REDWOOD

ROD ASHTON

AUDITION SIDES

Character Overview + Three Audition Scenes

SECTOR 7 FILMS

ROD ASHTON

45 | Founder & CEO, Vanguard Foods

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

Rod Ashton is a 45-year-old African-American businessman and the founder and CEO of Vanguard Foods. The script describes him as strong, assertive, savvy and ambitious. He has helped turn Redwood from a single restaurant into the foundation of a rapidly growing restaurant empire, and he thinks like an owner at all times - people, property, financing, operations, brand and legacy are all part of the same board.

Rod is confident, but he is not simply a corporate executive. His relationship with food is personal. His grandmother Ida entrusted him with family recipes passed down through generations and told him they were part of the family history and legacy. As an adult, Rod protects those recipes fiercely and sees Redwood as something larger than profit. The company is business, but the roots are family.

Among Edwin and Cleveland, Rod often occupies the center. Edwin pushes hard for expansion. Cleveland is more cautious. Rod wants growth, but he also understands that moving too fast can destroy what they built. His leadership comes from being able to make the decision, calm the room and keep everybody focused on the larger goal.

For the actor, Rod should feel like a man who has learned to move comfortably between worlds: a private jet and his grandmother's kitchen, investors and old friends, luxury and memory. He can be warm, funny and familiar, but when business begins, his mind is constantly calculating. He does not have to announce that he is the CEO. His confidence should make that obvious.

WHAT THE AUDITION SHOULD SHOW

- Leadership - Rod can make a decision and make other people believe in it.
- Business intelligence - he listens, calculates risk and understands where the leverage is.
- Legacy - Redwood is tied to family history, not simply money.
- Authority without performance - Rod does not need to act powerful; he is accustomed to being responsible for the outcome.
- Humanity - underneath the CEO is the grandson, husband, father and friend who remembers where all of this began.

DO NOT PLAY THE CEO. PLAY THE MAN WHO BUILT THE COMPANY - AND KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT IT COST TO GET THERE.

SIDE 1 - THE STANDARD

SCENE: Rod and Brown are evaluating Michael "Shorty" Reese in the Vanguard test kitchen. Shorty is an accomplished chef, but Rod is deciding whether he belongs at Redwood - the company's most important restaurant.

ACTOR OBJECTIVE: Assess the man, not just the food. Rod is looking for talent, but he is also deciding whether Shorty can be trusted with something personal to the family.

PERFORMANCE NOTE: Rod should be relaxed and direct. He is impressed, but never star-struck. When he begins talking about the family recipes, let the scene become more personal and more serious without becoming sentimental.

Shorty has just explained that his grandmother raised him, taught the family to cook, and helped set him on the path to culinary school.

SHORTY

But I'm not gonna lie. You seem awfully young to be a CEO my dude.

ROD

A lucky break. And I work my ass off. That's the secret. But head chef for seven years at XO ain't too shabby either brotha.

SHORTY gives up a crooked smile. Refusing to give up too much emotion. Then he slices a couple pieces of the lamb and lays them on a plate. There are clean forks on the table.

SHORTY

Tell me what you think.

BROWN steps up first and pokes a fork into a piece of lamb. His eyes roll up into his head and he throws his hands up.

BROWN

Damn champ. This right here is next level.

ROD picks up a fork and takes a piece of the lamb. He chews and shakes his head in agreement. Rod continues holding the fork and gestures with it as he speaks.

ROD

You got something here. It's a good start. But it's not over the top. Brown hired you to work as head chef of the Watershed at National Harbor. But I'm changing the plan. I want you to take over the kitchen at Redwood effective immediately. It's the highest grossing white cloth asset in the company. I'll up your salary another twenty k a year.

BROWN

Boss...

ROD raises his hand to stop Brown from speaking.

ROD

Redwood needs the absolute best. We have recipes that we exclusively use only at Redwood. Rare recipes. So sacred to me and my family I keep them in a safe. Five generations of perfecting, and perfecting, and perfecting. Those recipes are

what you need to take your food from great to phenomenal. You'll become a star chef. Be able to write your own ticket. You'll have to sign a strict non-disclosure agreement of course. Not one recipe is allowed to leave the kitchen. Ever!! It's considered theft and we gonna prosecute to the fullest extent of the law. And then sue your ass for every penny you own. You with me?

SHORTY

Yes sir.

ROD

Good. Now that's out of the way, we only want two things from you big dog. Your absolute loyalty and your A-game when it comes to the food. Give us both and the sky is the limit.

(1 beat..)

ROD

Welcome aboard!

SIDE 2 - THE NEGOTIATOR

SCENE: Rod and Geofrey meet Mr. Brewer and his son Tom on a golf course. Brewer is grieving his wife and wants to sell the family restaurant group. Rod wants the deal, but he refuses to overpay for troubled assets.

ACTOR OBJECTIVE: Close the deal without appearing desperate for it. Rod respects what Brewer built, but he knows Vanguard has the leverage.

PERFORMANCE NOTE: Do not play Rod as predatory. His respect for Brewer is real. His business position is also real. The strength of the scene is that compassion and negotiation can exist at the same time.

