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Thirteen Days

By David Self

DARKNESS. As the MAIN TITLES BEGIN, the theater thrums with a subsonic HISS which mounts in all the rattling power of THX, and we...

BURN IN, BRIGHT LIVING COLOR:

EXT. STRATOSPHERE - DAY

The glory of stratospheric dawn. The engines of a silver Lockheed U-2F rasp upon the trace oxygen here at 72,500 feet. Scattered cloud formations hang over the blue brilliance of sea far, far below. In the haze, the looming edge of land.

SUPER:

The spy plane's CAMERA DOORS whine open. The glassy eye of the 36-inch camera focuses. And then with a BANGBANGBANGBANG, its high-speed motor kicks in, shutter flying.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. O'DONNELL BEDROOM - DAY

A simple CAMERA, snapping away furiously in the hands of a giggling MARK O'DONNELL, 4. He's straddling and in the face of his dad, KENNY O'DONNELL, 30's, tough, Boston-Irish, with a prodigious case of morning hair. Kenny awakens, red-eyed. HELEN (O.S.)

Mark, get off your father!

Kenny sits up to the morning bedlam of the O'Donnell house. KIDS screech, doors bang all over. Kenny pushes Mark over, rolls out of bed, snatches up the corners of the blanket and hoists Mark over his shoulder in a screaming, kicking bundle.

INT. O'DONNELL HALLWAY - DAY

Kenny, with Mark in the bundle on his shoulder, meets his wife HELEN going the other way in the hall with LITTLE HELEN, 1, in her arms.

KENNY:

Hi, hon.

They kiss in passing. Daughter KATHY, 12, races by in angry pursuit of her twin, KEVIN, 12.

HELEN:

Don't forget, Mrs. Higgins wants to talk to you this afternoon about Kevin. You need to do something about this.

KENNY:

Kids are supposed to get detention.

Kenny dumps the bundle with Mark in a big pile of dirty laundry.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. MCCOY AIR FORCE BASE - FLORIDA - DAY

A pair of massive FILM CANISTERS unlock and drop from the belly of the U-2. TECHNICIANS secure them in orange carrying cases, lock them under key, fast and proficient. They whisk them out from under the spy plane.

The Technicians run for an idling Jeep. They sling the cases into the rear of the vehicle which in turn accelerates away hard, curving across the runway for another waiting plane.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. O'DONNELL KITCHEN - DAY

A kitchen out of the late 1950's. Kenny drinks coffee, ties a tie, rifles through a briefcase at the kitchen table. The horde of kids, ages 2-14, breakfast on an array of period food. Kenny grills the kids while he goes over papers.

KENNY:

Secretary of Defense...

KEVIN:

Dean Rusk!

KENNY:

Wrong, and you get to wax my car.

KENNY JR. smirk at Kevin.

KENNY JR.

Rusk is State, moron. Robert McNamara.

HELEN:

Got time for pancakes?

KENNY:

Nope. Attorney General?

A PHONE RINGS as the kids cry out en masse.

KIDS:

(chorus)

Too easy! Bobby, Bobby Kennedy!

Kenny glances up at the wall. There are two phones, side by

side. One RED, one BLACK. It's the black one ringing.
Helen answers. Kenny goes back to his papers.

KENNY:

All right, wise guys, Assistant
Secretary of State for Latin America...

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. STEUART BUILDING - DAY

A U.S. Navy truck lurches to a stop in front of the run-down,
brick-faced seven-story Steuart Building on 5th and K. Rear
doors BANG open, and out hop two MARINE GUARDS, side arms
drawn, film canisters in a carrying case between them.

SUPER:

(NPIC), WASHINGTON D.C.

As the Marines approach the building, front doors SLAM open.

INT. OPERATIONS OFFICE, NPIC - DAY

A bespectacled OPERATIONS MANAGER hands a clipboard to one of
the big Marine Guards who in turn hands him a set of keys.
The Manager unlocks the film cases. PHOTO INTERPRETERS swoop
in, whisk away the contents: SPOOLS OF FILM.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. O'DONNELL RESIDENCE - DAY

A black Lincoln pulls away from the modest white house on a
tidy Washington D.C. residential street.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C., AERIAL - DAY

The car threads its way through the Washington traffic, past
the big administrative buildings, down tree-lined avenues,
takes a turn into a gate. As the car stops at the gate, the
CAMERA flies past, revealing it's the gate to the WHITE
HOUSE.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. NPIC - DAY

CLOSE ON the five-thousand rolls of film spewing through
processing equipment, its streaking passage leading us
straight through the development machinery to:

A SERIES OF VARIOUS SHOTS:

Photo Interpreters power up light tables, stereoscopic
viewers, zip across the floor in wheeled chairs.

Flying switches, flickering lights, humming motors. It's an
eerie dance of technological black magic.

Another pair of Interpreters loom out of the darkness, side by side, ghostly looking, their glasses reflecting the glare of the light table, like magicians staring into a crystal ball.

IMAGES FILL THE SCREEN

Aerial shots, flashing by. Cuban countryside from 72,500 feet. A MAGNIFYING GLASS swings down on its arm in front of us, magnifying the carpet of trees... and a row of six canvas covered OBJECTS among them.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - WEST WING - DAY

Kenny, in business suit and tie, trots up the steps, and a MARINE GUARD snaps the door open for him.

INT. WEST WING - CONTINUOUS

Kenny, briefcase in hand, weaves his way through the empty, ornate hallways of the West Wing. Past magnificent doorways, early American furniture, paintings. He finally reaches a doorway, goes through into:

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A long, narrow affair, window at the back looking out into the Rose Garden. Kenny dumps his briefcase on the desk, shucks off his coat, removes a folder from his briefcase, turns and heads back out...

INT. WEST WING HALLS - CONTINUOUS

And into the warren of offices and halls that is the working White House. He takes a right, passes the doors to the Oval Office right next to his office, goes down a long, straight hall, into...

INT. MANSION - CONTINUOUS

The formal main building, the executive mansion. He passes the busts of Presidents past, turns left into an elevator. The doors close.

INT. 3RD FLOOR - FAMILY QUARTERS - DAY

The doors open. Kenny strides out onto a DIFFERENT FLOOR, the third. He heads down the long, posh hall of the family quarters. Fine furnishings, art. The living White House. He approaches the double doors at the end of the hall guarded by a cluster of SECRET SERVICE AGENTS. An agent opens one of the doors.

KENNY:

Morning, Floyd.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT

Good morning, Mr. O'Donnell.

INT. PRESIDENT'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kenny enters the elegant bedroom. The figure alone at a side table by the window, drinks coffee, breakfast still spread out before him, Washington Post obscuring his face.

KENNY:

Top o' the morning, Mr. President.

The figure lowers the paper.

It is PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY. He's wearing boxers and a tank top. Unshaven. Bed-head.

Kenny O'Donnell, former ward-pol and long-time Kennedy man, is his Chief of Staff...

THE PRESIDENT:

Morning, Kenny. You see this goddamn Capehart stuff?

The President rattles the paper. Kenny collapses in the chair opposite the President, sprawls, comfortable.

KENNY:

Bayh's going to lose, but it's good groundwork for us for '64.

Kenny steals a piece of buttered toast off the President's plate. The President spares him a glance.

THE PRESIDENT:

I was eating that.

KENNY:

No you weren't.

THE PRESIDENT:

(scanning the paper)

I was, you bastard.

Kenny takes a defiant bite.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

So what've we got today?

KENNY:

Today, for your information, is Pulaski Day. We're going to Buffalo...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE:

A luxury hotel crowded with LOCAL POLS: the Democratic machine of Buffalo. Beyond the open floor-to-ceiling windows, a CROWD. The Pulaski Day Parade, a glimpse of '69s Americana. High School bands blare Sousa. The scene is deafening, boisterous. Pols trail Kenny as he crosses the

ROOM:

POL #1

We're putting up Potowski next time.
Will you guys come out for him?

KENNY:

Who else you got?

POL #2

There's Richardson. Good kid.

KENNY:

Got the touch?

POL #2

Yeah. Still moldable, too.

KENNY:

Everyone likes a good kid...

And like that, a congressional candidate is made... Kenny accelerates, leaving the Pols behind. Suddenly, outside the windows, the crowd swells forward with a collective ROAR.

CROWD:

MR. PRESIDENT! PRESIDENT KENNEDY!

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

Kenny heads down the steps with New York Times Washington Bureau Chief, SCOTTY RESTON. Anonymous, they weave their way through the crowd for a police car on a side street.

RESTON:

How's my favorite President?

KENNY:

Busy. But you've got his heart.

RESTON:

I want an hour with him.

KENNY:

I said his heart, not his attention.

RESTON:

Three weeks before midterm elections?
You need me.

KENNY:

Well. There is a new civil rights
initiative he wants to talk about.

RESTON:

I'm doing a piece on Skybolt. I hear
Macmillan's meeting with him in Nassau.
Kenny just sighs as they make their way up to the police car.
A Secret Service Agent opens the door for him, another is
behind the wheel.

KENNY:

We're giving the Brits Polaris instead.
But a story'll just aggravate things.
Scotty stares at Kenny, determined. Kenny looks away. And
his eye catches a tall, willowy BEAUTIFUL WOMAN. She is
talking, excited, embarrassed, to two more SECRET SERVICE
AGENTS. What they're saying is lost in the noise.
Scotty follows Kenny's gaze. Then the two men share a look,
a silent understanding. Kenny glances at the Secret Service
guy holding the car door, tilts his head at the woman.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Not today. He's got tight schedule.
The Agent nods, heads for the other Agents and the Beautiful
Woman. Scotty acts like nothing has happened.

RESTON:

Pretending there isn't a problem won't
fix it. He can clear the air on Anglo
American relations.

KENNY:

Forget it, Scotty.

RESTON:

Let him talk to me, he makes Macmillan look good, I print it, the British public likes it, Macmillan owes you. The formula's exactly what Kenny wants to hear. He pretends to consider, pretends to cave as he gets in the car.

KENNY:

All right, you're in. Half hour. Reston's won. But so has Kenny, and he's made Scotty feel tough in the bargain. People like Kenny.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

In the back seat, Kenny stares out the window at the parade goers. The Secret Service Agents leave the Woman. Disappointed, the Woman turns and vanishes into the crowd. It's an eerie moment. Something troubles Kenny, and he glances up at the sky. A premonition. But it's a clear, clear blue. A day like this, all is right with the world...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. NPIC - NIGHT

Six Interpreters huddle around IMAGES on a light table. One of them shoulders his way into the group and THUMPS a black BINDER on the table. There are grim nods of agreement. The book is open to a PICTURE of an SS-4 BALLISTIC MISSILE. A photo from Moscow Mayday parade. An icon of the nuclear age escorted like some devil-god to a holocaust...

END MAIN TITLE SEQUENCE

EXT. THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

The White House casts long shadows this gorgeous October morning. Blue sky; the first flash of color in the trees.

SUPER:

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Briefcase and coat in hand, Kenny enters his office - and finds THREE MEN. Standing there. Thin-haired, bespectacled, academic-looking MCGEORGE BUNDY, 43, the National Security Advisor. The two men in the background: PHOTO INTERPRETERS. Kenny hangs up his coat, sees the Interpreters' large black display cases. And suddenly the world is slightly off kilter.

KENNY:

Hey, Mac. You're up bright and early.

BUNDY:

No, Ken. I need to see him now...

INT. WHITE HOUSE - RESIDENTIAL FLOOR - DAY

Kenny emerges from the elevator with Bundy. They head down the long, posh 3rd floor hall, the Presidential Detail guarding the doors at the end. But the familiar route feels strange, and lasting an eternity. Kenny eyes the package under Bundy's arm, its TOP SECRET stamp visible.

KENNY:

Morning, Floyd.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT

Good morning, Mr. O'Donnell. Mr. Bundy.

The Agent opens the door. Bundy pauses, Kenny with him.

KENNY:

What's it about?

BUNDY:

Cuba.

Bundy is tense. But Kenny relaxes.

KENNY:

Just Cuba? Okay, I got work to do, see you guys downstairs.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny's office is a raging beehive of activity. Kenny works the phone as ASSISTANTS come and go with files.

KENNY:

(to phone, scary calm)

Listen to me, you worthless piece of disloyal shit. You will pull Daly's man on the circuit. You owe your goddamn job to this administration.

(beat, listening)

There is a word you need to learn. It is the only word in politics. Loyalty.

LOYALTY you motherfucking piece of shit!

As Kenny THROWS the phone down at the receiver, and the PRIVATE DOOR to the Oval Office suddenly opens. Kenny glances up. President Kennedy stands there in the doorway. Kenny thinks he's reacting to the tirade.

KENNY (CONT'D)

What're you looking at? This isn't the blessed order of St. Mary the Meek.

Kenny stops.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Excuse us.

The Assistants leave, shutting the door after them. Kenny rises.

THE PRESIDENT:

I think you should come in here.

Kenny starts for the door.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Still think Cuba isn't important?

KENNY:

Not as far as the election goes.

The President lets Kenny by into...

INT. OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

WE ENTER from a different angle than we usually enter in

movies:

sits on the right, windows looking out on the Rose Garden behind it. Kenny's gaze swivels to:

THE OTHER END OF THE ROOM where the Interpreters, their crewcut chief, ARTHUR LUNDAHL, 50's, and Bundy stare at him. They're surrounded by PRESENTATION BOARDS propped up around the fireplace. The President's rocking chair and sofas.

THE PRESIDENT:

You used to look down a bomb sight for a living, Ken. What do you see?

In eerie silence, as all eyes follow him, Kenny makes his way among the presentation boards with the U-2 imagery, stops in front of the picture of the six canvas-covered objects. It unleashes a wave of memories.

KENNY:

We hit a Nazi buzz bomb field in '45.

(beat, incredulous)

It looks like a rocket base...

He puts his hand out to touch the image, then turns and looks to the President, knowing what they must be.

BUNDY:

On Sunday morning, one of our U-2s took these pictures. The Soviets are putting medium range ballistic missiles into Cuba.

Shock. Silence. Kenny glances to the other men.

LUNDAHL:

They appear to be the SS-4: range of a thousand miles, three-megaton nuclear warhead.

KENNY:

Jesus Christ in Heaven...

INT. WHITE HOUSE OPERATOR'S CENTER - DAY

A bank of WHITE HOUSE OPERATORS work the switchboard, fingers flying, voices overlapping in a babble of:

VARIOUS OPERATORS

Please hold for the White House...Mr.

O'Donnell for Secretary McNamara...

White House Operator... please hold...

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Kenny carries the phone with him as he paces hard from his desk to his window.

KENNY:

The principals are assembling in an hour. See you then.

Kenny hangs up. The President enters. A beat. And in that beat, there's a void. The two men are off their emotional stride, trying to grope their way out of shock.

THE PRESIDENT:

Where's Bobby?

Kenny nods, acknowledging the feeling

KENNY:

Should be here any minute.

THE PRESIDENT:

Good.

And we glimpse the chemistry of these guys by Bobby's absence. It's like they're missing their third wheel.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Good.

BOBBY (O.S.)

Where the hell are you?

The President and Kenny hear him out in the hall. And the tension goes out of them instantly.

THE PRESIDENT:

In here!

They turn to the door as BOBBY KENNEDY, 37, the President's younger brother/Attorney General, enters. Bobby shuts the door behind him, falls into Kenny's chair, and clearly grappling with his own disbelief, is hushed.

BOBBY:

Jesus Christ, guys. What the hell's Khrushchev thinking?

THE PRESIDENT:

Did you have any indication of this from Georgi? Any possible warning or sense of motivation?

BOBBY:

(shaking his head)

Complete snowjob. And then we went out and told the country they weren't putting missiles into Cuba.

(beat)

By the way, you realize we just lost the midterms.

KENNY:

Who gives a shit about the midterms now? The Soviets are putting nuclear weapons ninety miles away from us.

BOBBY:

You mean there's something more important than votes? Didn't think I'd live to see the day, Ken.
The President paces away, grim.

KENNY:

Jesus. I feel like we've caught the Jap carriers steaming for Pearl Harbor.

INT. WEST WING HALLWAY - DAY

The President strides down the plush hallway, Bobby and Kenny flanking him. Unconsciously, all three men assume the same

gait:

And before our eyes, the three men's game faces appear, and they become the hard-ass leaders of the United States. Secret Service Agents throw open the massive double doors to the Cabinet Room.

INT. CABINET ROOM - CONTINUOUS

And they enter. The group of men at the long, ornate Roosevelt-era table, rise as one.

GROUP:

Good morning, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT:

Good morning, gentlemen.

And the doors close on the eighteen men of EXCOM: The Executive Committee of the National Security Council. They are the legendary "Best and Brightest."

The President makes his way down the line: shakes hands with Secretary of State DEAN RUSK, 53, distinguished, with a soft, Georgian accent, a distant reserve.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Dean, good morning.

RUSK:

Mr. President.

The President leans past him, grasps the hand of the Secretary of Defense ROBERT MCNAMARA, 46, a gifted managerial genius... the price of which is a cold, hard personality.

THE PRESIDENT:

Bob. Bet you had a late night.

MCNAMARA:

Sleep is for the weak, Mr. President.

OFF TO THE SIDE, Kenny greets Vice President LYNDON JOHNSON, 54, and ADLAI STEVENSON, 62, Representative to the U.N., intellectual, well-spoken.

KENNY:

Lyndon. Adlai.

The silver-haired war hero and politically savvy Chairman of The Joint Chiefs of Staff, GENERAL MAXWELL TAYLOR, 50s, shakes the President's hand.

THE PRESIDENT:

Max.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

McCone's been notified and is coming back from the West coast. Carter's here, though.

He gestures to GENERAL MARSHALL CARTER, Deputy Chief of Operations for the CIA. Carter nods to the President.

THE CAMERA PANS OVER THE OTHERS.

DOUGLAS DILLON, ex-banker, Secretary of the Treasury.

ROSWELL GILPATRIC, studious Deputy Secretary of Defense.

PAUL NITZE, 55, the detail-driven facts man, Assistant Secretary of Defense.

GEORGE BALL, 50s, Undersecretary of State. Eloquent, a man of conscience.

U. ALEXIS JOHNSON, Deputy Under Secretary of State.

EDWARD MARTIN, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America.

LLEWELLYN THOMPSON, laid back, rumpled Soviet Affairs Advisor.

DON WILSON, Deputy Director of the USIA.

The President sits down at the center of the table, Rusk and McNamara to either side, and the others resume their seats.

Bobby takes one of the over-stuffed chairs at the table.

Kenny finds one along the wall behind the President, under the windows to the Rose Garden to TED SORENSEN, 30s, the President's legal counsel and speech writer. They greet each other coolly.

KENNY:

Ted.

SORENSEN:

Kenny.

The room falls silent. The President looks across the table to GENERAL CARTER.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay. Let's have it.

GENERAL CARTER:

Arthur Lundahl heads our photographic interpretation division at CIA. I'll let him and his boys take you through what we've got. Arthur?

Lundahl, standing at the end of the room with briefing boards, steps forward with a pointer.

LUNDAHL:

Gentlemen, as most of you now know a U-2 over Cuba on Sunday morning took a series of disturbing photographs.

SWINGING THE POINTER AT A BOARD SMASH CUTS US TO:

EXT. MISSILE SITE - LOS PALACIOS, CUBA - DAY

The sweltering Cuban countryside. Shouting SOVIET ROCKET TROOPS, stripped to the waist, glistening with sweat, machete a clearing under scattered, limp palm trees.

LUNDAHL (V.O.)

Our analysis at NPIC indicates the Soviet Union has followed its conventional weapons build-up in Cuba with the introduction of surface-to-surface medium-range ballistic missiles, or MRBMs. Our official estimate at this time is that this missile system is the SS-4 Sandal. We do not believe these missiles are as yet operational.

A bulldozer TEARS through the undergrowth. FILLING THE SCREEN. A 70-foot long MISSILE TRANSPORTER creeps along in the bulldozer's wake like a vast hearse with its shrouded cargo.

INT. CABINET ROOM - DAY

Lundahl raps his second board: a map of the United States, Cuba visible in the lower corner. An ARC is drawn clearly across the U.S., encompassing the entire Southeast.

LUNDAHL:

IRONBARK reports the SS-4 can deliver a 3-megaton nuclear weapon 1000 miles. So far we have identified 32 missiles served by around 3400 men, undoubtedly all Soviet personnel. Our cities and military installations in the Southeast,

as far north as Washington, are in range of these weapons, and in the event of a launch, would only have five minutes of warning.

GENERAL CARTER:

Five minutes, gentlemen. Five minutes.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

In those five minutes they could kill 80 million Americans and destroy a significant number of our bomber bases, degrading our retaliatory options. The Joint Chiefs' consensus is that this is a massively destabilizing move, upsetting the nuclear balance.

The President stares at Lundahl, and beating out each word.

THE PRESIDENT:

Arthur. Are. You. Sure?

Lundahl looks around the room. Everyone is hanging.

LUNDAHL:

Yes, Mr. President. These are nuclear missiles.

The men come to grips with their own fears, own anger.

BOBBY:

How long until they're operational?

LUNDAHL:

General Taylor can answer that question better than I can.

General Taylor drops a memo on the table WHICH BECOMES:

EXT. FIELD TABLE - MISSILE SITE, CUBA - DAY

SCHEMATICS slapped down on a camp table. A group of Soviet site ENGINEERS point and gesture as they study their ground from a shaded hillock. CLEARING CREWS and SURVEYORS work and sweat in the distance.

GENERAL TAYLOR (V.O.)

GMAIC estimates ten to fourteen days.

However, a crash program to ready the missiles could cut that time.

INT. CABINET ROOM - DAY

Taylor sees the grim looks all around.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

I have to stress that there may be more missiles that we don't know about. We need more U-2 coverage.

Kenny lets out his breath. He catches Bobby's eye. This is unbelievable.

THE PRESIDENT:

Is there any indication - anything at all - that suggests they intend to use these missiles in some sort of first strike?

GENERAL CARTER:

Not at present, sir. But I think the prudent answer is we don't know.

THE PRESIDENT:

Do we have any sort of intelligence from CIA on what Khrushchev is thinking?

GENERAL CARTER:

No, Mr. President. We don't. We just don't know what's happening inside the Kremlin at that level.

BOBBY:

They lied to us. Two weeks ago Dobrynin told me to my face Khurshev had no intention of putting missiles into Cuba. They said themselves, this is our backyard.

There's angry agreement. The President cuts it off.

THE PRESIDENT:

Gentlemen, I want first reactions. Assuming for a moment Khrushchev has not gone off the deep end and intends to start World War Three, what are we looking at?

Rusk glances to his team at the end of the table. Ball, Johnson, Martin, Thompson and Stevenson.

RUSK:

Mr. President, I believe my team is in agreement. If we permit the introduction of nuclear missiles to a Soviet satellite nation in our hemisphere, the diplomatic consequences will be too terrible to contemplate. The Russians are trying to show the world they can do whatever they want, wherever they want, and we're powerless to stop them. If they succeed...

