

COSMONAUT

by

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It was Yuri Gagarin who called on all of us to follow the stars.

-Neil Armstrong

It begins as it will end. In DARKNESS.

SUPER: **12 APRIL 1961**

BRIGHT, SYNCOPATED PIANO trickles through the SILENCE as if from a million miles away.

The darkness shatters as a razor-thin sliver of brilliant blue rises into view. It expands up into frame, resolving into the familiar, cobalt sphere of PLANET EARTH.

BOBBY DARIN (V.O.)
*Somewhere beyond the sea / She's
there watching for me...*

As Earth rises, we pull back through a small porthole into--

INT. VOSTOK 1 - CONTINUOUS

A tiny rocket ship spinning end-over-end in Earth orbit.

ANGLE ON: The lone COSMONAUT at its helm. Deep red letters emblazoned across his helmet: **СССР**

BOBBY DARIN (V.O.)
*If I can fly like birds on high / Then
straight to her arms I'd go sailing...*

The blue-tinged light of Earthrise illuminates the face of--

YURI GAGARIN (20s)

The warmth of Yuri's smile could ignite galaxies. His face open. Bright. Full of wonder and promise as he looks onto his home--

The first in human history to do so.

TITLE UP:

COSMONAUT

MUSIC BLARES, clear and loud, as Earth disappears from the helmet's reflection, light dimming on Yuri's ecstatic smile.

BOBBY DARIN (V.O.)
*It's far beyond the stars / It's near
beyond the moon / I know beyond a doubt
/ My heart will lead me there soon...*

As the SONG FADES, we push out through the porthole into--

THE SILENT BLACKNESS OF SPACE

We begin to descend. Darkness receding as we fall through--

OPEN SKY

Black turns gray turns clear blue. A placid canvas that gives way to--

A LUSH GREEN MEADOW

A gentle breeze carries a RUSSIAN CHILDREN'S FOLK SONG as it RUSTLES majestic evergreens at the meadow's edge.

CHILDREN (O.S.)
Samalyot postroyim sami / Ponisimsa
nad lesami...

A BOY lounges in the shade of the trees. Open face familiar:
 7 YEAR-OLD **YURI** intently watches a BEE BUZZING over his head.

SUPER: **PART I, RISE**

SUPER: **20 YEARS EARLIER, SMOLENSK OBLAST, USSR**

BORIS (O.S.)
 Yuri! It's working!!

Nearby, **BORIS GAGARIN** (5) barely keeps his feet on the ground as he's pulled along by a shoddy homemade kite.

His siblings, **VALENTIN** (13) and **ZOYA** (12) LAUGH as they chase the boy through tall grass.

BORIS (CONT'D)
 Yuri, look! Your kite works! Yuri!!

Zoya slows and, with a fretful SIGH, makes over to Yuri.
 Sprawls at his side.

ZOYA
 He won't stop til you look.

YURI
 I'd give anything to fly.

Zoya looks over, puzzled. Then, with a SHRIEK, sits bolt up.

CLOSE ON: the golden-maned bee, now crawling over Yuri's palm.

YURI (CONT'D)
(holding the bee close)
Once, I asked Babushka how they fly
with such tiny wings. She said it
was *magic*. But that's not right...

He sits up. Holds the bee out to Zoya, who scuttles back.

YURI (CONT'D)
Don't be scared. They only sting
when they defend their hive...

When Zoya shakes her head, Yuri shrugs. *Your loss*. Brings the
bee back toward his face.

YURI (CONT'D)
Baba said, the only thing bees care
about is the hive. Nothing's more
important. Not even their lives.

ZOYA
Sounds like a bad deal to me.

YURI
I think it's noble. And brave...

He finally looks out at the sun-drenched meadow, smile
growing as he sees Boris and the kite high overhead.

YURI (CONT'D)
Loving something so much you'd die
for it.

Yuri softly blows on the bee. He watches mesmerized as it
BUZZES into the air. Hanging before him as if suspended.

The boy is disarming, even to his older sister. Zoya leans in.

YURI (CONT'D)
OW!

He grabs his hand in pain as the bee flies off. Zoya,
startled, takes Yuri's hand, examining the sting.

ZOYA
Are you all right? You said it
wouldn't sting!

Just as Zoya notices Yuri's mischievous smile, he reaches and
pulls a long red ribbon from her hair, freeing her elaborate
braid. Then, stuffing the ribbon in his pocket, he runs off.

