

THE RIGHT STUFF

A Screenplay from
Tom Wolfe's book

by

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TRIUMPHANT MUSIC SWELLS

STOCK

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

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

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

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

Also in the NEWSREEL:

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

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

LOWELL THOMAS

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

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

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

SHOT. THE HIGH DESERT.

2

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

LOWELL THOMAS

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

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

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

FADE OUT:

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

CREDITS BEGIN. VERY SIMPLE WHITE LETTERS ON THE BLACKNESS.

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

The wind becomes the drone of the B-29.

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

PILOT (WAYNE'S VOICE)

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

GROUND CONTROL I

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

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

We hear the Pilot's rattling communications.

Buffeting grows louder.

And Something is going wrong with the controls.

GROUND CONTROL

We suggest you try (A).

PILOT

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

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

(4) CONT

GROUND CONTROL I

We suggest you try (B).

PILOT.

Trying (B).

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

GROUND CONTROL I

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

All theater speakers are rattling.

PILOT

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

DISSOLVE INTO -- INCREDIBLE MOVING POV-- FROM SKIES, CLOUDS PARTING
-- RIGHT DOWN, DOWN... INTO THE EARTH. AND SUDDENLY THE ENTIRE
SCREEN EXPLODES IN A BLINDING FLASH OF FLAMES. THIS MOMENT OF
CRASH. AND THIS IS NOT JUST THE LITTLE NEWSREEL SCREEN WE HAVE
FOCUSSED ON, THIS IS THE BIG, WIDE SCREEN, WITH BIG, WIDE SCREAMING
SOUND...AND WHAT WE LIKE TO CALL REAL-LIFE.

OR, IN THIS CASE, REAL-DEATH.

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

DISSOLVE TO: EXT DESERT HOUSING TRACT

(5)

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

CUT TO: INT BEDROOM

(6)

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

CUT TO: EXT DESERT HOUSE

(7)

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

Continued

And it flaps against the housedresses of the gaunt neighbors who stand in clusters on neighboring lawns, figures from a Dorothea Lange-scape: A death-watch. (7) CONT

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

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

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

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

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

YOUNG WOMAN
(a whispered scream)
No ! Go Away !

VERY CLOSE SHOT ON THE FRIEND OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS. (8) *

EXT. CEMETERY IN THE HIGH DESERT. DAY.

CUT TO NEXT SCENE -- HE BEGINS TO SING:

FRIEND
Lord guard and guide the men who fly,
Through the great spaces in the sky,
Be with them always in the air,
In darkening storms or sunlight fair.
O hear us when we lift our prayer
For those in peril in the air ! AMEN

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

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

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

CLOSE SHOT ON YEAGER. He glances from one face to the other. He has seen all this before. His eyes meet the Glamorous Woman's. They avert glances. Yeager looks up. A JET SQUADRON ROARS BY OVERHEAD. ONE PLANE IS MISSING IN THE FORMATION. (8)

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HIGH DESERT. DAY. (9)

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

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

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

EXT. DESERT NEAR PANCHO'S

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

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

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

PANCHO

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

CONTINUED...

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

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

BELL CIVILIAN

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

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

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

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

GIRL AT BAR

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

PANCHO

You have to die, Sweetie.

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

GIRL AT BAR

Howcome they drink so much ?

PANCHO

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

GIRL AT BAR

But the sun's still out.

PANCHO

Why so it is, Sweetie.

CONTINUED...

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

7
(10) CONT

SLICK

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

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

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

LIASON MAN (confidential tones)

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

MILITARY OFFICER

...Any problems with him ?

LIASON MAN

Only one. Holding him back.

MILITARY OFFICER

That shouldn't be a problem.

They all nod, the Military Officer clears his throat:

MILITARY OFFICER

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

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

YEAGER

Is that right ?

MILITARY OFFICER

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

CONTINUED...

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

8
(10) CONT

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

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

SECOND BELL GUY

(mumbling)

...If there is any beyond...

They give the Second Bell Guy a dirty look.

MILITARY OFFICER

...So what do you think, Yeager ?

*

YEAGER

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

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

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

(hoarse, nervous)

Waitress, a drink for Mr. Yeager here !

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

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

So you think you might have a go at it ?

YEAGER

Might.

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

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

YEAGER

You're already payin' me, aincha ?

MILITARY OFFICER

Why, sure, Yeager, but...

*

CONTINUED...

YEAGER

Then I'll see yew gentlemen tomorrow.

(10) CONT

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

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

How much are you paying him ?

MILITARY OFFICER

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

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

A week ?

MILITARY OFFICER

A month.

BELL AIRCRAFT GUY

That's not bad. Not bad.

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

YEAGER

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

GLAMOROUS

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

YEAGER

I'll give you a head start.

GLAMOROUS

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

YEAGER

I b'lieve I will.

GLAMOROUS

Can't be done, Flyboy.

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

*

PANCHO

Forget it, Sweetie. She's his wife.

EXT - PANCHO'S - NIGHT

(11)

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

YEAGER

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

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

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

CUT TO: EXT - EDWARDS AFB - DAY (October 14, 1947)

(12)

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

YEAGER

Where's Ridley? Ridley?

Ridley's up on the side of the X-1 just pulling the stencil off an inscription on the plane. It reads: GLAMOROUS GLENNIS

GLENNIS

(pleased as punch)

What're you doin'?

YEAGER

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

GLENNIS

Punch a hole in the sky!

YEAGER

Be right back.

Yeager moves off toward the X-1 with Ridley

PANCHO

(after them)

Important thing to remember is the first guy to break the sound barrier gets a free steak with all the trimmin's.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED:

(12)

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

Cor

RIDLEY
Whattya mean...dinged?

YEAGER
Well, I guess you might say I damned near like
to...broke a coupla the sonsabitches. I'm gonna
have a little trouble reachin' over t'shut the
door y'know....And if I don't do it, they'll get
somebody else who will.

Ridley stares at him like he's crazy, then nods and runs toward
the hangar. *

EXT/INT- HANGAR - DAY

(13)

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

EXT- RUNWAY - DAY

(14)

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

OMIT

(15)

INT - B-29 IN THE SKIES - DAY

(16)

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

YEAGER
.. Say, Ridley, you got any Beemans?

RIDLEY
Yeah, I got me a stick. Here.

YEAGER
Pay you back later.

RIDLEY
Fair 'nuff.

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

RIDLEY
Yew jus' reachover an' whang that handle shut
with it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MONTAGE

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

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

YEAGER'S VOICE OVER

Had a mild buffet there -- jest th' usual instability
...Say, Ridley...make a note here, will ya?...
(if yew got nothing better to do)... elevator effectiveness regained... (19) omi

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

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

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

ON THE GROUND, A SOUND THAT'S NEVER BEEN HEARD ON EARTH BEFORE... and the whole desert floor is racked. [THE PICTURES ON THE WALL AT PANCHO'S RATTLE -- a strange SIGH from the hundred pilots who died bringing it to this moment. ROOKIE AT THE BAR IS SHOCKED. (20) (A20)

WITH YEAGER. THE MACHOMETER IS OVER MACH 1 -- INTO THE UNMARKED ZONE. (A21)

YEAGER

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

RIDLEY IN THE B-29. Puts his thumbs up to the crew members. (321)

(Oct. 14, 1947)

-13-

RIDLEY

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

B21
(cont)

YEAGER

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

INT/EXT - FLIGHT OF THE X-1 - DAY

21

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

CUT TO:

EXT- NEAR A HANGAR AT EDWARDS - DAY

22

The Liason Man at a phone.

MILITARY OFFICER

Who you calling?

LIASON MAN

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

MILITARY OFFICER

Sorry. No press. No word of this goes beyond
the flight line.

LIASON MAN

What? The war's over. What's going on here?
This's big news. We need coverage of this.
Coverage is what'll get us the funding. And
funding's what's going to make planes go up
around here.

He starts to dial again; again, he's restrained.

MILITARY OFFICER

Nosir. Sorry. These are orders. National Security.
Maybe they don't want someone to know. The Russians
maybe. Anyway someone figured it out that way and
that's the way it is.

IN THE BACKGROUND: YEAGER BEING TOWED IN AS HE STANDS ON THE
WING OF HIS X-1. A few people wave—his entire celebration.

INT-PANCHO'S- DUSK.

23

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

PANCHO

Steak?

GLENNIS

(sexily)

With all the trimmin's.

PANCHO

Tell me, Yeager, you miserable bastard, how's it feel to be the fastest peckerwood alive?

YEAGER

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

(to Glennis)

I punched a hole in the sky...with your name on it.

GLENNIS

Figgered you would.

Liason man off to one side talking to Military Officer:

LIASON MAN

Word'll get out. Maybe not to the press, not to the general public. But pretty soon every fighter jock, every rocket ace, every rat racer in the country'll be headed this way. Every one of 'em wants to push the outside of the envelope and get to the top of the pyramid.

FACES AROUND THE ROOM: There's laughter there; but also a look of competition in the eyes. CLOSE SHOT ON THE ROOKIE AND THE GIRL AT THE BAR: He throws back a drink.

Pancho is laughing; Glennis, Ridley and Yeager laugh. And Yeager's ribs hurt like hell.

EXT - PANCHO'S -NIGHT

24

AND THE SONG ON THE JUKEBOX CARRIES OUT INTO THE NIGHT. Pilots stumbling, groping girls, bayin' for glory at the moon, round and full over the rat shack cantina...

JUKEBOX (O.S.)

They call me a dreamer, well maybe I am.
But I've got to see for myself—those Faraway Places...

OMIT

24A-30

CUT TO: EXT/INT COOPER CAR - HIGHWAY TO EDWARDS

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

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

GORDO

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

TRUDY

We ? You mean you.

GORDO

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

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

GORDO

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

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

GORDO

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

TRUDY

I hope so Gordo, I really and truly do.

GORDO

Hey, I ever let you down ?

CUT TO: INT COOPER TRACT HOUSE

(32) *

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

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

GORDO

ZZZZzzzzzzZZZZZ

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

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

~~EXT COOPER TRACT HOUSE~~

OUTSIDE. Trudy is taking some bags out of the car when she sees: (33) ACROSS THE STREET. A GRAY FORD at the curb. THE MINISTER walking up the driveway of the house across the street. Wind flaps his black suit.

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

OMIT PAGES 17 through 20

CUT TO:
INT - PANCHO'S - DAY

(34)

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

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

GORDO

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

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

*

GUS

Why if it ain't Hot Dawg! Gordo...(uh)...Cooper... right? Gordo here thinks he is one of them hot dawg pilots you hear so much about.

*

GORDO

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

GUS

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

PANCHO

What'll you rookies have?

GORDO

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

Gordo wonders why everybody gets suddenly serious.

GORDO

What'd I say?

PANCHO

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

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

Trudy has made her way half-way across the crowded room when she overhears the conversation from a nearby table. MARGE SLAYTON is talking; her husband, DEKE, is trying to calm her down. He seems embarrassed by her outpourings:

(34)
(cont'd)

MARGE

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

DEKE

(quietly, under control)

Marge, averages apply only to those with average stuff.

MARGE

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

DEKE

(mumbling)

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

Deke forcefully guides her toward the door. Marge passes one last imploring look, wanting someone to agree with her. But she knows she's speaking about the unspeakable. HER EYES MEET TRUDY'S. It's as if for an instant they realize they share some sort of demonic possession. HOLD ON MARGE; then HOLD ON TRUDY, slowing down to that frame-a-second quality, as in a DREAM WE HEAR

TRUDY'S VOICE

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

INT - COOPER'S PLANE - TRUDY'S DREAM

(35)

Gordo climbs into a cockpit. He gives the thumbs-up sign (as in the opening newsreel). His plane takes off into a troubled beyond. HEAVY, NIGHTMARE BREATHING SOUND.

EXT-DESERT-DAY, TRUDY'S DREAM

(36)

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

GORDO

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

CHATTER OF CHASE PILOT

...Punch out, Gordo. Punch out!

GORDO'S (CALM) VOICE

Rog, and....punching out...

INT - COOPER'S PLANE - DAY, TRUDY'S DREAM

USE GRAINY EXISTING FTG - EDWARDS EJECTION SEAT TESTS...

Gordo's head cracks against the cockpit, bursts through the windshield in slow motion...As the strange figure is catapulted into the sky in an orange cloud of smoke.

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

INT-COOPER BEDROOM - DAY

Trudy wakes in bed...(Just as wife in opening.)

Trudy lies back in bed. CLOSE on her SLEEPING FACE. Curtains blowing in the BG.

DREAM MONTAGE: PLANE CRASHES from existing ftg. SOUNDS BUILD to wake her again.

INT -COOPER'S HOUSE -DAY, TRUDY'S DREAM

She opens the front door. THE FRIEND OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS is standing there with a sympathetic look on his face.

TRUDY

Go away.....

The PHONE RINGS LOUDLY, SHOCKING HER. SHE TURNS. WHEN SHE TURNS BACK TO THE DOOR AGAIN, THE FRIEND OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS IS GONE. IN THE DISTANCE, A PLUME OF SMOKE RISES.

INT - COOPER KITCHEN - DAY, TRUDY'S DREAM

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

EXT - COOPER BACKYARD - DAY

(1953)

Then, in an instant, it's normal — GORDO'S OUT IN THE BACKYARD looking thru the flames of his barbeque, burning hot dogs, talking to Gus, and Deke.

INT - COOPER KITCHEN - DAY

Trudy turns from the window. BETTY GRISSOM and Marge are there with her. (Time has passed; the Coopers are a part of the Edwards community)

MARGE

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

CONTINUED:

BETTY GRISSOM

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

TRUDY

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

Say no more. They all fall silent for a moment.

TRUDY

(out of a clear blue sky)

I'm going to live with my folks in San Diego.

Eyes flit. She's going over the wall.

BETTY

What did Gordo say ?

TRUDY

(almost a laugh)

He maintained an even strain.

continued

CONTINUED:

(42)
(cont'd)
*

MARGE

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

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

BETTY

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

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

MARGE

Sometimes they sure are handy assholes though.

Gordo holds up a black and smoking hot dog.

TRUDY

Sometimes.

EXT - COOPER HOUSE/YEAGER BACKYARD - DAY

(43)

OUTSIDE. Gordo and the guys stop laughing to look at a nearby backyard. Yeager is standing in his doorway, looking up at the sky. Glennis is nearby, his TWO SMALL KIDS play on the sparse backyard lawn.

CLOSE ON YEAGER. He squints at the sky. He's waiting. He's shuffling a roll of quarters in his hand.

*
*

Gordo looks at Yeager, then at the window of his house. Trudy's inside, looking out. Then she backs away. Only the desert glare is reflected in the window.

CUT TO:

EXT - COOPER HOUSE - LATER

(43A)

Gordo is inside looking out the front window. (Shot from EXT)

HE SEES: His car pulling away from the curb. Two kids in the backseat waving goodbye. Trudy's driving; she's been crying.

CUT TO:

(Late 1953)

25

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

(47)

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

FIRST CIVILIAN
There they are!

SECOND CIVILIAN
You guys just fly in?

GUY IN SATIN JACKET
Drove.

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

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

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

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

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

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

GUS

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

GORDO

Who are those guys?

DEKE

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

GORDO

Walker?

DEKE

And that's Scott Crossfield.

GORDO

Oh, oh.

EXT -EDWARDS AFB RUNWAY - DAWN

(48)

DAWN, smacking the desert. Under the B-29, the D-558-2 with Crossfield inside moves into the sky.

Yeager, apart from the others, takes a post on the Edwards Radio Circuit and watches. Steam from some exhausts around him.

*

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

AND SCRATCHY COMMUNICATIONS COME OVER LOUDSPEAKERS ON THE GROUND.

INT - PANTHO'S - DAY

(48A)

BOOM! THE PICTURES ON THE WALL RATTLE.

EXT - EDWARDS AFB RUNWAY - DAY

(48B)

CHASE PLANE CHATTER

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

CROSSFIELD'S VOICE

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

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

CLOSE ON YEAGER'S HANDS — There's a special, gambler's shuffle he does with a roll of quarters. Gordo watches, learns.

*

CROSSFIELD'S VOICE

Mach two!

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

DOUGLAS CIVILIANS

We made it! We made it!

CLOSE SHOT: Yeager squinting at skies, no longer top of the pyramid. Ridley and the Rookies look at him, (a special look on his face) knowing what's got to be next.

48C

EXT-EDWARDS AFB- LATER, ON THE GROUND

TRACKING WITH Yeager and Ridley followed by Gus, Gordo, Rookies, Liason Man, etc. Press members streak by them, running to get in on the story. ARRIVING AT THE HANGAR, THEY SEE:

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

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

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

CROSSFIELD

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

REPORTER

Is there a new barrier after MACH 2?

CROSSFIELD

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

PRESS REPORTER

(laughing)

A demon? What's it called?

CROSSFIELD

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

PRESS REPORTER

What about bailing out?

CROSSFIELD

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

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

LIASON MAN

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

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

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

(48D)

NARRATOR

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

(Possibly add newsreel of Russian A-Bomb)

CUT TO:

EXT - YEAGER BACKYARD- DAY

(A49)*

Glennis looking to the sky. Nearby her TWO SMALL KIDS that we saw before, play. One boy looks up at the sky.

*
*

CUT TO:

INT - FLYING B-29 -DAY

(December 1953)

(49)

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

Yeager begins to climb down into the X-1A.

YEAGER

Say, Ridley, you got any Beemans?

RIDLEY

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

YEAGER

You got some gum or don'cha?

RIDLEY

(giving up)

I think I got me a stick.

YEAGER

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

RIDLEY

Fair 'nuff.

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

(49A)

FROM THE GROUND: Gordo and Gus watch the launch. The Friend of Widows and Orphans raises his binoculars and watches.

(49B)

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

(49C)

PICTURES ON THE WALL AT PANCHO'S SHAKE. PANCHO LOOKS to the sky. (49)

CROSSFIELD IS STANDING NEAR THE RADIO COMMUNICATIONS LISTENING HIS BACKERS FROM NACA AND DOUGLAS ARE THERE. (49)

THE MACHOMETER MOUNTS. YEAGER BUFFETS. (49)

AS HE HITS MACH2...and PSHERS ON! GROUND CONTROL URGES HIM TO STOP. BUT YEAGER KEEPS GOING...MACH 2. What's wrong with him?

Yeager hits 2.3 ...and HE KEEPS GOING. HE'S TAKING AN INCREDIBLE BEATING.

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

OMIT (49C)

YEAGER'S PLANE WHIPS THRU THE SKIES. Has he gone mad? THE SIREN CALL LURES HIM ON. "Yeager is the first man to go through a particular hole in the hypersonic envelope." (49H)

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

YEAGER'S HELMET POUNDS AGAINST THE CANOPY (S. MEL Apt shots) YEAGER IS JERKED AND SPUN INTO A BLACKOUT.