BOBBY:

It will be Munich all over again.

RUSK:

Appeasement only makes the aggressor more aggressive. Confidence in our security commitments around the world will falter, allies will become unsure in the face of Soviet pressure, and the Soviets will be emboldened to push us even harder. We must remove the missiles one way or another. It seems to me the options are either to build up the crisis 'til they give in, or we hit them. An air strike.
There's silence at the table. Some nods. Understanding.

THE PRESIDENT:

Bob?

MCNAMARA:

We've worked up several military scenarios. Before I ask General Taylor to lead us through the various options, I'd like for us to adopt a rule. If we are going to strike, we must agree now that we will do it before the missiles become operational. Because once they are, I don't think we can guarantee getting them all before at least some are launched.

And there it is. The clock is running.

BUNDY:

Sir. We need to consider... if we decide to act, there's a good chance we'll end up in a general war.

The room falls silent. The President leans back in his chair, studying the circle of men around the table, weighing them.

Kenny and the others watch him in silence. A long, dramatic pause. A course that will change history is about to be chosen. The President leans forward, folds his hands on the table. Fated. Grave.

THE PRESIDENT:

It's clear we cannot permit Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba. We must get those missiles out.

EXT. THE ROSE GARDEN - DAY

Kenny and Bobby follow the President down a path through the Rose Garden. The shock of the morning has worn off. The President stops, looks at them.

THE PRESIDENT:

I don't think it's going to matter what Khrushchev's intentions are. I tell you, right now... I don't see any way around hitting them.

A long moment of silence as they move along again.

KENNY:

If we hit 'em, kill a lot of Russians, they'll move against Berlin. They attack Berlin, that's NATO... and we're at war.

The guys stop again. The autumn day is bright, warm, alive. The air, the distant city sounds derail the relentless train of logic for a beat. And in their faces we see that all three men, for the first time, feel the enormity of war, its shadow over everything. It's only a couple of steps away. Steps that they're seriously contemplating.

BOBBY:

Damned if we do, but if we don't, we're

in a war for sure somewhere else in six months.

Pained, the President turns away.

THE PRESIDENT:

No choice. This is going to cost lives any way we go. Do nothing, and it could be 80 million of ours. We have to get rid of those missiles.

KENNY:

There've got to be alternatives to just going out and bombing them.

BOBBY:

He's right, Jack. Taylor is saying we may have some time. We've got to use it.

THE PRESIDENT:

So if there are alternatives that make sense - and I'm not saying there are - we need 'em. Need 'em fast.

BOBBY:

What about the allies? Congress? I think we may need to start letting key people know. And they're all scattered across the country for the campaign. We're going to need to get the U.N. staff in and warmed up. Jesus... I don't even know if we've got secure communications with half our embassies since that the Soviets got that cryptographer of ours.

THE PRESIDENT:

We can't worry about everything right now. We've got to figure out what we're going to do before we worry about how we do it.

KENNY:

The other thing is...

BOBBY:

... I know. CIA and the military fucked us on the Bay of Pigs.

KENNY:

They're going to be pressing for a military solution soon. We can't afford to let them ram their agenda down our throats. We need to come with options other than air strikes so we have some sort of choice here.

BOBBY:

We got a bunch of smart guys. We lock 'em up together in there, kick 'em in the ass til they come up with options. Kenny and the President look at him. Bobby nods.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

I'll do it.

KENNY:

(to the President)

It's too politicized with you in there, anyway. They need to be able to stick their necks out.

BOBBY:

It'll be the principals, a couple of the key guys from each department: the Executive Committee of the National Security Council. We'll call it EXCOM. Kenny snorts a laugh. Bobby shoots him a cross look.

KENNY:

EXCOM. Has a ring to it. Like F-Troop. The President stops. Bobby and Kenny stop, too.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay. Kenny and I only show for the meetings you call us into. Impress us. And do it fast.

(to Kenny)

You're in charge of keeping this quiet.

If word gets out before we know what we're going to do, there'll be panic. And it'll ruin any chance of surprise if we decide to hit them.

KENNY:

Then we need to do a few things right away. No Pierre. He knows, the press knows.

You're going to have to keep up your schedule - your movements are followed too closely. And we need to get these guys out of the White House. George Ball's got a conference room at State.
(to Bobby)

Reconvene over there this afternoon, come back here tonight.

Bobby nods.

BOBBY:

I think we should bring in Dean Acheson. He was fighting Soviets while we were still working the wards in Boston.

The President nods his approval. Looks at Kenny.

THE PRESIDENT:

Find him, Kenny. We're going to need all the help we can get.

INT. WEST WING - HALL OUTSIDE PRESS OFFICE - DAY

Kenny moves hard and fast through the twisting warren of hallways and tiny offices which is the West Wing. Suddenly, Scotty Reston pops out of a doorway behind Kenny.

RESTON:

Hey, Kenny! Who died?

Kenny glances over his shoulder at Scotty who points to a window. A beat, then Kenny returns to look out the window. Outside, the West Wing Drive is FILLED WITH LIMOUSINES. A flash of dismay, but Kenny covers fast.

KENNY:

Way it's going, the Democratic Party. DNC strategy session. If you can call it that.

Scotty chuckles. Kenny moves off, leading him away. Kenny's assistant runs up behind him, holding out a slip of paper.

ASSISTANT:

Sir?

Kenny tries to look him away.

RESTON:

It's Tuesday. You said to call. When do I get my 45 minutes?

KENNY:

Tell you what. We're in Connecticut tomorrow for Ribicoff. I'll get you up front with him during the flight.

RESTON:

Deal.

ASSISTANT:

Sir.

Kenny turns, harsh

KENNY:

What is it?

The Assistant eyes Scotty, holds his tongue. Kenny takes the slips.

ASSISTANT:

The number you asked for.

KENNY:

I ask for a lot of 'em. Whose is it?

ASSISTANT:

Dean Acheson's, sir.

That shuts Kenny up. Reston eyes the slip, then looks to Kenny's face. And he knows something isn't right here.

KENNY:

Gotta go, Scotty. See you tomorrow.

INT. TREASURY BUILDING GARAGE - NIGHT

A car jolts to a stop. The CAMERA PANS up over the sagging suspension, the government plates, the hood ornament

revealing half of EXCOM inside. Kenny stands nearby waiting for them.

The doors open, and out they pile like a bunch of clowns: Bobby, McNamara, Rusk, Ball, Martin, Dioptoric, Sorensen, Stevenson, and Nitze. They're sitting in each others' laps, banging their heads on the roof, joking, but tense.

BOBBY:

Screw secrecy. You try having that fat ass sit on your lap all the way from Foggy Bottom.

MCNAMARA:

You were excited. I say no more.
The gang falls in behind Kenny, trails him out of the garage.
INT. TUNNEL TO WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT
A steel door unlocks, swings open, and Kenny marches at the head of the wedge of men into a long tunnel. It's the infamous old passage from the Treasury to the White House. Kenny and Bobby get a little ahead of the others.

BOBBY:

Everybody agrees the diplomatic route is out. It's too slow, and they'll have the missiles finished.
Kenny looks at him. Then there's only one alternative. The CAMERA wipes through the ceiling to:
EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT
GROUND LEVEL. Where the brilliantly-lit flag flutters over the spotlight White House: their destination.
INT. CABINET ROOM - NIGHT
GENERAL WALTER 'CAM' SWEENEY, head of Tactical Air Command, stands at the head of the table with a presentation board. The men of EXCOM gather around Sweeney in their rumpled shirts, nursing coffee and cigarettes.

GENERAL SWEENEY:

We have 850 planes assembling at Homestead, Eglin, Opa Locka, MacDill, Patrick, Pensacola and Key West.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. HOMESTEAD AFB - FLORIDA - NIGHT
An F-100 Super Sabre stands under lights on a taxiway. The

CAMERA DESCENDS FROM ITS OVERHEAD SHOT, discovering the aircraft's sleek cockpit, menacing tiger-jaw paint job, the four 20mm cannons on its nose.

GENERAL SWEENEY (V.O.)

Due to the tropical foliage, the OPLAN calls for high-explosive and napalm loadouts for our ground attack sorties.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

The FLIGHT LINE where a full strike wing stands beyond this plane, pylons laden with weapons, GROUND CREW servicing them.

INT. CABINET ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Other EXCOM members draw near the board, its order of battle, strike maps. They're grim, but fascinated. Empowering. Intoxicating. Sexy. Kenny sees it in the faces, even the President's. Adlai does too, is upset.

ADLAI:

I still think there are diplomatic approaches we haven't considered yet.

Kenny looks at Adlai. The others around the room, embarrassed, don't respond. The group has moved on and Stevenson hasn't.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

We have high confidence in the expanded air strike option.

(beat)

The problem, Mr. President, is that it's a short-term solution. Khrushchev can send more missiles next month. The Chiefs and I believe we should follow up the air strikes with the full version of OPLAN 316.

THE PRESIDENT:

An invasion...

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Yes, sir. We can be sure we get all the missiles, and we remove Castro so this can never happen again.

Kenny looks around the room at the men, the murmurs of general agreement, senses the consensus building and is agitated.

THE PRESIDENT:

Is this the Chiefs' recommendation?

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Yes, sir. Our best option is to commence the strikes before the missiles are operational. The invasion happens eight days later.

The President leans back in his chair, turns to the man at the far end of the table: DEAN ACHESON, 60s, former Secretary of State. He sits silent, like some revered oracle, the architect of the American Cold War strategy of containment.

THE PRESIDENT:

Dean. What do you think?

Acheson arches an eyebrow, and when he speaks, his voice resonates throughout the room, powerful, smooth, hypnotic.

ACHESON:

Mr. President, you have rightly dismissed the diplomatic option. The Soviet will only tie you down in negotiation, and leave us short of our goal, the removal of the missiles.

Negotiating will do nothing more than give them time to make the missiles operational, complicating the necessary military task we have at hand.

Everyone in the room listens to him with rapt attention, his presence overshadowing the room, oracular:

ACHESON (CONT'D)

For the last fifteen years, I have fought here at this table along side your predecessors in the struggle against the Soviet. Gentlemen, I do not wish to seem melodramatic, but I do wish to impress upon you one observation with all conceivable sincerity. A lesson I have learned with bitter tears and great sacrifice.

(beat)

The Soviet understands only one

language:

word:

Kenny stares at the old man. Acheson's gaze finds his through the cigarette smoke. Acheson's eyes travel to the President.

ACHESON (CONT'D)

I concur with General Taylor. I recommend, sir, air strikes followed by invasion, perhaps preceded by an ultimatum to dismantle the missiles if military necessity permits.

Taylor nods, vindicated. The others murmur their approval. Bobby, at the table in front of Kenny and to his left, trades a dire look with Kenny. This is happening too fast. Bobby holds his head, looks about at the others, deeply distressed. The President sinks back in his chair, staring at Acheson.

THE PRESIDENT:

Then it appears we have three options.

Number one. A surgical air strike against the missiles themselves. Two, a larger air strike against their air defenses along with the missiles.

Kenny eyes Bobby. Bobby is writing something.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

And three, invasion.

Bobby looks over his shoulder at Kenny, and REACHES BACK to him with a folded NOTE. Kenny takes it, opens it.

It reads NOW I KNOW WHO TOJO FELT PLANNING PEARL HARBOR.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

We're certainly going to do number one; we're going to take out these missiles, so it seems to me we don't have to wait very long. We ought to at least be making those preparations.

Kenny gives Bobby a curt nod. Bobby tilts his head at the

President:

note in front of the President.

The President unfolds the note, and we HOLD ON IT and his reaction as in the b.g., out of focus, Taylor speaks:

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Yes, sir, we're preparing to implement all three options, though I must stress again, sir, there are risks to the strikes without the follow-on invasion. Bundy clears his throat. Speaks from somewhere down the table.

BUNDY:

You want to be clear, Mr. President, that we have definitely decided against a political track.

The President folds the note away, glances at Bobby. A beat, the President looks from Bobby to Acheson.

THE PRESIDENT:

Dean, how does this play out?

ACHESON:

Your first step, sir, will be to demand that the Soviet withdraw the missiles within 12 to 24 hours. They will refuse. When they do, you will order the strikes, followed by the invasion. They will resist, but will be overrun. They will retaliate against a target somewhere else in the world, most likely Berlin. We will honor our treaty commitments and resist them there, defeating them per our plans.

THE PRESIDENT:

Those plans call for the use of nuclear weapons.

(beat)

And what is the next step?

Acheson sits back in his chair, smooths his moustache. A dramatic beat, and then his ominous pronouncement rings out:

ACHESON:

Hopefully cooler heads will prevail before we reach the next step.

A chill runs down Kenny's spine. He looks in shock to the President. The President remains calm. But in place of the fated look the President has had, there's a hesitation.

INT. WEST WING HALLS - NIGHT

Acheson strides down the hall, Taylor, Sweeney, Carter and Bundy swept along behind him. Bundy is on the defensive, the others grim.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

If McNamara'd get off the fence...

BUNDY:

We have time.

GENERAL CARTER:

Goddamn it, it's obvious. It's the only option. That asshole, Stevenson. We can't let this drag out or we lose our shot.

BUNDY:

Bombing them...

ACHESON:

Remember that the Kennedys' father was one of the architects of Munich. The General is right. There is only one responsible choice here.

Bundy just nods. Taylor grabs a door ahead for Acheson.

ACHESON (CONT'D)

Let's pray appeasement doesn't run in families. I fear weakness does.

And the men head into a stairwell going down.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

Grimacing in pain. He opens a pill bottle, takes two pills out. He takes a whiskey in a shot glass from Kenny.

RESUME:

Kenny finishes pouring him and Bobby a couple of more shots, discreetly turning a blind eye to the President's pain.

The President returns from his desk, shirt untucked, disheveled, back stiff. He eases into his rocking chair.

Bobby lies sprawled on the couch. Kenny sits down. They all look at each other. A beat, something like shock.

KENNY:

Jesus Christ Almighty...

They burst out laughing. An absurd, tension draining moment.
They shoot their drinks, Kenny refills.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Call me Irish, but I don't believe in
cooler heads prevailing.

THE PRESIDENT:

Acheson's scenario is unacceptable. And
he has more experience than anyone.

KENNY:

There is no expert on this subject, no
wise old man.

The President stares Kenny in the face, understanding.

THE PRESIDENT:

The thing is, Acheson's right. Talk
alone won't accomplish anything.

Kenny considers the President, his face straight as he says:

KENNY:

Then let's bomb the shit out of them.

Everyone wants to, even you, even me.

(there's a point)

It sure would feel good.

The President sees what Kenny's saying: it'd be an emotional
response, not necessarily the intelligent one.

BOBBY:

Jack, I'm as conniving as they come, but
a sneak attack is just wrong.

KENNY:

He's right. And things are happening
too fast. It smells like the Bay of
Pigs all over again.

Bobby picks up some reconnaissance photos on the coffee
table.

BOBBY:

As if dealing with the Russians wasn't
hard enough, we gotta worry about our
own house.

THE PRESIDENT:

Tonight, listening to Taylor and Acheson, I kept seeing Burke and Dulles telling me all I had to do was sign on the dotted line. The invasion would succeed. Castro would be gone. Just like that. Easy.

The President is rendered mute by a wave of pain. Kenny and Bobby avert their eyes. When it passes, the President is hushed, grave.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

There's something...immoral about abandoning your own judgement.

Kenny nods, moved. The President reaches out for the reconnaissance photos Bobby's flipping through. Bobby hands them to him. The President looks them over. And when he speaks, there's humility. And resolve.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

We can't let things get ahead of themselves. We've got to control what happens.

We're going to do what we have to make this come out right. EXCOM is our first weapon.

(beat)

We'll resort to others as we need 'em.

EXT. AIRPORT - BRIDGEPOINT, CONNECTICUT - DAY

SUPER:

A LONG SHOT of an ENORMOUS CROWD thronging a bunting-trimmed platform. The President, barely recognizable at the distance, and a cluster of political VIPS wave from it, smiling.

Kenny steps INTO FRAME, back here at the fringes of the crowd.

THE PRESIDENT (O.S.)

Doesn't anybody in Connecticut have to work today?

The crowd goes nuts. Kenny paces, checks his watch, impatient to be done with the necessary diversion. Kenny gazes off to his right and spots Scotty Reston, along with half the White House press corps suckered along. Scotty catches Kenny's look.

Kenny turns away, but Scotty comes weaving over. The

President continues on, but all we hear is Scotty and Kenny.

RESTON:

Kenny! What happened? They didn't let me up front, said the President was on the phone the whole time.

KENNY:

He was.

RESTON:

Yeah? Who was he talking to? Acheson? Come on, O'Donnell, everyone's wondering what's going on. What's Acheson doing in town? And don't give me some bullshit about DNC think tanks. Acheson's Mr. Cold War.

KENNY:

Why don't you ask him yourself? You can have him on the way home.

RESTON:

I'm giving you a chance here: talk to me. You can influence how this thing unfolds.

But Kenny stands there, mute. Reston just shakes his head, knowing for sure something's up. He turns and heads back for the press corps.

EXT. STAIRS TO AIR FORCE ONE - DAY

Kenny and the President climb the stairs to the Presidential plane, the crowd cheering him. He gives a final wave.

THE PRESIDENT:

Let's get out of here.

KENNY:

Cheer up, you've neutralized the entire White House Press Corps for a day.

INT. GEORGE BALL'S CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

EXCOM meets in George Ball's small conference room at the State Department. Bobby, in shirtsleeves, paces at the head of the table, very, very alone. All eyes are on him.

BOBBY:

No. No. No. There is more than one option here. If one isn't occurring to us, it's because we haven't thought hard enough.

McNamara squirms. The others react in frustration. CIA chief JOHN MCCONE, sharp, tough, conservative, is harsh.

MCCONE:

Sometimes there is only one right choice, and you thank God when it's clear.

BOBBY:

You're talking about a sneak attack! How'll that make us look? Big country blasting a little one into the stone age. We'll be real favorites around the world.

ACHESON:

Bobby, that's naive. This is the real world, you know that better than anybody. Your argument is ridiculous.

MCCONE:

You weren't so ethically particular when we were talking about options for removing Castro over at CIA.

And there's nothing Bobby can say to that. He props himself up on the table, stares at it as if there's an answer in its shiny surface somewhere. There is only the reflection of his own face.

BOBBY:

I can't let my brother go down in History like a villain, like a Tojo, ordering another Pearl Harbor.

McCone, Acheson, and Taylor share a look. The last resistance to airstrikes is crumbling. Finally, Bobby looks up at McNamara.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Bob. If we go ahead with these air strikes...

(beat)

There's got to be something else. Give it to me. I don't care how crazy, inadequate or stupid it sounds.

(beat, pleading)

Give it to me.

McNamara suffers under the gaze of everyone at the table, weighing the situation out. And finally he ventures.

MCNAMARA:

Six months ago we gamed out a scenario. It's slow. It doesn't get rid of the missiles. There are a lot of drawbacks.

(beat)

The scenario was for a blockade of Cuba.

SUPER:

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Kenny enters the office from his side door in the middle of a debate. Military uniforms dominate the room: General Taylor, General Sweeney, and a host of briefing officers.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

The situation is worse than we thought. We count 40 missiles now, longer range IRBMs. They can hit every city in the continental U.S.

The President stares out the window at the Rose Garden, his back to Air Force Chief of Staff GENERAL CURTIS LEMAY, 60. Beetle-browed, arrogant, the archetypal Cold War general. Yet there is something about him, his intelligence perhaps, that suggests he's playing a role he knows and believes in. The only other civilians in the room are Bobby, Bundy and McNamara. The pressure from the military is almost physical.

LEMAY:

Mr. President, as of this moment my planes are ready to carry out the air strikes. All you have to do is give me the word, sir, and my boys will get those Red bastards.

The President continues staring out the window. Kenny eases over to the desk, leans on it, arms folded, interposing himself between the President and the soldiers. Bobby joins

him, side-by-side.

THE PRESIDENT:

How long until the army is ready?

GENERAL TAYLOR:

We've just begun the mobilization under cover of a pre-arranged exercise, sir. We're looking at another week and a half, Mr. President.

LEMAY:

But you can begin the strikes, now. The plans call for an eight-day air campaign. It'd light a fire under the army's ass to get in place.

That makes the President turn around, stare at LeMay.

THE PRESIDENT:

General LeMay, do you truly believe that's our best course of action?

LEMAY:

Mr. President, I believe it is the only course of action. American is in danger. Those missiles are a threat to our bomber bases and the safety of our nuclear deterrent. Without our deterrent, there's nothing to keep the enemy from choosing general nuclear war. It's our duty, our responsibility to the American people to take out those missiles and return stability to the strategic situation. The Big Red Dog is digging in our back yard, and we're justified in shooting him.

Taylor steps in softly, smoothly: good cop to LeMay's bad.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Sir, we have a rapidly closing window of opportunity where we can prevent those missiles from ever becoming operational. The other options...

He spares a look at McNamara, who watches the fireworks, arms

folded, serious.

GENERAL TAYLOR (CONT'D)

...do not guarantee the end result we can guarantee. However, the more time that goes by, the less reliable the choice we can offer you becomes.

The President, partially defused, looks from Taylor to McNamara. LeMay steps forward, softer now, sincere.

LEMAY:

Mr. President, the motto I chose for SAC is 'Peace is our Profession.' God forbid we find ourselves in a nuclear exchange. But if launched, those missiles in Cuba would kill a lot of Americans. That's why I'm being such a pain in the ass about destroying them. Destroying them immediately. Hell, even Mac agrees.

Bundy is uncomfortable. Everyone turns to him. He nods. Kenny realizes he's been co-opted by the military. McNamara does too, lets out a deep breath. The President eyes Bundy, then paces out from behind his desk, walks up to LeMay.

THE PRESIDENT:

General, what will the Soviets do when we attack?

LEMAY:

Nothing.

Kenny, Bobby and the President look at each other, unable to believe what they just heard.

THE PRESIDENT:

Nothing?

LEMAY:

Nothing. Because the only alternative open to them is one they can't choose. His pronouncement hangs there in the air: ominous, dangerous.

THE PRESIDENT:

Those aren't just missiles we'll be destroying. We kill Soviet soldiers,

and they will respond. How would we respond if they killed ours? No, they will do something, General, I promise you that. And I believe it'll be Berlin.

INT. WEST WING HALLWAY - DAY

LeMay walk out of the Oval Office with Taylor, Carter and their staffers.

LEMAY:

Those goddamn Kennedys are going to destroy this country if we don't do something about this.

There are dark looks on the faces of the other officers. They agree.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

As the meeting next door disperses, the President rummages through Kenny's jacket which hangs on Kenny's chair. Kenny, bemused, holds out the package of cigarettes the President is looking for.

KENNY:

I was hoping LeMay pushed you. I wouldn't mind going a few rounds with him.

The President glances up, takes the proffered smokes.

THE PRESIDENT:

We knew it was coming. I tell you, Kenny, these brass hats have one big advantage. We do what they want us to, none of us will be alive to tell 'em they were wrong.

