

FADE IN

EXT. BIG WHEEL AUTO PARTS (DETROIT, MI) - NIGHT

A large brick warehouse, 1940s built. In an old industrial neighborhood. The parking lot full.

A big crowd hovers out front, all abuzz. News vans are curbside.

INT. BIG WHEEL AUTO PARTS - WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Dim. Dingy. A place Jimmy Hoffa would love. Hand trucks scattered about. Aisles of inventory, in tall shelving and on pallets. The quiet is broken by two men walking, in argument.

LEON "PAW PAW" KOLTAI, 40-ish. Squat-ish. Content with blue collar life. Walks with a fun waddling bounce. And DOBIE SUTTON. Black, 60-ish. Owns the place. With digging you might find his sense of humor.

SUTTON

Those folks outside have nowhere else to go? Disrupting business all day, Leon. A God damn joke.

LEON

Not our fault Joe became a Roman candle. What'd you expect?

Leon stops, pointing to a bulletin board filled with effusive magazine covers and headlines. Detailing JOE SHMUGER'S ascent on the nation's top rated TV program, "WIN, PLACE OR PERISH."

Sutton shakes his head as they move on. He stops at a tall stack of spark plug cases. Hidden behind it is a short stack of air filters.

SUTTON

Joe said he'd move these spark plugs before he went on that crazy show. So you can see the air filters.

LEON

He will, right after. Some other projects he wants to do, too.

SUTTON

(walks on, ahead of Leon)
There's wanting. And there's doing.

INT. BIG WHEEL - LUNCH ROOM - NIGHT

A roomful of joyous TEAMSTERS, seated at long LUNCH TABLES. Diverse in shapes, sizes and ethnicity. Joined by families and media, they appreciate the gourmet catered dinner of pizza and beer. The room is electric with anticipation.

SUTTON AND LEON rush in. Each finding a seat. ROCKY, 50s, stands up. Stocky. Stubble beard. A cheap cigar clenched in his teeth.

ROCKY

Hey, everyone shut up! Joe's on.

The din subsides. All eyes focus on several GIANT TVs around the room. Appearing on them is the program, "WIN, PLACE OR PERISH." Exhibit "A" of intense, mean-spirited, reality TV.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Now, back to America's number one show, Win, Place or Perish! Right here on the Television Network of America! Once again, here's your host, Skeeter Watts!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

Bedlam from the capacity GARDEN AUDIENCE. On stage is a giant screen, plus big logos of the show and its network, "**T.N.A.**"

Pretty boy SKEETER WATTS, emcees. Late 20s. Earring. All hype, he is "The Price is Right" meets MTV.

SKEETER

We're back, in the exciting final round called, Surviving New York City. Where our final three contestants race through town to finish right here at Madison Square Garden, for that big ten million dollar Grand Prize.

GARDEN AUDIENCE

Go Joe, Go! Go Joe, Go! Go Joe, Go!

SKEETER

That's right. Unless you've been on Mars, you know our leader is Joe Shmuger, the tough, sharp-tongued forklift driver from Detroit, Michigan. We'll check on him in just a moment. First, reviewing the game's objective... Contestants are given a series of clues and instructions, to help direct them to their final destination by using smarts, cunning and even luck. Or they perish from sight, simple as that. Now, tied for second place is Arthur Bridges, a corporate CEO from Hackensack, New Jersey. Standing at the corner of Park Avenue and 78th Street, he waits for his personal driver to take him to his final checkpoint.

EXT. PARK AVE. & 78TH ST. - NIGHT

ARTHUR BRIDGES, 50s, stands, waiting. Brooks Bros. suit. Briefcase. He checks his watch. Looks down the street.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

SKEETER

Tied with Arthur Bridges is Dr. Irene Breslow, an astronomy professor from Bethesda, Maryland who nears her final checkpoint. As she does that, our home viewers will now vote on-line, setting the odds. Now, live audience, place your bets on either Irene, Arthur or Joe. Let us quickly go to Maryland for a glimpse of Irene's loyal students as they cheer her on with unfettered zeal.

INT. COLLEGE AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Nerdy astronomy students watch the show on a big TV. Passive as kittens. They look at the camera, smiling politely. One waves.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - NIGHT

On PROFESSOR IRENE BRESLOW, 40s, straight laced and naive. She tepidly approaches a ticket window. A MALE ATTENDANT, 70-ish, looks very familiar. Bushy white hair. Matching mustache. Brooklyn accent.

NOTE: AS THIS IS A TV BROADCAST, THE SCENES' DIALOGUE IS MIXED WITH THE AUDIO OF THE BOISTEROUS MADISON SQUARE GARDEN AUDIENCE.

IRENE

Excuse me, sir. How many minutes does it take to get to Madison Square Garden?

GARDEN AUDIENCE (V.O.)

Don't tell her! No! Let her perish!

ATTENDANT

Lady, what do I look like, Einstein?

She does a double take as the man looks exactly like Albert Einstein. He looks at her deadpan. Unsympathetic.

The Garden audience cheers wildly.

She steps over to a subway map. Perplexed.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

On stage, Skeeter watches Irene on the big screen.

SKEETER

Uh-oh. Irene fails to get help at the checkpoint, costing her valuable time. Plus she loses ten crucial points. Sorry, Doc.

GARDEN AUDIENCE (V.O.)

Awwww.

(one voice stands out)

No we're not!

INT. BIG WHEEL AUTO PARTS - LUNCH ROOM - NIGHT

The gang is juiced. Sutton, at a table, tries to do paperwork.

BIG WHEEL FANS

Go Joe, go! Go Joe, go! Go Joe, go!

SKEETER (V.O.)

Now, with his co-workers in Detroit all jacked, forklift driver Joe Shmuger, after beating out twenty contestants, closes in on the ten million dollar grand prize. Live!

More cheering.

EXT. MANHATTAN NEWSSTAND - NIGHT

A curb side newsstand. A BLACK MAN, 30s leaves, holding a magazine.

Striding up is JOE SHMUGER, 40-ish. The straw that stirs the blue collar drink. High school educated with a Ph.D in "*street*." His once athletic body has rounded from years of beer and burgers.

The NEWSSTAND CLERK, 30s, is on the phone. A large slobby, human aberration. Colorful tattoos. Many piercings. Breathing belligerence. On the wall a BIG MAGNET holds in place some flyers.

Joe, waiting, takes a look at the clerk as he talks.

JOE

(sotto)

Wow. He looks like he just ate the whole NBC peacock.

NEWSSTAND CLERK

(to Joe)

I know what you want. But I'm busy.

(into the phone)

So it makes you puke a little, big deal. I told you, I ain't usin' no rubber. Just take the stinkin' pill, bitch.

JOE

Easy, cowboy. Who taught you manners?

NEWSSTAND CLERK

What are you, writin' a book?

(hangs up the phone)

JOE

Yeah. The Illustrated Moron.

NEWSSTAND CLERK

Up yours, man. This is how I express myself.

JOE

Yeah? Then how do you shut up?

NEWSSTAND CLERK

Ok, no clues for you, Joe. Find the Garden on your own.

Joe takes the magnet from the wall. Sticks it to one of the clerk's pierced earrings, pulling it. Hard. Not letting go.

NEWSSTAND CLERK

Ow-ow! Ok, ok! The Garden's at Seventh and 33rd! Take Broadway, it's quicker.

JOE

It's ok, I got time. First, you're gonna apologize to that girl on the phone -- who should dump your fat Krispy Kreme ass. Then, you call your mom, and apologize for embarrassing her all these years. After you take a bath.

NEWSSTAND CLERK

Who says I embarrass--

Joe pulls harder on the earring.

NEWSSTAND CLERK

Owww! O.k., I promise, I promise.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The crowd cheers wildly.

EXT. MANHATTAN NEWS STAND - CURB SIDE - NIGHT

JOE flags a taxi. A few yards in front of him is the BLACK MAN from earlier, hailing a cab. A taxi passes by him, and pulls up to Joe. Joe is about to get in.

JOE

(whistles to Black man)
Hey, bud. Goin' midtown?

The Black man runs up. Gets in with Joe, to the driver's chagrin.

INT. BIG WHEEL - LUNCH ROOM - NIGHT

The gang loves it. Sutton "slaps skin" with Leon.

SKEETER (V.O.)

Whoa! Joe has time for an actual kind gesture. Haven't seen that in a few light years. That gives Joe ten big bonus points. Added to the huge audience vote. If he doesn't get detoured or passed, Joe Shmuger will be our new champion!

The Garden audience cheers wildly.

EXT. PARK AVE. & 78TH ST. - NIGHT

ARTHUR BRIDGES yells into his Blackberry. Raging. Looking around for his driver. A vagrant hovers near him. His hand is out for dough.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREETS - NIGHT

JOE'S CAB weaves through traffic.

SKEETER (V.O.)

As Joe Shmuger's taxi hits the home stretch, TNA's Tina Brash is out front, awaiting his arrival.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

A big crowd is behind TINA BRASH, 20s, who talks INTO THE CAMERA. Mini-skirted model. Razor thin. As brainy as Barbie.

BRASH

It's crazy here, Skeeter, as Joe's fans can barely wait for him to arrive. But all the taxis look alike. It's hard to tell 'em apart.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

SKEETER

That's great, Tina. Very astute, as always. Now, before we go back to Joe's hometown supporters, I want to-

-

A loud rumbling shakes the stage. Frightening Skeeter.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Joe's cab zooms through the loading area, down a corridor, barely missing support pillars.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - MAIN STAGE - NIGHT

The stage rumbles louder. Shaking like a temblor.

The cab CRASHES through the set on stage. Staging and lights fall down on top of it.

JOE gets out as plaster dust rains down on him. He is greeted by two jiggly models. Fireworks go off. Sirens. Strobes. Joe dusts himself off. The audience is going nuts.

SKEETER

And ahead of schedule, too! The winner of Win, Place or Perish -- Joe Shmuger!

JOE

Would've got here earlier, but we made a drop-off.

(presents an earring to Skeeter)

A souvenir for you, Skeeter. Gives you a matching set.

SKEETER

Gee. Um, thanks, Joe. You bought this, right?

(examines it closely)

Is that skin?

INT. BIG WHEEL - LUNCH ROOM - NIGHT

The place cracks up.

LEON

All right, Joe! Least you wiped off the blood.

EXT. PARK AVE. & 78TH ST. - NIGHT

ARTHUR BRIDGES is a frustrated wreck, swatting away pesky vagrants. He then grabs a cab.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - NIGHT

IRENE studies the large SUBWAY MAP. Working a calculator. Puzzled.

SKEETER (V.O.)

So, Arthur Bridges will place second. Although receiving no cash prize, he will get our souvenir home game. But for Irene Breslow however--

(turning conciliatory)

There is no third place finish. So unfortunately, she must perish. Per the release form she signed herself.

A big curtain drops from above, encircling Irene. Muffled screaming is heard. Struggling sounds. Her feet stick out at the bottom, writhing. Then they go limp and lifeless, pulled back under the curtain. The curtain rises, showing only empty floor space.

INT. COLLEGE AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Her students are elated. Giving high fives. Tearing up blue books.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

SKEETER

Ok, that does it for this season of Win, Place or Perish. So, until next year, every Tuesday night, remember folks.

(in unison with audience)

DON'T. GET. PERISHED!

Hysteria abounds, as Joe meets audience members. Signing autographs. Kissing women.

High above, in a packed press box, sits journalist MITCH STONE, late 20s. Instinctive. Amused at the scene. Typing on his laptop.

His screen's masthead reads: "NATION ON-LINE NEWS."

Under that, Mitch types a headline:

"Joe Shmuger Dons The Royal Crown. But, How Big is His Fiefdom?" by Mitch Stone.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - LUXURY SUITE - NIGHT

A logo on the wall: "TNA - Television Network of America. A GLOBAL MEDIA COMPANY."

Three Armani clad execs view the events on stage. Two young turks, PHIL SWEET, Programming V.P., and DAN ZAYKO, Sales V.P. Both 30-ish. In high euphoria.

And MORTON SILVER, 50-ish, president of TNA. With GQ looks. Perfect hair. French cuffs. In deep concern. Almost grim.

SWEET

God, I am so hard right now. Nielsen predicted a sixty point rating tonight, minimum. Maybe a ninety share. Ninety fucking share. Who shot J.R., my ass.

(sees Silver's concern)

Morton, what? We're in Shangri-la.

SILVER

...And, tomorrow?

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - BACK STAGE - NIGHT

SKEETER leads JOE in a "Meet & Greet." Autographs. Photos.

SKEETER

Joe, we just learned your mayor in Detroit called. He wants to set up a meeting with you.

JOE
 No kiddin'? The mayor, eh? Great.
 About time they talked to the working
 man.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

MITCH STONE types on his laptop. A food spread next to him. JOE bounces in, with Tina Brash on his arm. Both are all giggles as Mitch rises to meet Joe.

STONE
 Hi, Joe. Mitch Stone. From Nation On-
 line News. We spoke on the phone.

They shake hands.

JOE
 Yeah, right. The reporter. You wanna
 like, stalk me, or something? 24/7?

STONE
 More like shadowing. Your life will
 now be quite an interesting story.
 We'd use one camera. Whenever you're
 mobile.

JOE
 Wherever I go... I take a dump, you
 say right hand or left? I don't
 know. Sounds goofy.

STONE
 We'd fully respect your privacy. If
 it gets too intrusive, just say so.

JOE
 My language can get pretty, uh...

STONE
 Salty?

JOE
 Shitty.

STONE
 We'll bleep it out. Just like on TV.

Joe takes some grapes, offering some to Stone. He declines.

JOE
 I got loads of endorsement offers.
 You want me to do this for nothin'?

STONE
 You'd be seen on over sixty million
 computer screens. I'm no marketing
 whiz, but, I would think some partner
 would want to reach those eyeballs.

Joe ponders for a beat. Then, wheels turn in his head.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

A CAMERAMAN, STAN, sets up a camera & monitor for JOE and STONE.

STONE

I'll be reporting from the footage that's fed. You'll hardly know Stan's in the room.

JOE

Just like on W.P.P. Fuckin' ay.

STONE

Almost.

Stan rewinds the tape. Plays it back. JOE'S CURSE WORD IS BLEEPED.

JOE - ON TV MONITOR

Just like on W.P.P. "BLEEP"-in ay.

Joe is awed. Fully sold. He dons a "CHEVY" baseball cap. Big smile.

JOE

Let's rock 'n roll.

EXT. BIG WHEEL AUTO PARTS - DAY

A mob of press wait as JOE steers his CHEVY PICKUP TRUCK into the lot. He gets out, swarmed, like bees to a hive.

EXT. BIG WHEEL - LOADING DOCK - DAY

LEON unloads a truck as SUTTON watches, checking the items off on a clipboard. They stop. Watching the ruckus around Joe out front.

In the distance, DARK STORM CLOUDS approach, as Joe makes his way to the building's front entrance. Leon has mixed emotions, watching all the fuss. He assesses the ominous clouds.

SERIES OF SHOTS

SUGGESTED MUSIC - "JOEY'S IN A DREAM" by the The Pretty Things.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

A STOCKBOY stacks a display of WHEATIES BOXES, all graced with Joe's picture. A tall STANDEE of Joe is next to it.

INT. MAJOR BOOKSTORE - DAY

On the SAME STANDEE. Joe signs copies of his book, "TUESDAYS WITH JOEY." The line for autographs runs outside, around the building.

JOE opens a book from a beautiful woman. Finds a bookmark with her phone number on it. She smiles seductively.

EXT. BIG WHEEL - LOADING DOCK - DAY

JOE stands at the back of an open delivery truck, handing out boxes of giant plasma TVs to each of his thrilled coworkers.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - DEN - NIGHT

Small room. In a small house. Joe trudges in from work, a beer in his hand. He turns on his old 19" TV. Watching football. He sits in a recliner, happy as a clam.

INT. HOTEL BANQUET ROOM - DAY

JOE gives a motivation seminar, SRO. A sign says, "IF JOE CAN, I CAN!" Moving through the sea of faces we find...ANTHONY ROBBINS. Watching Joe, in awe. Taking notes.

EXT. HARVARD UNIVERSITY TUNDRA - DAY

JOE speaks at commencement. A *Snickers* logo on his graduation cap.

The graduates parade up to get diplomas. As they step off stage, each receives a box of Snickers bars.

EXT. TNA NETWORK STUDIOS - DAY

A limo pulls into the lot. JOE is in the FRONT SEAT, joking with the driver.

INT. TNA HEADQUARTERS - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Storyboards stand on a mantle. PHIL SWEET, DAN ZAYKO and TINA BRASH are in full suck-up mode. JOE reads the cover of a script: *JOE SHMUGER TV PILOT: 'BLUE COLLAR, BLUE KNIGHT'*

Sweet explains the storyboards to the group. They show Joe in police garb, with "*Joe*" written in script on his chest. He sits in his fork lift, a police flasher on top of it. Tina rides shotgun.

Joe appears dubious, but the execs think they've cured cancer. Joe watches Brash speaking - so skinny, she is almost surreal. As she turns, her torso profile gets thinner, ultimately DISAPPEARING - leaving only her ELEVATED HEAD.

Joe does a double-take, as she turns more, showing a full frame. He then refocuses on the guys.

JOE

But Todd, you manage the ad sales.
Isn't it early to talk about that?

ZAYKO

Bro, if I can't sell it, we don't make it.

EXT. SUBURBAN MANSION - DAY

A beautiful mansion on large manicured grounds. The curbside mailbox says "SHMUGER." JOE walks up the drive with his MOM, 60s. Pleasant lady. His hands covering her eyes. When he lifts them, she is astounded by the home.

The garage opens. A new MERCEDES pulls out, driven by LEON. Joe's mom is in tears. Big hugs.

INT. CAPITAL MORTGAGE CORP. OFFICE - DAY

JOE hands a MORTGAGE BROKER a CHECK. And a big envelope, labeled, CLOSING MORTGAGE DOCUMENTS. The broker reviews the check. Then rips the envelope into quarters. Hands them to Joe. They shake hands.

INT. BIG WHEEL AUTO PARTS - WAREHOUSE - DAY

Coworkers fawn over a PLAYBOY centerfold. Near a men's room door. JOE exits the men's room, zipping up his pants. He is followed out by a cute SECRETARY. Both, looking conspicuous.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

Joe is in jeans, and no shirt, showing a jelly belly. He attempts to pose sexily for a photographer. ONE SHOT FREEZES, into...

EXT. STEETSIDE BILLBOARD - DAY

...THE SAME SHOT, bigger than life. Joe, in a GUESS JEANS ad.

INT. E! NETWORK STUDIO - DAY

Joe sits in a forklift, talking with an E! AIR TALENT. A floor manager signals "cut." Joe then leaps out. Rushes to an adjacent set of a night skyline. Inserts an earplug. Puts on a sponsor's baseball cap. Looks into a studio camera.

JOE

Sorry I'm late, Ted. L.A. traffic.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. TV STUDIO - NIGHT

TED KOPPEL watches Joe on the big screen, bemused. A graphic reads: "TED KOPPEL REPORTS - HYPE IN AMERICA."

TED KOPPEL

In a moment, we'll talk to Joe Shmuger. The ultimate by-product of a dubious process.

Joe is unsure how to take that.

INT. CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF THE REPUBLIC (CPR) HQ - NIGHT

The lobby wall has the party logo and initials. Stodgy decor.

INT. CPR HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

The party hierarchy sits at a big table. In deep concern. Chairman CADWALLEDER FROST, 60s. Thin white hair. Eyeglasses. Bow tie. A crafty Southerner, Machiavelli himself could take lessons from him.

With WALTER CRAVENS, 50s. Menacing eyes. Party hatchet man and veteran brass knuckle player. And SIG SHULMAN, 50-ish. Seasoned communications man. The only one with personality, let alone warmth.

They pour over newspaper coverage, with headlines ripping the party. Frost holds one paper, with a most painful headline:
 "CPR CAN'T SHAKE 'THIRD RATE, THIRD PARTY' TAG."

A TV set is on. With TED KOPPEL interviewing Joe.

TED KOPPEL (ON TV)

How does a diversion as immense as Joe Shmuger turn into a proportionally sized influence? That part of our discussion when we come back.

FROST

Sig, turn that down.

Shulman obliges, using a remote.

SHULMAN

Democrats and G.O.P. are each looking at a 40% split for president this year. No matter who runs.

FROST

Gentlemen, we've been strangled by the two major parties far too long. Both have nothing but button-pushing gimmickry to mollify the press. "*Compassionate conservatism.*" What a crock. But fellows, another presidential slaughter would be catastrophic to this party. The label "Third rate, third party" would not be unwarranted. We'd have to fold up the whole damn tent.

CRAVENS

There are heavy dollars out there, Cad. Just waiting for a front runner with a dry palm.

FROST

Perhaps we could steal us a Seabiscuit from another party's stable.

SHULMAN

Colin Powell says he's not jumping.

CRAVENS

Why would he? He's the shiny black cherry in a pond of whipped cream.

FROST

(angrier)

I don't want some damn orphan retread. Christ, I'd take the real Seabiscuit, stand him up, teach it to kiss a baby and read a tele-prompter!

(throws the newspaper,
landing by the TV)

God damnit! At least he's a known commodity!

