUT TO

THE LONG LINE OF CARS, all with their radios on. We can hear the RADIO ANNOUNCER'S VOICE going on as before.

RADIO ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

...what in the world must be going  
through a man's mind at a time like  
this...?

(now on that --

CUT TO

THE CAPE AND THE ROCKET. We're maybe a hundred yards away from the white needle pointed at the cloudy sky. The skeletal like gantry surrounds the needle, and dozens and dozens of men clamber around the thing, working like fiends.

And now we're into the longest single shot of the movie --

Because we've seen rockets before, sure, but never when someone we knew and cared for was inside one --

CAMERA STARTS TO MOVE FORWARD TO

The rocket. And as it moves it passes by people, workmen of various sizes and shapes, and they're tense as hell and we hear snippets of their speech as we move by, not whole conversations, just words and parts of sentences and then we're passing by other workmen and we hear what they're saying.

Now once we reach the base of the rocket, we don't stop, not even for an instant, but instead of moving forward --

CAMERA STARTS TO MOVE UP TO

The capsule. And this is the first time we've had a real sense of the size of the thing. And sure, the Redstone was small compared to what came later, but nothing that measured eighty-three feet from one end to the other could exactly be considered small.

CAMERA CONTINUES ITS UPWARD MOVE.

And now we hear different voices. All the technicians with all their questions covering all the checklists are audible, overlapping. The technical jargon is dizzying as we rise higher and higher in the Florida morning until finally, finally, we're there, at the top, and the instant we reach it --

CUT TO

AL SHEPHERD IN THE CAPSULE. And this is our first sight of it and our reaction has got to be, 'My God, it's so small.' Because the capsule was small. Glenn said you didn't get into it as much as you put it on, and that was the truth.

He is resting in the tiny vehicle on top of the rocket/needle, on his back, facing upwards. There is no fear on his face. But beyond that, you can't tell remotely what he's thinking. Now --

CUT TO

THE BEACHES IN THE CANAVERAL AREA. A lot of people. I mean, a lot of people. Kids running around mostly, parents standing still, many with binoculars, staring at the rocket visible in the distance.

The air of tension that was obvious on the L.A. freeway is just as evident here. Maybe more so. They're almost close enough to touch the eighty foot needle.

Clouds roll past above. Not a great omen. TWO OLD MEN look at the skies, shake their heads.

A TEN YEAR OLD BRATTY TYPE KID stands by his mother. He gets her attention, points to the rocket, makes a big explosion sound, laughs. She doesn't think it's funny. He does. He makes the explosion sound again, louder, this time accompanying it with gestures. He laughs and laughs. She slaps him hard across the cheek. As he stops laughing, starts to cry --

CUT TO

A BUNCH OF HOUSE TRAILERS LINED UP AT THE REAR OF THE BEACH. A lot of people are visible, sitting by their trailers, watching tv.

CUT TO

THE TV. The rocket is visible, with the WALTER CRONKITE TYPE ANNOUNCER we saw earlier speaking, his face down in one corner of the picture.

CRONKITE TYPE

-- they tell us he isn't afraid --  
I have met Alan Shepherd and I can  
tell you that the man I met is not  
the type of man to know fear. Still,  
he's been waiting for over three and  
a half hours now and he must be  
thinking something. What can Alan  
Shepherd be thinking?  
(and on the words  
'thinking' --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD IN THE CAPSULE.

SHEPHERD

(flicking off one switch,  
flicking on another,  
speaking softly)  
Request permission to urinate.

SLAYTON'S VOICE (OVER)

Whaat?

SHEPHERD

I gotta pee.

SLAYTON'S VOICE (OVER)

Bad?

SHEPHERD

If it wasn't bad, do you think I'd  
mention it at a time like this?

SLAYTON'S VOICE (OVER)

Right, right. I'll check it out  
with the higher ups.

SHEPHERD nods, lies very still as we

CUT TO

MISSION CONTROL AND HALF A DOZEN IMPORTANT LOOKING TYPES. SLAYTON is there, DOC too. And we also recognize one of the GERMANS from the group that sang the 'Horst Wessel' song.

But the others are new to us. There is tremendous intensity in everything that follows.

GERMAN

(heavy accent)

The man is up dere mid oudt a  
urine receptible? How is zuch  
a zing possible?

SCIENTIST TYPE

The whole flight's only fifteen  
minutes, we figured who'd need one?  
No one counted on a hold up like  
this.

SECOND SCIENTIST

Can't we just get him out, let  
him pee, and put him back?

GERMAN

The peeing takes no time at all.  
But to unbolt the hatch and then  
bolt it back takes four hours und  
the flight is scrubbed.

THIRD SCIENTIST

If we just let him relieve himself,  
we'd have to alert all the suit  
technicians along the line --  
their temperature dials would go  
crazy and they'd have cardiac arrest.

FOURTH SCIENTIST

You think it's safe to just tell  
him to relieve himself?

GERMAN

Not if it causes him to electrocute  
himself -- bad for public relations --

(making a headline)

-- 'Shepherd dies peeing on launching  
pad' --

(to the others)

-- who is your suit expert? --

THIRD SCIENTIST

Olberding.

GERMAN

I suggest we bring him here.

(and as one of the

SCIENTISTS nods,

scurries off --

CUT TO

A LARGE AND VERY DETAILED blueprint of a space suit. Holding it, talking and pointing as he does, is a little bright man, DOCTOR OLBERDING.

OLBERDING

Electrocution, I can assure you all, is not a problem. Fire, however, might be.

CUT TO

THE GROUP OF EXPERTS. More of them now. THE GERMAN and OLBERDING are clearly in control.

GERMAN

Is it an affordable risk?

OLBERDING

(indicating on blueprint as he talks)

There is bound to be some element of risk when you introduce liquid into a pure-oxygen environment.

(several key wires are pointed out here)

Luckily for us, or for Shepherd I should say, the urine will only come in contact with low-voltage leads to the biomedical sensors.

GERMAN

Conclusion?

CUT TO

OLBERDING. CLOSE UP. There is a pause. Then he turns, looks at SLAYTON.

OLBERDING

Tell him to do it in the suit.  
(and as SLAYTON  
takes off --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. There seems to be kind of a faraway smile on his face now. We hear SLAYTON'S VOICE on the intercom.

SLAYTON (OVER)

Feeling better, Al?

SHEPHERD

I'm a real wetback now...  
(and as the smile lingers --

CUT TO

Outside a perfectly nice looking Virginia house -- and we might be looking at a carnival except there are too many cameras present. But that's the feel of it -- a whacko carnival. Maybe a hundred reporters -- tv folk with their equipment, print people with theirs -- all mingling and staring in at the house.

CUT TO

THE HOUSE. All blinds and curtains are drawn.

CUT TO

A TV LADY, on the phone with her station. She's drinking a coke, and has to talk loud in order to be heard over the mob of other reporters around her.

TV LADY

No Max, I've got nothing new --  
 (consulting notes)  
 -- we know of course she's upset,  
 she can't talk, that kind of thing  
 -- and the A.P. guy talked to a  
 gardener who said Mrs. Shepherd's  
 baby sitter told him Mrs. Shepherd's  
 all the time bursting into tears,  
 but we can't verify it --  
 (in the background now,  
 shouts -- 'The Diaper Man  
 -- it's the Diaper Man!' -- )  
 -- get right back to you Max, the  
 diaper man's here --  
 (and on that --

CUT TO

THE DIAPER MAN a couple houses down, leaving his truck, carrying a bundle and now, as he looks up, a wild expression hits his face as we

CUT TO

Not more than two dozen REPORTERS charging toward the diaper truck, microphones and notebooks clearly at the ready and

CUT TO

THE DIAPER MAN, looking around frantically, then beating it the hell back into his diaper truck, locking himself in as we

CUT TO

THE MEMBERS OF THE FOURTH ESTATE, surrounding the truck, faces pressed against various windows, shouting questions --

'How long have you known Mrs. Shepherd?' -- 'How well do you know Mrs. Shepherd?' -- 'Does she ever give you coffee?' -- 'Does she talk to you a lot about the flight when she's giving you the dirty diapers?' --

These are pro reporters, the best in the country, and the questions come zinging out, one after the other, never stopping as we

CUT TO

THE DIAPER MAN, trapped by the crazies, trying to make himself heard.

THE DIAPER MAN

I don't deliver to the Shepherds  
 -- why don't I? -- because I think  
 the Shepherd children are teen-agers --  
 (louder)  
 -- teeeeeeen-agers --  
 (but they keep on with  
 their questions as we

CUT TO

A TEEN AGED GIRL, peering out the window at the attack on the diaper man.

TEEN AGED GIRL

It's getting very weird out there,  
 mom.

CUT TO

A REAL LADY. She's LOUISE SHEPHERD and she's walking through her living room with a large coffee pitcher in her hand. As calm and tranquil as the Queen of England.

MRS. SHEPHERD

It'll all be over soon, darling.  
 (to the room)  
 I've just made fresh now, don't  
 anyone be shy.  
 (to HERBIE WEDMAN, the  
 Life Magazine reporter  
 who sits on a couch  
 with another woman)  
 Herbie? You could use a little  
 warming up there.  
 (she pours)

HERBIE

Thanks, Mrs. Shepherd.

MRS. SHEPHERD  
 (to the WOMAN)  
 Betty?

BETTY GRISSOM  
 I'm fine, Louise, thanks.

CUT TO

WEDMAN AND BETTY GRISSOM as LOUISE moves away, very much the ideal hostess. A tv set is on in the middle of the room, the picture of the rocket very clear. No one pays it much mind.

WEDMAN  
 I may have to juice this up a little for Life's readers.

BETTY GRISSOM  
 Y'know what I heard today, Herbie?  
 That Al may get to go to the White House after his flight.