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

OMIT (49J)

AND PANIC IN THE SKIES. HE'S STILL BLACKED OUT. VOICES HAVE NO REALITY --A LOST MOMENT IN LIFE. EXTEND THIS MOMENT AS YEAGER FALLS DOWN, DOWN..... (49K)

ONLY THE FRIEND OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS SEES—

OMIT (49L) (49L) (49KA)

YEAGER OPENS HIS EYES. TREMENDOUS GASP OF AIR. HIS POV: MYSTERIOUS FORMS COAGULATE AS THE SPINNING SKY RETURNS. HE HITS THE CONTROL STICK. (49M)

INT - FLYING B-29 -DAY RIDLEY

Yeager? Chuck? Where are you, Chuck? (49N)

AND YEAGER PULLS IT OUT OF THE SPIN. THE GROUND STABILIZES (Some of actual X-1A dialogue to be added here, per PK) (49P)

Yeager's voice sounds like every bone in his body has been broken....Fear has touched him.

CONTINUED.*

YEAGER

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

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

(49Q)

YEAGER FLIES OVER THE RUNWAY AND DOES A VICTORY ROLL (can we use any plane at that speed?), and his calm voice is heard by the rookies on the ground.

*

YEAGER

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

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

GORDO

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

GUS

Yea, verily. Hot Dawg.

TIGHT ON GORDO. Yeager has made a deep impression.

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

CUT TO:

INT - PANCHO'S - LATER

(50)

And it's another small celebration. NO PRESS.

YEAGER

I just tried to push her a little faster 'cause I's afraid I'd miss beer call. Where's my steak, Pancho?

*
*

PANCHO

Steak? I gave you a steak for Mach 1 and Crossfield one for Mach 2. You don't expect a steak every time you break some kinda world record, do ya?

*
*
*
*
*

CONTINUED:

YEAGER

I want my damn steak! Pancho!

(50)
(cont'd)

Laughing, Pancho snaps her fingers and a huge steak is toted out.

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

CROSSFIELD

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

YEAGER

Thank ye, Scotty. Much oblige.

The Liason Man appears with the Air Force Officer and puts something on the table in front of Yeager — SOMETHING UNDER A BLACK CLOTH.

LIASON MAN

I want to show you boys something.

And with a flourish, he pulls off the cloth and reveals a small model plane — the X-15.

YEAGER

That's it?

LIASON MAN

That will be it.

Pilots move in close. Crossfield, Walker, Gordo, etc. The model looks like a strange little black pipe in the beam of sunlight.

PANCHO

What's this? It's just a little brick with fins.
Thing fast?

YEAGER

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

LIASON

This is the X-15. A pilot'll take it up out of the earth's atmosphere and orbit around the earth and land it right out there on the dry lake bed. But it's still a couple of years away.

*

CONTINUED:

PANCHO

I gotta see that. First man into space gets a steak.
With all the trimmings. Which of you miserable pudknockers
it gonna be ?

LIASON MAN

Whoever's top of the pyramid when it's ready.
The best'll be first.

YEAGER

Yep.

Crossfield nods and tosses down a drink in agreement. Yeager
throws back a drink. Pancho pours. They look at the little toy
plane in silence. Rookies sing in b.g. Girls dance. But an air
of sobriety has come to Yeager's corner.

DISSOLVE TO:

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

CLOSE SHOT -- YEAGER'S HAND as he shuffles the quarters.

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

GORDO

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

GUS

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

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

CROSSFIELD

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

YEAGER (riding him)

Scotty, I'm plannin ta let ya know.

CROSSFIELD

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

continued

YEAGER

When's it gonna be ready ?

LIASON MAN

Early '58, the soonest.

YEAGER

'58 ? (shaking head) Long time,...long time.

(Then,tilting head). Y'hear somethin ?

Continued

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

(51)
(cont'd)

EXT - PANTHO'S - NIGHT

A FEW ROOKIES, Gus and Gordo sing beneath the full moon:

ROOKIES

"And nothing can stop the Army Air Force...."

Yeager, outside alone and woozy, listens. Now we definitely hear it: A FAINT BEEP, BEEP.... He looks at the sky. Nothing is seen (Or perhaps a churning, cloudy sky right after sunset--dramatic, magical effect)

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

IN THE CORRAL: A HORSE SNORTS. ITS EYE SUDDENLY GLEAMS. It hears the sound: BEEP....BEEP....

MONTAGE:

And across the black sky a strange face flits. It almost seems to come from science fiction, and it seems to be smiling down at Yeager, at Pantcho's, at the fifties' American night. Later we will come to identify this face as The Grand Designer.

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

(1957,

CARD: OCTOBER 4, 1957.

FROM THIS LAST MOMENT OF QUIET — CUT TO:

INT - WASHINGTON CORRIDOR - EARLY DAY

A FIGURE is running like hell down a corridor of power. It's a guy in a suit, but it looks strange to see a guy in a suit and tie running like this. There's something scary — war-like in urgency — about it.

INT - EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT ROOM -

He bursts through the door. It's dark inside, but there's a sense of a lot of men sitting in the dark.

RUNNING MAN/SECOND RECRUITER

(gasping, scared)

It's called, Sputnik!

VOICE FROM THE DARK

We know. Sit down!

SHADOWY FIGURES, all looking like they've been dragged out of bed early in the morning, all facing the same direction, sit in stony silence as the Senate Majority Leader, name of L.B. Johnson, speaks:

CONTINUED:

LBJ

Whoever controls the high ground of space will control the world. The Roman Empire controlled the world because it could build roads. Later, the British Empire was dominant because it had ships. In the air stage, we were powerful because we had airplanes. Now the Communists have established a foothold in outer space. Pretty soon they'll have damn space platforms up there to drop nuclear bombs on us, like rocks from a highway overpass. I, for one, do not intend to go to sleep by the light of a Communist moon. Now what in hell is the matter here?

(55)
(cont'd)

Two guys (One the RUNNING MAN, the other another RECRUITER) in the back of the room have been fiddling with a projector.

FIRST RECRUITER

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

RUNNING MAN/SECOND RECRUITER

I'll get the lights.

A SENATOR

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

As he begins groping around the floor in the darkness.

A SENATOR (cont'd)

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

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

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

*

FIRST RECRUITER

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

LBJ

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

SCIENTIST WITH A GERMAN ACCENT

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

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

(55)
(cont)

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

RUNNING MAN/SECOND RECRUITER
Isn't that their Grand Designer?

*
*

SCIENTIST WITH A GERMAN ACCENT
Let us see him again.

*
*

RUNNING MAN/SECOND RECRUITER
We don't know anything about him.

*
*

And the FACE OF THE GRAND DESIGNER moves across the screen once more and the Scientist sits forward, a cigarette dangling from his lip, as he studies this brief glimpse of his counterpart.

FIRST RECRUITER
In two months the Navy will launch our first satellite with a Vanguard Rocket.

*

RUNNING MAN/SECOND RECRUITER
Yeah, that ought to get us right back in the race.

*
*
*

CUT TO:

MONTAGE:

(56)

SUDDENLY BRIGHT, FULL SCREEN: A Vanguard sits on the pad.

A LONG, BONY FINGER presses a button.

A MIGHT SURGE OF NOISE AND FLAMES. (This was on national TV narrated by a Cronkite (?) type). The rocket lifts some six inches. Then it sinks very slowly, like a fat old man collapsing into a Barca-Lounger.

FAST TRACK along PRESS BOOTHS. Reporters on each phone BABBLING WILDLY.

(56A)

Then, MONTAGE OF CRASHING, EXPLODING MISSILES. (Possibly shots of "Panic in the Streets").

(56B)

THROUGH TV SCAN LINES: A HEADLINE WHIRLS INTO CAMERA: KAPUTNIK!

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

(56B)
(cont'd)

KRUSHCHEV LAUGHING, pouring out a stream of abuse.

LBJ (V.O.)

Get that derved asshole off there!

CUT TO:

INT - EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT ROOM - DAY

(57)

As the TV screen shrinks off. Essentially the same gathering as LBJ, Scientist with a German accent, etc., sit in glum silence.

A MAN IN THE SHADOWS watches. Figures walk in front of him, but his stillness makes us wonder: Who is he? *

SCIENTIST WITH A GERMAN ACCENT

We could have orbited a satellite a year ago if we had been given the green light. Now we must get something up there quick and dirty, any way at all.

LBJ

Yeah, but what?

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

57

SCIENTIST WITH GERMAN ACCENT

By combining our available rockets-- the Redstone and the Atlas -- I agree with those who say we can launch a pod...

LBJ : * :

A pod?

MAN IN SHADOWS stirs restlessly.

SCIENTIST WITH GERMAN ACCENT

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

LBJ

Spaceman?

SCIENTIST WITH GERMAN ACCENT

No, specimen.

LBJ

What kinda specimen?

SCIENTIST WITH GERMAN ACCENT

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

LBJ

A jimp? What in hell is a jimp?

SCIENTIST WITH GERMAN ACCENT

A jimp? A jimpanzee, Senator! An ape!

The MAN IN SHADOWS slams down his fist on the table and leans forward. It's IKE! *

*

MAN IN SHADOWS (IKE)

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

The Scientist seems skeptical, like he is adopting a wait-and-see attitude.

SCIENTIST WITH GERMAN ACCENT

No? Who then would you suggest we send into space, Mr. President?

CUT TO:

INT - EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT ROOM - DAY

58

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

The Scientist looks like his good time is being wasted.

Then, a succession of others who were actually considered: submarine crew members, parachute jumpers, arctic explorers, scuba divers, surfers, and--women telephone operators.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

(58)
(cont'd)

FIRST RECRUITER

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

IKE'S HAND SLAMS THE TABLE AGAIN, He's in and out of the shadows. *

IKE

Every damn lunatic in the USA will volunteer for this thing! Every dingling in the U.S. Congress will tout a favorite son. And what about security clearances? I want test pilots!

SCIENTIST WITH GERMAN ACCENT

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

OTHER VOICES JOIN IN

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

A cold unmoveable shot of Ike in the shadows.

RUNNING MAN/SECOND RECRUITER
(aside)

Looks like we're headed for some airbases.

FIRST RECRUITER

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

LONG DISSOLVE TO:

INT/EXT - RECRUITERS' CAR IN DESERT - DAY

(59)

MOVING PAST JOSHUA TREES AGAIN (Use Gordo's rigged car), past strange trucks, past broken houses, in wind...ominous...mysterious...

FIRST RECRUITER (continued)

...I've been there and hoped I'd never have to go there again. It's a godforsaken spot up at the roof of the high desert in California....

Stopping at the STRANGE GUARDHOUSE. A GUARD eyes them suspiciously. First Recruiter shows I.D.. As they drive off, GUARD picks up the phone to call ahead.

FIRST RECRUITER

They've got some sort of weird mad monk squadron up here...living in horrible conditions in rat shacks, ...corrugated tin, bare bones, bleached tarpulins... and a place called, "Pancho's Happy Bottom Riding Club."

CONTINUED:

NOTE: At this point, Running Man/Second Recruiter becomes "SECOND RECRUITER" until Sc. A123.

REV. 2/25/82
CONTINUED:

59

cont

SECOND RECRUITER

How'd it get a name like that?

*

CUT TO:

EXT. PANTO'S.

CLOSE ON GIRLS MOVING OUT OF PANTO'S GLARING AT CAMERA. Some sit around the empty pool. Others in doorways of the sheds behind the cantina. Some near corral. All are looking at the newcomers - - as if they had been expected.

60

The Two Recruiters are walking from their car toward the cantina, somewhat uneasy at being watched by the girls.

FIRST RECRUITER

We're supposed to meet their Liason Man here. They're expecting us.

SECOND RECRUITER

They? You keep saying 'they'. Who's they?

FIRST RECRUITER

Well...the top pilots in the world...a kind of brotherhood...the guys they say have the right stuff.

SECOND RECRUITER

What kind 'stuff'? You mean heroism? Bravery?

FIRST RECRUITER

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

SECOND RECRUITER

Well, what do they say it means?

FIRST RECRUITER

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

SECOND RECRUITER

They don't talk about it? - You mean to outsiders?

*

FIRST RECRUITER

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

SECOND RECRUITER

Who's that?

CONTINUED...

FIRST RECRUITER

Yeager.

(60) CONT.

SECOND RECRUITER

Never heard of him.

(60A)

INT. PANTHO'S DAY.

The screen door bangs and every head in the place turns and rivets the two Recruiters standing in the doorway facing the awesome gathering of the most death-defying group of men in the world. Liason Man moves toward them, as a VOICE FROM THE BACK IS HEARD. *

YEAGER'S VOICE

Lab rabbits.

A chorus of laughs as the ominous mood is broken.

SECOND RECRUITER

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

YEAGER

I said 'lab rabbits'.

continued

(60A) CONT

Another roar of laughter.

FIRST RECRUITER

What's that supposed to mean?

YEAGER

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

CROSSFIELD

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

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

PANCHO

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

JOE WALKER

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

LIASON MAN

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

FIRST RECRUITER

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

LIASON MAN

Yeager doesn't fit?!

FIRST RECRUITER

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

LIASON MAN

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

SECOND RECRUITER

(uneasy)

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

BACK IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM.

Continued

YEAGER

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

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

GORDO

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

GUS

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

GORDO

It means 'star-voyager'.

GUS

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

CUT TO:

MOTEL ROOM. NIGHT.

(61)

THE TWO RECRUITERS looking pretty dejected.

SECOND RECRUITER

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

FIRST RECRUITER

Hey, Bill Dana. Jose Jimenez. This guy's a laff riot.

*
*
*

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

STRAIGHT MAN

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

JOSE JIMENEZ

Oh, I hope not!

The audience is rolling in the aisles.

SECOND RECRUITER

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

First recruiter changes the station.

FIRST RECRUITER

CONTINUED

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

M.C.

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

SECOND RECRUITER

That kid ?

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

M.C.

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

The audience doubles the applause.

FIRST RECRUITER

That guy.

M.C.

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

JOHN GLENN

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

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

FIRST RECRUITER

They love this guy !

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

SECOND RECRUITER

(smiling, moving in closer)

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

CUT TO: EXT AIRCRAFT CARRIER

(62)

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

SECOND RECRUITER

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

Aviators! FIRST RECRUITER

What? I said that. SECOND RECRUITER

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

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

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

VOICE FROM SHIP CONTROL
Okay, Shepard, time to hit the deck.

PILOT (SHEPARD)
Ho-kay, Jose, I'm on my way.

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

REACTION SHOT. THE RECRUITERS screaming: Look out!

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

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

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

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

FIRST RECRUITER
We thought you were...you know...goners...
Shepard just keeps smiling, Smilin' Al.

FIRST RECRUITER
You panic?

SHEPARD

Oh no, Senor, I am afraid to panic.

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

NAVAL OFFICER:

He thinks he's Jose Jiminez.

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

SECOND RECRUITER

Well, you've heard about our project. We're going up against the Russians, all the way. It's got the highest priority. It's a hazardous undertaking. In fact it is extremely hazardous, if you get my meaning.

*
*

FIRST RECRUITER

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

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

SHEPARD

Sounds dangerous.

SECOND RECRUITER

It is. Very.

SHEPARD

Count me in.

Shepard flashes his fambovant Smilin' Al smile.

*

The recruiters look at each other and smile...a sinister smile?

*

Shepard sees their smile...and his smile falters.

*

CUT TO:

OMIT SC ## 63,64,65

63,64,65

INT - BLACK EYE EXAM ROOM - DAY

(66)

Shepard's head in a strap, some sort of instrument clamped over his eyes...and a HOSE STUCK IN HIS EAR. Someone in a smock turns on the cold water. SHEPARD'S EYEBALLS flutter madly.

*

*

CARD: LOVELACE CLINIC, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO. Feb. 1959

*

BLURRED SHOT: A GROUP OF SMOCKS WATCHING EVERY FLUTTER.

INT - HAND REFLEX ROOM - DAY

(67)

A HUGE, UGLY NEEDLE...a monster needle...is being lowered slowly down toward Shepard's arm by a SMOCK who stands in a GROUP OF SMOCKS. He drives the needle into the big muscle at the base of Shepard's thumb.

SHEPARD

Hannnh?

They aren't even looking at Shepard. They are looking at--

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

Shepard looks down at his hand. It is balling up into a fist and springing open and balling up into a fist and springing open and balling up into a fist and springing open at a furious rate.

SHEPARD

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

REFLECTOR HEAD

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

Suddenly the hand stops balling up. Shepard looks down at his hand--it looks dead.

REFLECTOR HEAD

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

And from the shadows, another man steps forward to take Shepard's place.

INT - DAYROOM - DAY

(67A)

Shepard, wearing hospital patient smock, drags himself into the dayroom. HE SEES: .

TWENTY-FIVE GUYS (test pilots) IN ROBERT HALL SUITS, trying to look inconspicuous, waiting in line to register at the nearby desk, or sitting in the chairs in the day room along with the regular hospital patients.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

(February 1959)

(67A)
(cont'd)

SHEPARD IN CHAIR, exhausted, as he HEARS THE VOICES OF THREE MEN at a nearby table:

GORDO'S VOICE

I don't get it, sendin' us down here on a bus disguised as civilians. What's the reason for all this top secrecy?

(Gus elbows him in the ribs.)

Hey, cut it out, Gus! What the hell?

Now on the THREE IN FG, with Shepard listening in BG:

GUS

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

GORDO

I still don't get it.

GUS

Might be Russian agents here.

They stare around the room suspiciously. Strange, Southwest-types. Just then THE GIANT ORDERLY, GONZALES enters, pushing a doddering patient in a wheelchair.

GORDO

Naw. You just got some Mexican guys here.

(Shepard turns; Gordo nods to him)

Howdy, senior.

(Shepard nods back with his Jose Jimenez look)

And you got your Navy and Marine pilots there.

Those guys are trying to act like they are disguised, but you can always tell your test pilots--they got those Robert Hall suits and those big pilot wristwatches...

DEKE

Yeah, you can tell those guys ain't up to Air Force standards. I hear we got some fifty-some odd guys tryin' out for just seven spots. After they choose the three of us, there's only gonna be four openin's left.

GUS

You said it. Wonder where we go from here?

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

(February 1959)

(67A)
(cont'd)

Shepard leans toward them.

SHEPARD

How go right through that door.

They look suspiciously at Shepard.

GUS

You talkin' to us, buddy?

SHEPARD

How are Hair Force, no?

They cast suspicious glances at one another.

SHEPARD

Hair Force pilots, they all go in that door.

Shepard points to a door and sits back in his chair; then he leans back and adds:

SHEPARD

When they go in that door they all look the same....But when they come out, they all look different.

DEKE

Oh, yeah? In what way?

Shepard leans back; then turns and leans forward again.

SHEPARD

When they come out, they look scared.

Big Smilin' Al smile. Just then A NURSE signals to them from the door.