ZOYA (CONT'D)
The devil catch you, Yuri!

YURI
Like to see him try!

Zoya can't help but grin as she gives chase.

IN THE MEADOW

Boris SQUEALS as Yuri lifts and spins him in the air. They tumble to the grass. Zoya and Val complete the joyous tangle.

They're in stitches. LAUGHING so hard, they don't notice Val extricate himself. Stand. His eyes locked on--

A RUSSIAN SOLDIER clumsily limping straight at them from across the meadow.

VALENTIN
Hey! Look.

They settle, at once. Rise as they see the approaching stranger -- holding his belly where a dark stain blooms on his woolen coat.

As he nears, the soldier's knees buckle. He drops to all fours, COUGHING blood. The kids back away, frightened. All but Yuri, who steps forward.

ZOYA
Yuri don't!

She grabs for him, but he's out of reach. A look of recognition as Yuri stands face-to-face with the man.

YURI
Misha?

The soldier looks up. Zoya GASPS as she too recognizes him. Barely a man at all, not a day past 15. Face severely burned, Misha focuses wild eyes on Yuri.

MISHA
Yuri. So nice to see a familiar face.

YURI
What happened to you?

But something steels in the wounded boy. He speaks quickly.

MISHA
The Germans are coming.

VALENTIN
The Germans!?

Nothing is more terrifying. The kids clutch one another.

MISHA
Prechistoye is burning. They'll be
in Klushino any-

A huge BOOM in the distance. Then another, closer now, sends
countless blackbirds SQUAWKING up from the forest canopy.

MISHA (CONT'D)
They'll bomb the mill first. Stay
away from-

YURI
(reaching out)
You're hurt. Let us take you to
your mother, she-

MISHA
(recoiling)
No! You have to go, this sec-

He cuts off as a distant ENGINE ROAR calls from the horizon.

Zoya GASPS in horror when she sees them:

5 JU88 Nazi airplanes flying menacingly toward Klushino.

Summoning the last of his strength, Misha shoves Yuri away.

MISHA (CONT'D)
Leave me! Go now!!

The children beat a frightened retreat as Misha collapses,
COUGHING in contorted pain next to the abandoned white kite.

EXT. FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

They tear through the woods. A HUGE EXPLOSION, the nearest
yet, stops Yuri cold. He turns to look back toward--

AN INFERNO--

Flames kiss the forest's edge where the green meadow had been.

YURI
Misha!

Yuri starts back, but Val yanks him the other way.

VALENTIN

Come on!

Even as he goes on, Yuri can't help but look over his shoulder.

EXT. HEART OF THE FOREST - MINUTES LATER

Gasping for breath, clothes soaked, the siblings run through thickets of huge, ancient trees. When, suddenly--

Yuri peels off. Makes in a different direction. Zoya notices and pulls up short.

ZOYA

Yuri!

The others follow suit, but Yuri keeps moving as he calls back.

YURI

Go home! I'll be right behind you.

VALENTIN

Where are you going?

YURI

To warn people. Tell mama and papa not to worry. Go!

And with that, he sprints off into the trees toward--

EXT. THE VILLAGE WINDMILL - LATER

Yuri tears down a dirt road toward Klushino's towering mill. Through its windows, he can see WORKERS toiling -- women and children -- unaware of the looming threat. It's a life or death race that proves futile as--

The JU88s appear between the mill's enormous sails. So close, Yuri can discern the iron crosses emblazoned beneath the planes' wings. Feel the GROWL of their engines.

The sight is awful and awesome, in equal measure. Yuri can't look away, even as the JUs drop into a dive of perfect, graceful unison, opening their bomb bay doors. Just as they prepare to devour everything in sight--

A SLASH of green cuts the sky, splintering the formation.

Astounded, Yuri watches the JUs frantically disperse, as a Soviet Yak-1 fighter plane doubles back, guns BLAZING.

Three of the JUs erupt with smoke and spin out toward the surrounding woods, where they EXPLODE SPECTACULARLY.

As the remaining pair lets fly streams of bullets, the YAK arcs upward, looping overhead.

Yuri watches – enthralled, transported – as the Russian plane repositions itself behind the JUs, giving the Germans nary a moment to act, before BLOWING another of them from the sky.