Bobby, Rusk and Sorensen enter from the hall.

SORENSEN:

Mr. President, Gromyko should be on his way by now.

RUSK:

We need to go over what you're going to say.

BOBBY:

There's still no sign they know that we know about the missiles. Been a lot of cloud cover; probably think we aren't getting any good product.

THE PRESIDENT:

We keep 'em in the dark as long as we can. But I sure as hell am going to test him.

INT. WEST WING HALL - DAY

Kenny comes out of the bathroom, and is buttonholed by the crewcut, bullet-headed Press Secretary, PIERRE SALINGER, in the crowded, busy hallway.

SALINGER:

Kenny, I'm getting funny questions from the guys in the press office. As Press Secretary, I need to know. What's going on?

Kenny wheels back into his office. It's filled with people. But he bends confidentially to Pierre's ear.

KENNY:

They're planning to shave you bald next time you fall asleep on the bus.

(off Pierre's get-serious look)

Sorry, Pierre, Gromyko just arrived.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

The Press Corps throngs Kenny's tiny office, pushing and shoving for a vantage at the side door to the Oval Office, waiting for the Gromyko photo-op. Kenny stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Reston and Sorensen near the door.

RESTON:

Are they going to discuss the military exercises going on in Florida?

Kenny doesn't even blink, but Sorensen does a poorer job at hiding his reaction.

KENNY:

Come on, Scotty. This meeting's been on the books for months. It's just a friendly talk on U.S.-Soviet relations.

Fortunately, the conversation is cut short as a dozen

FLASHBULBS suddenly go off on a dozen cameras as the reporters crush in on the Oval Office, and Reston is swept forward.

KENNY'S POV:

over the reporters. The President, unsmiling, enters the room beside Soviet Foreign Minister, ANDREI GROMYKO. Gromyko pauses for the photos: grim, dark haired, saturnine.

RESUME:

Kenny reacts. At last, the face of the enemy.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

The CAMERA picks up the darkened windows: the meeting has gone long. The CAMERA MOVES PAST Kenny and Sorensen standing in the doorway to Kenny's office, FINDS the President in his chair across from Gromyko on the sofa. Rusk, Ambassador ANATOLY DOBRINYN, and two INTERPRETERS around them.

THE PRESIDENT:

So that there should be no misunderstanding, the position of the United States, which has been made clear by the Attorney General to Ambassador Dobrynin here, I shall read a sentence from my own statement to the press dated September 13th.

(beat, reading)

Should missiles or offensive weapons be placed in Cuba, it would present the gravest threat to U.S. national security.

The President stares at Gromyko as the translator finishes translating. Gromyko sits there, enigmatic, cold, unreadable. The translator finishes, and Gromyko stops him with a gesture so he can answer in his own accented English.

GROMYKO:

Mr. President, this will never be done.

You need not be concerned.

The President hides his fury masterfully, and gazing over his

glasses, asks:

THE PRESIDENT:

So I do not misunderstand you: there are no offensive weapons in Cuba.

A beat. And Gromyko's response is flat, sure, steady:

GROMYKO:

No, Mr. President. We have sent defensive weapons only to Cuba.

Kenny's blazing eyes could drill holes in the back of Gromyko's head. His gaze swings to the PRESIDENT'S DESK. BENEATH THE DESK sit the BRIEFING BOARDS with the evidence. INT. WEST WING HALLWAY - NIGHT

Kenny emerges from his office. The Soviet delegation disappears down the hallway with Rusk. Kenny turns as Bobby, haggard, comes up from the other direction. Bobby gestures to the vanishing delegation, now being HARANGUED OC by the press.

BOBBY:

What happened?

The President comes out of the next door down the hall, the Oval Office. He turns and sees Kenny and Bobby. He's livid.

THE PRESIDENT:

Lying bastard. Lied to my face.

BOBBY:

We're split down the middle. If I held a vote I think airstrike would beat blockade by a vote or two.

THE PRESIDENT:

I want a consensus, Bobby. Consensus. Either air strike or blockade. Something everyone'll stand by even if they don't like it. I need it by Saturday. Make it happen.

BOBBY:

What if I can't?

KENNY:

We go into this split, the Russians will know it. And they'll use it against us. The prospect disturbs the three men.

THE PRESIDENT:

Have you cancelled Chicago and the rest of the weekend yet?

KENNY:

You don't show for Chicago, everyone'll know there's something going on.

THE PRESIDENT:

I don't care. Cancel it.

KENNY:

No way.

The President spins on him, unsure he heard correctly.

KENNY (CONT'D)

I'm not calling and cancelling on Daly.

You call and cancel on Daly.

THE PRESIDENT:

You're scared to cancel on Daly.

KENNY:

Damn right I'm scared.

The President pauses, looks at Bobby. Bobby shakes his head: don't look at me.

THE PRESIDENT:

Well, I'm not.

BOBBY:

Then you'll call, right?

INT. HALLWAY - SHERATON-BLACKSTONE HOTEL - NIGHT

SUPER:

THEN SUPER:

Kenny threads his way through the host of SECRET SERVICE AGENTS and ADVANCE MAN cramming the hallway on the floor of the hotel they've taken over. From one of the rooms emerges Salinger.

SALINGER:

Kenny, all right. What's going on here?

There's rumors going around an exercise in the southeast is related to Cuba. I'm the Press Secretary. I can't do my job if I don't know what's going on. So what's going on?

KENNY:

What are you telling them?

SALINGER:

The truth:

KENNY:

(deadly serious)

Tell 'em you've looked into it, and all it is is an exercise. And Pierre --

(beat, loaded)

The President may have a cold tomorrow.

Kenny stares at him, and the light dawns on Pierre.

Something big is going on and he's been cut out of it. He stalks off.

SALINGER:

Damn it, Kenny. Goddamn it!

INT. RECEPTION HALL - SHERATON-BLACKSTONE - NIGHT

A big 100-dollar-a-plate dinner is in full swing to a dinner band's tunes. The President and Chicago MAYOR RICHARD DALY make the rounds among the fund raising CROWD. Kenny follows them at a respectful distance, greeting old cronies.

Suddenly a MESSENGER hustles over to Kenny, hands him a note.

Kenny makes eye contact with the President, nods and leaves.

INT. HOTEL ELEVATORS - NIGHT

Kenny waits at the elevator. Scotty saunters up behind him.

He sizes Kenny up, clears his throat. Kenny turns around.

RESTON:

There are major rail disruptions in the South, two airborne divisions are on alert. That exercise is an invasion.

KENNY:

Well, you know how Bobby has it in for the State of Mississippi.

RESTON:

This is about Cuba.
Kenny freezes, then explodes.

KENNY:

Cuba? You're fucking crazy. We are not invading Cuba. Nobody gives a rat's ass about Cuba. Not now, not ever.
If you print something like that, all you're going to do is inflame the situation. Nobody talks to assholes who inflame situations. Assholes like that can find themselves cut out of the loop.
Reston is taken aback. Stung silence for a beat. Kenny's response is far louder than any "yes." Now Kenny realizes it.

RESTON:

You've never threatened me before.
And Kenny looks away, upset, but when he turns back to Reston, all that's there is his poker face. The elevator arrives.

RESTON (CONT'D)

All right. I'm not going to print anything until I have another source.
But I promise you, I'll get one.
Kenny boards the elevator. The doors shut on Scotty.
INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS
Kenny closes his eyes, sags against the wall, hating himself.
INT. KENNY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS
Kenny enters his hotel room. An Assistant waits with the phone, hands it straight to Kenny.

KENNY:

(to Assistant)
Tell Pierre I need to talk to him.
(to phone)
Bobby?
INT. OUTER ROOM - GEORGE BALL'S OFFICE - NIGHT
EXCOM files past Bobby out of George Ball's conference room.

BOBBY:

Bring him back.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE SHERATON-BLACKSTONE HOTEL - DAY

SUPER:

The President emerges from the hotel, a HAT on his head. The Press and a CROWD surge forward, crying out for the President's attention. Kenny slides into the limo first as the President waves to the crowd.

Salinger waits on the sidewalk, and after the limo pulls away, the Press pushes in on him. Pierre's face is pale - he's just been told everything.

SALINGER:

The President has a cold. He is cancelling the remainder of this trip and is returning to Washington on the advice of his doctor.

INT. WHITE HOUSE MANSION - OVAL ROOM - DAY

The White House Oval ROOM: opulent, filled with priceless art and furniture, but cramped. EXCOM members crowd around the center coffee table and the President. Kenny stands behind him with Bobby. Rusk rises from his seat, formal.

RUSK:

Mr. President, our deliberations have led us to the conclusion that, for the moment, a blockade of offensive weapons to Cuba is our best option. But we'll still need a strong showing of support from the Organization of American States to give us an umbrella of legitimacy.

At long last... Kenny looks at Bobby, relieved. They've bought time to find a settlement. Bobby smiles a small

smile:

MCNAMARA:

A blockade is technically an act of war, therefore we recommend calling the action a quarantine.

McNamara folder in hand, opens it, SMASH CUTTING US TO:

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - DAY

A SOVIET FREIGHTER churning its way south.

MCNAMARA (V.O.)

There are between 20 and 30 Soviet ships

underway to Cuba at this time.

The CAMERA races along its side, discovering TARPULINED OBJECTS on deck, and on its stack, the RED HAMMER AND SICKLE. MCNAMARA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

800 miles out, the navy will stop them, board, and any vessels containing weapons will be turned back.

CUT TO:

The Destroyer U.S.S. JOHN R. PIERCE putting out to sea, SAILORS racing over its deck, through hatches to its 5-inch gun turrets. The ship races by, AMERICAN FLAG streaming from its stern distaff, FILLING THE SCREEN, WIPING TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE MANSION - OVAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The President. He listens, looks over the briefing papers as McNamara continues. Everyone watches the President.

MCNAMARA:

A quarantine prevents more missiles from reaching Cuba, but it doesn't remove the ones already there. It gives the Soviets a chance to pull back without war. If they refuse to remove the missiles before they're operational, we retain the option to strike or invade.

BOBBY:

We believe that a surprise attack would be counter to what the United States stands for. We believe that an attack leaves us no room for maneuver, and the inevitable Soviet response will force us into a war we do not want. A war that, this time, will really end all war.

MCCONE:

Mr. President, there are still those of us who believe we should proceed with the strikes. With the blockade, we lose strategic surprise and we run the risk of a first strike if the Soviets decide they have to use the missiles or lose them.

The President gazes from one expectant face to another. But

he himself remains unreadable.

THE PRESIDENT:

Quarantine or air strike.

Adlai clears his throat. Everyone looks over at him. He stares down at his clasped hands for a beat. He's anguished about what he's going to say.

ADLAI:

There is a third option. With either course we undertake the risk of nuclear war. It seems to me maybe one of us in here should be a coward.

He smiles weakly, but gets no response from anyone.

ADLAI (CONT'D)

So I guess I'll be. Our third choice is to cut a deal. We trade Guantanamo and our missiles in Turkey, get them to pull their missiles out. We employ a back channel, attribute the idea to U Thant.

U Thant then raises it at the U.N.

Adlai looks for support around the room, but meets only stony gazes. From McCone and General Taylor, contempt. Dead silence for a long, long beat.

Kenny's heart goes out to Stevenson as he watches the man commit political suicide. Even Sorensen, standing behind him, unconsciously moves away. At last the President speaks.

THE PRESIDENT:

I don't think that's possible, Adlai.

(beat, to the room)

I will be asking the networks for air time Monday night. I have not yet made my final decision. We will announce our course of action then. I want to thank you all for your advice, gentlemen.

EXT. TRUMAN BALCONY - DAY

Kenny, Bobby, and the President lean on the railing of the Truman Balcony, stare out at the city.

BOBBY:

Goddman Stevenson. Jesus. Peace at any price. You'd think nobody learned anything from World War Two.

THE PRESIDENT:

Somebody had to say it. I respect Adlai for having the guts to risk looking like an appeaser.

BOBBY:

We have to pull him. He's not going to be able to handle the Soviets in front of the U.N. Zorin will eat him alive.

THE PRESIDENT:

We've got bigger problems right now.

KENNY:

We have to try the blockades. It probably won't work. It may just be delaying the inevitable. But we can't just go to war without trying not to.

THE PRESIDENT:

I don't know. I don't know.

He stares out at the Ellipse where a little-league football game sweeps across the grass, the shouts and screams of the CHILDREN, so alive, floating to them on the wind.

EXT. PATIO - JIM ROWE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A crowded D.C. party spills out of Jim Rowe's house onto his patio. Kenny steps INTO FRAME. He looks at the PARTYGOERS, the Washington social set. He stands out, oppressed by the knowledge he's unable to share. He takes a stiff drink. Suddenly out of the house totters Adlai, highball in hand. Glassy-eyed, he grins at Kenny and joins him.

ADLAI:

Just can't get away from you guys.
Escaping for a night on the town, eh?

KENNY:

As the town's most popular playboy, the President felt my presence would be sorely missed. So in the interests of National Security...

Kenny shrugs. Adlai takes a long drink, closes his eyes.

ADLAI:

Gotta keep up appearances. Of course, I don't care anymore. I'm a political dead man. You ever seen a man cut his own throat like I did today?

Kenny has no answer to that. He looks down, pained for Adlai.

ADLAI (CONT'D)

Well, it's all right.

(beat)

I came to tell you, just talked to a friend. Reston and Frankel have the story. It's going to run tomorrow.

INT. BEDROOM - JIM ROWE'S HOUSE - LATER

Kenny, shut in the bedroom, paces on the phone.

KENNY:

We're not going to make it to Monday. I'll try to lean on Reston, but you're going to have to call Orville Dryfoos. This is the sort of decision the publisher makes himself.

INT. ORVILLE DRYFOOS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

New York Times publisher ORVILLE DRYFOOS sits at his kitchen table in his underwear, still half-asleep, phone to his ear.

DRYFOOS:

Yes, sir, I understand. But we held on Bay of Pigs and it was the biggest mistake of my life. What makes this any different?

INT. PRESIDENT'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The President, on the phone, stops pacing by his bedside table and exhales.

THE PRESIDENT:

I'm asking you to hold the story until I can present our course of action on Monday night.

INT. ORVILLE DRYFOOS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

DRYFOOS:

All right. But I need a reason to give my boys. They're going to be screaming

for my head on a plate.

INT. PRESIDENT'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

THE PRESIDENT:

Orville. I want you to tell them this:
they'll be saving lives. Maybe even
including their own.

INT. ORVILLE DRYFOOS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

At that, Dryfoos sits up. Serious. All resistance gone.

DRYFOOS:

Yes, Mr. President.

INT. ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH - DAY

SUPER:

AVE MARIA soars over the communion meditation at a crowded
Sunday mass. Kenny, in a pew, glances off to his left.
The President sits nearby, head bowed. But Kenny knows he's
not thinking about the mass. And when the President at last
lifts his head, Kenny sees the calm poise.

The President has made up his mind...

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Bobby barges into Kenny's office. Kenny, knowing his unique
entry, doesn't bother to look up.

KENNY:

Acheson called, DeGaulle's with us;
haven't heard from anyone else yet.

Kenny finally looks up. Bobby's grim. And an icicle forms
in Kenny's gut as Bobby relays.

BOBBY:

He wants to talk to LeMay again.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Kenny, Bobby, McNamara, Rusk, Bundy and half of EXCOM stand
to the side of the room. General Sweeney and LeMay stand in
front of the President's desk.

The President, bowed in the window, is care-worn, a thousand
years old. The shadow, the composition of the SHOT tells us
all. It's down to what's in the heart of one man. Kenny is
deeply moved at his friend's Gethsemane.

THE PRESIDENT:

Cam, can you guarantee me you'll get all

the missiles?

Sweeney glances at LeMay. LeMay's stern, frozen look wills him to say, very simply, "yes."

But then the President turns around, looks Sweeney in the eye. It would make Machiavelli himself tell the truth.

GENERAL SWEENEY:

Sir, I can guarantee we'll get all the missiles we know about.

The President holds Sweeney in his gaze. Thank you.

LEMAY:

Mr. President, we can get better than ninety percent of them.

The President doesn't respond to LeMay's last-ditch appeal. Ninety-percent isn't good enough with nuclear weapons. He moves to his desk, signs a paper, hands it to General Sweeney.

THE PRESIDENT:

As of seven o'clock Monday night, all United States armed forces world wide will stand up to DEFCON 3.

EXT. BARKSDALE AFB - SUNSET

SUPER:

A DEAFENING WHINE. And INTO FRAME yawns the enormous spinning mouth of a B-52 bomber jet engine. It closes on us, sucking us in like a maelstrom, but at the last second the CAMERA SLIPSTREAMS OVER IT --

-- carrying us over the aircraft's wing. The CAMERA pivots and the vast war machine crawls away underneath joining -- -- a long LINE of identical behemoths, in single file inching down a taxi way which vanishes into the distance. As the plane's immense vertical tail WIPES OUR VIEW:

EXT. MISSILE SILO - NIGHT

The CAMERA races toward a spotlighted concrete emplacement, over the immense BLAST DOOR which is sliding open, and DOWN --

INT. MISSILE SILO - CONTINUOUS

-- into the depths of a missile silo. The CAMERA speeds down the side of the Titan missile, through CLOUDS of steaming liquid hydrogen, past FUELING HOSES which clamp one by one to the rocket's side, past GANTRY ARMS pulling away. The CAMERA hurtles all the way to the bottom, SMASHING THROUGH THE FLOOR

TO:

EXT. CARRIBEAN SEA - NIGHT

The dark ocean, whitecaps whipping luminous around the aircraft carrier, U.S.S. ESSEX and her escorts. Running lights flash red and green.

The carrier's SIREN begins a lonely, eerie WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP like some immense creature which has lost its mind. The ship FILLS THE SCREEN, CUTTING US INTO:

INT. WEST WING - CONTINUOUS

The doors to the Cabinet room. A beat. Then they SWING WIDE. The President emerges, livid fury on his face, leaving

chaos behind:

beat later, catches up with him.

KENNY:

You'd worry that something was wrong if Congress offered you unconditional support.

THE PRESIDENT:

They want this fucking job, they can have it. It's no great joy to me. The President exhales, getting control.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

The elected representatives of the people have spoken...

(beat; determined)

Now let's tell the people...

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

Kenny stands there in the doorway, arms folded. As we PULL AWAY FROM HIM, we REVEAL the three NETWORK T.V. CAMERAS staring straight at us. Their red lights go on as one, and we swing around REVERSING TO:

The President at his desk: telegenic, powerful.

THE PRESIDENT:

Good evening, my fellow citizens. This Government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet military build-up on the island of Cuba...

EXT. BARKSDALE AFB - NIGHT

The first B-52 trundles to a stop at the end of the runway.
It begins to throttle-up, the ROAR of its engine mounting...

THE PRESIDENT (V.O.)

...unmistakable evidence has now
established the fact that a series of
missile sites is in preparation on that
imprisoned island. The purpose of these
bases can be none other than to proved a
nuclear strike capability against the
Western Hemisphere...

-- AND DROWNING OUT the President's speech as the plane
lurches forward, down the runway into the night.

EXT. MISSILE SILO - NIGHT

The Titan solo door GRINDS OPEN. And the missile inside
begins to rise into the white bath of the crossed spotlights.

THE PRESIDENT (V.O.)

Therefore, in the defense of our own
security and under the authority of the
Constitution, I have directed that the
following initial steps be taken.

First, to halt this offensive build-up,
a strict quarantine --

EXT. CARRIBEAN SEA - NIGHT

The President's words conjure the ESSEX battlegroup, its
destroyers plunging through heavy seas, lit up in the night.

THE PRESIDENT (V.O.)

-- on all offensive military equipment
under shipment to Cuba is being
initiated. All ships of any kind bound
for Cuba, if found to contain cargoes of
offensive weapons, will be turned back.

Second:

and increased close surveillance of Cuba
and its military build-up. Should these
offensive military preparations
continue, further action will be
justified --

EXT. OVER THE FLORIDA STRAITS - NIGHT

A flight of F-4 PHANTOMS drops INTO FRAME, lights flashing.

THE PRESIDENT (V.O.)

-- I have directed the Armed Forces to
prepare for any eventualities.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

A beat. And the President looks up from his notes.

THE PRESIDENT:

And third:

this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union...

The chilling words hang there in the air. BLEEDING IN: the rising and falling WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP which becomes --

EXT. CARRIBEAN SEA - NIGHT

-- the voice of the Essex battlegroup: sparkling, alive, a constellation of lights scattered across the sea. One by one the escort ships answer the carrier's SIREN with their own wailing cries, an alien chorus among the ships, disappearing and reappearing in the swells. The communication crescendos to its fever pitch --

-- and then the battlegroup goes to blackout. Like a dying universe, the answering sirens cut off, the life-lights wink out, and an appalling darkness falls across the sea...

FADE OUT:

BLACKNESS, LIKE BEFORE A CURTAIN RISES. And then a

flickering:

INT. BATHROOM - WEST WING - DAY

SUPER:

Kenny, stripped to the waist, Sorensen and Bundy shave in nearby sinks. Bobby barges in.

BOBBY:

We're getting the Soviet response.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Specks of shaving cream still on his face, Kenny paces, reads the inky carbon as Bobby, Bundy and Sorensen read copies.

KENNY:

This is all rhetoric.

(realizing)

They don't know how to respond yet.

Kenny looks up. The President enters from the Oval Office.

THE PRESIDENT:

So now you're Khurshev. What do you do?

INT. CABINET ROOM - DAY

Kenny, arms folded, stands behind the President, the rest of EXCOM is looking at him.

KENNY:

-- run the blockade. They'll run the blockade.

ADMIRAL GEORGE ANDERSON, 50s, dapper, the Chief of Naval Operations, nods from the far end of the table.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

Which is exactly what they appear to be preparing to do, Mr. President. We're tracking 26 ships inbound to Cuba. There's no sign they're changing course. The closest ships, the Gagarin and the Kimovsk, will make the quarantine line by this time tomorrow.

MCNAMARA:

We're concerned about the possibility of an incident with an innocent cargo carrier. If it turns ugly, the Russians could use an ugly incident and bad world opinion as leverage to force us to remove the quarantine.

MCCONE:

Or they could use it as an excuse to escalate.

BOBBY:

Admiral Anderson, if the ships do not stop, what exactly are our rules of engagement?

Anderson signals A BRIEFING OFFICER who hits the lights and an overhead projector which SMASH CUTS TO:

INT. BRIDGE - U.S.S. JOHN R. PIERCE - DAY

The bridge of the U.S.S. John Pierce, a Gearing class destroyer. A RADIO OPERATOR addresses a mike in Russian.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON (V.O.)

Russian-speakers have been transferred to all of our ships. Once the quarantine takes effect in the morning, our ships will attempt to make radio contact with the approaching vessels. They will be ordered to reduce speed and prepare for inspection.

INT. WEAPONS' LOCKER - U.S.S. PIERCE - DAY

MARINES in flak jackets grab M-16s off a rack, race by.