Shulman freezes. Cravens is stoic. All look at the newspaper. Then, one by one, they look at the TV screen. Seeing Joe, animated in muted monologue. They watch for a long beat.

FROST

Turn that up.

Shulman obliges.

JOE (ON TV)

I didn't invent this uh, celebrity culture thing, but it sure ain't easy to stop once it lands in your lap. Ted, you were a regular reporter 'til some big story started Nightline, right?

TED KOPPEL (ON TV)

The Iranian hostage crisis, but you're close enough.

JOE (ON TV)

You were in the right place at the right time. Just like me. I agree. Americans should put more uh, I don't know, stuff, meaning, in their own lives. So they don't live *vicar, vicariously*, or whatever, through people like you, or me, or Lady Goo-Goo.

TED KOPPEL (ON TV)

I appreciate the inclusion, but you're veering off track a little.

JOE (ON TV)

No, I'm not. You're just afraid to be in the same boat as me. Take that FBI guy who was Deep Throat in Watergate. It came out in some glossy magazine. I'll lay you a hundred, some hot broad was still on the cover, half naked, showin' her bongos off to the friggin' world. It's all about sellin'.

TED KOPPEL (ON TV)
I do agree. But before we try to
interpret, we have to take a break.

A commercial starts. Shulman mutes it. All three are thinking.

INT. BIG WHEEL - WAREHOUSE - DAY

A typical day. Workers push loaded hand trucks. Working the
loading dock. Joe drives his hi-lo.

A STOCKBOY, long hair, pushes a TWO-WHEEL DOLLY. ROCKY stops
him.

ROCKY
Hey. Kid. What are you doin'? That's
my two-wheeler. Can't you read?

He points to the name written on it in marker: "RICK."

STOCKBOY
It says Rick.

ROCKY
Rick, Rocky. Same difference. Don't
get smart. Go get another one. While
you're at it, get me a coffee.

The boy moves on, passing Joe, dismounting his fork lift. His
lip is swollen.

JOE
Don't mess with Rocky's two-wheeler,
kid. He's killed for less.

STOCKBOY
Yeah, sure. Whatever you say.

JOE
(pissed at the condescension)
Screw it. Rocky, let's get him.

Joe and Rocky chase after the boy. Down an aisle. Terrifying
him.

JOE
The old wishbone. I'll take the
right leg. You grab the left.

The boy speeds up. Barely gets away. The men stop, sharing a
laugh.

ROCKY
Smart ass kids.
(strides off, O.S.)
Hey, Andy. Boy, did I bang your old
lady last night. Hoo-wee!

LEON waddles up to Joe, sipping a thermos. His lips are reddish, which Joe notices. The two stride on toward the lunch room.

JOE
I told you, stop drinkin' at work.
Wanna get fired?

LEON
A little vino with lunch.

JOE
You're somethin'.
(then)
So, how many pitches today?

LEON
Five. Last one looks like a real
dilly.

They pass by the hidden stack of air filters.

LEON
Sutton'll have a big black cow if
you don't move those air filters.

JOE
I'll get to it.

They enter the lunch room.

INT. BIG WHEEL AUTO PARTS - LUNCH ROOM - DAY

It is empty, except for JOE and LEON escorting out three corporate GEEKS. Straight laced. In plain suits. Wing tips.

GEEK #1
Sorry it's not up your alley, Joe.
Millions of pet owners out there,
you know.

JOE
The Joe Shmuger Dog Collar. It just
don't feel right, ya know?

The geeks exit. Frost and Cravens enter. Exchange hand shakes.

FROST
Hi, Joe. Cadwalleder Frost. This is
Walter Cravens.
(notices Joe's swollen lip)
My, what happened to your lip?

JOE
Little bar fight. A real asshole.
(gestures into camera)
Don't mind him. Just my on-line
shadow.

They sit at a lunch table. Near a used lunch tray, an open bag of potato chips on it. Frost and Cravens hand out their business cards.

FROST
Joe, we're with the Conservative
Party of the Republic. The CPR.

JOE
No shit? The guys in Row E.

Leon giggles.

FROST
Row E?

JOE
We're hockey fans. Last election, we
said you guys were so far right
wing, you were in row E.

LEON
Almost in the concourse.

FROST
Amusing. That is, if it were still
accurate. Which is why we're here.

JOE
Save it, fellas. I'm just a hot name
to sell shit 'cause I won a game
show. I'm no political poster boy.

FROST
We don't want you to be poster boy.
(hesitates, then)
We want you to be president.

JOE
President?
(reads the business card)
But you're the party chairman.

CRAVENS
Joe. We want you to run for
President of the United States.

An awkward beat. Leon is in shock.

JOE
Look, fellas, I gotta punch in soon.
So skip the opening tease.

He reaches for, and eats a potato chip from the opened bag.

FROST
That's the main act. Joe, in winning
that game show your values rang true
to every single American.

(MORE)

FROST (cont'd)

In every poll you're their most trusted citizen, by far. You entertain, yes, sure, but with views quite rational.

CRAVENS

You said on the show politics should include the working man. We agree.

JOE

I never said I was him. You guys free basing? I'm a hi-lo driver. A flavor of the month, shootin' for sixty days.

FROST

You're an icon, Joe. Who has America's ear. That's monumental.

JOE

An icon, eh. So is Gumby. President's someone who should have uh, vision. Educated.

CRAVENS

Like that CEO, and college professor you left in your dust? Last election, did anyone have real vision? Our man included?

JOE

Well, no, but--

FROST

Joe, why'd you return to your job? You don't have to work any more.

JOE

I'd get bored. Some stuff here I wanna do. Maybe, take a run at shop steward.

CRAVENS

You see things that can be improved? Ideas you want to see through?

JOE

They never made me foreman. Maybe I'll move up through the side door.

CRAVENS

And still have your voice heard.

JOE

Damn right.

FROST

That is exactly what we're saying.
(with emphasis)
By three hundred million people.

Joe digests it. Chomps a potato chip. Cravens is wary of the used tray, now attracting a fly. Leon still can't believe it.

LEON
Get outta town! What do you guys
want, really?

SUTTON pops open the door. One foot in.

SUTTON
Man, you still on break? I got half
a semi waiting to be emptied.

JOE
Ok, Mr. S. I'm on it. Sorry.

Sutton exits. The other men rise.

JOE
I'm flattered, fellas. But that's a
bit whacked. Even for me.

FROST
Give it a little thought. Please.

Joe sees Cravens smirking.

JOE
What's so funny?

CRAVENS
It's just that...you handled Ted
Koppel more masterfully than your own
boss.

Frost and Cravens stroll out. Joe stands there.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - DEN - NIGHT

A better glimpse of the room. Working class decor. A pair of boxing gloves hang. Sports memorabilia on shelves. A fishing rod leans against a wall. Photos, of Joe as a prep athlete. With his parents.

JOE sits in the recliner, reading a newspaper. While snacking on chips and beer. LOCAL NEWS is on the TV. Joe drops the paper, and surfs channels. Stops at TED KOPPEL, for a second.

JOE
You're a pussy, Ted.

A graphic reads: "RACE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE: ANY REAL RUNNERS?"

Joe flips to CHARLIE ROSE. Talking to an erudite author, 40s. Eyeglasses. A graphic shows his name: WAYNE M. LUSKY.

LUSKY (ON TV)
It's been the trend for years,
Charlie.

(MORE)

LUSKY (ON TV) (cont'd)

A frustrated electorate sifts through increasingly amorphous candidates, thereby exacerbating the apathy. No longer do they see it as a lesser of two evils, but are there any non-evils in the pipeline at all?

JOE

(swigs beer, burps loudly)

You find any Wayne, we'll both know.

Joe starts thinking. He reaches, and takes a pamphlet from a bookshelf. Skims through it. Then reading it closely. The cover says: "WE THE PEOPLE."

INT. BIG WHEEL AUTO PARTS - WAREHOUSE - NEXT AFTERNOON

JOE drives his forklift, glowing with hope. He parks it. Hops out. Heads briskly to the lunch room.

JOE

Let's go help the good mayor out.

INT. BIG WHEEL - LUNCHROOM - DAY

TWO BODYGUARDS hover nearby. The MAYOR, 50s, BLACK, sits with JOE. Hip, yet scholarly. Well dressed, like a BMW salesman, but with a law degree. He is excited. Hopeful. Joe however, is stunned.

JOE

You're serious about this?

MAYOR

Most definitely. I really need your input. You're the most qualified guy around.

(then)

How can I get on that show, "Win, Place or Perish?" Any tricks? Things they look for?

JOE

Beats me. For my entry video we just shot the breeze here in the lunch room. D'you meet these wiseacres? If you're a product of your environment, well, I've been here twenty years. We were just B.S.-in' around.

MAYOR

Like the Algonquin Round Table.

JOE

(nods, then points)

'Cept ours are rectangle. You got me who made 'em. I would say, just be yourself. Show your true colors.

MAYOR

(laughs hard)

That's a good one. Be yourself. *Heh.*
I'm an incumbent, man.

(rises, gives Joe a "soul"
handshake)

Appreciate your time, Joe. You did
this town proud.

(strolls to door, laughing)

Be yourself.

All except Joe exit. He is alone. Bummed.

INT. BIG WHEEL - WAREHOUSE - DAY

JOE shuffles from the lunch room. Sullen. He sees SUTTON at the stack of spark plug cases. Climbing them, trying to reach an air filter case behind them. He slips and falls.

Joe turns away, but Sutton sees him as he gets up.

SUTTON

Don't you duck out of sight. I asked
you to move this stack how many
times?

(dusts himself off)

Three. Three damn times. So the air
filters are visible to foot traffic.
And you promised to move it, how
many times?

JOE

Uh, I guess it--

SUTTON

Three damn times. And your attempts
to make good on that promise? Goose
egg. Zippo. Your word don't mean
shit.

A few workers gather.

JOE

Shit? Hey. When the guys wanted
voluntary Saturdays, who was the on-

SUTTON

Sure, for the guys. What about this
company? We all gotta chip in if I'm
to keep this place running. And not
get deep-sixed by some big chain. When
I need follow through, your face could
just as well be on a milk carton.

JOE

What?! Wait--. Who wanted to move
the packing boxes, so it's not messy
for cash & carry traffic? Who said
"put the oil, and filters out
front," so we don't have to walk so
far for the best sellers?

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)

Those air filters could've been moved by anyone. Hell, I want to use my brain, so the place runs smoother.

SUTTON

I like smoother. Hell, smoother is Primo Carnera. But when we did move those packing boxes, you had to go do your reality show. When we all came in on a Sunday for inventory, you did another book signing that you could've postponed. For those spark plugs, I asked just you. You wanna make changes, but putting out effort is a whole other matter. You're the sharpest guy here, but you're still driving a hi-lo. Ever wonder why? 'Cause you don't apply yourself. You don't step up!

JOE

Apply mys--?! You're the one, always--

SUTTON

(bigger)

You got reasons galore, man! But you ditch the ones that point to you.

JOE

I-I ditch them?!

SUTTON

You're damn straight.

JOE

Yeah?! Well ditch this! (BLEEP) You!

Joe stomps off. Brushes past a stunned Leon. And out the door.

INT. PENTHOUSE STRIP CLUB - DAY

Darkly lit. Plush decor. Colorful stage lighting. Mid-day crowd is both blue and white collar.

JOE sits at a table, looking dour. Reading a newspaper, illuminated by a ceiling light. Oblivious to the strippers, and happy patrons. LEON drinks wine, watching the action closely.

LEON

You're missing the show, man.

JOE

I know how it ends.

(stops reading)

Leon, why did I come back to work?

LEON

The employee discount?

(shrugs, reflecting)

(MORE)

LEON (cont'd)
 You and me, Joe, we're lifers. We do our twenty, thirty years, and then retire up north someplace. You said yourself, what are you gonna do with ten mill. It can't help you fish any better.

JOE
 Can get you a nicer boat.

LEON
 You talked of runnin' for shop steward. Maybe now's the time.

A STRIPPER on stage prances up, zeroing in on the sulking Joe. Giving her best effort for attention. But he's still oblivious.

JOE
 Shop steward. Big deal.
 (mimicking)
Uh-oh, contract says overtime is voluntary. Don't make us file a grievance.
 (normal tone)
 Don't mean shit. There's a bigger picture, Paw Paw. Sutton's right about one thing. I'm still just a hi-lo driver.

LEON
 Hey, you couldn't help quittin' school when your old man kicked. Had to help your ma out. You grew up quick.

JOE
 Not much to be afraid of after that. She loved her new digs, didn't she.

LEON
 She's proud of you, brother.

JOE
 So now what? What good is fame if you can't do nothin' with it. Guys like us, no one gives a shit. My pop wanted me to go to college. So I wouldn't have to follow in his tracks.

(re: the newspaper)
 We used to read the paper together every morning before he went to work.

LEON
 He'd be glad you still read it. Maybe not where you do your reading.

Joe folds up the paper. Gets up to leave.

LEON
 Where ya goin'?

JOE
To get a burger.

LEON
Get one here.

JOE
I'm not payin' twelve bucks for a
poker chip.

He marches out.

INT. CPR HQ - CADWALLEDER FROST'S OFFICE - DAY

Spacious. Traditional furniture. Coffee table. A wall photo of Pat Buchanan. FROST sits on a sofa, reviewing head shots: Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, Donald Trump, Jesse Ventura and Pat Sajak.

SHULMAN walks in. Sees the photos, examining them. Then, notices behind the door, a dart board with Hillary Clinton's picture.

FROST
I've got it down to five. Brand
names, every one.

CRAVENS scurries in.

CRAVENS
Shumuger's on the phone.

Frost, calm, steps to his desk. On it lies the book, "*48 Laws of Power*." He clicks the speaker phone.

FROST
Joe. How are ya, lad?

INT. JOE'S PICKUP TRUCK (PARKED) - DAY - INTERCUT

JOE is on his cell phone. Eating a fast food hamburger.

JOE
I'd say too middle-of-the-road for
you guys, actually. Not to mention
Teamster unqualified.

FROST
The party platform would follow your
lead, son. Let me leave you a plane
ticket. We'll talk.
(then)
Joe, yours is as fit as any other
job to be Commander In-Chief.

EXT. RONALD REAGAN NATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY (ESTABLISHING, OF
SIGN)

INT. AIRPORT GATE - DAY

CRAVENS watches passengers file out. JOE emerges last, in his work attire. Signing autographs for the FLIGHT CREW. A stewardess slyly slips Joe her phone number. Scampers off.

PILOT

Joe, call me next time. I'll get you a first class upgrade. No charge.

He walks off, as Cravens greets Joe.

JOE

Why is it, the more you can afford something, the less they make you pay?

Joe and Cravens stroll on as Joe gets mobbed by travelers. He signs autographs. Takes photos. Cravens watches it, pleased.

INT. CPR HEADQUARTERS - FROST'S OFFICE - DAY

A big PLACARD lays on the coffee table: "*JOE SHMUGER FOR PRESIDENT*"

JOE, still with a slightly swollen lip, sits around the coffee table with FROST AND CRAVENS. On the table are charts. Articles. Joe is distracted though, by the placard. Kind of awed.

JOE

A few of the uh, problems I got...

SHULMAN enters with Frost's secretary, KENDRA, 20s, who brings Frost a file. A sexy tart. Crystal blue eyes that can cut glass.

SHULMAN

Hi, Joe. Sig Shulman, Communications Director.

(shakes hands, sits down)

Good to finally meet you.

KENDRA

Here are the economic numbers, Cad.

She sends Joe a warm glance.

FROST

Thank you, Kendra. Did you meet Joe?

KENDRA

Hi. Welcome. I'm a big fan.

JOE

Of what, I don't know.
(is taken by her scent)

KENDRA

Cad, you're right about the self-depreciation. It's attractive.

(to Joe)

Do you want coffee? Evian? Perrier?

JOE

How 'bout some vintage D.C. tap?

Kendra saunters out.

JOE

Coffee acid. Gives me the runs like Calvin Johnson.

FROST

You said you had concerns, Joe?

JOE

(distracted)

Huh? Um... Man, no one smells like her at Big Wheel.

(re-focusing)

Well. I ain't takin' any money from giant corporations. Just regular people. No trade or lobby groups, like the National Rifle Association. Or any looney tunes like that.

The others turn white.

CRAVENS

A campaign can reach a billion dollars, Joe. To even begin to-

JOE

You said three hundred million people, right? I can't draw twenty, thirty bucks from a piece of that?

FROST

It's not as simple as that.

JOE

It is to me. What's more popular than money from the people? Otherwise, I'm out.

The others hesitate. Then nod, relenting.

JOE

I get final say on the cabinet. If I want oak, or walnut, then that's what it is.

(off the others' shock)

I'm kiddin'. Just messin' with you.

(looks into the camera)

And Stan, the on-line cameraman. He's part of the deal, too.

CRAVENS

Any skeletons in your closet? If you so much as stole a Tootsi-pop in day camp, CNN or TMZ will find your counselor.

JOE

TNA didn't find anything in their background check. Although they missed that pool hall arrest... Lousy prick. Tried to welsh.

CRAVENS

A gambling arrest? That's trouble.

JOE

No, just a fight.

SHULMAN

That how you got the swollen lip?

JOE

I stand up for myself. Some people can't take that.

(smiles)

Didn't keep you guys from callin'.

Kendra enters with the water for Joe. Smiles at him.

FROST

Sig. You and Kendra show Joe around. Make sure he's comfortable. We can talk politics later.

JOE

(to Kendra)

I'm in your hands.

The idea appeals to both. Joe, Shulman and Kendra stroll out, leaving just Cravens and Frost.

CRAVENS

Scary start. If there's poor cash flow, we're D.O.A. Not to mention his half-baked, blue collar views.

FROST

Relax. Priority "A" is to establish trust. When he sees he's under-financed, he'll relent. Or he just won't know. Just don't let him run into any Smith & Wesson VPs in the halls.

INT. CPR MAIN STAFF ROOM - DAY

Sea of cubicles. Staffers all abuzz, all WHITE MALES. And one BLACK FEMALE. JOE, SHULMAN AND KENDRA tour through.

SHULMAN

This is Communications Central. They coordinate with the field offices nationwide. Kendra funnels it all to us.

Joe sees Kendra's desk. On it is a photo of her and her SON, age six. He then sees her left hand - no wedding ring. She catches him. And smiles.

Joe looks out at the large room. Gazing at the hardworking staffers, as Kendra and Shulman step to a DRAPED WALL.

They unveil an enormous banner: "JOE SHMUGER FOR PRESIDENT." Joe sees it, big as life. Captivated. Inspired. And yes, motivated.
HOLD ON Joe.

VIDEO - A TV PROMO SPOT:

Footage of Joe's victory on "Win, Place or Perish." Clips flash quickly of him in New York City and Madison Square Garden. Graphics match the over-hyped voice over.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

From the network that brought you Freeway Crash Site Videos. Critics agree, Win, Place or Perish is a television phenomenon. Larry King calls it, "Stupendous. Wow. The finest television since Dr. Sarnoff invented the radio." And Robbie Garfinkel of the Trenton High School Gazette calls it, "Really, really, totally awesome." See an encore showing of Joe Shmuger's historic season finale, this Tuesday night at nine p.m. Plus exclusive interviews seen previously on only three other networks. Featuring the music of Jay-Z, Ja Rule, J-Lo, YoYo Ma, Eminem, LMFAO, LMNO-Pause, Vanilla Ice, Ice Cube, Ice Tea, With Lemon, Mocha Latte, and Double-Decaf-To-Go. Soundtrack available only on Global CDs and tapes.

INT. BIG WHEEL AUTO PARTS - LUNCHROOM - DAY

The preceding promo spot is seen on a lone TV set, during a humming crowded lunch hour. LEON is eating with ROCKY. The TV cuts to "TNA Network News."

Anchorman TOPPER QUEST, 20s, comes on. Cute. Dressed quite chic. His journalism training consisted only of modeling school.

TOPPER QUEST (ON TV)

This is TNA Network News, Mid-Day.
I'm Topper Quest. Our top story. Joe Shmuger is back.

ROCKY, LEON

Hey, everyone, shut up!

The room goes silent.

TOPPER QUEST (ON TV)

The Conservative Party of the Republic, C.P.R., today took a major leap to soften its extremist political image. Joe Shmuger, national phenomenon from TNA's own "Win, Place or Perish," was officially named the party's candidate this year for President of the United States.

The diners roar.

TOPPER QUEST (ON TV)

The announcement came just moments ago at a CPR rally, held, by the candidate's choice, at a D.C. bowling alley far from the usual beltway crowd.

BIG WHEEL WORKERS

Go Joe, go! Go Joe, go! Go Joe, go!

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

Bunting. Pageantry. Big excited crowd. Many in bowling shirts. A brass band finishes a song. JOE is at a podium. A glass of beer at his side.

***NOTE:** From this point on, a PRESS CORPS of a dozen reporters will be present at all of Joe's public campaigning.

JOE

(obviously reading a prompter)
We all know this is the greatest nation in the world. With resolve. And spirit. But we still have a ways to go. To work together in unity for a better, stronger America. My fellow Americans, we have a hilly road to travel. And I want to lead you up that hill. To be your driver up that hill. Your pilot.

He stops reading, upset, as the crowd cheers.