At once, the YAK doubles back, just the last bomber pulls into a bombing run towards the mill. The YAK FIRES, but the JU88 pitches and dodges.

Then, incredibly, the Russian pilot aims his craft directly at the German. The JU attempts to roll but is too late. The YAK GRINDS past, SNAPPING off one of the bomber's wings.

In that moment, Yuri is flooded with amazement and relief. Both of which dissipate instantly as he hears a PIERCING WHISTLE.

Above the mill, he catches the briefest glimpse of the bomb the German managed to release before the collision, and--

BOOM! The mill EXPLODES into a million burning pieces.

Everything slows as Yuri is blasted off his feet. Even as he sails backwards through the air, his eyes search for the Russian plane. Instead, however, they land on--

His brothers and sister, running toward him from the woods. Tears streaming. Screams muted by the RINGING in his ears.

SLAM! Yuri hits the ground. He lies winded, as the mill's giant propeller topples. Blocks out the sun as it falls toward him. Then, with an awful CRACK, it covers Yuri, and all goes **BLACK**.

FLASHES AS YURI FLOATS IN/OUT OF SEMI-CONSCIOUSNESS

- A Nazi caravan rolls past burning village buildings.
- GERMAN SHOUTS as NAZI OFFICERS pour from trucks.
- A NAZI SOLDIER carries Zoya and Boris toward a cattle truck packed with villagers. Zoya struggles so fiercely in the man's arms that he drops Boris, who manages to run off.
- As the caravan drives away, Zoya reaches toward Yuri--

BENEATH THE WINDMILL SAIL

Yuri fights to free himself from the propeller's weight. Barely managing to loose an arm, he reaches back. But, as Zoya and Valentin vanish down the road, Yuri's awareness wanes, and his eyes flutter shut.

BORIS
(urgent whisper)
Yuri... Yuri!

BENEATH THE WINDMILL SAIL - LATER

Groggily opening his eyes, Yuri sees Boris reaching through the broken planks, fingers centimeters from his own. Pressing forward, Yuri manages to grab his brother's hand.

YURI
Go home. It's not safe-

Before he can finish, Boris is jerked backward. The boy lets out a PIERCING WAIL as his hand is torn from Yuri's, and he's lifted off the ground.

Yuri thrashes violently as a NAZI carries his brother away. Despite his effort, he infuriatingly fails to free himself.

Boris's CRIES growing distant, Yuri pulls even harder. And finally, he frees his other arm. As he does--

Boris's SCREAM chokes off. Summoning every last ounce of strength, Yuri yanks hard as he can and just barely pulls his torso free, scrambling from the rubble out onto--

THE ROAD

Yuri searches for a sign of Boris. His eyes stop on--

A GROVE OF TREES. An undisturbed oasis. Except--

Dangling legs appear around a trunk. Mismatched shoes, dancing hauntingly on tiptoe before disappearing.

YURI (CONT'D)
No.

EXT. TREE GROVE - MOMENTS LATER

Yuri sprints up to Boris, who hangs by the neck from a scarf. Mercifully, the branch is low enough for the boy's toes to touch ground. Still, he convulses spastically. Eyes white.

Yuri reaches up, unbinds the scarf, and the pair falls to the ground. Just as Yuri sees the awful ringed wound around Boris's neck, the boy stills.

YURI
(shaking him helplessly)
Boris? I'm so sorry. It's all my
fault. I couldn't do anything. I
couldn't help any of you.

Then, all at once, Boris HEAVES a massive gulp of air. His breathing resumes as he looks up at Yuri, bewildered. Overwhelmed, Yuri hugs his brother close.

EXT. FOREST - LATER

Yuri, sweat-soaked, is carrying a passed-out Boris on his back when a tree root sends them tumbling.

Instinctively, Yuri holds on to his brother, managing to keep the boy from hitting the ground even as his own face hits dirt.

Winded, Yuri slides from beneath Boris. Looks at the boy as he rubs his own smarting face. Boris, asleep, is none the wiser.

And there, in the dirt, Yuri, overtaken by rage and loss, starts to CRY. Only--a nearby flash of red catches his eye. Looking over, he sees--

Zoya's ribbon. Having fallen from his pocket, the red band snakes along the ground with the breeze. As it disappears around an enormous tree, Yuri leaps up after.