NURSE

Would you come this way?

As the three walk apprehensively toward the door, Shepard notices:

GONZALES has been standing nearby behind his wheelchair patient, watching his performance, not looking at it too kindly.

SHEPARD

Buenos dias, Gonzales.

GONZALES

Yeah.

TRACKING WITH GORDO, GUS, DEKE toward the door.

GORDO

That guy didn't fool me a bit.

GUS

You mean that Mexican guy?

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

(67A)
(cont'd)

GORDO

Mexican? You kidding? That guy's Navy.
He exhibits a real swabbo sense of humor.
Look over there. Another Navy guy.

NEAR THE WINDOW, SCHIRRA is leaning forward showing two other
guys a box. They very cautiously peer inside.

SCHIRRA

Careful....Careful....I caught this mongoose
out there in the desert. I'll open the top
a little so you can see him. But don't put
your hand in or he'll take it off for you.
This baby is vicious.

They lean in : then, suddenly, a long, gray snakelike coil comes
popping out right into their faces, scaring the other guys.

SCHIRRA

Gotcha!

He roars with laughter. Back to Gordo and the Guys.

GORDO

Real swabbo sense of humor.

Schirra sees them staring at him. He's laughing, but his eyes
tell us he's sizing them up.

They stare back at him; then go through the door.

INT - ISOLATION ROOM - DAY

(67B)

Gordo is just sitting quietly in a chair reading a LIFE
MAGAZINE. Directly opposite is ANOTHER CANDIDATE, also
relaxing, seemingly totally at ease as he sips a glass of water.
The only thing that seems suspicious are the WIRES we notice down
the back of the guys' necks.

THROUGH A SMALL, SQUARE WINDOW in the door, the face of a WOMAN
peeks -- DR. GLADYS LORING. For the first time we realize it's
an isolation booth. (s. Russian training footage)

Gordo and the other candidate seem to be competing in relaxing.
CLOSE ON TICKING CLOCK.. SIGN: HOURS YOU HAVE BEEN IN HERE--
TWELVE HOURS. The other Candidate looks nervous. Gordo yawns,
scratches himself.

STEAM JETS let steam into the room. THE OTHER CANDIDATE looks
surprised. He begins to sweat. Gordo stretches and falls asleep.
Dr. Loring looks in through the window.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

(67B)
(cont'd)

CLOCK TICKS. Hours now shown are FOURTEEN.

The other candidate tries to whistle to show how relaxed he is. His lips are dry. Gordo is sleeping.

SUDDENLY ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE. LIGHTS FLASH, BELLS SOUND, BUZZERS DRILL THE BRAIN, SHOCKS RIDE UP THE BACKS OF THEIR NECKS. The Other candidate cracks up. He bolts for the door in the flashing lights, beats on it.

Dr. Loring locks in, watches the guy holding his head, totally wiggled out. Then she looks over at Gordo.

GORDO'S STILL SLEEPING. He opens his eyes just slightly, enough for us to know he's seeing Dr. Loring looking in. Then he goes on pretending to sleep. BELLS CLANG.

OMIT SCS # 68, 69

70

INT- ANOTHER EXAM ROOM - DAY

GORDO AND GUS IN A ROW OF TEN GUYS SITTING AT A TABLE, GLENN & CARPENTER are there. In front of each guy there's a tube leading to an instrument with a column of mercury. A BRACE OF SMOCKS stands watching with clipboards: one of the TWO WOMEN DOCTORS is the imposing DR. LORING!

DR. LORING.

We just want to welcome you all here and wish you all luck. You may proceed.

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

DR. LORING

The record is ninety-one seconds.

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

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

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

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

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

GLENN

Terrific, Scott. Darned good, darned good.

CONTINUED...

(70) CONT

CARPENTER

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

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

GUS

Hey, dija hear that ? : :
We're competin' with Archie and Jughead.

CUT TO: INT MILKSHAKE

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

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

DR. LORING

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

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

GLENN

Hi. I'm John Glenn.

Shepard is woozy, nauseous, and his mean-streak is showing: He refuses the hand as he climbs out -- The Icy Commander.

SHEPARD

Not very funny, Sir.

Glenn just smiles back. He may talk like a Boy Scout, but smiling, he can sure look tough. A sense of competition between these two in this moment. Glenn climbs into the Milkshake Machine.

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

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

EXT - LOVELACE CLINIC - DAY

(A72)

Glenn and Carpenter jogging across the Albuquerque terrain, working hard, trying to be the best, *

WHILE INSIDE:

INT - HOSPITAL DAYROOM - DAY

*

72

*

GORDO

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

GUS

Yeah, who does he think he is?

*

*

GORDO

(calming him)

*

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

GUS

I hate that.

GORDO

Just listen, Gus. What I'm saying is this whole thing here calls for a little second-convolution thinking.... Gus, you gotta charm the doctor, sell the saint.

*

INT- DR. LORING'S OFFICE -DAY

73

Gus in front of GLADYS LORING.

*

GORDO'S VOICE (continuing)

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

DR. LORING

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

GORDO'S VOICE

(Also shoot Gordo as in SC 72)

...What do you say?

GUS

Well sir, Dr. Loring...uh..Dr. Loring...

GORDO'S VOICE

Charm her, Gus....

*

*

GUS

(continuing)

I'm a pilot, and as such I am accustomed to hanging my hide out on the edge day in and day out. A fighter jock is accustomed to risk. In fact, I enjoy the risks.

Gladys Loring is scribbling like mad.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

73

(cont-d)

GORDO'S VOICE (Also as in SC 72)

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

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

GUS

Oh, I don't regard this as a particularly high risk proposition...

GORDO'S VOICE

...Smile, Gus.....

GUS

(continuing)

...Why no, certainly not compared to some of the test work I've been doing for the Air Force. Since this project has a high national priority, I'm sure the safety precautions will be far more thorough than when I had the F-100 in the test stage....

GORDO'S VOICE

...Smile slightly and roll your eyes heavenward-- the "halo effect"....

GUS

(continuing)

...I mean I don't see this as risky at all. I wouldn't be here if I thought space capsules were in any shape or form...risky.

CUT BACK TO HOSPITAL DAYROOM - DAY

(74)

GORDO

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

DEKE

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

GUS

You mean we gotta lie to prove we are rational?

GORDO

Prudent lying, Gus. And figuring out the drill.

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

GORDO

What do you think the drill is here?

GUS

Testing reaction times.

GORDO

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

DEKE

Neither of these two guys is cracking.

GORDO

Strange. Figured they would.

GUS

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

Gordo

What?

CONTINUED:

He's GUS humming.

CLOSE SHOT. GLENN. Under pressure, this guy hums. And if we were to Name That Tune it might be "Battle Hymn of the Republic."
SHOT: SEVEN SMOCKS A-SMILING. They like Glenn.

CUT TO:

INT CORRIDOR OF CLINIC, TRACKING GORDO AND GUS, past nurses, hospital hoi polloi.

GORDO

Gus, I've got the whole thing figured out. The drill here is going to be seeing who can drill the brains out of Dr. Gladys Loring.

GUS

You're nuts. She thinks we're all just a bunch of miserable pudknockers.

GORDO

Gus, this one fighter jock who is not a miserable pudknocker. She's a woman, susceptible to charm just like the rest of 'em.

As they turn into a testing room, Gordo give him a "watch this" look.

CUT TO: INT SPERM ROOM

GORDO HAS A LOOK OF UTTER DISBELIEF ON HIS FACE. Dr. Loring is just sitting sternly in front of him, handing him a beaker.

GORDO

You want what in there?

DR. LORING

Sperm...

GORDO

What for?

DR. LORING

Sperm motility factors.

GORDO

But...How...?

DR. LORING

Through ejaculation. Masturbation is the customary procedure.

GORDO

What!???

DR. LORING.

The best results seem to be obtained through fantasization, accompanied by masturbation, followed by ejaculation.

CONTINUED:

Gordo blinks, then the old smile returns, and the fighter jock gleam reappears. (cont'd) (77)

GORDO

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

NO RESPONSE FROM DR. LORING. Those eyes could shrivel marble. She hands him a vintage Playboy. *

INT. BATHROOM

(78)

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

GORDO

Hey, knock it off!

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

GORDO

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

(78) edit

INT. DR. LORING'S OFFICE.

CUT TO: GORDO RETURNS TO DR. LORING. He holds up a beaker. (78) B

DR. LORING

My, that was quick.

Gordo has an "I'm sorry darling" look. She scribbles something.

GORDO

Plenty more where that came from...heh, heh.

DR. LORING

And...I'd like to meet your wife.

Gordo gulps--Trudy's in San Diego, remember.

GORDO

My wife ?

DR. LORING

Yes. You're married, aren't you ?

TIGHT SHOT. GORDO. A "second convolution" look comes over him.

GORDO

Married ? Me ? (Thinking fast) Sure.

DR. LORING

Happily ?

continued

GORDO

You bet! Real stable relationship.

DR. LORING

Good. I'd like to meet your wife.

GORDO

You'd like to meet my...? Sure thing.

DR. LORING

Tomorrow.

GORDO

Tomorrow ? Uh...No good. I don't think she could fly down until next week...

DR. LORING

Tomorrow !

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

GORDO AND TRUDY AND KIDS in car--the same shot as when we first met * them; Gordo speeding like rat-racer, passing cars in desert landscape Trudy looks like she's slept even less than before.

GORDO

I'll tell ya hon, this astronaut thing is the best way for us up the ladder. We play it right, we can get right to the top.

TRUDY

We ? You mean you.

GORDO

Hey, we're a team...From now on...Hey, this is a new thing...(no response from Trudy). Hey, I ever let you down ?

TRUDY

Yeah.

GORDO

Yeah ? (smiling back) I know it's been tough. But, like I said, no more nightmares.

TRUDY

I bet.

GORDO

Hey, who's the best pilot you ever saw ?

Trudy just smiles and looks at him.

GORDO

Yer lookin at him.

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE DR. LORING'S OFFICE.

Gordo is reading a Life Magazine (choose cover--gives us date).
Door opens and women's laughter is heard as Trudy and Dr. Loring
exit. Dr. Loring half smiles at Gordo; and he half-smiles back.

DOWN CORRIDOR. GORDO AND TRUDY.

TRUDY

Well, you're all set. I told her you were
stable, well-adjusted, attentive, persevering.
I lied.

GORDO

Good goin. What'd she say?

TRUDY

She laughed. She knows you too well.

GORDO

Let's face it, some women just have a problem with men.

BEHIND THEM DR. LORING is leaving her office. MOVE WITH HER as
she moves down the corridor, through a hallway, and into...

INT. THE HUMAN MILKSHAKE ROOM. Dimly lit. She stands in front
of the machine; then, she puts down her clipboard.

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

CAMERA HAS BEEN MOVING EVER SO CURIOUSLY AROUND TO WHERE THE WINDOW ON THE HATCH REVEALS.. A LARGE WRISTWATCH LIKE ONLY PILOTS WEAR PRESSED FIRMLY UP AGAINST THE WINDOW. AND WE CUT QUICKLY TO:

INT. RADIOLOGY ROOM. DAY.

A LONG, FLAMINGO-PINK TUBE into which a milky substance is being pumped. PAN DOWN to find Shepard in a contorted position, discretely receiving an enema. (81)

SHEPARD

What's that?

SMOCK

Barium.

Shepard looks like the barium is sloshing behind his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

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

RADIOLOGIST

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

SHEPARD

Deflates? Where's the john?

RADIOLOGIST

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

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

SHEPARD

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

GONZALES

We must wait.

Then another door opens and there's ANOTHER ASTRONAUT APPLICANT *
He's bunched over LIKE A CRAB! And he's holding the end of his tube, about to burst. They look at each other, tears about to flow.

CONTINUED...

(Early 1959)

53

SHEPARD

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

(81)
cont

INT

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

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

ELEVATOR. Other Astronaut applicant punches the button furiously, people are waiting. Then, SHEPARD NOTICES: *

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

INT - ELEVATOR - DAY

(83)

They are inside the crowded elevator and Shepard notices they are still being watched. The OTHER ASTRONAUT APPLICANT has turned green. There is the distinct possibility that he will let go right there in the elevator. *

GONZALES

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

Everyone in the elevator looks like Gonzales' friends.

SHEPARD

(feigning calm, turning green)

You're right you're right you're...unghh...
absolutely right.

INT - 3rd FLOOR CORRIDOR - DAY

(84)

The door opens and the OTHER ASTRONAUT APPLICANT is out, doing a crazy tango quickly down another crowded hallway to the john. Shepard sees the Smocks checking him out on their charts. *

SHEPARD

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

GONZALES

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

SHEPARD

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

CONTINUED....

CONTINUED:

(84)
(cont'd)GONZALES
(confidentially)I think you gonna make it, man.
I think you gonna be an astronaut

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

OMIT

(85)*

WE CUT TO:

INT PRESS CONF ROOM

THE RAVENOUS ANIMAL - The Press. And THE SOUND is coming from THEM - bubble, bubble, toil and trouble, steam and scream in the most excited way. Some climb ladders under huge lights. (86)

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

NASA MAN

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

CONTINUED:

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

GUS

Holy shit!

GORDO (aside to Gus)

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

GUS

But we ain't done anything yet.

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

NASA MAN

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

And the crowd noise is growing and growing...

NASA MAN

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

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

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

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

FIRST REPORTER

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

DEKE

(awkward, hates this stuff)

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

SCHIRRA

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

Light smiles, light applause, light interest, until:

GLENN

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

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

GORDO

I don't believe this.

GUS

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

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

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

GLENN

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

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

GLENN (cont'd)

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

IN THE AUDIENCE A WOMAN breaks out in SOBS.

GLENN (cont'd)

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

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

GLENN

And when I think of Orville and Wilbur Wright standing on a hill at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, tossing a coin to see which one would take the first airplane flight, and I think of us here today... I just thank God I live in a country where the best and the finest in a man can be brought out.

(86)
(cont'd)

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

GORDO

Gus, time for some second-convolution thinking.
(And then aloud)

You know, I'd like to second some things that Mr. Glenn has said here today. I think we are very fortunate that we have, should we say, been blessed with the talents that have been picked for something like this...

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

GORDO

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

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

DEKE

(almost to himself)

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

GORDO

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

DEKE

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

DISSOLVE TO:

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

SHEPARD

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

Applause. And the Hallelujah Chorus plays.

DISSOLVE TO:

2ND REPORTER

Who will be the first to go into space?

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

NASA MAN

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

TREMENDOUS OVATION.

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

LIASON MAN

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

DISSOLVE TO:

Reporter asking the last question.

3RD REPORTER

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

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

GORDO

Share it, brother!

GUS

(waving hand in air)

Fuckin A!

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

CUT TO: INT PHOTO SESSION ROOM

(87)

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

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

INT

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

A hickie is removed: Hallelujah.

A crack in lipstick smoothed: Hallelujah.

A furze of mustache zipped away: Hallelujah.

A forehead pimple blotted out: Hal-le-lu-jah.

AND THE MUSIC ENDS ABRUPTLY.

INT LUCE OFFICE

ALL SEVEN ASTRONAUTS AND THEIR WIVES SIT IN A HUGE OFFICE. They seem like they are in an audience, just sitting quietly, staring forward. (89)

AND NOW MEET HENRY LUCE. He's behind his huge desk, in shadows (something like the special lighting we have given the Press), and he's attended to by various secretaries and underlings. Framed Life Magazine covers hang on the walls. *

Luce speaks loudly enough to be heard by all. *

LUCE

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

SIDEKICK

Tops. *

LUCE

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

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

LUCE

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

GUS

Gus.

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

LUCE

What's that?

GUS

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

CONTINUED...

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

LUCE

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

GUS

Ivan.

LUCE

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

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

INT CORRIDOR AT 'LIFE'
LEAVING LUCE'S OFFICE. INTO CORRIDOR. (90)

Trudy coming out next to ANNIE GLENN.

TRUDY

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

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

TRUDY

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

GORDO

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

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

INT LUCE'S OFFICE
BACK IN LUCE'S OFFICE. PICTURE OF ANNIE GLENN IN LUCE'S HANDS. (91)

LUCE

...What's this?

LIFE REPORTER

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

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

continued

LUCE

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

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

REPORTER

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

LUCE

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

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

LUCE (cont'd)

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

FAMILY SHOTS. Gordo playing with his kids, etc. Movietone music begins to build as Luce pursues his vision: posed series of family photos in magazine.

LUCE (cont'd)

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

OUT TO: MONTAGE OF TESTS.

IN F.G. A FIGURE (Gordo) being pumped up and down. In B.G. TECHNICIANS watching through glass observation window. (92)

A FIGURE (Glenn) SWEEPING BACK AND FORTH THROUGH FRAME in f.g.; while being watched by technicians in b.g.

A FIGURE (Shepard) UPSIDE DOWN, swinging like a pendulum, in f.g.; being watched..

THE PROCEDURES TRAINER. Constant flashing red warning lights. (93)

continued

MAYDAY VOICE (Screaming)

Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Abort! Abort!

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

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

A SCIENTIST

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

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

A SCIENTIST (cont'd)

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

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

A SCIENTIST (cont'd)

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

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

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

PSYCHOLOGIST SMOCK

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

REPORTER

Sounds like you would be happy with an experienced zombie.

SMOCK

(German accent)

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

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

SMOCK (GERMAN ACCENT)
(fading down corridor)

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

PSYCHOLOGIST

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

SMOCK (GERMAN ACCENT)

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

As they round a corner,

GORDO

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

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

CUT TO: EXT PANCHO'S DAY 1960

(94)

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

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

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT PANCHO'S LATER

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

(95)

PANCHO

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

YEAGER

I kinda doubt it, Pancho.

PANCHO

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

YEAGER

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

PANCHO

What the girls did after hours was their own business.

YEAGER

Pancho, what they did after hours was their business.

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

GLENNIS

Where you goin Pancho?

PANCHO

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

FRED

Seventh.

PANCHO

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

FRED

Don't call me that.

*

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

(95)
(cont'd)

PANCHO

Sure, Fred, sure. Lissen, if anyone can find me, I'll buy a free steak for the first man who flies into outer space. Maybe it'll be one of them ass-tronauts.

YEAGER

Call that flyin'? Hell, once they put those boys in the capsule, that's the last they got to say on the subject. They won't be doin' any flyin' over there. Asides, I hear a monkey's gonna make the first flight.

PANCHO

A monkey? You're kiddin'.

YEAGER

Ain't kiddin'. Hell, who'd wanta fly anthin' where you had to sweep the monkey crap off the seat before you sat down?

PANCHO

Yeager, I know you. You'll find a way to get there before them. C'mon, Fred, let's go.

GLENNIS

Pancho, wait....

For a moment, everything stops. Eyes water...from the smoke.

GLENNIS

You were always gonna tell me about the time you useta fly guns down to the Mexican revolutionaries and they gave you the name, Pancho.

