

Wolfe's 'The Right Stuff': new journalism=!

"The Right Stuff" by Tom Wolfe, Bantam, \$5.95, 357 pages.

By P.J. PLATZ
Daily Collegian Staff Writer
He's back! It's out! And it's here!
Who? What? Where?
Tom Wolfe's "The Right Stuff" is finally out in paperback, that's what! The one who writes with lots of these "!" and plenty of those "?" and italics, too, if this confounded crazy excuse of a machine could make them.

They spend their time breaking speed records and engines. They glory in soaring it up on the juice the night before an especially dangerous flight mission, starting the day with little else but coffee, a cigarette and a hangover.

Yes, this is the first astronaut (besides the Russian cosmonauts), the first man to risk their lives, but for what? Mom and apple pie? The American Way?

But new journalism is chock-full of "!"s and "?"s and italics. That's what makes it fun. And "The Right Stuff" fairly overflows its pages with words like "extraordinary" and "guyana" and "zip" and "ultimate." Which is terribly unconventional (that's what makes it new), but with Wolfe at the helm it's all AOK by me. And "The Right Stuff" is all about the first U.S. astronauts. That's what makes it journalism.

Wolfe has also written such modern and really terrific books like "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test," "The Pump House Gang," and "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby." (With titles like that, who needs a book inside?)

"The Right Stuff" is the story of guys with the Right Stuff or, "that Righteous Stuff." These men are the first American astronauts, the men who have the kind of stuff it takes to pilot airplanes, jets and super-sonic rockets.

Hell, no. They're there for no other reason than glory. And they know they'll get it because they have the Right Stuff, in space, taking orders from some voice a way down below.

"Surely all this would become obvious in time... and yet it wasn't becoming obvious. Here at mighty Edwards itself

Wolfe sucks us right into the world of the pilots' wives, a world hampered with fear, weak-kneed and absolute. The women have formed a telephone chain; word travels fast when a plane goes down. But whose husband is it? Wolfe calls these women "Angels of Death," and rightly so.

"Even out in the middle of the swamp, in this rot-bog of pine trunks and scum slicks, dead dodder vines and mosquito eggs, even out in this great overripe stomp, the smell of 'burned beyond recognition' obliterated everything else.

When airplane fuel exploded, it created a heat so intense that everything but the hardest metals not only burned — everything of rubber, plastic, celluloid, wood, leather, cloth, flesh, gristle, calcium, horn, hair, blood, and protoplasm — is not only burned, it gave up the ghost in the form of every stricken putrid gas known to chemistry.

One could smell the horror. It came in through the nostrils and burned the rhinal cavities raw and penetrated the liver and permeated the bowels like a black gas until there was nothing in the universe, inside or out, except the stretch of the chair."

When the astronauts are finally chosen after weeks of grueling tests, the fervor and mass excitement held by America — nay, the world — mirrors a universal attitude of super-optimism. But — hey! — what's all the fuss? After all, these men weren't chosen for their flying skill; they wouldn't even be flying. They'd be just floating around somewhere in space, taking orders from some voice a way down below.

"Surely all this would become obvious in time... and yet it wasn't becoming obvious. Here at mighty Edwards itself