JOE

Ah, that sucks. That just blows. That ain't me. It's B.S. All these years we should've been voting for the damn speech writers, not the candidates. They're the ones with all the ideas.

The crowd laughs. Applauds. He resumes without the prompter.

JOE

Look. This is a great country, every day of the year. Except one.

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)

Election Day comes, and we're always scratchin' our heads. Who are these guys? What the hell's going on?

The crowd applauds.

JOE

Washington's always closed to the common man like you, me, the bus driver. They're not gonna hear your beefs, when you give 'em a hundred bucks, and someone else gives 'em a hundred grand. You nuts? But that's all changing!

Cheers rise. FROST AND CRAVENS stand behind the SHOE COUNTER, near some returned bowling shoes. Uncomfortable. Near them is Reporter MITCH STONE, taking notes. They all notice the glass of beer next to Joe.

STONE

Mr. Cravens. What is Joe drinking?

CRAVENS

Apple juice.

JOE

Today, our children curse more than any truck driver I know. Hardly carin' about anything. Libraries are used more for practicing skateboard tricks than reading books. College graduates don't even know when the War of 1812 was. I didn't finish junior college, but I can still read a damn newspaper. Or get news on TV, or on-line. We should never stop learnin', folks. What we need is a Sputnik, like in the '50s. Russians put a satellite in space, so they made us hit the books. Hard. Now, we pass kids up a grade so they don't feel bad if they flunk. Dumb as tree bark, but at least their self-esteem is good. What the hell happened to this country? Well, there's a new Joe in town. And he's taking no money from the rich fat cats. I need help from a group no one's seen in a while. And that's you! The voters!

The audience erupts.

JOE

Now. If anyone beats my high game of two-eighteen, I'll buy them a tall boy.

(to the brass band)

Don't you guys know any Seger?

Aerosmith?

(to the crowd)

Now have fun, and let's roll this joint all the way to the White House!

The audience is in delirium. Music starts, playing rock and roll. Joe steps out, beer glass in hand, greeting the crowd. Stone starts typing on his laptop. Frost and Cravens peer at his screen closely.

INT. BIG WHEEL - LUNCH ROOM - DAY

Group cheering. Many high fives. Sutton watches the TV, mouth agape.

TOPPER QUEST (ON TV)
National reaction to the Shmuger
candidacy has been surprising to say
the least. TNA's April Dawson
reports.

EXT. CITY STREET CORNER - DAY

APRIL DAWSON, 20s, does a stand-up. Model-pretty. Serious demeanor, despite the cleavage, low rider mid-drift, and navel ring.

DAWSON
On street corners around the nation,
reaction to the Joe Shmuger candidacy
has been shock. Dismay. And yes,
acceptance.

SERIES OF SHOTS - ON-THE-STREET INTERVIEWS

JEWISH MAN, 60S
Go on. It's a kibbitz. No one'll
vote for him. Nah. It's just a
kibbitz.

CUT TO:

WOMAN, 50S
(laughing hysterically)

CUT TO:

MALE INTELLECTUAL
It's the end of the world. Does he know
economics? Foreign policy? Social
issues? No. Is he the best man around?
Probably.

CUT TO:

FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENT
He was so cute on that show. And
funny. Oh my God, yes, I'd vote for
him.

CUT TO:

BLACK WOMAN, 40S
 Ain't never seen a white man give a
 taxi to a person of color. Never.
 Hell yes I'll vote for him.

CUT TO:

WOMAN, 50S
 (still laughing hysterically)

CUT TO:

NEWSSTAND CLERK
 (a bandage on his ear)
 Guy's an asshole, man. Even before I
 met him. Just an asshole.

CUT TO:

COLLEGE DUDE
 Rock the vote, dude. For Joe. The
 other guys. Vote for yourself if you
 want. Just don't waste it.

CUT TO:

WOMAN, 50S
 (still laughing, catches breath)
 Oh my. A-hem. Ok... Now, if he's pro
 choice...

CUT TO:

MALE INTELLECTUAL
 It's the end of the world.

EXT. "JONATHAN HARWOOD FOR PRESIDENT" HEADQUARTERS - DAY

APRIL DAWSON continues her stand-up. In front of a modest,
 candidate's headquarters building.

DAWSON
 At headquarters of Democratic nominee
 Jonathan Harwood, you could hear the
 glee erupt this morning. They are
 confident that a Shmuger-led CPR
 ticket will steal a large slice of the
 far right Republican voting pie,
 labeled by some as, "that lunatic
 fringe." It is similar to the spoiler
 role famously played in past elections
 by third party candidates. So, with
 open arms, and probably some hugs and
 kisses, they welcome Joe to the race.

In a building window is a picture of Joe, and a banner: "GO
 JOE, GO!" Inside, staffers celebrate with handshakes and hugs.

INT. WESLEY WILLIAMS HEADQUARTERS - MAIN FOYER - DAY

Staffers run around in deep concern. Near panic.

DAWSON (V.O.)

The scene at headquarters of Republican nominee Wesley Williams, however, was a bit more reticent.

INT. WESLEY WILLIAMS HEADQUARTERS - HALLWAYS - DAY

On walls are posters with the face of candidate WESLEY WILLIAMS, 60-ish. Crewcut. Stiff. Staffers run in and out of a conference room.

We approach the room, but stop at the door. Looking inside, staffers argue heatedly. Pouring over Joe's endorsement products - Wheaties, Snickers, and anything else a studio marketing department can secure. Some read his book, *Tuesdays with Joey*. All very distressed.

DAWSON (V.O.)

No one spoke on camera, but tension is very high. The older skewing Conservative Party of the Republic, once rooted far right of the G.O.P., has been inching closer to the middle, taking Republican voters with them. Plus, in the race for fund-raising, always a hot issue as candidates can sell their souls for as little as a Happy Meal, there is deep concern. Most products endorsed by Shmuger have already agreed to contribute five per cent of their profits to his campaign.

A STAFFER passes by the camera, and slams the door in our face.

INT. T.N.A. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A TNA logo on the wall. DAN ZAYKO and PHIL SWEET review a wall grid of TNA's prime-time program lineup. Titles include: *JERSEY SHORE BAYWATCH*. *REAL POLICE BEATINGS*. *STREET DRAG RACING CRASHES*. *BACKYARD FIST FIGHTS*. And *TED NUGENT'S KILL 'EM & EAT 'EM SAFARI*.

Behind them is MORTON SILVER, examining the grid. Concerned.

SILVER

Not a Win, Place or Perish in the lot. Since that show ended, my friends, ratings are down forty per cent. You think your jobs were on the line before...

A female ASSISTANT rushes in.

ASSISTANT

Guys. You better check the news feed.

A TV on behind them, they flip channels, stopping at Joe's rally.

ON TV: The "JOE SHMUGER FOR PRESIDENT" banner, big as life. Joe bowls a big strike. Lots of celebration. Swarms of people writing checks, and handing them over. The execs stare at the TV.

ZAYKO

Holy Shit.

SWEET

We created the little monster.

SILVER

(to the assistant)

Set me up a conference call with the board of directors. Immediately.

INT. NATION ON-LINE NEWSROOM - DAY

A dot.com version of a traditional newspaper. Mostly non-conformist twenty-somethings. MITCH STONE works at his computer. Reading a story on screen. He cracks a smile.

STONE

Jackpot.

On his computer screen:

(AP) GALLUP POLL FINDS SHMUGER RUNNING A RESPECTABLE THIRD WITH 26%; CANDIDATES HARWOOD AND WILLIAMS QUICKLY RE-THINK STRATEGIES.

EXT. HARWOOD FOR PRESIDENT HEADQUARTERS - DAY

STAFFERS are in a panic. Tearing down all the SHMUGER signage.

INT. CPR CONFERENCE ROOM (WAR ROOM) - DAY

The conference room is now SHMUGER CENTRAL. A WHITE BOARD on the wall lists Joe's campaign TOUR CITIES. Plus the poll results:

DEMOCRAT, JONATHAN HARWOOD	- 37%
REPUBLICAN, WESLEY WILLIAMS	- 30%
JOE	- 26%
UNDECIDED	- 9%

There is jubilation as FROST, CRAVENS and JOE watch SHULMAN read the good news.

SHULMAN

(reading a chart)

Women, 30%. They think he's cute. Young men, 40%. They like his chutzpah. College students, you got 55%. Don't freak yet. Those shmucks hardly vote.

JOE

Told ya. Nobody's learnin' nothin'.

SHULMAN

It's nuts. Requests are pouring in.
Meet the Press, NPR, Piers Morgan.

JOE

Awesome. What's NPR again?

SHULMAN

National Public Radio.

JOE

With no commercials. Yeah, I like
that one.

CRAVENS

Lose Meet the Press. Get MTV. ESPN.
And that late talk show guy, uh,
Johnny Carson Daly.

(to Joe)

What are your passions, Joe?
Hobbies?

JOE

The three P's. Pool. Poker. And
pussy.

The others smile uncomfortably.

FROST

Joe, we'll start with regional TV, to
coincide with your campaign stops.
Our party doesn't hold a useless
expensive convention that no one
watches anyway. Much more prudent to
put the funds right into advertising.
There'll be no challengers to you in
the CPR.

JOE

What, d'you run out of white people?

The others chuckle awkwardly. They pack up. Joe and Shulman
saunter out. Frost and Cravens stay.

INT. CPR HQ - HALLWAY - DAY

SHULMAN walks with JOE, demonstrating the "politician's fist."

SHULMAN

Hold your fist, thumb up, at all
times when speaking. Very
authoritative. All the masters do it.
Clinton made it a damn art form.

JOE

(tries it out)
Like this?

SHULMAN

Drives the point right home. And you'll need new threads. You just won ten million cash. Look like it for Chrisakes. Kendra'll take you.

JOE

I don't need new clothes.

SHULMAN

Smile.

Joe smiles. Shulman examines his teeth.

SHULMAN

And bleach your teeth.

INT. CPR HEADQUARTERS - WAR ROOM - DAY

FROST and CRAVENS confer, after Joe and Schulman's departure.

CRAVENS

We're going to have to take control sometime.

FROST

Did you hear those young demos? Never in our wildest dreams, Walter. Madison Avenue gives him a Q Rating of 82. Beats Tom Hanks and Peyton Manning by a country mile. He's a genie from a bottle. Trust me. He'll come to us.

SERIES OF SHOTS - JOE CAMPAIGNING

SUGGESTED MUSIC - "LIFE IS A CARNIVAL" by The Band

Joe's GUESS JEANS BILLBOARD is now tagged: "VOTE JOE FOR PRESIDENT!"

AT A MEMPHIS COUNTY FAIR: JOE is shaking hands. Kissing babies. He holds one infant in one hand like a football. SHULMAN grabs it.

AT A FACTORY-NEWARK, NJ: Two Forklifts are next to each other. JOE drives one. A FACTORY WORKER in the other. As employees watch, the two start drag racing through the plant.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS DINNER - DETROIT: It is SRO. JOE is in mid-speech when the BIG WHEEL GANG bursts in, in raucous support. Smoking cigarettes. A bit grubby. The women are aghast.

AT A LIBRARY: SHULMAN drops books on a table next to JOE. He is unexcited.

AT A SUPERMARKET - MIAMI: JOE greets moms at a Wheaties display featuring his picture. Kissing babies, but now, carefully. One baby vomits on him.

AT THE LIBRARY: SHULMAN puts magazines on the table, but Joe is gone. He looks around. Sees JOE flirting with a LIBRARIAN, stereotyped. She wears eyeglasses. Her hair up in a bun.

A BLACK BAPTIST CHURCH - CHICAGO. Packed, as JOE belts out a gospel tune. Cravens watches in the back, feeling out of place.

AT THE LIBRARY: JOE pleads with the LIBRARIAN. Begrudgingly, she removes her glasses. Lets down her hair. He then convinces her to whisk her hair side to side (IN SLO-MO) like a Clairol ad.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. PICNIC GROUNDS (ATLANTA, GA) - DAY

A large crowd enjoys a campaign bar-b-que. Campaign posters. Bunting. Fans stuffing money boxes with cash, coins and checks.

JOE speaks from a small stage, in a baseball cap with a logo. Eating a bratwurst while speaking. A smudge of mustard on his chin.

Off to the side, CRAVENS and SHULMAN watch, in suit & ties. Carefully eating messy ribs.

JOE

While Senator Harwood and Governor Williams hold dinners at twenty grand a plate, our picnic is on the house. On our good styrofoam china, too. They're raising millions, I'm raising votes. That's how this country was started. For the good of everybody. To just "do the right thing." You know, like that movie. By that short black guy.

Modest cheers from the crowd, as Cravens and Shulman cringe. Up front, a BLACK WOMAN raises her hand.

BLACK WOMAN

How do you feel about affirmative action?

Shulman and Cravens brace for trouble.

JOE

How do I feel?

(thinking)

Um. How do you feel about it?

BLACK WOMAN

I'm asking you.

JOE

I know. And I'm asking you. What if you got a job you know you're not as qualified for as other applicants? Like a doctor in the emergency room.

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)

Or something without people's lives at stake. We don't even know what affirmative action is. It's supposed to level the playing field. But before they're out of school, looking for work. So you don't have to get into college with lower grades than other students. Or get hired just because a company doesn't want to get boycotted. What's that word, uh...diversity! A great thing. I've seen it. Lived it. But you gotta be ready. Street cred is all fine and dandy, but Bill Gates ain't lookin' for ebonics grads, I'll tell you that.

BLACK WOMAN

So how do you expect to do all that?

JOE

Right now? Uhhh... I don't know.

The press corps is stunned. Cravens is livid.

JOE

But I'll tell you this, however it's done. How good a public school is shouldn't depend only on how much money your parents make. That's wacky.

The press nod in agreement as the crowd cheers. Cravens and Shulman look at them all, befuddled.

EXT. PICNIC GROUNDS - PARKING LOT - DAY

CRAVENS and JOE scurry toward a black TOWN CAR.

CRAVENS

Are you deranged? Don't you ever, ever, ever answer a question with "I don't know." It's flagrant weakness. Total fallibility. What are you, stupid?

JOE

I didn't have an answer that second. It's only human.

CRAVENS

They don't want human. They want genius. Superman. Deflect the question. Sell the message first, damnit. Don't worry about delivering on it. Got it? No offense, Joe, but don't be such a blithering amateur.

Cravens opens the car door. Joe stops.

JOE

I'm not takin' a limo.

CRAVENS

It's a Town Car.

JOE

A limo without the bar. I'll find my own way.

Joe approaches an older car pulling out. The driver obliges, as Joe gets in. They drive off, leaving Cravens.

INT. HOTEL SUITE (ATLANTA) - NEXT MORNING

CRAVENS and SHULMAN each hold a copy of the schedule, reviewing.

SHULMAN

Rotary club at noon. The mall at two.

JOE barges in. Throws the morning Atlanta paper on the table. The headline reads: **"'I DON'T KNOW!' SHMUGER'S NUMBERS BOUNCE AS VOTERS SITE 'CANDIDATE THAT'S ACTUALLY HUMAN.'"**

JOE

No offense, Walter. But go (BLEEP) yourself.

He storms out.

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT (ATLANTA) - DAY

FROST, with briefcase, walks to his rental car. In the distance, JOE exits the hotel.

JOE

Cadwalleder! Cadwalleder, wait!

Frost sees him, not thrilled. He slows. Checks his watch.

JOE

Been trying to see you all morning. I got an idea about a running mate.

They walk together, toward Frost's car.

FROST

And we'll want to hear it. First we have pressing matters. Like finances.

JOE

I thought the dough was pouring in.

FROST

Yes. But it still pales next to the war chests of our opponents. They upped their TV buys by forty million each. Took valuable polling points from us. We really need to reevaluate contributors, Joe.

JOE

But I've been blasting those people.

FROST

Relax, Joe. It can be modified as a very benign need.

JOE

Need to what? Sell out? It's just a bunch of spin. That's not why you wanted me.

FROST

Joe. If we don't act, we'll be dead in the water.

JOE

It's all right, I can swim.

FROST

(losing patience, stops walking, sees Joe's clothes)

I thought Shulman told you to get a new wardrobe.

JOE

Haven't had time. But I really want you to meet my V.P. suggestion.

(has Frost's reluctant ear)

Mr. Lester Hudson.

(off Frost's blank look)

Best government teacher at Reuther High. Man's a genius.

FROST

Joe, I don't think you realiz--

JOE

This is a wise man. Harvard Ph.D. He just loves teaching. Just meet him. We get back to Michigan soon.

FROST

I'll meet him. If you seriously consider what I said about our crisis.

(checks watch)

I'm late for lunch. Can we call it a quid pro quo?

JOE

No, thanks. I don't like seafood.

Joe rushes off. Frost shows concern.

EXT. SUBURBAN SHOPPING DISTRICT (ATLANTA) - DAY

Eclectic shops line a village-like street. Not too crowded as KENDRA leads JOE past storefronts. A BODYGUARD hovers behind them.

She points to outfits in windows of shop after shop, but he balks at each one. Finally he relents, and they enter a store.

INT. MENS CLOTHIER - DAY

Upscale. JOE is being fitted in a dark suit. He sees himself in the mirror. Unhappy. KENDRA looks on.

The career SALESMAN, 60s, marks the alterations. He is weary from hours of futile attempts.

JOE

Didn't you know, Kendra, I'm
allergic to suits and ties.
(looks at price tag)
Holy sh... Twelve hundred bucks?!

SALESMAN

We've been through a dozen looks,
sir. This is the last one near your
size.

KENDRA

We'll take it.

JOE

Are you bonkers?

KENDRA

You, be quiet. I'm stepping in. My
son Eric shops better than you.

Joe, amused, accepts her dictate.

INT. WOMEN'S BOUTIQUE - DAY

JOE and KENDRA mosey, each carrying a shopping bag. Kendra browses the SHOE DISPLAY. Joe is drawn to a lingerie table.

KENDRA

I'll be one sec.
(notices a gorgeous pair)
Oh my God. These are just saintly.

JOE

Not gonna pray to 'em, are you?

INT. WOMENS BOUTIQUE - SHOE FITTING AREA - DAY

A SALESWOMAN, 50s, looks on, as Kendra wears the shoes. In elated bliss. Joe notices her toe ring, finding it sexy.

KENDRA
They're perfect. Like a deity. How much?

SALESWOMAN
Five seventy nine, ninety five.

Now Kendra feels the sticker shock.

JOE
A deity, eh. Wrong persuasion, maybe.

KENDRA
Thanks, anyway. Sorry. Let's go Joe.

She scurries off toward the door. Joe lags, slow to follow.

JOE
A grand for a suit is o.k., but six bills for shoes is cracked? Women.

EXT. SUBURBAN SHOPPING DISTRICT - DAY

JOE and KENDRA stroll with shopping bags. Her patience drained. The bodyguard lags behind.

KENDRA
This is getting silly. I have to get you more than one suit. Cad will be furious.

JOE
We did. A lot more.

KENDRA
Jeans and work shirts don't cut it. My God, why are you so against looking distinguished?

JOE
Because I'm not, o.k.?! Why can't you guys accept that? I'm just me!

He calms. Reflecting. Pulling nervously at a loose pant thread.

JOE
My first suit... I bought in eleventh grade, when I ran for student council. Was really jacked, too. But no one took me seriously. *"Student council? You're our star running back, Joe. Our point guard. Why you wanna be on student council?"* Then Coach McEvoy calls me in.

(mimicking coach)
"Son, I'm worried. With this council business, you'll miss some practice. Lose your focus. If I get less than a hunerd yards a game from you..."

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)
 (in normal tone)
 That's how he said hundred. *Hun-erd.*
 (resumes mimick)
*"We won't reach the state playoffs.
 Those council kids are nerds
 anyway."*

(in normal tone)
 Which was true. But when they got in
 the good colleges, no one dissed 'em.
 They respected 'em. For their minds,
 not 'cause they could put points on
 the board. I really wanted that, you
 know.

(pulling the pant thread, a
 hole opens up)
 But, I quit the race. Then, three
 games in, against Oak Park, my knee
 shatters like a light bulb. Colleges
 that offered a full ride all said,
 "See ya."

(then)
 Only time I wore that suit since was
 at my old man's funeral.

KENDRA
 You'll wear it again... On
 Inauguration Day. That reminds me.
 They moved our flight up, back to
 Washington. It's in my Day Planner.

Joe realizes the now big hole he created in his jeans.
 Kendra takes her purse from her shopping bag. Sees something
 inside.

KENDRA
 What's this?

She pulls out a shoebox. In it, the pricey shoes from the
 boutique.

JOE
 I snuck it in when you weren't
 looking.
 (sees her discomfort)
 What? You love 'em, right? Hey, even
 I've seen "Sex and the City."

She kisses his cheek softly. Then, a soft peck on his neck, which
 he welcomes. They smile.

JOE
 (sniffs her scent)
 What is that perfume, anyway?

KENDRA
 Poison.

INT. CPR HQ - HALLWAY - DAY

SHULMAN walks, immersed in a newspaper. Passes a MALE STAFFER.

SHULMAN
Have you seen Joe?

He nods "no." Shulman continues on. Passes a MENS ROOM DOOR. JOE pokes out his head. Steps out. Followed by KENDRA. Both straighten their clothes and appearance. Joe passes Shulman.