PANCHO

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

Fred steps on the gas with no lip, and they go driving off into the desert...forever.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE/STOCK

INT - CHIMP EXAM ROOM -

(96)

CARD: HOLLOMAN AIR FORCE BASE, NEW MEXICO. May 1960.

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

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

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

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

(96)
(cont'd)

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

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

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

INT - CHIMP CENTRIFUGE ROOM - DAY

(97)

AND ALL THIS IS BEING WATCHED (of course) BY SMOCKS. REFLECTOR HEADS.

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

Another Smock presses a button.

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

SCIENTIST WITH GERMAN ACCENT

Good. We are right on schedule.

*

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

LONG DISSOLVE INTO:

INT CENTRIFUGE ROOM

(98)

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

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

LIFE REPORTER

How do you feel ?

GLENN

A hunnert percent. A-okay.

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

LIFE REPORTER

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

GLENN

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

CUT TO:

GLENN AND CARPENTER JOGGING HARD. Determined looks, running on a beach somewhere.

FULLSCREEN CLOSE UP OF TICHNOR BROTHERS POSTCARD: Two grinning dogs with hind legs raised to hydrant. Caption: "This is a wonderful place just between you and me and the lamppost".

GUS' VOICE OVER

Dear Betty. Wish you could be here with us,
but as yaw know, the Cape is off limits to wives
and I am very sad about that, and...and...

DEKE'S VOICE OVER

...And I sure do miss you...a lot.

POSTCARD has been moving and WE PULL BACK TO REVEAL Gus and Deke walking, Gus holding card, wearing Bermudas and Florida beach wear.

GUS

Yeah...that's good. "I sure do miss you alot."
That's good.

AND WIDEN TO REVEAL: THE WHOLE COCOA BEACH SCENE: Local Oldsters, Toothless Floridians, Where-the-Boys-Are Bikinied Nubiles, etc. All smiling and all watching the two Astronaut celebrities pass.

OLDSTERS AND NUBILES

Hi Gus...Whaddaya say, Deke?

Gus and Deke are more interested in the hot cars the local dealer is displaying right there on the beach to Schirra, Shepard and Gordo, and appropriately dressed in Bermudas. (TWO YOUNG GIRLS in bikinis stand quietly watching).

CAR DEALER

You can lease em from me for practically nothing per year, and try this on (puts jacket on)

Gets a little chilly here at night.

Just figger folks'll want to rat race in what the astronauts rat-race in.

Gordo slips into jacket;
Carpenter running along the shore.

as they see Glenn and *

TRACKING WITH GLENN AND CARPENTER. Jogging steadily. Behind them o.s. we can HEAR REVVING SOUNDS.

MOVE TO REVEAL--A rat-race is beginning behind them--a wild screeching proficiency run. Three cars bearing down on them, rock music coming on louder and louder. STUNT--POSS. DRIVE PAST THEM AND WEAVE THROUGH PILINGS, throwing sand in joggers' faces.

Carpenter looks perturbed; but Glenn is unfazed. They jog on. As they jog one of the cars has backed up and comes up along-side him, keeping pace. He keeps running, trying not to notice this

CONTINUED...

tracking car. He glances out of the corner of his eye and SEES:
Two long lovely legs propped up on the dashboard in the front
seat. ANOTHER GIRL IN BACKSEAT just smiles up at him.

99
cont

GIRL IN FRONT

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

GLENN

(Huffing)

Th...that's right.

GIRL IN FRONT

Need a lift ?

GLENN

N...no thanks.

GIRL IN BACK

Gettin in shape, John ?

And we notice next to the girl in front--a guy in bermudas with
A BIG WRISTWATCH--and we know ONE of the guys is there driving,
But we don't see him.

GIRL IN FRONT

That's good John. Fine work. Get in shape so
we can show those Russians.

GIRL IN BACK

Bye John. Bye, Scott. Keep it up. Keep it up.

As the car digs in and peels away,
CUT TO:

INT. COCOA BEACH MOTEL BAR. NIGHT.

100

The SAME TWO GIRLS enter the bar, and survey the room from the
doorway. SULTRY MUSIC PLAYS. (Poss. a piano player per PK)

*

THEY SEE: ALL SEVEN ASTRONAUTS SPRINKLED AROUND THE ROOM.

Near some partying German technicians, GUS AND DEKE sit quietly,
sipping beers. (Possibly, German singing per PK)

*

IN ONE CORNER, HAVING A SNACK ----- GLENN AND CARPENTER, drinking
milk, poring over some technical charts.

GORDO showing his imitation YEAGER-COIN SHUFFLE to some locals.

AND SHEPARD at the bar next to SCHIRRA. Tears are streaming from
Shepard's face as he watches TV.

JOSE JIMENEZ (on TV)

My name, Jose Jimenez, and I am a astronaut in the
HamERICAN space program, etc.

SHEPARD

Oh, God, I can't take it. This guy kills me. I
theenk I gonna die from thees.

CONTINUED....

THE GIRLS STAND IN THE DOORWAY, surveying all. Music and cuts of the various guys glancing at them heighten sexual atmosphere.

FRONT GIRL

Four down, three to go.

And she smiles her sexy smile, and the two girls begin to move through the tables.

John Glenn looks at them, watching them. WHO ARE THEY HEADED FOR? As Glenn stares at them and pokes Carpenter who looks up... The girls come closer, closer....

CUT TO: INT- THRONE ROOM - DAY.

* 101

CLOSE ON JOHN GLENN. He's got his back up; and when he's angry, he's formidable.

JOHN GLENN

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

Gordo enters in mid-speech and flops down next to Carpenter. All the other guys are there--getting into their silver space suits.

GORDO

What's ticking him off ?

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

GLENN

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

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

CONTINUED:

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

GLENN

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

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

SHEPARD

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

Most of the boys are absolutely in accord with Shepard.

SHEPARD (Cont'd)

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

And now it begins to heat up:

SHIRRA

(to Glenn)

Yeah, who the hell do you think you are ?

Carpenter rises to Glenn's defense:

CARPENTER

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

And then ALL TALKING AT ONCE:

CARPENTER AND GLENN

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

SHEPARD AND THE REST

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

Just as hostility between the boys reaches a feverish pitch,

OUTSIDE THE THRONE ROOM, A SECRETARY IS HOLDING THE TEN PRESS REPORTERS AT BAY,

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

SECRETARY

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

INT - THRONE/DRESSING ROOM - DAY
BACK INSIDE THE SEANCE:

(103)

GUS

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

GLENN

What ?

GUS

Us ! We are the monkey.

DEKE

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

GUS

Fuckin-A right, bubba !

DEKE

And what Gus is sayin' is what we've got to do
is change things around here. He's sayin' we are
pilots, we know more about what we need to fly
than anyone else. He's sayin' we got to alter the
experiment. And that comes down to who controls things
from here on in, and...

*
*
*

GLENN

I just want to say one thing.

SHEPARD

Oh yeah ? What's that ?

GLENN

Gus is right !

INT - HALLWAY - DAY

(103A)

They step out into the hallway and pose for the famous picture
in their space suits. Bulbs pop. Press crowds in around them.

CUT TO: INT. COCOA BEACH HANGAR

(1960)

-71-

104

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

SMOCK (GERMAN)

Take it easy with that !

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

GERMAN ASSISTANT

Wonderful, no ?

The Seven Guys are speechless for a moment.

GORDO

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

GERMAN ASSISTANT

Window ? There is no window.

GUS

No window ? What about the hatch ?

GERMAN ASSISTANT

Hatch ?

GUS

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

GERMAN ASSISTANT

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

DEKE

What would happen if the automatic controls went out ?

GERMAN ASSISTANT

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

DEKE

But... just in case it did ?

CARPENTER

A pilot would have to fly it down...

GERMAN ASSISTANT

He could not...

SCHIRRA

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

GERMAN ASSISTANT

It's settled ! This is it !

CONTINUED...

CONTINUED:

(104)
(cont'd)

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

GLENN

I wonder how the press is going to feel about this?

GERMAN ASSISTANT

The press? What do they have to say about it?

Gordo looks across the room and sees what Glenn has seen. A "Second Convolution" look comes over his face.

GORDO

You know what makes this capsule go up?

GERMAN ASSISTANT

Do we know what makes this capsule go up? We make it go up by providing the thrust, and the...

GORDO

Funding!

GERMAN ASSISTANT

I beg your pardon?

GORDO

Funding makes your capsules go up.

GUS

Yeah, no bucks, no Buck Rogers.

GORDO

And the press out there wants Buck Rogers.

DEKE

That's us—we're Buck Rogers.

CARPENTER

And a story in the press that said we were just 'spam in a can' might have some effect on the funding....

SCHIRRA

And the public might not take too well to the idea that we're being treated like lab rabbits.

DEKE

Especially when we're trying to challenge the Russians for the heavens....

GLENN

And those fellows over there (The Press Swarm) have been making us out as the seven finest and bravest pilots in all America, and if a story in the press were to come out that we were not being allowed to fly as pilots....

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED

(104)
(cont'd)

Shepard speaks from the shadows—the Iciest Commander.

SHEPARD

We want a window!

The engineers and Scientists have been getting the message.

GERMAN ASSISTANT

Well, maybe there could be...

(Shepard takes a step forward)

...We are seriously considering...a window.

GLENN

Seriously considering?

GERMAN ASSISTANT

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

GUS

That's where the hatch goes.

GERMAN ASSISTANT

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

SHEPARD

Spacecraft!

GERMAN ASSISTANT

I beg your pardon?

SHEPARD

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

GERMAN ASSISTANT

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

DEKE

..(to the press)

Pilot! The astronaut-pilot!...

GERMAN ASSISTANT

(he hates this)

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

Engineers and smocks are wincing. The seven pilots smile and nod.

DELETE SCS 105, 106

(105, 106)

CUT TO: INT PADDED PLANE

(107)

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

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

CUT TO: EXT EDWARD AFB

(108)

A BLACK TARPAULIN FLAPPING FURIOUSLY IN THE STRONG DESERT WIND.

WIND BLOWS ACROSS THE PRESS CORPS AS THE LIASON MAN STEPS FORWARD, like a ringmaster, waving his arm at the crew that pulls back the tarpaulin revealing the X-15, "the most evil looking beast ever put in the air. (NOTE: This was a joint Air Force/NASA Project) In the howling wind we can barely hear his voice as he speaks: *

LIASON MAN

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

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

LIASON MAN

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

CONTINUED...

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

MEMBER OF PRESS

Yeager...? Where's Yeager ?

But the Liason Man seems unable to hear him. He just shrugs as the X-15, tucked under the B-52 bomber's wing, takes off. *

Music begins: "Three coins in a Fountain..."

...which one will the Fountain choose?"

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

NARRATOR

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

CUT TO: INT HOLLOMAN CHIMP IDIOT BOX ROOM

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

CUT TO: RUSSIAN STOCK FOOTAGE

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

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

COUNTDOWN

Four, three, two, one...

A LONG, BONY FINGER PRESSES A BUTTON.

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

113 A - ASTROS.

BOOM ! IT BLOWS UP ! 113 B - STOCK

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

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

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

AND CONTINUE THE MONTAGE OF EXPLODING AMERICAN ROCKETS, and the

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

A SLOW FADE. DISTANT TRUMPET MUSIC IS HEARD.
CUT TO: INT GLENN BEDROOM. NIGHT

ANNIE GLENN smiling in dim light. She's learned to talk by gesture, by glance, by shrug and silence. And John Glenn has learned to understand. He's been playing his trumpet. (116)

GLENN

Kids asleep ?

She smiles, nods, looks sexy. They're lying HEAD TO HEAD on two beds backed into a corner. Above Glenn are models of every plane he's ever flown.

GLENN

I'll be going back to Cape Canaveral tomorrow. I wish to heck it wasn't off limits to wives, Annie. *

She shrugs.

GLENN

There'll be so much work to do anyway, more tests.

ANNIE

A...a...ffff...tur ?

GLENN

After hours I'll run a lot. There's a beautiful long beach there, Cocoa Beach. You can run forever. Scott Carpenter'll run along with me. He's a good guy. Real philosophical. He's got this telescope he looks up at the sky with at night. He thinks there's Something out there.

ANNIE

Whhhh...?

GLENN

I don't know. He thinks the Unknown is known by those unknown to us.

Annie laughs, soft and sweet. Glenn has picked up a trumpet and fingers it as they talk.

ANNIE

And thh...othhhrrs ?

GLENN

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

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

(1960)

76

116 CONT.

GLENN

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

ANNIE

Huh ?

GLENN

It's important to America to send a man up there first. I'm planning to be the first one to ride the rocket. The best should be first. *

He begins to play his trumpet, and we're surprised at the beautiful sound ("Amazing Grace",), and even more surprised at Annie Glenn-- even though her eyes look scared -- who begins to sing along. And when she sings...there's not the slightest stutter. Only the flutter of an angel's voice.

CUT TO: HAM'S FLIGHT

(Feb. 1961)

STOCK SHOT OF A PARACHUTE CAPSULE DESCENDING. PARACHUTE OPENING.

117

STOCK SHOTS: Helicopter closing in on capsule.

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

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

PRESS

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

CONTINUED...

(111) CONT

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

PRESS

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

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

CUT TO: INSERT - HAM ON LIFE

(118)

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

CUT FROM COVER OF LIFE TO: INT YEAGER HOME

(119)

YEAGER HOLDING COVER AND LAUGHING his wild laugh TO:

INT LUCE OFFICE

LUCE LAUGHING; holding the magazine:

(120)

LUCE

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

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

THE LAUGHING FACE OF THE RUSSIAN GRAND DESIGNER. And they HEAR: (21)
Faint babooshka music, a distant hum, growing louder.

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

CUT TO: CARD: WASHINGTON, April 12, 1961

INT

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

INT EXEC GOVT ROOM

Again, they enter a dark conference room filled again with high-ranking government people. And a runner gasps out: (123)

RUNNING MAN/2nd RECRUITER

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

OFFICIAL

We know! Sit down!

STOCK RUSSIAN FOOTAGE

AGAIN THE BLACK & WHITE FILM, as the OFFICIALS WATCH FOOTAGE of the Russian rocket orbiting in space. Victory lights flashing all around the Kremlin. A shot of Krushchev LAUGHING And it's scar (124)

CUT TO: INT PRESS ROOM

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

(125) CONT

Astronauts at a Press Conference.

VOICE FROM SWARM

Is it true that you were ready to go, but the flight was cancelled and we could have beat the Russians by two weeks ?

SECOND VOICE

And why didn't we send a man up instead of a monkey ?

The Astronauts look down, scuff (There was truth in this question). But as the camera MOVES INTO GLENN:

GLENN

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

VOICE FROM SWARM

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

NASA MAN (same as Press Conference)

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

CUT TO:

INT: LONG CORRIDOR UNDER PRESS CONFERENCE. (Or NOTE: Poss. exterior at Ames or Ames Navy Hangar). Behind them the Press is being kept back by guards, bulbs popping; and the Seven Astronauts are alone, walking in a tight group, quietly and quickly. You can see they are pissed off. Finally:

GLENN

You know, I'm tired of being forthright, gracious and magnanimous. (Deke grunts agreement). I'm tired of being big about this thing...

GUS

Amen, bubba.

GLENN

I'm tired of these stupid questions from the press. (Grunts of approval). And I'm tired of those people in smocks (grunts)...and those engineers telling us what we can't do (grunt, grunt)...and the others who think we are not pilots...

GORDO

Tell it, John !

GLENN

And I'm tired of monkeys:

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

(126)

GLENN

But more than anything, I'm tired of being second to those Russians...(silent nods, pace getting faster). And I think it's about time...About time we...

126

SHEPARD

Got someone up there!

GORDO

Let's get up into space....

CARPENTER

Let's get going....

GLENN

Fu...fu...

DEKE

Fuckin A !...

GLENN

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

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

(May 5, 1961)

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

EXT
CAPD: CAPE CANAVERAL. May 5, 1961.

LAUNCH AREA (127)

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

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

Steam, searchlights.

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

P.O.V. -- INSIDE HELMET

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

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

EXT/INT CAPSULE

THE MAN IN THE SILVER SUIT slides into the capsule. Another Man dressed in white, rises above him. IT'S JOHN GLENN! He's not first! (A127)

THE MAN IN THE SILVER SUIT IS ALAN SHEPARD! Glenn has placed a sign on the instrument panel that says, "No Handball Playing in this Area". Shepard hands it back to Glenn:

SHEPARD
(smiling)

Not very funny, John.

GLENN

No? I thought...

SHEPARD

But I sure appreciate it, John.

(A look of Dawn Patrol camaraderie) I surely do.

CONTINUED...

GLENN (warmly)
Vaya con Dios, Jose.

80

TV MONITORS W/PRESS. TV CAMERAS.

THE HATCH IS CLOSED. INT. SHEPARD CAPSULE. Shepard sits in the greenish glow of the capsule. Through the periscope window we can see other Astronauts and groundcrew smiling in through WIDE ANGLE DISTORTION. Shepard mumbles to himself:

SHEPARD

Please, dear Lord, don't let me fuck up !

Suddenly GORDO'S VOICE speaks to him:

GORDO'S VOICE

Would you repeat that, please ?

Shepard realizes he's being broadcast to the control tower.
(AN IRRITATING TONE, very high up in the audible range is coming into his headset, some sort of feedback sound.)

SHEPARD

I said, "Everything's A-Okay."

INT. BLOCKHOUSE. IN THOSE DAYS IT WAS ONLY A HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE DAMN ROCKET! People are hanging on his every word.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - Gordo is acting as the "capcom" in the control room.

GORDO

(To Shepard) I thought that's what you said, (ALoud):
--He said "Everything's A-okay."

EXT CAPE VIEWING STAND

THE PRESS AREA. Walter Cronkite is on camera, talking to the nation:

CRONKITE

He says "Everything is A-okay!"
And there you have it in a nutshell...etc.

INT. CAPSULE SHEPARD WAITS.

See his rocket THROUGH THE BLOCKHOUSE WINDOW.

INT BLOCKHSE Scientist w/Germ accent, his Boys are nervous. They want this to go exactly right.

SCIENTIST W/GERMAN ACCENT

We go over the checklist again. We will hold until we are absolutely certain.

LEADER OF LAUNCH PAD TEAM

Auto retro jettison switch. Arm ?

His voice comes through to Shepard with that shrill feedback sound.

SHEPARD

Roger. Auto retro jettison switch. Arm.

VOICE

Retro heater switch. Off ?

SHEPARD

Roger. Retro heater switch: Off.

INT SHEPARD HOME
NOW SEE ROCKET ON TV SCREEN.

YOUNG GIRL'S SCREAMING VOICE

Mommy ! Look out here !

INSIDE SMALL HOUSE WITH LOUISE SHEPARD AND OTHER WIVES. HER DAUGHTER IS AT THE WINDOW. Louise has been watching the proceedings on TV; now she moves quickly to the window.

