

**THE RIGHT STUFF**

"Hotel Sierra"

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Based on the book by  
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National Geographic  
Warner Horizon  
Appian Way

TEASER

ON TWO EYES.

Extremely close, WIDE OPEN.

Beads of sweat dot a freckled forehead. Swatch of buzzed red hair peeks out from a leather head-covering, A FLIGHT HELMET.

But we can't be flying, because it's DEAD QUIET.

And now we're EASING BACK, almost imperceptibly, so the man's face, cocooned in his helmet, just comes into view. Breathing shallow, eyes darting. This is

JOHN GLENN, 31. And he's scared.

Glenn's lips are moving. We strain to make out what he's saying. Gibberish maybe. But then it sharpens, a whisper:

\*  
\*

GLENN

Not going to make it... I'm not  
going to make it...

Over and over again. A lament.

And now our PULL BACK has revealed a cockpit, a fighter jet. But the SILENCE is deafening. We EASE THROUGH THE CANOPY, see the jet in full from outside, notice a thin finger of

\*

BLACK SMOKE

bleeding from the jet's mangled left wing, an AILERON shot through, oil still smoldering. We're in the air. But not flying, not exactly. We're GLIDING.

\*

FALLING.

How close we are to the ground is unclear, because for now we only see the jet from SIDE-ON. And although we're outside the craft, we keep hearing Glenn's doleful whisper...

\*

GLENN (O.S.)

I'm not going to make it... I'm not  
going to make it.

WE SWING BEHIND THE JET, see its DORMANT ENGINE, and then PULL UP AND AWAY, TILTING DOWN so we finally see Glenn's plane from above, see what's in store for him below...

\*  
\*

THE OCEAN. A dark and haunting blue. Far as the eye can see.

From so high up, the breakers are as fleeting as spider silk catching sunlight. Here, then gone.

RISING faster now, heavenward, the crippled fighter growing smaller and smaller, fragile. Glenn a speck within a speck.

\*  
\*

But his disembodied whisper is right on top of us...

\*

GLENN (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Not going to make it, I'm not going  
to make it, I'm --

**INT. BUNK ROOM - NIGHT**

Glenn SHOOTs UP in bed, sharp intake of breath. Years later. He's 39, fireball crew-cut thinning. The boyish freckles around his eyes have folded into his crow's feet.

\*

He looks around, catches his breath. But we might as well still be in a dream, because we're looking at

TWO BUNK BEDS in an antiseptic space. College dorm rooms look like the Four Seasons in comparison. A lounge sags in one corner beneath a water stain on the ceiling. Not much else. Except for the other man in the room...

ALAN SHEPARD. He's picked the meat off the bone of every one of his 37 years. A restless quality to him. Lupine.

\*

GLENN  
Is it time?

\*

Shepard doesn't turn, is making his bed. Hospital corners.

SHEPARD  
Nope.

Glenn looks to a clock: 1:37 AM. A beat.

GLENN  
Think I'll go for a quick jog.

**EXT. BEACH - NIGHT**

Odd sight: John Glenn, in shorts and t-shirt, running on the beach in the dead of night. He's in the middle distance, the FULL MOON high overhead. Quiet lap of waves breaking ashore.

\*

\*

\*

And now, from off-screen, here comes Alan Shepard. Jogging down to the beach. He falls in line with Glenn.

Two future American heroes. Running side-by-side. Neither acknowledges the other. We might notice Shepard nosing ahead of Glenn. And then Glenn quickens his pace, retakes a small lead. They aren't running together.

They're competing.

The two go DASHING past us, kicking up sand, and we're...

\*

**INT. SHOWER ROOM - NIGHT**

STEAM. White Tile.

Glenn and Shepard, post-shower, in TERRY-CLOTH BATHROBES. Standing at sinks, shaving. Shepard flies the razor across his face without thought, autopilot.

ON GLENN as he shaves a patch near his Adam's apple. Wipes his face with a towel. Looks in the mirror. Seems lost. A searching gaze: *What is this...? What have I become...?* \*

*Who am I?* \*

Shepard SLAPS his shaven cheeks with aftershave and we're...

**INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT**

As with the other rooms in this clinical space, there isn't much to remark on here: white walls, a cheap, white dining table, white chairs. Glenn and Shepard sit in silence in their white robes. Eating breakfast in the middle of the night. And what's on their plates is even more peculiar... \*

Bacon-wrapped FILET MIGNON. TOAST. COFFEE. A fried EGG, over easy, the YELLOW-ORANGE YOLK a vibrant punch of color in this monochromatic setting. The clink of silverware. \*

GLENN

Tough life, huh? Filet mignon for breakfast?

(shakes head, smiles)

Hell.

Glenn looks up at Shepard, who goes on eating like he didn't hear a thing. Glenn nods to himself. He gets it. Nerves. \*

GLENN (cont'd)

This is a big deal. Russians are going to finally see what we can do. Day like today, a man's gotta think about what he's gonna say, you know? Gotta have something good. Something memorable. \*

ON SHEPARD'S PLATE, knife cutting into the hunk of meat. Eyes glued to the table, doesn't break from eating as...

SHEPARD

You're a great pilot, John. One of the best. And I got no doubt you'll be a good astronaut.

(chew, chew)

But you went chicken shit. Went behind my back. And you know I know that. So we don't have to sit here, pretend like we're best buddies. Even on a day like today. \*

Glenn stares. Shepard swallows, sips coffee. \*

SHEPARD (cont'd)  
 And no, a man shouldn't be thinking  
 about what he's going to say. A man  
 should be thinking about what he's  
 going to *do*.

(looks to plate)  
 Like right now, what I'm doing is,  
 I'm enjoying my breakfast.

Shepard finally looks over, LOCKS EYES with Glenn.

SHEPARD (cont'd)  
 And I'd like to eat in some goddamn  
 peace and quiet.

A beat. Glenn looks down. His half-eaten meal, decadent just  
 a moment ago, seems sad and embarrassing now.

KNOCK KNOCK. A door opens off-screen...

MAN (O.S.)  
 They're ready for you both.

Glenn slowly rises. He clears his throat. Low, small:

GLENN  
 See you out there.

Shepard lifts his coffee as a so-long. Glenn turns, exits.

Shepard alone in this lifeless space. Moment of solitude. He  
 takes a DEEP BREATH. Looks down at his plate. Didn't even  
 get to finish his breakfast. He PIERCES the egg with the tip  
 of his knife, and as the yolk spills through the membrane...

**EXT. COCOA BEACH - DAY**

THE SUN oozes over the horizon of the ATLANTIC OCEAN.

DAYBREAK. But here's something strange: beachgoers are  
 already tromping down to the sand, staking claims, spreading  
 blankets. A man unfolds a beach chair, but instead of  
 orienting it directly toward the ocean, he angles it out at  
 a specific point to the north...

And now we notice that all the other early birds have done  
 the same thing...

A woman squints, shields her eyes from the rising sun. A man  
 points at something unseen up the beach. A young boy sitting  
 in the sand lifts an empty COKE BOTTLE skyward, a pretend  
 rocket, the sun refracting through the prismatic glass...

RADIO (V.O.)  
 All across the country, Americans  
 are gathered at this early hour...

**INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - DAY**

NEW YORK CITY: hats and fashion, busy commuters. But we're...

PUSHING IN SLOWLY on a LARGE CLUTCH OF MEN AND WOMEN gathered around a TV at a NEWSSTAND as live coverage of the Mercury countdown plays...

RADIO (V.O.)

A public besieged by a climate of  
fear since the day the Soviet Union  
launched Sputnik now takes part in  
an agonizing wait...

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

**INT. WISCONSIN BARN - DAY**

A dairy farmer in overalls listens intently to his radio. The tension of a nation concentrated in his pupils, a lit cigarette forgotten between his fingers...

RADIO (V.O.)

A rocket meant to deliver a nuclear  
payload sits on a launch pad here  
at Cape Canaveral, in Florida...

\*

**EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL - DAY**

ABRAHAM LINCOLN looms over a moment he couldn't have fathomed: a black janitor has paused his work, a TRANSISTOR RADIO held to his ear, while a white D.C. apparatchik stands beside him, straining to hear the latest...

\*

RADIO (V.O.)

Engineers are monitoring every  
fathomable variable at what is  
being called the 'Mercury Control  
Center...'

\*

**EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY**

LOS ANGELES: we're LOOKING DOWN on what was then called the SANTA MONICA FREEWAY. SCORES OF CARS have pulled to the shoulder, the drivers inside so enthralled that to operate a vehicle while listening to the news would be hazardous...

\*  
\*

RADIO (V.O.)

Just hours from now, a new chapter  
in American history will begin...

\*

**EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY**

BACK TO FLORIDA: we're still at a birds-eye view, but now we're above a SCHOOLYARD as RIVULETS OF CHILDREN stream from classrooms, children pointing up, teachers ushering them, the lesson today in the skies above...

RADIO (V.O.)

One man will climb into the space  
capsule and launch beyond Earth's  
atmosphere...

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - ROOFTOP - DAY**

A TRIO OF BUSINESS MEN in dress shirts descend the ladder of  
the building's rooftop, squinting out toward The Cape...

RADIO (V.O.)

He will glimpse Earth as no  
American has before...

**EXT. CHURCH - DAY**

TWO NUNS outside a church. Peering out for evidence of the  
new American god. Backs turned to the house of their lord...

RADIO (V.O.)

He will see the world again, for  
the first time.

**EXT. CAPE CANAVERAL - DAY**

ORANGE fills the screen. ABSOLUTE QUIET. Eerie.

But now we're PULLING BACK. And we realize the flaming  
ORANGE is actually the paint job on a structure...

Metal girders and exhaust funnels. The ESCAPE TOWER attached  
to the Freedom 7 Capsule. We keep PULLING BACK, taking in  
the entire capsule now, an unseen astronaut locked inside...

We now reveal the hulking mass of the MERCURY-REDSTONE  
ROCKET, its aluminum fuselage filled with rocket fuel, a  
fragile container of potential chaos. But here, now, it's  
serene. Almost reverent. The towering rocket like a DEITY.

We PULL FURTHER OUT, taking in the gantry, the launchpad.  
The surrounding land, flat and deserted. It all looks so  
lonely. Finally, the silence is broken. An unmoored voice:

MERCURY CONTROL (O.S.)

Ten, night, eight, seven...

Here we go, the hinge moment of the 20th Century...

MERCURY CONTROL (O.S.) (cont'd)

Six, five, four...

But we'll just have to wait for all that...

MERCURY CONTROL (O.S.) (cont'd)

Three, two...

CUT TO BLACK

ACT ONE

CARD OVER BLACK: **"TWO YEARS EARLIER"**

\*

HARD CUT TO:

BLOOD.

A coagulating bulls-eye soiling WHITE CARPET. We are...

**INT. COOPER HOUSE - DAY**

ON GORDO COOPER, 32. Face down on the carpet. Passed out. Or dead. But then he lifts his head...

GORDO'S POV: a shimmery field of DIAMONDS. But as his eyes focus, we see that it's actually

SHARDS OF GLASS. Some smeared with blood. And blood closer to Gordo. He lifts his hand, turns it over...

GORDO

Shit.

A JAGGED GASH in his palm, semi-congealed. Gordo sits up with difficulty. The TINKLE OF GLASS falling off his body. He stares at his wound, hungover. The sound of a TELEVISION off-screen. Gordo looks up. An ANCHOR delivers news:

\*

\*

ANCHOR (ON TV)

\*

Democrats in Congress are laying blame at President Eisenhower's feet after the Soviet Union successfully launched a dog named 'Laika' into orbit, further widening America's gap in space exploration.

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

The report shows a picture of an expressionless terrier. Gordo squints -- is he still dreaming? THE FRONT DOOR opens.

\*

\*

MAN (O.S.)

Well peas and rice, what have we here?

Gordo turns to find BUD JENNINGS, 30s. Sweet face, ready smile. Has an easy confidence and an unbreakable spirit.