SHULMAN
There you are. When was your last physical?

JOE
I dunno. Why?

EXT. MUNICIPAL PARK - DAY

Softball fields. A playground full of kids. Wooded trails.

JOE and SCHULMAN are jogging, with an entourage behind them. The press are far back. Fans line their path. Joe is panting badly.

JOE
How far have we gone?

SHULMAN
Quarter mile, maybe.

JOE
Christ.

SHULMAN
I got fifteen years on you, and I'm fine. Besides, running makes you look fit. Presidential.

JOE
So does a mistress. I can't run. My knee is pure glass. Swelling up right now. Ah, it don't matter. If I win, you'll just say I'm in perfect health anyway.

SHULMAN
What makes you say that?

JOE
'Cause they always do. Every president. Even FDR, right? And the guy was dying. Look super human. Ain't that it?
(hacking)
I may be plump, but I'm not stupid.
(cough, hack)

Shulman knows he's right. Joe's stride starts showing a LIMP. Behind them is a big LUXURY VAN. In it are FROST and CRAVENS.

INT. LUXURY VAN (MOVING) - DAY

CRAVENS drives, while holding a cell phone. FROST in the passenger seat. Both watch Joe jogging.

CRAVENS
Did he tell you his brilliant
running mate suggestion?

FROST
I said I'd meet with him.

CRAVENS
Cad, you can't be serious.

FROST
Give me some credit. Willis
Trompeter is ready. And he's
perfect. Won't draw early fire. And
he'll run this nation just as we
desire. With or without Joe's
involvement.

CRAVENS
You really think he'll cave to the
pressure?

FROST
He won't have a choice. But we will.
To catch him with young girls. Boys.
His mother. Take your pick.

CRAVENS
(sadistic chuckle)
'Tis a bumpy road on which history
is made. But the press love him.
What if they learn it's B.S.?

FROST
Walter, you disappoint me. Of all
people, you should know. Allegations
don't have to be true. They just have
to be loud. Very, very loud.

We see Joe struggling in his jog.

CRAVENS
He'll need a lot of stamina.

EXT. MUNICIPAL PARK - DAY

JOE is hobbling worse, trying to conceal his panting. SHULMAN, running next to him, as his cell phone rings. He answers.

SHULMAN
Yeah, Shulman... We're jogging now,
can he call you back?... Hell. You
guys and your deadlines.
(halts the caravan)
(MORE)

SHULMAN (cont'd)
 Joe, sorry. It's that interview with Reuters. They can't push it back.

JOE
 Damn. Barely broke a sweat.

He limps over to the van's rear door. Shulman addresses the crowd.

SHULMAN
 Gotta cut it short, folks. Sorry, can't do autographs. See you at the polls.

JOE
 (takes the cell phone)
 Mr. Reuters. How ya doin'?

Joe and Shulman hop into the van. Shut the doors behind them.

INT. LUXURY VAN - REAR CABIN - DAY

JOE, crouched over, holds his painful knee. Wheezing like a dying mule. SHULMAN comforts him.

JOE
 (to Cravens in front)
 What the hell took you so long?
 Couldn't see me dyin' out there?
 (coughing)
 Sig, don't just stand there. Get out a press release. Candidate Shmuger,
 (cough, hack)
 is a marvel of physical condition.

INT. CPR H.Q. - WAR ROOM - DAY

FROST and CRAVENS revise polling numbers on the white board.

FROST
 We only fell two points. Not bad for skipping a week's TV ads.

CRAVENS
 Pat Robertson's in town. May even have a check for us.

FROST
 He's not trying to convert Joe Lieberman again, is he? If only it were that easy.

CRAVENS
 For that 60 Minutes exhibit they're opening at the Newseum. Big tribute to Mike Wallace.

FROST
 Tch. Why can't Jews just do comedy? Only thing they're good at.

Joe barges in.

JOE
Hey, what happened to the TV spot on
C.S.I. last night?

FROST
We had to pull it. I told you.
Budget cuts.

CRAVENS
There's just no dough, Joe.

JOE
You a poet, and don't realize it?

FROST
Joe, I'm optimistic. But realistic.
If we want to compete seriously,
we'll have to address the funds on
the sidelines. Otherwise, more TV
will have to go. Which kills me
since we just dropped six polling
points.

Cravens hides a smirk over the lie. Joe is down. For a beat, as he ponders this looming deal with the devil. Ready to relent.

JOE
Who are we talkin' about? And how
much?

Frost smiles. About to reply, as Joe's cell phone rings. He answers.

JOE
Hello?... Morton Silver?! Hey, what
brings you to D.C.?... The new 60
Minutes exhibit. Oh, yeah, I loved
Mike Wallace... Really?... Nine a.m.
is my jogging time. But for you...
Sure, we can find it. See ya then.

He hangs up. Unfurls a wide grin.

INT. WTAA TV - LOBBY - DAY

TNA's affiliate in D.C. Very modern, it oozes "hip." Young staffers pass by, probably hired through a modeling agency.

JOE, FROST and CRAVENS enter. Greeted by a giant MURAL OF JOE, from "Win, Place or Perish." It looms over the room like a deity.

CAYLA, 20s, a gorgeous assistant, greets them.

CAYLA
Hello, Joe. I'm Cayla. Welcome.
Everyone's in Studio A.

She leads them down a hall, past framed photos of the network's on-air talking heads. Frost and Cravens proceed. But would rather have a root canal.

INT. WTAA TV - STUDIO A - DAY

JOE, FROST and CRAVENS shuffle in. Met by a large display of the divisions of the conglomerate, GLOBAL MEDIA. Many logos. TNA Network. Global Outdoor Sign. Global Radio. Global Cable Group. Sports bars. Video games. Magazines. Consumer products. A literal shrine to FCC deregulation.

Greeting them are MORT SILVER, DAN ZAYKO and PHIL SWEET. Dripping in anticipation. Behind them is a tall curtain.

SILVER

Gentlemen! Welcome to TNA. I'm Mort Silver, president of the network.

JOE

Hey, Mr. Silver. Good to see you again. Hi guys.

SILVER

(looks into camera, cynical)
Is this your on-line shadow? Nice. They're lucky I don't sue.

INTRODUCTIONS are made. Handshakes. Near the display of the Global empire is a talk show set. All but Joe sit down in it.

JOE

So, how was that 60 Minutes bash last night?

SILVER

Wonderful. That is, until Pat Robertson walked in. Shmuck keeps trying to convert me.

JOE

(sees a food layout nearby)
Hey, check out the spread.
(starts munching)

SILVER

Gentlemen, TNA and Joe had a quite fruitful relationship as you know. Like a family.

CRAVENS

A family with record ratings.

SILVER

Indeed. And we'd like to rekindle that relationship. Introduce you to our siblings if you will, at Global Media. To assist your campaign.

CRAVENS

Assist. Like what, do some radio interviews?

SWEET

(points to Global divisions)

Like commercial air time, on six hundred radio and TV stations. Ad space on most of our two thousand billboards. A dozen magazines. Product tie-ins.

Joe rejoins the group. Cream cheese on his mouth. He offers a bagel to Frost and Cravens. They decline.

ZAYKO

A sponsorship promotion, unprecedented in U.S. politics. Would send your opponents scurrying for the bunkers. Plus, additional support by piggybacking with our advertisers.

JOE

You gotta be kiddin'.

FROST

A synergy program... For a presidential campaign?

(indignant)

What's the catch? What do you want?

Silver opens the curtain. Unveiling a giant wall-size "TNA-JOE FOR PRESIDENT" banner. Joe is awestruck.

SILVER

The "TNA/Joe for President Campaign." We want to be your official network. Interview exclusivity, save for general announcements. While conducting mass cross-promotion. We would be your marketing director.

ZAYKO

The news division wouldn't just cover Joe. It would endorse him.

JOE

Like what a newspaper does? Like the New York Times.

CRAVENS

More like the National Enquirer.

SILVER

We don't win Pulitzers. But we do reach the masses. With a full arsenal.

SWEET

Since no more Fairness Doctrine...
Giving equal time is a subjective
task.

FROST

Networks usually tie a dollar value
to proposals like this. A ballpark
idea?

SILVER

Projecting inventory from all
divisions this quarter... I'd say
the neighborhood of \$450 million.

JOE

Holy Sweet Gordie Howe! I'd move to
that neighborhood.

FROST

You do get credit for thinking
outside the box.

JOE

(beaming)
The box? It's out of this (**BLEEP**)-in
world!
(bites a bagel)

INT. TNA NEWSROOM - DAY

JAFFE

You're out of your fucking minds!

ROBIN JAFFE, 30-ish, berates PHIL SWEET. As president of news,
she's as serious a journalist as can exist in the TNA world. It
is a large working newsroom, but in a loft space. With an MTV
tint.

JAFFE

Network news endorsing a candidate?!
Who we created?!

SWEET

Jaffe, it's no different than a
newspaper endorsement.

JAFFE

An editorial, maybe. Not the entire
news department. Not weeks before the
election. Not after a 40% ratings
dive, and twenty point drop in the
stock price! We'll be the joke of
broadcast journalism.

From afar, pretty boy anchor TOPPER QUEST hears. Walks up.

TOPPER QUEST

Robin. What the hell's going on?

JAFFE
 We're endorsing Shmuger for
 president. Full coverage. Top story,
 daily.

TOPPER QUEST
 (shocked; then, to Sweet)
 For real?

SWEET
 Rubber stamped by the Global board.

TOPPER QUEST
 (thinking, unmoved)
 Cool. I'll be in makeup.
 (moseys off)

JAFFE
 You've all had a lobotomy.

CUT TO:

TV PROGRAM VIDEO

Garish graphics. Audio and video wipes. Whoosh sound effects.
 Trite music. A giant logo explodes for the show, "ENTERTAINMENT
 ACCESS!"

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Opening the sealed doors to
 Hollywood, it's time for
 Entertainment Access! The number one
 entertainment news program in
 America!

ON SCREEN, A GRAPHIC:
*"The number One Entertainment News Program in America!***

WITH A DISCLAIMER, in small print:
 ** *"Except in New York, L.A., Chicago, San Francisco,
 Philadelphia, Boston, Detroit, Miami, Dallas, and cities in top
 100 ADI rankings #15-#34, #37-#53, #55-#71 and #82-#97."*

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 And now, your hosts, Tina Brash and
 Shane Garden.

INT. "ENTERTAINMENT ACCESS" SET - DAY

Obnoxiously garish set. TINA BRASH is now in a glittery,
 nightclub-ish short mini skirt. With SHANE GARDEN, 30s. An
 excited talking head, fresh off his Reno weatherman gig.

GARDEN
 Welcome everyone. I'm Shane Garden.

BRASH
 And I'm Tina Brash. Today's top
 story.

(MORE)

BRASH (cont'd)
 Joe Shmuger makes history again. But first, these late breaking news bulletins.

ON VIDEO - Graphics whirl and wipe across the screen. The stories described in V.O. are backed with footage cut in MILLISECONDS, INDECIPHERABLE TO THE VIEWER.

BRASH (V.O.)
 Actress Sharon Stone is in the news again. The star of the hit film, Basic Instinct, and, let's face it, her ONLY hit, purchased a bottle of aspirin today at a local drug store. The hot rumor sweeping Hollywood? She may have had a headache.

(flashes a cynical look)
 And today, actress Lindsay Lohan, hoping once again to burnish her sagging film career, announced she will star in an adult porno movie. Finally! Asked how she will handle it with that newly born baby, she said not to worry. Her child will be on set the entire time.

CUT TO:

Shane Garden at the anchor desk. The "TNA-JOE FOR PRESIDENT" logo is super'ed on screen behind him.

GARDEN
 Wow. Big day. Now, our top story. Joe Shmuger, the charismatic winner of Win, Place or Perish, the nation's number one TV show, signed a historic agreement making TNA the exclusive network of the Shmuger for President campaign. Watch for regular campaign updates on the TNA Network News with Topper Quest. Making political history is almost old hat for Joe, as he reflects in this exclusive Entertainment Access interview, just acquired from CNN.

CUT TO:

JOE - ON VIDEO
 (in TNA baseball cap)
 I gotta say, it's great to be back with-

CUT TO:

GARDEN
 Well said, Joe, as usual. Now, a word from our sponsor.

CUT TO:

TV COMMERCIAL VIDEO

A TV spot for GLOBAL PLAY-A-TRON video games. JOE is seen playing against a LITTLE BOY.

INT. MICHIGAN CPR CAMPAIGN HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The Play-a-Tron spot plays on a TV. JOE turns it off.

JOE
Little punk took me for twenty
bucks.

A state of Michigan map. List of area cities and tour dates. Much signage of an Olympics-sized roster of sponsors: TNA, Guess Jeans, Wheaties, Snickers, Global Play-a-Tron etc. The "TNA-JOE FOR PRESIDENT" campaign logo is on all materials.

FROST and CRAVENS review the calendar. Joe opens a beer. A knock, as LEON pops in. Wearing a jacket over a Pamela Anderson t-shirt.

CRAVENS
(after Leon enters)
Come in.

JOE
Hey, Paw Paw.

LEON
Hiya, fellas.
(sees Joe's teeth, shocked)
What'd you do to your teeth?

JOE
Sshhh. Got 'em bleached.

LEON
By who, Sherwin Williams?

JOE
Is he here?

Leon nods affirmatively. Joe darts out.

CRAVENS
He calls you Paw Paw. Do you not
trim your nails?

LEON
Paw Paw's my hometown, out-state.
Michigan wine country.

Joe bounces in. Nods to Leon to leave. Shunned, he shuffles out.

JOE
(waves in someone)
Fellas. Meet Lester Hudson. The
pride of Walter Reuther High School.

LESTER HUDSON enters, 60-ish. A BLACK MAN. Reserved. Intuitive. Likes crewnecks and blazers. Frost and Cravens shake hands with him, barely hiding their shock.

JOE
(introducing)
Cadwalleder Frost, party chairman.
Walter Cravens, chief adviser.

HUDSON
(slightly hoarse)
Nice to meet you gentlemen.

JOE
What's with your voice? Not yelling
at the kids, are ya?

HUDSON
Saw a hilarious movie last night.
Was yelling back at the screen.

Joe laughs at the joke. Cravens and Frost do not. They all sit.

HUDSON
I must say, I'm very flattered you'd
consider me as a running mate. But I'm
an independent, gentlemen. Aligning
with your party takes some getting used
to.

JOE
They're a flexible bunch. Aren't you
guys?

CRAVENS
Like an Olympic gymnast.

HUDSON
I didn't notice any brothers in the
building. 'Less I should check the
janitor's closet.

CRAVENS
Change often takes a little time.
However, what we need is,

HUDSON
A token?

CRAVENS
Experience. Jousting with Congress
is no walk in the park.

FROST
Mr. Hudson -- Can I call you Lester?

HUDSON
If we get to know each other.

FROST

I'd like to. With full respect to Joe, we think you could be much more help as a staff adviser. Joe's a strong candidate, but he knows he has a ways to go. Plus, I think everyone would agree the vice presidency can often be a thankless trip to Siberia.

(chuckles)

Other than the one now in office, and maybe old pal Dick Cheney, can anyone name a "number two" from the last quarter century?

All think a long beat...in vain.

FROST

My point. We'll have many positions that go beyond any hollow job often given to minorities. Like some public affairs slot. That's not what we want.

HUDSON

Now you're talking to me.

CRAVENS

We do that at times.

FROST

We conservatives don't like stereotypes of us, any more than minorities do of them. Think about it, Mr. Hudson. Please.

INT. MICHIGAN CPR CAMPAIGN HQ - LOBBY - DAY

JOE and HUDSON approach the main door.

JOE

They're not so bad, once you get to know 'em.

HUDSON

You're assuming, Joe. I appreciate you asking me. Really. But I have to pass. You really want my advice?

(off Joe's nod, then,
cynically)

What are you doing?

JOE

What do you mean? I'm trying to do something with my life. Maybe give people a reason to vote for a change.

HUDSON

Ok. But because you want to. Nobody else.

(MORE)

HUDSON (cont'd)

Don't end up like so many others, who, blinded by the seduction, lose their conviction. Or why they ran in the first place. Williams. Harwood. Who knows if they're straight. But you're talking about the most important office in the world. Remember that.

Joe nods. Hudson pats Joe's gut.

HUDSON

Looks like you've been eating some pre-game meals, but skipping the games. How's the knee?

JOE

Holding up. Thanks a lot, Mr. Hudson.

HUDSON

Lester.

Hudson smiles. Steps out the door. His advice resonates with Joe, for a beat. LEON waddles up about to exit, holding a note.

LEON

I'll see ya later. Shulman gave me some articles to get you. Just hit the stands.

JOE

I'll come with. I gotta think. And I know just the place.

Joe dons a new baseball cap. Walks out with Leon.

EXT. MICHIGAN CPR CAMPAIGN HQ - DAY

The parking lot is walled off from the street. JOE, LEON, and STAN the on-line cameraman, are in Joe's pickup truck as it starts out of the lot. SHULMAN rushes out, frantic.

SHULMAN

You can't go out unaccompanied! You nuts? And you got an interview at two!

Joe's truck turns into the street, passing the surprised press. They rush to their cars, but Joe, elated, is soon out of sight.

INT. NEWSROOM CAFE - DAY

Similar to the L.A. eatery, but an old style saloon. Several TVs are tuned to news and sports channels. A newsstand in the rear.

JOE sits at the bar, with a beer. LEON walks up with some magazines.

LEON
 (re: Shulman's note)
 I couldn't tell if this says New
 York Magazine, or New Yorker.

JOE
 It's the same thing, ain't it.

A male BAR PATRON, 30s, in a suit, stands behind Joe, watching TV.

BAR PATRON
 They're separate publications.

On one TV a rally appears for SENATOR HARWOOD.

JOE, BAR PATRON
 (to the bartender)
 Hey, turn that up!

The BARTENDER obliges.

Joe glances at the PATRON. Sees a button on his lapel: "HARWOOD FOR PRESIDENT/Staff." Joe turns away, unnoticed by him. Both watch the TV with high interest.

ON THE TV
 JONATHAN HARWOOD, 50s, is speaking. Handsome, but a bit ruffled. A Bill Clinton wannabe, he lacks the luster and charm.

REPORTER (ON TV)
 Senator, how would you preserve
 Social Security, in light of the
 enormous budget deficit?

JOE
 (sotto)
 Ya got me.

HARWOOD (ON TV)
 (guarded)
 This nation is faced with crises
 every day. Yes, we must think of the
 future. We must guarantee the
 reserve for our nation's retirees,
 and I have every bit of faith that
 we will.

BAR PATRON
 Uh-oh.

REPORTER (ON TV)
 You say to think of the future, but
 aren't you avoiding discussion of
 exactly that?

HARWOOD (ON TV)
 (hesitates, then)
 The senior citizens of this country
 can be confident their hard earned
 funds will be there when they need
 them. That's what I'm saying.

BAR PATRON
 Cripe.

JOE
 He didn't say shit.

BAR PATRON
 He was supposed to. To Fire-wall the
 reserve. Up retirement age two years.

JOE
 Sounds like a shortage of balls to
 me.
 (catches his glibness)

BAR PATRON
 He's got 'em. Just won't use 'em pre-
 election. It's called *candidate-*
itis. The country freaks when they
 hear an ugly truth. Then much rather
 go on living in denial.

The Bar Patron leans in, setting his empty glass on the bar. He
 peers at Joe, who again turns away, staying unrecognized.

BAR PATRON
 Later, pal.

He walks out of the bar. Joe ponders Harwood's performance.

INT. JOE'S PICKUP TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

JOE drives with LEON, both eating pizza. Sauce stains on their
 shirts. Leon swigs from a wine bottle in a paper bag.

JOE
 They let you take that out?!

LEON
 When I mentioned I was with you,
 they offered anything I wanted.

JOE
 This whole country's lost its mind.

LEON
 Who's your two o'clock interview
 with? That began twenty minutes ago.

JOE
 I think Time Magazine.

LEON

Maybe that's one you should make?

Joe dials on his cell. Pulls a business card from his pocket.

JOE

Sig... I know, I know. Have her meet me at this address. It's closer, and it's casual. 4-1-4-0 Woodward. At Warren Avenue. Be there in a few.
(hangs up)

LEON

Woodward and Warren. Isn't that...?

JOE

Closer and casual.

INT. MAGIC STICK POOL HALL - DAY

Dimly lit. Rows of tables. Patrons are half IBM, half Elmore Leonard. JOE and LEON stroll in. Greeted by staff and players.

Joe is met by Time Magazine's LAURIE LERNER, 30-ish. Amiable. Professional. And hungry.

JOE

Hiya, Laurie, is it?

LERNER

Yes, Laurie Lerner. Thanks for taking the time.

JOE

Sorry, I'm late. This place o.k? We can relax. Shoot a few games.

LERNER

Sure. I can tape it.

JOE

(gives keys to Leon)
Can you take the truck back? I'll get a ride back.

Leon feels left out, again. Revealing envy. He shuffles out the door. Joe and Lerner stroll to the rear of the hall.

INT. MAGIC STICK POOL HALL - REAR TABLE - DAY

JOE and LERNER shoot pool. Perched on the table bank are two beer bottles, and her mini-tape recorder.