LOUISE

Oh, Lord !

EXT SHEPARD HOUSE

THE FIRST THING SHE SEES: NEIGHBORS ON A DEATH WATCH ON HER LAWN, along with the usual rabble of gawkers who materialize for car wrecks or roof jumps or traffic arguments. Then, SHE SEES: (132)

THE ANIMAL-- Mobs of REPORTERS AND CAMERAMEN AND OTHER BIG-TIMERS out there on the lawn "wearing bush jackets...and knocking back their Pepsi Colas and Nehis and yelling to each other...crazy with the excitement of being on the scene, bawling for news of the anguished sound of Louise Shepard."

INT SHEPARD HOUSE

LOUISE

They're tearing up the lawn !

(133)

The Other Wives look up. MOVE IN ON ANNIE GLENN; She's scared!

ANNIE GLENN

Whhat ddddooo thhey w...want...?

TRUDY

Anything they can get. And interview for the entire nation with the anguished wife of...

ANNIE (more scared)

In...interviews ?

THEN THE PHONE RINGS. All the wives freeze. Louise Shepard picks it up quickly, moves to see the TV -- Is he still there?

LOUISE

Yes ?

INT CAPE CONTROL

NASA MAN on the phone to her from Control Central.

(134)

NASA MAN

Just wanted to keep you informed, Mrs. Shepard. Everything's A-okay. Just some delays. Nothing to worry about.

(May 5, 1961)

81 A

INT. BLOCKHOUSE Scientist w/Germ. Accent looks worried.
In b.g. a countdown has started.

(134 A)

*

SCIENTIST W/GERMAN ACCENT
Stop countdown. There is a bad inverter. We cannot
have a 'go' until all systems are absolutely free from
malfunction.

*

OUTSIDE. WALTER CRONKITE. PRESS PLATFORM #1

(135)

CRONKITE
There's another 'Hold' from NASA, another delay.
And Alan Shepard is there, patiently waiting.
What can be going through his mind at this moment?

*

CLOSE ON SHEPARD IN CAPSULE.

SHEPARD

(136)

Gordo ? (The answer is a loud hum).
Gordo, I have to urinate.

CUTS OF MEN AT CONTROL CENTRAL. A STATE OF PANIC.

(137)

SCIENTIST (SMOCK)
We never thought of that. It's just a fifteen
minute flight.

ANOTHER SMOCK

Could he just do it in his suit ?

GORDO

(137A)

The man's been sitting there for hours !

SCIENTIST W/GERMAN ACCENT

(137B)

*

There might be a danger in introducing liquid
into the pure-oxygen environment of the capsule
and pressure suit and causing an electrical short
that might start a fire. Tell him he cannot.

GORDO

(to Shepard)

(137C)

Say, ole buddy, they promise that we'll stop at
the next gas station. They request that you hold
it until then.

Shepard doesn't say anything. He just sits there, waiting.

(137 D)

TIME PASSES. CUTS DESIGNED TO AGITATE SHEPARD'S BLADDER PROBLEM:

(137E PT.)

STEAM COMING STEADILY OUT OF ROCKET.

CLOCKS TICKING IN CONTROL ROOM.

(137E14)

WIVES AT HOME --DRINKING COFFEE, WAITING. MORE COFFEE POURED

(137 F)

A GUY IN THE BUNKER LEAVING THE JOHN WITH SOUND OF FLUSHING BEHIND HIM--heads turn; then return to tasks at hand.

(137 FF)*

DISSOLVING FROM SHADOW OF ROCKET TO SHADOW MOVED like sundial to new position. Steam rising.

(137 G)*

TECHNICIANS FIDDLING WITH BUTTONS, LEVERS, DRINKING WATER, SHOWING PRESSURE. STEAM....STEAM, EVERYWHERE.

(137 H)*

SHEPARD, fidgeting, squirming.

(137 J)

SHEPARD

Request permission to relieve bladder !

Scientist w/G. accent nods to Gordo-- almost a shrug--let's see what happens.

(137K)

SCIENTIST W/GERMAN-ACCENT

Do it in the suit.

*

(May 5, 1961)

83

SHOT. SHEPARD CLOSSES HIS EYES. SO DOES SCIENTIST/W/GERM. ACCENT*
He's nervous.
SHOT. THE DIALS FOLLOW FLOW OF URINE UP HIS BACK.

FIRST TECHNICIAN

Suit thermometer shows, freon flow jumped from
30 to 45.

SECOND TECHNICIAN

Left lower chest sensor...no shortout so far...
moving up to recording electrocardiogram...
malfunction...No shortout...Moving up back...no shortout...

Life Science Specialists and suit technicians are in a tither.
WILL HE BE ELECTROCUTED ? ANXIETY, as:

THIRD TECHNICIAN

It's pooling up in the middle of the back.

SHEPARD'S VOICE

Weh-ayl...I'm a wetback now.

Gordo turns to Deke and they laugh. Technicians don't see
what's so funny.

SCIENTIST WITH GERM. ACCENT

It is questionable whether we can proceed.

He looks nervously at his frazzled crew of Technicians. Then
they all hear an ICY VOICE.

SHEPARD (The Icy Commander)

All right, I'm cooler than you are. Why don't
you fix your little problem...and LIGHT THIS CANDLE !

Everyong freezes for an instant. Looks exchanged, then:

GORDO

He's right !

DEKE

He surely is !!

CLOSE ON SCIENTIST W/GERM. ACCENT. A moment's hesitation

SCIENTIST W/GERM. ACCENT

Begin countdown !

Cheers. That was all they needed. HEROIC MUSIC BEGINS, an
incredible moment of camaraderie. All right ! Let's go !

MONTAGE OF EVERYONE SWINGING INTO ACTION. Ten, nine, eight...

Including CUTS OF: THE FRIEND OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS STEPPING
UP FORWARD. (next to Cronkite?). AND THE SAME TWO GUYS WHO WILL
PUSH THE FINAL BUTTON who have pushed the buttons on all the

CONTINUED...

failures before ! The same bony finger reaching in to release the rocket. (137P)

DEKE SLAYTON, CONTROL, now on the microphone to Shepard:

DEKE

Fire ! You're on your way, Jose !

AND THE WHOLE PLACE BEGINS TO RUMBLE. THIS TIME WE'RE RIGHT UP CLOSE AND WE SEE AND WE FEEL THE MAXIMUM POSSIBLE EXPLOSION IN THE THEATER AS SOUND CRACKS THROUGH AND FLAMES FILL THE SCREEN. (138)

HUGE BILLOWING SMOKE OBSCURES WINDOWS (138A)

INSIDE OF BUNKER SHAKES. THINGS FALL. (138B)

REFLECTED ROCKET RISING AS TECHNICIANS LOOK OUT WINDOW (138C)

PRESS CORPS-- WIND BLOWS OVER THEM AS LAUNCH IS REFLECTED IN CAMERAS, BINOCULARS, ETC. (138D)

CUT TO: INT SHEPARD HOME (138E)

THE TELEVISION COVERAGE: The wisp of vanishing smoke.

LOUISE SHEPARD'S LITTLE HOUSE. And all hell has broken loose outside. Trudy is at the window.

TRUDY

Louise, migod, they're going after your diaper service man.

LOUISE

We don't have a diaper service man.

EXT SHEPARD HOME

OUTSIDE the Press is chasing a diaper service man carrying his big plastic bags. (139)

REPORTERS

Do you actually know the Shepards ?...Have you been in the house ?...Can you tell us the layout of the house ?

The Laundry Man is running, locking himself in his panel truck.

INT SHEPARD HOME

ANNIE GLENN AND TRUDY AT THE WINDOW ARE SUDDENLY TERRIFIED BY A HAND, A FACE, A TERRIFYING LOOKING CAMERA THAT POPS IN FRONT OF THEM (AS IN A HORROR FILM). (140)

PRESS

Let us in! We want to see!
What are you feeling?

Trudy pulls the curtains shut. Annie's scared.

TRUDY

They're interviewing anything that walks out there-- the dog, the cat. They're even interviewing the rhododendrons!

CUT TO: INT SHEPARD CAPSULE

SHEPARD, HE'S UP THERE IN SPACE, if only for a few moments, and he has "the sensation of shooting right through the top of the sky". The Awe; the Wonder, the Siren call:

SHEPARD

What a beautiful view !

BACK TO SHEPARD'S HOUSE.

Louise Shepard is so busy carrying in coffee for her guests, she doesn't have time to watch the t.v.

BETTY GRISSOM

He's coming down !

CUT TO: INT SHEPARD CAPSULE

SHEPARD feeling the tremendous pull of the g-forces. THE SOUND IS BUILDING INCREDIBLY, and he forces his breath out in grunts.

SHEPARD

Uhhhsix...uh seven...uhhh eight...
unhhhh nine...Ohhhhkay...ohhhhkay....
ohhhhkay...ohhhhkay....ohhhhkay.

STOCK
And the capsule hits the water.

CUT TO: EXT AIRCRAFT CARRIER

A BAND PLAYING on the aircraft carrier as the capsule, swaying beneath the helicopter, approaches.

The entire crew is turned toward Shepard in the sunlight.

As his silver foot descends onto the deck, someone outlines the spot where This Man in the Silver Suit Walked.

CUT TO: INT WHITE HOUSE

THE WHITE HOUSE: PRESIDENT KENNEDY is giving Shepard his award. All the Astronauts and wives are in attendance -- Explore possibilities of "doctoring" our actors back into that time and place in History -- split screen, front projection, rotoscoping, etc. -- So that when Kennedy drops the medal, as he did, and picks it up:

KENNEDY

(ad libbing)

This medal has traveled from the ground up...

It is our Alan Shepard who accepts it, smiling. As the Press closes in, Sinatra never had it so good.

CUT TO: A portion of Kennedy's "space speech".

KENNEDY

I believe this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth.

CUT TO:

^{EXT}
OUTSIDE THE WHITE HOUSE. The wives are walking away. (146)

BETTY GRISSOM
What was Jackie like ?

LOUISE SHEPARD
She was nice. We talked about all sorts of things.

BETTY GRISSOM
My Gus goes up next. I can't wait to talk
to Jackie after that.

CUT TO: INT- MOTEL BAR *

FACES OF GIRLS LOOKING THROUGH WINDOW. They're wearing bathing
suits and looking in at something important from the pool area: (147)

^{INT}
INSIDE THE HOLIDAY INN BAR, Gordo and Gus nod back at the astro-
groupies as they toss back a few. In b.g. Shepard signs autographs,
talks to Texans with attache cases. (148)

GORDO
Gus, I never realized a gruff, mean son-of-a-bitch
like you was so popular. How'd you get to go up
before me and even before Mr. Klean, the Marine ?

GUS
Charm, Hot Dawg, pure charm. Watch this. (To waitress):
How you doin', Sis ?

The WAITRESS is not as awed as the girls outside.

WAITRESS
So-so. How you doin' ?

GUS
I ain't doin any more. Damn thing is draggin
in the mud, and it won't come up.

Gordo likes the line but the waitress looks absolutely bored.

GORDO
That's charm, Gus. Pure Charm.

GUS
(trying again)
I said it's draggin in the mud...Hey, miss,
how'd you like one of these ?

GUS lifts a tiny model of the capsule from a pile of little
models on the table in front of him. (He's also been rolling
up dimes.)

WAITRESS
I can get one of them from a dime store.

GUS

Not one that's been up into outer space, you can't. I'm takin these up there with me tomorrow. Think you might like a little souvenir after I get into the history books ?

WAITRESS

Well...I might...if it's been into outer space....

GUS

See you after outer space; Miss. (as she leaves) Hot Dawg, you got to think ahead to the future. Folks got a taste for things that have actually been there. I'm even gonna give you one of these dimes I'm takin with me so's you can play with it in your pocket and dream about outer space.

GORDO

Gus, just watch it you don't screw the pooch.

CUT TO:

A ROCKET WAITING IN THE DAWN. (149)

GUS IS INSIDE. Waiting...waiting. (149A)

INT. CAPE CONTROL. A THIN FINGER TOUCHES A BUTTON: BLAST OFF (149AA)

IN CAPSULE Gus shudders and shudders and shudders

BETTY GRISSOM; she's all dolled-up, and very excited. She's watching it on t.v., and she can hear the PRESS NOISE OUTSIDE. (150)

BETTY GRISSOM

This is it ! Do you think I should go outside to just say a few words to those nice press fellas outside. It wouldn't hurt, and they've been waiting so long.

TRUDY

I'd wait, Betty. Til Gus is down.

BETTY

Oh, well. Maybe you're right.

CUT TO:

INT CAPSULE

Gus in the throes of g-force shuddering. (151)

STOCK (?)

THEN A PARACHUTE OPENING, and the capsule slowly descending into the ocean. (151A)

INT CAPSULE

INSIDE WITH GUS. GUS' POV through window. The water's getting closer and closer. Gus is

STOCK (?)

BREATHING FASTER AND FASTER. (151B)

THE CAPSULE hits the water, keels over on one side. A GURGLING (151C)

EXT SEA RECOVERY

INT. CAPSULE

88

SOUND of water.

The camera in the capsule emphasizes the claustrophobia. LOUDER and FASTER breathing.

GUS' POV.

Gus can see the helicopter swirling overhead. The yellow dye marker spreads over the waters and he looks through yellow water at the sky.

VOICE

This is Hunt Club One. We are in orbit at this time around the capsule.

GUS

Gimme about another five minutes here, to mark these positions here, before I give you a call to come in and hook on. (Almost shouting) Are you ready to come in and hook on at any time ?

HELICOPTER

Hunt Club 1, roger, we are ready any time you are.

CUT TO:

INT. CAPSULE

CONTROL CENTRAL. There's celebrating going on, but THE LIFE SYSTEMS MONITORS look concerned. Gordo slides in next to them to watch the dials.

LIFE SYSTEMS MONITOR

His pulse rate is way up there. It's been high all along, but now it's way up there, 171

GORDO

No sweat. It's all over. He's made it !
(softly) Hang in there, Gus.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CAPSULE

GUS, breathing hard, making marks on charts in the bobbing capsule.

AND IN THE HELICOPTER WATCHING THE CAPSULE:

EXT SEA RECOVERY

HELICOPTER PILOT

This is Hunt Club, we are ready for pickup.

GUS

Roger, I've unplugged my suit so I'm kinda warm now...so...

HELICOPTER PILOT

One, roger.

GUS

One...roger...Now if you tell me to, ah, you're ready for me to blow, I'll have to take my helmet off...there...(Heavy breathing).

151D

152

153

154

INT HELICOPTER

INT CAPSULE

INT HELICOPTER

INT CAPSULE

The Helicopter Pilot looks at his Co-pilot kinda funny.
Something going on down there ?

INT HELICOPTER

GUS

And now power down...there...and then I'll
blow the hatch when you're ready.

INT CAPSULE

HELICOPTER PILOT

One, roger, and when you do blow the hatch,
the collar will be down there waiting for you.

INT HELICOPTER

GUS

Ah, roger...roger.

INT CAPSULE

And the Helicopter Pilot turns to his Co-pilot, signalling
him to lower the collar.

INT HELICOPTER

Just then, BALOOM ! Gus blows the hatch.

INT / EXT CAPSULE

Gus scrambles out of the hatch and plops into the water without
even looking up. He starts swimming like mad.

Water is pouring into the capsule, and it's sinking.

HELICOPTER PILOT

What happened ?! Go after the capsule ! He's got
that suit on. It'll float him.

INT / EXT
HELICOPTER

He guns the helicopter down to the level of the water, desper-
ately trying to hook the capsule. Finally, he hooks it.

But the capsule sinks under the water and starts sinking like
a brick. Three wheels of the helicopter are touching the water.

A red light goes on in the helicopter panel.

INT HELICOPTER

PILOT

We can't pull this much weight !

AND GUS ! He's flopping and floundering, waving his arms.

GUS AT SEA

GUS

Help me ! I'm drowning ! I'm drowning !
You bastards -- I'm drowning !

A Second Helicopter arrives, it's blades flattening out the
sea around Gus. His head is popping in and out.

GUS

Not the capsule ! Me ! Here ! Help me !

And his head goes under again.

The First Helicopter lifts the capsule out of the water, but
he can't make the helicopter move forward. It just hangs there
like a hummingbird. Red lights flash all over the control panel.

EXT
INT

The Co-pilot finally cuts the capsule loose. It disappears forever.

TIGHT ON GUS. Water in his mouth. He suddenly feels the horse collar around himself. He flops through the hole like a dead flounder landing on the fishmarket scales. They lift him into the sky.

GUS P
32

CUT TO: INT CARRIER EXAM ROOM

(155)

ABOARD THE CARRIER. The little MODELS OF THE CAPSULE COME TUMBLING ONTO THE FLOOR ALONG WITH THE ROLLS OF DIMES. As Gus gets out of space suit.

*
*

A DOCTOR -- wearing a smock -- picks him up and looks at --

GUS, his suit still dripping with water. He's shaking, and he's got a strange look on his face.

GUS

I didn't do anything. I was just lying there
-- and it just blew.

DISSOLVE TO: INT ASHORE EXAM ROOM

(156)

Gus is ashore, still being tested by DOCTORS who look suspiciously at his rapid pulse rate. Sensors clamped on his head.

*

DOCTOR

Ninety. Normally, at rest, it's sixty-eight.

GUS

I didn't panic. I didn't touch the button.
I was just lying there -- and it blew.

DISSOLVE TO: INT DE-BRIEFING ROOM

(157)

Gus being de-briefed before MILITARY AND ENGINEERING BRASS. Their looks are not friendly. He's in long underwear.

*

GUS

The capsule was rocking around a little, but there weren't any loose items in the capsule, so I don't see how I could have hit that button...No, I was just lying there, flat on my back --and it just blew.

OFFICER

Thank you, Mr. Grissom.

Gus leaves the room.

OFFICER

What do you think?

ENGINEER

Explosive hatches have been on jet fighters for ten years. The damned things have been wrung inside out, subjected to trial by heat, by water, by shaking,

Continued

(1961)

91 (157) CONT

ENGINEER (Cont.)
 pounding. We even dropped them from a height of
 a hundred feet onto concrete -- and none have ever
 just blown !

CUT TO:

EXT PATRICK AFB

(158)
 A SMALL, TACKY FLORIDA MILITARY BAND PLAYING out on some brain-
 frying slab of cement under a big canopy at Patrick Air Force
 Base near Cocoa Beach.

Betty comes off a HELICOPTER with their TWO KIDS and is met by Gus *
 He can hardly even look at her as someone he knows. TWO SHOT: *
 on them marching toward the canopy: *

BETTY

Aren't we going to the White House, Gus ?

GUS

Naw.

BETTY

(aside to Gus)

Isn't the President coming, Gus ?

GUS

Naw.