WEDMAN  
 To meet the President.

BETTY GRISSOM  
And Jackie.  
 (shakes her head in wonder)  
 Would that ever be something.  
 (smiles)  
 Gus flies next. Can you just see Gus and me in the White House? Meeting them?

CUT TO

BETTY GRISSOM. CLOSE UP.

BETTY GRISSOM  
 Would that ever be something...  
 (her eyes are dreaming)

CUT TO

LOUISE in the kitchen. She puts the coffee container down, picks up a sweater she's knitting, starts back into the living room.

WEDMAN is waiting for her, notebook open.

WEDMAN  
 Can you help me please on just one point?

LOUISE SHEPHERD  
 If I can, Herbie.

WEDMAN

Why am I the most nervous person  
in this room?

MRS. SHEPHERD

(little laugh)

Alan's a Navy pilot. They don't  
like this talked about, but a  
quarter of Navy pilots die in  
accidents. And they don't count  
combat because combat isn't an  
accident.

CUT TO

LOUISE SHEPHERD. CLOSE UP.

MRS. SHEPHERD

Alan used to go off every morning  
for years and test machines with  
names that all sound like monsters  
with steel teeth: the Demon, the  
Tigercat, the Banshee...

CUT TO

LOUISE, gesturing around the room.

MRS. SHEPHERD

This? This is nothing --  
(pointing to the tv set  
with the rocket in the  
center -- )  
-- at least I know where he is  
today...  
(from her calm face --

CUT TO

THE ROCKET in real life. Nothing much has changed except the  
sun is higher now.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD lying on his back in the rocket as the countdown  
continues. More than ever, he seems like a valuable piece  
of china packed in a box full of styrofoam. There's a  
greenish fluorescent light in the capsule. There are few  
sounds -- the hums of the cabin fans and the pressure-suit  
fans --

But the sun is giving him trouble now -- it flashes through  
the periscope window and these bursts are bothersome. So he  
reaches out with his left arm, takes a grey filter, and  
carefully, slowly, places it over the periscope. This

neutralizes most colors and takes away the power of the sun.

His left arm, when he does this, moves frighteningly close to the ABORT handle. It doesn't hit it, but there's almost contact. As he lies there in that awkward position, bearing up wonderfully well --

CUT TO

GRISSOM AND DOC in Mission Control as suddenly another hold up comes in the countdown.

GRISSOM

What the hell is it this time?

DOC

You want the technical or the emotional explanation?

GRISSOM

(looks at DOC)

Emotional?

DOC

There's a lot of working parts to these babies and someone's in charge of every part. And today they're being extra cautious --

(looking around the room -- the tension is awful and building)

-- because nobody wants to be the man who killed Alan Shepherd...

(from them --

CUT TO

The beach. The tension's building there too. The kids have stopped running around playing games. Everybody's standing in the Florida morning staring off at the white needle. And the clouds that seem to be forming above it.

CUT TO

THE CLOUDS. Not a very happy sight --

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

SHEPHERD IN THE CAPSULE, looking at the clouds through his grey filtered periscope window. They look dark. As he scowls --

CUT TO

VICKERS, their training officer, typing a piece of paper,

finishing, taking it out of the machine, looking it over.  
We're in an office at Canaveral. GILROY, the NASA guy walks in.

GILROY

Get 'em finished?  
(VICKERS nods, but it's  
clear he's not happy)  
Let's get over to Control then.

VICKERS

(snaps this out)  
When I'm done proofreading.

GILROY

Look, I'm sorry I made you do  
these but they had to be done.  
(beat)  
Do one for me?

VICKERS

You said do one for everybody.  
(selects one)  
Here's you.  
(as he starts to read  
another typed piece  
of paper --

CUT TO

VICKERS. CLOSE UP. Maybe he's been drinking.

VICKERS

(reading)  
'When Al Shepherd shook my hand  
this morning, his last words were,  
"Mr. Gilroy -- promise me you won't  
let the American people lose faith  
in the project. If I die, it's  
only so Project Mercury can live."  
(puts the paper down)

CUT TO

GILROY. Pleased.

GILROY

Good, real good -- even sounds like  
me...

CUT TO

JOHN GLENN standing with some technicians in front of a bunch  
of machines with dials. GLENN has one hand on the other wrist.  
After a moment we realize what he's doing: he's taking his  
pulse.

GLENN  
(finished -- to head  
PULSE GUY)  
What'd you say Al's pulse was?

PULSE GUY  
Ninety.

GLENN  
(shaking his head)  
That's eight points lower than  
mine --  
(as he moves on

CUT TO

THE COUNTDOWN. Three minutes and thirty seconds to go.  
Twenty nine. Twenty eight. -- Wild tension among all the  
technicians in mission control -- Twenty seven. Twenty six --

CUT TO

THE L.A. FREEWAY again and more cars are pulled off the road.  
No one's sitting now -- they're all walking around their cars,  
some one direction, some the other, it's like a kind of mystic  
incantation --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD IN THE CAPSULE, listening to the countdown -- two  
minutes fifty five -- fifty four -- fifty three --  
SHEPHERD slowly with his left hand now begins to reach out  
toward the filter he put over the periscope and as he does --

CUT TO

THE ABORT HANDLE AS HIS LEFT FOREARM HITS IT and the instant  
it does --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, pulling his left arm the hell away. He stares at  
the abort handle, takes a deep breath because that was close  
-- now he looks at the grey filter over the periscope. To  
hell with it, he'll leave it there as we

CUT TO

MISSION CONTROL AND THE COUNTDOWN. A bunch of top SCIENTISTS  
are checking everything and it's forty-four, forty-three,  
forty-two, forty-one -- forty and on that --

CUT TO

A TECHNICIAN LOOKING AT A DIAL.

TECHNICIAN

Hold it.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, listening over his headphones to the scientific conference going on. Overlapping talk. Terse and deadly. 'What's wrong for chrissakes?' 'Fuel pressure's just a hair high.' 'Can you bleed off some of the excess?' 'Maybe-- might be better though to reset from inside the booster manually?' 'Jesus, that's a forty-eight hour delay you're talking about.'

These words, what we can make out of them, do not set SHEPHERD smiling.

CUT TO

THE CONFERENCE GOING ON. A dozen really top scientific minds, going over the possibilities. One of them, OLBERDING, the suit expert we met before speaks in to the microphone to SHEPHERD.

OLBERDING

It's Olberding, Al. Suit holding up all right. You still cool?

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, EXTREME CLOSE UP. His words loud and slow and distinct. His tone absolutely glacial --

SHEPHERD

I'm -- cooler -- than -- you -- are --

CUT TO

MISSION CONTROL and everyone listening to the power of SHEPHERD'S VOICE.

SHEPHERD (OVER)

-- Why -- don't you -- fix -- your  
-- little -- problem --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. EXTREME CLOSE UP.

SHEPHERD

-- AND -- LIGHT -- THIS -- CANDLE --  
(and on that --

CUT TO

THE BIGGEST, the most impressive shot of the picture thus far -- actually, it's not one shot but a whole goddam series of

them and what we are seeing, from up close, is a rocket blasting into the sky, and we've got shots from the ground going up and shots from the top looking down, you name it, we've got cameras there --

-- but it's not just the sight of the monster you've got to have the sound -- this isn't some cute little sound like the helicopter attack in the Coppola film -- this is some kind of a rumble.

And flames envelope the launching pad and there's gas and every other hell-like thing you care to conjure with.

But the final statement that has to be made here and transmitted to an audience is just this: when one of these mothers begins to journey in to space, the whole earth trembles. On the giant rockets, miles away even, you can feel your clothing flapping and you sense beneath your feet the quaking of the ground.

This rocket, SHEPHERD'S rocket, isn't that big. But it's big enough. The screen must simply explode with flame and sound that could kill you if you were really there --

-- in other words, the top of the theatre comes off.

During this, we hear muffled voices, SLAYTON'S AND SHEPHERD'S.

SLAYTON (OVER)

Liftoff -- you're on your way,  
Jose --

SHEPHERD

-- ahhhhh, Roger: lift-off and  
the lock is started.

(pause. Then --)

This is Freedom Seven. The fuel  
is go, 1.2 g, cabin at 14 psi,  
oxygen is go.

CUT TO

FREEDOM SEVEN, lifting into the Florida heavens, picking up speed as it blazes its way.

CUT TO

Inside the cabin and it's surprisingly quiet. Just a few things make noise and we see them now: a camera whirring about a foot from his face, recording his expressions; a little tape recorder, its little motor running; the fans and the gyro's and the inverters, all of them making sounds, but soft ones. And the radio. Now that we've seen all the little noisemakers, we see SHEPHERD HIMSELF and it comes as a little

surprise because the G forces are building up and his face is flattened out by the power.

CUT TO

The beach and the crowd staring, all of them, up as the fire-streak rises higher in the morning sky. It's a little past 9:30 now, and

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, lying there in the capsule, only we see him in black and white because we're seeing him through the capsule camera, and he looks jerky so that probably accounts for the fact that there seems to be a hell of a lot of vibration suddenly and

CUT TO

SHEPHERD IN COLOR as we see him and there is a hell of a lot of vibration, it's shaking him up pretty good and as he squints toward the instrument panel --

CUT TO

THE PANEL and it's blurred, the vibration has made it all but impossible for SHEPHERD to see it clearly and

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, the vibration much worse now and

CUT TO

THE PANEL, worse too, much more blurred -- now only more blurred -- now clearing -- now clear, and

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, the vibration gone.

SHEPHERD

Okay Deke, it's a lot smoother now.  
A lot smoother.

CUT TO

SLAYTON in Mission Control. The air of excitement in the place does nothing but build. SLAYTON is with a bunch of people, among them PETERSON, the NASA p.r. guy.