\*

GORDO

I didn't even drink that much.

BUD

Compared to what? A water buffalo?

Bud helps Gordo to his feet. They move toward the bathroom.



BUD (cont'd)  
 Now I didn't break any glass  
 tables, but after you left? Boy  
 howdy there were fireworks in my  
 marriage bed, tell you what...

**INT. SHOWER - DAY**

ON GORDO'S PALM, fingers splayed, as water rains down across  
 the wound. Bud is on the other side of the shower curtain,  
 voice raised to be heard above the din.

BUD (O.S.)  
 So then Loretta says to me, she  
 says, 'course I like when we do it  
 normal, that's peachy as hell, but  
 it's *my* turn to say what's what.  
 And so I'm thinking: okay, well,  
 what *is* what? And that's when she  
 drags in this bar stool...

Gordo inspects his palm, blood cleared away. Not so bad...

BUD (O.S.) (cont'd)  
 Shit, Gordo, I shouldn't be telling  
 you this, it's my wife after all.

Gordo removes his hand from the shower stream. FRESH BLOOD  
 immediately gushes from the wound, pours over his fingers...

**INT. BATHROOM - DAY**

Gordo stands in a towel while Bud wraps GAUZE around and  
 around his palm... \*

BUD  
 So I said, what, you think I don't  
 know the female anatomy? And she  
 looks at me Gordo, and she says,  
 'Matter of fact, Bud, you don't  
 know the first thing about it.'  
 (tapes off gauze)  
 Test that paw for me, cowboy.  
 (as Gordo flexes palm)  
 So then I say maybe it's time for  
 me to go to *school* if what you're  
 saying is I don't know boo about  
 the ladyform... \*

Gordo picks up his watch from the sink, eyes flashing.

GORDO  
 Shit, we're gonna be late. \*

BUD  
 (following after)  
 Christ, you get me talkin', shame  
 on you...

**INT. BUD'S CAR - DAY**

Bud drives, Gordo in the passenger seat.

BUD  
 Truth be told, all I learned about  
 pleasing a lady I got from Billy  
 Vanderkamp in fifth grade, he's  
 that bastard kid who got the  
 railroad spike shot through his  
 skull? Couldn't say his R's and  
 pissed himself whenever the church  
 bells rang? So an incomplete  
 education is what I'm getting at --

GORDO  
 Anybody asks, I cut this fixing my  
 water heater, all right?

Bud pulls to a stop, kills the ignition. We don't see where  
 they are. Must be the parking lot at work. Gordo opens and  
 closes his palm as if it's a transplanted limb. Bud turns to  
 him, suddenly serious.

BUD  
 Hey, no shame in calling in sick,  
 Gordo. The brass don't need any  
 hiccups. Not with the way things  
 are going in the world.

Gordo opens the car door. As he gets out...

GORDO  
 Just another day at the office.

And now we PIVOT AROUND to follow Gordo and Bud as they  
 hustle over to

TWO HULKING F-104 JETS. Gassed and ready on the tarmac,  
 ground crews at the ready.

Gordo and Bud go dashing past A SIGN in the foreground, its  
 paint faded from the punishing desert elements:

"EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE"

Gordo Cooper is injured and hungover, maybe still drunk. And  
 yet he's about to blast off in fourteen tons of unproven  
 taxpayer fighter craft. He's an AIR FORCE TEST PILOT.

As he and Bud approach their jets...

FOOOOOOM! A FIGHTER JET ROCKETS down the runway and SCREAMS into the air, taking us to...

**INT. FEDERAL OFFICE BUILDING - DAY**

A polite KNOCK-KNOCK as a man opens a door, trepidatiously peeks his head into the unmarked office. This is

GLYNN LUNNEY, 21. Takes one look around, realizes he's in the wrong place. Mumbles to the TWO MEN sifting through cardboard boxes in the empty office, backs out... \*

LUNNEY

Sorry...

KRAFT

Get in here and shut the goddamn door.

This is CHRIS KRAFT, mid-30s. Rolled-up sleeves, tie slung over his shoulder. Burgeoning jowls that pull his mouth into a slight frown. Lunney halts, lifts an abashed smile.

LUNNEY

Oh, I'm actually looking for the Aeronautics and Space Administration?

(re: clipboard in hand)

It's my first day and I've got to deliver this --

KRAFT

Where are you from?

LUNNEY

(taken aback)

Uh... Old Forge, Pennsylvania? \*

The other man looks up: BOB GILRUTH, 46, balding, piercing eyes that never seem to blink. \*

GILRUTH

I knew a guy from Old Forge. Family had a goat farm.

KRAFT

Do goats shit in your ears in Old Forge, Pennsylvania?

LUNNEY

No, sir... \*

KRAFT

So it's safe to say that there is no goat shit impeding your ability to understand human speech. \*

LUNNEY

Yessir?

GILRUTH

Is that the list of test pilots?

LUNNEY

(dawning horror)

Yessir...

KRAFT

Kid. Get *in* here.

GILRUTH

And shut the goddamn door.

Lunney's mouth parts. He looks around: a moldering drop-ceiling, broken mini-blinds, mimeographs piled on tables.

KRAFT

Welcome to NASA.

Somehow, this is the crucible of America's space program. From Lunney's open mouth, a sound is escaping, a HIGH MOAN of regret. But no, it's actually...

\*  
\*

**EXT. EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE - DAY**

THE SCREAM OF TWO F104 STARFIGHTERS streaking RIGHT PAST US in the clear Mojave sky...

**GORDO'S PLANE**

In the cockpit with Gordo, desert landscape flying by. We're a hundred feet off the ground, Bud's plane in sight up ahead.

\*  
\*

Gordo PULLS BACK ON THE STICK and BANKS RIGHT, arcing up into the sky at a dizzying ascent. It's balletic and stomach-churning all at once...

\*

**BUD'S PLANE**

Bud pulls into level flight above a CLOUD BED colored yellow by the low sun. Looks out at the world from on high.

\*  
\*

BUD

By God, isn't that beautiful...

It's corny, but here's the thing: it *is* beautiful. So beautiful it hurts. Bud thumbs his COM BUTTON:

BUD (cont'd)

What do you say, Gordo? Good to throttle up?

\*  
\*

**GORDO'S PLANE**

Gordo BLINKS, pekid face, cold sweat. He glances at a SMALL CHECKLIST: the parameters to be tested on today's run. \*

ON GORDO'S BANDAGED HAND: He grips the throttle tighter... \*

GORDO

Let's see which bolts are loose.

As Gordo PUSHES THE THROTTLE TO THE FLOOR, the engines open up with an ear-splitting ROAR as we CUT TO: \*

**INT. NASA OFFICES - DAY**

TOTAL SILENCE. ON A TYPED LIST of names. Abstractions.

GILRUTH (O.S.)

This is all of them?

The page FLIPS, curling over the clipboard: MORE NAMES...

LUNNEY (O.S.)

Best test pilots in the military,  
yes sir.

FLIP, FLIP: more pages, more names. Gilruth looks up at Lunney, confused. \*

GILRUTH

How come there's no Marines?

LUNNEY

Oh, the Navy guys told me all the best test pilots go to them, and that the also-rans get booted to the Marines. \*

Kraft, leaning against a nearby desk, bows his head, as if it suddenly weighs a thousand pounds. Gilruth turns to him. \*

GILRUTH

Chris, this guy here says the Navy, which has a universally acknowledged rivalry with the Marines, tells him there's no good Marine pilots. Would you baste that turkey? \*

Kraft shakes his bowed head. Gilruth opens a drawer, removes

A BLACK MAGIC MARKER

He uncaps the pen, CROSSES OUT A NAME on the list -- SHICK. Lunney squints, confused, takes a half-step toward Gilruth. \*

LUNNEY

I'll find some Marines, but --

*SHHHICK*: Gilruth crosses out another name. *SHHHICK*: and another. Lunney points...

LUNNEY (cont'd)

No, see that's Andy Holt, he's --

GILRUTH

A war hero.

*SHHHICK*. Andy Holt's name disappears under the redacting line of the magic marker as... \*

**EXT. SKY - DAY**

FOOOM! Bud's F104 goes sailing by in the upper atmosphere.

BUD (ON RADIO)

Smooth as silk up here.

**GORDO'S PLANE**

Careful breaths: in, out. Gordo looks terrible. On the MACHMETER. It's pegged at 0.70 -- 70% the speed of sound. \*

BUD (ON RADIO)

I'm gonna push her over.

GORDO

Drexel will go ballistic if he finds out. \*

BUD (ON RADIO)

We're out of radar contact -- he ain't gonna find out. \*

Gordo blinks, breathes. Fear fighting pride. \*

GORDO

Okay, right in your wake.

Gordo applies steady pressure to the throttle. We hear his LABORED BREATHS...

ON THE MACHMETER: 0.70... 0.75... 0.80...

The fuselage begins to RATTLE... \*

ON GORDO'S HAND, gripping the throttle for dear life...

**BUD'S PLANE** \*

The BLUR of the instrument panel, VIBRATIONS strong enough that we can hear the shuddering complaint of the airframe as it approaches the speed of sound: 0.85... 0.90...

Bud's teeth might clatter out of his head, eyeballs jelly out of their sockets. But he's calm. This is NORMAL. \*

**INT. NASA OFFICES - DAY**

CLOSE ON THE REFLECTION in Lunney's EYEGLASSES: the LIST OF PILOTS. It's QUIET, except for the sound of Gilruth's marker, crossing out a name here, a name there...

GILRUTH  
Kid, every trade has its occupational quirks...

**GORDO'S PLANE**

ON GORDO'S HAND: we notice a little BLOOD has started to soak through the bandage. Gordo is HYPERVENTILATING. The incessant VIBRATIONS. He's having trouble concentrating...

**NASA**

PUSHING SLOWLY IN on the list, the names taking up the whole frame. SHHHICK goes the marker...

GILRUTH (O.S.)  
Lawyers cheat on their spouses...

**BUD'S PLANE**

VIBRATING LIKE CRAZY, but then it clears MACH 1 and everything calms, the resonance subsiding... \*

BUD  
Through the bubble... \*

**GORDO'S PLANE**

Gordo's eyes FLARE, the instrument panel a BLUR. He fights to find focus when... \*

BLOOD STARTS POURING IN A STREAM down his arm...

GILRUTH (V.O.)  
Politicians take bribes...

Gordo brings up his wounded hand, the bandage saturated RED. \*

He finally tugs back on the throttle... \*

He's sitting this one out.

**NASA**

SHHHICK, SHHHICK...

GILRUTH  
Writers like to drink...

**BUD'S PLANE**

Calm, sky like glass, cruising above the speed of sound. Bud nudges the control stick a hair to the left when suddenly...

The craft WRENCHES sideways and

Bud's helmet

*SLAMS*

against one side

of the canopy and then

CRACK!

HITS the other side,

SPIDER-WEBBING the glass...

**GORDO'S PLANE**

Gordo watches as Bud's 104, a speck in the distance, starts WHIRLING in a FLAT SPIN...

GORDO

Bud?!

**IN THE SKY**

We're FALLING WITH BUD'S PLANE, watching as it windmills.

GILRUTH (V.O.)

And test pilots?

**GORDO'S PLANE**

Gordo watches helplessly as Bud's plane falls like a rock.

GORDO

BUD!

**BUD'S PLANE**

FRIGHTENINGLY QUIET as Bud's head is tossed from side to side. He's UNCONSCIOUS. The world a smear outside the cockpit as we SPIN and FALL in an almost graceful pirouette...

\*

**NASA**

THE BLACKED-OUT NAMES, the killing marker...

GILRUTH (O.S.)

Well test pilots have a particularly odd habit...



**DESERT SKY**

LOOKING DOWN AS WE PLUMMET HELPLESSLY TOWARD EARTH, the  
desert floor COMING RIGHT AT US, FAST APPROACHING and...

\*

BLACK. Hold...

GILRUTH (O.S.)  
A lot of them die.