BETTY

And no ticker-tape parade in New York ?

GUS

Un-unh.

BETTY

Not even one in Mitchell, Indiana ?

Gus doesn't want to talk...to anyone.

BETTY

(on verge of tears)

And no Jackie ?

UNDER THE CANOPY. A NASA MAN is giving Gus his medal.

NASA MAN

...And the Distinguished Service Medal I am about
 to award to Virgil I. Grissom, Jr...etc.

INT. MUSTY CABIN COURT-TYPE ROOM. DAY.

(158A)
 Out the window cars are roaring by on the highway. On the other
 side of the highway is amazing brick-hot Cocoa Beach. Betty and
 Gus, continuing:

BETTY

These are what they call the VIP rooms here ?
 But isn't there even a TV ? Or a pool ?

continued

Gus looks around, shrugs. That's right, no TV, no pool. What do you want me to do about it? He opens the refrigerator. He smiles a little.

GUS

Hey, look. They filled up the refrigerator.
Pretty good, huh?

Betty can't take it. The full refrigerator starts the SCREAMING:

BETTY

Pretty good? A full refrigerator?! I can see the afternoon shaping up just great. And the rest of the day tomorrow, too. What do they want me to do in here? Cook?! And then risk my life and the kids' by dragging them across that highway to the worst beach in Florida? Gus, I want to eat in the White House! I wanted to talk to Jackie about...things!

GUS

Listen Hon, I gotta get over to the Holiday Inn, y'know, for some...ah...beer call with the guys, and...

BETTY

NOOOO! GUS! All those years of test flying, all those times I waited, all those times you weren't there. The Military promised. They are welshing on their damn compact, Gus...Finally, I am Mrs. Honorable Astronaut. But they are treating me like the Honorable Mrs. Squirming Hatch Blower!

GUS

(screaming back, furious)

I did not do anything wrong! The hatch just blew! It was a glitch, a technical malfunction. Why in hey-al don't anyone believe me?

BETTY

I know that. But are these the goodies, Gus? Is this how the military pays off? They owe you, Gus. But they owe me too, Gus. THEY OWE ME. THEY OWE ME. A LOT!

Gus's eyes are actually tearing up. They are both on the edge of an hysterical outburst. Just as they reach this emotional peak, THEY HEAR A RAPPING AT THE DOOR. THE BUZZING, CHURNING SOUND, o.s. Gus looks through the curtains and sees: THE PRESS.

Gus and Betty look at one another. They know they must face them. This is a critical moment--what will happen out there? Is the hatch-blower story going to be all over the papers? Betty wipes aside a tear. Gus takes a deep breath. He nods to her, a half-smile of bravery, AND AS GUS OPENS THE DOOR...NEWSREEL MUSIC BLARES, AND...

CUT TO:

EXT COURT MOTEL

(1961)

93

159

*

BLACK AND WHITE NEWSREEL OF GUS AND BETTY COMING OUT AND SMILING, surrounded by the yammering cameras. And the story is about "our newest hero--brave, small Gus. So brave and we almost lost him through drowning." AND USING THE SAME SHOTS FROM GUS'S RESCUE DEBACLE:

NARRATOR

Here we see him shouting to the helicopter
to save the capsule first !

INT: CLASSROOM

DAY.

160

*

The image of Gus is still on the t.v. screen.
Liason Man among Young Officers watching.

Ridley, *

RIDLEY

(laughing incredulously)

Migod, he lost his capsule...But he's sticking
to his story. Way to go, Gus. Do something like
that in flight test and it'd be all over. He just
screwed the pooch, plain and simple.

Yeager has entered unnoticed.

YEAGER

Sometimes you get a pooch that can't be screwed.

LIASON

Exactly. Right now the President's got his
own problems with the Bay of Pigs. He doesn't
want the astronauts' image tarnished. Nothing
these guys do will be called a failure. But
you'd think the public would know they are just
doing what monkeys have done.

YEAGER

(irked)

Monkeys ? Yew think them monkeys knew they were
sittin on top of rockets that always blow up ?
Those Astronaut boys know that. I'll tell yew
somethin -- it takes somethin special for a man to
volunteer for a suicide mission, especially one
that's on t.v. Nosir, Gus did alright.

As Yeager walks off:

LIASON MAN

But I thought we...(Confused by Yeager, then with
a certain bitterness). You know, it looks to me
like the era of the fly boys -- the stick n rudder
pilots--is just about over. You know what I'd do if
I were a hot, young fighter jock right now ?...
I'd apply for astronaut.

Ridley and the others pretend not to hear as they watch t.v. *
(Possibly NEWSREEL).

CUT TO: INT

YEAGER'S HOUSE. Time hasn't changed much, just made the landscape more barren. The house is a little Contractor Suburban near the highway. GLENNIS is watching a cheerful Betty Grissom interview in b.g. as she hears the front screen door slam. (161)

She doesn't turn around, but she knows Yeager is passing through the room (maybe a shadow across the t.v. screen). TWO KIDS turn, but say nothing.

EXT
YEAGER BACKYARD. Yeager sits in a chair, pretending to sleep. Glennis comes across the scrubby yard and sits in a deck chair near him. For a long moment, nobody says anything; then: (161A)

GLENNIS

You know...I always hated flying. (No answer from Yeager)...But when I met you, you were already a pilot, so I never had a complaint comin. And when you went up in those planes, me and the kids never had any insurance except for a couple months pay in case anything happened. I hated that kinda talk about insurance. Y'know the government spends lots of time and money teachin test pilots to be fearless. But they don't spend a damn penny teachin you how to be the fearless wife of a test pilot. Some wives...they had all kindsa nightmares...But...(just realizing)...I guess I liked it...I guess I liked a man who could push the outside of the envelope, Flyboy...(Yeager turns an eye slowly toward her) But I never could stand a man who was one of those Remember-whens, you know, those bitter guys who just sit around in backyards...If that ever happens, Flyboy, I'm goin out that front door...and you'll never catch me. *

She stands over him.

YEAGER (beginning a smile)

Y'know...ah'm a fearless man....But I'm a 'scaird of you...

GLENNIS

(smiling to herself)

No, yer not....But you oughta be.

A DISTANT TRUMPET SOUND FADES OVER THEM:

FADING TO: INT GLENN HOME (162)

JOHN GLENN AT HOME. He tries to play a few more notes, but the spirit seems to have gone out of him. Annie looks at him sympathetically, NO DIALOGUE, but it's clear that Glenn feels it's

continued

all over. History's written. That's all she wrote. He closes his eyes.

Annie shuts the lights out.

IN DARKNESS, THE CAMERA DRIFTS OVER GLENN, his music still faintly lingering in the night air. But then ANOTHER MUSIC, ever so faint--THAT LOW HUMMING SOUND.

SUBLIMINAL FLASH. THE GRAND DESIGNER. He smiles: Is it an evil smile? Or is it just History smiling down on John Glenn? (162A)

CAMERA MOVES OVER GLENN. SUBLIMINAL FLASH: A RUSSIAN COSMONAUT GETTING INTO A CAPSULE. This is Glenn's own Nightmare Newsreel as there's smoke and flashing light, and in the smudged darkness a capsule comes hurling right at him. (162B)

HIS EYES POP OPEN. A BREEZE BLOWS THE CURTAINS. He falls back to sleep. (162C)

THE CAPSULE DRIFTS TOWARD THE CAMERA. (162C)

THE BACK OF A MAN IN A SUIT RUNS IN PANIC DOWN AN ECHOING CORRIDOR. (162D)

A DOOR OPENS, HEADS TURN, AND MEN OF POWER AND DIGNITY SIT THERE. (162E)

HOLLOW VOICE

We know! Sit down!

JFK TURNS IN HIS DREAM. KENNEDY SMILES. Some voice, Somewhere, is trying to speak: Ti...ti...ti... (162F)

SUDDENLY HIS EYES OPEN AGAIN. ANNIE IS STANDING OVER HIM, light from the other room haloing her in the darkness. She holds the phone out toward him. (162G)

ANNIE

(stammering, excited)

Ti...ti...Titov. Orbi...tngg...T'Russns...
overrrr...(without stuttering) John, wake up!

Glenn sits bolt upright, and grabs the phone.

VOICE ON PHONE

John, the Russians have sent Titov up and he's been orbiting for almost a day now, going over our country, John...

THE HEAD NASA MAN is sitting around that table with government men, talking to Glenn: (162H)

NASA MAN (Cont'd)

...And we've got to put a man in orbit right away. We've got to close the space gap or the ballgame's all over. No more twelve minute flights. The Free World needs a man in orbit...

REV.
2/25/82

(Dec '61- Jan. '62)

95

162H CONT
162-2
Intercuts

NASA MAN (Cont'd)

We're scrapping the Redstone and going with the Atlas Rocket. And you know what that means. The magic word is "orbit," John.

JOHN GLENN is getting dressed as fast as he can with the phone tucked under his neck. Annie's running in with his shoes.

NASA MAN'S VOICE

...We haven't been too lucky with that rocket. And we're not going to be able to take all the precautions we'd like. It's going to be extremely...

GLENN has a huge smile on his face. His shoes are on.

GLENN

I'm ready !

NASA MAN'S VOICE

...dangerous...What's that ?

His face is glistening. This is the fighter-jock's idea of what it's all about.

GLENN

I'm ready ! A hunnert per cent !

CUT TO:

EXT LAUNCH PAD (STOCK)

THE ROCKET ON THE PAD. (CARD: Jan. 27, 1962 . CAPE CANAVERAL.)

163

INT CAPE CANAVERAL

THE MEN WAITING IN CONTROL CENTRAL. Familiar faces: HEAD NASA MAN, VON BRAUN, DEKE, CARPENTER, THE GUYS WHO PRESS THE FINAL BUTTONS. They all look nervous. 163A

LINING THE SHORE. TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE. (Use actual shots). 163B

WALKER CRONKITE AND THE PRESS HOARDS.

163C

CRONKITE

We've been told there's another delay and there's yet another hold in the countdown. Something to do with the weather, we are told. Astronaut John Glenn has been in there for four hours already, and...

INSIDE THE CAPSULE. JOHN GLENN SITS PATIENTLY, looking at the sky. 163D

CLOSE ON GLENN. He's looking at the mirrors on his wrists, showing us his final preparations. He waits...waits. 163E

THROUGH WINDOW- GULLS FLY OVERHEAD. HUMMING SOUND OF MOTORS (R.P.-- view of sky and abort tower above). *

THE SKY--IT'S CLOUDING OVER. WIDE SHOT OF CAPE

163F

CUT TO: INT GLENN HOME

ANNIE GLENN, watching the t.v. coverage. The other wives are there. There's also the LIFE REPORTER AND A PHOTOGRAPHER who keeps snapping pictures, trying not to be as annoying as he is. ON THE TV. A WOMAN WITH A MICROPHONE is talking:

WOMAN REPORTER

Inside this trim, modest suburban home is Annie Glenn, wife of Astronaut John Glenn, sharing the anxiety and pride of the entire world at this tense moment, but in a very private and crucial way that only she can understand...

There's a GUY TAPPING AT THE WINDOW. TRUDY goes to the window to speak to him. Outside IT'S NUT CITY. THE PRESS IS HELD BACK, but four giant mobile units that look like toasters are on the lawn.

WOMAN REPORTER (Cont'd)

...And we understand that the Vice President is nearby, waiting to come and speak with her.

Trudy comes over to Annie. Annie's very nervous.

TRUDY

He's asking again.

ANNIE

Nnno.

CUT TO: EXT GLENN HOME

GUY FROM WINDOW running around a corner. In b.g. we can see the chaos around John Glenn's home.

INT/EXT INSIDE A LIMOUSINE, a man in a big, Texas cowboy hat is talking to TWO REPORTERS, who seem trapped on the drop seats.

LBJ

You know what the Russians want ?

REPORTER

Nosir.

LBJ

They want our peckers in their pockets.

LBJ finds that more amusing than does the woman reporter.

THE GUY FROM THE WINDOW--JOHNSON'S AIDE--pokes his head in the limo window.

AIDE

She still says no.

LBJ

(his gracious smile)

NO ? Did you tell her I will bring in ABC-TV, NBC-TV, and CBS-TV, and her words--and mine--

OUTSIDE THE LIMO, A MAD RUSH is on. Reporters are scrambling around the corner towards the Glenn house.

AIDE
Yes, sir. I told her that.

The two reporters in the car get out and begin to run with the other reporters.

LBJ
Hey, come back here ! Where in hay-ell are they going ?

AIDE
I think the flight's been cancelled.

LBJ
Cancelled ? Why...that's perfect ! I'll go in there and console her...on nationwide TV. I'll pay her a sympathy call.

AIDE
Yes, sir.

CUT TO: INT GLENN CAPSULE

(166)

THE CAPSULE. THE HATCH IS THROWN BACK. CARPENTER LOOKS DOWN AT GLENN. HE LOOKS EXHAUSTED, EMOTIONALLY SPENT. As he climbs out, he looks angrily at the sky.

CUT TO: INT GLENN HOME

(167)

Annie Glenn, and she looks more nervous than ever. In b.g. the AIDE is at the window again.

ANNIE
T...tell him nnnno !

CUT TO: EXT/INT LIMO

(168)

LBJ in his limo, SCREAMING.

LBJ
What do you mean, no ? I want somebody to get NASA on the line. I want to lean on NASA, I want to buck this problem right on up the chain to the top. Right away.

AIDE
To the top ?

LBJ
Damn right ! They better get someone to tell her to play ball.

CUT TO:

INT

HANGAR AT CAPE CANAVERAL. John Glenn is covered with sweat, drawn, deflated, and beginning to feel very tired after waiting for five hours. He's still got half his mesh underlining hanging off his body and bio-sensor wires sprouting from out his thoracic cage. Carpenter, Gus, Deke, and Shepard are walking with him when they see the head NASA MAN and his entourage approaching.

NASA MAN

John, there's a problem with your wife.

GLENN

My wife ? Is it serious ?

NASA MAN

We think it is. There's a phone hookup here. We've got her on it.

'Serious' could mean a lot of things at this point. Glenn picks up the phone in an agitated state.

GLENN

Annie ? Are you all right ? (He listens)...
The Vice President ?

NASA MAN

(whispering)

Tell her to let him in with the networks.
Coverage, John. You know.

John Glenn has his back up.

GLENN

(into phone)

Annie, if you don't want the Vice President or the TV networks or anybody else to come into the house, then that's it as far as I'm concerned ! They are not coming in--and I will back you up all the way, a hundred percent, and you tell them that. I don't want Johnson or any of the rest of them to put so much as one toe inside our house !

INT GLENN HOME

ANNIE'S FACE--brightens with strength.

169A

THE NASA MEN are horrified.

169B

NASA MAN

John, you can't do that. That is the Vice President and head of the program--You have got to think of the broader interests of the program !

GLENN

You're way out of line !

NASA MAN

I'm out of line ? I'm running this show here.

continued

GLENN
We'll see about that.

NASA MAN
And I'm thinking of changing the order of
flight assignments.

THE OTHER ASTRONAUTS CROWD IN AROUND GLENN. They look like a
tough and angry bunch of muthas.

DEKE
Oh yeah, who you gonna get ?

The Nasa Man gets the message. He tries to soften.

NASA MAN
Now wait a second, fellas.

SHEPARD
Step aside, pal.

CARPENTER
Make way, buddy.

And they all brush by the NASA hierarchy, protecting John Glenn.

CUT TO: INT/EXT LIMO

Johnson's limo, and it's ROCKING with anger. A small crowd of
aides backs off.

LBJ
Pansies ! Cows ! Gladiolas ! Isn't
there anyone who can deal with a housewife ?

OMIT 171

CUT TO: EXT AUSTRALIA BUSH

A HERD OF KANGAROO LEAPING ACROSS THE ROAD. GORDO IS IN A LAND
ROVER, DRIVING WITH AUSTRALIANS IN BUSH HATS, ETC., blowing car
horns at kangaroo:

DRIVER
Come on, mates ! Move along there !

EXT AUSTRALIA

A BLOCKHOUSE IN THE WILDERNESS. CARD: Muchea, Australia. Feb.20,1961.

Gordo is walking toward the blockhouse when he sees a GROUP OF MEN
in baggy brown suits, their hair hanging down in Shirley Temple
ringlets. Dark-skinned, scary looking. Especially the Old Guy
in b.g. with the bone in his nose.

MAN
Hi, mon.

GORDO
Hiya. Who are you guys ?

continued

MAN

100 (173) CONT

Aborigines, mon. Who you be ?

GORDO

I'm an astronaut.

Glances pass around. The aborigines murmur the word 'astronaut' a few times. The Australians wait patiently by the blockhouse--we can see the elaborate instruments inside.

ABORIGINE

What you do here, astronaut ?

GORDO

A friend of mine is gonna fly overhead, and I'm gonna help him.

ABORIGINE

Fly overhead ? You blokes know how to do that too ?

GORDO

You mean you know how to do that ?

ABORIGINE

Not me, mon. But that old bloke over there, he know. I seen him do that many times. Maybe he can give you a hand if you get in trouble. He is real good at it. What time is your friend gonna fly by ?

GORDO

He should be by tonight, but you never know. These things have a way of being late.

ABORIGINE

We know that, mon. These things are hard. People don't know that. They think you are a fake if your magic do not happen just so, right away.

CUT TO: INT GLENN CAPSULE

(174)

JOHN GLENN in the capsule. He's just sitting there. Then, HE STARTS SHAKING (We're using the one-frame per second technique they actually used to photograph the astronauts in the capsule)--

GLENN

The clock is operating. We're underway.

EXT. THE BLAST FROM THE ROCKET IS TREMENDOUS. BIG NOISE INCREASING AS DEPLETED REPELLANT REPLACES GAS. FLIGHT GETS LOUDER: THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE SHIELD THEIR EYES AND LOOK TO THE SKIES. CHEERING IN CONTROL TOWER.

(175)

THIS TIME WE SEE THE HIGHPOINTS OF THE LAUNCH FROM INSIDE.

THE ATLAS BOOSTER IS JETTISONED and through a circle of fire we can see the earth receding below.

continued

QUICK CUTS FROM ACTUAL FOOTAGE of the horizon coming into view, of the capsule going into orbit.

MINIATURE SHOT. THE CAPSULE TURNING AROUND. (175A)

INT CAPSULE

GLENN

Zero-g and I feel fine. Capsule is turning around. Oh ! That view is...tremendous ! Flying backwards. (176)

You can feel the blue and white planet moving below.

INT
AT CONTROL CENTRAL. Shepard is capcom. CLOSE ON HIS PILOT'S WRISTWATCH (177)

SHEPARD

Roger, Friendship 7. You have a Go, at least seven orbits.

GLENN

Roger. Understand. Go for at least seven orbits... This is Friendship 7. Can see clear back, a big cloud pattern way back across toward the Cape. Beautiful sight.

