



## **The Right Stuff (Picador Books)**



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*Tom Wolfe*

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Looks at the experiences of some of the first astronauts in order to ascertain what makes them tick and why they are prepared to put their lives at such enormous risk. This book won the American Book Award for Non-Fiction.

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368 pages

Amazon Review

Tom Wolfe began *The Right Stuff* at a time when it was unfashionable to contemplate American heroism. Nixon had left the White House in disgrace, the nation was reeling from the catastrophe of Vietnam, and in 1979--the year the book appeared--Americans were being held hostage by Iranian militants. Yet it was exactly the anachronistic courage of his subjects that captivated Wolfe. In his foreword, he notes that as late as 1970, almost one in four career Navy pilots died in accidents. "*The Right Stuff*," he explains, "became a story of why men were willing--willing?--delighted!--to take on such odds in this, an era literary people had long since characterized as the age of the anti-hero." Wolfe's roots in New Journalism were intertwined with the nonfiction novel that Truman Capote had pioneered with *In Cold Blood*. As Capote did, Wolfe tells his story from a limited omniscient perspective, dropping into the lives of his "characters" as each in turn becomes a major player in the space program. After an opening chapter on the terror of being a test pilot's wife, the story cuts back to the late 1940s, when Americans were first attempting to break the sound barrier. Test pilots, we discover, are people who live fast lives with dangerous machines, not all of them airborne. Wolfe traces Alan Shepard's suborbital flight and Gus Grissom's embarrassing panic on the high seas (making the controversial claim that Grissom flooded his Liberty capsule by blowing the escape hatch too soon). The author also produces an admiring portrait of John Glenn's apple-pie heroism and selfless dedication. By the time Wolfe concludes with a return to Yeager and his late-career exploits, the narrative's epic proportions and literary merits are secure. Certainly *The Right Stuff* is the best, the funniest, and the most vivid book ever written about America's manned space program. --*Patrick O'Kelley* Review

"An exhilarating flight into fear, love, beauty and fiery death ... magnificent."-- "People "It is Tom Wolfe at his very best ... technically accurate, learned, cheeky, risky, touching, tough, compassionate, nostalgic, worshipful, jingoistic -- The Right Stuff is superb." -- "The New York Times Book Review "Breathtaking ... epic ... There are images and ideas in The Right Stuff that glisten like a rocket screaming to the heavens." -- "Los Angeles Times "Romantic and thrilling ... One of the most romantic and thrilling books ever written about men who put themselves in peril." -- "The Boston Globe "It's magic ... the best book I have read in the last ten years."-- "Chicago Tribune Also by Tom Wolfe: The Bonfire of the VanitiesThe Electric Kool-Aid Acid TestFrom Bauhaus to Our HouseThe Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline BabyThe Painted WordThe Right StuffMauve Gloves & MadmenClutter & VineIn Our TimeThe Pumphouse GangRadical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers Available wherever Bantam Books are sold From the Publisher The Right Stuff is the best, the funniest, and the most vivid book ever written about America's manned space program.

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