EXT. U.S.S. PIERCE - AFT DECK - DAY

A ship's boat full of Marines lowers away, hits the water, engine spraying as it launches forward - in dress rehearsal.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON (V.O.)

An inspection party will then board and search the ship. If weapons are found, the ship will be ordered to leave the quarantine area or be towed into port upon refusal.

INT. CABINET ROOM - DAY

All eyes are on Admiral Anderson's overhead projections. Bobby, restless, gets up, begins pacing.

BOBBY:

What happens if the ship doesn't stop for inspection or want to be towed?

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

A warning shot will be fired across its bow.

Bobby stops, stares directly at the Admiral.

BOBBY:

And what happens if the ship ignores the warning shot?

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

Then we fire at its rudder, disable it, and carry out the inspection.

Kenny looks at the President who remains unmoved, unreadable.

THE PRESIDENT:

There will be no shooting without my explicit orders. Is that understood?

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

Yes, sir.

The President glances at McNamara.

THE PRESIDENT:

Well, Admiral, it looks like it's up to the Navy.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

The Navy won't let you down, sir.

THE PRESIDENT:

General, have we developed any more information on the missiles?

GENERAL TAYLOR:

They are continuing to proceed with the development. We're commencing low-level photography runs this morning.

MCCONE:

The pictures will be used to firm up our estimates of the missiles' readiness and develop target packages for strikes should you order them.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Our guy running this show is the best. Commander Bill Ecker of the Navy's VFP 62, the Fightin' Photo. Something of a character, but the highest efficiency ratings we've ever had.

He pushes Ecker's personnel file across the table, and as the President opens it, on ECKER'S PHOTO, we SMASH CUT TO:

INT. READY ROOM - KEY WEST NAVAL AIR STATION - DAY

The man himself, COMMANDER BILL ECKER, 30s, playing cards, smoking cigars with his wingman, LIEUTENANT BRUCE WILHEMY and the PILOTS of VFP-62, the 'Fightin' Photo.' They lounge, tinker with equipment. Their ready room is filled with pin ups, movie posters, and all things photographic.

ECKER:

75 millimeter, I'm listening. On the big screen there's nothing like it.

The other pilots heckle him, but are muted by Taylor.

GENERAL TAYLOR (V.O.)

To protect our pilots, we're prepared to

retaliate against any SAM site or anti aircraft battery that opens fire.

WILHEMY:

Watch out, Hollywood. There's a new epic director in town!

INT. CABINET ROOM - DAY

EXCOM listens in sober silence.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

We have a flight of Thunderchiefs able to respond within minutes of an attack on our planes.

Kenny catches the President's eye. Kenny glances at the door. Step outside, I need to talk to you.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The President and Kenny stand in front of the President's desk. All the doors are shut. Weak sunlight filters into the hushed room as if to a confessional.

KENNY:

I don't like what's happening.

THE PRESIDENT:

In the morning I'm taking charge of the blockade from the situation room.

McNamara'll set up shop in the flag plot at the Pentagon, keep an eye on things there.

KENNY:

All right. 'Cause you get armed boarders climbing into Soviet ships, shots being fired across bows...

THE PRESIDENT:

I know, I know...

KENNY:

What about these low-level flights? They're starting in what? An hour? Do you realize what you're letting yourself in for?

THE PRESIDENT:

We need those flights. We have to know when those missiles become operational, because when they do, we need to destroy them.

KENNY:

Fair enough. But Castro's on alert and we're flying attack planes over their sites, on the deck. There's no way for them to know they're carrying cameras, not bombs. They're going to be shot at, plain and simple.

Kenny's right, and the President looks away in frustration.

KENNY (CONT'D)

I'm your political advisor, and I'm giving you political analysis here. This is a setup. The Chiefs want to go in. It's the only way they can redeem themselves for the Bay of Pigs. They have to go in, and they have to do it right. It's that simple.

THE PRESIDENT:

I'm gonna protect those pilots.

The President stares intently at Kenny. Kenny glances at the door, his voice hushed. He hesitates.

KENNY:

They're boxing us in with these rules of engagement. If you agree to 'em, and one of our planes gets knocked down or one of the ships won't stop for inspection, the Chiefs will have us by the balls and will force us to start shooting. They want a war, and they're arranging things to get one. If you don't want one, we have to do something about it.

The President understands. He shakes his head, paces away.

THE PRESIDENT:

How does a man get to a place where he can say, 'throw those lives away,' so

easily?

KENNY:

Maybe it's harder for them to say it than they let on.

At the very least, they believe it's in our best interest. And at the end of the day, they may end up being right.

The President turns away, considers. Then turns back.

THE PRESIDENT:

Triple check everything the Chiefs say to us with the guys who actually have to do it. No one's to know about this but Bobby. I need redundant control over what happens out there. And if things aren't as advertised, you're going to make sure they come out the way I want them to come out, starting with this low level flight thing.

Jesus Christ...Kenny is daunted. For a beat he just stares.

KENNY:

That's going to be tough. You know how these guys are about their chains of command...

THE PRESIDENT:

Any problems, you remind them those chains of commands end at one place. Me.

INT. WEST WING HALLS - DAY

Kenny and the President head for the Cabinet Room. Rusk comes out before they get there.

RUSK:

Mr. President. The OAS meeting starts in an hour. I haven't prepared at all. We can't expect --

THE PRESIDENT:

-- we need this one, Dean. The quarantine's legal if we get a mandate, otherwise it's an act of war in the eyes

of the world. Get me that vote. Make it unanimous.

RUSK:

Mr. President, The Organization of American States hasn't had a unanimous vote since --
The President moves for the Cabinet Room.

THE PRESIDENT:

-- unanimous, Dean.

Kenny slaps the dismayed Rusk on the back, heads off down a hall away from the Cabinet Room.

INT. WHITE HOUSE SWITCHBOARD - DAY

Kenny opens the door to the White House switchboard room. A half-dozen OPERATORS work their lines, making connections on the old-fashioned switchboard. Unnoticed, he sizes them up, their skill. They're all courteous, pretty, professional. The CAMERA PANS down the line... and stops on a middle-aged matron at the end - the sternest, most scary of them all. Her name is MARGARET.

MARGARET:

White House Operator. Yes sir.

(beat, harsh, booming)

Speaker McCormack, hold for the Vice President.

Her voice is so severe, so smoker-gravelled, it makes the blood run cold. This is the woman Kenny's looking for.

KENNY:

Ma'am, would you mind helping me out with a few special calls?

INT. READY ROOM - KEY WEST NAS - DAY

Ecker, Wilhemy and their Pilots are in angry debate.

ECKER:

Orson Welles is a hack. Now you want to talk about a director, you talk about David Lean...

WILHEMY:

Welles is a G-d. Lean's the hack.

ECKER:

Bullshit, Bruce, nobody but Lean is making decent movies these days.

(to Young Pilot)

Get that fixed yet?

Nearby, a YOUNG PILOT tinkers with a \$300,000 spy camera.

YOUNG PILOT:

Uhhh... yup. Think so.

Suddenly, the door opens and a pale DUTY SERGEANT enters.

DUTY SERGEANT:

Sir...telephone, sir.

INT. DUTY OFFICE - DAY

Ecker enters, marches over to the phone. All the SOLDIERS in the room stare at him. Ecker wiggles his cigar to a corner of his mouth, picks up, styling.

ECKER:

VFP-62, Fightin' Photo, here. But what we really want to do is direct.

INTERCUT CALL TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE SWITCHBOARD - CONTINUOUS

Margaret works her magic.

MARGARET:

This is the White House Operator. Hold for the President.

INT. DUTY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ecker blinks, becomes a mild lamb.

ECKER:

Oh shit.

INT. WHITE HOUSE SWITCHBOARD - CONTINUOUS

MARGARET:

Honey, you don't know what shit is.

BEGIN INTERCUT:

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny, sitting on his desk, taps his fingers, looks at the phone. He's kept Ecker on hold long enough - and picks up.

KENNY:

Commander, my name is Ken O'Donnell.

Special Assistant to the President.

INTERCUT CALL TO:

INT. DUTY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ecker exhales. It's not the President, but Ecker is so shaken up it might as well be.

ECKER:

Yes, sir.

KENNY (O.S.)

The President has instructed me to pass along an order to you.

(beat)

You are not to get shot down.

Did he hear right?

ECKER:

Uh... we'll do our best, sir.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

KENNY:

I don't think you understand me correctly. You are not to get shot down under any circumstances. Whatever happens up there, you were not shot at. Mechanical failures are fine; crashing into mountains, fine. But you and your men are not to be shot at, fired at, launched upon.

INT. DUTY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ecker sits down in a chair, sobered.

ECKER:

Excuse me, sir, what's going on here?

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny stands, drops the hard nose bullshit.

KENNY:

Commander, if you are fired upon, the President will be forced to attack the sites that fire on you. He doesn't want to have to do that. It's very important that he doesn't, or things could go very badly out of control.

INT. DUTY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ecker lets out a long breath.

ECKER:

I think I understand. What about my men? If it comes up hot and heavy, and we don't have anyone to protect us...

I'm going to be writing letters to parents. I hate writing letters to parents.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny nods to himself, feeling. He's done it himself.

KENNY:

If the President protects you, Commander, he may have to do it with the Bomb.

INT. DUTY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ecker doesn't want to be avenged with atomic weapons. No sane person would.

KENNY (V.O.)

I've known the man for fifteen years. The problem is, he will protect you. So

I'm asking:

Don't get shot at.

Ecker down, deeply affected. Suddenly, A BELL RINGS. A TELETYPE goes off. Ecker knows it's for him. His orders.

ECKER:

Okay, Mr. O'Donnell. We'll do what we can.

END INTERCUT.

As Ecker hangs up, the Duty Officer rips off the ORDERS, hands them to Ecker, who takes one look, then gazes out the window at the runway --

EXT. RUNWAY - KEY WEST NAVAL AIR STATION - DAY

A CART speeds down the flight line past the waiting F8U-1P Corsairs. One by one, the four pilots accompanying Ecker and Wilhemy jump off to mount their planes. The cart still moving.

ECKER:

Get that fuel assayed?

WILHEMY:

Yeah. It sucks. Ain't for high performance babies like ours. Shoulda brought some from home, but what can you do? Last-second deployments...

Wilhemy jumps off, then they're at Ecker's plane, and he jumps off. Too late to worry about bad fuel now. He hoists himself up and into the cockpit of the sleek navy jet.

INT. ECKER'S CRUSADER - DAY

As the canopy closes, Ecker powers up the engines, talks to his flight over the Guard channel.

ECKER:

Okay, time to play Spin the Bottle with our bearded buddy. Nobody gets out ahead. Remember, just sitting here we're only ten minutes from target.

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

The Crusaders swing around in pairs at one end of the runway, and then the first two throttle-up, flaps down, and drop their brakes. The machines LUNGE forward like duelling drag racers. The FILL THE SCREEN, blow past.

EXT. AERIAL - OVER KEY WEST - DAY

The six Crusaders, in pairs, streak over the buildings and streets of Key West. And in a heartbeat, cross the beach and are out to sea.

And already on the horizon, the low clouds and dark line of land. Cuba. Ninety miles away.

INT. ECKER'S CRUSADER - DAY

The ocean shrieks past so close you can see the white foam. Ecker checks the altimeter: 150 FEET.

A small fishing boat looms ahead, its net booms reaching up like tree limbs. The Crusader rockets over it.

Ecker checks his instruments. OUT THE WINDOW, the other Crusaders thunder over the water, past sailboats, cabin cruisers, the small-craft traffic outside Key West. The speed sucks the breath away.

ECKER:

Go to military throttle on my mark.

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

His airspeed indicator spins up to 400 knots. And then his radio suddenly crackles:

PILOT #1 (O.S.)
Flameout flameout!
PILOT #2 (O.S.)
Shit! Me too!

ECKER:

Get some altitude!
Two of the Crusaders pull up, away from the water.
PILOT #1 (O.S.)
Oh, God damn. Got it restarted.
PILOT #2 (O.S.)
Yeah. Yeah. Me too. Goddamn fuel.
PILOT #1 (O.S.)
Sir, I don't think she's gonna hold up
for the run.

ECKER:

Affirmative. You two get out of here.
EXT. AERIAL - CRUSADERS - DAY
The two planes with bad fuel pull wingovers to their left,
head for the airfield in the distance. The four remaining
planes streak over the ocean. There are no more small craft
this far out in the strait.
INT. ECKER'S CRUSADER - DAY
Cuba, green and hazy, looms in the window. Ecker throws a
series of switches.

ECKER:

Start your camera checks.
A mechanical WHINE accompanies the switch-throwing. Ecker
pulls the trigger on his joystick and a THUMP THUMP THUMP
hammers away. There are green lights across his boards.
One of the other pilots cuts in on the radio:
PILOT #3 (O.S.)
Failure. All cameras. Sonofabitch.
Film must not have fed.
PILOT #4 (O.S.)
Jesus! Shit! Oh shit! I just shot it
all, boss. Activator jammed open, its
exposing everything now.
WILHEMY (O.S.)
That's alright, Lenny, it happens to
most men at some time --
Ecker grimaces, but his voice stays cool.

ECKER:

-- Scrub, you two. Get out of here.

Still with me, Bruce?

WILHEMY (O.S.)

That's affirm.

The two Crusaders who've failed their camera checks break off. And now Cuba's hills, the Havana sky line are right in front of them.

EXT. CUBAN BEACH - CONTINUOUS

The last two Crusaders streak over the surf, a white wake of spray in their jetwash, and cross the beach with a boom.

EXT. AERIAL - CRUSADERS - CONTINUOUS

The planes dip and rise with the green tropical contours, taking us on a sickening roller-coaster ride over Cuban countryside at treetop level.

Palm forest, roads, can fields, more palm forest race by. And then, ahead, a large clearing.

ECKER (O.S.)

Warm 'em up. We're here.

EXT. ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERY - CONTINUOUS

Cuban ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNNERS shout as they traverse their 40mm guns in their sandbagged emplacement. The low rippling thunder of the incoming jets becomes an earsplitting ROAR... and the Crusaders blast out over the clearing. The anti aircraft guns open up.

INT. WILHEMY'S CRUSADER - CONTINUOUS

Wilhemy jinks left to avoid a streaking of TRACER FIRE.

WILHEMY:

Holy shit!

INT. ECKER'S CRUSADER - CONTINUOUS

Tracers and flack pepper the air in front of Ecker's Crusader. METAL PINGS, TINKS, RATTLES off the fuselage. Anti-aircraft and small arms fire comes up from all over, hitting the planes multiple times. He surveys the shapes in the target zone dead ahead.

ECKER:

Lights.

And sees the long, canvas-covered objects on the ground. The missiles. They draw closer.

ECKER (CONT'D)

Camera.

A steel fragment CRACKS his window, obscuring our view.

ECKER (CONT'D)

Action.

And he thumbs the CAMERA SWITCH. All twelve B-system cameras begin banging away like cannons.

EXT. AERIAL - CRUSADERS - DAY

TRACERS lace the air between the two planes as they blast over the missile site. Over trailers. Over tents. Over trucks. Over trenches. Over bulldozers.

And then they're out over forest again. It's all over in seconds. The triple-A stops. In unison, the two planes bank right, heading for the distant blue, blue sea.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Kenny paces by the phone. It rings. He picks up, listens, reacts. Relief. And we know the planes have made it back.

EXT. RUNWAY - CECIL FIELD, FLA. - DAY

Ecker jumps down from the cockpit ladder and turns an eye to his battered, pock-marked plane. Wilhemy and the GROUND CREW CHIEF come running up, the Chief letting out a whistle.

GROUND CREW CHIEF

Lookit what daddy done brung home.

WILHEMY:

You shoulda seen it, Chief, they --

ECKER:

-- damn sparrows. Must've been migrating. Guess I hit a couple hundred.

(to Wilhemy, stern)

How many did you hit, Bruce?

Wilhemy stands there, looking at Ecker, not sure what to make of him. The Crew Chief just starts laughing as more impressed GROUND CREW come up.

WILHEMY:

A few. I guess.

GROUND CREW CHIEF

Was them 20 or 40 million sparrows?

Ecker, sweat-plastered and foul, steps into the Chief's face.

ECKER:

Those are bird strikes. Sparrows to be precise. Got a problem with that?

The Chief stands there, glances at the plane one more time, and shakes his head, 'No.' Ecker takes the Chief's maintenance clipboard from him, writes in big bold marker: BIRD STRIKES. He thrusts it back into the Chief's hands and walks off; the astonished Wilhemy remains behind.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

In Kenny's credenza, a small black and white T.V. plays. WALTER CRONKITE narrates on the television as a train laden with TANKS on flatbeds pulls out of a station.

WALTER CRONKITE (V.O.)

Massive military preparations are underway throughout the southeast in what Pentagon officials are confirming is the largest mobilization since Korea.

The railways have been nationalized to assist in the deployment, here transporting elements of the U.S. 1st Armored Division from Ft. Hood, Texas.

A PHONE RINGS. Kenny turns from the T.V., turns down Walter Cronkite, as he answers.

KENNY:

Yeah?

INT. OAS MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

George Ball stands at the back of a crowded room filled with applauding OAS DELEGATES. It's for Rusk, at a podium up front.

BALL:

Kenny. The vote just came down.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Kenny opens his door, lets Rusk in. The President, Bobby and half of EXCOM look up. Rusk stands there somber.

RUSK:

Unanimous. One abstention.

And then he breaks into a huge grin. Everyone cheers him.

THE PRESIDENT:

About time something went our way.

An Assistant enters behind Kenny. Kenny senses him, turns as the others move to shake hands with Rusk.

ASSISTANT:

Telephone, Mr. O'Donnell.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Kenny, grinning, ducks back into his office, closes the door after the Assistant leaves. He picks up the phone.

KENNY:

Hello?

INTERCUT CALL TO:

INT. READY ROOM - CECIL FIELD - DAY

Ecker stands at a phone, stares out a window at a replacement plane being fueled. A Crusader, not his shot-up one.

ECKER:

Mr. O'Donnell, I've been ordered to deliver the film to the Pentagon personally. What's going on?

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny thinks fast. Oh shit.

KENNY:

The Chiefs must want to talk to you.

(beat)

Listen to me, Commander, they'll want to know if you were fired on. Were you?

ECKER (O.S.)

You could say that, sir.

KENNY:

Commander. Do not, under any circumstances, tell the Chiefs.

END INTERCUT:

INT. PENTAGON - DAY

SUPER:

Ecker, still in his sweat-drenched flight suit approaches a security checkpoint. GUARDS secure his sidearm and usher him through a doorway. A sign over it reads JCS.

INT. THE TANK - DAY

The door swings open into the Joint Chiefs' SOUND-PROOFED briefing room known as THE TANK. LeMay, Taylor and Anderson sit there around the table. Ecker salutes.

ECKER:

Commander William B. Ecker reporting as ordered!

LeMay rises, prowls over to Ecker.

LEMAY:

Son , I want to know just one thing. Those bastards shoot so much as a BB gun at you?

A long beat. Sweat runs off Ecker's head. He can smell LeMay's breath.

ECKER:

Sir, it was a milk run, sir.

INT. WEST WING HALL - NIGHT

Kenny joins the President and General Taylor in the hallway as they head for the Oval Office.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

It appears our low-level flights are getting back okay. Some unconfirmed reports of small-arms fire from some of the missions, but that's it.

Slightly behind them, Kenny looks sidelong at Taylor.

THE PRESIDENT:

Guess we can't blame Khrushchev for a few patriotic farmers. And the ships?

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Still heading for Cuba.

THE PRESIDENT:

All right. Then I guess it's time.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

FLASHBULBS go off all around the room as the President walks in, goes over to his desk. Reporters observe silently, T.V. cameras track him; Kenny, Bobby and Sorensen watch as the President sits, takes a pen from his pocket.

THE PRESIDENT:

In accordance with this afternoon's vote at the OAS, the quarantine shall hereby be effective as of ten o'clock tomorrow morning.

Kenny observes in silence as the President SIGNS the Proclamation of Interdiction.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - LATER

The Oval Office has emptied out. Only Kenny, Bobby, Sorensen and the President remain. The President looks out the window, Sorensen sits in a chair in front of the desk. Bobby and Kenny sit on the edge of the desk.

THE PRESIDENT:

Last summer I read a book. The Guns of August. I wish every man on that blockade line had read that book.

The President moves over to the GLOBE by his desk, spins it, stopping in on Europe.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

World War One. Thirteen million killed all because the militaries of both alliances were so highly attuned to each other's movements and dispositions, afraid of letting the other guy have a theoretical advantage. And your man in the field, his family at home, couldn't even tell you the reasons why their lives were being sacrificed.

(beat)

Why couldn't they stop it?

Can we? The President's fingers turn the globe. It stops on North America. Kenny and Bobby listen.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

And here we are, fifty years later. One of their ships resists the inspection.

We shoot out its rudder and board. They shoot down our planes in response. We bomb their anti-aircraft sites in response to that. They attack Berlin.

We invade Cuba. They fire their missiles. We fire ours.

The President sets the globe gently spinning and walks away.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Kenny rubs his eyes, listens to his phone and the WOMAN'S VOICE at the other end. It's his wife.

HELEN (O.S.)

When are you going to be home?

KENNY:

I don't know, Helen. I want you to keep the kids close tomorrow. Leave the T.V. on, sleep with it on in the bedroom until I tell you you can turn it off.

HELEN (O.S.)

What's happened?

KENNY:

Nothing. Nothing you don't know about. Tomorrow's the big day. Just have the car ready to go if I call or if the Civil Defense Warning comes on.

HELEN (O.S.)

What happens to you? I'm not leaving without you.

KENNY:

I'll be evacuated with the President. A long silence on the other end of the line.

HELEN (O.S.)

Great. So while you're under a rock somewhere with the President, what am I supposed to do with your five children? And to that, there is no answer. A beat, and it's all Kenny

can promise:

KENNY:

I'll find you. But we're not going to let it come to that. I promise.

INT. WHITE HOUSE CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Kenny hands Bobby and Bundy cups of coffee. The three men nurse them in the silence of the abandoned cafeteria.

KENNY:

Helen just asked me what sort of arrangements we have for the families.

BUNDY:

I just checked myself.

(beat)

They're being issued identity cards. Call comes, and evacuation officers meet

them at pre-arranged departure areas.
They go by helicopter to Mount Weather.
We meet them there.

Bobby looks at his coffee, then up at Kenny. He gently
shakes his head. It's all a sham.

BOBBY:

Course that's for morale. The missiles
only take five minutes to get here.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

SUPER:

Kenny bolts upright from his couch. He rubs his face, sits
on the edge in the dark for a beat. He's not going back to
sleep. He grabs his trousers.

INT. WEST WING HALLS - CONTINUOUS

Kenny makes his way through the dim, deserted halls.
Somewhere in the distance a phone rings. He reaches a door.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

Kenny, bundled in an overcoat, steps outside the North
Entrance. The cool air invigorates him. He eyes the fence,
Pennsylvania Avenue beyond it, seeming to isolate this world
from the living city beyond. He starts for the main gate.