ROD
We're hoping we can come to terms. We have a counter, but honestly the gap is substantial. information.

MR. BREWER
What are you talkin' about? They're all operating in the black. The real estate alone is damn near worth what we're askin' for the whole shabang.

ROD
Tindeco and Brewer's Place especially, I get it. Nostalgia. Everyone who comes through the door is like family.

ROD turns to Geofrey.

ROD
What was that restaurant show back in the day where everybody knew everybody?

GEOFREY
Cheers.

ROD
That's it. Brewer's Place is like the neighborhood Cheers. 'Where everybody knows your name'. I get it. The only problem the restaurants are sucking wind. Either in the red or barely out. That's why you're here isn't it? Cause we know how to turn'um around. That's what we do.

TOM
How much less are we talking?

GEOFREY
You'll walk with just under five million. We assume all your debt.

MR. BREWER
That's peanuts.

ROD
Brewer's Place and The Finery books are off. Overhead was way under reported in the schedule. Tindeco is making a few dollars. But that's about it. It's gonna take a lot of work for Vanguard to do it's magic.

MR. BREWER

No fuckin' way. I'll let Danny run the business before we take what you're offering. I swear to god I will.

TOM

Dad. Hear them out.

Geofrey challenges the accounting and makes clear that Vanguard is prepared to close quickly.

ROD

No more headaches, robbing Peter to pay Paul, and the sleepless nights. They take a toll on you.

MR. BREWER

Thirty two years of my life tied up in these restaurants. Sun up to sun down working all day. And for what?

ROD

Your peace of mind and your dignity Brewer.

(1 beat...)

TOM

How long will it take to send us the counter?

GEOFREY

When I'm through with the changes in the contract. Say two days tops.

TOM

Send it over. We will discuss with family and respond promptly.

ROD

It'll be in your inbox by tomorrow noon. If the family agrees to the terms I'll have funds wired within forty-eight hours.

SIDE 3 - THE PARTNER

SCENE: Rod, Edwin and Cleveland are debating the future of Vanguard. Edwin wants outside capital and aggressive expansion. Cleveland believes they can continue growing organically. The discussion becomes personal.

ACTOR OBJECTIVE: Keep the company moving forward without allowing the partnership to fracture. Rod has a position, but his larger responsibility is the brotherhood and the business they built together.

PERFORMANCE NOTE: Start as a businessman making a case. When Edwin and Cleveland turn personal, Rod becomes the leader of the room. His intervention should come from history with these men, not corporate management technique.

EDWIN
Let's consider the pros and cons. If we take the Lieman deal we get damn near unlimited cash to expand. Vangurd stays private. We stay in control of the company. Down-side, we're swimming with sharks who love the taste of blood.

CLEVELAND enters the office behind Edwin.

EDWIN
The other option is go public.

CLEVELAND
So that's it? Only two options? Take cash from the bloodsuckers or go public? What about option three. We built this organically. Used Redwood to leverage loans and paid them off one restaurant at a time. Now we got cash. Lots of it. Why can't we still keep growing the company the same way? One restaurant at a time?

ROD
Cause that's not the way opportunities come at this level bro. You know that. We buy from distressed sellers. They come to us cause they're divorcing or running out of capital. It might be one location or five at a time.

EDWIN
We'd be overleveraged if we keep using our own cash. OPM. That's the name of the game.

ROD
I agree with Ed Cleve. We got two viable options to keep up the momentum.

CLEVELAND
I hear you. But we've already made it. We don't have anything to prove to nobody but us. We can take our time.

EDWIN
Bro what are you talking about? We need to cease the moment and corner the market now. While we're on top. One offs won't do it anymore.

CLEVELAND

You know what my pops use to say to us whenever me or my brothers were being greedy? Pigs get fat and hogs get slaughtered. So which one do you want to be Ed, the pig or the hog?

EDWIN is still sitting. Cleve is standing close to him...

EDWIN

Neither! Last time I checked your pops hadn't build a multimillion-dollar empire!

CLEVELAND

Yeah, and yours was a drunk Ed, so what else is new.

EDWIN starts to rise out of his seat. Rod stops him.

ROD

Wait! Wait! Stop! Ya'll are trippin'. Cleve, we get your point. Look, I brought ya'll into this to help me build Redwood into a powerhouse restaurant. And we did it. We did it. We are the only three black men in the world who could've turned into an empire. So, what the hell are we fighting for? You both are right. Yes we want to keep growing and expanding. On the other hand we can't afford to slip up casue we're moving to fast either. Everybody take a deep breath. We'll work it out like we always do.

ROD rises from his chair and walks to the liquor cabinet in his office. Then pulls out a bottle and pours some into several glasses. Then, raises one of the glasses.

ROD

Cooley High remember. The brotherhood. Cheers!

AUDITION REMINDER

Across these three sides, we should see the full Rod Ashton: the founder who protects the standard, the negotiator who understands leverage, and the partner who knows that an empire is only as strong as the people who built it together.

That's Rod Ashton. Now show us your version of him.