SLAYTON

Roger, Friendship Seven, sounds good.

PETERSON

Wait a sec', did he just say  
smoother?

(SLAYTON nods)

That means it must have been rough,  
he didn't report that there was bad  
vibration.

SLAYTON

Naturally -- if he had, some asshole  
scientist probably would have aborted  
the mission.

(now he looks around  
the room filled with  
technicians)

Any asshole scientist.

CUT TO

THE BEACH. Everyone is still staring at the sky. Only the  
rocket isn't visible anymore. It's far away and gone. The  
mob still stares.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD IN THE CAPSULE. Suddenly there is a roaring sound  
and as he stares up in the direction --

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE FROM OUTSIDE as the escape tower separates from  
the rest, floats off into space.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD in the capsule, and he should look pleased, except  
that he doesn't quite. And we find out why as we

CUT TO

THE PULSE SCIENTISTS. They are studying dials and they don't  
look happy either.

FIRST SCIENTIST

His pulse keeps rising -- 138.

SECOND SCIENTIST

I promise you something -- if the  
next separation goes the way it's  
supposed to go, it'll come down as  
fast as it went up --

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE AND THE ROCKET IN SPACE. And now there are some mild explosions, and slowly, but perfectly, the huge rocket begins to fall away from the tiny capsule. This was, along with the blast off the most dangerous part of the trip and it couldn't go any better --

CUT TO

THE TINY CAPSULE, at last alone in space, and now it gradually begins to turn itself around, so that the blunt end, instead of the thin end, is leading --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, the look that was on his face gone now. The crunch is past.

SHEPHERD  
Switching to manual pitch.  
(as he moves the  
proper control --

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE IN SPACE. It responds, nosing up and down, as the little gas jets go off, moving the resistance free capsule in the proper way.

SHEPHERD (OVER)  
Switching to manual yaw.

And now as the capsule yaws from side to side, with the gas jets supplying the power --

CUT TO

SLAYTON.

SHEPHERD (OVER)  
Yaw is okay. Roll is okay.

SLAYTON  
Periscope okay?

SHEPHERD (OVER)  
Periscope is coming out.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD IN THE COCKPIT, looking through the periscope window now, and he's 100 miles up and this is it folks, this is our first view through the eyes of man and what it's all like down where we are and as he squints --

CUT TO

THE VIEW THROUGH THE PERISCOPE -- and it's sludge. Not only is it cloudy as hell, but because of the grey filter, the whole thing looks like some 1930's black and white movie. It's all goulash we're looking at. Grey goulash.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. What are you gonna do?

SHEPHERD  
(with all the enthusiasm  
he can muster)  
Oh, what a beautiful view -- this  
view is...beautiful.

CUT TO

The view again. Really crud.

CUT TO

SLAYTON in Control.

SLAYTON  
(into mike)  
I'll bet it is.  
(turns to PETERSON  
the p.r. guy)  
I can't even imagine what it  
must be like.

PETERSON  
At least awesome.  
(SLAYTON nods as we

CUT TO

THE MOB outside the SHEPHERD house. All the tv ladies are doing live human interest bilge, none of it quite audible over the general hubbub.

CUT TO

LOUISE SHEPHERD inside her house. She is kind of watching the screen as she knits. Calm and regal as before.

CUT TO

ALAN SHEPHERD IN THE CAPSULE as he kind of looks up surprised as a washer floats by.

CUT TO

THE WASHER. The kind workmen use, just a small, flat metal ring. It hangs there in space.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. He's weightless, except he's packed in so tight and there's so little room in the tiny capsule, there's not many ways you can tell. The flaps on his uniform are standing up straight we notice now, but that's about it. As SHEPHERD raises a hand, reaches for the washer --

CUT TO

THE WASHER, hanging there in space. Now as SHEPHERD'S gloved hand tries to grab it, it skitters away.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, a little surprised that he misses it. He reaches out again and again he can't quite grab hold of it as we

CUT TO

THE LITTLE WASHER, skittering away, floating to one side of the capsule, lies against the wall as

SLAYTON (OVER)  
Prepare to retro-fire.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. Surprised.

SHEPHERD  
Already?  
(shakes his head a little)  
Start retro-sequence. Retro attitude  
on green.  
(he works the manual  
control stick --

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, slightly changing attitude, tipped for firing.

CUT TO

THE RETRO ROCKETS. These were three small rockets whose function in an orbital flight was to slow the capsule down sufficiently for our gravity to begin to exert control. They weren't needed actually, for this flight, since SHEPHERD wasn't in orbit, but they used it as a rehearsal here.

SLAYTON (OVER)  
Retro one.

The first retro rocket goes off on schedule.

SHEPHERD (OVER)  
Retro one. Very smooth.

CUT TO  
SLAYTON.

SLAYTON  
Retro two.

SHEPHERD (OVER)  
Retro two.

SLAYTON  
Very good, Friendship Seven.  
Retro three.

CUT TO  
THE CAPSULE IN SPACE as the third rocket goes off as scheduled.  
CUT TO  
SHEPHERD.

SHEPHERD  
Retro three. All three retros  
have fired.

CUT TO  
SLAYTON. All around now in mission control there is this  
sense that they've just about done it, only nobody wants to  
let go. Not yet. Faces are drawn as ever. The tension  
won't go away.

CUT TO  
THE CAPSULE, and now the package that held the retro rockets  
comes away and tumbles off into space and THE CAPSULE is  
falling fast now, very very fast back toward earth and

CUT TO  
SHEPHERD  
Going to re-entry attitude.  
(and as he moves the  
control stick --

CUT TO  
THE CAPSULE, and it's going 5,000 miles per hour as it drops  
toward earth and  
CUT TO

SLAYTON. Taut. To PETERSON.

SLAYTON  
Get ready for the G's.

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, rocketing down, slowing, slowing -- it goes from 5,000 MPH to 340 MPH in a little over a minute --

SHEPHERD (OVER)  
This is Freedom Seven. This is  
Freedom Seven --

CUT TO

THE 'G' dial on the control panel. The dial responds to what we hear SHEPHERD saying.

SHEPHERD (OVER)  
'G' build up three --  
(pause)  
-- six --  
(longer pause -- SHEPHERD'S  
voice is starting to change)  
-- nine --  
(and on that word --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. CLOSE UP, and he really looks terrible, his face flattened by the G forces. And now this strange word bursts out of him --

SHEPHERD  
-- ohh -- kayyy --  
(beat)  
-- ohh -- kayyy --

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, falling through space --

SHEPHERD (OVER)  
-- ohh -- kayyy --  
(harder)  
-- hohh -- kayyyyy --  
(harder still)  
-- thizz -- seven -- hohh-kayyy --

CUT TO

SLAYTON, as SHEPHERD'S voice fills Control --

SHEPHERD (OVER)

-- HOHH--KAY --

(beat)

-- sevv--vennn -- hoh-kay --

(beat)

-- hohh -- hohh-kay --

CUT TO

PETERSON, upset and surprised.

PETERSON

Why are you smiling?

CUT TO

SLAYTON. And indeed, he is doing just that: smiling. A relieved and happy smile.

SLAYTON

'Cause once that main chute opens,  
you may have an honest to Christ  
hero on your hands instead of just  
some celebrity...

(and on that --

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE DESCENDING AS SEEN FROM BELOW. Now, this gigantic white parachute billows out around it, and as the capsule continues its fall, but slowly and gracefully --

CUT TO

A BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO OF JOHN F. KENNEDY.

PULL BACK MORE TO REVEAL

That he is shaking hands with ALAN SHEPHERD.

PULL BACK STILL MORE TO REVEAL

That we are at an impressive reception in the Rose Garden of the White House. In the background, stand the other six.

And now a muffled sound begins that's going to get nothing but louder and Louder and LOUDER and that sound is the roar of giant crowds as we

CONTINUE TO PULL BACK TO REVEAL

An almost infinite number of photos of SHEPHERD, some in black and white, some color. Pictures of SHEPHERD alone or with his wife and kids, on parades in Washington and New York and New Hampshire (the crowd roar is getting deafening now) and the

covers of magazines -- not just Life, and not just American periodicals either. From France and England and India and you name the country, from around the world there's AL SHEPHERD smiling out on the cover.

THE CAMERA never stops pulling back -- there was simply no end to the world wide adulation. Now from all these pictures and all those voices --

CUT TO

The voice and face of PRESIDENT KENNEDY on tv. (He's giving the famous speech to congress three weeks after the SHEPHERD flight.)

KENNEDY

Now is the time to take longer  
strides, time for a great new  
American enterprise --

CUT TO

A REPORTERS BAR IN WASHINGTON. LINK is among them. Everyone except LINK is watching the tv while they knock back a few. LINK is walking around strangely. The bar, by the way, is dark and drab.

OLD REPORTER

Hey Link -- what're ya doing?

LINK

I'm takin' longer strides, like  
the President asked.  
(as the assembled groan --

CUT TO

KENNEDY on the tube as the REPORTERS drink and watch.

KENNEDY

-- we take an additional risk by  
making it in full view of the world;  
but as is shown by the feat of  
Astronaut Shepherd, this very risk  
enhances our stature when we are  
successful.

LINK

I voted for this guy; it must be  
senility --

CUT TO

KENNEDY ON TV. CLOSE UP.

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 the earth.

CUT TO

LINK and the REPORTERS. LINK is appalled.

LINK

The frigging moon? Jesus, why not.

OLD REPORTER

You're just sour 'cause you got a rotten book deal 'cause Life beat you to the good stuff.

LINK

You should know why I'm sour -- you're reporters, you should all know -- it's because this is bull-shit, baby, it's all cosmetic.

(pointing to the tube)

When Gagarin went up, Kennedy hated the space program, 'cause he thought it made him look like a loser. Then four weeks ago, he backs the Bay of Pigs, which he knew made him look like a loser. Then Shepherd does what an ape does, the country goes bananas, and whoosh, we're off to the moon.