Rounding the tree, Yuri is relieved to find the ribbon snagged on a root. Gratefully, he picks it up. And as he rises, Yuri's breath catches, as he finds himself looking amazedly at--

The Yak-1 plane--

Just meters away, the downed craft rests with its nose dug partially into the earth. Its canopy glass already open.

If Yuri has any doubt about what to do next, it doesn't show. He turns and looks back at his sleeping brother.

YURI
I'm going to be the best pilot in
the world. I'll help people. Keep
them safe.

He looks down at Zoya's ribbon in his hand.

YURI (CONT'D)

I promise.

Then Yuri reverently ties the band around his wrist and makes his way toward--

The Yak-1. Yuri stands before the enormous plane -- badly damaged, warped and burned in places.

He traces its body with a fingertip. Caresses its cool surface. He wipes away ash, until his own reflection looks back from the beautiful smooth metal. Then, heart racing, Yuri scrambles up into--

THE YAK-1 COCKPIT

Yuri lands in the seat, relieved to find it empty.

He thrills as he takes in the cockpit. Looks excitedly out through the canopy--

Yet even with the downward tilt, he's far too little to see over the controls. The wind instantly leaves his sails.

As Yuri slumps in the seat, however, he sees a small, partially burned book lying beneath his feet. He picks up--

An aviation manual. Annotated diagram of a Yak-1 on its cover.

Yuri brings the book closer, surprised to find words messily scribbled next to the diagram--

YURI (CONT'D)

(reading)

Eyes to the skies.

Yuri looks from the manual to the bracelet at his wrist.

YURI (CONT'D)

Eyes to the skies.

His little face hardening with determination, Yuri flips open the manual. Aping the picture inside, he wraps his hands around the yoke. And as his eyes move skyward, we--

ANGLE through the YAK'S window: filled with naked sky as--

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

WOO HOO!

INT. MIG-15 COCKPIT - SKY ABOVE ORENBURG - DAY

A grown man's hand reaches and flips a switch on the controls, now sleeker, infinitely more advanced. As it does, a red ribbon, faded from years of wear, peeks from the man's sleeve.

20 YEAR-OLD YURI pulls his plane out of its loop.

A broad chest and shoulders fill Yuri's jumpsuit. All traces of boy are gone, except, of course, the undimmed smile.

SUPER: ORENBURG PILOT TRAINING CENTRE - 13 YEARS LATER

Behind Yuri sits fellow cadet and copilot, **DERGUNOV** (20s). Serious Derg could easily pass for a professor with his furrowed brow and thick glasses.

DERG

Let's level off, and-

The words cut off as, Yuri does the exact opposite and drops into another loop. This time, he flips the plane, completing a figure eight entirely upside-down.

DERG (CONT'D)

Yuri-

Yuri shifts the yoke, and the MiG rolls sideways. Levels out. Then immediately does a second barrel roll. Then a third.

Yuri, exhilarated, once more levels the plane.

DERG (CONT'D)

Bring it in.

YURI

What? No, come on!

DERG

Now, Yuri.

YURI

But-

DERG

NOW.

Disappointed, Yuri drops into a *Split-S* half-loop toward--

THE RUNWAY

SLAM! An unnerving jolt as the MiG ricochets off the pavement, only to jarringly SLAM down again.

Finally finding purchase, the MiG's wing SCRAPES ground, only one wheel on the runway. Sparks mix with rubber smoke as the little snub-nosed craft lurches precariously sideways. Its wing GROANING horribly, threatening to snap, just as--

BURST! A tire blows, sending the plane into a tailspin. Fireworks fly as landing gear GRINDS the runway. It spins once. Twice. Before finally jerking to an stop.

IN THE PLANE

The cadets sit, chests heaving. Unsure they're alive.

EXT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - MINUTES LATER

Not having uttered a word since "landing," Yuri and Derg approach the hangar.

Just inside, **LEV** (40s), their flight instructor, stands over a desk, making furious notes in a massively thick binder. He glares up at the pair as they pass.

Derg, still pale as a sheet, averts his gaze. Yuri, however, leans over to his copilot, conspiratorially.

YURI

That was incredible, right? I-

WHAM! Derg socks Yuri in the face.