CELEBRATION, CHEERING -- THIS IS IT ! A MAN IN ORBIT !

DISSOLVE FROM SHOT TO SHOT. MOVING INTO NIGHT.

INT GLENN CAPSULE

GLENN

Speed is 17,500 miles per hour, and we are moving into night. (178)

And the earth begins to dim, like on a rheostat. Then a tremendous band of orange light stretches from one side of the horizon to the other, as if the sun were a molten liquid that had emptied into a tube along the horizon. (178a)

CUTS OF EACH OF ASTRONAUTS AT TRACKING STATIONS OR IN CAPCOM to show how they watch their Brother. (178B)

GUS GRISSOM IN BERMUDA (with caption).

GLENN

This is Friendship 7. I have the Cape in sight down there. It looks real fine from up here.

GUS

Rog. Rog.

GLENN

As you know.

GUS

Yea, verily, Sonny. Sendin' you on your way.

And (to be worked out) Deke at Canton Island (do with set redress).

DEKE etc. (work out)

Hello, Friendship 7. Do you read ? How me ? etc.

CUT TO:

^{INT}
THE TRACKING STATION IN AUSTRALIA. NIGHT. GORDO'S INSIDE WITH HIS AUSSIE TEAM. (179)

OUTSIDE. THE ABORIGINE SHAMAN is chanting in the night. Other aborigines sit on their haunches watching. They've got a huge bonfire going. The SHAMAN grunts something, and his eyes roll to the skies. (180)

FIRST ABORIGINE
Somethin' is comin by up there, mon.

INSIDE. THERE'S A PAUSE BEFORE THE LIGHT ON THE PANEL INDICATES: (181)

AUSSIE ENGINEER
'e's comin', lads.

And Gordo swings into action.

continued

GORDO
Hey there, Friendship Seven.

GLENN
That sure was a short day.

GORDO
Say again, Friendship Seven.

GLENN
That was the shortest day I've run into.

GORDO
Kinda passes rapidly, huh ?

GLENN
Yessir...I can see lights down there in Australia,
Gordo. Where are they from ?

GORDO
Well John, all of Perth and all of Rockingham got
their lights on. (And he looks out the window at
the bonfire). And we got a few more lit here and
there.

GLENN
Well, they show up very well, and thank everybody
for turning them on, will you ?

GORDO
We sure will, John.

Gordo waves out the window. The aborigines wave back. SPARKS
fly out from the bonfire and UP INTO THE SKY.

UP IN THE SKY. GLENN IS HEADING TOWARD THE BLUE BAND OF DAWN. (182)

GLENN
Wait a second. I see something strange out here.
Sparks.. Needles of some kind...all over the sky...

AND WE SEE A DAZZLING DISPLAY OF THOUSANDS OF TINY NEEDLES GLEAMING
IN THE SUN OUTSIDE THE CAPSULE. LIKE SPARKS.

GLENN
This is Friendship 7. I'll try to describe what
I'm in up here. I am in a big mass of some very
small particles that are brilliantly lit up like
they're luminescent. I never saw anything like it !

A whole shower of them
coming by ! They swirl around the capsule and go in
front of the window and they're brilliantly lighted.

continued

CAPCOM (SHEPARD) (192A)

Roger, Friendship 7. Can you hear any impact with the capsule? Over.

GLENN (192B)

Negative, negative. They're very slow. They're not going away from me more than maybe three or four miles per hour.

No answer from Capcom. The lights outside are swirling around, and they really look incredible...almost alive.
AND THE CAPSULE IS PANNED INTO A MIRACULOUS DAWN. MUSIC SOARING.

GLENN

Don't think they could be any kind of organism... Unless some Air Force communications experiment went amok? ...Or our astronomers have been wrong?... Hello, Capcom, do you read me? (Silence) There's some swirling over me now...over? (More Silence).
It's amazing. Truly miraculous...

IN CONTROL CENTRAL (183)

SUDDEN DARKNESS. GREEN WARNING LIGHT FLASHING "LANDING BAG DEPLOYED"
Grim looking faces. Something's wrong that Glenn doesn't know about.

NASA MAN

Could it be those fireflies or whatever they are?

SCIENTIST W/GERM/ACCENT

I doubt it. It's the heat shield. It's loose. If it comes off...he...will...

SHEPARD

If the heat shield comes off, he'll burn up...
he'll fry...When he tries to re-enter.

Scientist w/accnt just looks at him, and the meaning of the look is clear--it's extremely dangerous--OR WORSE. *

GLENN'S VOICE

Do you read me? Over...?

NASA MAN grabs the microphone.

NASA MAN

Let's try something. Anything. (Then over intercom).
Roger, Friendship Seven. Will you correlate the actions of the particles surrounding your spacecraft with the actions of your control jets? Do you read? Over.

GLENN'S VOICE

Roger. I do not think they were from my control jets, Negative. Over.

BACK TO GLENN. A CAMERA IS FLOATING IN THE CABIN NEXT TO HIM.
HE REACHES TO GRAB IT. (184)

GLENN

I'm going to try to get some pictures of those little guys.

CAPCOM VOICE (184A)

Sounds like a good idea, Friendship Seven. (184B)

GLENN BEGINS SNAPPING PICTURES. NOTE - HIS CAMERA-WEIGHTLESS EFFECT
Use "single-frame" photos of Glen

DISSOLVE TO: NIGHT FALL (MONTAGE OF OTHER ASTRONAUTS AT TRACKING STATION
--feeling of circling the globe) (185)
AND DISSOLVE TO: DAWN. (186)

GLENN LOOKS DOWN. Little flashes are all over the place below.

GLENN

Looks like lightning down below. Like flashlights underneath a blanket. Kinda extraordinary. Here come the little guys again. Fireflies.

And they swirl up around his capsule. Glenn laughs.

GLENN

Get outta here.

Then he sees something on the other window--BLOOD. It's all over the window, blood and dirt, a real mess.

GLENN

Here's something on the other window. Blood ?
Blood and dirt. Dirt could be from firing of
escape tower. Blood, maybe from bugs...No...Or birds
...Or maybe it's just the sun diffusing...Or from the
fireflies ? Do you read ? Over ?...Whoa! There they
go again.

The fireflies swirl up and around him. No answer from below.

CONTROL CENTRAL. Tremendous activity.. (187)

SHEPARD

He's going into his third orbit. How long you gonna keep him up there ?

NASA MAN

What am I going to tell him ?

SHEPARD

He's a pilot! You tell him about the condition
of his craft!

NASA MAN

Okay. Three complete orbits. Then we give him the bad news.

INT GLENN HOME
CUTS OF ANNIE WATCHING. (188)

CUTS OF GLENN--SINGLE FRAME CLICKING--BUILD TENSIONS (188A)

BACK INSIDE THE CONTROL ROOM. MODEL OF CAPSULE BEING EXAMINED. (189)

NASA MAN

(carefully explaining each technical term)

There's one hope. We've decided it may be possible to leave the retrorocket package that covers the heat shield on instead of blowing it off as planned. The straps may be strong enough to hold the heat shield in place. Maybe it'll protect the loose heat shield. If it fails...

CLOSE ON TINY MODEL. IT BECOMES THE SECTION OF CAPSULE IN SPACE MOVING INTO DARKNESS.

UP WITH GLENN. Sailing along.

CAPCOM VOICE

Friendship Seven. We have been reading an indication on the ground of segment 5-1, which is Landing Bag Deploy. We suspect this an erroneous signal. Cape would like you to check by putting the landing-bag switch in auto position.

GLENN

You have been reading....?

CAPCOM

Over ?

GLENN

Do I understand you have been reading this all along ?

CAPCOM

That's correct, over.

GLENN

(suddenly suspicious, but always cool)
Okay, if that's what you recommend, we'll go ahead and try it. (He switches). Negative.
Over.

CAPCOM

Roger, that's fine. In this case, we'll go ahead, and re-entry will be normal.

GLENN

Re-entry ? Only three orbits ? Over.

CAPCOM

That is correct....

Glenn knows he's in trouble, but what is remarkable when we look at the actual film on his face is the calmness with which he faces this danger.

CAPCOM

John, leave your retropack on through your pass over Texas. Do you read ?

GLENN

Roger. What is the reason for this ? Over.

continued

No answer.

GLENN

Do you have a time for going to Jettison retro ?
Over.

CAPCOM

Texas will give you that message. Over.

TEXAS VOICE

This is Texas, Friendship Seven, howyreyouall ?
Ah...we are recommending that you leave the
retropackage on through the entire re-entry...

CREATE CONFUSION OF CAPCOM VOICES COMING AT GLENN, THEN,
Shepard's voice breaks in.

SHEPARD

John, retract your periscope manually. Listen,
John, we are not sure whether or not your landing
bag has deployed. We feel it is possible to re-enter
with the retropackage on. We see no difficulty at
this time with that type of re-entry. Do you read ?

Glenn understands now. He knows the heat shield is loose and
they are trying to protect it with the retropack.

GLENN

Roger, understand.

And his hands begin to fly as he begins to flip switches,
(He comes down backwards) to put some things on automatic,
to retract his periscope, as he looks out the window, HE SEES:

FLAMES...The strap from the retropack is on fire. A thumping
sound on the window, the strap is coming apart. It breaks.
Then it's gone! The heat shield is beginning to burn. John
Glenn hangs on. A MASSIVE, SWINGING PENDULUM-LIKE MOTION OF CAPSULE.

IN CONTROL ROOM. A STRANGE SOUND COMES OVER THE SPEAKERS, low
at first, crackling, then beginning to rise...

CAPCOM

What's that ? That sound...?

SHEPARD

Humming. It's him. (Engineers look like he's crazy)
It's alright. He does that.

And Shepard leans forward prayerfully. Humming grows louder.

AND JOHN GLENN INSIDE THE CAPSULE BEGINS TO BUFFET. HE FIGHTS
WITH THE CONTROLS as the humming grows louder and louder: "Mmmine
eyes have seen the Glory of the Coming of the Lord..."

THROUGH THE WINDOW--A bright light, a deep orange glow, all over capsule.
A SCRAPING SOUND like giant fingernails clawing at the metal shingles
covering the tiny spacecraft.

190 CONT

A190
intent

191

192

THE HEAT SHIELD IS ABLATING, SENDING OFF A CORONA OF FLAMES. THUDS. THE CAPSULE IS ROCKING. BUFFETING GROWS. HUGE CHUNKS OF THE CAPSULE ARE FLYING AWAY IN FLAMES. INCREDIBLE RACKING. "He is tramping out the fields where the grapes of wrath are stored."

THE BLACK SKY TURNS PALE ORANGE. FUEL GAUGE SHOWS EMPTY. "His Truth is marching on..." AND HE'S HUMMING LOUDER AND MUSIC JOINS IN, RISING...AS FIRE IS ALL AROUND HIM AND EVERYTHING IS RATTLING AND HE'S JUST A FLAMING BALL HURTLING THROUGH THE SKY..."Glory, Glory..." and then...NOTHING ! TOTAL, ABSOLUTE SILENCE.

IN CONTROL ROOM. SHEPARD LEANS FORWARD TO MICROPHONE.

(192A)

SHEPARD

John...??

CAPCOM

He can't hear you. He's hit the ionization layer...No communications are possible for a few minutes. Then...we'll... know...

Schirra moves up next to Shepard, they wait...

In the Control Room everything seems agitated by the sudden silence that fills the room. Strange details: The lights moving down the huge location map in silence. Every bit of motion stops: a tapping finger stops; a messenger stops; a hundred tops of heads seem to be staring upward, mesmerized, waiting for some word from Above.

OUTSIDE. (DOCUMENTARY). CROWDS WAIT IN SILENCE. 192B

THE PRESS CORPS SEEMS FROZEN, LOOKING UPWARD.

192C

Press site #1

ANNIE GLENN WAITING NEAR A TV SET, THE OTHER WIVES NEARBY. 192D
AND REPORTERS WAITING OUTSIDE.

CAPCOM (CAPE)

Ah, Friendship Seven, this is Cape. Do you read ? 192E
(Silence). Ah, Friendship Seven, this is Cape.
Do you read ? (Silence). Friendship Seven this is
Cape. DO YOU READ ?

Suddenly it seems hopeless. He must be lost. Shrugs, bowed heads.

GLENN'S VOICE

Ah, loud and clear. How me ?

Sudden elation grips the Cape.

CAPE

Reading you loud and clear. How you doin ?

GLENN

Oh, pretty good....

(192EE) intercut

They love that line -- 'pretty good' -- Cheering in the control room as sound returns in a massive burst. Schirrah lights up a cigar for Shepard, and the music rises up.

GLENN (Cont.)

My condition is good (slightly guarded), but that was a real fireball, boy, I had great chunks of that retropack breaking off all the way through....

STOCK

And over the ocean, a BEAUTIFUL PARACHUTE BLOOMS, DANGLING A TINY SEED--A CAPSULE. HE'S ALIVE...DRUMS ARE BEATING....

CUT TO: EXT NY TICKET TAPE PARADE

A SNOWSTORM OF TICKET TAPE. A GIGANTIC PARADE. MARCHING BANDS. AND MOVE INTO OUR INSERT: Our Glenn, Our Annie, and Our LBJ-- finally getting his moment of glory--all together in the same car.

Grown men, grown policemen, are crying in the streets (Shoot as insert).

CUT TO: INT CONGRESS

193A

CONGRESS. Glenn on the podium with LBJ and McCormack behind him. (Use actual pan over the room as he waves his arm and says:)

GLENN

...And I'd like to introduce the real rock in our family...My wife, ANNIE !...

CLOSE SHOT. THE BALCONY. TEARS ARE IN ANNIE'S EYES, AND IN THE EYES OF ALL AROUND HER.

AND IN JOHN GLENN'S EYES, A PROUD, TRIUMPHANT TWINKLE.

DISSOLVING TO: EDWARDS CLASSROOM

YEAGER IS AT A BLACKBOARD in a classroom. He's teaching a class. Diagrams are all over the board. The students are all young, shiny pilots. Yeager's puzzling over some chart he doesn't understand.

STUDENT PILOT

Sir, could you tell us some more about anisotropic functions and multiple-encounter trajectories...?

YEAGER

Yeah...well...uh...first you got to learn to be good flyers. Wax each others tails a few times up there, and...

ANOTHER STUDENT PILOT

Is that gonna get us to Houston?

192E
192EE
cont.
intercut

192F

193

194

YEAGER

Houston ?

(194)
cont

ANOTHER STUDENT PILOT

Yeah, that's where they are moving the Astronauts to. That's where all the goodies are going to be.

STUDENT PILOT

Yeah, and all the nookie.

YEAGER

(as they laugh)

Is that a fact?

*

INT

CORRIDOR OF EDWARDS BUILDING • CLASSROOM

(195)

Yeager stops at an open door. Another group of young pilots, and they are sitting on a row of chairs. A NASA MAN is talking to them. Among them, one black trainee,

*

*

NASA MAN

Now cross your legs. Look, you see how sloppy those short socks look? Wear 'em long like this.

*

*

From now on you wear knee-length socks so that no bare flesh shows. If you get to be an Astronaut, you are going to be on stage a lot and in the public eye a lot, and you have to look sharp. And another thing, when you put your hands on your hips... (he demonstrates)... The thumbs should be to the rear and the fingers forward. Only women and interior decorators put the thumbs forward and the fingers back, like this.

The Astronaut-hopefuls laugh.

VOICE BEHIND YEAGER

I predicted it, didn't I?

IT'S THE LIASON MAN, with his little pork-pie hat. The two of them begin to walk out of the building.

LIASON MAN

I was right all along. I knew what would happen without the coverage and the funding. In my line of work, it's important to feel you can predict the future. Yeah... I was right all along....

YEAGER

Is that a fact?

*

continue

(195)
cont.

LIASON MAN

Yes. I'm moving on to Houston, too. I guess they understood and appreciated the problems I had here...Did pretty well; considering....

EXT
OUTSIDE THE BUILDING.

(196)

LIASON MAN

Well, there's the good news...It's finally showed up....

The NF-104 is being towed into a hangar nearby. Yeager is mesmerized by the new beast's beauty. A glint from the plane's window.

LIASON MAN (Cont.)

...the one we had been waiting for, with the big rocket. Boy, if we'da only had those a few years back....Anyway, the bad news is that the entire program is probably going to be scrapped. From now on the Astronaut Boys in Houston have got the only ticket...Barring, of course, some... unforeseen...event....

OMIT SC## 197-210 (Cooper Launch Sequence)

(197 -
210
omit)**
*

CUT TO: INT HANGAR AT EDWARDS

(1963)

A HANGAR AT EDWARDS. TOTAL SILENCE. THE NEW PLANE (NF-104) with the huge rocket mounted on it sits silently in the hangar.

YEAGER STANDS WATCHING IT. The plane glares back...like the bronc that can't be broken. Yeager's shuffling quarters in his hand.

(211)

RIDLEY moves up behind him, silently. (Ridley's been working on a nearby plane, a wrench in his hand.) Yeager knows he's there:

YEAGER

Ridley, I hear the Russians set a record of goin up 114,000 feet startin from the ground.

RIDLEY

Somethin like that. Nobody seems to care about that kinda record no more. All they seem to want now's capsules n' outer space.

CONTINUED:

DELETE Pgs 111, 112

YEAGER

(as if he didn't hear)

Y'know, I think this plane could top that Russian record.

(211)
(cont'd)

RIDLEY

(looks at him oddly)

Maybe. (He starts to walk away.) Too bad they cancelled this one. It looks like it woulda been a good one.

He leaves Yeager alone, squinting at the plane. Bright glare from the plane, BLEACHING WHITE THEN, SUDDEN BLACKNESS.

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*

INT - HOUSTON ASTRODOME

AND IN THE BLACKNESS, A SENSE OF MOVING QUICKLY THROUGH A TUNNEL TOWARD A DISTANT OPENING. SMOKE AND FIRE IN THE OPENING (where the match was--a match cut) As in a dream of death...or of birth, speeding quickly toward the light--

(212)

LBJ'S VOICE

And here they come...Looky here what I brought you!

THEY BURST INTO THE HOUSTON COLISEUM where thousands of people mill around and stare down at them from the stands. The band bursts out: THE EYES OF TEXAS ARE UPON YOU.

GORDO AND TRUDY have been riding side by side, sitting on the back of a Caddie convertible. Behind them, the other astronauts are sitting on the backs of their convertibles as the motorcade makes its way onto the floor where in TEN HUGE PITS THEY ARE ROASTING THIRTY COWS ON SPITS, LIGHTS CUTTING THROUGH SMOKE. LBJ is on the podium wearing a cowboy hat with the microphone.

LBJ

Welcome to Houston! Your new home! Your neighbors here--and me--we'd like to give you this little barbecue here, Texas style!