EXT. MAIN GATE - CONTINUOUS

A WHITE HOUSE POLICE OFFICER jumps up as Kenny approaches.

POLICE OFFICER:

Would you like me to call a car, Mr.
O'Donnell.

Kenny checks his watch.

KENNY:

How long will it take to get someone up?

POLICE OFFICER:

Fifteen minutes, maybe. To your house,
sir?

Kenny considers, shakes his head. He wants to go home,
but...

KENNY:

No. No, I'll let her sleep. Let 'em
sleep.

Kenny says it with a certain finality. The Police Officer

nods, and Kenny wanders out through the gates, shouldering the weight of the world.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Kenny makes his way down a sidewalk not far from the White House. A 24-hour drug store's doors are open. He pauses. Inside, a knot of PEOPLE - late-night deliverymen, a cop, the store employees - talk in undertones at the counter. Behind it, a T.V. is signing off with the national anthem. Sober voices, sober looks. Kenny moves on.

EXT. NEWS STAND - NIGHT

A cluster of COLLEGE STUDENTS talk at a news stand. They're waiting for the NEWSIE to cut the bands of the next day's Washington Post, the bundles just being thrown to the sidewalk from the delivery truck. Kenny approaches. In their thing beards, counter-culture clothes, the kids seem so young, Kenny so old. Kenny buys a newspaper, its dire headlines, every story about the crisis.

EXT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - NIGHT

Kenny, newspaper under his arm, continues down the street. Up ahead, the lights are on in a Catholic Church. Lines of CHURCHGOERS are at the door. Kenny stops, surprised at the sight this late. And then he sees the hand-painted banner: CONFESSIONS 24 HOURS. PRAY FOR PEACE.

Kenny is moved. He glances over his shoulder, and then... joins the line himself.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - SITUATION ROOM - DAY

Kenny's WATCH reads one minute til ten o'clock. PULL BACK TO

REVEAL:

Kenny, standing just inside the open doors to the White House Situation Room, a state-of-the-art conference room. A long, central table surrounded by leather chairs with phones and screens built in. T.V. monitors hang from the ceilings in the corners. There are no windows, just oppressive bunker like walls. It's far underground.

Across the room the President paces, phone in hand. Half of EXCOM is in their seats. The other half, along with a steady stream of DUTY OFFICERS, are coming and going. Kenny steps aside for a Duty Officer, listens to the President.

THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, Bob, I'm putting you on intercom.

Suddenly, McNamara's VOICE fills the room.

MCNAMARA (O.S.)

Hey, guys, can you hear me?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. FLAG PLOT - THE PENTAGON - DAY

McNamara stands, phone in hand.

MCNAMARA:

I have one minute til ten here --

THE CAMERA TRACKS AROUND HIM, REVEALING:

A large, elaborate war room, like Mission Control. Big screens, plexiglass tracking boards, tiered banks of communications equipment. A massive LIGHT TABLE on the floor at the center of the room projects a map of the Caribbean and Atlantic. Arcing across it is a RED LINE: the blockade. The map is covered with cryptic military notations; WATCH OFFICERS on a platform which swings out over it update the latest ship positions.

McNamara's in a booth overlooking the room. It's open to the next tier below where Admiral Anderson is giving orders.

MCNAMARA (CONT'D)

-- and no sign of them stopping.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - DAY

Kenny and Bobby move to the President's end of the table, sit down across from each other in mirror-image fashion. EXCOM looks to the President. The second hand of the clock on the wall wheels past 12. A hush falls over the room.

THE PRESIDENT:

Bob, the quarantine is now in effect.

INT. FLAG PLOT - DAY

McNamara is mute for a beat. He turns to view the big room.

MCNAMARA:

Then it looks like our first customers are the Gagarin and Kimovsk.

He nods to Admiral Anderson, who calls an order down to a Watch Officer on the floor, and on screens all around the room, a sector of the map MAGNIFIES the unfolding encounter --

EXT. BRIDGE WING - U.S.S. PIERCE - DAY

-- between the destroyer, U.S.S. Pierce and the SOVIET FREIGHTERS Gagarin and Kimovsk. The Pierce's bridge wings are crammed with helmeted OFFICERS and LOOKOUTS. They peer through binoculars at the distant ships, plowing ahead, straight for them. The CAPTAIN lowers his binoculars,

determined.

CAPTAIN:

Helm, shape heading for intercept, zero
one zero. All ahead full --

OFFICER (O.S.)

-- new contact! New contact!

Everyone whirls to the bridge. The Captain steps forward.

INT. COMBAT INFORMATION CENTER - U.S.S. PIERCE - DAY

The Captain ducks into the CIC. The CHIEF SONARAN reports.

CHIEF SONARMAN:

Submerged contact, designation Sierra
one at 6000 yards bearing 030.

CAPTAIN:

A submarine...

INT. SITUATION ROOM - DAY

The President reacts. Kenny and Bobby react.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

It's protecting the freighters.

Consternation. The President picks up the phone.

THE PRESIDENT:

Bob, is there any way we can avoid
stopping a submarine first?

MCNAMARA (O.S.)

I'm afraid not, Mr. President. The sub
has positioned itself between the Pierce
and the Soviet ships. Admiral Anderson
insists it's too much of a risk to
proceed with stopping the freighters.
The Pierce would be a sitting duck for
the sub.

All around the room frustration. Bobby shakes his head.

Kenny sinks back in his chair. The President hesitates.

THE PRESIDENT:

Put me through to the Pierce.

INT. FLAG PLOT - DAY

Admiral Anderson nods to a COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER. The man
makes the connection on a switchboard.

McNamara casts an eye to the map. The two red MARKERS

labeled Gagarin and Kimovsk are joined by a third: the SUB. They are ALMOST TOUCHING the blockade line. On the other side, the single blue marker for the Pierce.

INT. BRIDGE - U.S.S. PIERCE - DAY

The Captain enters the bridge, takes the phone from the arm of his chair.

CAPTAIN:

Mr. President?

INT. SITUATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The President holds the phone, agonized.

THE PRESIDENT:

Captain, can you force that submarine to the surface for inspection without damaging it yourself?

INT. BRIDGE, U.S.S. PIERCE - DAY

CAPTAIN:

I can bring it up, Mr. President. But whether it's damaged or not is up to the sub.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The President lowers the phone, looks to Bobby and Kenny.

MCCONE:

Even if they force it up, that sub will be inspected over the crews' dead bodies. They'd be executed for allowing it when they got home.

All eyes are on the President. His eyes are closed tight, face gray, hand over his mouth. The time of decision is at hand. He lifts the phone once again.

THE PRESIDENT:

Captain, force the sub to the surface for inspection.

MCNAMARA (O.S.)

Mr. President! We're receiving reports that the ships are stopping!

THE PRESIDENT:

(to phone)

Captain, belay that order!

(to McNamara)

Bob, where's that coming from!

MCNAMARA (O.S.)

Just a second, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT:

Will somebody find out what's going on?!

McCone jumps up, leaves the room. The President looks at Kenny, tense. Everyone holds their breath.

RUSK:

Are they stopping?

The HISS of static on the open line fills the room. Silence.

EXT. BRIDGE - U.S.S. JOHN R. PIERCE - CONTINUOUS

Lookouts peer across the water at the oncoming Soviet Freighter.

BINOCULAR POV:

Of the Soviet Bridge, where their LOOKOUTS are staring right back through their binoculars.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - DAY

The HISS of static. And then.

MCNAMARA (O.S.)

Mr. President?

INT. FLAG PLOT - THE PENTAGON - CONTINUOUS

McNamara is grinning wildly at the chaos unfolding in the flag plot below. Phones are ringing everywhere.

ON THE LIGHT TABLE

The Watch Officers' hands fly from one notation to the other, circling the Soviet ships, marking them DEAD IN THE WATER.

MCNAMARA:

-- we've got reports coming from all over! The ships are stopping! Some... are turning around!

INT. SITUATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room EXPLODES, victorious. Kenny and Bobby break into big grins, grab each other. Kenny pumps the President's hand. Rusk and Bundy slap each other on the back.

RUSK:

We were eyeball to eyeball and I think the other fellow just blinked.

The ruckus goes on for a minute. McCone comes back in.

MCCONE:

Mr. President.

His voice is lost in the celebration. McCone calls out:

MCCONE (CONT'D)

Mr. President!

The hubub dies away.

MCCONE (CONT'D)

Sir, we have the tally from NSA. We have twenty ships stopping and or turning around. Six, however, appear to be continuing for the line. Including the Gagarin and Kimovsk.

The elation goes out of the room. Kenny looks at the President. The President picks up the phone again.

THE PRESIDENT:

Captain, have the ships you're observing changed course?

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

No, Mr. President. They've just crossed the quarantine line.

Bobby grips the edge of the table, immediately believing.

BOBBY:

It's an accident. They must not have gotten their orders yet. Let 'em go.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Unlikely, Mr. President. We've been monitoring transmissions from both the Gagarin and Kimovsk. Their radios are working fine.

MCCONE:

One ship, an accident maybe. Six: this is intentional.

The President looks to Bobby. He has no answer. Kenny's mind races over the variables, and he leans forward, intense, suddenly understanding in a flash of insight:

KENNY:

They're right. This is intentional.

He glances around the room. All of EXCOM is looking at him.

Bobby stares at Kenny, too shocked to feel betrayed.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Khrushchev's stopped the 20 ships which are carrying contraband, and he's letting the ones which aren't go through, hoping for an incident. I think we should let them go.

Bobby relaxes. Around the table there are nods.

MCCONE:

If we do, it erodes the credibility of the quarantine. He'll just send more through tomorrow.

The President looks at Kenny.

KENNY:

Then we deal with it tomorrow. But today he's stopped most of them. He's done something smart here. We gave him an ultimatum, and he's agreed to most of it, preserving just enough room to save face. We need to do something just as smart now.

Bobby's nodding, following the argument. Kenny looks around the room for support.

INT. FLAG PLOT - THE PENTAGON - CONTINUOUS

McNamara, pacing on the phone, jumps in.

MCNAMARA:

Mr. President, I agree. Let them go. Four of the six continuing ships are still a day away from the line. They've stopped all the ones we suspect have weapons aboard.

It would look bad shooting up a freighter full of baby food.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The President holds Kenny's gaze, then lifts the phone.

THE PRESIDENT:

Captain, I want you to maintain contact with those ships. Do nothing until I order otherwise. Is that clear?

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Yes, Mr. President. Contact only.
He hangs up, turns to Kenny.

THE PRESIDENT:

I hope you're right.

EXT. SOUTH LAWN - DAY

Kenny, Bobby and the President make their way across the lawn, out of earshot of the building.

BOBBY:

What happened to speak when spoken to?

KENNY:

Give it a rest. You were thinking the same thing, just didn't have the guts to take the heat.

Bobby likes getting under Kenny's skin. Bobby aims a punch at his head which Kenny knocks away. The President changes gear, serious.

THE PRESIDENT:

We can horsetrade with Khrushchev on ships. But it doesn't get us any closer to removing those missiles.

KENNY:

Have to hope it's a signal that he'll back down on the real issue too.

BOBBY:

We're going to have to stop a ship eventually, show the quarantine's got teeth, or we'll prove McCone right.

THE PRESIDENT:

McNamara's on his way back here now. We need to pick the right ship. No subs. No armed boarding parties either. We need a little more time to figure this one out.

KENNY:

Then let's move the quarantine line.

It's a simple suggestion. The President considers him a

beat, and then McNamara emerges from the White House, heads for them. The three friends assume their more reserved, political faces as he comes up.

MCNAMARA:

Mr. President. Bobby. Kenny. The Essex battle group has the Gagarin, Kimovsk and the sub escort under their thumb. We've got a few hours now before we need to worry about any more flashpoints on the line.

(beat)

We could use a few more hours. I think we should consider moving the quarantine line back to 500 miles.

Bobby and the President look at Kenny like he's some kind of Svengali. Kenny just stands there, poker faced.

INT. WEST WING - DAY

Kenny and McNamara enter the White House from the South Lawn. They stride down the hall, side by side.

KENNY:

Moving the line. Stroke of genius.

MCNAMARA:

(snappish)

Of course it is. But the President needs to realize we're going to have to stop a ship eventually.

They turn a corner, silence for a beat.

KENNY:

The Chiefs are looking for a provocation out there. The President's going to come under enormous pressure. You have to keep 'em on a short leash, Bob. McNamara spares Kenny a short, nasty look.

MCNAMARA:

You must think I'm blind and stupid. I've already gotten the birds and bees from Bobby. The President doesn't have to double-barrel me.

KENNY:

Listen to me, goddamn it. We're talking about a possible nuclear war. You dropped the ball on Bay of Pigs --

MCNAMARA:

-- you sonofabitch, goddamn it, I didn't drop --

KENNY:

You were in the room. It was your purview. It was your job to make sure Bissel wasn't fucking us over and you didn't do it. You've got the most important job in the world right now. You're the smartest guy the President has.

(beat)

Besides me.

That gets an amused snort from McNamara, breaking the tension.

MCNAMARA:

Anybody ever tell you you're an egomaniac and a prick, O'Donnell?

Kenny stares him in the eye, serious, hushed. A friend.

KENNY:

You need to be the best you've ever been.

McNamara enters the elevator. He turns, stands there facing Kenny for a dramatic beat. Then the doors close.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

WALTER CRONKITE, on the B&W T.V. screen, sits in front of a map showing Cuba and the blockade line.

WALTER CRONKITE (V.O.)

-- well, it appears the world has just received a reprieve. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara has announced that the quarantine zone has been moved from 800 to 500 miles.

PULL BACK, REVEALING:

Kenny watching the T.V., is yelling at the phone.

KENNY:

Find out how close our exercises are coming to their cruise missiles. I'm calling you back in five, and you will have an answer for me or I will come down there and beat the shit out of you.

(beat)

Then you can press charges, and I'll get a Presidential pardon.

He hangs up, hears SHOUTING from the Oval Office. He goes to the door, enters --

INT. OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

-- and sees the President leaning over his desk, jabbing his finger at General Taylor.

THE PRESIDENT:

-- how the goddamn hell did this happen?

I'm going to have Power's head on a platter next to LeMay's!

(noticing Kenny)

Hey, Kenny, did you hear me give the order to go to DEFCON 2? I remember giving the order to go to DEFCON 3, but I must be suffering from amnesia because I've just been informed our nuclear forces are DEFCON 2!

Kenny realizes he's not joking as he spots Bobby sitting on the couch behind Taylor, pale as a ghost. Taylor, embattled, wants to die, but stands there like a man.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MISSILE SILO - DAY

CLOSE ON:

The nose cone of a TITAN MISSILE, its 20 megaton nuclear warhead wrapped in the steel re-entry shell. Cold, silent, fearsome.

GENERAL TAYLOR (V.O.)

Mr. President, the orders were limited to our strategic forces in the continental U.S.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Taylor continues on.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Technically, General LeMay is correct that SAC has the statutory authority -- The President punches his desk.

THE PRESIDENT:

-- I have the authority. I am the commander-in-chief of the United States, and I say when we go to war!

GENERAL TAYLOR:

We are not at war, sir, not until we're at DEFCON 1.

THE PRESIDENT:

General, the Joint Chiefs have just signalled our intent to escalate to the Soviets. You have signalled an escalation which I had no wish to signal, and which I did not approve. But Taylor knows this very well. And the way he's suffering, it's clear he's taking the heat for his underlings. From over on the couch Bobby chimes in:

BOBBY:

LeMay... he's history.
The President glances at Kenny who stands there, speechless.

THE PRESIDENT:

Get out of here, Max.
The General leaves. Kenny closes the door, wanders deeper into the office. He looks from the President to Bobby. There's a long, long beat of shocked silence.

KENNY:

Jesus...

BOBBY:

Rescind the order. Can all the Chiefs. Put Nitze, Gilpatric and the Undersecretaries in charge.

KENNY:

We can't do that, Bobby.

THE PRESIDENT:

He's right, we can't rescind DEFCON 2.
The Soviets will think we've gotten
sweet on them.

KENNY:

And we can't purge the Chiefs. Our
invasion talk will look like a bluff.
Or even that there's been an attempted
coup.
Bobby is disgusted, but knows they're right.

BOBBY:

McNamara won't be able to handle them.
It's too much for one man...
(knowing look to Kenny)
...with all due respect to our heroic
fifth column.
The President collapses in his rocking chair. Kenny leans
over the back of the sofa next to Bobby.

KENNY:

We've got Khrushchev's attention with the
blockade. If we want a political
solution. I think it's time to turn up
the diplomatic heat. Cause if we let
this go on too long, we're going to find
ourselves in a war.
Bobby looks at the President, meaningful. The President
turns to Kenny.

THE PRESIDENT:

I've been considering a variation on one
of Stevenson's ideas. We're going to
send up a trial balloon through Lippman.
The Jupiter missiles.
EXT. WEST WING DRIVEWAY - DAY

SUPER:

The West Wing looms behind Kenny and Bundy. Kenny, poker
faced, takes a drag on his cigarette. Bundy nervously flicks
his, looks away from Kenny a beat.

BUNDY:

What did you think of Lippman's column this morning?

KENNY:

I think it's a bad idea.
Bundy turns back to him.

BUNDY:

Thank God. Look, everyone is furious about it. We trade away our missiles in Turkey and we're fucked politically. Kenny grinds his jaw, but doesn't say anything. He agrees. Bundy steps up to him, confiding.

BUNDY (CONT'D)

You gotta stop 'em. We know it's Jack and Bobby's idea - they leaked it to Lippman. The military guys are going ape, and they're not alone.

KENNY:

Then they should speak up.

BUNDY:

Christ, Ken, you know it's not that easy.

KENNY:

Yes it is.

BUNDY:

No it isn't. They don't trust the people that feel this way. But these people are right. And the Kennedys are wrong.

(beat)

We need you to tell 'em, Kenny. They'll listen to you.

Kenny prickles, intense, but Bundy presses on, too wrapped up in his own thinking to notice.

BUNDY (CONT'D)

Jack and Bobby are good men. But it takes a certain character, moral toughness to stand up to --

KENNY:

-- You listen to me. Nobody, nobody, talks about my friends that way. You're fucking here right now because of the Kennedys. They may be wrong. They make mistakes. But they're not weak. The weak ones are these 'people' who can't speak their own minds.

BUNDY:

You know I don't mean they're weak. Kenny gets in his face, intimidating.

KENNY:

No, they just lack 'moral toughness.' And you think I'll play your Judas. You WASPS and blue-bloods never understood us, thinking we want into your club. Well we got our own club now.

(beat)

And you guys don't realize fighting with each other is our way. Nobody plays us off each other. And nobody ever gets between us...

INT. PRESIDENT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Kenny throws himself on a chair in the bedroom's sitting area, newspaper in hand. The President, buttoning his shirt in a full-length mirror, sees him. There's a TV on. The President selects a tie from a nearby rack, eyes the paper.

THE PRESIDENT:

What's that?

KENNY:

Oh, just a bunch of crap about withdrawing our Jupiter missiles in Turkey if the Soviets'll do the same in Cuba.

The President's eyes flick over to him in the mirror.

THE PRESIDENT:

I don't want to listen to this again.

KENNY:

If we made a trade, we'd be giving in to extortion, and NATO would never trust us again. We'll get clobbered in world opinion.

THE PRESIDENT:

It's a goddman trial balloon. Trial is the operative word, here.

KENNY:

Then somebody'd better deny it publicly. The President turns around, heads over to the T.V. Kenny folds his arms, disgusted.

THE PRESIDENT:

Jesus Christ, O'Donnell, you're the one saying we need to move forward on a political solution.

KENNY:

Yeah, a good political solution.
ON THE T.V.

Live coverage of the United Nations Security Council meetings. Holding forth in Russian is VALERIAN ZORIN, 50s, tough, likeable, the Soviet Ambassador to the U.N. and chairman of the Security Council. A translator relays the meaning.

TRANSLATOR FOR ZORIN (O.S.)

We call on the world to condemn the piratical actions of America...

RESUME:

The President's jaw tightens. He turns to Kenny.

THE PRESIDENT:

You want to turn up the heat? You call Adlai. Tell him to stick it to Zorin.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Kenny, phone to his ear, suffers as Bobby harangues him.

BOBBY:

Adlai's too weak! We have to convince Jack to pull him, get McCloy in there.

KENNY:

You can't take him out this late in the game.

BOBBY:

Zorin will eat him alive!

KENNY:

Then talk to your brother, goddamn it. The two of you don't need any advice to get into trouble.

BOBBY:

What's gotten into you?
Kenny throws the Lippman article at him.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Oh, still sore about this.

KENNY:

Something your father would've come up with.

Silence. Terrible silence. That paralyzes Bobby. Kenny stares at him. He means it, but regrets it, too.

BOBBY:

My father --

KENNY:

-- I'm just trying to make a point.

This idea is that fucking bad.

But Bobby gets it. Kenny shifts gears, lets it go.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Adlai can handle Zorin. He knows the inning and the score.

BOBBY:

He better. Because nobody thinks he's up to this. Nobody.

INT. U.S. OFFICES - U.N. - DAY

The U.S. suite is in frantic preparation, STAFFERS coming and going. Stevenson takes his phone from a SECRETARY.

ADLAI:

Yes?

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny turns to gaze at his little T.V. in the credenza, U.N. coverage continuing, as if he could see Adlai there.

KENNY:

Adlai, it's Kenny. How're you doing?

INT. U.S. OFFICES - U.N. - CONTINUOUS

Adlai is packing up his briefcase.

ADLAI:

Busy, Ken. What do you need?

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny rises from his chair, paces toward the T.V. He pauses.

KENNY:

The President told me to pass the word

to you:

INT. U.S. OFFICES - U.N. - CONTINUOUS

Adlai looks around to his own T.V., showing the session going on downstairs. Zorin, ON CAMERA, dominates the council: alternately bold, aggressive, and then reasonable. Even in Russian, with the lagging translation, he's formidable.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny is watching exactly the same performance. Zorin is masterful. Kenny knows it. And when he talks to Adlai, it's with the fatalism of a coach knowing he's putting his third string quarterback in against the all-Pro linebacker.

KENNY:

Adlai. The world has to know we're right. If we're going to have a chance at a political solution, we need international pressure. You got to be tough, Adlai. You need to find it, old friend.

INT. U.S. OFFICES - U.N. - CONTINUOUS

Adlai watches his Staffers leave his inner office. He hears Kenny, and everything Kenny is saying.

ADLAI:

I hear you. I'm glad it's you calling. I thought it would be Bobby. If they're

still sticking to their stonewall strategy, I'll get 'em.

(beat)

Thanks, Ken.

Adlai lowers the phone to its cradle. An ANXIOUS STAFFER sticks his head in the door, a concerned, questioning look on his face.