YOUNG REPORTER

Shepherd's a hero, admit it.

CUT TO

LINK. CLOSE UP.

LINK

He is, huh? Well I met Churchill once. He was out of power and too much with the booze, but when he walked into the room, goddamit, I teared up. Believe me, when I look at the Seven Dwarfs, my eyes are dry.

(drains his glass)

If the Russians had decided to go under water instead of into space, if they'd started to build the New Atlantis -- Buster Crabbe would be a hero today...

(now, from this dark, not very pretty place --

CUT TO

The without question most beautiful shot of the movie so far. It comes as a surprise and it lasts only a blink's worth of time before we

QUICK DISSOLVE TO

Another shot, equally beautiful, the colors clear and lovely and it's gone in an instant too as we

QUICK DISSOLVE TO

A third shot, still as beautiful and now we realize what it is we've been watching: the world, the earth, this planet, seen from very high up, but each dissolve brought us closer and closer as we now

CUT TO

A MERCURY CAPSULE, falling like a cannonball back toward earth --

                                GRISSOM'S VOICE (OVER)  
Approaching drogue chute attitude.

                                SHEPHERD'S VOICE (OVER)  
We have a green drogue chute light here, Liberty Bell Seven, how do you read?

And now as we watch, the drogue chute, a small first chute to slow the fall opens and we

CUT TO

GRISSOM in his capsule. He has a big window, which makes one helluva difference. Otherwise, the inside of a capsule is the inside of a capsule.

                                GRISSOM  
The drogue is good.  
                                (GUS looks just fine with  
                                        the trip almost done as we

CUT TO

THE PULSE SCIENTISTS we saw during the SHEPHERD flight. They don't look so fine. They stare intently at their various dials.

                                1ST PULSE MAN  
It's still in the 160's.

                                2ND PULSE MAN  
Well, it was 171 when the retro-rockets fired. At least it's down.

1ST PULSE MAN  
It's still in the 160's --

2ND PULSE MAN  
-- look, the flight's almost over,  
you can't order an abort now.

CUT TO

THE FIRST PULSE MAN. He says nothing. But he sure doesn't look happy as we

CUT TO

A WARSHIP AND TWO HELICOPTERS, starting to take off.

CUT TO

LIBERTY BELL SEVEN, both chutes wide open now, gracefully floating toward the water and

CUT TO

LEWIS AND REINHARD, the two officers in charge of the prime recovery copter. Ahead of them now, LIBERTY BELL is coming closer and closer to landing and

CUT TO

COX, the officer in charge of the second copter, not far behind. LIBERTY BELL is about to land up ahead now as we

CUT TO

GRISSOM in LIBERTY BELL as it hits the water and sure it has parachutes slowing it down, but still the blow is considerable and shocking and as GUS grunts --

CUT TO

THE WINDOW OF THE CAPSULE as the capsule tilts way over and the window is under water. And it seems to stay that way for awhile as we

CUT TO

GUS, unhooking himself here and there, but his eyes are on the window and the fact that the capsule is taking its own sweet time righting itself. Now, from somewhere comes a sudden gurgling sound -- water must be seeping in somewhere and as GUS looks wildly around --

PAN TO

INSIDE THE CAPSULE. Where is that gurgling sound coming from?

CUT TO

GUS, his eyes nervously flicking around, trying to find the source of the gurgling and

CUT TO

INSIDE THE CAPSULE. It all seems dry -- but the gurgling sound continues as we

CUT TO

THE COPTERS, a good distance away, but approaching fast. In the water, the capsule can be seen way over on its side but then, as we watch, it slowly begins to right itself and

CUT TO

GUS, staring at the window as it emerges from the water and the capsule is upright again. The gurgling sound stops. GUS is, who wouldn't be, relieved as we

CUT TO

THE COPTERS, ready for approach and pick up, looking down. Beside the capsule there is the dye cannister and some ropes and straps and

CUT TO

GRISSOM, in the capsule, unplugging himself, making a few last minute data markings --

RADIO (OVER)

Liberty Bell Seven, this is Hunt  
Club One, are you ready for pickup?

GRISSOM

Affirmative. I've unplugged my  
suit so I'm kinda warm now --

RADIO (OVER)

-- we'll be ready for you in a  
minute or two --

GRISSOM

-- ah, Roger.

CUT TO

REINHARD AND LEWIS in the copter. LEWIS reaches for a pole with a hook on it, like a shepherd's crook. As he inches toward the door of the copter, opens it, looks down --

CUT TO

THE TOP OF THE CAPSULE. There is a loop at the capsule's neck.

CUT TO

LEWIS with the hooked pole -- it's attached to a cable. As he goes more and more into the doorway --

CUT TO

THE COPTER, lowering down over the capsule and

CUT TO

LEWIS, leaning waaaay out now and

CUT TO

GRISSOM in the capsule as suddenly, the hatch blows with a frightening sound and water begins pouring through and

CUT TO

LEWIS AND REINHARD, watching stunned as the capsule skips along the ocean surface like a stone.

REINHARD

-- he should have waited -- my  
God, he blew it too soon --

CUT TO

GRISSOM, throwing his helmet away, fighting his way out of the capsule and into the ocean and

CUT TO

THE DYE MARKER and its straps and ropes as GRISSOM becomes entangled with them, sinks momentarily under, fights his way to the surface again, starts to swim away and

CUT TO

INSIDE THE CAPSULE as water continues to pour in and

CUT TO

INSIDE THE COPTER.

REINHARD

Don't worry about Grissom -- those  
suits are buoyant, he can float  
forever -- I'm going down, we've  
got to save the capsule --

LEWIS

-- can we? -- we can hoist 4000  
pounds and it weighs 2400 -- but  
that's empty --

REINHARD

-- get ready --

CUT TO

THE COPTER, lowering, lowering until it's just above the  
capsule and

CUT TO

LEWIS, leaning out with the hooked pole, reaching down and

CUT TO

THE LOOP OF THE CAPSULE as LEWIS misses, misses again -- it's  
rough and he can't get an easy shot at it and

CUT TO

GUS IN THE OCEAN, struggling to stay afloat, a terrible wild  
expression on his face and

CUT TO

THE LOOP as the hook goes through and

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, filled with water now, starting to sink and

CUT TO

THE COPTER as the cable attached to the hooked stick goes  
taut and

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, sinking out of sight and

CUT TO

THE COPTER, and its wheels are actually in the water now, all  
three wheels, and

CUT TO

REINHARD at the controls, forcing the copter upwards and

CUT TO

THE COPTER, starting to pull up and

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, re-emerging slowly from the ocean, first just the top, then the first foot, then the first yard, then

CUT TO

REINHARD piloting his copter as suddenly the control panel in front of him begins flashing all kinds of red signals and

CUT TO

GRISSOM IN THE WATER, screaming --

GRISSOM  
Help me -- help me you bastards  
-- I'm drowning --  
    (and as he waves frantically --

CUT TO

THE SECOND COPTER, COX the pilot seeing the waving, smiling, waving back --

CUT TO

THE FIRST COPTER, REINHARD ignoring his controls which are flashing more red than ever as he fights his way up, foot by slow foot and

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, half way out of the water now, now a little bit more and

CUT TO

GUS, sinking, fighting his way up, screaming --

GRISSOM  
-- drowning you mothers -- helpppp --

CUT TO

COX in the second copter, to his partner --

COX  
I'm gonna try and get close --  
see if I can help Reinhard --  
    (and as he manipulates  
        his machine --

CUT TO

GUS, as the wash from the blades of the second copter flood over him and he sinks down again, weaker, slowly fighting his way back --

                  GRISSOM  
                  (his voice weaker now  
                  -- his body is much  
                  deeper in the water)  
                  ...drowning...

CUT TO

COX, his copter hovering closer and closer to the first --

CUT TO

GRISSOM, as the prop wash hits him again, pulls him under -- he's very feeble now --

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, almost out of the water entirely and

CUT TO

THE COPTER, hovering above it -- but it's not moving upwards anymore, it's just fluttering there like a hummingbird and

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE AND THE COPTER with no movement by either. Then, slowly, very slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, the capsule begins to sink again and

CUT TO

INSIDE THE COPTER. It's over and REINHARD knows it.

                  REINHARD  
                  (the panel ahead of him  
                  is almost solid red now)  
                  Cut us loose.

CUT TO

LEWIS, releasing the cable and

CUT TO

COX, in the second copter, seeing this, indicates that a life preserver be thrown to GRISSOM and

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE. For a moment it doesn't move. Then, slowly it begins to sink as we

CUT TO

GRISSOM, hanging through the life preserver, rising out of the water toward the second copter and

CUT TO

REINHARD AND LEWIS, whipped from their effort, staring and

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, sinking faster now. Now it's all underwater but we can still see it barely. Now not even barely. Nothing but ocean. The capsule is gone as we

CUT TO

GUS in the second copter. Safe. Except from his actions, he sure doesn't look like he believes it -- because what he's doing is fighting his way into a Mae West life preserver.

CUT TO

COX AND THE OTHER OFFICER, looking quietly at each other, then, as their eyes flick to GRISSOM --

CUT TO

GRISSOM. Fighting with the preserver. In panic. His eyes wide and scary. His hands cannot stop their terrible trembling ...HOLD for a beat. As the trembling gets worse --

CUT TO

BETTY GRISSOM in her living room. A BUNCH OF PEOPLE, all of them excited and pleased are hovering around. The tv is on, talking about the flight but we don't hear anything clearly, it's just noise. RENE CARPENTER, the prettiest of the SEVEN WIVES is trying to get people to shush, as BETTY talks into the phone.