HARD CUT TO:

A NAME, typewritten, taking up the entire screen...

**BUD JENNINGS**

SHHHHICKKKK...

The marker BLACKS IT OUT. The erasure of a man. Horrible.

GILRUTH  
I asked for the best test pilots in  
the United States. Well your list  
is out of date, son: none of the  
best test pilots are dead.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

Gilruth flips back the pages on the list, looks at Lunney.

\*

GILRUTH (cont'd)  
What we're doing here has  
consequences for the entire world.  
We got a cold war that wants to  
turn hot. And we don't have time  
for do-overs.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

Gilruth POPS the clipboard against Lunney's chest as...

\*

PRIEST (PRELAP)  
If I make my bed in the depths, you  
are there...

**EXT. CEMETERY - DAY**

San Diego. Air Force Funeral. Cemetery by the sea. A PRIEST  
gives a graveside eulogy...

PRIEST  
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the  
sea, even there your hand will  
guide me...

PUSHING IN ON GORDO COOPER in his dress blues, a young girl  
at his side. This is his daughter, CAMALA (CAM) COOPER, 8,  
blond ringlets, squinting in the California sun.

Solemn crowd, all eyes on the priest. Except for Gordo, who is locked on to someone off-screen... \*

LORETTA JENNINGS. Bud's widow, lost gaze. \*

Gordo watches her. But now we MOVE OFF him so that we favor CAM, who also stares unwaveringly. But she's looking at... \*

LORETTA'S DAUGHTER, also 8, eyes cast down. Lost. We move closer and closer. And then she finally... \*

LOOKS UP and LOCKS EYES WITH CAM. Cam BLINKS, struck with horror. She could be looking in the mirror. Her ghost lifts a hand, gives a small wave as... \*

BOOM! Unseen AIR FORCE JETS do a flyby overhead. But Cam doesn't even blink. She just stares at the girl. \*

Haunted.

**INT. SAN DIEGO HOUSE - DAY**

Spanish style home. The quiet clutch of a memorial service. Black hats, deviled eggs.

Cam peers through a window that looks onto the front yard, where two young boys whack a lemon tree with a broom handle.

Gordo enters, watches his daughter a moment. Murmurings from elsewhere in the house, but here it's just the two of them. \*

GORDO  
Doing okay, sweetie?

CAM  
They're going to move away now,  
aren't they? Like always happens.

GORDO  
Yeah. Probably they will.

CAM  
You know that boy Bobby Kerpata? \*

GORDO  
Yeah I know Bobby Kerpata.

CAM  
He said when they found Mr.  
Jennings's plane? That three of his  
teeth were embedded in the  
altimeter. What's embedded mean?

A beat.

GORDO  
What else did Bobby say?

CAM

Said you're going to die.  
 (off Gordo)  
 That all you test pilots will. But  
 his dad won't. Because his dad  
 decided not to be a pilot anymore.

GORDO

Well you tell Bobby Kerpata that  
 the reason his dad isn't a pilot  
 anymore is because he wasn't good  
 enough, okay? He doesn't have it,  
 doesn't have the --

\*

AHEM. Gordo turns. His wife, TRUDY COOPER, 32, has just entered the room. Pursed smile, poise and confidence. The ability to command attention without saying a word.

TRUDY

(to Gordo)  
 I thought you might want to join in  
 paying our respects.

Cam turns from the window. She walks past Gordo and Trudy, on her way out to play with the boys.

GORDO

That Kerpata kid is filling her  
 head with garbage.

TRUDY

Yes. I'm sure you set the record  
 straight. Told her you're made of  
 steel. And that you'll never die.

OFF GORDO...

**EXT. SAN DIEGO HOME - LATER**

Cam runs around the lawn, chased by the two boys. New friends. Gordo and Trudy step out onto the front porch.

GORDO

You gone up at all?

TRUDY

Did some pattern work in a little  
 Cub. Touch-and-gos. Some night  
 landings to stay current.

Turns out Trudy's a PILOT. But despite having this in common, there's an odd distance between husband and wife.

Trudy notices Gordo's hand, still bandaged but freshly dressed, less conspicuous.

TRUDY (cont'd)  
Do I want to know?

GORDO  
(turning over palm)  
Was opening a can of paint. Lost my  
grip on the screwdriver.

\*  
\*

Trudy knows it's bullshit. Gordo checks his watch.

GORDO (cont'd)  
Gotta fly early tomorrow.

TRUDY  
Gordo, you gotta slow down. Just  
for a while. Put in a request, C-  
131s or something.

\*

GORDO  
Transports? Jesus, Trudy.

TRUDY  
Why are you doing this? So that  
when a war breaks out, you can go  
be a hero?

\*  
\*  
\*

GORDO  
I'm good at what I do.

\*  
\*

TRUDY  
Yeah, well it's ruining you. It  
already ruined us.  
(eyes Cam)  
And I'll kill you if it ruins her.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

Trudy holds Gordo's gaze as CAM trots up.

\*

CAM  
You really gotta go now?

GORDO  
It's a long drive, cutie pie.

Gordo hugs Trudy. A cold parting. He turns, takes Cam's  
hand. They walk down to his car, out of Trudy's earshot.

CAM  
It's just dumb. Can't someone else  
take care of Grandma? She doesn't  
even seem that sick.

\*  
\*

GORDO  
Sometimes people look like one  
thing but down deep there's  
something else going on. She needs  
your mom. And your mom needs you.

They reach Gordo's car. A beat. Something on Cam's mind. \*

CAM  
Dad, I'm scared.

GORDO  
Scared of what?

CAM  
Well... what if the Russians shoot  
at us? With that thing they got up  
in the sky. \*

GORDO  
Bobby Kerpata tell you that?

CAM  
It was on the news. \*

Gordo looks at Cam. Puts a fatherly hand on her head.

GORDO  
Don't you worry about any Russians,  
okay?

CAM  
We'll go back to normal, right? You  
and me and Mom?

A beat. The yearning look on Cam's face.

GORDO  
Of course.

CAM  
Promise.

Gordo looks like he might break down. He loves his daughter.  
And so he says the only thing a father can say. \*

GORDO  
I promise. \*

**INT. GORDO'S CAR - DAY**

SLAM goes the driver's door. Gordo starts the engine. He  
glances in the rearview mirror: CAM, looking right back at  
him. And in this moment, Gordo knows that Trudy is right. He  
must change something. Or he'll wind up dead. \*

Gordo puts the car in gear, and as he eases onto the street  
and pulls away, we see Cam receding into the distance, her  
tiny hand waving like mad until she's small and gone and  
Gordo's eyes shift to the empty road ahead and we...

CUT TO BLACK

ACT TWO**INT. NASA OFFICES - DAY**

A HIVE OF ACTIVITY, the opposite of the desolate office space from earlier. A FOREMAN hollers directives. PAINTERS roll paint onto walls, MOVERS heft furniture, CARPENTERS drill and hammer, SECRETARIES set up desks.

And in the middle of it all, Gilruth sits atop a desk, huddled with Kraft, scratching calculations on scrap paper. They speak quietly, as though they exist on a different plane in the universe from the hustle and bustle around them.

KRAFT

Jupiter C power plant wide open,  
maybe you can get ballistic...

GILRUTH

Specific impulse in the first stage  
at two-hundred...

KRAFT

Call it two-fifteen. Burn time  
approximately one forty with  
Seventy-five, twenty-five ethyl.

GILRUTH

Maybe hydyne-dimethyl.

Hushed, almost intimate. Two men incubating a space program that will soon be the world's envy. The real work, the unsung work. Kraft suddenly looks up from his scribblings.

KRAFT

Are we crazy?

GILRUTH

Chris, we're trying to shoot a man  
beyond planet Earth on a silo of  
fire. It's bedtime for Bonzo -- of  
course we're crazy.

The door opens. Lunney dashes in, waving a clipboard.

LUNNEY

New list!

Kraft grabs the clipboard, quickly scans the pages.

KRAFT

Well paint my pecker: he even found  
you a Marine, Bob.

GILRUTH

One whole Marine? Who is it?

KRAFT

John Glenn.

GILRUTH

Oh, I love John Glenn! He was on  
Name That Tune! \*

KRAFT

And Project Bullet -- you know  
about Project Bullet, kid?

Lunney opens his mouth to answer, doesn't get the chance.

GILRUTH

And Korea? The guy shoots down a  
bunch of MiGs, gets his own wing  
blown apart in the process, somehow  
glides unpowered over the ocean,  
lands back at base... \*

KRAFT

Then jumps in a new plane and races  
out to find his downed wingman. How  
could you put together a list and  
not include Johnny Glenn?

GILRUTH

He named *all* the tunes, Lunney! \*

KRAFT

John Glenn, that's good.

GILRUTH

Yeah, Johnny Glenn...

Kraft and Gilruth nod in tandem, looking off. A thought hits  
Gilruth. He turns to Lunney.

GILRUTH (cont'd)

How old is he?

**INT. WINDOWLESS OFFICE - DAY**

MOVING PAST SCHEMATICS that are pinned to dimly-lit CORK  
WALLS: extruded views of AIRPLANES, COCKPITS, ENGINES. A  
draftsman's fine BLOCK FONT identifies each component: \*  
flight helmets, avionics, landing gear. \*

A SPACE SUIT. A ROCKET.

SUPER: "NAVY BUREAU OF AERONAUTICS"

CLOSE ON JOHN GLENN. Or, a black-and-white PHOTO of him. \*  
Emerging from the cockpit of a VOUGHT F8U CRUSADER, smiling. \*  
FLIP: the photo disappears, replaced by printed copy...

We're looking at a MAGAZINE article about Glenn. And we now REVEAL the man who's reading it...

JOHN GLENN himself. Unlike his photo, he isn't smiling. And he doesn't seem to hear the blabbering of a MAN off-screen:

MAN (O.S.)

I mean, do you call it a cosmonaut  
or an astronaut. Argonaut's for  
balloon pilots, so that's taken...

\*

Glenn scans the paragraphs. Face of growing fury.

\*

MAN (O.S.) (cont'd)

Me, I go with cosmonaut, because  
cosmos, that's *everything*, near  
space, outer space, *all* of it...

REVEAL THE MAN, MARTY SCHNELLHAM, 40s. Clearly an engineer: thick glasses, bushy mustache, never heard of exercise. The two men share the cramped office. Schnellham rocks in a squeaky chair at his desk opposite Glenn.

SCHNELLHAM

Whereas astronaut, hell, that's the  
stars. But nobody's going to the  
*stars*, at least not this cent--

GLENN

*Ridiculous.*

\*

Glenn FLINGS the magazine across the room, looks off. A beat. Schnellham slowly edges out of his seat. Picks up the magazine off. Sits back down, starts to read.

\*

\*

\*

SCHNELLHAM

The gleaming metal fusel--

GLENN

Skip to the last part.

Schnellham turns the pages, clears his throat.

SCHNELLHAM

Project Bullet set a record which  
will not soon be broken. But at  
thirty-eight...

Schnellham stops. Looks up. Glenn, eyes lost, finishes it off for him, having committed the daggered prose to memory.

\*

GLENN

But at thirty-eight, Major Glenn  
has reached the practical age limit  
for piloting complicated pieces of  
machinery through the air.

(MORE)



GLENN (cont'd)  
 And so it falls to a new generation  
 of daredevils to best Glenn's feat  
 and take the nation beyond this  
 career-capping accomplishment.  
 (raises brow)  
 I get all that right?

SCHNELHAM  
 (points)  
 Says *achievement*, not  
 accomplishment.

Glenn is not amused. Schnellham tosses the magazine back on  
 Glenn's desk.

SCHNELHAM (cont'd)  
 It's not that bad, John.

Glenn grabs a TRASH CAN from under his desk.

GLENN  
 It's a eulogy.

He SCOOPS the magazine into the trash. A beat.

Schnellham reaches up to the wall behind him and snatches a  
 schematic of a SPACE CAPSULE from its pinioned place on the  
 cork. He holds it out in front on Glenn, TAP-TAP-TAPS it.