Adlai adjusts his tie. HIS HAND IS SHAKING. He notices it, and manages a brave smile.

ADLAI (CONT'D)

I'm an old political cat, Jimmy.

(beat)

But I've got one life left.

INT. HALL, U.N. - CONTINUOUS

Adlai, briefcase in hand, marches down the hall at the hand

of his team:

leather portfolio bags. The big double doors to the council chamber loom, and he gestures to the Photo Interpreters.

ADLAI:

Wait here.

And then a DOORMAN throws open the door for him.

INT. U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Adlai enters. He is instantly dwarfed by the enormous room. Lights, T.V. cameras, the imposing circular arrangement of delegation tables. And the entire world is watching.

Adlai pauses. Then as the first SECURITY COUNCIL MEMBERS begin to notice him, he heads for the vacant seats for the American delegation. The ROMANIAN DELEGATE sees the air.

ROMANIAN DELEGATE

(through translator)

...we call upon the world to condemn this purely American provocation...

But as the Romanian wheezes on, all eyes are on Adlai. Adlai takes his seat, his Staffers behind him. They pass him up papers, and he spreads them before him, taking no notice that the entire room is staring at him.

Adlai finally glances up. Across the circle sits Zorin, in the flesh, at the head of his own tough-looking DELEGATION. He acknowledges Adlai with a superior smile.

ROMANIAN DELEGATE (CONT'D)

We, the people of Romania, stand in solidarity with the people of Cuba and

their revolution in the face of this American threat to world peace. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Romanian Delegate leans back from his microphone. Zorin leans forward, begins in Russian, and the Translator's voice catches up with him. His tone, body language, composure are all that of complete confidence.

ZORIN:

(through translator)

We are glad you could join us, Mr. Stevenson.

Adlai nods, returns to his notes, as Zorin continues.

ZORIN (CONT'D)

For the last couple of hours I have heard nothing but questions from the world here. The United States has led us to the brink of calamity. The peoples of the world want to know why. We are told again and again of this so called incontrovertible evidence of offensive weapons in Cuba. Yet we are not allowed to see this evidence. Are your spy planes so secret you cannot share this evidence with us? Some planes?!

The audience laughs. Zorin basks in it. And then grows stern.

ZORIN (CONT'D)

Or perhaps there is no such evidence. Perhaps the United States is mistaken.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - WHITE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

EXCOM watches the coverage on the situation room's T.V.'s. The President and Bobby sit side by side, Kenny just behind them. Bobby checks his watch, looks at the President.

BOBBY:

I make the call, and Adlai is out. McCloy goes in. Bobby looks back at Kenny.

THE PRESIDENT:

Let's hope it doesn't come to that.

INT. U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Zorin stares at Adlai. Adlai studiously ignores him, works on his own papers.

ZORIN:

The United States has no facts in hand.
Falsity is what America has in its hands
- false evidence.

Zorin leans back in his chair. Adlai finally looks up. He meets Zorin's icy bravura. He notes the cameras around the room. This is the grandest stage of all.

ZORIN (CONT'D)

The chair recognizes the representative
from the United States.

And in that moment, Adlai becomes the spokesman for America.

ADLAI:

Well, let me say something to you, Mr.
Ambassador, we do have the evidence. We
have it, and it is clear and
incontrovertible.

Adlai's tone is definitive. A tremor of interest passes
through the various delegations.

ADLAI (CONT'D)

And let me say something else. Those
weapons must be taken out of Cuba. You,
the Soviet Union, have created this new
danger, not the United States.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

EXCOM is transfixed by the continuing debate.

BUNDY:

Come on, Adlai!

They all crowd the T.V. as if it were a title fight. Except
for Bobby. Kenny glances over at him. He has the phone
pinned between his ear and shoulder. Kenny looks back to the
T.V.

INT. U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Adlai fixes Zorin in his seat, his voice rising.

ADLAI:

Mr. Zorin, I remind you that the other
day you did not deny the existence of
these weapons. But today, again, if I
heard you correctly, you now say they do

not exist.

Zorin, headphones on, listens to his own translation, but doesn't respond, acts bored. It gets Adlai's goat, and he begins to lose his cool. A rumble from the U.N. The CAMERA FINDS Adlai's hand SHAKING, gripping his pen.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

EXCOM is worried.

RUSK:

Come on, Adlai, don't let him off!

BOBBY:

John? It's Bobby. Get ready to send your staffer in. He's going to be coming out.

INT. U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

But Adlai's tremors are not tremors of fear. They are tremors of anger. His voice goes hard and cold.

ADLAI:

All right, sir. Let me ask you one simple question. Do you, Ambassador Zorin, deny that the U.S.S.R. has placed and is placing medium and intermediate range missiles and sites in Cuba? Yes or no - don't wait for the translation - yes or no?

The diplomatic world GASPS as Adlai drops all pretense of civility, all statesman-like grace.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

EXCOM's excitement mounts. In the chorus urging Adlai on, we find Kenny edge toward the screen.

KENNY:

Yeah. Yeah.

INT. U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Zorin shoots Adlai a testy look.

ZORIN:

I am not in an American courtroom, sir, and therefore I do not wish to answer a question that is put to me in the fashion in which a prosecutor puts questions. In due course, sir, you will

have your answer.

There's laughter at Zorin's refusal to be bullied: but it's nervous laughter, not the polite stuff of diplomatic tete-a tete. The RUMBLE in the room grows louder.

ADLAI:

You are in the courtroom of world opinion right now, and you can answer yes or no. You have denied they exist, and I want to know if I have understood you correctly.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - DAY

EXCOM ROARS! Fists in the air! Bobby lets the phone dangle a beat, covers it. And then he lifts it again.

BOBBY:

John, I'll get back to you.

He lowers the phone to the receiver. Kenny shoots him a triumphant smile. The President looks at Kenny, shakes his head, a big smile on his face.

INT. U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Adlai presses on.

ADLAI:

And I'm prepared to present the evidence in this room, proving that the Soviet Union has lied to the world.

And Zorin cracks. He looks uneasily to his delegation. They bend forward to consult. Adlai sits back in his chair, draping his arms over its wings with the confidence of someone who knows he's kicked ass.

Adlai looks around the room while he's waiting for his answer, managing not to smile. The diplomatic world is scandalized. At last Zorin regroups, lifts his head from his huddle.

ZORIN:

If you do not choose to continue your statement, the Chair recognizes the representative from Chile.

The CHILEAN DELEGATE stands.

CHILEAN DELEGATE

I yield my time and the floor to the representative to the United States.

The room explodes in laughter. Not just nervous any more, not just polite. They're laughing at Zorin's parliamentary ploy blowing up in his face.

Zorin's smile is gone, his smooth facade destroyed. And he looks like the biggest fool in the world.

Adlai stares at the beet-faced man with disdain. At last, Adlai stands, gestures to the door to the hall behind him. The PHOTO INTERPRETERS come racing in with their briefing boards.

ADLAI:

Well then, ladies and gentlemen, since it appears we might be here for a while, shall we have a look at what the Soviets are doing in Cuba?

The Delegates RUMBLE in interest, rise from their seats to approach Adlai.

INT. SITUATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

EXCOM celebrates. Phones ring at several of the chairs at the conference table. The President and Kenny meet as Bundy picks up a phone in the b.g.

THE PRESIDENT:

Didn't know Adlai had it in him. Too bad he didn't have this stuff in '52.

KENNY:

Zorin must not have gotten instructions. Somebody in their Foreign Ministry's blown it big-time. Bundy steps forward, holding the phone.

BUNDY:

Mr. President...

Kenny and the President turn to see what they already have heard in those two words: concern. The room falls quiet.

INT. FLAG PLOT - THE PENTAGON - CONTINUOUS

Phone in hand, McNamara paces at his post over the flag plot.

MCNAMARA:

...the ship is called Groznyy.

EXT. OCEAN, PUERTO RICO TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

The Soviet Tanker, Groznyy, breasts the heavy seas. Armed CREWMEN race along the deck to makeshift sandbagged

emplacements in the bow.

MCNAMARA (V.O.)

We lost track of it yesterday at nightfall. We thought we gave it plenty of room when we moved the quarantine line back. We just reacquired it.

The CAMERA PANS to the left, revealing a U.S. DESTROYER racing up alongside a few hundred yards away, pounding up and over the swells, punching up a huge fan of spray from its bow.

INT. FLAG PLOT - THE PENTAGON - CONTINUOUS

MCNAMARA:

It crossed the line hours ago.

Admiral Anderson, on the phone on the level below, is tense.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

Hail them again.

THE PRESIDENT (O.S.)

Keep us posted, Bob.

McNamara leans against the wall, closes his eyes in exhaustion and stress. And when he opens the, we PAN AROUND

TO REVEAL:

A G-d-like view of the flag plot, covered with HUNDREDS OF SHIPS, PLANES AND MARKINGS.

McNamara stares out at the bewildering tangle of symbols, living men behind each one. Each tangle of red and blue symbols a powderkeg. A G-dlike view indeed. And it is far more than any one mere man could keep control of. And he begins to realize it.

MCNAMARA:

We're kidding ourselves...

And not only that, in his bleary, sleep-deprived fog, he begins to understand something happening down there.

The CAMERA MOVES over the enormous map, over the scrolling cryptic numerology. THE BUZZ of radio communications bleeds in from the background. The overhead platform swivels on its motor, like the vast arm of some fate-writing god as the Watch Officer on it updates the movements of the ships.

McNamara stares, at the verge of grasping something. Through the door-crack of genius, he has the glimpse of some grander thing, some grander design.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

Very well. Load your guns.

That starts McNamara from his fatigued reverie. He goes to the railing, looks down on Anderson.

MCNAMARA:

What was that, Admiral?

Anderson turns, gazes up from his tier below, distracted.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

We've been hailing the Groznyy for the last hour, Mr. Secretary. The Groznyy refuses to stop.

MCNAMARA:

What are you doing?

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

Carrying out our mission, Mr. Secretary. If you don't mind, we're very busy right now. We need to be able to do our jobs.

MCNAMARA:

Admiral, I asked you a question.

Anderson holds the phone aside, turns around again, looks up at him, impatient. His answer is hard, cold, dangerous.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

We're going to follow the Rules of Engagement. The Rules of Engagement which the President has approved and signed in his order of October 23rd. Anderson listens again to the phone.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Yes, Captain, you may proceed. Clear your guns.

MCNAMARA:

What --

EXT. OCEAN, PUERTO RICO TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

The Destroyer's forward 5-inch twin guns swivel, train on the Groznyy. A beat. They OPEN FIRE with an ear-splitting BAMBAM, ripping the air in front of the muzzles, the Groznyy so close a miss isn't possible.

INT. FLAG PLOT - THE PENTAGON - CONTINUOUS

McNamara SHOUTS at Anderson, dropping down the steps to Anderson's level.

MCNAMARA:

GODDAMNIT, STOP THAT FIRING!

Watch Officers scramble to comply, chaos and shouting in the war room as a chorus of "Cease fire cease fire cease fire," goes up. McNamara turns on Anderson, is in his face.

MCNAMARA (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ, God help us.

Anderson smashes the phone down, wheels on McNamara, furious.

EXT. OCEAN, PUERTO RICO TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

The Destroyer's guns hammer away at the Groznyy, at point blank range... but the Groznyy IS UNHARMED.

Suddenly, in the air above it appear BRILLIANT FLARES. They light up the ship, brighter than the sun. The destroyer isn't firing deadly rounds... it's firing harmless starshells.

INT. FLAG PLOT - THE PENTAGON - CONTINUOUS

Anderson gets in McNamara's face.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

That ship was firing starshells.

Starshells. Flares, Mr. Secretary.

Everyone's eyes are on the two men. Only the chatter of teletype breaks the paralyzing silence. McNamara blinks, looks down at the plot on the floor. Anderson's voice drops to a deadly sotto.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Goddammitt, I've got a job to do.

You've been camped out up there since Monday night. You're exhausted and you're making mistakes. Interfere with me, you will get some of killed. I will not allow that.

McNamara looks away at the faces of the men in the room.

MCNAMARA:

Starshells.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

Get out of our way, Mr. Secretary. The navy has been running blockades since the days of John Paul Jones.

McNamara turns back. And all trepidation, embarrassment, hesitation are gone. He coldly appraises Anderson.

MCNAMARA:

I believe the President made it clear

that there would be no firing on ships without his express permission.

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

With all due respect, Mr. Secretary, we were not firing on the ship. Firing on a ship means attacking the ship. We were not attacking the ship. We were firing over it.

MCNAMARA:

This was not the President's intention when he gave that order. What if the Soviets don't see the distention? What if they make the same mistake I just did?

(beat)

There will be no firing anything near ANY Soviet ships without my express permission, is that understood, Admiral?

ADMIRAL ANDERSON

Yes, sir.

MCNAMARA:

And I will only issue such instructions when ordered to by the President.

(beat)

John Paul Jones... you don't understand a thing, do you, Admiral?

He passes his hand over the enormous plot below.

MCNAMARA (CONT'D)

This isn't a blockade.

McNamara, trembling with anger, awe, whirls to Anderson. And his burgeoning insight is born - clear, hard and cold.

MCNAMARA (CONT'D)

This, all this, is language, a new vocabulary the likes of which the world has never seen.

This is President Kennedy communicating with Secretary Khrushchev.

McNamara JABS HIS FINGER OUT AT the plot, and --

-- the CAMERA RACES DOWN, TRACKING OVER IT, across the vast ebb and flow of information, the delicate ballet of symbols and numerology, this language of steel and human life.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

SUPER:

On Kenny's T.V. Walter Cronkite reads the news to footage of a BOARDING PARTY going up a ladder to the freighter MARCULA. WALTER CRONKITE (V.O.)

At 7:

Kennedy stopped and boarded the Soviet charter vessel Marcula.

The Boarding Party wears dress whites and is UNARMED.

WALTER CRONKITE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

After a 3-hour inspection, the Kennedy signaled no contraband found. Cleared to continue. Pentagon spokesmen expect the next encounter.

Kenny, who turns from the T.V. as the door to his office opens. Rusk walks in.

RUSK:

Kenny, we need to see the President.

Something's happened.

Kenny reacts to Rusk's enigmatic expression. And out from behind Rusk steps JOHN SCALI, the ABC News Correspondent.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

OFF THEIR REACTIONS, the CAMERA FINDS an under-strength, ad hoc EXCOM - Kenny, Bobby, Taylor, Bundy, Sorensen, McCone, Ball and the President. Guarded hope all around. The short, balding, pugnacious Scali looks discomfited.

SCALI:

I have lunch with him maybe once a month. Way he talks, he acts like he knows Khrushchev personally, but he's never elaborated. I've used him as a source in a couple of stories.

Kenny paces behind the gathered men around the President's desk, listening, mind going a million miles an hour.

RUSK:

The FBI has identified this Alexander Fomin as the Soviet Resident, the KGB equivalent of one of our station chiefs. He's their highest ranking spy in this country. And he knows John's a friend

of mine.

BUNDY:

All the trademarks of a back-channel
overture.

Kenny eyes Bundy, makes him uncomfortable. The President
sizes Scali up.

THE PRESIDENT:

So they'll remove the missiles, and
we'll pledge not to invade Cuba,
destabilize Castro or assist anyone who
plans in doing so...

Nobody dares speak. It's as if the possibility of a
settlement will vanish into thin air if anyone moves.

BOBBY:

I think... this may be our first real
message from Khrushchev.

MCCONE:

The alternative, Mr. President, is that
this could be a trap.

KENNY:

Dangle a settlement, tie us down in
negotiations, we come up short...

MCCONE:

Why else would they approach us in this
way? It's deniable. The Soviets have
done nothing but lie to us. This could
be more of the same.

KENNY:

That may be why Khrushchev's introducing
this guy. We've been burned by his
usual players in the formal channels, so
he brings in an honest broker.

MCCONE:

That may be what they want us to think.

RUSK:

The truth is, Mr. President, we don't even really know whom Fomin speaks for. It could be Khrushchev. It could be some faction in the Politburo or the KGB itself. We just don't know.

BOBBY:

By the way, Scali, your activities now fall under the secrecy codicils of the National Security Act. Sorry, no Pulitzer.

The gathered men chuckle, only Scali a bit dour but being a good sport about it. Scali checks his watch.

SCALI:

Mr. President, we don't have much time. I'm supposed to meet with him again in three and a half hours.

THE PRESIDENT:

Well, it seems the question of the day is -- is the offer legitimate?

He moves away from his desk. The men watch him.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

If it is... if it is, then we can't afford to ignore it.

(beat, to Scali)

John, we'll have instructions for you in a couple of hours.

Scali nods. Rusk escorts him out. They wait until the door closes. Taylor looks over at McCone who nods.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Mr. President, I'm afraid we have some bad news. We're getting GMAIC estimates from our latest low-level overflights.

It appears the missiles are two to three days away from operational status.

MCCONE:

So we don't have much time to play out back-channel communiques.

Kenny gives Bobby a hard look. The President appears unfazed.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

The quarantine, sir, is not producing results. The Chiefs feel it's time you take another look at our options.

The President considers Taylor, then looks over to Kenny.

THE PRESIDENT:

Kenny, get over to your old stomping grounds. Go through everything the FBI has on Fomin. I need your best call: is this guy legit and is he speaking for Khrushchev? And I need you to tell me by the time I call you, because right after I call you, I'm calling Scali with his instructions.

INT. FBI, COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE DEPARTMENT FILES - NIGHT
BANG! A STACK OF FILES slams down beside Kenny on a large paper-covered conference table. WALTER SHERIDAN, Kenny's investigator-buddy, wears a visitor's pass just like Kenny. Kenny and Walter RIFLE through the folders, super fast, super proficient. A half-dozen FBI AGENTS work around the table.

SHERIDAN:

Okay. So, what we've got is this guy Alexander Feklisov, aka Alexander Fomin, declared Consul to the Soviet Embassy, but in reality the KGB Papa Spy. An illustrious tour of duty during the Great Patriotic War gets him on the Party fast track, various tours of duty in KGB, American postings. He's an expert on us, and... that's all we've got on Papa Spy.

KENNY:

Who's he talking for? Is it Khrushchev, or is this more bullshit?

Kenny stands, runs his hands through his hair, aggravated.

KENNY (CONT'D)

How do you become the KGB top spy in the United States?

SHERIDAN:

Gotta know someone.

Kenny whirls on Sheridan. A frozen beat.

KENNY:

Politics is politics. Walter.

(whirling on Agents)

Khrushchev is the Moscow Party Boss under Stalin. Give me their career chronologies!

Walter pushes a typed dateline of Khrushchev's major career moves, and one of the Agents hands Kenny a list of Fomin's postings. He lays them side by side. And for every step of Khrushchev's, there's a step for Fomin. Not only that, but the DATES ARE IDENTICAL or nearly so.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Every time Khrushchev moves up, Fomin does within a year...

(tracing up the list)

Khrushchev was the administrator in charge of preparing Moscow's defenses during the war. And Fomin... was here in the U.S.

Kenny's face falls. But a YOUNG FBI AGENT cuts in.

YOUNG FBI AGENT:

Not at first.

The Young FBI Agent proffers him a file. Kenny snatches it.

YOUNG FBI AGENT (CONT'D)

He was an engineer stationed outside Moscow in '42. Specialized in tank traps.

Kenny looks up at Walter. Walter nods sagely, lights a pipe.

KENNY:

They know each other. They're war buddies.

SHERIDAN:

It's thin. But real life usually is.

A PHONE on the table SHRILLS, shattering the silent triumph.

KENNY:

Hello?

THE PRESIDENT (O.S.)

I've got to move. What do you have, Kenny?

KENNY:

They know each other! Khrushchev and Feklisov aka Fomin were war buddies!
THE PRESIDENT (O.S.)
You're sure...

KENNY:

Don't take it to court, but we've got good circumstantial evidence...

(off Walter's nod)

Walter agrees. My gut's telling me Khrushchev's turning to a trusted old friend to carry his message.

THE PRESIDENT (O.S.)

Okay, Ken. We're going.

INT. STATLER HOTEL COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

A few lonely BUSINESS TRAVELERS hang out in the dim coffee shop. Faint music plays. Scali and ALEXANDER FOMIN sit with steaming cups of coffee. Scali, nervous, unfolds a note. Fomin, an expressionless gray spectre of a man, eyes him. He is, in his boredom, a spy's spy.

SCALI:

I am instructed to tell you that the American Government would respond favorably to an offer along the lines you have discussed. If this solution were raised at the U.N. by Ambassador Zorin, he would find a favorable reply from Ambassador Stevenson.

FOMIN:

So I understand you correctly. If the missiles in Cuba were dismantled, returned to the Soviet Union, and a guarantee was made not to reintroduce them, the United States would be prepared to guarantee that it would never invade Cuba?

SCALI:

That is correct.

FOMIN:

This is from the Highest Authority?

SCALI:

Yes. From the Highest Authority. There are two conditions. The U.N. must be allowed to inspect the removal of the missiles.

FOMIN:

And, of course, the U.N. must be allowed to observe the redeployment of forces from the American Southeast.

Scali demurs. He has no instructions on this count.

FOMIN (CONT'D)

And the second condition?

SCALI:

Time is of the essence.

Scali takes a sip of coffee. Fomin stares at him, intense.

FOMIN:

John. How much time?

SCALI:

48 hours. In 48 hours there can be no deals.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

Scali finishes debriefing the President, Bobby, Kenny, McCone, Taylor and Bundy.

SCALI:

He left right away. Got the feeling he meant business.

Kenny and Bobby share a hopeful glance. Rusk enters from Kenny's office. And he's unable to contain his excitement.

RUSK:

Mr. President, we're receiving a letter from Khrushchev over at State.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE - STATE DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

From a cluster of folding metal chairs, Kenny, Bobby, Rusk

and Sorensen watch a TELETYPE hammer out the message as it comes off the wire. It's painfully slow, like watching a bad typist type a manuscript. Ten pages of this is an eternity. To top it off, it's in Russian. A TRANSLATOR reads it off, word by word to a TRANSCRIBER.

TRANSLATOR:

...two...of...us...pull...on...the...
knot...of...war...

INT. CABINET ROOM - NIGHT

Kenny slams a page of Khrushchev's letter on the table. He jabs his finger at it. EXCOM listens, intent.

KENNY:

It's ten pages of sentimental fluff, but he's saying right here. He'll remove the missiles in return for a no-invasion pledge. It looks like Fomin's overture was genuine.

The President turns to McCone.

MCCONE:

Our early analysis says this was probably written by Khrushchev himself. It's a first draft, and shows no signs of being polished by the foreign ministry. In fact, it probably hasn't been approved by the Politburo. They wouldn't have let the emotionalism go by. The analysts say it was written by someone under considerable stress.

EXCOM chuckles.

THE PRESIDENT:

Glad to hear we're not alone.

The President eyes the EXCOM members one by one, an incipient smile on his face.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Well, gentlemen, I wasn't planning on invading Cuba anyway. I think we can live with the terms of this deal.