BETTY

I knew you'd call when you could,  
I'm just so glad you're safe.

(lightly)

Heard you got a little wet.

GRISSOM'S VOICE (OVER)

The water was warm and you know I  
like to swim.

BETTY

(dreading this)

You didn't do anything wrong, did  
you?

GRISSOM'S VOICE (OVER)  
I did not do anything wrong --  
the hatch just blew.

                  BETTY  
                  (relieved)  
The phones just been ringing off  
the hook with people calling to  
congratulate.

                  GRISSOM'S VOICE (OVER)  
That's good -- hey listen -- I need  
some nice clean shirts, willya take  
care of that?

                  BETTY  
You know I will.

                  GRISSOM'S VOICE (OVER)  
Gotta go. See ya.  
                  (as he hangs up --

CUT TO

BETTY. Almost reluctantly, she hangs up the phone, turns to  
RENE, all excited.

                  BETTY  
Oh Rene -- Gus said he needs nice  
clothes --  
                  (beat)  
-- I bet that's his way of telling  
me we're heading for the White House --  
                  (now, suddenly --

CUT TO

The words 'PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE' painted in a circle. The  
reason they're in a circle is because they are painted on a  
bass drum as we

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

A place we've never seen but it sure ain't the White House.  
We're on a brain frying slab of runway, it's a heat wave in  
Florida near the end of July and you can literally see the  
heat rising.

A small tent has been erected. The crummy band watching as  
on a platform in the shade are a few dignitaries. Everyone  
is in agony from the heat.

GUS stands with his family while an old NASA executive pins a  
medal on his shirt.

Sweat pours off everyone. It's just awful. Awful and tacky

and enough to break your heart. Hold on the ceremony until the medal is on, then

CUT TO

What looks like a crummy motel cabin built in the Depression. The GRISSOM family, dressed as before, are walking in.

CUT TO

INSIDE THE GUESTHOUSE. Just as terribly as from the outside. BETTY is fighting for control. The two boys run in to other rooms.

CUT TO

BETTY. Staring around at the pit. Silence. You just know if she were alone she'd sob her heart out, but she's not alone, and no power on earth is going to make her do that. She keeps everything under control.

CUT TO

GUS, wandering in to the kitchen. Tiny and dark. He looks in the refrigerator, calls out.

GUS

All stocked with food, terrific --  
this place is goddam nice, y'know?

BETTY

(in the doorway)

Oh, it's everything the books said  
-- I mean, there's Buckingham Palace  
and that place in India, the Taj  
Mahal, and there's the Guesthouse  
at Patrick Airforce Base in Florida.

GUS

Just don't make a fuss, all right?

CUT TO

BETTY, and it's like she's just been hit, and she's about to reply but then her LITTLE SONS run in.

FIRST SON

Mom -- there's no pool --

SECOND SON

-- and no tv --

BETTY

Your father and I are talking, children.  
Go play on the beach.

FIRST SON  
We can't get to the beach --

SECOND SON  
-- there's the road --  
(and as he points --

CUT TO

BETTY, standing in the back door. A superhighway is set between the house and the beach and traffic roars along, dangerous and fast and --

BETTY  
Go to one of the bedrooms, children --

FIRST SON  
-- but --

BETTY  
Please.

CUT TO

THE SONS. Her tone is not the kind of thing you argue with. As they nod, turn --

CUT TO

GUS in the kitchen, munching on a piece of fruit as he studies the contents of the icebox -- BETTY slams the door shut hard.

BETTY  
I'm not cooking, Gus -- make a reservation at the Holiday Inn for the family --

GUS  
-- can't, they're booked solid and --

CUT TO

BETTY. CLOSE UP. And there's an explosion building.

BETTY  
I never made a fuss in my life -- when we got married and you went off to college alone because you couldn't find a place big enough for the both of us, I didn't fuss -- and when your first son was born and you didn't come see him til he was six months old, I didn't fuss -- and when I was in the hospital twenty one days last year and you visited me once and then couldn't last through one visiting session, I didn't fuss --

(MORE)

BETTY (contd)

(big)

-- but I'm fussing now --

CUT TO

GUS, backing off --

GUS

-- this is really accomplishing  
a lot -- scream some more --

CUT TO

BETTY, move in on him --

BETTY

(bigger)

-- I just may --

(huge)

-- because they're cheating me --

BETTY AND GUS, head to head now --

BETTY

-- when your man's in the military,  
you know it's not gonna be roses --

(mimicking)

-- 'if the military'd wanted you to  
have a wife, they'd have issued him  
one -- '

(staring dead at him)

-- but you know one thing -- when  
the goodies start to come, everyone  
gets their fair share --

CUT TO

BETTY, flinging the icebox door open --

BETTY

Well, you seven are equal and this  
is not my fair share -- cooking in  
the heat's not the same as being  
served by waiters in the White House  
-- and that --

(she rips at the medal

that was pinned on before)

-- that's not the same as a Fifth  
Avenue parade --

CUT TO

BETTY. CLOSE UP.

BETTY

-- we worked hard for this -- I

(MORE)

BETTY (contd)  
 saw you sixty days last year -- and  
 it's not fair, it's not goddam fair --  
 (a terrible hurt cry)  
 -- and they owe me!!!  
 (it's an angry lady we're  
 looking at -- HOLD on  
 her awhile...

CUT TO

A CORNFIELD, someplace we haven't been before. Late afternoon.

A LITTLE KID comes running wildly into view, staring at the sky. We see now that he's crying out of control. Now HIS MOTHER comes after him. She pulls him to her, consoles the KID. But nothing she does can make him stop staring at the sky. Or stop crying...

CUT TO

THE ROOF OF A MANHATTAN BROWNSTONE. Night. A MAN, educated looking, is watching the darkness above.

Now A WOMAN comes to the doorway of the roof, beckons for THE MAN to come inside. THE MAN shakes his head. No. As he turns, we see he holds a rifle in his hands...

CUT TO

THE OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. LBJ is talking to LINK. His desk is covered with newspapers -- many of them with pictures of a space ship taking up a considerable part of the front page.

LINK  
 I can't be precise, but this feels  
 like a worse panic than with the dog.  
 (JOHNSON nods)  
 You think it's serious?

LBJ  
 The fact that they orbited Titov  
 for 25 hours --  
 (shrugs)  
 -- that's a scientific achievement.  
 (feet off desk now)  
 But the fact that three times he flew  
 right over America. That's something  
 different. Suppose next time they give  
 Mr. Titov H Bombs and he drops them  
 as he goes along, like some kid dropping  
 rocks off a highway overpass...  
 (beat)  
 Now you tell me if you think it's  
 serious.

CUT TO

LINK. He lights a butt, stands.

LINK

You know what I've been wondering lately? Maybe they're better than we are. The goddam Russians. Young and hungry, the way we used to be. On the come while we're on the skids...

(JOHNSON stares off,  
says nothing)

Boy, wouldn't that just be shit?...  
(and as he turns to go --

CUT TO

GILROY'S OFFICE as GLENN walks in. GILROY points to a chair and GLENN sits.

GILROY

The Titov flight has changed our plans a little bit. I've just been on with Washington and they don't want any more of those fifteen minute jobs. I know you were next in line to duplicate Shepherd and Gus, but that's scrubbed.

(GLENN waits)

We're going for the hole in the sky, John -- we're going to put a man in orbit --

(beat)

-- and it's you --

(beat)

-- unless of course you'd rather not.

GLENN

(he is thrilled -- shrugs)

I wouldn't mind...

(now he just can't keep  
from smiling as we

CUT TO

A TINY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN COCOA BEACH. Early Sunday morning. A few people, quiet, well dressed, enter the church. Now a few more walk in. They too are quiet.

CUT TO

GLENN. He gets out of his car, walking toward the church. He is dressed as the others were dressed. Religion, as we've seen, is a serious thing with him and as he enters

HOLD FOR A MOMENT.

Then a not well dressed guy scurries toward the church entrance. He's carrying a note pad in one hand. Another guy comes right behind -- a bunch of cameras slung around his neck.

CUT TO

INSIDE THE CHURCH. The service is just starting. GLENN stares front until he hears a click sound. Then another. Now there comes a whole barrage of clicking as we

CUT TO

REPORTERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS. Dozens of them, moving down from bench to bench, getting closer to GLENN.

CUT TO

GLENN. Aware now of what's going on. He looks to the MINISTER at the front, tries to gesture that he's sorry --

CUT TO

THE MINISTER and from his point of view we can see that it's becoming a melee now, as the photographers start shouldering and elbowing each other in an effort to reach GLENN and suddenly

CUT TO

GLENN, bolting out a side entrance of the church, running, running for his car...Hold just a moment. Then --

CUT TO

DOC. Dressed. Dark out. He enters a room, walks across it. Asleep in his underwear shorts on the top bunk of a double decker bunk is GLENN.

DOC

It's January 27th, John.

(GLENN'S eyes flutter.

He nods, quickly starts  
to rise as we

CUT TO

GLENN in a different room, still dressed as before. DOC is attaching bio-censors to his body, sticking them on the spots where we saw the men being tattooed.

GLENN

(as DOC works quickly)

Weather?

DOC

It's supposed to improve.

(GLENN nods; DOC  
goes on with  
more attaching --

CUT TO

GLENN eating a low residue meal. CARPENTER, his back up, eats with him. The meal is strained orange juice, eggs over easy, filet mignon, Postum.

DOC AND VICKERS are across the room, talking quietly.

VICKERS

Physical go okay?

DOC

(nods)

You know, years from now no one will believe it, but there is simply no fear.

VICKERS

I think that's because bravery depends on your perception of what's dangerous.