EXT. ORENBURG AIRBASE - FIELD - HOURS LATER

Yuri kneels in a field of dead grass at the edge of a quiet runway. One eye swollen shut in a huge shiner, he looks over at--

Derg, kneeling by his side. Dipping a paint brush into a rusty bucket, Derg mind-numbingly slaps green paint onto the dry yellow blades. Feels Yuri watching.

DERG

For such a great pilot, you're pretty shit at landing.

YURI

What can I say? It's my least favorite part.

DERG

Yuri, I'm training to be a pilot precisely so I *don't* die in a plane crash. We can't all be as reckless as you. Some of us have wives. Mine thinks I'm an idiot.

YURI

You're the smartest idiot I know.

DERG

If I was smart, I'd have found a different copilot months ago.

YURI

Why didn't you?

DERG

Because I'm the only thing keeping you from flying straight into your own grave. You may not want the ground as a friend, Yuri, but you certainly can't afford to have it as an enemy.

(continuing to paint)

You're the brother I never wanted.

Yuri is unexpectedly moved by this sentiment. He grabs his brush. Starts helping Derg paint the grass.

YURI

When I was little, during the war, I found a Yak flight manual the army had left behind in my village. It was the only book my family owned. I must have read it 1,000 times.

DERG

You should be better at landing then.

YURI

Those chapters were burned.

DERG

I read old myths growing up. You know the one about Icarus?

YURI
The boy with wings?

DERG
The boy who flies too close to the
sun and drowns in the sea.

YURI
No. That's not how it went.

Derg looks at Yuri incredulously, but Yuri cracks a smile. He playfully shoves Derg, who shoves back, knocking Yuri off balance. He pounces on Yuri, and they start to tussle.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
So the rumors are true...

The mortified men leap to their feet. Turn toward a GROUP OF YOUNG WOMEN walking by. Among them--

VALYA (19) stands out like the sun in the night sky. Impishly defiant with dark, saucer eyes that look at Yuri -- through him.

VALYA
These army boys *do* practice on each
other's joysticks.

Yuri doesn't even hear the GIGGLES of the other girls as he and Valya catch eyes. Only the briefest of seconds passes before she turns, but for him, it's a heart-stopping eternity. He grins as a TINKLING BALALAIKA MELODY starts to play--

INT. AIRBASE - COMMUNAL HALL - DAYS LATER

CLOSE ON: the fingers of the BALALAIKA PLAYER dancing deftly over the instrument's strings.

The room erupts with excitement as ACCORDION and TAMBOURINE join the folk song, *KALINKA*. Seated at a window, Valya demurs as her GIRLFRIENDS join the circle forming on the dance floor.

OUTSIDE

Yuri slogs by in his jumpsuit, exhausted. Hearing the SONG, he looks toward the hall, and 10,000 volts pass through him--

THROUGH THE WINDOW: Valya sits alone, desperate with boredom.

INT. COMMUNAL HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Valya starts as Yuri plants himself on the table next to her.

YURI

It's not Derg's fault he can't keep
his hands to himself. I'm very
irresistible. Don't you think?

He smiles ridiculously. Valya considers him, deadly serious.

VALYA

You looked better with the black
eye. Less boring. Is he a good
kisser, at least?

Yuri's turn to be off balance as the MUSIC accelerates.

YURI

He wasn't- we were just playing
around. I haven't kissed him. Or
anyone. I haven't kissed anyone.
(damage control)
Derg is my best friend. He was mad
because I almost killed us. Again.
See, I can't quite land. I mean, *I*
can. I just haven't... yet.

He's beet red. This is not how it was meant to go. To make
matters worse, Valya is LAUGHING. He rises, not daring to utter
another word as he slinks away with searing disappointment.

VALYA (O.S.)

Come on. Dance with me.

He spins, utterly befuddled. Is she messing with him again?

YURI

What?

VALYA

Dance with me...

Yuri looks toward the concentric circles of people spinning
to the CRESCENDOING music. Valya stands. Grabs his hand.

VALYA (CONT'D)

No, no. Not to this. Please,
anything but this.

And just like that, Yuri lets her pull him out the door.

POV on the circling dancers from above: spinning faster as music accelerates. Individuals blur into a dervish that becomes--

A SPINNING RECORD. Slowing as a gramophone needle lifts off it--

INT. A LARGE APARTMENT - LATER

Yuri and Valya's BELLY LAUGHTER drowns out the last ECHO of MUSIC. Winded from dancing, they heave for breath between GIGGLES. He hunches, hands on thighs. She wipes her eyes.