There are mostly nods of assent, big smiles around the table. Except from McCone and Taylor. The President takes his copy of the letter, flips through it. He shakes his head, almost

unable to believe that Khrushchev has given in. A long beat.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Ted, I want you to draft our acceptance.

EXT. O'DONNELL DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

A long, black car stops at the end of Kenny's driveway. The door opens, and Kenny steps out. He says an inaudible goodnight to the driver, and the car pulls off. He turns, facing the white two-story house with the neat front yard, the lights out. And he smiles. Home at last.

EXT. O'DONNELL PATIO - NIGHT

A screen door squeaks open. Kenny steps out into the darkness of the back yard. And there, in her robe, sitting startled on a lawn chair, lit only by the dim glow of the kitchen window, is Helen. Kenny stands there tired, his coat slung over his shoulder.

KENNY:

Hi.

Helen rises, her own care-worn face turned to his. For a silent moment they gaze at each other, searching in the lines of each others' face for the changes of a long separation. They see them. But they've been married a long time, and the awkwardness passes.

HELEN:

Hi, O'Donnell. You look old.

Kenny drops his coat on a table as Helen comes up and folds herself into his arms.

HELEN (CONT'D)

This job's going to kill you. If I don't first.

They kiss, comfortable. But not too long, and he lets her go. She looks at him again, sees he's suppressing a smile.

HELEN (CONT'D)

If you're home it means either Jack and Bobby have finally figured out what a con man you are and fired you, or --

KENNY:

-- we got a back channel communication from Khrushchev this evening feeling us out about a deal. He confirmed it just a little while ago in a letter to the President. I think we've won.

HELEN:

A thing like this... who could even think of winning?

INT. HALL OUTSIDE KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

SUPER:

Kenny, in his overcoat, steps aside as a pair of Duty Officers race past him, almost bowling him over. He slows as he nears the doors to his office and the Oval Office, DISCOVERING:

TOTAL CHAOS. EXCOM guys, Assistants, dart to and from the offices and halls. On all their faces grim expressions. Kenny stands there a beat in confusion. And then Bobby swings out of Kenny's office. There's a desperate edge to Bobby's voice.

BOBBY:

Where've you been? We've been trying to find you all morning.

KENNY:

Helen and I went out for breakfast. EXCOM's not supposed to convene til eight.

BOBBY:

We just got a second letter from Khrushchev. The deal's off.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE CABINET ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kenny and Bobby walk fast for the cabinet room, Kenny still in his coat.

BOBBY:

We're getting everyone together as fast as we can.

KENNY:

What does the letter say?

BOBBY:

They want us to take our missiles out of Turkey along with the no invasion pledge. It looks like Fomin was a ploy

after all, and they were just stalling
for time.

Kenny is stunned.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

It gets worse.

Kenny gives Bobby a sharp look as they enter --

INT. CABINET ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The President, in shirtsleeves, no tie, glances up at Kenny
as he and Bobby enter. Kenny can only bear his look for a

second:

clearly relieved to see him, gives him a faint smile.

Half of EXCOM, including McNamara, McCone, Rusk, and Taylor
barely notice them as they're already there arguing.

Kenny sits down hurriedly, shucks off his coat as he joins
the conversation in mid-stream.

MCCONE:

My specialists are in agreement: this
morning's letter is not Khrushchev. Last
night's letter was.

(beat)

The evidence supports only one

conclusion:

Khrushchev was replaced overnight.

KENNY:

Jesus Christ...

Bobby gives him a look: told you things got worse.

THE PRESIDENT:

Dean?

RUSK:

It doesn't necessarily mean there's been
a coup. Khrushchev's name is signed to
the letter.

MCNAMARA:

Aw, come on, Dean!

RUSK:

But at the very least... It does suggest

he's been co-opted by hard line elements.

MCNAMARA:

Which at the end of the day is the same thing as a coup. A puppet Khrushchev, and a hard-line Soviet government pulling the strings. No deal. And the missiles are almost operational.

Bitter silence. They all look to the President. Imminent victory has turned to ashes. The President studies his own folded hands. Ball and Thompson enter, take seats. One by one, throughout the scene, other EXCOM members join the group.

THE PRESIDENT:

You know, the problem we have is that this is latest offer of theirs will seem reasonable to everyone. We remove our missiles, they remove theirs.

Our Jupiters were scheduled for removal anyway. They're obsolete, after all.

Kenny shakes his head in mute anger. McNamara and Rusk seem to sense the President's feelings, too.

RUSK:

Mr. President, agreeing to such a trade would be tantamount to paying ransom. They'll put a gun to our head again, and expect us to pay again. Kenny looks the President in the eye.

KENNY:

We can't sell out one of our friends for our own safety. NATO wouldn't trust us anymore, and they'd be right not to.

The President sighs in the face of the stern advice. He nods, expecting as much. Bobby still can't look at anyone.

THE PRESIDENT:

So which one of you geniuses can tell me how to explain ourselves to the world? How do we work with them if there's been a hard-line coup?

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Mr. President, there is another possibility we haven't considered. This may not be a coup at all.

Everyone of Kenny's instincts jumps. His head snaps up to listen to Taylor. Taylor pauses.

GENERAL TAYLOR (CONT'D)

It's possible that the back-channel overture, last night's letter, and this letter today, along with everything the Soviets have said all along, is nothing more than a lie -- disinformation.

MCNAMARA:

Designed to keep us from taking action.

Kenny hears the fatalism in McNamara's voice. A long beat.

Everyone stares at McNamara.

MCNAMARA (CONT'D)

I hate to say it, but if I had to bet, I'd bet Max is right. What if they have no intention of honoring this deal, either?

Then tomorrow they add another condition. Meanwhile, the quarantine isn't working and they're continuing to work on the missile sites.

(beat)

I think we have to consider issuing warning orders for our forces.

They were so close last night... and suddenly Lundahl and LeMay enter the room with the day's briefing boards.

LUNDAHL:

Mr. President...

Lundahl stands there at the end of the table, gray. He almost can't say it, can't look the President in the face.

LUNDAHL (CONT'D)

This morning's photography is in. It appears the Soviets have commenced a crash program to ready the missiles.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. MISSILE SITE - CUBA - CONTINUOUS

The missiles site is now more than just dirt and clearing equipment. It's an armed camp, with missiles, fuel trailers, erectors spaced every few hundred yards. MISSILE TECHNICIANS service the towering SS-4s.

LUNDAHL (V.O.)

The first missiles became operational last night.

With a barrage of shouted orders in Russian, and a whine of the ERECTOR's engines, THE MISSILE BEGINS TO RISE.

LUNDAHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We expect they'll all be operational in

36 hours:

It stops, vertical.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CABINET ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The news hits the room like a thunderbolt. Kenny looks to Bobby and the President. The blood is gone from their faces.

MCNAMARA:

Then we're out of time. We have to go in.

LUNDAHL:

That may not be as easy as we thought either. We've gotten confirmation that the Soviets have also deployed battlefield nuclear weapons to Cuba. A pall falls over the room as LeMay explains.

LEMAY:

FROGS, we call 'em. Short range tactical nukes. It's possible they've delegated release authority to their local commanders for use against our invasion troops. It'd be standard doctrine.

(beat)

Our capability to get all the missiles has eroded during our delay with the quarantine. The good news is that for the moment we know where the FROGS are, and we can target them, too. But the

longer we wait, the harder it's going to get.

They all look to the President. Kenny stares, in a private hell, blacker and more complete than anyone should ever know. In that shocked silence each man grapples with failure. The Best and the Brightest could not prevent what must come next.

THE PRESIDENT:

Then we have no choice.

(to Taylor)

General, issue the warning orders to our forces. They will be prepared to execute the air strikes Monday morning and the follow-on invasion according to the schedule thereafter. I'll need the official release orders on my desk Sunday night.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Understood, sir. We need to step up the overflights, finalize our pilots' target folders in order to be able to carry out the strikes.

The President gives Kenny a meaningful look.

THE PRESIDENT:

Permission granted.

Taylor exits. Kenny rises, gives the President an almost imperceptible nod, as he prepares to leave in Taylor's wake.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Gentlemen, if anybody's got any great ideas, now's the time...

INT. READY ROOM - MACDILL AFB - DAY

MAJOR RUDOLPH ANDERSON, 30, wearing the bulky high-altitude pressure suit of a U-2 pilot, takes the phone from one of the Air Force NCOs who are helping him suit up.

MAJOR ANDERSON:

This is Major Anderson.

INTERCUT CALL TO:

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny, at the other end of the line, stares out the window at the fall day. It seems so mild, so unlike war. And it takes him a beat before he realizes Anderson's on the line.

MAJOR ANDERSON (O.S.)
Hello? Anyone there?

KENNY:

Major, my name is Kenneth O'Donnell.
Special Assistant to the President.
Kenny takes a breath, ready to start the shuck-and-jive...
but for some reason doesn't.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Major, a few days ago the President
ordered me to help him keep control of
what's going on out there. I've been
browbeating pilots, navy guys left and
right to make sure you don't get us here
in Washington into trouble. But you
know what? We're pretty damn good at
getting ourselves into trouble. So
instead of riding your ass, I'm just
going to tell you what's going on, and
let you figure out how best to help us
out up here.

INT. READY ROOM - MACDILL AFB - CONTINUOUS

Now mostly suited up, Major Anderson takes the phone out of
the NCO's hand. He nods, serious.

MAJOR ANDERSON:

Go ahead, sir.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

KENNY:

Last night, we looked like we were going
to cut a deal to get us all out of this
mess. Today, the Soviets are reneging.
We're going to try to salvage the
situation, but a lot of things are going
wrong today. It's making everyone
nervous, and it will be very hard to
avoid going to war. Don't get shot
down, Major. Beyond that, whatever else
you can do to help us, I'd really
appreciate it.

INT. READY ROOM - MACDILL AFB - CONTINUOUS

Major Anderson waves his NCOs away. They leave the room.
The Major sits on a bench in front of his locker, thinks.

MAJOR ANDERSON:

When you're up there at 72,000 feet,
there's a million things that can go
wrong. Is your oxygen mix right? Will
your cameras freeze up? Are you leaving
contrail...

(beat)

Those million things are beyond your
control, mostly... But you know, when
you realize that, there's a kind of
peace. You don't need to be in control.
You never were in control in the first
place. If you're a good man, and your
ground crew are good men, it's all you
can ask for. And with the grace of G-d,
it'll get you through.

The young Major smiles to himself, to the phone.

MAJOR ANDERSON (CONT'D)

You sound like a good man. You'll be
all right, Mr. O'Donnell. We believe in
you guys down here.

(beat)

Thanks for the call.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kenny nods to himself, deeply touched by the man's faith.

KENNY:

Thank you, Major.

INT. READY ROOM - MACDILL AFB - CONTINUOUS

With a click, the line goes dead and Anderson walks the phone
over to the receiver on the wall.

END INTERCUT:

EXT. RUNWAY - MACDILL AFB - MOMENTS LATER

A cart speeds down the tarmac, an NCO behind the wheel.
Beside him sits Major Anderson, his helmet on, visor up. He
adjusts the mix on the oxygen bottle he's carrying at his
feet, breathing in preparation for the high-altitude flight.
Up ahead, among a host of service vehicles, sits the U-2.

INT. U-2 - DAY

Anderson switches over to the U-2's oxygen supply as his NCOs
belt him in. They slap him on the helmet for good luck and
lower the canopy as he brings his engines up to power.

MAJOR ANDERSON:

This is flight G3132, requesting permission for take-off.

TOWER VOICE (O.S.)

G3132, you've got runway one, you are cleared to proceed to Angels 72.

MAJOR ANDERSON:

Roger that.

And he throws the throttle forward,

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. STRATOSPHERE - MOMENTS LATER

The twilight, in-between, world of the stratosphere. Far below -- clouds, shining blue day. Above, stars and the indigo depths of space. We hang in utter silence.

A silver glint appears in the center of the horizon. It grows larger. Then larger still. It is the U-2. We barely have time to register the rising hiss of its engines, when it FILLS THE SCREEN and BOOMS PAST, leaving us standing still.

The CAMERA PANS to follow it, but it's already dwindled to a speck, and we feel how fast 600 miles an hour really is.

INT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

Anderson's gloved hand reaches for the CAMERA HEATER switches.

EXT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

The belly door whines open like a silver eyelid, exposing the camera's lense.

INT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

Anderson double checks his position, switches to the autopilot for the stability only the machine can provide, then hits the CAMERA ACTIVATE button on his joystick.

BAMABMABMABMA... The camera begins its photography.

Anderson watches the number on the film-remaining counter spool down. He stares out the window. The towering clouds below rise up magnificent, glorious... a glimpse of heaven.

Rapt, Anderson stares. And then suddenly a BLARING ALARM GOES OFF IN THE COCKPIT. It shocks Anderson around to the controls. It's his MISSILE WARNING LIGHT.

Anderson' hands flash out to the joystick, turning off the cameras, disabling autopilot. He banks the U-2 hard.

EXT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

As the U-2 turns, far, far below, emerging from the clouds,

barely visible, rises a CONTRAIL. It arcs lazily toward us. A beat, and then another CONTRAIL.

Then ANOTHER. The anti-aircraft missiles creating them are too small to be seen with the naked eye.

INT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

The cockpit is a cacophony of alarms and lights, the horizon outside tilted. Anderson's breath comes fast, rasping as he does his strains going into the high-g turn.

He looks out the cockpit window, finds the first SA-2 missile in pursuit only several thousand feet below him now. He waits. Waits. Waits, still in the turn. The black head of the missile now visible.

He puts the plane over, rolling out into an opposite bank.

EXT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

The spy plane's long flimsy wings weren't made for dogfighting. They BEND terribly in the rollout. And then the first missile STREAKS past, tries to correct its miss, but can't and vanishes into the distance at a 90-degree angle.

INT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

Anderson's breath comes faster and faster as the second missile rises up, now visible. He puts the throttle as far as it goes, trying to outrun death. Every second is a tenth of a mile, and every mile shortens the missile's life span. The rising missile drafts aft, closing on the U-2 from behind.

EXT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

The second missile's contrail rises up behind the plane, levels off, and closes on it at a tremendous rate.

The third missile rises up in the far distance behind the second.

The second missile races up on the U-2, closer, right behind it, can't miss. Then at a hundred yards, the contrail suddenly peters out, and the missile, out of fuel, drops away.

But the third missile closes.

INT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

Anderson glances out the window, sees the spent missiles fall away, and spots the third missile still seeking him aft.

Hand pinning the throttle forward, he prays under his breath.

EXT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

The third SA-2 rides its billowing column of exhaust straight for the tail of the U-2. This one is not out of fuel.

INT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

Major Anderson opens his eyes. He stares out the window at the glorious wonder of cloud and sea and earth below.

EXT. U-2 - CONTINUOUS

And the missile looms. We have time to realize it's almost as big as the plane itself before it SHEARS right into the U 2's tail and EXPLODES in a BLINDING FLASH.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE BUNDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Kenny, jogging down the hall, hears form an open door.

BUNDY (O.S.)

Kenny!

Kenny goes over to the threshold. Inside the office Bundy stands up from behind his desk, grave. And Kenny knows.

INT. CABINET ROOM - DAY

All of EXCOM is there except for Bundy. Kenny sits behind the President, deeply distraught over Major Anderson.

THE PRESIDENT:

Does this attack on our plane represent a definitive, intentional escalation on the part of the Soviets?

GENERAL TAYLOR:

The Soviets are in control of the SAMs. It's hard to believe with their centralized command structure that it could be an accidental launch.

MCCONE:

Mr. President, taken with the events of the past few hours, I believe this confirms our worst fears. We're now dealing with a hard-line Soviet government, perhaps with Khrushchev as a puppet head, perhaps not.

In the silence, Kenny reads the faces around the room.

They're convinced by McCone's pronouncement. Kenny's not.

KENNY:

It could be a mistake.

McCone gives him a get-serious look. But Kenny presses on.

KENNY (CONT'D)

We need to be positive before we react.

Bundy enters the room. Everyone looks up. He stands there in the doorway, his face tight.

Kenny sags in his chair. Bundy, of course, has more bad news, and they all know it. A hopeless beat. The President just stares at Bundy, unable to ask. Bundy nods, affirming what everyone is thinking.

BUNDY:

A U-2 on a routine air-sampling mission over Siberia got lost and penetrated Soviet airspace. The Soviets scrambled MIGs in pursuit, thinking it was a bomber. It got out okay. Somebody forgot to cancel the mission.

THE PRESIDENT:

Goddammitt. There's always some sonofabitch who doesn't get the word. All we need is the Soviets thinking we're bombing them.

(facetious)

Anybody else?

The humor falls on a cold audience.

GENERAL TAYLOR:

Mr. President, our pilots are in danger. We must order punitive airstrikes against the SAM site that shot down Major Anderson per our rules of engagement.

And finally the moment Kenny has dreaded all this time has come to pass. He looks at Bobby, then at the President. The President stares at the cup of coffee in his hands, as if trying to read the Fates' design in it. A long beat, and everyone holds their breath.

THE PRESIDENT:

No. I want confirmation there wasn't some sort of accident first.

LeMay clears his throat. Everyone looks at him, expecting him to scream or jump up and down.

LEMAY:

I think that's a good idea, Mr. President. It'll be safer for my boys to get those SAMs on Monday when we get

the rest of the bastards. I can wait a day and a half.

THE PRESIDENT:

Very well, then.

But he says it without any belief in the words, realizing they're being tied fast to the train tracks of war.

INT. KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Alone in his office, shattered, Kenny stares out the window, viewing the distant Ellipse through a gap in the trees. Kids are out there playing football. He glances at his watch, and grabs his jacket.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

Kenny puts on his jacket as he goes down the steps into the bright autumn day, walking away from the White House. It drops behind him -- his step is faster, more urgent.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Kenny walks down the sidewalk, drawn toward the Ellipse. The sixth grade FOOTBALL PLAYERS sweep forward with a running play. Kenny scans them, searching, his breath coming hard.

EXT. ELLIPSE - DAY

He reaches the edge of the open field. And then he spots the name on the jersey: O'Donnell. It's Kevin. The players relinquish the ball and the offense comes off the field. Kevin sees his dad.

KEVIN:

Hey! Dad!

Kenny manages a smile as Kevin trots over. Kevin pulls his helmet off. They stand there a long beat, Kenny desperate to take him up, abandon his post... but he doesn't.

KENNY:

Hey, sport. You winning?

KEVIN:

Yeah.

But Kevin sees the turmoil in his father's face.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Is everything going to be okay, Dad?

Kenny's forced smile is answer enough.

KENNY:

Yeah, Kev. Everything's gonna be fine.

But Kevin knows. Together they know. The end of the world is at hand.

KEVIN:

I guess you won't be coming home tonight.

KENNY:

I, uh...

Suddenly a car HONKS. Kenny turns around. Bobby is leaning out the rear passenger window of his limo. And he sees what Kenny is doing. He doesn't want to cut in, but has to.

BOBBY:

Kenny! We need to talk.
Kenny looks back at his son.

KENNY:

Get back out there, kid. Remember to hit 'em hard.

KEVIN:

What about you? Where are you going?

KENNY:

Back to work.
Kevin puts his helmet back on his head. Kenny watches as Kevin jogs off to rejoin his team. Kenny turns his back on his son, and strides for Bobby's limo, dying inside.

EXT. SANS SOUCI PARKING LOT - DAY

Kenny and Bobby stand by their car off to one side of the restaurant's parking lot. Bobby's Secret Service Agents maintain a discreet distance.

KENNY:

If we're going to make a deal, we're going to have to do it fast. This is only getting out of control. The only reason we're not at war this very minute is he's been able to stretch, bend and break his own rules. He won't be able to keep it up forever.
Bobby jams the last bit of sandwich in his mouth. A beat.
Kenny looks him in the eye.

BOBBY:

And?

KENNY:

And Jack wants to trade the missiles in Turkey.

BOBBY:

The Jupiters are obsolete. They were supposed to have been dismantled last summer anyway --

KENNY:

-- Jesus, Mary and Joseph. I told you how stupid it was to float the Lippman article! But you wouldn't listen to me. What if there hasn't been a coup at all? What if it's you two who invited that second letter by raising the possibility of a trade?

Bobby is speechless with rage.

KENNY (CONT'D)

And if the two of you are thinking this trade is your ace in the hole, you're so wrong. It's a deuce.

Bobby's beyond furious. They catch their rising voices.

KENNY (CONT'D)

And it's not just me who thinks that. Everyone on this so-called EXCOM is telling you exactly the same thing: make the trade, and they're going to force us into trade after trade until finally they demand something we won't trade like Berlin, and we do end up in a war.
(beat)

Not to mention, that long before that happens, this government will be politically dead.

Bobby simmers for a long beat, thinking. And boy, does this guy hate admitting he's wrong.

BOBBY:

All right, so maybe we overestimated how

reasonable this trade would look. Okay?
You happy? So now what?

KENNY:

So now you've got to talk him out of it.
And then we've got to figure out an
acceptable political solution.

BOBBY:

And if there has been a coup and there
is no acceptable political solution?
Kenny stares off at the city, agonized.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

Kenny enters from his office, finding Bobby, Rusk and
Sorensen talking with the President. The President gives him
a brief, meaningful look.

RUSK:

Whatever response we send, it will take
several hours for the wire to be
received by our embassy and delivered to
the Kremlin. So we're looking at early
tomorrow morning at the earliest before
Khrushchev could respond.

As Rusk talks, Kenny passes close by Bobby. Bobby whispers:

BOBBY:

He gets it, but he's pissed.

THE PRESIDENT:

That's all well and good, but what do we
say to 'em?

SORENSEN:

It depends on if we really believe
there's been a coup.
That strikes a cord with Kenny.

KENNY:

I agree. If there has been a coup, and
there's a hard-line government in power
now, then it doesn't matter what we say.
The end of the day we'll either agree to
their terms, they'll agree to ours, or

we'll go to war. But what if there hasn't been a coup? What if... what if what is happening is a series of accidents?

SORENSEN:

The second letter is an accident?

KENNY:

No. The letter is an intentional, but it's having an effect far greater than its authors intended.

(beat)

What if our Jupiter missiles are just a last minute haggle to salvage something? Maybe a bone Khrushchev is throwing to the hard line, not really caring if we reject it or not?

(beat)

And then these accidents have happened.

BOBBY:

Making the second letter and the overall picture look worse than it really is.

SORENSEN:

The Guns of August.

KENNY:

Exactly.

(beat)

If they're sane and human like we are, then maybe we just refuse, and they'll let it slide, like we've been letting things slide.

SORENSEN:

So we reject the second letter.
And Kenny looks at Bobby. The world stops.

KENNY:

No. We don't reject it...
It hits Bobby like a lightning bolt.

BOBBY:

... We accept the first letter and pretend the second doesn't exist.

The President, Rusk and Sorensen stare at him, mute.

INT. CABINET ROOM - NIGHT

HOLD ON the exact same mute reaction from the entire assembled EXCOM. Finally McCone breaks the spell.