(from them --

CUT TO

TWO MEN WE HAVEN'T SEEN BEFORE, and we're in tight, so we can't tell what they're doing, but from the effort on their faces, it's hard brute work.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

That these are the SUIT TECHNICIANS and they are putting GLENN into his space suit. It weighed, without helmet, 36 pounds and was practically molded to your body and it was impossible to get into by yourself.

GLENN is doing his best to be helpful. He is standing at this point, with both legs and one arm in. He nods and they begin the labor of getting the second arm into the suit. It's a bitch but they do it -- only now comes the hard part, the head. GLENN ducks down, they manipulate and suit expertly and he drives to push forward with his head but it's not coming, it's just not coming as we

CUT TO

GLENN, as with one final push, his head pops through and

CUT TO

GLENN lying on a couch now, with his boots and gloves on. They are pressure checking the suit. As he lies there, the suit begins to expand like a balloon...

CUT TO

GLENN AND DOC AND THE SUIT TECHNICIANS leaving Hangar S. The absurd sight of the ballooning suit was the last smile we're going to get for a time. From now on, the tension, which has been thick since he was awakened, does nothing but build. And for an example of that --

CUT TO

THE GIANT ATLAS ROCKET, floodlit -- it's still the middle of the night -- surrounded by its skeletal like gantry. Dozens and dozens of technicians and security forces work in a frenzy, moving up and down and all the hell over. The ground is covered with a ghostly white vapor.

It's like something out of Dante.

CUT TO

THE TRANSFER VAN, a white truck that brought the astronauts from Hangar S to the rocket stops near the Atlas. GLENN gets out, DOC and the suit technicians with him. As he moves in his slow cumbersome way toward the gantry elevator --

CUT TO

THE TECHNICIANS and spontaneously they all suddenly start clapping, applauding like crazy.

CUT TO

THE GANTRY ELEVATOR, opening. GLENN and the others get in. The ELEVATOR closes. Pause. The elevator starts to rise --

HOLD on the elevator.

Stay right on the ground as up it goes, up and up slowly and steadily, and this is our first close up look at the Atlas -- it was twice the diameter of the rocket SHEPHERD rode and had five times the explosive power.

The vapor drifts across continually as the elevator rises to the level of the capsule.

CUT TO

GLENN at insertion, and just as you couldn't put your suit on without help, you couldn't get into the capsule alone either. There was a handle just about the hatch that you could hold on to, and GLENN is doing that.

But the SUIT TECHNICIANS are really the guys who are putting him in. They lift, lug, push, all the time being careful not to rip the fabric of the suit and as they continue their labors --

CUT TO

THE HATCH and the final bolts being closed, and now

CUT TO

JOHN GLENN alone in the capsule at last. It's dark. We can hear the eerie creaking of the rocket. The countdown continues. And we can also hear the pounding of GLENN'S heart...

CUT TO

HERBIE WEDMAN, the Life reporter, quietly and as unobtrusively as possible walking around a house toward the back door.

It's the GLENN house and as he goes, we can see that the front of it looks like Nut City. Just as GLENN'S ROCKET was bigger than SHEPHERD'S, so was the interest surrounding this flight.

There are four television remote set-ups with all their cables criss-crossing the lawn. And all their technicians. And gofers and groupies. Not to mention the print media. The atmosphere is about what you'd get at a public hanging.

Now --

CUT TO

WEDMAN, knocking softly on the back door of the GLENN House.  
RENE CARPENTER peeks out, quickly opens the door, lets him in.

WEDMAN

(they're in the kitchen--  
he hands her a Kleenex)

This is all the tranquilizers I had,  
Mrs. Carpenter -- if she's that  
worried about the flight, I think  
she should call her doctor and --

RENE

Oh Herbie, haven't you been around  
us long enough yet to know it's not  
the flight -- John came back one day  
in Korea with 375 holes in his plane  
-- Annie's panicked about after the  
flight.

WEDMAN

After?

RENE

She's got to go out like the other  
wives have and say a few words on  
live television.

CUT TO

RENE. CLOSE UP.

RENE

With Annie's speech thing, one minute  
of talking on live television...

(shakes her head)

...that's her own private vision  
of hell.

(from them --

CUT TO

DAWN OVER THE CANAVERAL AREA BEACH. Only we can't see the beach yet on account of we're looking at the sky. The weather doesn't look so red hot. Clouds moving in -- but there are occasional breaks when the sun shines through and on one of those

PAN DOWN TO

THE BEACH and it's not like the SHEPHERD flight. This is double that. Triple. You never saw so many people. Staring at the huge Atlas in the distance.

CUT TO

THE PRESS AREA. Over 600 reporters from all over the world covered the launch.

CUT TO

THE V.I.P. GRANDSTANDS. Packed.

CUT TO

THE GLENN LIVING ROOM. There were three tv sets set up at one end of the room. The sound is only from one and GLENN'S teen age kids, a boy and a girl, are in charge of deciding which sound to hear. Right now, our Cronkite type is talking somberly, as RENE AND ANNIE move in and out, others sit, the Life Photographer snaps away at anything that moves, etc.

CRONKITE TYPE

-- these delays seem to be a built in part of our launchings -- Glenn is well into his third hour now -- and perhaps it's because of the complexity involved -- there are eighteen tracking stations on three continents around the world -- altogether, 25,000 people are working to --

GLENN'S DAUGHTER

-- hey mom, that's our house --  
(and she switches off the CRONKITE TYPE, switches on the shot of their home which is soon replaced by a Nancy Dickerson type plastic tv lady)

NANCY DICKERSON TYPE

-- wait, just like the rest of the world. But we all know what must be in her heart. And what her one greatest wish must be.

RENE

(to ANNIE)  
-- tell her the truth, Annie --  
(to the tv lady)  
-- she wants an Electrolux vacuum cleaner with all the attachments --  
(as ANNIE smiles --

CUT TO

THE SKIES OVER CANAVERAL. Darkening. Fewer patches of blue.

CUT TO

MISSION CONTROL. The countdown is at forty minutes, forty seconds away. Thirty-nine seconds. Thirty-eight, seven, six and

CUT TO

THE GLENN LAWN. Suddenly two photographers begin to have a fight. Just as suddenly they stop hitting each other, mutter 'sorry', look at their watches, mutter 'shit.'

CUT TO

SOMETHING WE DIDN'T EXPECT: A GIANT BLACK LIMOUSINE parked on a side street in Arlington. There are motorcycles and police at a discreet distance. And closer in, half a dozen staff cars.

CUT TO

INSIDE THE LIMO AND LYNDON JOHNSON sitting there. An aide is with him. The radio is on softly.

LBJ

How far's the Glenn house?

AIDE

Couple miles maybe.

LBJ

Poor bastard's been up there over five hours now -- it'd be nice if I paid a sympathy call on his missus.

(thinking now)

Okay, set this up -- call her, tell her I'll be over.

(AIDE nods)

And tell the tv guys I'll bring in one crew but they can all three share the interview.

(AIDE nods again)

Oh yeah -- get that Life putz out -- if he's in alone the other print guys will get very unhappy, and we can't have that, can we.

AIDE

(starting to leave)

No sir.

CUT TO

LBJ. Settling back.

LBJ

Get cracking.

(smiles)

I don't see any reason why we can't get ten minutes live out of this.

(quickly --

CUT TO

ANNIE GLENN on the phone. Eyes wide.

ANNIE

-- tuh -- tuh-ten?

(pauses, listening,  
nodding)

-- um-hmm; um-hmm, um-hmm.  
(then)

No.

(and as she hangs up.

CUT TO

JOHNSON AND HIS AIDE.

LBJ

How can anyone turn down a chance  
to be on television? It's un-  
American, for chrissakes --

AIDE

-- what she said was --

LBJ

(cutting in)

-- what she said was 'no.'

(meaningfully)

Lean on her, okay?

CUT TO

ANNIE ON THE PHONE. And now she's angry. She's in the  
kitchen, and WEDMAN the Life kid is there.

ANNIE

-- I thought I made it clear --  
Mr. Wedman stays. We have a  
contract and I do not break my  
word. Now is that clear?  
(as she goes on)

CUT TO

LBJ IN HIS CAR; exploding.

LBJ

Can't anybody on my staff --  
a housewife for chrissakes?

(meaningfully)

Haven't we got contacts at the  
Marine Corps? And the Pentagon?  
And NASA? Isn't it about time  
we contacted our contacts?

(huge)

Get some muscle on her now!

CUT TO

ANNIE AND WEDMAN in the kitchen. He is pale.

WEDMAN

I had a long life in mind for myself, Mrs. Glenn, and the vice-president is known as a rather vindictive man, and --

ANNIE

-- you're not leaving!

WEDMAN

-- but --

ANNIE

-- you go noplacE, you got that?

WEDMAN

Yes ma'm.

(beat)

Mrs. Glenn?

(she looks at him)

You're speaking, um, well, without a whole lot of hesitation and I kind of wondered --

CUT TO

ANNIE. CLOSE UP. This is one staunch lady.

ANNIE

I don't stutter when I sing and

I don't stutter when I'm angry --

(deep breath)

-- and I am quite put out just now...

CUT TO

MISSION CONTROL, and the countdown is at twenty minutes five seconds, four, three, two, one and

CUT TO

GILROY. He looks across the room, shakes his head --

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, to whom GILROY was signalling. He speaks softly into the microphone.

SHEPHERD

They're scrubbing it for today,

John, I'm sorry.

(he stares dead ahead  
and we

CUT TO

GLENN in the capsule as the news hits him. We haven't seen him since insertion and he's been there for over five hours now and the cancellation news is not easy to take. He just lies stunned and whipped and pale...