SCHNELHAM  
*This* is your next achievement.  
 You're helping to *make* it.

GLENN  
 I don't care about making it. I  
 want to fly it.

SCHNELHAM  
 You wouldn't be *flying* anything.  
 You'd be two tons of dead weight.

GLENN  
 No, I'd be the first man in space.

SCHNELHAM  
 You already have enough glory, John.

GLENN  
 Every school kid will know the name  
 of the first American to go into  
 space. His face will be everywhere.  
 And he'll never be forgotten.  
 That's not glory.  
 (solemn nod)  
 That's history.

**EXT. BACK YARD - GLENN HOME - DAY**

ON LYN GLENN, 9, climbing in a large OAK TREE. Humming to herself, the theme song to HOPPALONG CASSIDY.

In the background, the modest GLENN HOME. Fresh paint. Picket fence.

**INT. GLENN HOME - DAY**

WHITE ROSES, freshly cut from the yard, are bunched on a small dish towel. ANNIE GLENN, 38, hums her own tune, a HYMN, as she REACHES for a VASE from a high cupboard.

**THE BACK YARD**

Lyn HOISTS herself onto a branch, steps out. Slips, losing her balance, pony tail swinging, but she rights herself. She stands tall and... \*

JUMPS. Lands in the grass. The forgiving joints of youth. \*

**THE HOUSE**

WATER pours from the faucet in the sink. ON ANNIE as she CUTS the stem of each rose at a diagonal under the stream. HUMMING the words of the Lord. \*

**THE BACKYARD**

Lyn SCALES the tree again. Her humming melds with bird calls and the gentle susuruss of summer insects.

Lyn edges out onto the branch. CREAK of wood, the complaint of a tree limb. She looks down. HUMMING her sweet tune. \*

**THE HOUSE**

SNAP! ANNIE'S garden shears SLICE a rose stem. SNAP! She cuts another. The vibrant GREEN of the exposed stalks. Into the vase they go. \*

**THE BACKYARD**

Lyn -- HUM, HUM -- stands tall. Then JUMPS and

HITS THE GRASS. EYES GO WIDE, MOUTH AGAPE.

**THE HOUSE**

SNAP! as the shears cut through another stem and...

AN AGONIZING SCREAM. Annie SPINS, knocking the vase to the floor. It SHATTERS. The DOOR BURSTS OPEN. Lyn stumbles in, SHRIEKING, BLOOD soaking one leg, streaming out behind her. \*

ANNIE'S EYES FLARE. She RUNS, SCOOPS LYN UP...

But Annie is oddly SILENT, her mouth CONVULSING as she holds her daughter close. She SPINS, dashes into the

LIVING ROOM. She YANKS the receiver from the rotary phone. Trembling fingers. The long pull of the ZERO for the...

\*  
\*

FEMALE VOICE (PHONE)

Operator.

SHRIEKING. BLOOD FLOWING onto the floor. Lyn FLAILING.

CLOSE ON A LONG NAIL IN LYN'S FOOT. Embedded up through her ANKLE. Long, jagged rips in her flesh.

\*

ANNIE'S FROZEN MOUTH, TEARS running down her face.

OPERATOR (PHONE)

Hello, is there an emergency?

Annie might be having a convulsion. The staccato of aborted syllables. And by now we'll know. She has a STUTTER.

\*

SHRIEKING. BLOOD.

OPERATOR (PHONE) (cont'd)

I need an address. Hello?

\*

Annie's cheeks KICKING, face COLLAPSING, hands QUAVERING...

\*

OPERATOR (PHONE) (cont'd)

Hello...?

BANG: Annie SLAMS the phone down and picks it back up again, DIALS FURIOUSLY, this time a full number as...

**INT. WINDOWLESS OFFICE - DAY**

RING RING. John Glenn picks up, hears LYN'S SCREAMING.

\*

GLENN

Hello?

And from the halting plosive sounds underneath the screams, he knows. Glenn SHOTS OUT OF HIS CHAIR...

\*

\*

GLENN (cont'd)

Annie?!

**INT. HOSPITAL - EXAM ROOM - DAY**

ON LYN, brave, as a needle pokes her skin, sutures the wound. John and Annie sit along the wall. Annie looks drained.

ON ANNIE'S BACK. John starts rubbing it. Whispers in her ear.

GLENN

It's okay. It's all right, my baby.

Slow circles, a calming circuit. But Annie doesn't appear soothed. She shuts her eyes. Wants to say something. The horrible effort of it all. Whispered:

ANNIE

I...

Her voice catches. ON GLENN'S HAND, closer, the *shush-shush* of his palm on the fabric of her sweater. There, there...

ANNIE (cont'd)

I -- I'm-m...

The doctor pokes and pulls the stitches. Lyn watches, calm.

CLOSE ON ANNIE AND JOHN, her shuddering lips to his ear. SHUSH-SHUSH goes his hand on her back. Finally, like whispered buckshot, a collapse, a plea...

ANNIE (cont'd)

I'm not a *child*, John.

ON ANNIE'S BACK: John's circular shushing stops, and he presses his palm FLAT TO HER BACK. She's right. He pulls her close, man and wife, and we're...

**INT. SHEPARD HOME - BEDROOM - DAY**

CLOSE ON THE BACK OF ALAN SHEPARD, here 36, as he pulls on his Navy dress coat. A WOMAN'S HAND appears, presses to his back. He turns. It's his wife, LOUISE SHEPARD, 37.

LOUISE

Going somewhere?

SHEPARD

I just heard. There's a retirement.  
Or... a funeral. Something.  
(off Louise)

Bob Buck's going to be there.

LOUISE

Will you be back tonight?

A weighted moment. Shepard sharpens.

SHEPARD

I'm going to see Bob Buck. And then  
I'm coming home.

BOY (O.S.)

Mom! I'm hungry as a *walrus*!

Louise brushes dust off Shepard's shoulder board. She might believe him, she might not. But her eyes almost shrug, a look that says: we'll see, but I've got your number.

LOUISE  
Well then say hi to Bob for me.

Louise exits. OFF ALAN as we PRELAP LAUGHTER...

**INT. OFFICER'S CLUB - NIGHT**

MOVING WITH SHEPARD, a ropey bundle of nerves, as he passes Naval officers in clusters. Scotch and jokes.

SUPER: "ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND"

Shepard closes in on BOB BUCK, late 50s, true Navy man. The kind of guy who prays for a storm so he can find a new young port. He stands with an older officer, trading tall tales. Shepard sidles up. Bob Buck smiles. \*

BUCK  
Rex, you know Alan Shepard? Most talented test pilot the Navy's --

SHEPARD  
I need more hours, Bob.

Bob Buck's smile ticks down. He nods to Rex. \*

BUCK  
'Scuse us a minute.

Bob Buck claps an arm around Shepard's shoulder. They amble toward the bar. \*

BUCK (cont'd)  
How's that tuna you been chasing?  
The red-headed number with the wiggle in her hiney?

SHEPARD  
An X-14, a Falcon 1 -- doesn't matter. Just something I can fly.

Bob Buck retails disappointment. The social impropriety of talking business at the pleasure hour. \*

BUCK  
What's General Brand got you doing?

SHEPARD  
Readiness Officer. For two years. I'm staring at graph paper all day, calculating fuel needs for aircraft carriers I'll never step foot on. \*

BUCK  
R.O. is a cush gig. Regular hours, home in time to see the kids... \*

SHEPARD

It's a desk job. And I didn't ask  
for regular hours.

\*  
\*

Bob Buck motions to the bartender for a drink.

BUCK

You could donate a point of your IQ  
to everyone in this room and still  
be smarter than almost all of 'em.

\*

SHEPARD

That supposed to flatter me?

BUCK

Unlike your peers, you can finish a  
day's worth of R.O. work in a  
couple hours. So for the next  
couple years, you're getting to the  
bar by three.

\*

(raises glass)

And that's if you don't wake up  
'til the crack of noon and take the  
long way to the club.

\*

SHEPARD

I belong in a plane. I was promised.

BUCK

(curt)

No, you kept mouthing off and we  
said we'd see what we could do.

\*

A note of desperation creeps into Shepard's voice.

SHEPARD

Bob, *please*. I'll do anything --

BUCK

Al, you're not a full-time pilot  
anymore. Look around. Look where you  
are. You *won*. Start acting like it.

\*

\*

The drink arrives. Bob Buck hands it to Shepard, a parting  
gift, then walks off. Shepard watches him go.

#### **EXT. OFFICER'S CLUB - NIGHT**

Shepard comes outside, lights a cigarette. Glances at the  
long wall of windows looking back in at the officer's club.  
He doesn't feel like he's won. That room is death.

\*

\*

The odd site of the officers laughing uproariously in  
SILENCE. We hear instead the distant BREAKERS of the ocean.  
And then the waves becomes more rhythmic. Start to sound  
almost mechanical. Almost like...

\*

**INT. BASEMENT OFFICE - DAY**

TYPING. YOUNG WOMEN work furiously on either side of a LONG TABLE in a DIMLY-LIT BASEMENT. We're in...

SUPER: "THE PENTAGON"

MOVING DOWN THE TABLE as the women type CONFIDENTIAL TELEGRAMS on lumbering TELEX MACHINES, copying from a TEMPLATE at each station. \*

PICK UP KRAFT, GILRUTH and LUNNEY, supervising. Kraft approaches TWO TYPISTS who clack away on ORDINARY TYPEWRITERS at the end of the table.

KRAFT

How much longer on the locals?

One of the typists -- FWIP! -- pulls a slip of paper from her typewriter and hands it down the table to A WOMAN, who seals it in an pre-addressed ENVELOPE.

WOMAN

Last one.

Kraft hands FOUR STACKS OF ENVELOPES to waiting COURIERS.

KRAFT

Under no circumstances are you to deliver to anyone but the intended recipient. Understood?

The couriers nod, receive their payloads, and exit...

**INT. EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE - DEBRIEFING ROOM - DAY**

Gordo enters the room. BRIGADIER GENERAL DREXEL, 60s, voice like sandpaper, stands with two other SENIOR OFFICERS. Gordo SALUTES. The officers return the gesture, sit. \*

Gordo stands in the middle of the room. Literally called to the carpet. Weight of the world. A long beat while Drexel looks at papers. Gordo clears his throat. \*

GORDO

Sir, if I may?

Drexel looks up. \*

GORDO (cont'd)

I've been doing some thinking, thought long and hard. And in light of... Well, sir, I have a family? A daughter. And I was hoping...

(swallows)

I'd like to put in a transfer.

DREXEL  
A transfer.

GORDO  
C-131s. Or something like that.

Drexel stares at Gordo, irked and baffled. His gaze shifts.

DREXEL  
How's that hand?

GORDO  
Better, sir.

DREXEL  
And what happened, exactly?

Gordo looks down. Covers the dressing with his other palm.

GORDO  
Jar of peaches. See, I dropped it  
on the kitchen tile. And I went to  
pick up the shards. And well, I was  
on the phone, you know. Got  
distracted.  
(awkward smile)  
Hadn't had my coffee yet, sir.

Drexel and the other officers sit stone-faced. Then:

DREXEL  
Lieutenant Cooper, I'll make this  
quick. We're all saddened by Bud's  
passing. Just need to be sure we're  
all on the same page.

GORDO  
Yessir.

DREXEL  
You and Bud do everything by the  
book that day?

GORDO  
Well, sir, there was a lot going  
on, and truth be told --

DREXEL  
But you'd agree that no protocols  
were breached.

GORDO  
Sir?

DREXEL  
You can just say 'Yes.'



Gordo's eyes dart, trying to read the situation. \*

GORDO

Bud was a top-notch stick-and-rudder man, sir, if that's what you're asking. But we're test pilots. We push things.

(shrugs)

Sometimes they break.

Drexel sits back. Narrows. \*

DREXEL \*

Bud wasn't just your wingman -- he was your friend. Is that right?