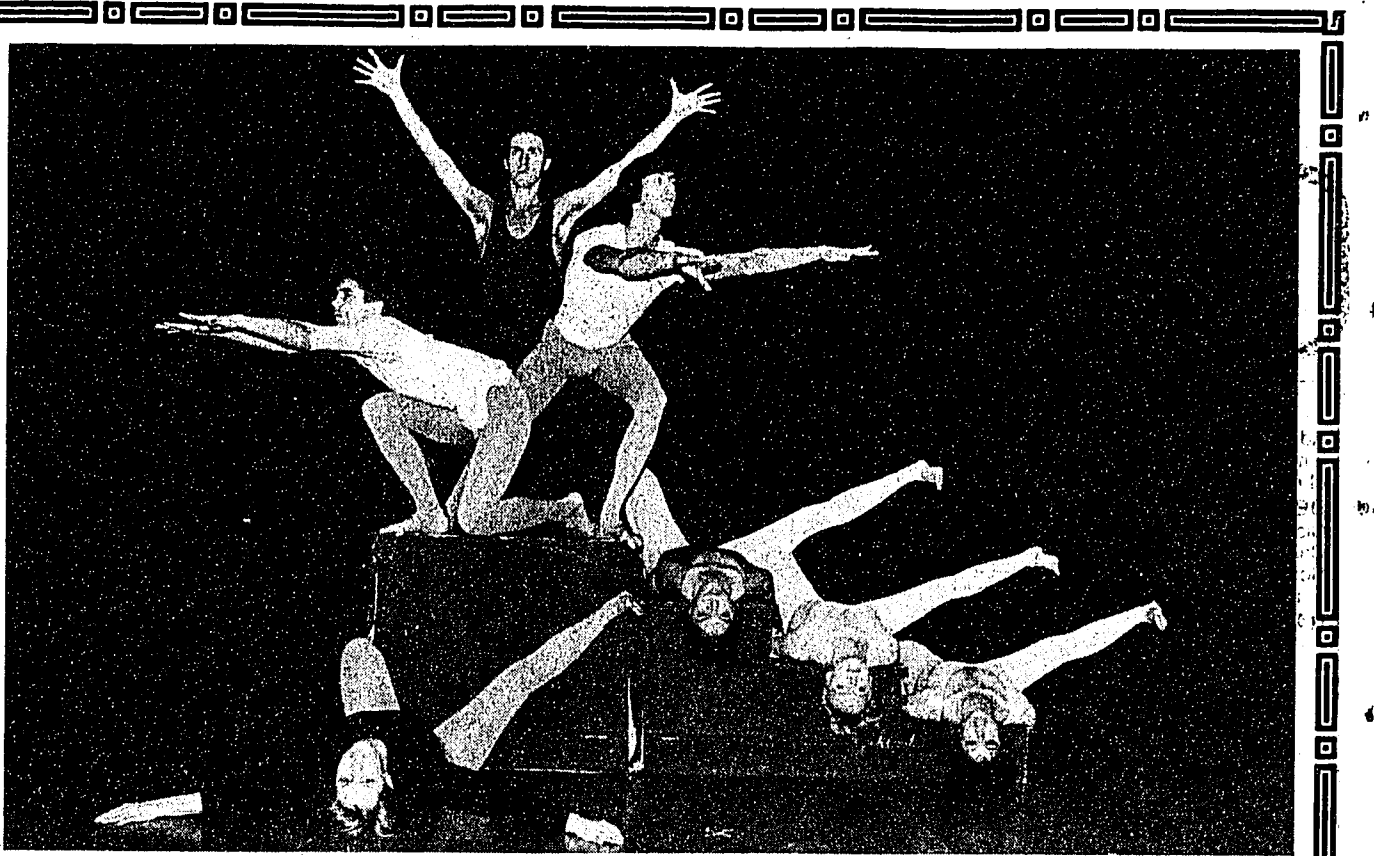
the boys could feel the earth trembling. A great sliding of the templates was taking place inside the universal pyramid. You could feel the old terrain crumbling, and... seven rookies were

somehow being installed as the hottest numbers in flying — and they hadn't done a goddamned thing yet but turn up at a press conference!

Oh, but they must have done something right; they had to have had the Right Stuff in the first place.



Tom Wolfe



Reach out and touch someone
The dance company "Orchestra" balances movement with stillness for dramatic effect in this scene. The company presents its annual fall production Sunday afternoon and evening in White Building.

Two-car collision reported by State College police

Cars driven by Joyce A. Holt, Middlebury, and Daniel E. Ulmer, Bellefont, collided at 350 E. College Ave. on Monday, the State College Police Department reported. Police estimated the damage to each car at \$300.

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• Marie Kahl, 302 Wolf, told State College police her down jacket was stolen from Alpha Tau Omega fraternity, 321 Fairmount Ave., last Wednesday. Police estimated the value of the jacket at \$100.

• Joseph Urbanowicz, 206 Sprout, told University police that a calculator was stolen from his room over the weekend. Police estimated the value of the calculator at \$105.

• State College police officer Randy Diehl told University police that someone stole a window on the east side of Rec Hall and stole about 20 T-shirts. Police estimated the value of the shirts at \$70.

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