A GIANT PAPER PLATE. As a big chunk of black beef is dropped onto it next to a peck of kidney beans, sinking in gravy. Trudy smiles weakly as she looks down at the plate and up at a Texas Woman

TEXAS WOMAN

Eat some, honey, you deserve it. You musta been through a lot.

Trudy smiles, nods, sees Gordo beaming a smile at her through the smoke. Around them and the others--A RING OF TEXAS RANGERS with their huge, white hats, facing outward. Beyond them the thousands of onlookers in the grandstands--The Eyes of Texas are Upon Them, watching them eat amid the burning cattle. A long line of Houston VIP's are giving them all the Big Howdy.

CUT TO: HOUSTON.

SMOKE IS RISING FROM THE BARBECUES. Texans stare down from the stands.

212
cont.

Lines of dignitaries wait to meet the seated astronauts and wives, who are trying to eat off paper plates awkwardly balanced on their laps. BRIEF SNATCHES OF CONVERSATIONS:

TEXAN (TO SHEPARD)

Since you boys will be re-locatin here in Houston to show our appreciation for what you've done, Mr. Sharp here will contribute the land in Sharpsville; the contractors will contribute the houses; and the furniture and department stores will furnish the furnishins, from top to bottom...

ANOTHER TEXAN (to Annie Glenn)

Hi, there, little lady! Just damned glad to see you, too! We've heard a lot of good things about you gals, a lot of good things (huge Karo-syrup grin).

Annie laughs, looks across the room at her husband, surrounded by Texans. He nods to her and smiles, ever watchful. The Texan moves to Alan Shepard.

ANOTHER TEXAN

Hiya. Which one are you?

SHEPARD

Shepard.

ANOTHER

Oh, yeah? Which one's Glenn? He's the one I wanta meet.

POV: THROUGH THE SMOKE: GLENN AND ANNIE surrounded by fans.
IN ANOTHER AREA: GUS AND GORDO AND THEIR WIVES, sitting with plates in their laps, smoke rising all around them, backs of Texas Rangers protecting them from curious ONLOOKERS.
Gordo nods to the friendly faces through the smoke.

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GORDO

Y'know, s'funny, Gus. Here I am, got myself twenty-five grand a year from the magazine contract got a free house with all the furnishin's, a Corvette, a free lunch from one end of America to the other....And I ain't even been up there yet.

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CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

218

cont

GUS

(riding him)

Yep. I noticed that.

GORDO

You noticed that? You noticed I ain't even been up there yet? Well, I guess they are saving the best for last.

GUS

I guess so, Hot Dawg, I guess so. Just watch it you don't screw the pooch.

Gus can chuckle now about his painful memories. Gordo looks at him, nodding quietly, smiling--when suddenly they hear the sound--ROOT WEEVILS, heading this way through the smoke. THE PRSS comes bobbing and weaving in their direction.

GORDO

Oh, oh. Time to get adorable, Gus.

And they advance toward Gordo and Gus with their cameras with the most protuberant lenses, screwed into their eye sockets, elbowing and hiping one another out of the way.

TV HEAVY

We 're talking to Gordon Cooper who is soon to be America's next astronaut to orbit the earth. Since you're the last of the original seven and the least known, could you begin by telling us--who was the best pilot you ever saw?

GORDO

Who's the best pilot I ever saw?
Who's the best pilot I ever saw?.....

He's smiling, looking at Trudy--she knows his answer to that one. But then he looks at Gus, gruff Gus sitting there scowling at the press, and Gordo's mood changes. We haven't seen this side of Gordo before:

GORDO

(shuffling a roll of quarters, Yeager-style)
I seen a lot of 'em. Most of 'em were pictures on a wall....

PRESS

What?....Speak up!....Can't hear you....Whereabouts?

continued

CONTINUED:

(212)

cont

GORDO

I said, "pictures on a wall"...back at some place...that doesn't exist anymore.

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Some of em...are right here in this room....

(putting his hand on Gus' shoulder. Gus is almost moved to tears.....) and

*
*

some of em, they're still out there somewhere, doin what they always do, goin up each day in a hurtlin piece of machinery, puttin their hides on the line, hangin it out over the edge, pushin the outside of the envelope, then haulin it back... But there was one pilot I seen who truly had the right....

He's cut off right there by the Press as they crawl, hunker, elbow, shove and scrape their way toward him, bulbs popping, sound growing:

CONTINUED:

PRESS

Slow down...What did he say?...Could you speak up, please?...What's an envelope?....etc.

And Gordo suddenly comes to his senses. What do they care, anyway? This is not something to be talked about here. The fighter-jock in Gordo rises up again and that cocky smile returns.

GORDO

Who's the best pilot I ever saw?
...Why, yer lookin at him!

And Gps laughs, and Trudy laughs, and the bulbs pop the screen WHITE.

(omit 213)

CUT TO: EXT EDWARDS AFB

AND OUT OF THE WHITENESS, THE DESERT GLARE. AND IN THAT DESERT GLARE AN INCREDIBLE FIGURE STANDS. He's wearing a glistening silver space suit, and he carries a gleaming helmet. The sunlight halos his head:

(214)

FIGURE

Ridley!

Ridley has been working under a plane. As he steps out from underneath, the sun blinds his eyes. He sees the Incredible Figure.

RIDLEY

Yeah?

FIGURE

You got any Beemans?

Ridley's eyes light up. He's been waiting for this day, for those words again, for ten years.

RIDLEY

Yeah. Matter of fact, I think I got me a stick.

FIGURE

Loan it to me, will ye? Pay you back later.

RIDLEY

Fair nuff.

FIGURE

I think I see a new plane over there with my name on it.

Overjoyed, Ridley throws his wrench back over his shoulder and runs into the sun after the spaceman walking toward the new plane.

INT
CONTROL TOWER. EDWARDS.

118

(215)

TWO CONTROLLERS, half-drowsing, suddenly notice a PLANE taxiing down the runway.

FIRST CONTROLLER

Hey, what's that? Anyone got clearance?

SECOND CONTROLLER

What kind of plane is that? (into communications.. appropriate comm. inquiries). Do you have clearance?

YEAGER'S VOICE

Ah'm just takin her up to wring her out, boys.
Any objections?

YEAGER ROLLS BY ON THE RUNWAY AND TAKES OFF.

FIRST CONTROLLER

It's Yeager! No sir, no objections. All clear.
He must have clearance, right?

SECOND CONTROLLER

Sure, he must.

EXT EDWARDS

Ridley standing on the ground with a couple of pilots and engineers -- they're all shielding their eyes, looking to the skies. THEY SEE:

(216)

INT/EXT NF104

A distant, tiny plane streaking upward.

(217)

YEAGER IN THE SKY. He's going up at a 50-degree angle.

UP AND UP. THE ALTIMETER is at 40,000 feet and the MACHOMETER already at 2.2. HE PULLS BACK THE STICK. STEEPER, HIGHER, FASTER.

HE CUTS IN THE AFTERBURNER AND IT SLAMS HIM BACK INTO HIS SEAT.

UP AND UP. HE THROWS THE SWITCH ON HIS ROCKET ENGINE AND IT SLAMS HIM BACK AGAIN.

THE NOSE PITCHES UP TO 70 degrees.

THE G-forces are rising, shaking Yeager back into his seat.

THE SKY CHANGES TO INDIGO AS THE PLANE ROARS UP AND UP.

A LIGHT ON THE CONSOLE. HE THROWS A SWITCH. THE LIGHT GOES OUT. 78,000 feet. MACHOMETER MOVES UP... 2.3, 2.4...CLIMBING. Like he wants to poke a hole in the sky and climb right on up to Heaven!

continued

90,000...95,000...100,000 feet and STILL CLIMBING. THE SKY IS ALMOST BLACK. HIS EYES ARE RED, ANGRY. PUSH IT HIGHER. HE SLAMS ANOTHER SWITCH. HE SEES: A STRANGE SKY, STREAKING AND STROBING AHEAD OF HIM. FLASHING FORMS OF LIGHT IN THE COCKPIT: THE SIREN CALL.

104,000 FEET. He pushes another control. NOTHING HAPPENS. HE PUSHES again. NOTHING. AGAIN. NOTHING AGAIN. Something floats by, weightless.

YEAGER

(talking to his horse)

Just a little bit more. I know you got it in ye...Another few thousand feet... Just gimme a little more...a little more...

STRANGE NOISE IN THE PLANE. He's gently trying to coax more out of the beast. His voice is calm, but there's a strange look in his eye.

YEAGER

Stretch a little more...What're you doin' ?

THEN THE PLANE STOPS CLIMBING. IT JUST HANGS THERE IN SPACE: THEN IT BEGINS TO GO BACK DOWN, TAIL FIRST, NOSE UP IN THE AIR.

YEAGER HITS A THRUSTER. HYDROGEN PEROXIDE SQUIRTS OUT OF THE JET ON THE NOSE OF THE SHIP...AND DOESN'T DO A GODDAMN THING.

THE ALTIMETER IS DROPPING...93,000....92,000...NOSE STILL UP IN THE AIR.....

HE HITS A THRUSTER. THE SHIP SNAPS INTO A FLAT SPIN, spinning right over its center of gravity, like a pinwheel on a stick.

YEAGER

Now you got it...Okay, now let's get yer nose down, like you're spouse to...

YEAGER'S HEAD IS ON THE OUTER EDGE OF THE CIRCLE, SPINNING AROUND....HE HITS THE SIDEARM CONTROL AGAIN. NO MORE HYDROGEN PEROXIDE. EMPTY.

HE CAN'T LIGHT UP THE ENGINE AGAIN UNLESS THE NOSE IS DOWN...

YEAGER (hard breathing, soft voice)

Say, Christamighty, whatsamatter ?....

Howcome yore nose won't stay down. Gotta light up your engine again. I cain't getcha goin without yore nose down...We got to get some air....We got problems...ole buddy....

HE'S IN A STEADY STATE FLAT SPIN AND DROPPING...THE ALTIMETER IS DROPPING...81,000....80,000.....R.P.M.'S ARE AT DEAD ZERO.

HE'S FALLING, FALLING...AND THE DAMNED BEAST ISN'T MAKING A SOUND. JUST SPINNING AROUND LIKE A LENGTH OF PIPE IN THE SKY...

120
BARELY ABLE TO STRUGGLE AGAINST THE CENTRIFUGAL FORCE, HE HITS
THE SPEED BRAKES...

(217)
cont.

YEAGER

Put...some brakes...on ye....
Hold on, there...hold....

BANGO ! THE CHUTE CATCHES WITH A JOLT ! It pulls the tail up.
Now he's going straight down...15,000...12,000 feet.

He jettisons the chute. THE BEAST HEAVES UP AGAIN ! THE NOSE
GOES BACK TO THE AIR !

IT BEGINS TO SPIN AND SPIN. 8,000 feet. We can see the earth
spinning toward us.

HE HUNCHES HIMSELF INTO A BALL, AND REACHES UNDER THE SEAT FOR
A CINCH RING. WHAM ! HE'S EXPLODED OUT OF THE COCKPIT WITH
TREMENDOUS FORCE. IT'S LIKE A CONCUSSION. HE'S HURLED INTO SPACE.

AND YEAGER BEGINS TO SLOWLY FLOAT AND FALL THROUGH THE SKY.
LIKE AN ANGEL...A FALLING ANGEL.

AND AS HE FALLS...HIS CHUTE OPENS...THE EJECTION SEAT BECOMES
ENTANGLED IN THE CHUTE...AND THE SEAT CRASHES INTO HIS VISOR.
HIS FACE IS ON FIRE AS HE FALLS...

CUT BACK TO:

^{INT}
HOUSTON. THE DOME. Smoke is rising around the Politician.

(218)

POLITICIAN

And now, in honor of the Most Important Pilots
in the History of Mankind, and our new neighbors,
we are real proud to present...MISS SALLY RAND !

THE BAND STRIKES UP "SUGAR BLUES" ...and out prances Sally Rand
carrying her enormous plumed fans, winking and mincing about...
and she knew things about moving pelvises and about moving fans
that may never be known again...as she shakes and wags and fans
for the Seven Brave Brothers and their Seven Brave Brides through
the smoke of the burning cows.

And then, a strange thing happens. We're on a CLOSE SHOT OF
ALAN SHEPARD, sitting next to Louise, his wife, and they have
bemused smiles that tell us they are being cordial enough...
but right then, THE MUSIC FADES. It's still there, of course,
because Sally Rand is bumping and grinding away; but now we're
in another dimension, as it were, and SHEPARD LOOKS ACROSS THE
CROWD AT GLENN. And Glenn feels his gaze and there's the slightest
of nods.

AND GLENN LOOKS AT GUS. AND GUS AT WALLY, and so on. And the
WIVES, TOO, are part of this perception that takes place in the
silence that occurs amidst this cacaphony of sound. They all
feel it as they look across this place filled with car salesmen
and roasting cows, with hunkered down photographers and swarming
pressmen...and they know something no one else there knows.

In the silence there's the faint music of a long-lost Pancho's playing, of a time of flyboys and pictures on the wall...BUT THE MAIN SOUND, THE SOUND THAT GROWS LOUDER AND LOUDER...AND LOUDER...IS OF A PLANE SCREAMING DOWN AND DOWN THROUGH THE SKIES (as under the opening credits, where we did not see it). UNTIL SUDDENLY...THE SCREEN EXPLODES IN FIRE.

BLACK SMOKE RISES IN THE DESERT.

220

LONG SHOT. THE SMOKE IN THE DISTANCE. A plane is burning out there, alone, in the twisted Joshua tree landscape.

THEN, IN THE FOREGROUND, AN INCREDIBLE APPARITION RISES UP IN SMOKE--

A BURNING HELMET -- WITH A MAN INSIDE ! Blood is pouring out of the man's left eye and there's smoke inside the helmet. He's trying to jam his hand through the hole in the visor...the oxygen is burning...he's gulping smoke...he's struggling...

With tremendous effort he lifts the broken visor. Salvation ! Like a sea the air carries it all away -- the smoke, the flames... The fire is out. YEAGER STANDS ALONE IN THE DESERT. Joshua trees all around. In the distance, black smoke rises from his crashed plane.

Some drops of blood fall from his hand onto the chute as he rolls it up. And he lifts the chute up and puts it under one arm, and picks up his helmet and puts it under the crook of the other arm. He turns, and we see: his eye socket is slashed, swollen, caked shut, and covered with a crust of burned blood. He looks around...And he begins to walk.

A lone figure in a pressure suit walking across the face of a planet -- it could be a moon, any moon at all. And he walks on and on.

EXT DESERT DAY

THE AMBULANCE is roaring through the nightmare of gnarled and twisted Joshua trees searching for any semblance of a human form. RIDLEY'S inside along with the two drivers.

221

DRIVER

Over there ! Is that a man ?

RIDLEY

Yer damn right it is !

They head off the road, tumbling across the desert toward the distant figure, walking in the setting sun.

Yeager walks with a steady pace, still carrying his rolled up parachute and the helmet in the crook of his arm...

And there's some MUSIC THAT SAYS...SOME MEN...SOME THINGS... NEVER DIE...

THEY'RE STILL OUT THERE IN THE HIGH DESERT...HEADED THIS WAY.

*continued **

CONTINUED:

(221)
cont.

MOVE IN ON THE SMOKE RISING FROM THE CRASHED PLANE, slowly, slowly.
AND SUDDENLY CUT TO:

INT - COOPER BEDROOM, VIRGINIA - DAWN

(222)

TRUDY WAKING UP IN BED FROM A NIGHTMARE.

The breeze is blowing the curtains. A CLANGING SOUND O.S.
She LOOKS OUT THE WINDOW:

The sun's not up yet, but the Press vehicles have already
pulled up in the darkness. CABLES ARE BEING LAID. ... And on
on a lawn across the way—
A STUPENDOUS AERIAL IS BEING ERECTED--EIGHT STORIES HIGH!

(223)

CUT TO: CARD: MAY 15, 1963
THE ROCKET WAITING BY THE SEA.

EXT - PRESS SITE #1 - DAWN

(224)

And a Walter Cronkite is there in the dawn's early light talking
to the entire world.

OUR CRONKITE

Astronaut Gordon Cooper has been waiting atop
the rocket loaded with 200,000 pounds of liquid
oxygen. What goes through a man's mind at a time
like this?

INT - CONTROL CENTRAL - SAME TIME

(225)

The countdown is in progress in B.G. A LIFE SCIENCES ENGINEER,
who has been monitoring the biomedical telemetry notices something
very odd.

LIFE SCIENCES ENGINEER

I don't believe this!

Everything stops for a moment.

LIFE SCIENCES ENGINEER

Every objective reading of the calibrations and
printout indicate...The guy's stacking Zs...
(what?)...The astronaut has gone to sleep.

CUT TO:

INT-CAPSULE - SAME TIME

(226)

Gordo: He's sitting there in the green glow of the capsule light, and

GORDO

ZZZZZZzzzzzzZZZZZZZZzzzzz.

John Glenn is Capcom, and takes the microphone. His voice carries
over the snoozing spaceman.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

(226)

(cont'd)

GLENN'S VOICE

Oh, Gordo? Gordo? We...ah...hate to disturb you. (Huh? wuzzit?)...But we've got a launch here (Huh? Oh yeah.)... And there's millions of folks around the world watching and...

GORDO

Hey, no sweat! Let's go!

INSIDE THE BLOCKHOUSE the countdown continues.

(227)

Somewhere nearby, A GROUNDCREW MAN in white coverall, does some last minute hammering--We don't see his face. It's Gus who notices him, and it's Gus who would remember the Hammering Man from the old days at Pancho's who put the pictures of the pilots on the wall.

INSIDE THE CAPSULE, GORDO WAITS. Through the window--now there's a big window on the capsule-- he can see seagulls swirling (a memory of Edwards).

(228)

EXT - PRESS SITE #1 - SAME TIME

(229)

The PRESS CLOSES IN. And the tremendous BLAST OFF IS reflected in their cameras. A HUGE WIND SWEEPS OVER THEM.

INT. - CONTROL CENTRAL

(230)

GLENN

Off we go!

EXT - LAUNCH AREA - DAY

(231)

And the rocket rides off the pad--And the music of the AIR FORCE HYMN begins to play, at first softly, under the incredible explosion. And then, as the rocket rises up and up, the MUSIC comes on stronger and stronger, until you can almost sing along:

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

MONTAGE:

EXTs - DAY

(232)

And all eyes are to the skies, and every body is watching, from the folks lining the shores, to the wives in Trudy's backyard. And the Press looks skyward, and Glenn and Shepard, and Gus:

GUS

Go, Hot Dawg! Go!

And the Friend of Widows and ORphans, and The Grand Designer, and Walter Cronkite....

INT- CAPSULE

(233)

And Gordo's inside, chewing up the space like an astro-rat-racer.

EXT - STOCK

(234)

And the tiny spacecraft goes up, and up, until it disappears in the wild blue yonder, and....

"Nothing can stop the Army Air Force."

END