VALYA

Your dancing is very imaginative.

YURI

I agree..!

He does a self-serious, awful spin. Losing his balance, he lands on the couch, sending her into another LAUGHING fit.

YURI (CONT'D)

The Bolshoi asked me to join, but I declined. Let that Nureyev keep his job, I say.

VALYA

(going to the gramophone)

Nureyev dances for the Kirov.

YURI

Well, he can have that too.

He looks around. Hanging oriental rug. Imported furniture. Wall unit displaying intricately engraved china.

YURI (CONT'D)

Nice place. Your family must be--

VALYA

Oh no. My friend Sveta lives here. Her dad is well positioned in the party.

(off his look)

It's all right. I stay here when her family is at their dacha on the Black Sea. A nice break from the rat hole my family shares with four others on the outskirts of town.

She turns. Yuri catches himself staring. Averts his gaze.

YURI

I liked that song. What was it?

He HUMS a tone-deaf, atonal melody as Valya lifts the record.

VALYA

This song is *Rock Around the Clock*.
No idea what song you were singing.
(examining the record)
Who was this person, you think?

YURI

What?

Valya summons him with a flick of her head. He goes. Looks--

OVER HER SHOULDER: The record is striking. Odd. Translucent.
A round chest x-ray. Her finger traces a fractured white rib.

YURI (CONT'D)

What's that?

VALYA

Sveta gets them off the black
market. X-ray films imprinted with
Western music. *Real* music.

YURI

Dangerous for the daughter of a
party member, no?

VALYA

He has no idea. One thing all men
have in common is an uncanny ability
to miss the obvious. Especially when
it's right under their noses...

She puts the record on the turntable. Lowers the needle. As
it spins, STATIC gives way to the familiar, SYNCOPATED PIANO--

BOBBY DARIN (V.O.)

*Somewhere beyond the sea / Somewhere
waiting for me...*

Valya turns. Lifting her arms, she starts to dance. So close,
Yuri can feel her breathe. He's entranced. Positively ruined.

VALYA

They're called, *bones*. These records.
I like to think about whose bones
they are. Or were. How that person
would feel knowing their insides are
forever etched with this music. So
joyous. So secret. So illicit.

She wraps her arms around his neck. He sways in her spell.

YURI

You know, you can get arrested just
for playing this.

She grins. She knows. And it doesn't matter because she's kissing him. The room spins. Never on the ground has he felt this thrill.

VALYA

Are you going to tell on me?

YURI

Not if you marry me.

Pulling away, Valya looks at him askance. Then, grinning, she pushes him backward across the room.

VALYA

(COOING into his ear)
Slow down, Yuri. Maybe then you'll
be able to land that plane.

Opening the door behind him, Valya pushes a reeling Yuri into the hall. As she shuts the door, we hear the ROAR of THUNDER as--

INT. MIG-15 COCKPIT - DAY

Yuri's plane GROWLS toward the runway. Face hardening with determination, he decisively pulls back--

YURI

Come on.

He's almost even -- almost at right speed. He's gonna make it!

IN THE HANGAR

Lev flinches at a loud METALLIC SNAP. Cringes as he watches--

The MiG skid to a stop, flat on its belly. Landing gear having punctured the wings, it looks like a taxidermied butterfly.

Again, Lev scribbles angrily in Yuri's file before shutting the book with a--

EXT. CADET DORMITORY - DAY

SLAM. A Moskvich 400 car door shuts. Its engine IGNITES, and it rolls off, leaving behind Derg and Yuri, who shouts after--

YURI

VALYA!

DOWN THE ROAD

Valya's head peeks from the car's passenger-side window.

YURI (CONT'D)

MARRY ME!

VALYA

NO!

Fighting a smile, she ducks back--

INSIDE THE CAR

In the drivers seat, Valya's friend SVETA rolls her eyes as she GUNS the gas, speeding off with a GROWL that grows LOUDER as--

INT. MIG-15 COCKPIT - DAY

Yuri takes a slow, deliberate breath as he eases the plane toward the runway. He's calm. He's got it this time, he knows it. Derg leans forward, encouragingly.

DERG

Easy, Yuri. Easy.

Yuri suddenly tenses. Should've hit the runway by now. *Where is it?* He looks around trying to gauge his location.