GORDO

That's correct, sir.

DREXEL \*

And you wouldn't want to sully the reputation of a friend, would you?

GORDO

Course not, sir, that isn't what --

DREXEL \*

And I assume you you wouldn't want to bring further scrutiny on your squadron. Or what we do here.

GORDO

I believe in what we do here. All I meant to say is that situations in the air can be complex --

DREXEL \*

Complexity can be confusing.

GORDO

Suppose so, sir.

DREXEL \*

We don't want to confuse people.

GORDO

I guess not... \*

DREXEL \*

A simple story, Cooper.

GORDO

Simple story, sir.

DREXEL \*

Jar of peaches.

Silence. Gordo stares. The point made: stick to your lie.  
Drexel rises, followed by the officers. Gordo moves to go. \*

DREXEL (cont'd) \*  
Sit tight.

GORDO  
Sir?

DREXEL \*  
Guys from Miramar here to deliver  
you some message. From Washington.  
(as an afterthought)  
Oh, and transfer denied.

Gordo's stomach sinks. He weakly salutes as Drexel and the \*  
officers push past.

COURIER (O.S.)  
Lieutenant Cooper?

Cooper turns. A MILITARY COURIER hands him a SEALED \*  
TELEGRAM. Cooper looks over the courier's shoulder, sees an \*  
MP standing at attention in the doorway.

GORDO \*  
What's this?

COURIER  
It's top secret, sir. Only thing I  
know is that you're supposed to  
pack your bags, come with us.

Gordo looks at the telegram. His injured hand, his dead \*  
friend, a rebuke by his senior officers, a family life in \*  
shambles. And so of course it's all come to this: some \*  
missive from afar that will drive the dagger through his  
heart for good.

He opens the envelope, reads the telegram. His dread gives \*  
way to puzzlement as we PRELAP THE HISS OF HYDRAULICS... \*

#### **INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY**

A train stops at a station, the doors open, passengers flood  
out. A Navy man in uniform steps off. Oddly, along with his  
duffel, he carries a GUITAR CASE. He stops when he sees a  
COURIER on the platform, staring at him, flanked by an MP.

COURIER  
Captain Carpenter?

This is SCOTT CARPENTER, 34. Much more on him in a later \*  
episode. For now, he puts his guitar case down, takes the \*  
telegram, looks perplexed as we begin a...

## SERIES OF SHOTS:

- WIDE ON A MOVIE THEATER: Air Force men coming out of a matinee of SOUTH PACIFIC. A courier and MP approach one of the men, pull him aside...
- NAVAL EXCHANGE: a test pilot sips a milkshake on a stool in the Navy trading post at Pax River. An MP and COURIER sit down on either side of him. The pilot looks from one to the other, puts the milkshake down... \*
- A PARK: a Navy pickup baseball game. The first baseman summoned off the field by an MP. GRUMBLINGS from the rest of the fielders as play is stopped. \*
- TARMAC: A test pilot taxis to a stop, opens his canopy. Looks out. A courier and MP waiting on the asphalt...
- CUL DE SAC: Doors open to a government sedan as an Air Force pilot comes down the walk from his house, looks up, stops when he sees our spooky messengers. And finally...

**INT. WINDOWLESS OFFICE - NIGHT**

A TALL COURIER outside an office with an MP. The courier KNOCKS, opens the door a crack, revealing only SCHNELLHAM... \*

TALL COURIER  
Major Glenn?

SCHNELLHAM  
(dry)  
That's the nicest thing anybody has  
ever said about me.

The courier squints, confused. Glenn opens the door fully.

GLENN  
I'm Major Glenn.

The courier hands Glenn the telegram.

TALL COURIER  
We'll be waiting outside, sir.

The courier and MP leave. Glenn shuts the door, looks to Schnellham, who shrugs. Glenn opens the envelope. Pulls out the typed telegram. Reads...

GLENN  
Top Secret Communication. Eyes only.

Glenn looks up -- he shouldn't be reading this aloud. Schnellham gives a dismissive squint: fuck it, keep going.

GLENN (cont'd)  
 To Major John Glenn, US Marine  
 Corps: Report to Washington DC.  
 Secret airman briefing, Pentagon,  
 Monday, March 13. Disembark to  
 Emerson International hotel, eleven  
 AM of same. Civilian attire. ID as  
 Paul Hamilton.

Glenn looks up. He and Schnellham realize it at the same  
 time. Their faces ignite. Schnellham rises from his chair.

GLENN (cont'd)  
 It's the space program.

SCHNELHAM  
 It's the *space program!*

Schnellham WRAPS Glenn in a bear hug and Glenn LAUGHS WITH  
 JOY as we're... \*

**INT. SHEPARD'S OFFICE - DAY**

PRINTED FIGURES. TABLES. A LEDGER. Reveal SHEPARD. Like  
 Glenn, a bird with his wings clipped. He's scribbling  
 through his paperwork, pushing around fuel and planes by  
 scratching graphite on paper.

He looks up. The clock says 2:59. Sure enough, just as Bob  
 Buck said, he's got his work done for the day. He pushes  
 back from his desk with a sigh... \*

**INT. OFFICER'S CLUB - DAY**

Shepard's a few drinks deep. And it's still early. He nods  
 to the bartender for another. Road to success. Then: A  
 COMMOTION. He turns, sees... \*

THREE DRUNK MEN, Naval test pilots: JOHN TIERNEY, JIM  
 LOVELL, and WALLY SHIRRA, all mid-30s. They're heading out  
 of the bar. Shirra, who we will come to know much better in  
 subsequent episodes, turns... \*

SHIRRA  
 Hey, Shepard! We're racing to D.C.  
 in the morning, loser buys drinks.  
 You in?

SHEPARD  
 D.C.?

SHIRRA  
 The telegram, numb-nuts!

SHEPARD  
 What telegram?

Shirra looks at Shepard. Oops. Tierney throws an arm around Shirra and pulls him out of the bar.

Shepard stiffens. He rises from his stool...

\*

**EXT. OFFICER'S CLUB - DAY**

Shepard marches up to the trio, reaches for Shirra, grabs his shoulder, spins him around.

SHEPARD  
What *telegram*?

SHIRRA  
Nothing. Just a... briefing.

TIERNEY  
Wally, shut up.

\*

SHEPARD  
You got a telegram about a briefing.

SHIRRA  
We're racing to D.C., that's all.

\*

SHEPARD  
What kind of briefing?

SHIRRA  
No... no briefing. Just --

TIERNEY  
Shut up, Wally.

SHEPARD  
Fuck off, John.

\*

Shirra pulls away from Shepard's grip.

SHIRRA  
Look, I don't even know, okay? We were told to go to D.C. A bunch of test pilots. Some secret thing. That's all I know, swear to Christ.

Shepard deflates. Tierney and Lovell start to walk off. Shirra recedes, opens his palms in apology as he backs away.

\*

\*

SHIRRA (cont'd)  
And I just thought you'd be going because you're... you know... you.

Shirra shrugs in apology. Turns. The men leave.

PULLING BACK from Shepard. A little drunk, totally isolated. His worst fear in life confirmed: he's been left behind. He heels around. Shuffles back toward the officer's club...

**INT. SHEPARD'S CAR - NIGHT**

SLAM goes the door as Shepard FLUMPS into the driver's seat. It's LATE. He's SAUCED. Fumbles for his... keys... attaboy, gets 'em into the... whatchama...

VROOM. There we go.

**INT. SHEPARD'S CAR - LATER**

Shepard FLIES down the road. The confidence of a test pilot handling something any sixteen-year-old masters on a lazy Saturday afternoon.

He PASSES one car, pushing the pedal to the floor. Comes up on a pickup, TAILGATES it a beat, lays on the HORN, then...

VROOOM! Veers into the oncoming lane, passing the pickup as well. The driver of the pickup ACCELERATES. What a jerk. But Shepard isn't cowed. You want to race the American Navy's best test pilot? You wanna go, asshole? You really think --

LIGHT. Blinding, enveloping. A blaring SOUND. What the...?

AN ONCOMING CAR. Shepard SWERVES at the last second as the car FLIES PAST, but now the world is TURNING, WHIRLING, a horrible BLUR...

Shepard FIGHTS the spin, jockeying the wheel, when...

BOOM! The sound of DIRT AND DUST showering over the car and settling back to the ground.

The dust clears. The car is on the shoulder, down a small embankment. Shepard is unscathed. A MAN rushes up outside...

MAN (O.S.)

You all right, pal? Hey, you okay?

Shepard turns, looks at the man and squints, puzzled by the very nature of the question.

SHEPARD

Okay?! I'm fucking *invincible*.

Shepard puts the car in gear and eases back onto the street.

He hits the gas and recedes out into the night as we...

CUT TO BLACK

ACT THREE**EXT. WASHINGTON NATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY**

Gordo emerges from the terminal dressed in shirt sleeves. He waves a hand, hails a cab.

The cabbie pops the trunk, helps Gordo with his bag. Gordo crosses, uncrosses his arms. Trying to look casual. Then:

GORDO

What a day for some sight-seeing!

The cabbie looks at him. Nods absently.

**INT. EMERSON INTERNATIONAL HOTEL - DAY**

Gordo enters the lobby and approaches the reception desk. Nods to the female CLERK, 20s.

GORDO

Hi there, checking in.

CLERK

Name?

GORDO

Paul Hamilton.

The clerk SIGHS, then hands over the registration book. Gordo lifts a pen, pauses when he sees...

"PAUL HAMILTON" written over and over, dozens of times in different hands.

CLERK

Not only do you have the same name,  
you all look the same too.

Gordo looks up. The clerk nods toward the bar at:

A GROUP OF MEN. All white. All between 32 and 39 years old. All with the same cocksure grin that must be genetically linked to thrill-seeking and death wishes. Test pilots.

CLERK (cont'd)

Last month two guests named Ronaldo  
checked in within an hour of each  
other and I thought *that* was weird.

The clerk holds up Gordo's key. He takes it and we're...

**INT. SHEPARD'S OFFICE - DAY**

ON SHEPARD. Tabulating fuel reserves. Monotony.

\*

BALC (O.S.)  
Hey, Shepard...

Shepard looks up, sees an enlisted man in the doorway: BALC, cocky, 20s. WAVES AN ENVELOPE in the air. \*

BALC  
Came Friday. They said only the addressee could sign for it, so I pretended to be you. Almost didn't work since I'm so goddamn handsome.

Shepard rises and SNATCHES the envelope, TEARS it open, READS the message inside. Balc nonchalantly reaches up, grabs the door jamb, cool guy.

BALC (cont'd)  
So last night I'm copping a feel with *Barbara* --

Shepard GRABS Balc by the shirt with both hands.

SHEPARD  
You idiot!

Balc looks at him with sudden terror: Barbara isn't, like, Shepard's sister or something, is she...? Shepard shoves Balc away, quickly gathers his things.

SHEPARD (cont'd)  
It starts in two *hours!*

BALC  
W... what does?

Shepard DASHES out, turns, throws up his arms...

SHEPARD  
I don't *know!*

He SPRINTS OFF and we're...

**INT. PENTAGON - AUDITORIUM - DAY**

Kraft and Gilruth stand at a lectern on a raised dais in the auditorium, scanning the room as they talk... \*

GILRUTH  
The P42 buffers the solenoid array from any electrical intrusion... \*

KRAFT  
(picking up from notes)  
Thus... uh, right... thus mitigating concern about accidental escape module retrofire.



GILRUTH

In over one hundred tests, the escape tower has failed only once, due to an oversight that has since been corrected with triple redundancy.

KRAFT

Our ultimate aim is for spaceflight to be a safer and more predictable experience than anything you men have thus far --

\*

\*

LUNNEY (O.S.)

Guys...?

Kraft and Gilruth look up.

REVEAL A SEA OF CHAIRS. All empty. Except for Lunney in the third row. This is a PRACTICE PITCH. Gilruth and Kraft look immediately defensive.