CUT TO

THE PENTAGON. Quickly --

CUT TO

AN OFFICE IN THE PENTAGON. A DECORATED MARINE GENERAL is on the phone as we

DISSOLVE TO

NASA HEADQUARTERS WASHINGTON. Quickly

CUT TO

AN OFFICE IN NASA, WASHINGTON. A very important looking man is on the phone. He nods, hangs up, immediately dials again as we

CUT TO

NASA HEADQUARTERS, CANAVERAL and the GUY we saw give GRISSOM the medal is on the phone, nodding his head over and over.

CUT TO

GLENN in the ready room in Hangar S. The man has been through a lot and is drained. He sits, kind of dazed while TECHNICIANS take off his suit and unwire him. Just the outer covering of the suit is off. The mesh lining and all the sensors are still on.

A GROUP OF NASA BRASS enter, headed by the BOSS who was just nodding on the phone. They walk right up to GLENN who has had a day, and right off we're into business.

NASA BOSS

John, we're having a little trouble with your wife.

CUT TO

GLENN. Totally befuddled.

GLENN

My wife?

CUT TO

NASA group, coming closer.

NASA BOSS

She won't cooperate, John; why don't you give her a little call.

Now.

(and as he gestures --

CUT TO

ONE OF THE GROUP, handing an odd looking phone to GLENN.

NASA BOSS

We've got a phone hook-up all ready for you.

(hands GLENN phone)

GLENN

Call her?

(confused, beat, the wires  
sticking out all over him,  
sweaty and dirty, he starts  
to dial and we

CUT TO

ANNIE GLENN, the words tumbling out, but as she goes on,  
her stutter begins to return.

ANNIE

-- they won't stop phoning, John --  
all these 'functionaries' keep cah-  
calling and the secret serv -- vuh --  
they call too and I duh -- duh --  
(her face is starting  
to contort now --)  
-- duh -- duh --

CUT TO

GLENN. He listens for a long beat. Then, very gently  
and soft --

GLENN

Whatever you want, honey. You  
don't want those people in, they  
don't come in, period. Over.  
Now forget it, it's history.  
(and he hangs up, hands  
the phone back, just  
sits there as before,  
sweaty with wires coming  
out of him, looking at  
the floor.

CUT TO

THE NASA BOSS moving in on top of GLENN who still looks down.

NASA BOSS

That was sure some goddam wonderful  
help to our program you just did,  
mister.

(GLENN doesn't move)

Do you begin to realize how out  
of line you are?

(furious)

I could scrub you from the flight;  
the man we put in orbit ought to  
understand the broader interests  
of the program. I could put another  
man in your place right now.

CUT TO

GLENN. CLOSE UP. Slowly he raises his eyes to the other man.  
All the anger and frustration inside him are visible in his  
eyes. But his voice is soft.

GLENN

Do it.

(and he stares dead at  
the NASA BOSS

CUT TO

THE NASA BOSS. For a moment he tries to return the stare. But he knows a losing fight when he's in one and he drops his eyes, whirls, storms out, the others following.

CUT TO

GLENN, staring after them. He's not a man to mess with, not today...

CUT TO

THE ATLAS ROCKET AT NIGHT. Quiet. A few lights. The gantry looks more skeleton-like than ever.

The sound of a mournful muted trumpet is heard, playing slowly and sad, 'Amazing Grace.'

CUT TO

GLENN, alone, seated on a low cross-piece of the gantry, playing his horn. DOC comes up behind him.

DOC

I know how you feel.

GLENN

No you don't --

(plays a little more)

-- last night I had dinner with friends in town -- and today they called to tell me their kid had come down with mumps.

(plays a few more notes.

Then --)

I never had mumps.

DOC

I'm a doctor, I refuse to let you catch them. Anyway, that's not what you should be worrying about.

GLENN

What then?

DOC gestures with one arm toward the Atlas rocket. In the quiet night, it looks dead prehistoric thing.

DOC

The Atlas Rocket. Forty thousand parts.

(pause)

And every part built by the lowest bidder.

CUT TO

GLENN. He just breaks out laughing in the night. And as he laughs, we hear a voice going 'three--two--one---' and then quickly

CUT TO

THE MOST FRIGHTENING SOUND anyone ever heard as we watch the ATLAS blast off into a blinding Florida morning. Sure, the SHEPHERD launch sound was loud but remember, this rocket contained 5 times the explosive power of the other, and if the SHEPHERD launch took the roof off the theatre--

-- well, with this one, the walls come tumbling down.

GLENN'S VOICE (OVER)

Roger. The clock is operating.  
We're underway.

These are phenomenons, these rockets, when they leave the earth. Flames and vapors and it looks almost like they're encased in dry ice and of course the sound is like nothing ever heard and there is about the entire enterprise a sense of awe that such a thing is actually happening, truly, right there in front of God and everybody -- it is remarkable what Man can do.

CUT TO

THE BEACHES and this is not like the beach when it was full for the aborted flight. This was a strange thing going on -- people had actually decided to live on the beach, it was that important to be there when and if John Glenn made history. Little towns had actually sprung up, communities on the beach, with mayors they elected. This wasn't an event, this was the event.

So it's not just the size of the crowd. It's also the fact they are there exactly for what they came to see, like the people who at last got to Lourdes. There is, in other words, an almost religious feel to the beach mobs just now.

CUT TO

THE PRESS AREA. That same sense of Specialness.

CUT TO

THE VIP grandstands. Enlarged, of course, and jammed, of course. And no one talks. They just, hopefully, prayerfully maybe, stare. And now

CUT TO

MAYBE THE BIGGEST TELEVISION SET ANYONE EVER SAW. AT LEAST THEN. It measured 12 by 16 feet and CBS-tv had put it up and we're about to see where as we

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

GRAND CENTRAL STATION. We're in the high ceilinged main

concourse and four thousand people are standing, riveted. It's rush hour in the morning but ain't nobody leaving just now. This is a well-dressed bunch of commuters mostly, neckties and hats and

CUT TO

THE TV SCREEN as it looks like the rocket's about to topple, which is what it always looks like since your perspective isn't what it might be and

CUT TO

THE GIANT GRAND CENTRAL CROWD. And then, after a moment of quiet, somebody hollers, 'GO BABY' and that starts it -- 'UP THERE' 'GO GET 'EM' 'HANG IN JOHNNY' 'ALL THE WAY -- ALL THE WAY' -- it's becoming a chant now -- 'ALL THE WAY -- ALL THE WAY -- ALL THE WAYYYYY -- '

CUT TO

THE WASHINGTON REPORTERS BAR. The tv is on and it's early yet, but that never stopped a really good reporter from drinking. LINK sits with the guys we saw before, and next to him is the OLD REPORTER. No one is shouting here, of course. These are pro's. Suddenly --

LINK  
(it just bursts from him)  
-- BEAT THE FUCKERS --

The OLD REPORTER turns slowly, stares at LINK. LINK hesitates, shrugs, downs his drink, orders another as we

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, rising very high now and at least from outside, not all that smoothly as we

CUT TO

GLENN, the G forces high, his face very flattened. The rocket is taking considerable buffeting and then there comes a distant sound and he is slammed forward hard and

CUT TO

THE ROCKET as two booster engines shut off and are detached from the main projectile. They drift off into space, tumbling and we watching them until we

CUT TO

THE ESCAPE TOWER, blasting away, and now the rocket is accelerating like hell, moving faster by a lot than anything we've yet seen and we watch as the escape tower is left behind in space as if it were standing still and

CUT TO

THE ROCKET as suddenly it starts to really whip up and down, as if it were tied to the end of some springboard and

CUT TO

GLENN, riding it out and then as there comes a loud report, almost like an explosion --

CUT TO

THE FINAL ROCKETS blasting loose, leaving the capsule on its own and as the capsule starts its turnaround

CUT TO

GLENN. Weightless in the capsule.

GLENN  
Turnaround has started. Capsule  
is turning around. Zero G and  
I feel fine.

CUT TO

THE VIEW THROUGH HIS WINDOW. He describes what's there --

GLENN  
I can see the booster. Couple  
hundred yards behind me. It's  
beautiful. It really is  
beautiful...

SHEPHERD (OVER)  
You have a go.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD AT THE MIKE in Mission Control. Beside him is PETERSON, the p.r. guy. SHEPHERD never betrays much, but right now he's pretty excited.

SHEPHERD  
He is in orbit. In...orbit!

PETERSON  
We hit the keyhole in the sky.  
And in the next five hours, he'll  
see three sunrises, three sunsets...  
(beat)  
...and four Tuesdays.  
(shakes his head)  
After all this time, I still don't  
understand anything.

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE; things are just barely beginning to darken as we  
CUT TO

GLENN, in the capsule, as he sails into his first sunset.  
He stares riveted out the window and no wonder --

CUT TO

THE SUNSET. Stupendous and strange, because among other things, from up there, the sun sets eighteen times faster than it does from down here.

A tremendous band of orange light stretches from horizon to horizon. Like a molten liquid that had been poured into a tube along the horizon.

Above it, a wider band of oranges and reds shading into blackness above. And there are yellows and purples of all gradations.

Even some stars are visible in the black sky.

Then quickly -- all of it gone and it's night.

CUT TO

INSIDE THE CAPSULE AND GLENN on the intercom with COOPER.

GLENN

That sure was a short day. About the shortest one I've ever run into.

COOPER (OVER)

Loud and clear, Friendship Seven. Have you any landmark observations to make?

(GLENN stares down through the window)

CUT TO

THE GROUND. Faaaaaar below, a clumped bunch of lights.

GLENN (OVER)

I think I can see the outline of a town on the coast.

COOPER (OVER)

That's Perth -- they put their lights on for you.

CUT TO

GLENN, looking down.

GLENN

Thank everybody for turning them on, will you do that for me?

COOPER (OVER)

Sure will, John.

CUT TO

FRIENDSHIP SEVEN. Sailing on through the night sky. The stars are blinding. Ahead, already, the sky is just starting to lighten.

CUT TO

GLENN. Totally absorbed in checking his instrument panel.