JOE

Actually, I've hardly spent any of the winnings. This game'll be my biggest tab all month.

LERNER

The magazine's picking this up.

JOE

See. I can't even try.

At a table in BG, TWO MEN, playing, begin arguing.

LERNER

You could be the first bachelor commander-in-chief since Woodrow Wilson. You rarely date anyone more than three times. Why do you think that is?

JOE

You a reporter, or a shrink? It's crazy, now. Women are coming out of the woodwork. Strange thing about fame.

LERNER

Many want fame more than anything. But few get to be President. You wouldn't get to drive your truck.

JOE

Like hell. Armor plate it if they want. It stays. An *oh-two* Silverado. Great name, too. Buy the truck. Then see the movie.

In BG, the arguing men get raucous. Audibly drunk. Joe keeps an eye.

LERNER

Is your favorite meal really a hot dog?

JOE

No. Course not. A Coney Island. Detroit chili dog. Onions, mustard. Some loose hamburger. Geez, I'm not that plain a Joe.

A WAITRESS brings two more beers. Then, wipes down a nearby table. Hearing their conversation, as Joe makes a tough shot.

LERNER

Nice. Are you a hustler?

JOE

I am a politician. Wanna go one? Will the mag cover your losses?

LERNER

I think you're judging a book by its blouse. Rack 'em.

Joe puts down a \$20 bill. The waitress sees this. Amused.

In BG, the two men start brawling. Joe rushes over. Breaks them up.

JOE
Hey. Hey! Ass-wipes. Take it
outside.

BRAWLER #1
(BLEEP) you, Joe. Whyn't you go back
to your pussy game show.
(punches Joe)

JOE
Argh! Damn.
(pissed, but resigned)
Great.

Joe throws a solid right. The three start swinging. Wrestling.
Some wild punches connect. A BOUNCER arrives, separating them.

BRAWLER #1 throws a bottle at Joe, who ducks. It shatters on
Lerner's head, dropping her to the floor.

JOE
(to brawler)
You (BLEEP)-in retard.

He slugs him, out cold. Then rushes over to Lerner, also out
cold. He surveys the scene. Showing dread.

INT. MICHIGAN CPR CAMPAIGN HQ - CONF. ROOM - DAY

At the table are CRAVENS and SHULMAN, livid. And JOE.

CRAVENS
A retard. We have a retard running
for president. First candidate ever
to commit battery. He'll probably
sue. As will the woman. Not to
mention, gambling.

JOE
(realizing)
The waitress.

CRAVENS
Thank God no press were there, other
than your on-line guy. Maybe
Cadwalleder won't see it. But Mr.
Moron, this is major trouble. With a
capital T.

JOE
Which rhymes with P, and that stands
for pool.

Shulman chuckles.

CRAVENS
Shut up, Sig. And where were you?
Time Magazine not big enough for your
attendance?

SHULMAN

What's the status on the Secret Service?

CRAVENS

We should hear from the Treasury department any day. Or else that DUI the Secretary got last year will be lead story on Brian Williams.

(to Joe)

Mr. Shmuger. A short fuse for fighting is campaign kryptonite. On steroids! Do you understand? You keep your fists hidden.

(to Shulman)

Sig, you see to that. After you fix this magazine disaster.

JOE

It's not a disaster.

CRAVENS

Oh, now you're a press expert? Your job is to win the presidency of the United States, God damnit! You leave the important matters to us.

JOE

She's a cool chick. She shoots pool. Drinks beer from the bottle. Besides, the interview was a wash.

CRAVENS

What do you mean, a wash?

JOE

Her questions were lobs, down the middle. Nothing about the campaign. Or a running mate. Nothing uh, relevant.

SHULMAN

She does the People page. Celeb fluff.

JOE

Why the hell was that?

SHULMAN

Because that's what they wanted.

Joe is bummed.

CRAVENS

Speaking of a running mate. Joe, it's time you met Willis. Cad's bringing him in tomorrow.

JOE

No shit? Wow. I knew he's a hard Republican, but I never thought he'd switch parties.

CRAVENS

You know of him?

JOE

C'mon. I didn't come from under a rock. Everyone knows Bruce Willis.

SHULMAN

Joe. Willis Trompeter. Was a California Congressman.

JOE

Oh.

INT. MICHIGAN CPR CAMPAIGN HQ - CONF. ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

SHULMAN is on the phone, elated. Jotting down polling numbers. JOE shuffles in, dressed like a shlub. Disturbed. Shulman hangs up.

JOE

This Time Magazine thing. Gonna be serious interviews, too, right?

SHULMAN

Of course. I couldn't feed you to the lions right off. It's strategy. Pal, you're up to twenty nine per cent.

(confiding)

Listen. Getting you into the White House is my only goal. But you'd be getting me into it, too. A career crown. And you were right about Lerner. She's not writing about the fight.

(then)

Last thing she recalls is two-ball in the side pocket.

KENDRA bounces in, chewing gum. Shows off several TRADING CARDS.

KENDRA

Joe's trading cards are in. Look. Here's you in New York.

(shows another card)

At the Statue of Liberty, peeking under her robe.

JOE

Outta sight. Can you send some to my mom?

KENDRA

If I can keep the gum.

SHULMAN

These'll be in thousands of
retailers. Williams and Harwood's
grandkids'll drive them nuts begging
for them.

JOE

Just call me Pokey Joe.

They all laugh. Slapping high fives, as FROST enters. Then,
WILLIS TROMPETER, 60s. Tall. Gawky. In his omnipresent PAISLEY
TIE. Hasn't laughed since the Reagan years. He walks in as,

SHULMAN

That's President Pokey-Joe.

FROST

Joe. I'd like you to meet Willis
Trompeter. Your running mate.

JOE

Welcome aboard, Congressman. Got a
serious campaign going here.

Kendra POPS a bubble. Embarrassed.

TROMPETER

I can see by the toys. Whatever works
these days, eh. Even rowdy pool halls.

The mention surprises Joe and Shulman. Frost is curious.

TROMPETER

I read Nation On-Line, too.
(looks into camera, disturbed)
Is that what this is?
(off Shulman's nod)
Lovely.

FROST

Something to drink, Willis?

TROMPETER

Water will do.

Kendra skips out to fetch. The men sit. Trompeter looks
disparagingly at Joe's drab attire.

TROMPETER

Ok, Cadwalleder. What am I doing in
Detroit? Of all places.

JOE

Something wrong with that?

TROMPETER

Well. It is Detroit.

FROST

This is Joe's home town, Willis. It was timely to announce the ticket here.

TROMPETER

I don't normally dive into hostile waters. It's so blue collar, for God's sakes.

FROST

Joe's a forklift driver, remember Willis? From our first meeting?

JOE

Teamsters Local 337. For God's sakes.

Kendra brings Trompeter a GLASS OF WATER. He is irritated by it.

TROMPETER

You don't have bottled water?

KENDRA

Sorry.

She takes back the glass. Shares the joke with Joe as she exits.

TROMPETER

I'm not big with unions. When one champions corporate liberties to boost the economy, it's reflexive for unions to reject. No matter how many jobs are created.

JOE

You're in bed with 'em now. So don't hog the covers.

Kendra enters. Hands Trompeter a bottled water - with Joe's mug on the label. She trots out.

JOE

Now, there's a campaign issue. Drinkable water from your own faucet. It all comes from a pipe anyway.

Trompeter sees Joe's picture on the label.

JOE

But that stuff is pure.

TROMPETER

I just don't like people handling my drinking water.

Joe is very uneasy.

Kendra, in the hallway, signals Joe to come meet her. Winks at him.

INT. STORE ROOM - DAY

JOE and KENDRA tug at each other's clothes. Playful in their lust.

JOE
 (mimicking Trompeter)
I just don't like people handling my drinking water.
 (in normal tone)
 Handle this.

KENDRA
 (unzipping his fly)
 O.k.

JOE
 Whoa.

KENDRA
 We don't have much time. You have a rally. And I have to check up on Eric.

JOE
 You are a good mom. You know that?

KENDRA
 One can only try.
 (pulls Joe's clothes off)
 But we have to get you to your running mate's unveiling.

JOE
 It's an unveiling, all right. Like a gravestone.

EXT. CANTON SPORTS CENTER (MICH.) - DAY

Acres of softball fields. A huge, rabid crowd at one field, where JOE stands on a stage. A banner hangs with the now ubiquitous "TNA/JOE FOR PRESIDENT" logo. He wears a sponsored cap. Holding a bat. TROMPETER is next to him, ill at ease in the bourgeois setting.

FROST and KENDRA watch from the wings. In the back is a now larger press corps, accompanied by SCHULMAN and some staffers.

Joe ad libs as usual. Excited. But with a sign of apprehension.

JOE
 ...You could call this our national ass-kicking tour. Because we're gonna leave a long trail of red rumps.

Frost cringes.

JOE

And now, joining me on this mission
is a veteran of the Washington
battles. Congressman, Willis
Trompeter!

The crowd responds mildly. A few people ask, 'Who?' Trompeter
unfolds his typed speech. Reads it, as stiff as a board.

TROMPETER

Thank you, candidate *Shum-ger*, er,
Schum, er, um, Joe. Ladies and
gentlemen, we embark today on a
great journey. To take back America,
from those trying to poison it. To
corrupt it. And we can do this by
fighting today's secular mentality.
Returning our Lord's values and
guidance to the home. And to our
schools. By allowing citizens to
defend themselves freely, bearing
arms, without senseless red tape,
and onerous background checks.

Joe is freaked.

TROMPETER

Our fine nation has some of the most
beautiful, pristine land masses in
the world. Untarnished by scars of
an industrial society. It takes
great willpower to preserve such a
luxury.

Joe calms.

TROMPETER

A luxury my friends, we can no longer
afford.

Joe freaks again, as,

TROMPETER

And let me continue, by saying
this...

EXT. CANTON SPORTS CENTER - VACANT DIAMOND - DAY

JOE and SHULMAN stand near a dugout, far from the disbursing
crowd. Joe speaks in a low tone, between stragglers who stop by
for an autograph -- on their baseball, glove, etc.

JOE

Where the hell'd you get this guy? He
doesn't even know my name, let alone
me.

SHULMAN

You don't have to love the man. Just let him help you win. You're pulling from the middle and left. He pulls at the right flank. You think FDR really trusted Truman? Kennedy and LBJ?

A fan gives Joe the new TIME MAGAZINE to sign, opened to the story on him. It draws his scorn as he autographs it.

Joe sees in the distance, Kendra, upset, arguing heatedly with FROST. She stomps off.

SHULMAN

The man delivers votes. He has a huge, loyal following.

JOE

Yeah, in the Vatican. Probably packs a piece, too.

SHULMAN

Just for this trip.

INT. MICHIGAN CAMPAIGN HQ - CONF. ROOM - DAY

FROST works his laptop. Print-outs from major newspapers lay out beside him. JOE and SHULMAN enter, looking ready to travel.

JOE

You wanted to see me?

FROST

Yes, both of you. We dropped five polling points. Very upsetting, given our recent gains. And quite baffling. Until I saw today's batch of clips.

He holds up a newspaper printout. It shows a photo of the POOL HALL FIGHT. The photo credit says NATION ON-LINE NEWS. He shows them the other papers' printouts, one by one, all with the same photo.

Joe looks ill. Shulman, even worse.

FROST

Hold on sports fans. There's more.

He clicks a remote, playing the TV/VCR. Several clips appear from different stations, but all showing the slug, NATION ON-LINE.

It is Joe fighting at the bar. Then the beer bottle shatters on Lerner's head. Frost is boiling.

SHULMAN

Cadwalleder, I can expl--

FROST
You. Say nothing.

JOE
It's my fault--

FROST
You. Even less.
(angrier)
We're in a snapshot culture,
gentlemen. Soundbites. Photos. Info
bits. Without explanation. And from
that comes judgement. Not truth. I
counted on us benefiting from that
process, not being victims of it. Five
God damn points. Gentlemen,
(stares at Shulman)
this will not happen again. Is that
clear? Now. Good luck in Cleveland.

INT. ROCK & ROLL HALL OF FAME (CLEVELAND) - DAY

Large room. Big exhibits. Lake Erie visible through a large window. LAURIE LERNER is taking notes, away from the press corps, as JOE speaks with enthusiasm to a big gathering.

JOE
In the glory days of Motown, guys
sang about their love for "My Girl."
Today, they're all rapping about
their "*ho bitches*." So much anger
now... But take a good look around
this building. There's a lot more
than anger. There's protest, and
love, and real soul. That's the
power! Helps you really enjoy what
life's about, you know? So on
Election Day you can enjoy life, too.
By using your power. Get out there
and vote! Thank you, Cleveland!

The audience roars. SHULMAN leads Joe through the crowd, shaking hands. Lerner trails him. Her hair is different. With bangs.

LERNER
Nice job. The music angle resonates.

JOE
Good. You can write about my record
collection, as I hop from bed to bed.

LERNER
I thought you knew the story's
focus. Sorry.

JOE
Well, me too. For your noggin. Least
it's not black and blue.

LERNER
 (lifts her bangs, showing a
 dark bruise)
 You got a minute?

JOE
 Meet me by the Clinton exhibit.

LERNER
 Clinton? Not that damn saxophone
 again.

INT. ROCK & ROLL HALL OF FAME - FUNKADELIC EXHIBIT - DAY

A GEORGE CLINTON MANNEQUIN. In outrageous clothes and fur. Big dreadlocks. LERNER inspects it, as do some Clinton look-alikes.

JOE walks up with two sodas. One for LERNER. They sit on a bench.

LERNER
 I'm trying to do a follow-up piece.
 Like, on the actual campaign. I
 thought I'd get it in last time. But
 we were interrupted.

JOE
 (hopeful)
 Would mean a lot. That I'm not just,
 you know, some goof from a TV show.

Lerner sees the longing in Joe's face.
 A MAN, 20s, walks by, admiring the Clinton exhibit. Sees Joe.

MAN
 How 'bout the Funkmaster as a
 running mate, Joe. That would get
 you votes.

JOE
 (eyes the garish mannequin)
 Little over the top. Even for me.

MAN
 No way, dude. But you're sure
 getting my vote. First time ever.
 Same for my friends, too.

He wanders off. LERNER takes note of the man's interest. Joe however, is unsettled by his suggestion.

LERNER
 It just came over the wires.
 Williams issued a debate challenge.
 To you, and Harwood.

JOE
 Debate? You're not serious. Was my
 worst class. I hated those file
 cards.

LERNER

Not that kind of debate. You can't use cards.

JOE

Trying to make me feel better?

TV CREWS rush up. For the first time their lights scare Joe.

TV REPORTER #1

Joe. Any comment on today's debate challenge? Early strategies?

TV REPORTER #2

What ground rules would you want?

JOE

Um, not sure.

(gets up, to Laurie)

I'll see you later.

LERNER

Where are you going?

JOE

To study up. Gonna watch West Wing DVDs, what else.

An alarmed SHULMAN arrives, none too soon.

SHULMAN

We have to go, Joe.

Shulman and Joe scamper off, chased by the press corps.

INT. LARGE HOTEL SUITE - DAY

SHULMAN and CRAVENS sit. With JOE, scared out of his wits. A TV is on, muted. In adjacent rooms, staffers are at work.

JOE

D-plus. A lousy D-plus I got in debate class.

CRAVENS

They need it more than we do. We'll delay for a few weeks. We just can't appear like we're stalling.

JOE

But we are stalling.

CRAVENS

No, we're not.

JOE

You just said delay.

CRAVENS

You want to debate them.

JOE
Not really.

SHULMAN
Yes, you do.

JOE
I do? But after the delay.

SHULMAN
No, now. So badly, you can taste it.
On live TV.

CRAVENS
They want it a.s.a.p.

JOE
But we don't.

CRAVENS
Yes, we do.

JOE
Jesus, do we, or don't we?

SHULMAN
We do. But only if it's right.

JOE
If what's right?

CRAVENS
Everything. The format. Location.
The moderator. But they're the ones
being so damn dilatory.

JOE
Dila-what?

SHULMAN
If they'd only stop making these
frivolous demands. You'd debate
today.

JOE
Whoa.

CRAVENS
They're over-complicating a simple
process. You won't be bullied by
some Ivy League debate team
captains.

SHULMAN
Their demands are outlandish. They
are depriving America of an open
forum.

JOE
While I'm doing, what?

SHULMAN
Rehearsing.

JOE
Rehearsing? What, like an actor?

CRAVENS
Like Laurence (**BLEEP**)-ing Olivier.

SHULMAN
But publicly, you say "Bring it on."

On the TV Rachel Dawson appears. A small TATTOO now on her neck.

CRAVENS
Turn that up.

Shulman hits the remote.

DAWSON (ON TV)
The Shmuger camp has been guarded today, long knowing a debate was inevitable. But it also is being reported that Joe is a much more skilled debater than his D-minus high school grade might indicate.

CRAVENS
Minus? I thought it was a D-plus.

JOE
You say tomay-to...

DAWSON (ON TV)
Campaigning in Ohio today, Joe had only a brief comment on his planned strategy.

JOE (ON TV)
To study up. Gonna watch West Wing DVDs, what else.

JOE
A joke! That was a (**BLEEP**)-in joke! Those morons! They call that helping?

CRAVENS
You are not making this easy.

EXT. WESLEY WILLIAMS CAMPAIGN HQ - DAY

"WESLEY WILLIAMS, 60-ish, in a suit, meets with media. The crew-cut man from the posters. Stiff. Savoring the opportunity.

WILLIAMS
Back in law school we used to watch Jeopardy on TV. I even found an occasional test answer from it.
(MORE)

WILLIAMS (cont'd)

Little did I know another program would someday provide far better political preparation. I'm just glad my opponent isn't studying the World Wrestling programs.

(waits for crowd
laughter)

Folks, we're all seeing this candidate for what he is, and not a moment too soon.

EXT. A DOWNTOWN STREET - DAY

On-the-street interviews.

WOMAN, 50S

Yeah, I used to watch The West Wing. A great show. Very educational.

CUT TO:

MALE YUPPIE, 40S

Who has time to read the paper every day, with work. The kids. Besides, I can tell fact from fiction. I'm not an idiot.

CUT TO:

BLACK MAN, 30S

Share a taxi with a brother, and they go diggin' for dirt. You know damn well the other guys watched that show. They just won't admit it.

CUT TO:

MALE INTELLECTUAL

Nobody listens to me. I tell you, it's the end of the world.

(listens to a question)

Yes, I used to watch the West Wing... Biggest thing I learned? I didn't know Rob Lowe could act.

INT. TNA STUDIO - NEWS SET - DAY

A giant map of the U.S. is displayed. All states are evenly split up in red, white or blue, signifying which candidate leads.

TOPPER QUEST stands anchoring. Wearing a black, skin tight t-shirt. Black jeans. He points to a "LEADER BOARD" with poll results.

TOPPER QUEST

The latest Gallup poll is out, and aside from the empathy to Joe Shmuger's "rumored" reliance on the West Wing TV show, the bigger news is which states each candidate now leads. With three weeks to go it is still very close with Senator Harwood and Governor Williams tied with 33% each, Joe Shmuger up two points at 29%, and 5% still undecided. This, with a slight margin of error of only 25%. Similar polling results were announced by ABC News-Washington Post, CNN-USA Today, and TNA's own survey with O.K. Magazine. It also paints a good picture of where the most crucial electoral votes lie. With this current trend, it's likely one sole state will decide the entire race, similar to races of recent past. This time though, it looks to be none other than

(points to map)

Rhode Island. Yes, that tiny, but densely populated state, with its now crucial four electoral votes, will decide this presidential horse race. Right now the three camps are hashing out terms of the only debate to take place, also in Rhode Island, indicating if nothing else, a big surge in DVD sales for The West Wing.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

JOE is interviewed by a TNA TV REPORTER. A neon "TOPLESS BAR" sign is seen over his shoulder.

JOE

I'll debate today. Any time, any place. If they'd only stop their frivolous demands. But I won't be bullied by some Ivy League debate captains. They're the ones depriving America of a forum to decide. Being so damn, *dietary*.

The reporter cuts it. Pockets his microphone.

TV REPORTER #4

Thanks, Joe. They'll probably break into the World Series for this. No biggie. It's only in extra innings.

The news crew departs. Joe is relieved. But terrified. He sees the "TOPLESS BAR" sign. Barely resisting, he trots in.

INT. CPR - WAR ROOM - DAY

A LARGE MAP of Rhode Island is now on the wall. CRAVENS is pissed, reviewing materials with SHULMAN. He checks his watch.

CRAVENS

You should have stayed with him if he was so shaky. Christ. With this debate, his ego's not brittle enough?

SHULMAN

I thought he was o.k.

(reads a pamphlet)

"With just five counties, the state of Rhode Island is only thirty seven miles wide. With four hundred miles of coastline, water separates six different land blocks."

(stops reading)

This'll be a nightmare.

JOE (O.S.)

Uh-oh. Is little Siggy afraid of nightmares?

Joe stumbles in, drunk.

CRAVENS

Where the hell have you been?

JOE

Had a few shots with lunch. I just forgot the lunch.

CRAVENS

You're drunk.

SHULMAN

Kendra!

KENDRA (O.S.)

Coffee's on its way.