\*

\*

GILRUTH

What's the problem, Lunney?

LUNNEY

You said you wanted feedback, so...

\*

KRAFT

Spit it out, *Lunney*.

\*

LUNNEY

These guys *like* danger.

(off Gilruth and Kraft)

That's what you told me day one.

You tell them jumping out of the third floor will break their legs?

They'll fall all over themselves to run upstairs and prove you wrong.

KRAFT

But our rockets are safe. We've busted our asses...

GILRUTH

We can't promise some... *spectacle*. We're not carnival barkers.

KRAFT

There's no bearded lady here, *Lunney*.

Lunney nods, nods. Then half-raises a legal pad from his lap -- it's FILLED WITH NOTES.

LUNNEY

You wanna hear my ideas or not?

**EXT. PENTAGON - SECURITY CHECKPOINT - DAY**

A gate raises. Shepard's car SHOOTs FORWARD as he hits the gas, then SCREECHES to a halt in a parking space. He jumps out, starts the QUARTER-MILE SPRINT to the Pentagon...

\*  
\*

KRAFT (PRELAP)  
The module sits atop thirty tons of highly combustible ethyl alcohol...

**INT. PENTAGON - CORRIDOR - DAY**

Shepard, covered in FLOP SWEAT, his shirt soaking through, opens a set of DOUBLE DOORS...

KRAFT (PRELAP)  
Powering a Rocketdyne engine that provides 78,000 pounds of thrust...

**INT. PENTAGON - AUDITORIUM - DAY**

FOLLOWING SHEPARD down the aisle to find that all the seats are now FILLED: one hundred ten test pilots all listening with sphinx-like inscrutability.

Kraft and Gilruth are mid-presentation. And it's night and day from their milquetoast practice pitch earlier.

\*  
\*

GILRUTH  
But the aluminum fuselage housing it all is so thin you could pierce it with a pocket knife.

KRAFT  
If our specs sound familiar, it's because we've essentially removed the core from a *nuclear missile*. And we want to put you in its place.

\*

GILRUTH  
Would we like to test the Mercury-Redstone system for years before risking a man's life?

KRAFT  
We would. Are we afforded such a luxury with the Russians sneaking satellites through our backyard?

\*

KRAFT (cont'd)  
No we are not.

The Patton-esque bravado is laudable, but their paunches and short-sleeved button-downs give the machismo a haircut. Still, they've got the attention of the pilots.

GILRUTH

You men are accustomed to testing dangerous, unproven aircraft. And somehow you made it here in one piece. Most of you have families. You have careers. You have *lives*.

KRAFT

That could come to an abrupt halt if you sign on to our endeavor.

ON LUNNEY in the front row. He looks over one shoulder, then another, taking in the men. He returns to front, looks fidgety -- Jesus, they really took his notes to heart.

KRAFT (cont'd)

This program is strictly voluntary. It's a civilian enterprise. There are a hundred ten of you here, the best our country has. We hope to take thirty-two of you to the Lovelace clinic for medical evaluation. But only seven of those will truly have what it takes. Those seven will be the Mercury Astronauts.

*Mercury Astronauts*. This breaks the blasé facades of the men in the audience. The term sounds magical, a handful of fairy dusty flung out into the room.

GILRUTH

We aim to be the first nation to put a man in space. But let's be frank: the Russians are sprinting around the track and we're still at the starting block, tripping over our shoelaces.

KRAFT

But *this* -- this is our chance. The road forks here. Down one path, our way of life prevails. The ideals of this nation win out. Down the other path? Well, that is a scenario I'd rather not contemplate.

GILRUTH

The choice is yours, gentlemen. Sleep on it, call your wives. And give word to Mr. Lunney by tomorrow morning.

Gilruth and Kraft step down from the dais. MURMURS as the men turn to one another.

ON SHEPARD. Having only heard the tail end of it. But we can tell by the determined look on his face: he heard enough. He looks around. Takes in his competition. Locks on to: \*

JOHN GLENN, all smiles, glad-handing. Shepard stares. And stares. And now Bobby Darin is singing "MACK THE KNIFE" as we find ourselves in the... \*

**INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT**

Catnip for flyboys: alcohol and braggadocio, women to ogle.

Gordo enters, glances around. Doesn't know a soul. He approaches TWO MEN having a conversation, nods hello, awkward. \*

GORDO

Hey there. Gordo Cooper. Edwards.

One of the men, A NAVY PILOT, 35, offers his hand. And we notice he looks like a POLISHED VERSION of Gordo. This is... \*

CONRAD

Pete Conrad. Pax River. Wait... \*

Gordo Cooper? \*

(turns to other man) \*

Larry, this is the guy. \*

LARRY BALDWIN, 36, is sipping his whiskey through two cocktail straws. He gives Gordo a quick once-over.

LARRY

Oh yeah. Your wingman joined the choir. \*

GORDO

Bud. He was my friend. \*

Larry clucks his tongue. \*

LARRY

Tough titty said the kitty. \*

CONRAD

Everybody's talking about it. Kinda surprised they let you in. \*

GORDO

People are talking about it? \*

CONRAD

Must be hard for you. The grieving and all. \*

Gordo gives a loose nod, doesn't know what to say. Something off-screen catches Conrad's eye... \*

CONRAD (cont'd)  
Well shit. That's a sight.

GORDO  
(looking)  
What?

REVEAL GLENN at the bar, and SHEPARD sidling up next to him.

LARRY  
Just two of the best pilots who  
ever lived. We're up against *them*?

CONRAD  
If I owned this place, I'd put a  
couple'a plaques on those stools,  
rope it off as a national monument.

Conrad downs his drink, pats Gordo on the shoulder. He and  
Larry walk off.

Gordo turns, looks at Glenn and Shepard. Hands dumbly at his  
side, just watching. He looks like an orphan. \*

WITH GLENN AND SHEPARD NOW: both staring ahead. They haven't  
acknowledged one another yet.

SHEPARD  
Did I miss much? \*

GLENN  
Not really.

SHEPARD  
Annie, right? She good? \*

GLENN  
Doing great. And how's uh... \*

SHEPARD  
Louise.

GLENN  
Louise.

SHEPARD  
Couldn't be better.

A beat. The threadbare patter of two men who barely know one  
another. Like famous actors thrust together: they run in the  
same exclusive circles, but know one another mostly by  
reputation. Dogs sniffing each other out. \*

SHEPARD (cont'd)  
Well, John, what do you think?

GLENN

You know how these things go. Lots of promises out of the gate, and then you hit a wall of red tape. I mean, a civilian agency?

SHEPARD

Yeah, if they were really committed it'd be a branch of the military.

GLENN

Could just be a publicity stunt.

SHEPARD

Well you love those.

Shepard stares, inscrutable. Glenn returns a half-smile, can't tell if the jab was good-natured or barbed. Shepard turns to the bartender.

SHEPARD (cont'd)

Scotch.

(back to Glenn)

So I'm guessing you're in.

GLENN

(coy smile)

Yeah, I'm gonna do it.

SHEPARD

Now was that so hard? It's almost like you're scared of the competition. Want to thin the pack.

GLENN

Oh, I have no doubt I'll be one of the seven they pick.

SHEPARD

Well then congrats. And good luck.

GLENN

Thanks. But you're...?

SHEPARD

Nah, I'm not gonna be one of the seven.

GLENN

(masking relief)

No?

SHEPARD

No. I'm going to be the first man in space.

Shepard holds Glenn's gaze. Dead serious. The first to mark his territory. A long beat, the air thick. \*

GORDO (O.S.) \*

Hi there. \*

Shepard and Glenn turn. Gordo stands awkwardly, raises a hand, waves a little hello. Like a boy. \*

GORDO \*

Just wanted to introduce myself. \*

(beat, then) \*

Gordo Cooper. A real honor. \*

Glenn lifts his hand to shake. He's sincere. Politic. \*

GLENN \*

Pleasure's all mine, Gordo. We might just be a part of history here tonight. Quite a moment for our country, and for the entire human race -- \*

SHEPARD \*

(cutting Glenn off) \*

Christ -- what are you drinking? \*

Gordo opens his mouth, thinking. \*

SHEPARD (cont'd) \*

Scotch it is. \*

GORDO \*

Okay, sure. \*

Shepard motions the bartender for another. \*

SHIRRA (O.S) \*

Well shit in my Chevy, you crash the gates or what?

Wally Shirra, the Navy pilot who hemmed and hawed outside the officer's club, jabs Shepard on the shoulder.

Gordo's drink arrives. Shepard hands it to him, rises, turns to Glenn. \*

SHEPARD \*

Good seeing you, John. Enjoy the seltzer.

Glenn nods absently. Shepard PUTS HIS ARM AROUND GORDO. Leads him off, together with Shirra. \*

Glenn pushes away his SODA WATER. He looks out at the sea of his contemporaries. AT A FAR TABLE, men egg each other on, a DRINKING COMPETITION, sophomoric.

Glenn watches. Doesn't fit in. Knows it. He rises to leave. We MOVE OFF GLENN, TRACKING DOWN THE BAR until we land on:

\*  
\*

TWO MEN. Who knows how long they've been there. One finally reaches out a hand to the other. This is DEKE SLAYTON, 35. The other man is GUS GRISSOM, 33.

DEKE

Deke.

GUS

Gus.

They shake once. A beat. Deke points to Gus's drink.

DEKE

Rye?

GUS

Rye.

DEKE

You fish?

GUS

Fishing's my favorite.

(then)

Also cars. You?

DEKE

I love cars. And camping.

GUS

Big outdoors.

A beat. Deke and Gus give each a slight nod. It's the most laconic introduction in the history of man, but we've just witnessed two strangers becoming BEST FRIENDS. And it's the ignition of the tightest bond in the entire series.

\*

DEKE

(lifts glass)

All right then.

GUS

Yep.

They drink. Expressionless. Smitten.

ON SHEPARD, now engrossed in a conversation with a BRUNETTE, mid-20s, who Shepard has drawn into his orbit.



BRUNETTE

So if you wanted to point out your  
friends standing right behind me...

SHEPARD

I'd say 'Check your six, beautiful.'

BRUNETTE

And so what's 'Hotel Sierra?'

SHEPARD

Well Hotel Sierra is what I am.  
Stands for 'Hot Shit.'

BRUNETTE

(smiles, lifts hand)  
I'm Carol.

SHEPARD

Paul.

A group of four men -- LOVELL, SHIRRA, CONRAD, and GORDO --  
have been watching in a knot just steps away. Conrad steps  
forward, extends his arm to the brunette.

SHIRRA

Hi there, I'm Paul.

Shirra, Lovell, and Gordo extend their hands in turn...

LOVELL

Paul.

CONRAD

Paul.

GORDO

Paul.

The brunette looks from one to the next. Shepard shrugs.

BRUNETTE

Very funny, boys. Goodnight.

She turns and leaves. The guys CRACK UP. Shepard shakes his  
head, stymied but amused. Shirra lifts his glass.

SHIRRA

To drinking, flying and fucking.

SHEPARD

Though the first should never  
thwart the last.

The men LAUGH and CLINK glasses.

Gordo looks happy. He's a part of something...

IN A CORNER BOOTH: Gilruth, Kraft and Lunney are tucked away, inconspicuous. Gilruth clamps a hand on Lunney's neck. \*

GILRUTH

Took guts telling us to change course like that at the last second. I'll tell you, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart...

(grave) \*

If it turns out you were wrong, I will set you on fire.

Lunney nods, then lifts his drink to his lips and takes a long, thirsty GULP. \*

**INT. EMERSON INTERNATIONAL HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT**

ON THE BRUNETTE walking toward the elevators. And here comes SHEPARD, double-timing it, catching up with her...

SHEPARD

Sorry about that. Let me walk you to your room. \*

BRUNETTE

Are you making a pass at me?

SHEPARD

Oh God no. I did that fifteen minutes ago. Now I'm flagrantly hitting on you.