MCCONE:

It won't work --

Bobby, Kenny and Sorensen start to object, but McCone raises his voice over theirs.

MCCONE (CONT'D)

-- because it's wishful thinking! It's the same wishful thinking that blinded us all these months while the Soviets were sneaking those missiles in under our noses!

McNamara shakes his head, intrigued but skeptical.

MCNAMARA:

Ignore the second letter, agree to the conditions of the first...

GENERAL TAYLOR:

There's no reason to believe the Soviets will let it go.

RUSK:

Max is right. Why will they accept it?

MCNAMARA:

It can work. If, IF they believe we'll hit them.

Kenny, Bobby and Sorensen look at McNamara, grateful.

MCNAMARA (CONT'D)

We've only got time for one more round of diplomacy. The first airstrikes start in less than 36 hours.

RUSK:

But we have to make them agree to it.

So how do we do that?

The President leans forward. Sensing he's about to speak,

all eyes turn to him.

THE PRESIDENT:

We give them something. We tell them we'll remove the missiles from Turkey say, six months from now so that there appears to be no linkage. We also tell them if they go public about it, we deny it and the deal is off.

KENNY:

And we do it under the table so we can disavow any knowledge of it.

MCCONE:

It's transparent. The press'll be all over it.

KENNY:

Six months from now, I'm not going to care. Are you? We'll deal with it.

MCNAMARA:

At least it will expose whether Khrushchev has been overthrown. We'll know what we're dealing with.

KENNY:

And if this is a move to appease the hard line, then it may just be the bone he needs to regain control of his own house.

Most EXCOM is nodding, agreeing. McCone shakes his head in disgust. Taylor sits in silence.

RUSK:

Whoever carries the message has to hit the nail on the head. Come across as too soft, they'll push us. Too hard, they'll be cornered and even more dangerous.

MCCONE:

They could pre-empt.

It's a terrible responsibility to bear. The room is silent. At last Bobby looks up from his folded hands to his brother. The President stares back. There is nobody else who can do this. Only Bobby. His brother.

THE PRESIDENT:

Bobby. You know Dobrynin best.

Bobby nods, taking up the gauntlet.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

Ted, you get working on the draft.

Sorensen and Bobby rise as one, head for the doors.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

And make sure he knows we have to have an answer tomorrow.

(beat, final)

Because on Monday we begin military action against Cuba.

Bobby and Kenny exchange a look.

EXT. WEST WING DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

A LONG SHOT:

overcoat, briefcase in hand. He pauses, tiny, alone. The West Wing - and all its imposing spotlight power behind him - reduced to this insignificant man on his eleventh-hour mission.

And then, out of the shadows, in the f.g., steps Kenny in his own coat, his breath frosting in the late-night air. Bobby sees him, and knows he is not so alone anymore.

ON THE DRIVEWAY:

They meet in front of the limo. Bobby stops, shuffles his things, awkward.

BOBBY:

What do you want? A good-bye kiss?

Kenny opens the driver's side door. The Secret Service LIMO DRIVER peers out.

LIMO DRIVER:

Hey, Kenny.

KENNY:

Hey, Joe. Listen, I'll take care of him. Go ahead in, grab some coffee.

We'll be back pretty quick.

LIMO DRIVER:

You sure?

Kenny's nod and look -- there's no arguing. The Limo Driver hops out, and Kenny gets in. Bobby stands there outside for a beat. He tries to hide how touched he is, but can't completely.

KENNY:

What's the matter with you? Forget how to open a car door?

INT. BOBBY'S LIMO - NIGHT

Bobby recovers, opens his own door, gets in the front seat next to Kenny.

KENNY:

Jesus, you rich people.

Kenny starts up the engine. Bobby smiles a twisted smile. As the car pulls away, the two men sit in silence, neither willing to admit how glad the other is there.

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA AVE. - NIGHT

The limo wheels out into the street, carrying the two friends into the darkness.

INT. BOBBY'S LIMO - NIGHT

Bobby stares out the window at the passing city, the lights the lives behind those windows. As the car drives on and on, the tension returns. Bobby feels the weight of all those lives. On him. A long beat. He gazes at Kenny, the only man he could ever admit this to:

BOBBY:

I don't know if I can do this.

Kenny glances over at him. Bobby stares back.

KENNY:

There's nobody else I'd rather have going in there.

Bobby looks at him.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Nobody else I'd trust Helen and the kids' lives to.

Kenny means it. He looks away. Bobby shifts, awkward.

BOBBY:

Take a left.

Kenny looks him. This isn't the way to the Justice Department. But he complies.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

We gave so much to get here. I don't know. Sometimes I think what the hell did we do it for?

KENNY:

Because we knew we could do a better job than everyone else.

And Bobby, in the silence and closeness of the car, turns on Kenny - anguished, knowing his life is at its climax.

BOBBY:

You know... I hate being called the brilliant one. The ruthless one. They guy who does the dirty work. The one everybody's afraid of.

Kenny looks to him, moved, not knowing what to say.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

I hate it. I'm not smart, you know.

And I'm not so ruthless.

He looks to Kenny, searching his face, then away, embarrassed.

KENNY:

You're right about the smart part, but ruthless, well...

That breaks the tension as they arrive at the scene:

THROUGH THE WINDOW

Appears the grim, square lines of the SOVIET EMBASSY. Police cars line the streets outside it. All the windows are dark.

A cordon of KGB GUARDS in plainclothes stand by the gated entrance. On the opposite side of the street lounge two dozen WASHINGTON D.C. POLICE.

RESUME:

Kenny gives Bobby a look. Bobby rolls down his window.

BOBBY:

Slow down. Smell that?

KENNY:

Smoke.

BOBBY:

Just wanted to see for myself.

(beat)

They're burning their documents.

The final duty of an embassy before war...

BOBBY (CONT'D)

They think we're going to war. G-d help us, Ken.

EXT. SOVIET EMBASSY - NIGHT

THE CAMERA lifts away from the limo, turning toward the Embassy, past the Guards, past the brass plate which reads EMBASSY OF THE UNITED SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS, up and up to the roof where black, reeking SMOKE billows from all of the Embassy's several chimneys.

The CAMERA races into it. It engulfs us all.

EXT. JUSTICE DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

Kenny squeals the limo up to the curb in front of the Justice Department. The doors fly open, and Kenny and Bobby jump out, head up the steps to the building.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE BOBBY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Bobby's STAFFERS greet them as they stride down the hall, Staffer #1 taking Bobby's coat.

STAFFER #1

Sir, Ambassador Dobrynin is already here. We have him waiting in your office.

They reach the double oak doors to Bobby's suite and stop. Bobby faces Kenny.

KENNY:

I'll whistle up some luck for you.

And before Kenny's eyes, all of Bobby's doubt vanishes. In its place, a severe confidence. A grandeur Kenny has never seen.

It makes Kenny pause. He beholds his best friend become a man of the ages. And then Bobby SMOOTHLY opens the door.

INT. BOBBY'S WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

And a DOOR SHUTS OC like a threshold of history. HOLD ON Bobby's waiting room. Silent. Cavernous. Dim. Plush carpet. Heavy drapes framing dark windows. And abandoned secretary's desk. A row of sofas and chairs on either side

of the room. Two doorways, one at either end of the room. A WOMAN sits in one of the chairs for visitors. Dressed in gray. Prim. But beautiful. A secretary of some sort. One of the double doors to the hall swings silently open. Kenny glides in. He sees the other door shut at the far end of the room. Kenny crashes in one of the chairs to wait. HOLD ON THE SCENE, motionless, silent.

Kenny WHISTLES two notes. Stops. And then he begins to WHISTLE the Irish tune, O'Donnell Aboo. He gets a bar into it -- and there's a polite, soft COUGH.

Kenny stops. Then notices the Woman in gray across the room. He didn't see her. It's dim over there. She looks at him, expressionless.

The CAMERA FINDS: a pin on her lapel. A RED HAMMER AND SICKLE.

Kenny reacts. Dobrynin's assistant? His opposite number? A friend? Or more than a friend?

Here is the face of the enemy. Not a smile between them.

Kenny resumes his ease. And begins to WHISTLE again.

The haunting Irish song echoes in the vaulted ceiling, filling the dim room. Strange, sad, beautiful. The woman listens. And her face begins to soften.

Kenny stares at the dark, lonely windows, his SONG striving to fill the empty room.

Kenny sinks deeper in the chair, his tune all-consuming...

and the Woman's voice breaks in. Kenny stops, looks over.

Her voice is tremulous and beautiful. Just a snatch of some song in Russian. She stops, awkward.

Kenny stares. The Woman stares back. No smiles. But in their eyes, they each see the other's fear, the other's beauty, the other's humanity.

So this is the enemy.

THE WOMAN:

Who are you?

Kenny glances to the door. He considers for a long moment.

KENNY:

The friend.

Kenny breaks the gaze. He begins to whistle again. The CAMERA drifts away, finding the far DOOR to the inner office, Kenny's tune stronger, carrying with it hope...

INT. BOBBY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

... to the other side of that DOOR. Dobrynin sits in a chair

opposite Bobby behind his desk. The room is equally dim.
And far more tense.

Silence. And then the FAINTEST STRAIN of O'Donnell Aboo.
Dobrynin glances briefly over his shoulder at the door.
But Bobby, unseen by Dobrynin, can't help the flicker of a
private smile. It's Kenny's presence, and Bobby is the
stronger for it. And then the tune is gone.
Bobby leans forward, cool, controlled, masterful.

BOBBY:

Ambassador Dobrynin, we are aware that
at this moment your missiles in Cuba are
at the brink of operational readiness...

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. MISSILE SITE - CUBA - CONTINUOUS

Floodlights illuminate MISSILES, vertical on their erectors,
support VEHICLES, clustered across the man-made clearing.
Mask-wearing Technicians wave a FUEL TRUCK back to the
nearest missile. Clouds of toxic VAPOR rise from the others.
They've already been fueled.

BOBBY (V.O.)

They are a vital threat to my country.
If launched, they would kill 80 million
Americans.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BOBBY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Dobrynin listens impassively, as is his professional duty.

BOBBY:

My brother, my friends, my countrymen
and I cannot and will not permit those
missiles to become operational.

(beat)

I promise you that.

Dobrynin looks out the window. And then, pained, looks back
at Bobby.

DOBRYNIN:

Then I fear our two nations will go to
war. And I fear where war will lead us.
Bobby acknowledges him with a nod.

BOBBY:

If the missiles do not become operational, if you remove the missiles, then there will be no war.

(beat)

At this moment, the President is accepting the terms of Secretary Khrushchev's letter of Friday night. If the Soviet Union halts construction immediately, removes the missiles, and submits to U.N. inspection, the United States will pledge to never invade Cuba or aid others in that enterprise.

Dobrynin stares at Bobby. Stares hard.

DOBRYNIN:

If your Jupiter missiles in Turkey were removed also, such an accommodation could be reached.

The two men move their argument forward with the deliberation and formality of chess masters.

BOBBY:

(tired sounding)

The United States cannot agree to such terms under threat. Any belief to the contrary --

(beat)

-- was in error.

Dobrynin reels internally. The only sign on his face is a slight tremor. Bobby looks up, registers the calculated effect. And to Dobrynin's horror, the Russian believes:

DOBRYNIN:

You want war...

But not so fast. Bobby folds his hands. And he smoothly goes from hard-ass brinksman to sensitive deal-maker.

BOBBY:

However, while there can be no quid pro quo on this issue, the United States can offer a private assurance.

Dobrynin holds his breath.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Our Jupiter missiles in Turkey are obsolete, and have been scheduled for withdrawal for some time. This withdrawal should be completed within, say, six months.

Dobrynin lets out his breath.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Of course, any public disclosure of this assurance would negate the deal and produce the most stringent denials from our government.

Dobrynin grasps the move immediately, understanding the ramifications. Still he hesitates a moment.

DOBRYNIN:

This private assurance represents the word of the Highest Authority?

BOBBY:

Yes.

DOBRYNIN:

And it can be relayed beyond Comrade Khrushchev's ears to the top circles of my government

BOBBY:

Of course. Our pledge can be relayed to any government official Secretary Khrushchev sees fit to satisfy.

Meaning this is the bone he can show the hard line. Dobrynin struggles internally, knowing what Bobby has done, wanting to hug him. It comes across as agitation.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

With the caveat that it is not made public in any way, shape or form.

(beat)

And we must have an answer tomorrow at the latest. I cannot stress this point enough.

DOBRYNIN:

Tomorrow...

BOBBY:

Tomorrow...

Dobrynin rises from his chair. Bobby rises with him.

DOBRYNIN:

Then you must excuse me and permit me to relay the substance of our discussion to my superiors.

Dobrynin heads for the door. Half way there he turns back to Bobby, deeply moved. Deeply grateful.

DOBRYNIN (CONT'D)

We have heard stories that some among your military men wish for war.

(beat)

You are a good man. Your brother is a good man. I assure you there are other good men. Let us hope the will of good men is enough to counter the terrible strength of this thing which has been put in motion.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

Kenny enters the Oval Office through his side door. The office is dark, only the desk lamp on. Kenny's gaze moves over the trappings of power: the carpet with the Presidential Seal, the rocking chair by the fireplace, the desk.

And on the desk, tucked almost out of sight, sits a small, humble wooden plaque. It's turned to face the occupant of the chair behind the desk. Kenny reaches out, turns it around. It is the Breton's Fisherman's Prayer.

It reads:

BOBBY (O.S.)

We're out here.

Kenny holds on the plaque a beat, and looks up at the open French door to the Rose Garden. The curtains swirl around him in the wind as he goes through the door and out --

EXT. PORTICO - CONTINUOUS

-- onto the portico. Standing there in the dark, by the white neoclassical pillars of the cloister, are Bobby and the President. They're holding drinks. Kenny joins them. The President gestures out across the South Lawn to the gleaming Washington Monument.

THE PRESIDENT:

We were just debating who had it worse,
us or George Washington and his guys.

BOBBY:

He didn't have to worry about nuclear
weapons.

THE PRESIDENT:

Yeah, but the country didn't even exist
as a country yet. It was a mess, and he
didn't have a leg to stand on.

KENNY:

All he had was his character.
The President and Bobby nod at the justice of that remark.

BOBBY:

How does a guy get a rep like that?

THE PRESIDENT:

Doesn't matter to me. If I went down in
history like Adams, I'd die happy. All
they say about him today is --

KENNY:

-- he kept the peace.
Kenny looks at the President. The President feels it, and
gazes back to him.
The three of them stare out at the glittering city. The
grandness of the world lies before them, and they are
deciding its fate, and are humbled by the awfulness of it.
The silence is beyond power.
And for a long moment, they know not to disturb it. There is
nothing left to say. The President, at last, finishes his
drink.

THE PRESIDENT:

You know, we never did control it. Not
really. Not like we think.
He looks at Kenny. Kenny nods. He knows that now too.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

But we did our best. Now it's up to
them.

EXT. O'DONNELL DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Kenny's limo pulls away, leaving Kenny, coat in hand, at the bottom of his driveway. He watches it go, silently urging it to return for him with some call from the President telling him he's desperately needed. But it doesn't.

He turns to his house. The lights are all out.

He notices he's CLUTCHING the handle of his briefcase. His knuckles are white. With conscious effort, he unfolds his hand, letting the briefcase drop on the driveway.

He stands alone, stripped of his friends, his family, his job... and in that moment, mute, impotent in the shadow of Armageddon, Kenny is our Everyman of the Nuclear Age.

INT. O'DONNELL KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Helen stands in the kitchen, a ghostly white figure in her robe, the windows open and curtain flapping as she breathes the air. Kenny enters. He stands in the doorway.

HELEN:

I saw you out there. You want him to call you back, need you.

KENNY:

No. I'm glad I'm home.
And she knows the worst.

HELEN:

How long do we have?
Kenny's voice breaks.

KENNY:

If the sun rises in the morning, it is only because of men of goodwill.

(beat)

And that's all there is between us and the Devil.

They take each other in their arms, the wisdom of the atomic age so simple, so tenuous, every human life hanging by such a thread... yet a thread so powerful. The CAMERA RISES FROM THEM, finding the OPEN WINDOW and the DARKNESS.

INT. O'DONNELL BEDROOM - DAWN

The RED DOME OF NUCLEAR FIRE rising over Washington. It roils the air in its expanding, blood-red glory.

It is the sun. The dawn in the East.

PULL BACK THROUGH THE OPEN WINDOW.

SUPER:

into Kenny and Helen's bedroom. And silence. Kenny and Helen lie together on the bed. The light burns into Kenny's half-shut eye. Kenny is only dimly conscious of the light's meaning. Until the PHONE SHRILLS downstairs.

Kenny is instantly up, launched out of the room.

INT. O'DONNELL KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Kenny snatches the RED PHONE from its hook.

KENNY:

Yeah?

BOBBY (O.S.)

Kenny. It's over.

EXT. ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH - DAY

THE CHURCH BELLS TOLL in raucous celebration. Kenny, Helen and the five O'DONNELL KIDS join the throng packing through the doors to the church. They're all smiling except Kenny who searches for faces in the CROWD.

And then he spots Bobby with his FAMILY. Bobby grins at him. That makes Kenny grin back.

RADIO MOSCOW (O.S.)

This is Radio Moscow. Moscow calling.

But Kenny keeps looking.

RADIO MOSCOW (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The following statement is the text of a letter from General Secretary Khrushchev to President Kennedy.

Kenny spots him emerging from the Presidential limo, surrounded by Secret Service Agents - John Kennedy. His FAMILY also is with him.

RADIO MOSCOW (O.S.) (CONT'D)

...I regard with respect and trust the statement you made in your message of 27 October 1962 that there would be no attack, no invasion of Cuba, and not only the part of the United States, but also on the part of the Western Hemisphere, as you said in your same message. Then the motives which induced us to render assistance of such a kind to Cuba disappear...

Kennedy, greeting well-wishers, a brilliant smile on his face, is carried through the crowd toward Kenny and the doors of the church.

RADIO MOSCOW (O.S.) (CONT'D)

...it is for this reason that we have instructed our officers - these missiles, as I already informed you are in the hands of Soviet officers to take appropriate measures to discontinue construction, dismantle them, and return them to the Soviet Union.

EXT. MISSILE SITE - CUBA - DAY

the base has been half-dismantled over night. Fuel trucks pull away, lumping down the makeshift dirt road. Across the site missiles are lowered, their nose cones being removed.

A MISSILE on its transporter, Technicians crawling all over it, COVERING IT with a tarp.

A massive Soviet Helicopter's rotors thunder as it lifts off, cargo crates swaying under it, a CLOUD OF DUST FROM ITS WASH FILLING THE SCREEN, WIPING US TO:

INT. CABINET ROOM - DAY

EXCOM laughing, celebrating, half-drunk already this Sunday morning. The President shushes the group.

THE PRESIDENT:

Hey! Hey. Okay, that's enough.

The group quiets down. The Presidents stares at them, calm, firm. They sober up quickly. Kenny listens, expectant.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

I don't want any gloating. This is not a victory over the Soviets. It's a victory with the Soviets.

(beat)

I want everyone to remember that.

INT. WEST WING HALLWAY - DAY

Kenny rounds a corner. McNamara, Bundy and McCone are talking, excited, hushed, standing to one side, down the hall. Kenny eyes them as he draws closer, and then they notice he's approaching. Bundy nods him over, confidential.

BUNDY:

We've been talking. We can play this big in '64. It's the foreign policy trophy we've been waiting.

Kenny sickens. He tries to listen, but it all begins to blur.

BUNDY (CONT'D)

I think we can ride it all the way home next election. Bet you're way ahead of us, eh?

Bundy slaps Kenny on the back. Kenny is pale. Is what they're saying possible? But Bundy and McCone are too wrapped up in their schemes to notice Kenny's distress.

MCCONE:

We've ordered crash reassessment of our major geopolitical hotspots. We've got a lot of new clout, and we can run the table on the Soviets. Middle East, Southeast Asia...

And Kenny, sad, moved beyond all pity and loathing, realizes it is possible. They haven't gotten it. He is speechless, helplessly shaking his head. Bundy finally sees something isn't right with him.

MCNAMARA:

What's wrong, O'Donnell?

Kenny can't speak. Can't find the words. But tongue-tied

finally manages:

KENNY:

Don't you understand?

McNamara and Bundy look at him funny.

BUNDY:

Understand what?

Kenny just looks at them, eyes filled with sorrow. They begin to feel uncomfortable.

KENNY:

The sun came up today.

BUNDY:

Yeah.

KENNY:

It shouldn't have. But it did.

MCCONE:

We were lucky we were able to keep it

under control.

Kenny looks away, unable to bear it.

KENNY:

Every day the sun comes up... says something about us.

BUNDY:

Says what, Kenny?

Kenny looks back at them.

KENNY:

Something... amazing.

They just stare at him. And with secret smiles, superior smiles, they nod.

MCNAMARA:

Sure, Ken. I understand. Feels good to win, doesn't it?

But they don't understand, and together turn away.

BUNDY:

See you later, Kenny.

Kenny watches them, heads bowed in discussion, disappear into the labyrinth of the West Wing. Kenny turns his back on them.

INT. PRESIDENT'S BEDROOM - DAY

The President stands at his mirror, tying a bow tie to a tux for some Sunday special event. Kenny gathers up his folder from nearby breakfast table.

Kenny meets the President's gaze in the mirror, and the two men know they have been to the same mountaintop.

THE PRESIDENT:

Kenny...

A beat. Kenny stands straight, ready for action, ready for some necessary thing. Ready to go back into the game.

THE PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

...never mind. See you around, Kenny.

Kenny starts to leave, but at the door, turns back.

KENNY:

You know...

The President looks at him in the mirror.

KENNY (CONT'D)

...this was what we're here for.

The President smiles an ever-so-faint smile. Kenny turns and leaves the room, vanishing, and as we HOLD on the empty doorway, the simple, whistled melody of O'DONNELL ABOO drifts from the hallway beyond, becoming our END MUSIC.

FADE OUT:

SUPER:

Shortly after the crisis President Kennedy ordered a reassessment of U.S.-Soviet relations, ushering a brief thaw in the Cold War. During this time, the Washington-Moscow hotline was installed to ensure that in a future crisis, miscommunication would not lead to nuclear war. The President was assassinated on November 22nd, a year after the crisis ended.

THE SUPER:

Bobby Kennedy ran for president in 1968. After winning the California primary, he called Kenny from the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles and told him, "I finally feel like I'm out from under my brother's shadow."
Bobby was assassinated minutes later.

THEN SUPER:

The members of EXCOM continued to serve with distinction in government in various capacities over the next three decades. As Lyndon Johnson's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara urged containment of the Soviet threat in every theatre of conflict around the world. He ultimately advised President Johnson to increase the U.S. military commitment to one of these minor backwater conflicts: Vietnam.

AND FINALLY SUPER:

Kenny O'Donnell witnessed the President's assassination from the car behind. He went on to head the Peace Platform at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, fighting to end the Vietnam War. He died in 1977.