CRAVENS

And water!

(to Joe)

Christ.

JOE

Nah, call me Joe.

CRAVENS

I saw the strip joint on TV. You had to drink yourself silly, too?

JOE

Oh, Wally. I was silly long before I went drinking.

SHULMAN

You can ask forgiveness at the Providence church rally.

Shulman packs his briefcase. Kendra runs in with a big coffee mug, and water. Joe takes the bottle, winking at her. But she ignores it.

SHULMAN
(grabs the coffee)
He'll drink it on the way.

CRAVENS
Our luck, you get sauced the day before Secret Service protection starts. Frost and I will meet you at the airport.

Shulman leads Joe toward the door.

CRAVENS
And for God's sakes, don't let anyone see him like that.

JOE
(exiting, announcing)
By executive order, everyone close your eyes!
(O.S.)
See ya, Wally. Don't forget to bring the Beaver.

EXT. CPR HEADQUARTERS - DAY

An UNMARKED VAN pulls up. SHULMAN steps out, waving to TWO STAFFERS to bring Joe out from the building. JOE is whistling the "LEAVE IT TO BEAVER" THEME.

PASSERS BY see Joe at the van. They get excited, calling to him. One is a GORGEOUS GIRL that Joe shoots a wink to.

JOE
(mimicking Beaver Cleaver)
Gee, Wally. What does "ballot stuffing" mean?

SHULMAN
Get him in here!

The staffers throw Joe inside the van. Jump in with him.

JOE
(looking at the cute girl)
But, I didn't say bye to the Beaver.

The van's doors shut. It speeds off.

INT. CAMPAIGN JET - REAR CABIN - DAY (FLYING)

JOE sits with FROST, like a child in the principal's office. While contrite, he admires the private plane. He drinks coffee, which is starting to rip up his stomach.

FROST
Very upsetting. Strippers. Alcohol.
Not the behavior of a president.

JOE
No, more like a senator.

FROST
I'm serious. We're just able to rent
this plane. And I will not see our
efforts ruined by childish fears.

JOE
I'll be fine, Cad, really. Anyone
call you Caddy? Or, do you need a
tee time? I'm kidding. C'mon. The
party needs a sense-a humor.

FROST
Joe. I'm considering Trompeter to do
the debate.

That sobers him up.

FROST
Today only bolsters that opinion.
Look what just the idea of debating
does to you.

JOE
I'll look like a brainless sap.

FROST
Better than a brainless candidate if
you get whipped.

JOE
We don't even agree on stuff.

FROST
He's a pro. Like those hockey
metaphors you love? A team player.

JOE
Which team, the Detroit Right Wings?

FROST
You're still our man. The voters know
debating isn't your forte. Let's just
concentrate on Rhode Island. For
which you'll need your best Christian
face.

Frost gets up. Stalks up to the front section.

Joe sits alone. Full of doubt. His stomach growls. Sensing
trouble, he dashes to the rest room.

INT. CAMPAIGN JET - FRONT SECTION - DAY (FLYING)

FROST sits next to CRAVENS and SHULMAN.

FROST
I want Willis on stand-by. One more screw-up, and he's in. But I approve all spoken positions.

SHULMAN
What about Joe?

FROST
(icily)
That, my friend, is your job.

Shulman realizes the challenge.

INT. CHURCH - SCHOOL CORRIDOR (PROVIDENCE, R.I.) - DUSK

CRAVENS paces as SHULMAN stands against a wall. Checks his watch. Nearby is a MENS ROOM DOOR.

CRAVENS
He already got sick on the plane.
What's he doing in there?

INT. CHURCH - MEN'S ROOM STALL (PROVIDENCE CHURCH) - DUSK

JOE
(on cell phone)
I'm thinking.

He is sitting on a toilet.

JOE
If it's worth it. Or screw it, let Trompeter do it. Give him the throne.
(realizes the toilet pun)

INT. TIME MAGAZINE - LAURIE LERNER'S CUBICLE - DUSK - INTERCUT

LERNER is on the phone.

LERNER
They can't showcase him too much.
You're the main act.

JOE
I'm still trying to accept that.

LERNER
You said you're a politician. Comes with the territory.

JOE
Dodging that territory was the point of this whole thing.

LERNER

Uh-oh. Is that naivete, from Joe Shmuger?

JOE

Don't tell anybody.

LERNER

Ok. But only if you, sir, take this chance to show us that rare candidate who is truly perspicacious.

JOE

(stumped at the word)

Um. Really?

LERNER

You bet. And I'll write it, too, if they let me.

JOE

Um. Thanks.

Both hang up. Lerner shows a creeping respect for him.

INT. CHURCH - SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

SHULMAN and CRAVENS are waiting. Joe races past. To the classrooms.

SHULMAN

Now what?

INT. CHURCH - CLASSROOM - DUSK

Empty, as JOE bursts in. He scans a bookshelf. Finds a DICTIONARY. Leaps through the pages.

JOE

Perspicacious. Perspica...

(reads)

"Keen mental perception or discernment."

(then)

No shit.

INT. CHURCH - MAIN CHAPEL - DUSK

A big crowd. Warm, but not rabid. A LARGE PRESS CORPS at the rear, near SHULMAN and CRAVENS. FROST sits in a pew. JOE, at the pulpit.

JOE

I'll admit it. For years I didn't think God existed at all. Young kid, whose hard working pop dies for no reason except, "It was his time?" Pretty hard to swallow, you know? Like, what do you tell families of murder victims? Or terrorism, like 9/11? Or the Holocaust?

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)

When God's looking down on this world, shaking his head, thinkin', "You just don't get it, do you." Man, so cruel to his fellow man. So, how does God tell us these things? What are the signs? I always liked the one about the religious woman, caught in a giant storm. She was a churchgoer. God fearing. Flood waters were rising on her house, until a neighbor comes to rescue her. She refuses help, telling him, "My faith is in God. He will save me." A second neighbor comes. Then a third, as the flood reaches her roof. She's stranded. "No thank you. God will save me, I have faith." So, the rains wash away her house, and she drowns. Then, she's at heaven's gate. And she tells God how hurt she is. "Lord. You had my undying faith, and when I needed you most, you let me down. Why?" And God says, "What are you talkin' about, I sent three people for ya."

Much laughter. Followed by applause. A WOMAN PARISHIONER raises her hand with a question.

WOMAN PARISHIONER

Then, don't you think it's time we look for guidance from Him, and put prayer in our schools?

An agreeing rumble in the audience. Frost looks on, hopeful.

JOE

To me, it's always been cut and dried. And should be settled once and for all.

The audience nods.

JOE

I'm no lawyer. Thank God. *Heh*, no pun intended. But the First Amendment says in black and white, church and state are to be kept separate.

The room hushes. Frost is angered. Joe pulls out his "WE THE PEOPLE" pamphlet.

JOE

(reading pamphlet)

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

(stops reading)

Sounds clear to me. Why keep throwing away millions of dollars on lawyers?

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)

Can we all use spiritual guidance from God? Heck, yeah. But it's also your right to say, "Thanks, but it's not for me. I don't believe in it." The founding fathers were smarter than all of us. I understand the need to pray. And when it's strong, I look at this precious little book, and pray any time I want. And, to any God I want. I wish more people would, too.

(then)

Thank you, Providence. God bless you all! And I mean that!

Applause is sporadic and uncertain. Some want to join, hesitating.

INT. CHURCH - CORRIDOR - DUSK

SHULMAN and JOE walk briskly.

SHULMAN

Wow. Call that a bullet dodged. You enjoy walking through flames? Man, they hardly knew what hit 'em. Pal, you were a veteran politician in there.

Joe stops. Pissed.

SHULMAN

What?

JOE

That's terrible.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - EVENING

Parishioners disperse as JOE signs a final autograph. He sees his TNA VAN. From nowhere, FROST joins him.

FROST

Joe. Do you know the phrase, "preaching to the choir?" Ever stop to think what it means? You say you want to debate, then give me a perfect reason not to let you. Denouncing prayer in school, at a church appearance? Admitting atheism? In Providence?

JOE

But Sig was saying--

FROST

I am party chairman, not Sig Shulman. Look, I realize you've had little in higher education. But don't telegraph it to two hundred million Christians.

Frost stomps off. Joe stands there. Flummoxed.

INT. PRIVATE SOCIAL CLUB - SMOKING LOUNGE - NIGHT

Cushy leather and oak. Dark ominous lighting. In a corner sit FROST, CRAVENS and TROMPETER. Indulging in brandy, and log-size cigars.

TROMPETER

You are patient, Frost. But how many more gaffes can you aff--, can we, afford? You have me. Christ, use me.

FROST

Where appropriate, Willis, trust me. Let Joe do the entertaining. It's what he's good at.

TROMPETER

And the debate?

FROST

(a consternating sigh)
Shulman is convinced if we switch now, it'll raise a red flag. But if Joe drops another bomb, we will pull the trigger. Look, if we follow his swath as planned, Willis, you'll soon be setting policy from the Oval Office. With Joe as the good PR ambassador we envision.

TROMPETER

The man dresses like he sleeps in the park.

Frost and Cravens hide their agreement.

INT. TIME MAGAZINE - EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

LERNER appeals to her EDITOR, 40s. Cynical. His tie knotted tightly.

EDITOR

But you just did a piece on Shmuger. You scooped People Magazine for Chrisakes, our sister publication. They're pissed.

LERNER

But he's gaining steadily. Williams and Howard are scared to death of him.

EDITOR

He's a game show contestant! Christ, has everyone lost their God damn minds?! We're supposed to guard against frivolity, not feed the addiction.

(then)

Lerner, do you like this guy?

LERNER
Just the story. Honest.

EDITOR
(thinking a beat)
If he does well in the debate...
maybe, we'll talk. That's a big
'if.' And a bigger 'maybe.'

Lerner, thrilled, skips out.

SERIES OF SHOTS - JOE'S WHISTLE STOP TOUR
SUGGESTED MUSIC: "Mystery Train" by The Band

NOTE: FROM THIS POINT ON, SECRET SERVICE AGENTS ACCOMPANY JOE.
In near proximity, but never obtrusive to private moments.

TRAIN STATION: A sign: "JOE'S TNA/RHODE ISLAND WHISTLE STOP
TOUR." JOE shakes hands with crowd members. Signing autographs.
Holding babies like an old pro, as cameras catch it all. He
boards the caboose with SHULMAN, where they stand on the deck.

JOE sees TROMPETER across the tracks, talking to reporters.
They hang on his every word, taking notes. Joe is envious, as
the train starts moving. KENDRA and FROST stay with Trompeter,
discomforting Joe even more.

RHODE ISLAND SHORELINE: JOE'S TRAIN slowly passes, as JOE waves
to a crowd. SHULMAN next to him. Crossing a bridge, Joe waves
to some swimmers. He is struck by an urge. And then jumps into
the water, fully clothed. The crowd erupts. The train stops
suddenly, almost jolting Shulman off of the deck.

TRAIN SUITE: JOE reads one of many books stacked on the table, as
SHULMAN walks out the door. Joe discards the book. Picks up a
MAXIM MAGAZINE. Then, on the TV, he sees Trompeter being
interviewed.

RHODE ISLAND FISHING DOCKS: In BG, the train is stopped. In the
FG, a swarm of FISHERMEN root Joe on, as he struggles to reel in a
giant fish. News cameras shoot away.

NATION ON-LINE NEWSROOM: MITCH STONE and EDITORS track the
campaigns on a Rhode Island map. All stunned as they post new poll
numbers.

HARWOOD - 35%
WILLIAMS - 33%
SHMUGER - 31%.

Stone is handed a "GLOBAL MEDIA PRESS RELEASE:"
"TNA RATINGS UP 60% DURING SHMUGER CAMPAIGN; GLOBAL'S STOCK SURGE
IS TOAST OF WALL STREET."

IN TRAIN LOUNGE: JOE reads a book: "DEBATING FOR DUMMIES."

TRAIN SUITE: SHULMAN enters. Sees a table full of homework, but no
Joe. He finds JOE in the next room. Playing a video game with the
BOY from the TV spot earlier. The kid loses. Pays Joe \$20.

PROVIDENCE TRAIN STATION: Joe's train is parked. TROMPETER stands with JOE on the caboose deck, addressing the large crowd.

TROMPETER

The good people of Providence welcome you back, Joe. And with the debate two days away, we pray the Almighty is on your side, paving the path to victory.

The crowd responds strongly. Trompeter clasps Joe's hand, and raises it high. The crowd goes nuts.

PROVIDENCE TV STATION: JOE and TROMPETER are interviewed by a NEWS ANCHOR. Trompeter hogs every answer, frustrating Joe.

In the control room are SWEET, ZAYKO and SILVER. Silver holds the press release about Global's profits. They share a champagne toast.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. PROVIDENCE TV STATION - DAY

JOE, upset, emerges with TROMPETER, heading to the parking lot.

JOE

What the hell you doin'? I didn't get a word in edgewise.

TROMPETER

Joe, we're exploiting our strengths. I've dazzled journalists for thirty years. You're expert at fishing, and fun campaign requisites. Keep it up. You're doing swell.

Trompeter rushes off, leaving Joe. He is greeted by waiting press, plus FROST, CRAVENS and KENDRA. They whisk him into a BUS as he answers questions. The door shuts quickly. The bus zooms off.

Joe, alone, is met by SHULMAN. With a small compact rental car.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

A TV is on with muted sound. A clock reads **1:25am**. JOE is studying, as SHULMAN stacks material for him, filled with Post-It notes.

Joe is fatigued. Overwhelmed. He puts down a book. Takes a beer from the mini-bar. Props his feet up.

SHULMAN

Nuh-uh. No beer break. The debate's tomorrow Pops, and you're not ready.

JOE

You know... Maybe Trompeter should do it. He is the veteran.

SHULMAN

Don't even think about going there.
This is the easy part. Come
Inauguration Day, you'll be working
your ass off 24/7. You've got to step
up, mister. Start applying yourself.

JOE

Simple as that.

SHULMAN

Hey. This isn't some pissant game
show, buddy boy. I stuck my neck out
for you. We all did. So don't bring
that poor forklift driver crap now.
You're beat. Maybe a little scared.
Fine. I'll get some coffee because
we could go all night.

Shulman stalks off. Out the door.

JOE

A little scared?

He picks up a Sports Illustrated. The phone rings. He answers.

JOE

(sullen)

Joe the schmo.

INT. LEON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - INTERCUT

LEON, on the phone, watches women's aerobics on TV. Halfway
through a wine bottle.

LEON

Christ, who died?

JOE

Hey, Paw Paw.

LEON

Thought you'd be walkin' on air
after all the catchin' up you did.

JOE

Oh, sure, I could polish the
frickin' space station. This
debate's got me all twisted like a
Red Vine. Do you think I'm in over
my head?

LEON

Uh-oh. Someone's grabbed your sack
with pliers. You gotta remember -
these guys are all professional poli-
dicks. You can still shuck it, Joe.
Come on home, back to Big Wheel.

(sips his wine)

JOE

You drinkin' at this hour? Jesus.

(then)

I'm in too deep, man. And... Laurie Lerner said I should stick with it.

LEON

Well, if the big magazine writer says so-- Geez, piss on me. Sutton would give you your job back. You could still win shop steward.

JOE

Steward, *shmeward*. Ain't the same, Paw Paw. Can't you understand? I'm past that now. I'm a perspicacious kind of guy.

LEON

Perspiration-who? The hell is that?

JOE

It means perceptive.

LEON

Well, shit, then say that! You some snooty Ivy Leaguer? Can't talk normal?

JOE

I need a better vocabulary than a warehouseman. I'm gettin' advice from a guy, can't stay one foot from the bottle.

LEON

A measly warehouseman? What, you're too good now for union grunts, that it? Flyin' all around, livin' the Miller high life. Whatcha really tryin' to say?

JOE

Are you goofy? I've been sayin' all along, you're a **(BLEEP)**-in wino. Get help already! Even your name's just a fun excuse for denial. Paw Paw. Like I'm in Mayberry -- Little Opie with a stutter. Jesus H. Christ!

LEON

So, why ya wastin' time on a lousy wino?! Oh, that's right. So you can't work on your debate. So when your ass gets tarred, you can say you were helpin' your old pal, the drunk. Like all your other excuses. Jesus H. Christ is right! That's why you never made foreman. Sutton's right. Takes more than a little effort, and that ain't your M.O. Got some big deas.

(MORE)

LEON (cont'd)
 But no follow-up. Good luck tomorrow,
 Joey boy, 'cause Jesus H. Christ,
 you're gonna (**BLEEP**)-in need it!

He slams down the phone. As does Joe. Now depressed, for a beat.
 He flips through TV channels. Comes to a rerun of "The West Wing."

JOE
 And (**BLEEP**) you, too!

He turns off the TV. There is a knock at the door.

YOUNG WAITER (O.S.)
 Room service.

Joe lets in a YOUNG WAITER. Pushing a cart with FIVE COFFEE
 POTS and ONLY ONE CUP & SAUCER. Both see the absurdity.

YOUNG WAITER
 The order said only one cup &
 saucer. Should there be more?

JOE
 (signing the check)
 Can't O.D. if I start sharin', can
 I.

YOUNG WAITER
 I saw you at church last week. You
 were great.

JOE
 Yeah, right. Took a wild crowd,
 turned 'em into mutes.

YOUNG WAITER
 Lot of us thought so. But couldn't
 say, with the pastor there. We hoped
 you would stick around. Maybe inspire
 us to step up.

JOE
 Step up. Sure. Guess we all got
 fears, huh, kid.

The waiter scurries out. Joe ponders the coffee pots. Pours a
 cup and sips. He flips through the Sports Illustrated. Stops.
 Sighs.

He drops the magazine for a government report. Skimming
 curiously. Then, reading intently. He drinks down the cup. Pours
 another one.

MONTAGE - JOE STUDYING

Joe begins real studying. Jotting notes. Highlighting. Drinking
 coffee. Papers and books opened, strewn about. Sipping.

SHULMAN and CRAVENS grill Joe with questions.

Shulman sleeps, as Joe and Cravens work.

Cravens sleeps, while Joe and Shulman work. Joe chugs cup after cup.

Shulman and Cravens sleep, as Joe studies solo.

Joe, alone, still studies. Pours and chugs another cup.

END MONTAGE

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

The coffee pots are EMPTY. Some, tipped over. Joe jots notes, all jittery as if in detox. He stops. Sprints to the bathroom, O.S.

AUDIO: Of peeing. Then a FLUSH.
Joe walks back from the bathroom. Stops. Sensing. Feels his stomach. He runs back in, shutting the door. Utters a LOUD MOAN.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM STAGE - NIGHT

JOE stands at a podium in a sport shirt and blazer. Mid-debate. Very jittery. His stomach growls, as he lets out a low moan. He also aches to pee.

In the audience, TNA's SWEET and ZAYKO are seated.
A woman MODERATOR, 40s, a real journalist, sits center stage.

GOVERNOR WILLIAMS is speaking. SENATOR HARWOOD watches Williams. Then notices Joe in huge discomfort.

WILLIAMS

This country was founded on free enterprise. The most efficient economic system known to man. Free markets do work. Regulation only impedes innovation.

MODERATOR

Thank you, Governor Williams. Mr. Shmuger, you have ninety seconds to rebut.

Joe is in severe stomach pain. Barely listening.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

FROST, CRAVENS and SHULMAN watch on a monitor. MORT SILVER struts in like a proud papa. He watches the stage from the wings.

INT. AUDITORIUM STAGE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The moderator waits for Joe.

MODERATOR

Mr. Shmuger...

Joe's stomach growls violently, which the microphone picks up.

JOE

(a slight moan)

Free markets. Right. Uh, all due respect, Governor. That's a crock. I got one word for you. Enron. You want another? The mortgage crisis. Hello! Greed, my friends, is not good. Greed sucks. Big time. And we're all guilty. CEOs do anything to jack up the stock price, legal or not. Ethical or not. And stockholders look the other way, long as the gravy train's runnin'. How many times we gotta get screwed? Didn't we learn anything from history?

The audience applauds. Joe squirms in more stomach pain.

JOE

Deregulation. Like the banks? Or, the broadcasters? More control into fewer and fewer hands? Talk about the fox guarding the hen house. We're not talkin' just any product, like cars or can openers. These are ideas, folks. Persuasive messages, that do nothin' but make you watch or buy their other messages. TV. Radio. The news. Only thing that counts to them is ratings. How can they tell us what's important when they're too busy sellin' to us?!

Huge applause from the audience. Sweet and Zayko are in shock...

INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

...as are Frost, Cravens and Shulman. Silver marches up to them.

SILVER

Does he have cancer of the cerebrum?
Or, is it you brainiacs?

(into the camera)

Get that mother-(BLEEP)-ing thing
out of my face!

(to Frost)

Another stunt like that, I'll pull
the plug so fast your head'll spin
like a new dreidel. You got that?

He storms off.

INT. AUDITORIUM STAGE - NIGHT

MODERATOR

Senator Harwood. With many opinions on the war on drugs, you were quoted as endorsing the use of marijuana for cancer patients, and other medical reasons. Is that an official element of your drug policy, if elected?

Joe emits a stomach moan. Behind the podium, he holds his crotch.