The brunette shakes her head, smiles. The two walk off. We LEAVE THEM to find...

GLENN. Getting his key from the front desk. Having seen it all. Unamused at the womanizing. Almost angry.

**INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY**

MORNING. Shepard stands buttoning his shirt. The brunette blinks awake in bed behind him, sits up... \*

BRUNETTE

So?

SHEPARD

So so.

BRUNETTE

So you're in the Navy. You grew up in New Hampshire.

(nods to wedding ring)

And you're married. That much I got. But you still won't tell me your name. And don't say Paul. \*

Shepard slips his shoes on. \*

SHEPARD

I'll tell you anything you want.  
Tell you my shoe size and my blood  
type. Just not my name. Because  
then, well that makes this real. \*

(flutters hand)

But it's actually all just a dream.

The brunette stares. Shepard lifts the phone. \*

BRUNETTE

You always get what you want?

Shepard looks at her, cold, his smile vanishing.

SHEPARD

Always.

HOLD. He's dead serious. And downright frightening. And then he looks down, dials a zero. The operator picks up. \*

SHEPARD (cont'd)

Get me Glenn Lunney.

**EXT. NASA PARKING LOT - DAY**

Gilruth and Kraft lean against the hood of Kraft's baby-blue Studebaker. Low morning light. The men both drink from SMALL CARTONS OF MILK: Kraft's chocolate, Gilruth's whole. They're deep in thought, contemplating Plan B. Nervous. \*

GILRUTH

Where's the kid...?

Beat.

KRAFT

Test pilots aren't our only option.  
What about acrobats? \*

GILRUTH

Or jockeys. They're small. Could  
easily fit into the capsule. \*

Something catches their attention off-screen. REVEAL...

LUNNEY. Sprinting toward them, bat out of hell. He catches up, stops, bends at the waist, hyperventilating. \*

LUNNEY

Two...! Two...!

Gilruth lowers the carton from his lips, wipes away a milk mustache. Looks to Kraft, both immediately crestfallen.

KRAFT

Only two signed on?

Lunney shakes his head violently.

LUNNEY

Only two *declined*.

Kraft and Gilruth are stunned, holding their milks like morons. A flash of elation quickly devolves into anxiety.

GILRUTH

We've got three days to narrow the list from a hundred and eight to thirty-two.

Lunney nods like a bobble doll, then GRABS Kraft's milk and CHUGS IT for hydration as we're...

**INT. GORDO'S HOUSE - DAY**

Gordo opens the door to his modest home. Waves to the private in the Jeep who dropped him off. Shuts the door.

He moves down the hall toward his bedroom. Stops at...

CAM'S BEDROOM. Sparse. Most of her belongings moved to her grandmother's house in San Diego.

ON THE DOOR FRAME: little HEIGHT TICKS, the markings of age, evidence of a growing girl. Gordo traces the marks with the finger of his wounded hand. A yearning, a regret in his eyes. But then he stops.

Looks at his hand. He unwraps the gauze, revealing...

THE ANGRY WOUND. A beat. He sinks to the floor. Stares at it. Who the hell is he kidding? He's a fuck up. There's no way anybody's going to put this wreck of a man into space.

OFF GORDO sitting on the floor of his quiet house...

**INT. NASA OFFICES - DAY**

A mini PHONE BANK lined up on a cheap card table in the main area. GILRUTH, KRAFT and LUNNEY make calls. It's CHAOS...

GILRUTH

Mr. Lovell, please...

KRAFT

Yes, one week of medical and psychological examination...

LUNNEY

Thank you, sir, your itinerary is on its way.

And now we're...

**INT. GLENN HOME - BEDROOM - DAY**

Glenn hangs up the phone. Annie in bed next to him. A beat.

ANNIE

Y-you really want this. Don't you?

Glenn turns, looks at Annie. Brings his head close to hers.

GLENN

Remember when we were kids? Wills Creek?

(off Annie's nod)

I always thought if I just went a little further, one day I'd come around a bend, be the first person to step foot somewhere. But it wasn't true. Every inch of the world's been picked over. \*

ANNIE

W-what, you want... adventure?

GLENN

This is my chance to be first at something. To do something memorable. And I want it more than anyone, Annie. \*

Annie opens her mouth, abandons words. Just nods: okay. \*

GLENN (cont'd) \*

I have to be gone a full week. New Mexico, bunch of medical stuff. I can get somebody to help out. So you won't be here alone. \*

Annie brings up a hand, puts it on Glenn's cheek. \*

ANNIE

I... believe in you, John. You need t-to believe in me... too.

Glenn brings his own hand up, grasps hers...

**INT. GORDO HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING** \*

Gordo is brushing his teeth when... RING, RING. He exits the bathroom, grabs the phone, mouth still full of toothpaste. \*

GORDO \*

(garbled) \*

Hello? \*

KRAFT (ON PHONE)

Lieutenant Cooper, Chris Kraft.

(MORE)

KRAFT (ON PHONE) (cont'd)  
I'm calling to see if you're still  
interested in Project Mercury.

\*

Gordo's eyes go wide. He SPITS THE TOOTHPASTE into his palm.

\*

GORDO  
Good morning sir. I... yes, you're  
damn right I am.

\*

KRAFT (ON PHONE)  
Well good. We'll send over some  
materials. We'll also need to  
schedule an interview with you wife  
and family.

\*

\*

Gordo blinks. Shit.

\*

GORDO  
My family? What for?

KRAFT (ON PHONE)  
Just part of the background check.

\*

GORDO  
Oh. 'Course. I'll let them know.  
Thank you, Mr. Kraft.

Gordo hangs up. Enthralled. But then immediately anxious.

\*

He picks up the phone again, dials. The line RINGS.  
Finally...

\*

\*

TRUDY (ON PHONE)  
Hello?

GORDO  
Trudy, it's me. I have news. And I  
need a big favor.  
(then)  
How soon can you be back here?

OFF GORDO...

CUT TO BLACK.

ACT FOUR

IN SLOW MOTION: A HIPPO snatches a ZEBRA. The zebra's limbs SNAP, mouth in AGONY. The image goes BLACK, replaced by

\*  
\*

TITLE CARD: "LUST"

AN ATONAL SCORE plays, as if chimps have broken into a music hall and commandeered the instruments. RAPID CUTS of...

\*

A TIME-LAPSE of a FLOWER BLOOMING. TITLE CARD: "DISCOUNT"

MILITIA MEN march in the streets. TITLE CARD: "SUPPER TIME"

A MUSTACHIOED MAN and a CURLY-HAIRED WOMAN tenderly make love on a CIRCULAR BED. TITLE CARD: "MAYHEM"

FASTER CUTS: MANNEQUIN PARTS are tossed into a FIRE. A MIME feigns DYING. A PIG eats a PORK CHOP. A barrage of WORDS AND IMAGES, flying by so quickly we barely discern any of them. SUBLIMINAL CHAOS, the CHIMP SCORE at full assault...

\*  
\*  
\*

REVEAL GUS GRISSOM. Watching this AVANT-GARDE FILM in...

**INT. LOVELACE CLINIC - SCREENING ROOM - DAY**

Grissom sits perplexed as the images reflect off his face, ELECTRODES stuck to his temples.

\*  
\*

SUPER: "LOVELACE MEDICAL CLINIC, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO"

FWAP, FWAP, FWAP: the 16mm film reel rolls out. The projector CLICKS off. Grissom blinks. Low, to himself:

\*

GRISSOM

What in the Sam Hell was that?

\*

**EXT. SCREENING ROOM - DAY**

Grissom emerges into a hallway, dazed, where other TEST PILOTS sit waiting their turn. A NURSE calls out to Gus...

\*

NURSE

Mr. Grissom, report down the hall for your semen motility sample.

GRISSOM

(dry as bone)  
My semen what?

NURSE

Next!

**BEGIN MONTAGE:**

- FIVE MEN ride EXERCISE BIKES while wearing MASKS to measure lung capacity.

\*

Doctors and nurses stand by with clipboards. GLENN, in good shape, is kicking ass. SHEPARD sucks wind...

- Pete Conrad BARRELS out of the screening room...

CONRAD

What is this beatnik *bullshit*?

- SHEPARD dumps his CIGARETTES in the trash. Mourns them.

- JIM LOVELL, Navy candidate and future astronaut, has an endoscope threaded up through his nostril and down his throat. His eyes BUG OUT.

DOCTOR

You'll gag right about... *now*.

Lovell GAGS VIOLENTLY.

DOCTOR (cont'd)

Very good.

- SHEPARD, GLENN and three other men grip PLUNGERS, as on a game show. They stare at a screen. A DOT appears on the screen and: CLICK CLICK CLICK! The men hit the plungers, a test of their reaction times. Shepard and Glenn eye each other. Might as well be a two-man competition.

- SCOTT CARPENTER twists and turns in a triple-axis AEROTRIM, a large gyroscope used to test balance and equilibrium. He MOANS and then suddenly VOMITS, barf spraying in an impressive arc. A nurse calmly CHECKS A BOX on her clipboard.

- LOVELL, now lying on his side, knees to his chest. A doctor shows him a LONG STEEL SPECULUM.

DOCTOR (cont'd)

We'll insert this into your rectum and expand it using this screw...

(demonstrates device)

After your sphincters relax, most of the pain should subside.

Lovell just stares. Reveal DEKE SLAYTON one bed over, having just finished the exam, slow to get up...

DEKE

I told 'em to stick it where the sun don't shine. And then they did.

#### **INT. EXAM ROOM - DAY**

Gordo and Pete Conrad sit next to each other in lab chairs, one arm each outstretched, GIVING BLOOD. A quiet moment.



GORDO  
Sure is a lot of blood.

CONRAD  
It's all bullshit.

Beat.

GORDO  
Heard you saying how much you love  
the F-86? That's my baby. I logged  
more hours in that than anything.  
(then)  
You and me got a lot in common.

CONRAD  
Well if that's true, then one of us  
is going home.

GORDO  
What do you mean?

CONRAD  
Way I see it, it's like they're  
casting a movie. And there's only  
room for one John Wayne, right?

GORDO  
I thought they'd just take the  
seven best pilots.

CONRAD  
Hey compadre, no offense, but what  
business does a nice guy like you  
have going to space? You really  
want to do this? \*

GORDO  
Sure I do. Don't you? \*

CONRAD  
Yeah, but my buddy didn't augur  
into the dirt a couple weeks ago.  
(off Gordo) \*  
Maybe you should pull back on the  
throttle for a while. Fly \*  
transports or something. \*

Gordo gives a forlorn micro-chuckle, shakes his head. \*

GORDO  
I can't go back to Edwards. It's  
this or nothing for me. \*

Gordo is guileless, as candid as a boy to his mother. \*

CONRAD

Gordo, maybe you're right -- maybe you and me are alike. And maybe under different circumstances we'd even be friends. But listen: I got a real good record. Aced my way through test pilot school. My medical's ship-shape.

(off Gordo)

Think I'm John Wayne here, you know?

A beat. Gordo looks down at the blood flowing from his arm.

GORDO

Gotta be a chance they take me.

CONRAD

Sure. And you should hold your head high. You got this far.

GORDO

Yeah.

CONRAD

And hey, unless there's some Martian broads on the moon? You're gonna catch a lot more tail down here on Earth!

Conrad LAUGHS and SLAPS Gordo's arm with his free hand.

Gordo's mouth lifts into a mirthless smile as Conrad LAUGHS and LAUGHS and LAUGHS and we're...

**EXT. LOVELACE CLINIC - LAWN - NIGHT**

GORDO stares out at the MILKY WAY. Middle of the night. The sound of footsteps approaching. He turns to find

JOHN GLENN. The men nod to each other. Both turn to look out at the starry sky. A silent beat.

GLENN

Amazing isn't it?

GORDO

Yeah, sure is.

GLENN

I'm walking on the beach a few months ago with a scientist buddy. Tells me that for every grain of sand on all the beaches in the world, there's at least fifty stars out in the universe. I stood there staring at sand for a good hour.