CUT TO

THE SKY AHEAD. Dawn is rocketing toward us.

CUT TO

GLENN, really occupied with his control panel.

CUT TO

THE SUNRISE. As startling in its way as the sunset was. And as strange. And

CUT TO

GLENN, and he is shocked at something, really for the first time in space, shocked -- he speaks quickly into the mike and as he does, the CAMERA moves so that we can see what he's describing --

GLENN

This is Friendship Seven. I am in a big mass of some very small particles. They're brilliantly lit up --

(we see them now too)

-- they're luminescent. They look like little stars.

DIFFERENT VOICE (OVER)

(we're over Canton Island now)

Can you hear any impact with the capsule?--

GLENN

-- negative, negative -- they're swirling around the capsule -- there are literally thousands of them.

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE AND THE STRANGE LIGHTS. Fireflies? Needles? Tiny weightless diamonds, they seem to go to infinity. Now from them --

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE riding through day.

CUT TO

INSIDE THE CAPSULE. GLENN is taking photos out the window. He comes to the last shot.

He puts the camera in space in front of him, leaves it there where it stays, weightless, as he takes out a new roll of film. Once he's got the new roll unwrapped, he reaches casually for the camera in mid-air, takes it down, and as he begins to reload --

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE sailing along. Suddenly it veers off to the right and

CUT TO

GLENN, moving quickly to a manual control, using it.

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE. It goes back into proper orbit.

CUT TO

GLENN, releasing the manual control and as he does --

CUT TO

THE CAPSULE, veering off again and

CUT TO

GLENN, bringing it back in manually.

GLENN

This is Friendship Seven --  
controls are sluggish -- yaw  
drifting 20 degrees to the right.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD in Mission Control, PETERSON alongside.

GLENN (OVER)

Not serious -- I will control capsule manually from now on.

SHEPHERD

Roger, Friendship Seven.

(looks at PETERSON)

Think Ham could do that?

(kind of a big moment

for the pilots. Now --

CUT TO

FRIENDSHIP SEVEN, sailing through its second night, GLENN working the controls. All is very much well.

CUT TO

A STRANGE MACHINE we've never seen before and a TECHNICIAN staring at it, pale and dazed. We are at CANAVERAL. Suddenly the TECHNICIAN gets up, starts to practically run for the nearest door as we

CUT TO

A VERY IMPORTANT TYPE MEETING. Nothing but honchos and hotshots. THE TECHNICIAN is visible on the outskirts. GILROY is running things.

GILROY

We have just been given a piece of very disturbing information. Our signals indicate that John's heatshield has come loose.

(looks around)

Since there are so many technical difficulties -- he's controlling the craft himself as it is -- these new signals may themselves be false. And if that's the case, all is perfectly well.

GERMAN

What if the signal is correct?

GILROY

Since the heat at re-entry is 3000 degrees, John will be incinerated instantly.

CUT TO

GILROY, moving to a diagram of the capsule. Needless to say, he has their attention.

GILROY

I'd like to share my decision with you -- if you have any better notions, I'll be only too grateful.

CUT TO

THE DIAGRAM.

GILROY'S VOICE (OVER)

The heatshield, as we know, is supposed to burn up on re-entry, and thereby protect the capsule from burning. The retrorocket package covers it. If we leave it on, rather than blowing it off, the straps may be strong enough to hold the heatshield in place. I don't honestly think they will, but I have no other suggestions. Do you?

CUT TO

ALL THE BRILLIANT MEN. No one raises a hand. From their sombre faces --

CUT TO

GLENN in the capsule, working the controls.

RADIO VOICE (OVER)

This is Indian Ocean Capcom. MCC would like to know: is your heatshield switch in off position?

GLENN

(kind of an odd question)  
Roger. This is Friendship Seven.

CUT TO

GORDON COOPER at the mike in his Australian control room.

COOPER

Will you confirm the heatshield switch is in the center off position?

GLENN (OVER)

That is affirmative.

COOPER

And you haven't heard any banging noises or anything?

GLENN (OVER)

Negative.

COOPER

They wanted this answer, Friendship  
Seven.

CUT TO

GLENN, curiouser and curiouser. Now he blinks as we see the window is covered with blood. Or whatever it is, it sure looks like blood.

GLENN

This is Friendship Seven. It looks  
like blood has suddenly appeared  
outside my window. Maybe.

(he stares at the  
bloody window --

CUT TO

ANOTHER GUY AT A MIKE. No one is very happy along about now, but there is an attempt by all at a certain casual tone.

GUY AT MIKE

This is Canton Island, Friendship  
Seven -- we had a request to ask  
if you'd heard any flapping --

CUT TO

FRIENDSHIP SEVEN SAILING ALONG IN ITS FINAL ORBIT AS  
a series of overlapping questions are heard --

Friendship Seven -- we've been  
asked to about your heatshield  
switch...

(now a different voice)

...would you please confirm...

(another voice)

...the center off position...

CUT TO

WALLY SCHIRRA at the mike in California.

SCHIRRA

We're thirty seconds from firing  
the retro-rockets, John --  
I'll give you the timing.

GLENN (OVER)

Roger.

SCHIRRA

John -- leave your retropack on  
through your pass over Texas, do  
you read?

CUT TO

GLENN. He knows now.

GLENN

When do I Jettison Retro?

SCHIRRA (OVER)

They'll tell you over Texas.  
(beat)  
Ten seconds to sequence.

CUT TO

THE RETRO-ROCKETS.

SCHIRRA (OVER)

Five...four...three...two...one...  
MARK.

Now the rockets begin to fire, great blasts, three of them,  
and

CUT TO

GLENN. It is very dicey along about now.

VOICE (OVER)

This is Texas Capcom, Friendship  
Seven. We are recommending that  
you leave the retropacking on  
through the entire re-entry.

GLENN

This is Friendship Seven -- what  
is the reason for this? Do you  
have any reason? Over?

VOICE (OVER)

Not at this time. Cape flight will  
give you the reason when you are  
in view.

CUT TO

AL SHEPHERD at the Cape control mike.

SHEPHERD

Seven, this is Cape --

GLENN

-- go ahead Cape --

CUT TO

GLENN, listening intently.

SHEPHERD (OVER)

We recommend...  
(and it's dead --

GLENN

Go ahead, Cape. Friendship Seven.  
Go ahead, Cape, Friendship Seven...

CUT TO

SHEPHERD. He shakes his head. Communications are dead...

CUT TO

A WHOLE SERIES OF VERY QUICK SHOTS. FACES. All the faces of the people we've seen working on the orbit shot -- all of the dull and scared and waiting -- that was the worst of it all, the waiting. This moment, now, was the most difficult moment of Project Mercury. Communications were gone, and there was no way of knowing if they were bringing back a man or ashes. Now --

CUT TO

THIS INCREDIBLE SHOT OF A FIREBALL -- that's all we can see, this great flaming mass dropping down and down and down toward the earth below.

HOLD ON THE FIREBALL. HOLD. KEEP HOLDING UNTIL AT LAST WE

CUT TO

GLENN in the capsule, staring out the window as great chunks of flaming material flash by.

There are sounds of things ripping and tearing.

Now more flaming chunks, banging against the capsule.

The tearing sounds are worse now. It sounds like the heatshield is going.

CUT TO

SHEPHERD, over and over and over --

SHEPHERD

Seven -- this is Cape -- Over --  
Seven, this is Cape -- this is Cape,  
Seven. Over. Over --  
(without warning)

GLENN

-- That was some fireball, boy --

CUT TO

GLENN, and he's alive, the re-entry safely finished and

SHEPHERD (OVER)

-- reading you loud and clear --  
how are you doing?

GLENN

Ohhhh, pretty good...  
(and as he lies there  
alone and alive --

CUT TO

A CRUSH OF YOUNG SEAMEN'S FACES. All of them looking up,  
many of them crying as we

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

GLENN'S CAPSULE being lowered onto the deck, via helicopter,  
of the U.S. Destroyer Noa.

CUT TO

GLENN, walking across the deck, following a bunch of ship's  
officers and medical types. He stops, looks back.

CUT TO

SOME SAILORS. On their knees. They are painting each spot  
that JOHN GLENN walked with white paint. Now --

CUT TO

MISSION CONTROL. DOC AND VICKERS are sitting at a desk,  
wiped out and crying.

CUT TO

THE BEACHES. Five hours later. The religious awe still  
there. Tears all over the place.

CUT TO

GRAND CENTRAL. The same as before. Only the people are  
crying now.

CUT TO

THE REPORTERS BAR IN WASHINGTON. The reporters are all there  
only now they're sloshed.

LINK  
(nudging the OLD REPORTER  
on the arm)  
And you were the asshole said we  
weren't as good as those pinko  
commie fags.

OLD REPORTER  
(blinks slowly)  
Naw; that was you.

LINK  
Oh, right...  
(beat)  
...I was the asshole...

CUT TO

LINK. CLOSE UP. He rests his head heavily on his hands, his fingertips near his eyes. He feels something funny, looks at his fingertips. They are wet from his tears...

CUT TO

GLENN, waving, leaving the Noa via copter. The deck is jammed with everybody waving back. Now the copter takes off into the later afternoon.

CUT TO

INSIDE THE COPTER. THE PILOT, young, is thrilled at the chance to fly GLENN. For a moment, silent. Then --

PILOT  
Was it really fantastic?

CUT TO

GLENN. You don't know what kind of thing he's going to say until he says it --

GLENN  
Just your typical day in space...  
(and now, as he smiles --

CUT TO

THE COPTER. The moon is rising, framing the copter. Now the copter veers left, out of sight.

HOLD ON THE MOON.

Then the camera begins moving in closer and closer and as it picks up speed, straight at the moon --

FINAL FADE OUT.