HARWOOD

I do not, nor have I ever condoned the use of drugs. Let me be very clear. It is a scourge on this nation, and I will do whatever is necessary to address the problem.

The moderator leans in, waiting for more. It doesn't come.

JOE

That it?

With no response, the moderator nods to Joe.

JOE

Senator, that's about as clear as quicksand. You know the 1920s had a drug war. Called Prohibition. Back then politicians had the balls, er, uh, the guts to admit it was a bust. Why can't we do that today? That's my question.

Younger audience members erupt. Some chants of "Go Joe, go." Giving him some confidence.

INT. AUDITORIUM BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

FROST leans in to Shulman.

FROST

What's a dreidel?

INT. AUDITORIUM STAGE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

MODERATOR

Governor Williams?

WILLIAMS

A question, yes, but also not an answer. We have made progress. Arrests are at an all-time high. Shipments are seized regularly. Convictions are up.

JOE

So are drug murders by kids, younger and younger. Gang violence. Prisons, a mess, and packed like sardines. Rehabilitation's just a wet dream.

MODERATOR

Mr. Shmuger.

JOE

I can't rebut the rebuttal?

MODERATOR

A-hem. Back to the economy. Mr. Shmuger, this past recession has again sparked debate on government's role. To provide stimulus indirectly through tax cuts, or directly by increased federal spending and expansion. Do you endorse the Keynesian economic theories?

Joe holds his stomach, in pain. Thinking. Trying to remember.

JOE

Keynesian. Keynes. Oh yeah! Keynes. He was a sharp guy, but also kind of nutty. His ideas worked, until he started to lose it. He knew business, though.

Joe accidentally bites his tongue. Wincing in even more pain. Holding his mouth.

MODERATOR

But as an advocate of fiscal discipline, can you endorse spending like he did, even during large deficits.

JOE

(in a heavy lisp)
Spending's ok, but not too much.
Sorry, I bit my tongue!
(sees that no one understands)
I bit my tongue!

He sticks out his bloody tongue, drawing a collective "EWWW" from the audience.

JOE

I don't know about a deficit. He was loaded as hell, but he spent it all.

MODERATOR

I'm not sure I understand. When Keynes himself was spending?

JOE
 (confident, but in agony)
 When he built that castle. Bought
 all that art. Before he was losing
 money.

MODERATOR
 Sir, that was never discussed in his
 books. Unless, you mean--

JOE
 Not the book. But the movie.
 (in clearer speech)
 He lost the election. Then went
 loopy.

MODERATOR
 The election? Keynes?

JOE
 (in severe stomach pain)
 Yeah. Charlie Kanes. You know. With
 what's his name.

All are very curious.

JOE
 The fat guy with the beard. Orson
 Wells. Yeah, Citizen Kanes! An awesome
 flick.
 (in unbearable stomach
 pain)

MODERATOR
 Mr. Shmuger, I'm referring to *The
 General Theory of Employment,
 Interest and Money*, by famed
 economist, John Maynard Keynes.

Joe wants to vanish. A long beat. Then, out pops a long, loud
 FART.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - THE NEXT MORNING

SHULMAN stands outside JOE'S bathroom door.

SHULMAN
 Joe... Joe. C'mon out. The public will
 sympathize. Hell, with five pots of
 coffee, they'd think Keynes was Abel's
 brother. C'mon. You have a whole state
 to cover.

JOE (O.S.)
 No. I'm sick.

SHULMAN
 An ailing ego, maybe. I'm telling
 you, it's fine. You're impervious.

JOE (O.S.)
Oh, great. I'm not running for king.

SHULMAN
Not imperial. Impervious. Means
you're bulletproof.

JOE (O.S.)
See! I'm a frickin' idiot!

SHULMAN
You're learning, Joe. You said
yourself, never stop learning.
C'mon... An anxious public eagerly
awaits your next response.

O.S., the toilet flushes.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - MORNING

JOE trudges slowly, reading a newspaper. Swigging Pepto-Bismol.

Ahead, an OLD WAITER pushes a loaded room service cart. A bad
wheel sticks, making him struggle. Joe notices. Quickly helps him
push.

JOE
Here, let me help.

OLD WAITER
Thanks. Just going to Six-Eleven.

JOE
That's Trompeter's room. Hope he
ordered some personality.

The waiter steps ahead of Joe and the cart. Knocks on the door.

JOE
(calling into room)
Meal time, Willis. You can't drag
your butt downstairs?

Joe pushes the cart to the door. It is opened. By KENDRA.
Wearing a robe. A running shower is heard in the B.G.

JOE
Hey. What, d'you guys switch rooms?

He sees inside. Draped over a chair is a man's suit jacket. And
a PAISLEY NECKTIE. Joe darts off.

KENDRA
Joe. It's not what you--

EXT. PROVIDENCE HOTEL - MORNING

A large FLATBED TRUCK is out front, swathed in TNA-campaign
signage. Other vehicles behind it. SHULMAN, FROST and CRAVENS
stand nearby. JOE marches out of the lobby.

JOE
 Let's roll. Got a whole damn state
 to cover.
 (sotto)
 Stuff's poison, all right.

FROST
 I need to talk to you, first. You
 can't leave without Willis.

JOE
 (BLEEP)-in' watch me.
 (leaps onto the flatbed;
 then, to Shulman)
 Now!

Frost gives an approving nod to Shulman, who gets in the
 truck's passenger seat. The DRIVER starts it up. It takes off,
 with the caravan behind it. A loaded PRESS BUS joins in.

EXT. URBAN STREET CORNER (PROVIDENCE) - MORNING

Joe stands in the flatbed, which is parked, as he address a
 crowd. Obviously troubled.

JOE
 What is a leader anyway? Someone who
 leads, and acts fast? Or waits for a
 damn poll result? Sure, he should
 listen to the people. But sometimes the
 people are plain wrong. Hell, you could
 train a baboon to follow an opinion
 poll!

The crowd goes wild.

EXT. DIFFERENT STREET CORNER (JAMESTOWN, RI) - MORNING

HARWOOD, in a dark suit, reads from what is a visible GALLUP
 POLL printout. Speaking to a modest crowd. Staffers look on,
 hopeful. Near them is a big sign that reads: "JAMESTOWN CITY
LIMITS."

HARWOOD
 Americans want efficient government,
 not big government. They want better
 schools. Full employment. Safer
 streets, here in the city of, Newport.

His staffers cringe.

HARWOOD
 And even funding of the arts. So our
 children can differentiate between a
 great actor like Orson Wells, and an
 economist like John Maynard Keynes.

He and the crowd all laugh.

HARWOOD
 Thank you, people of,
 (glances down, reading)
 Pawtucket.

EXT. PROVIDENCE STREET - DAY

JOE speaks from the flatbed, as the caravan moves at a crawl.
 Passing curb-side fans.

JOE
 We can't just sit back on cruise
 control. Someone's gotta make sure no
 one's sleeping around, er, sleeping at
 the wheel. People bitch how bad things
 are, but then you ask 'em, "*Did you
 vote? Did you call your Congressman?*"
 'Course not. The biggest enemy of
 democracy isn't terrorism. It's
 apathy. It takes hard work, folks.
 Instead of stupid crap like suing fast
 food joints 'cause we're fat. We gotta
 all step up. And the time to do it is
 now!

The people roar. Some chants of "Yeah, Step up!" ring out. Joe
 hears those familiar words.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET CORNER (RHODE ISLAND) - DAY

GOV. WILLIAMS mingles with a crowd. His campaign signage has many
 photos of himself. Plus, a PICTURE OF ORSON WELLS as Citizen Kane.
 The signage copy reads: "*Real leaders are fact, not fiction.*"

He stops hand-shaking, right by his limo. Then addresses the
 crowd.

WILLIAMS
 I just wonder where this candidate's
 ideals come from. The movie page? TV
 Guide? Have we strayed that far from
 objective news sources like Rush
 Limbaugh or Sean Hannity? After all,
 this is an election.

EXT. PROVIDENCE STREET CORNER - DAY

JOE stands in front of the flatbed, addressing a larger crowd.
 He sees KENDRA approaching in the distance. Fueling his fire.

JOE
 Sometimes we gotta get tough with our
 foreign allies. Ask if they're really
 our friends. Like in any
 relationship. Are they real lovers,
 or are we just some cheap, one night
 trick?!

The crowd erupts.

JOE

They may seduce us, with gifts, or
trade. Maybe blow in our ear,
wanting to be with a winner. But do
they stab us in the back with one
hand, while jerking us off with the
other?

The crowd is shocked.

JOE

I mean, uh, uh, I'm just mad, that's
all. What about you?!

The crowd erupts. Joe hops onto the truck, and it drives off.

MONTAGE - THE THREE CAMPAIGN CARAVANS

The campaigns hit various Rhode Island locales. City and
countryside. Inland areas and coastline. Indoor venues and
outdoor.

GOVERNOR WILLIAMS, in a LIMO, leads his caravan. With the poster
of ORSON WELLS and the same slogan: *Real leaders are fact, not
fiction.*

HARWOOD, in a MINI-VAN, leads his caravan. Featuring a big
poster of MARTIN SHEEN from the "West Wing." With the slogan:
"Television is not a textbook."

A TNA NEWSCAST, has TOPPER QUEST charting the three campaigns
on a map of Rhode Island. All heading straight for Providence.

DOWNTOWN PROVIDENCE: The three caravans creep slowly toward
KENNEDY PLAZA. Each in a parade route lined with followers.

LAURIE LERNER, at her desk, watches the three caravans on TV.

END MONTAGE

EXT. KENNEDY PLAZA (DOWNTOWN PROVIDENCE) - DAY

JOE'S FLATBED and his followers enter the plaza at slow speed.

HARWOOD'S CARAVAN enters slowly from another street. The
mocking MARTIN SHEEN sign in full view.

WILLIAMS' CARAVAN creeps in. With its mocking CITIZEN KANE
POSTER.

JOE, from his flatbed, sees the other campaigns' signs mocking
him. Angering him. The caravans and their crowds all converge
in the square, blocking all other traffic.

The Williams LIMO and Harwood MINIVAN have no room to maneuver.
They veer to miss each other, and both CRASH into the FLATBED -
throwing Joe head first into his truck's gating.

The three campaign crowds merge into a big hive-like swarm.

Joe shakes off the blow to his head. He leaps off the truck, smack into an intimidating collage of Martin Sheen and Orson Wells.

The DRIVERS from the other two lead vehicles rush out, checking the damage. Both are mid 20s. Burly. The three men are quickly trailed by their respective mobs, falling in behind them.

JOE

Who's driving, you or your leader dogs? You almost knocked me out.

HARWOOD'S DRIVER

(to Williams' driver)

Oh, we wouldn't want that. Joe here might miss another reality show calling him.

In the distance, Joe sees KENDRA approaching. Stirring his ire more. SHULMAN rushes up to peace-keep.

SHULMAN

Fellas. Why don't we just exchange insurance info. Be on our way.

WILLIAMS' DRIVER

Yeah. American Idol. He can be the singing dunce.

JOE

Hey! Stevie Wonder. You watch your ass.

SHULMAN

Easy, Joe. We don't want another fight.

WILLIAMS' DRIVER

Yeah, Joe, fighting is bad. Although farting is sure ok. You could probably win that show, "Who cut the cheese?"

HARWOOD'S DRIVER

Grand prize is an economics course. From Charles Foster Keynes. *Hah-hah.*

The two drivers crack up. Til Joe pushes them.

JOE

I said watch it, asshole!

The drivers shove Joe back, hard, into a FIRE HYDRANT, banging his bad knee. He stumbles. Williams' Driver kicks the knee, sending Joe into throbbing agony. Replaced by commensurate anger.

SHULMAN

No, don't, Joe!

Joe punches each driver. The three entourages join in. And the brawl is on. Shulman jumps in. Then, the Secret Service. And the mob of followers. Local and state police.

SUGGESTED MUSIC: "Trouble Brother" by Robert Bradley.

Joe, limping, does fine, decking anyone in his path. Shulman however, is getting clobbered.

The TWO DRIVERS pin Joe against the flatbed, hitting him. Joe then lifts a truck gating from its sockets, and clobbers them on the head with it.

The swarm of people is in total pandemonium.

INT. TIME MAGAZINE - LERNER'S CUBICLE - DAY

LERNER and her EDITOR watch the giant brawl on TV. In disbelief.

EDITOR

You were right. They are scared of him. He's beating the shit out of everyone. You can do that TV piece now. On Alex Trebek. You like game shows.

He stalks off. She is crushed. Watching the insanity.

INT. CAMPAIGN HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

SHULMAN puts a new ice pack on his swollen eye. A clock reads **1:40am**. CRAVENS and FROST watch over him for a beat. A SECRET SERVICE AGENT on the periphery.

FROST

Incredible. Just incomprehensible. What did we say about fighting? I'm at a complete loss for words.

JOE (O.S.)

You can have two of mine.

JOE limps in. Holding one ice pack on his head. Another one is wrapped around his knee.

JOE

I quit.

FROST

Joe.

JOE

Don't "Joe" me.

(to the Secret Service agent)
They were a big help. Sure, you'll take a bullet for me, but for a pop in the mouth, you're not so quick.

(reflecting)

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)
 You know, I've always been a funny
 guy. Just never a joke. Until now.

SHULMAN
 Let's not rush to judgment, just
 because of a small setback.

JOE
 Small? Last setback this small they
 were sweeping ice chips off the
 Titanic. Time to face facts, guys. I
 ain't your man.

A pall of doom falls over the room. Reluctantly, they are all
 accepting their fate. Joe's cell phone rings. He answers.

JOE
 Joe the shmuck.

INT. LAURIE LERNER'S HOME - NIGHT - INTERCUT

LERNER, at her computer, talks on the phone.

LERNER
 Hi, it's Lerner. Um. About that
 follow-up piece. It's not good news.
 (hearing Joe's silence)
 I'm sorry, Joe. I still have an idea
 tho--

JOE
 Forget it... But thanks.

They hang up. Lerner ponders for a beat. Then looks at her
 computer. A news story draws her attention.
 Headlined: "VOTER TURNOUT PROJECTING A RECORD HIGH."

In the suite, Joe and the other three drip in despair. No one
 speaks for a couple long beats.

A STAFFER strolls in. Carrying copies of the WASHINGTON POST.

STAFFER
 Bulldog edition just came in.

He sets them on a table. Strolls out.

The headline screams: "**ONE TOUGH JOE! SHMUGER FRONT RUNNER
 AFTER PROVIDENCE MELEE**"
 The Subhead: "**NATION WATCHES AMBUSH; EXTOLS CANDIDATE 'AT LAST
 WITH A SPINE'**"

Stunned silence for a couple beats. Shulman, with one eye open,
 smiles. Wider. Gradually breaking into laughter. Harder.

Cravens soon joins in. Even Frost cracks a smile. The relief can
 be cut with a buzz saw. Except for Joe, staring at the headline.
 Stoic.

SHULMAN

You see, Joe. You're (**BLEEP**)-ing bullet proof. This is manna from heaven. In a gold wrapper.

Joe dashes off, limping out of the room. Shulman drops his ice pack. Gives chase.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

JOE hobbles down the hall. SHULMAN follows.

SHULMAN

Joe.

EXT. CAMPAIGN HOTEL - NIGHT

JOE limps briskly out of the lobby. Passes some parked limos. As CHAUFFEURS recognize him, each quickly opens a limo door, which Joe eschews. SHULMAN tails him.

SHULMAN

Joe! God damn it. Stop!

Joe slows as Shulman catches up. He finally stops for him.

SHULMAN

What is your problem? The world is kneeling at your feet. America loves you. And dare I say it. You're going to be our next president.

Joe cringes.

SHULMAN

Has a zing to it, doesn't it.

They begin a slow stroll. Around the mammoth property.

JOE

Wasn't supposed to be like this. I wanted to win on ability. Not my left hook. I'm a joke, Sig. I quit.

SHULMAN

You're not a joke. You've got balls. Big round boulders. Know how many candidates that don't? That I've slid into office? You're a fighter. So. I'm a trainer. Who for years has been looking for that rare prospect, who can go all the way to the title. Who needs molding. Polish. They all do, trust me. And I can tell you, none of them, not one, ever carried a copy of the Constitution on them.

JOE

'Cause they knew it by heart.

SHULMAN
Horse shit. Not without a tele-
prompter.

They stop walking. Now, near the hotel LOADING DOCK, adjacent to an ENORMOUS PARKING GARAGE. On the dock, some workers move loaded hand trucks. One drives a forklift.

Joe pulls out his Constitution pamphlet, "*We the People*."

JOE
I'm scared, Sig. For the first time in
my life.
(nods to the dock
workers)
I'm no different than them.

SHULMAN
You're nothing like them.

JOE
I go to pool halls, and strip clubs.
I drink, and brawl, and curse.

SHULMAN
Like any holder of office.

JOE
That's just it. I wasn't supposed to
be a politician. Like the rest. I
never even knew what uh, perspicacious
is.

SHULMAN
Perspicacious?

JOE
Yeah, you know. Means "real
perceptive."

SHULMAN
I was never sure. Honest.

Surprising Joe.

SHULMAN
You know the word now. Right? That's
how it works, sonny. You're
learning.
(re: dockworkers)
I'll lay you fifty bucks they don't
know the word. There, gambling.
Another vice of yours.

Joe cracks a grin. Shulman takes the pamphlet from him. They turn back toward the hotel's front entrance. Strolling.

SHULMAN

(reading pamphlet)

*"We the people of the United States,
in order to form a more perfect
union, establish justice, insure
domestic tranquility, provide for the
common defense, promote the general
welfare,*

(SLOW FADE)

*and secure the blessings of liberty
to ourselves and our posterity, do
ordain and establish this
Constitution for the United States of
America."*

FADE TO:

EXT. PROVIDENCE RIVERFRONT - DAWN

Tranquil, as the sun breaks through. Seagulls. Nary a soul,
except JOE, doing some fishing. At peace. Optimistic even.

From the street, KENDRA approaches. Joe tries to ignore her. An
awkward beat.

KENDRA

I have to explain.

JOE

Nah. He's tall. Wears a fifteen
shoe. A girl has needs.

KENDRA

It's not like tha--

JOE

We had some kicks. Enjoy the
gorgeous sunrise. No bands. No
riots. Some peace before the big
day.

KENDRA

I was gonna lose my child if I
didn't play ball with Frost.
(getting Joe's attention)
Couple years ago I was busted. Two
joints in my purse. Dumb, I know. My
ex was gonna take Eric. Frost pulled
some strings, but in return,
required my help in certain,
sensitive areas.

JOE

Pardon the pun.

KENDRA

Sleeping with you was my choice.

JOE

And Trompeter wasn't?

KENDRA

Frost would've hung me if I didn't.
He needed Willis happy until he's
first string.

JOE

By blackmailing you? Could be four
years, at least.

KENDRA

You think I like working with these
people? There's another agenda, and
you're not on it.

JOE

What're you talkin' about? It's mine
to lose, now.

KENDRA

Yes. Then what. Don't be naive.
They're not moderates. And there are
more than me who play ball with them,
willingly or not. Whose school-age
daughter you raped. Or son. Or the
cocaine they find in your truck.

JOE

You're batty. You don't have a clue.

KENDRA

I have a lot more than that.
(hands him a one-page)
Administration appointments after
you take office. All Trompeter's
people.

Joe reads it. Sees a list of positions and names.

KENDRA

The cabinet. Judgeships. The works.
Look under "Support staff. West Wing."

Joe reads further down a list. Sees...HIS OWN NAME.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

FROST packs up a box of files. His garment bag against a table.
JOE walks in calmly, holding a sheet of paper.

JOE

Hey, Cad. I uh, did some more
homework. Found some good names for
appointees.

FROST

Oh. It's so late. Aren't you tired?
(looks around)
Where's your on-line camera guy?

JOE

I gave him some time off.

(then)

Don't you put feelers out early for these things? Save people from making commitments?

FROST

Availabilities always change. We can review the list later.

JOE

No, let's do it now. I'm fresh as an all-night card shark.

FROST

You want to put feelers out.

(takes the sheet, reads)

Kenneth Fried for Treasury Secretary. A Jew running the finances? Don't be silly, you'll get creamed.

JOE

I didn't know he was Jewish. He pulled two companies outta bankruptcy. Consulted to the World Bank.

FROST

(reads further)

Lester Hudson for Health and Human Services. You see genius. I see high school teacher. We're planning huge welfare cuts. I doubt any black man would want to be party to it. You'd look way too calculating.

JOE

That'd be a first.

FROST

We have other names, with more experience. And far more--

JOE

To the right? Like in Row E?

FROST

Appointing these people will get you fried like a Texas omelette.

JOE

How come it's, "I'll get fried?" Or, "I'll get creamed?" But for your ideas, it's, "we're cutting welfare." "We have better names." Who's running this thing?

FROST

Well, you are. It's just--

JOE

Then I call the shots.

FROST

It may appear simple, but running this country, my Teamster friend, is a complicated process. For which one needs vast experience, that you simply don't have.

JOE

And you do.

FROST

(bigger)

You're damn right I do. I finally get this party into the White House, and I'm not gonna let some rookie gum it all up for us.

JOE

There you go again. Gum it up for "us." Meaning you guys. Not me.