(MORE)

GLENN (cont'd)  
 (smiles)  
 Like a *dummy*. But there's just so  
 damn *much* out there.

GORDO  
 And here we are.

GLENN  
 Pretty lucky, huh? To be born in  
 this country right at the time we  
 finally slip off and go exploring  
 it all.

Gordo turns. Looks at Glenn. Really takes him in.

GORDO  
 All I've heard about all week is  
 drinking and women and a bunch of  
 stories about flying that don't  
 sound half true. Nobody's said a  
 word about space.  
 (then)  
 Except you. You just don't talk  
 like the rest of those guys.

GLENN  
 That's because I'm not like the  
 rest of those guys.

Gordo nods, smiles.

GLENN (cont'd)  
 I'm turning in, Gordo.

GORDO  
 Night, John.

GLENN  
 Don't stay up too late.

Glenn walks off. Gordo watches him go. And it's like he's  
 watching his own father turn in for the night.

He finally turns, looks back out at the sky.

#### **INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY**

Rows of desks, like a classroom. A SHARPENED PENCIL and a  
 blank SHEET OF PAPER for each of the astronaut candidates. A  
 psychologist, DR. WHITE, stands at the front of the room.

DR. WHITE  
 You have fifteen minutes to answer  
 the following question.

Dr. White turns, writes in big letters on the chalkboard...

DR. WHITE (cont'd)  
 Who... am... I?  
 (turns)  
 You may begin.

The men grab their pencils, start writing.

PUSHING FROM ABOVE on Glenn's paper. He writes in steady bromides: "I am a family man, a man who believes in God and country. When I first started teaching Sunday school..." \*  
 \*

The other men in the room aren't as verbose as Glenn, but they're all scrawling away. Except for one man...

SHEPARD. Pencil poised. He stares down at the blank paper as if confronting the abyss. Doesn't move a muscle. We PRELAP: \*

DR. WHITE (V.O.)  
 This isn't an interrogation, Alan.

**INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY**

CLOSE ON SHEPARD'S PAPER: "I am a man who values my privacy."

That's it. Dr. White holds the paper. Shepard sits on the other side of the desk, wants to be anywhere but here. \*  
 \*

SHEPARD  
 What a relief.

DR. WHITE  
 Many men find that it can be rewarding to explore one's emotions in a safe environment such as this. \*  
 \*  
 \*

SHEPARD  
 A safe environment.

DR. WHITE  
 Such as this.

SHEPARD  
 I said all I need to say. \*

DR. WHITE  
 Did you have a good relationship with your mother?

SHEPARD  
 Yeah, so what?

DR. WHITE  
 And your father, how about him?

SHEPARD

Doc, you're looking for a brain  
that's been scrambled into a  
strange soup, but that ain't me.

DR. WHITE

How's your home life? Is it happy?  
(off Shepard)  
Have you ever cheated on your wife?

\*  
\*  
\*

Shepard stands, jaw flexed. An angry calm.

\*

SHEPARD

I am one of the best pilots the  
United States Navy has ever known.  
Me and the other men, we've been  
here almost a week. You've put  
scopes down our throats and up our  
butts and collected fluids I didn't  
even know were sloshing around  
inside me. But I draw the line at  
this.

\*

(taps his head)

You don't get to poke around in  
here. My family, my home life,  
that's *mine*. And it sure as hell has  
nothing to do with how good a pilot  
I am, or how well I'd do in space.

Shepard starts to leave. Halts as...

\*

DR. WHITE

I know how good of a pilot you are,  
Alan. And your medical evaluation  
puts you near the head of the pack.  
The simple fact is, you're too  
good.

\*  
\*

(as Shepard turns)

You swing your dick like someone  
who knows he'll be picked for the  
job. And you're probably right.

\*  
\*

Shepard betrays nothing, looks into the doctor's eyes.

DR. WHITE (cont'd)

But you aren't honest with  
yourself. And that'll catch up to  
you. Eventually.

A long beat. Shepard's FURIOUS. He finally turns and STORMS  
out, SLAMMING THE DOOR behind him.

**INT. ALBUQUERQUE AIRPORT - TERMINAL - DAY**

ON A PAN AM DC-7 on the tarmac. REVEAL SCOTT CARPENTER, staring dolefully at the plane through the terminal's bank of windows. He turns to Gordo and Glenn, sighs.

CARPENTER

God, I hate flying commercial. It's like a five-star chef being forced to eat out of a pig trough.

The men shake hands. Carpenter moves off toward the gate.

Gordo turns to Glenn.

GORDO

Well, I'm boarding soon. It was real meeting you.

GLENN

Good meeting you, Gordo.

The men shake hands.

GLENN (cont'd)

And hey, I know some of the brass back in D.C. Who knows, maybe I can put in a good word for you. Couldn't hurt, right?

GORDO

I suppose not.

GLENN

Hope to see you in the mix.

Gordo knows it's just a pleasantry, maybe borne out of pity. But still, it's nice to hear.

WE FOLLOW GORDO as he makes his way toward his gate, duffel in hand, waving here and there at the other astronaut candidates. Seems like a true goodbye. There's a darkness descending on him as he moves toward the gate.

Gordo reaches the gate agent, gives her a polite smile. As he hands over his ticket we MOVE TO...

THE AGENT'S CLIPBOARD: she CHECKS A BOX next to Gordo's name on the PASSENGER MANIFEST and we're...

**INT. NASA OFFICES - DAY**

ON THE LIST OF THIRTY-TWO ASTRONAUTS. Gilruth tosses it onto a table, amid a pile of...



**INT. GLENN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Annie affixes a hat just so on her head. Lyn sits at the table in her Sunday best, eating toast. Glenn enters in a suit, nods to Lyn:

\*  
\*  
\*

GLENN  
Finish that in the car, honey,  
we'll be late for the service.

\*  
\*

RING, RING. John doubles back, picks up the phone.

GLENN (cont'd)  
Hello? Yes, hello, Mr. Kraft.  
(straightening)  
I am, yes, I'd be honored...

\*

Glenn breaks into a smile. Annie turns, sensing what this is about. Lyn, oblivious, crunches toast.

\*  
\*

GLENN (cont'd)  
*Thank you, sir. I won't let you  
down!*

\*

Glenn hangs up the phone, then BURSTS FORWARD.

GLENN (cont'd)  
I got it!

Annie YELPS with delight as Glenn KISSES HER.

LYN  
(through toast)  
Got what?

Glenn SCOOPS LYN UP in his arms and SWINGS HER in a circle.

GLENN  
Your father is going to be *the  
first man in outer space!*

As Glenn LAUGHS with delight and hugs Lyn close and JUMPS UP AND DOWN WITH ANNIE, we're...

**INT. SHEPARD HOUSE - DAY**

Shepard is ON THE PHONE, holding the receiver out a bit so Louise, who is nestled close to him, can hear. They're both upbeat, but Shepard maintains his New Hampshire severity.

SHEPARD  
It's an honor and a privilege, Mr.  
Kraft... I cannot wait to get  
started. Much thanks to you, sir.

\*  
\*



He hangs up. SMILES. And we might notice it's the first time he's smiled the entire episode. He pulls Louise close.

LOUISE  
Congratulations, Al.

SHEPARD  
Couldn't do it without you, Lou.

They look at each other lovingly. You'd never think their marriage was marred by Shepard's infidelity. And in a way, maybe it isn't. As we wonder how the hell that all works, we PRELAP the voice of NASA administrator T. KEITH GLENNAN...

GLENNAN (V.O.)  
Which of these men will be first to orbit the Earth, I cannot tell you. He won't know himself until the day of the flight.

**INT. CARPENTER HOUSE - DAY**

Pushing through a house decorated in an eclectic style, proto-hippie. We emerge into THE LIVING ROOM to find SCOTT CARPENTER playing guitar for his wife RENE...

The PHONE RINGS and Carpenter rises to answer it...

CARPENTER  
Hello? Yes?

Carpenter BRIGHTENS. Rene SHOTS UP to him. You can't imagine these two being apart for one second...

GLENNAN (V.O.)  
The astronaut training program will last probably two years.

**INT. SHIRRA HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Wally Shirra sits with his wife and kids, using his hand to demonstrate the whirling Aerotrim. They watch, transfixed...

GLENNAN (V.O.)  
And during this time our urgent goal is to subject these gentlemen to every stress, each unusual environment they will experience in that flight.

The phone RINGS. Shirra rises, answers. His eyebrows lift...

**EXT. GRISSOM HOUSE - DAY**

Gus Grissom, wearing a fishing hat and holding a tackle box, walks up the driveway with his two sons.

GLENNAN (V.O.)  
Gentlemen, it's my pleasure to  
introduce to you...

Gus's wife, BETTY, flings open the screen door, waves the  
receiver at him MADLY. He looks up, eyes WIDE, and starts  
SPRINTING toward Betty...

GLENNAN (V.O.) (cont'd)  
Virgil I. Grissom...

**EXT. SLAYTON HOUSE - NIGHT**

Deke Slayton pops BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE, pours a glass for  
himself and his wife, MARGE...

GLENNAN (V.O.)  
Donald K. Slayton...

**INT. WINDOWLESS OFFICE - DAY**

Glenn spills the details of Lovelace to an enthralled  
SCHNELLHAM, though it's all in silence as...

GLENNAN (V.O.)  
John H. Glenn...

**INT. SHIRRA HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Wally Shirra's children WRAP HIM IN TINFOIL. Tinfoil HELMET,  
tinfoil SPACESUIT, tinfoil BOOTS. The perfect astronaut...

GLENNAN (V.O.)  
Walter M. Shirra...

**INT. OFFICER'S CLUB - NIGHT**

The cock of the walk. Shepard isn't bee-lining across the  
floor anymore, begging for a handout. He's being feted,  
surrounded by a circle of well-wishers.

GLENNAN (V.O.)  
Alan B. Shepard...

Scotches raised, jokes flying. And Shepard can't wait to  
kiss it all goodbye. \*

**EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - DAY**

Rene and Scott Carpenter PACK HIS BAGS. Scott shoves his  
guitar in its case...

GLENNAN (V.O.)  
Malcolm Scott Carpenter...

**INT. GORDO'S HOUSE - DAY**

Gordo HANGS UP his phone, so happy he's almost CRYING. He can't believe it. We think he's alone for a moment, but then he reaches over and HUGS CAM TIGHT. She wraps her arms around him. \*

GLENNAN (V.O.)  
And Leroy 'Gordo' Cooper...

Gordo looks across the room, where \*

TRUDY sits on a chair. Staring. Lost, trapped. \*

Gordo's eyes say it's going to be okay, this is what they need, this is how they start over. But Trudy looks as though she's stepped into quicksand as we... \*

DIP TO BLACK.

A BEAT. Then, OVER BLACK:

GLENNAN (V.O.) (cont'd)  
These, ladies and gentlemen, are  
the nation's Mercury astronauts.

POP, POP, POP! FLASHBULBS going off, bringing us to...

**INT. NASA BRIEFING ROOM - DAY**

Journalists are PACKED into the room. PHOTOGRAPHERS LUNGE FORWARD, snapping away at the seven men, who stand awkwardly in suits and ties. The bravest specimens the nation could muster. But this sudden onslaught takes them aback. \*

ON KRAFT, GILRUTH and LUNNEY. Gilruth CLAPS a hand on Lunney's back and smiles as if to say: you did good, kid.

GORDO looks sheepish, doesn't know what to do with his hands. He looks to GLENN, who gives him a calming nod, a look that says relax, kid, you got this. \*

Glenn then turns. SMILES for the crowd. Looking from one camera to the next. Eager. Poster child. The photographers seem to be favoring him. \*

ON SHEPARD, watching Glenn. He narrows. He's in a real dogfight now. Glenn has come hard out of the gate, and Shepard may have underestimated him. But we can see it in Shepard's eyes: from this moment forward... \*

He's going in for the kill. \*

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF PILOT