FROST

Be wise, Joe. If you sit back, let Willis and I handle things, you can enjoy your place in history as our 45th president.

JOE

And if I don't?

FROST

Joe. You're a good guy. I like you. And I hate eradicating people I like.

(then)

Did you know I almost became a doctor? Did a year of med school. But then realized, medicine isn't nearly as satisfying as this.

JOE

What? Public service?

FROST

Being God. I create. And I can destroy. Please, don't tempt my hand. Would be so unpleasant for the nation to lose its favorite...amusement.

JOE

(feeling the hurt)

I was a joke to you. Just like I said. So, I play ball with you, or have my life ruined. That it?

FROST

Nobody said you're not...perceptive.

JOE

Got it almost right.

(then)

I had a buddy once. Ken Lucas. Real together guy. Good family man. After he turned fifty, he lost his job. Couldn't find another. Was too old for a mid-level, and not ready for senior. The debts piled up. His wife was leaving him. One day, they caught him robbing a bank. Freaked us out. Our pal Kenny? Couldn't be. In the end, he was no different than you.

FROST

You're equating me, to a bank robber?

JOE

Picking me to run. You were desperate guy. Committing a desperate act.

Joe lumbers out.

INT. HOTEL COMPLEX - NIGHT

JOE walks slowly, in a daze. Down hallways. Into...

THE BAR. Oblivious, as patrons congratulate him. He sits down. Buys a shot. About to chug, he studies it. Sets it down. Stalks off...

INTO THE RESTAURANT. Passing a sea of happy diners. Into...

THE BANQUET ROOM AREA. Through a big corridor into...

THE ENORMOUS PARKING GARAGE. Still numb, walking up one ramp...

Then down one ramp. Down another ramp. Passing one aisle of cars. Down a ramp. Then another aisle of cars. And another row of cars. Until finally, Joe reaches a dead end wall.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Joe stares at a cement wall. Dazed. He looks around in all directions. Sees a door. Goes to try it. It's locked. He looks around again. Sees nothing but a sea of cars. A long scary beat. Out of nowhere, a VALET sprints by. Starts up a car. Pulls out.

JOE

Hey. Hey! Where's the way outta here? To the street?

VALET

(from the car)

Street? Man, you're at the lowest level there is.

(pointing)

Elevator's around those pillars.

(MORE)

VALET (cont'd)
 Unless it's broke again. A ramp is
 down over there.

He drives off.

Joe walks past the pillars. Finds the elevator. Presses it, but
 it doesn't light up. He listens for movement. Nothing.

He looks for the ramp. Again, in vain. He is sweating.
 Desperate.

JOE
 It's down over where?!

He walks on. Around one pillar. Then another, finding nothing.
 He starts hyperventilating.

He discovers the ramp, finally. Walking up. Faster. Up another
 ramp. But still no doors anywhere. Breathing heavier.

EXT. HOTEL LOADING DOCK - NIGHT

JOE bursts out of a lone steel door next to the loading dock.
 Dripping sweat. Breathing heavily, he slows himself down. Then
 feels his chest, with alarm.

He takes whiffs of the fresh night oxygen. Deep, calming
 breaths.

INT. LEON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

LEON is in bed, asleep. The phone rings. He answers, barely.

LEON
 Someone better have died.

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT - INTERCUT

JOE is now in a small park, the hotel not in sight. Looking up
 to a clear sky of onyx. On his cell phone.

JOE
 I got one question.

LEON
 Who is this?

JOE
 Jesus H. Christ. What does the "H"
 stand for, anyway?

LEON
 Um. "Hell," if I know?
 (chuckles, looks at
 clock)
 You bonkers? It's three-thirty.

JOE
 That's nothin'. For White House
 staff.

LEON
What... You talkin' in your sleep?

JOE
Haven't had a wink since the debate.
I'm gonna need people I can trust.
Except, one condition. No more juice.

LEON
Not a drop since the debate, either.

JOE
Good. Good. Do me a favor? Call Mr.
Hudson. And the mayor. He owes me. I
need everyone at DEFCON One when I
land tomorrow.

LEON
You got it, brother.

JOE
Now get some sleep. 'Cause you're
gonna need it. I'll see ya tomorrow.

LEON
Hey, Joe. Thanks a lot.

JOE
You got it, brother.

Both hang up. Leon lays back in bed. Calm. Then,

LEON
Holy shit-a-brick! Hah-hah! WHOO-
eee!

INT. JOE'S HOTEL SUITE - THE NEXT MORNING

JOE, in a robe, sits on his bed, amidst newspapers and file folders. He is on the phone, munching a bagel, reading a magazine.

JOE
On a story? Well, can you tell her
Joe called?... Yeah, that Joe...
Well, thank you very much. Your first
vote in years, eh?... I want to ask
Laurie if she'll be my press
secretary... Told you it's important.

He hangs up. A MAD POUNDING on the door. He gets off the bed.

JOE
Relax, will ya. Your wife left an
hour ago

He opens it. It's SHULMAN. Drunk. With an open bottle of whiskey.

SHULMAN

You're not dressed? Election's tomorrow, we got work to do. Places to go. Votes to buy. 'Sides...I owe you one.

(choking up)

I didn't know, Joe. I swear. They wanted Trompeter just for balance. I never thought they'd hose you. These guys are bloodsuckers, man. I'm taking you drinking.

JOE

Sig, it's ok. I'm goin' to the mattresses. They wanna screw me for their boy, Trompeter? Fine. I'll show 'em who's a joke.

SHULMAN

(starts laughing)

Willis is their boy, all right.
(laughing harder)

JOE

You're delirious.

SHULMAN

I'm sane as sorbet. You dummy. You're convinced they think you're a joke.

JOE

Wouldn't call it a secret.

SHULMAN

Say you lose this thing. Hmmm?
Wouldn't they be jokes, too?

JOE

(thinking)

Maybe.

SHULMAN

Maybe? They'd be fried green tomatoes. All for a guy who won a TV show? Would you bet those odds?

JOE

I said it was a stretch. Unless they had a net.

(then)

They're not hanging you?

SHULMAN

Nah. Not if one's already in the noose. Who's far more extreme than middle-of-the-road Joe Shmuger.

JOE

Trompeter? They were gonna torch their own man?

SHULMAN

Too extreme. He brought down the ticket. In politics, doll-face, the worst defeat has the best scapegoat. Besides, they can't blame me... I'm already canned. Effective Election Day. I couldn't keep you out of trouble.

JOE

Oh, Sig. I'm sorr-

SHULMAN

Oh, shut up. It's fine. Great, even. Made me look in the mirror.

JOE

But the White House. It's what you always wanted.

SHULMAN

You in the winner's circle. That's my payoff.

Joe is stupefied. He goes to the mini-bar. Takes a little whisky bottle. Drinks from it.

SHULMAN

Told you we're drinking.
(chugs from Joe's bottle)

JOE

They loyal to anything?

SHULMAN

Power... And, internet porn.

Joe can't stomach it. He looks at the material on his bed. At the newspaper headline, "ONE TOUGH JOE!" He is unsure of anything.

EXT. DETROIT METRO AIRPORT - TARMAC - NIGHT (ELECTION EVE)

Joe's campaign jet is met by a rabid crowd, led by the MAYOR. LESTER HUDSON next to him.

JOE steps out of the plane, and down the stairway. Followed by CRAVENS. And SHULMAN, battling a headache from his morning binge.

Joe, with his own headache, meets the Mayor and Hudson at a podium.

JOE

Good to see you, Mr. Mayor. Mr. Hudson.

(to the crowd)

Hey DEE-TROIT! It's great to be home. It's been a long campaign. Now it's up to you. For the little guy to have his say.

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)
That's what tomorrow is about. So get
out there, and let's all kick ass!

The crowd roars. Joe ducks into a van. Followed in by the Mayor, and Hudson. At the wheel is LEON, who drives off. Shulman and a concerned Cravens rush into another van. It takes off.

EXT. DETROIT HOTEL - NIGHT

A big, chain-run property. Horseshoe drive.

Joe's van pulls up. JOE leaps out, followed by the MAYOR, HUDSON, and then LEON. They all march into the lobby.

The van with CRAVENS and SHULMAN pulls up behind them. They get out.

INT. DETROIT HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Huge lobby. Tall atrium. FROST is waiting with KENDRA. JOE trots in, hunky dory. HIS ENTOURAGE continues on, to the elevators.

JOE
Whadya say, Cad?

FROST
What's going on, Joe? I thought we
settled things.

SHULMAN and CRAVENS scurry up.

JOE
(rubbing his head)
They wanna celebrate with me. What's
the prob?

SHULMAN
Your head hurting, too?

JOE
Yeah, I wonder why. Least it makes
me forget how bushed I am.

FROST
Joe, you haven't won, yet. We're
meeting now, to discuss tomorrow.

JOE
It's all kosher. I'll meet you in a
few. Let me get some aspirin.

SHULMAN
Get me some, too.

Joe saunters to the elevators, joining his posse. They all enter a car, going up, watched closely by Cravens and Frost.

CRAVENS

He just needs familiar faces. I'll
keep tabs on him. Meet you upstairs.

Cravens and Shulman go to the elevators. Frost stays. With Kendra.

FROST

When is Willis in from Texas?

KENDRA

About forty minutes. I was just
going to the airport.

FROST

Bring him right to me. No rides in
the hay.

(then)

I hope you don't mind.

INT. DETROIT HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

The room is abuzz. JOE, LEON, HUDSON, the MAYOR and some
friendly locals get situated. At desks, laptops and phones.

Joe gives some pages to Hudson and the Mayor.

JOE

Can you give this a once over? My
acceptance speech. First time not
winging it, I'm a little nervous.

MAYOR

If you write like you speak, Joe,
you'll be fine.

JOE

If I write like I speak, Mr.
Hudson'll recall my diploma. I gotta
go meet those guys.

Joe heads to the door. Massaging his head. Hudson stops him.

HUDSON

I know we discussed it. But you
don't have to do this. You can win
this war, Joe. Without winning the
battle. Now that's historic.

JOE

I know. But I'm good. Thanks, Mr. H.
(quickly)
Lester.

Joe marches out, ready to rumble.

INT. DETROIT HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

JOE heads toward the gift shop. Deep fatigue setting in. In the
distance, something catches his eye.

A massive "TNA-JOE FOR PRESIDENT" POSTER hangs in front of the GRAND BALLROOM. Joe shuffles over to it. He yawns.

INT. DETROIT HOTEL - GRAND BALLROOM - NIGHT

JOE enters what is literally a shrine to him. Laudatory banners and bunting blanket the room. Giant posters of his mug. Banquet tables fully set. A large net full of colorful balloons hides the ceiling.

Joe is blown away by it. A wave of emotion swells in him.

AUDIO FANTASY

A big crowd cheering.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen, the next
President of the United States. Joe
Shmuger!

A band plays "Hail to the Chief."

Joe is misty eyed. Seeing the machinations of his campaign, as the displayed logos of sponsors correlate to the V.O.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Brought to you by, TNA Television,
Chevy Trucks, Snickers, General
Mills, makers of Wheaties, Global
Play-a-Tron...

END AUDIO FANTASY

He sees a standee of himself. Posing with a vampy looking Tina Brash. He is awash in consternation. Exhausted. He sits in one chair. Props his feet up on another. Lets out a big yawn.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

-AT THE U.S. CAPITOL, JOE is sworn in by the CHIEF JUSTICE. He finishes. Turns, and hugs his MOM. Big applause.

-AT INAUGURAL BALL, JOE dances with his MOM. LEON cuts in, so Joe steps aside. He finds KENDRA. And they dance.

INT. THE WHITE HOUSE - DAWN

JOE strolls up the long driveway, his tuxedo askew. Swigging from a champagne bottle. Munching from a Wheaties box.

He is rushed by a bunch of fans. He stops to give autographs. Signing Wheaties boxes. Chevy caps. Posing for photos.

A FEMALE STAFFER rushes up, alarmed, pointing to her watch. Joe holds up a finger, saying, "Be right there." The staffer runs off.

Joe continues up the drive. Sees TINA BRASH, by the big standee of them together. With a big Snickers display. She winks at him, beckoning him over.

Joe strides up to Tina, and she yanks him behind the standee. Starts kissing him. Pulling his clothes off.

The staffer runs out again, panicked. She calls to Joe behind the standee. Then rushes off. Joe, frustrated, zips up his pants. Scurries off, holding a Snickers bar, which he stuffs in his pocket.

Joe pulls out his HOUSE KEY, as he gets to the WHITE HOUSE'S FRONT DOOR. He tries the key. But it doesn't work.

He moves on to other doors, trying the key with no success. He elbows a window, in vain. He hits it harder, hurting himself. He treks around the grounds, looking for a way in.

Joe is outside the Oval Office door. He tries the key, again with no success. A BEARDED MAN, 60s, approaches. Three piece suit. Derby hat. British accent.

BEARDED MAN

Excuse me. I'm here to meet with the new president.

JOE

Oh, good. You the butler? 'Cause my frickin' key's not workin'.

BEARDED MAN

I beg your pardon. I am a scholar. My name is John...John Keynes. And you ar--

JOE

Wow. Call me chagrined.

BEARDED MAN/KEYNES

Should I know of you, Mr. Chagrined?

JOE

Not yet. But I should know of you. Been a crazy day. Can't get into my own house.

KEYNES

Your house... Interesting. Do you have the deed? If you're the rightful resident. Did you try knocking?

Keynes steps in front of him. Knocks on the door. A few seconds pass. The door is opened by.....MARTIN SHEEN.

MARTIN SHEEN

Ahh, Dr. Keynes. I've been expecting you. Welcome to my home.

KEYNES

Your home? But...if you're president, then

(turns to Joe)

Who is Mr. Chagrined?

JOE

Me? I'm uh...

Stupefied, as MARTIN SHEEN pulls out a document. Shows it to Joe. Headlined: "DEED TO PROPERTY. 1600 PENNSYLVANIA AVE."

Joe is flummoxed. A beat. He is nervous. Takes out a SNICKERS bar. Starts eating it.

MARTIN SHEEN

(to Joe)

Will you be joining us, Mr. Chagrined? You see, John and I have been preparing years for this moment. Doing nothing but great diligence, educating ourselves. Working with experts. Legislators.

Joe ruminates through the confusion. Chewing, as Sheen and Keynes look at him. He looks at the Snickers bar in his hand. A beat.

JOE

All comes down to... Me? I'm just a brand name.

(a beat)

You guys do your thing. I'll be on my way.

He trudges off. Still holding his house key.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. DETROIT HOTEL - GRAND BALLROOM - NIGHT

JOE wakes. Still in the chair. His room key in one hand. A half eaten Snickers bar in the other, smeared with melted chocolate.

INT. DETROIT HOTEL - WAR ROOM - NIGHT

Filled with charts and contents from Michigan headquarters.

FROST, CRAVENS and SHULMAN are at work. A big SCOREBOARD shows:

SHMUGER/TROMPETER	- 37%
HARWOOD	- 30%
WILLIAMS	- 30%
UNDECIDED	- 3%

A case of champagne sits opened. JOE steps in, passive. Meditative. He eyes the scoreboard. In awe.

CRAVENS

Where the hell have you been?

JOE

In the ballroom. Sure looks great.

CRAVENS

Lovely, but we have work to do. And where's Trompeter? Christ.

JOE

Jesus H.

(a giggle)

Except you won't need it. The room,
I mean. I just called A.P. And
Reuters. I pulled out.

CRAVENS

Have you had a brain hemorrhage?!

FROST

(unfazed)

Joe. After all we've done for you.

JOE

I'll send a thank-you note. You said
yourself, Cad. I'm a joke.

FROST

Joe, the ticket has far too much
momentum. Willis will be president.

JOE

That might be a little tough.

FROST

Unprecedented, maybe. Some
constitutional debate. It's not
discussed in your little pamphlet,
but our lawyers are quite confident.

JOE

See. You don't even need me. That's
good, 'cause I promised to take
someone to the airport.

Cravens checks the late hour on his watch. Then TROMPETER steps
in. With his garment bag. Befuddling the others.

TROMPETER

Gentlemen. It seems Joe and I have
something in common after all.

JOE

Patsies of a feather flock together.

FROST

I don't follow.

TROMPETER

Sure you do. Frost, it's been years
since I felt a dagger in my spine. The
anger. The hurt. All that was
surpassed though, by the
embarrassment. Coming from a third
rate, third party.

Stinging to Frost.

TROMPETER
You had us all snowed.

FROST
Willis, I assure you there's a
misunderstanding. What's Joe told
you?

TROMPETER
This isn't about Joe. It's about
backbone. Character. Malice like yours
is like toxic waste. It always seeps
out. That's Washington. Joe was only
concerned of the fallout in case of
defeat. Which I assured him would be
shouldered by everyone in this room.
(then)
It's your assigning me sole
ownership I find so repugnant.

FROST
Where in hell did you hear such...

He looks at Shulman. KENDRA steps in with a file. Gives it to
Frost.

KENDRA
The weekend research project you
wanted. I'll be down the hall.

She exits, making eye contact with Joe. Frost glares at
Shulman.

FROST
A leak. Like toxic waste.

SHULMAN
Oh, spare me the dramatics. I'll hook
up the damn polygraph myself.

JOE
Boys, don't fight. Like I said. The
thank-you note's in the mail.

CRAVENS
I could rip your throat out.

FROST
You put in a lot of effort. I thought
you'd want to see it come to
fruition.

JOE
Actually...I think it already did.

FROST
You sad fool. We could've made history.
Been in every child's textbook. High
schools named after you. Boulevards.
You're gonna trash all that?

(MORE)

FROST (cont'd)
I really thought you wanted to be president, Joe.

JOE
No. You wanted to be President. Cad. Me? I guess I'm not that desperate. Tooodle-oo.

Joe and Trompeter stroll out.

FADE TO:

EXT. BIG WHEEL - LOADING DOCK - THE NEXT AFTERNOON

LEON loads a Big Wheel truck, tossing cases in to the driver.

LEON
That's it for number five. Your sixth stop'll be Spector Auto. On Eight Mile.

He looks off to the side. Sees JOE standing curb side.

LEON
Give me a minute, Andy.

He leaps off the dock. Saunters up to Joe by the street. They share a laugh.

LEON
You son of a bitch. Everyone's lookin' for ya. The press just left to cover the story.

JOE
Thought I'd lay low. Why, what happened?

LEON
You didn't hear? Asshole, you nearly caused another riot.

JOE
Was at my mom's all day.

LEON
The polls, dummy. Largest turnout in history. Lines for blocks. They're short of booths. Staffing. It's crazy.

(a chuckle)
Got me who they're voting for. But the people, Joe. They sure heard ya.

JOE
I'll be damned.

LEON
Comin' inside?

JOE

Just came by to thank you. For everything.

LEON

Ahh... I hated that you were leaving this place. Even if you lost, that you were really gonna walk away. But no way you can come back here. You'd kill yourself. Hell, I'd kill ya. You would've been a good president, Joe. Even Sutton said it.

Joe's face lights up.

LEON

Wouldn't shut up about you to the media. Never saw a guy work so hard.

Joe feels some useful pride. Leon sees a limousine waiting.

LEON

Where's your truck?

JOE

The shop. First time in twelve years, you believe it? My book publisher's payin' for this loaner.

LEON

That's sure nice.

JOE

Nah, pretty shitty. They apply it to the book's marketing expenses. They think I don't know.

(then)

Sutton really said that, huh?

LEON

Like a proud papa.

Joe looks at the warehouse. Content. He heads toward the limo.

LEON

(with an announcer's hype)

Joe Shmuger! You just gave this country one wild ride. What are you gonna do now?!

JOE

(turns, shrugs)

Gonna go vote.

He gets in the limo's rear seat. It drives off. Leon watches it cruise down the street.

A MAIL TRUCK pulls up. The driver steps out.

LEON
Hope you got the new Playboy.

The driver gives Leon a mail bundle. Gets back in. Drives off.

INT. BIG WHEEL - WAREHOUSE - DAY

SUTTON marches down an aisle, reading his clipboard. He looks up. Stops in his tracks. Before him is a big, clean display of the air filters. Immaculately stacked. With a nice sign labeling them.

ANOTHER AISLE, LEON saunters up, sifting through the mail. He comes to a magazine. Thrilled.

LEON
HEYYYYY!

INSERT: TIME MAGAZINE, with Joe on the cover. Headline reads: "WHY JOE MATTERED," by Laurie Lerner."

EXT. DETROIT STREETS - DAY

JOE'S LIMO cruises. Stops near a polling center. Cars are lined up to enter the lot. Voters lined around the building. Joe takes a long look.

FINAL MONTAGE
SUGGESTED MUSIC: "LET'S SEE ACTION" by The Who.

We then see --
Lines of people. At voting booths. At check-in tables.
Depositing ballots. TV news crews shooting the scenes.
Interviewing voters.
Computer screen voting machines are punched. One after another.
BALLOT CARDS, are slipped into ballot boxes.

ONE BALLOT CARD slips out, and falls. It lands on the floor.

CLOSE ON, THE BALLOT CARD. Many holes punched out. Except, there is one lone, hanging...PAPER CHAD.

FINAL FADE OUT

TITLE:

To contact your elected representatives, or for a complete listing, log on to www.congress.org.

(then)

Tell 'em Joe sent ya.