Only when the frozen ocean opens before him, does Yuri realize he's run out of runway. He grits his teeth as the plane arcs toward shallow sea ice.

INT. COMMUNAL APARTMENT - BATHROOM - EVENING

SPLASH! A pair of hands cuts into a water basin.

Valya scoops a handful of water onto her face. Then, hearing a TITTER behind her, she turns to see--

A group of YOUNG GIRLS GIGGLING in the doorway.

VALYA

What!?

One of the girls pulls a paper airplane from behind her back. Valya takes the glider. Unfolds it to reveal--

A CRUDE DRAWING. Bride and groom stick figures at an altar. A plane flying over them writes "? ? ? ?" in the paper sky.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PLAYGROUND - MOMENTS LATER

Yuri eagerly waits by the window for Valya to appear. Instead, the paper plane flies out, right at his face.

EXT. FLIGHT SCHOOL - RUNWAY - DAY

Pulling sharply up, Yuri's MiG barely escapes landing atop another plane.

CLOSE ON: Lev's binder, as the instructor adds another X to an already long column of red X's below Yuri's photo.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

A speedboat bounces over a crystalline surface, drenching Yuri who glides behind on waterskis. He waves toward--

THE BEACH

Where bathing-suited Valya, Sveta, and Derg sit watching.

DERG
SHOW OFF!

Valya blows a kiss.

ON THE WATER

Yuri catches the air kiss. Then, he lifts a ski, zooming effortlessly along on one leg like an acrobat.

YURI
MARRY ME, VALYA!

ON THE BEACH

Valya shakes her head in an exaggerated NO!

ON THE WATER

Yuri dramatically mimes stabbing himself in the chest, before collapsing into the water.

EXT. FLIGHT SCHOOL - RUNWAY - DAY

The MiG approaches the ground. Lower. Then lower still. Until--

Yuri lights down on the runway as gently as a sparrow.

Lev watches nearby, mouth agape. Then, pleased, he heads--

INTO THE HANGAR

There, pleasure quickly becomes confusion as Lev approaches his desk, where he finds his binder missing.

ON THE RUNWAY

The MiG slows to a stop, and Yuri, completely over the moon, spills from the cockpit.

Derg, equally beside himself, leaps to his feet in celebration. Then, as he looks down at Yuri's seat, he lets out a massive GUFFAW. Because there--

On the seat, sits the instructor's enormous binder of files, which Yuri just used as a booster seat.

Yuri joins Derg's LAUGHTER as he flops onto his back on the ground. Ecstatic and exhausted, all he can do is gaze up at--
THE NIGHT SKY: A zillion shimmering stars in a sea of black.

YURI (O.S.)

There! You see it?

A pleasantly surprised GASP as a light appears at sky's edge. Larger than the stars, though not much, and moving quickly.

VALYA (O.S.)

Yes! But...

We follow the light as it glides over the canvas of sky, which zooms by, until stars suddenly give way to SAND--

EXT. LAKESIDE BEACH - NIGHT

Leaving behind the sky's reflection in the lake's surface, we move along the empty beach until--

VALYA (O.S.)

I thought it would be bigger.

Two sets of tangled legs. Entwined bodies on an abandoned shore. Naked but for a blanket. Flushed, Valya rests on Yuri's chest. Eyes following the light above.

YURI

It's moving so quickly. No atmosphere to slow it down. Just imagine. They'll put a man up there soon.

VALYA

Sounds like a death sentence. I won't envy that man.

YURI

I will.
(trying out the name)
Sputnik.

VALYA

Sputnik. Traveling companion.

YURI

Someone to help shoulder the loneliness of a long journey.

They watch silently as the satellite flies into the distance. Then Yuri turns to Valya. Looks at her inscrutably.

VALYA

What?

YURI

I passed my training.

VALYA

Yuri! That's wonderful! Guess all that time I spent teaching you to land wasn't wasted, after all.

She kisses him. Momentarily, he lets her. Then he pulls away.

YURI

They're sending me to Murmansk.

VALYA

(blindsided)
Oh.

YURI

Derg's been posted there too. He's moving his whole family north.

VALYA

I see.

(after a moment)

What does it mean for us?

YURI

Murmansk is far away. I could be there for years...

Sitting up, Yuri takes Valya's hands. Forces himself to speak.

YURI (CONT'D)

Valya, I've never loved anyone like I love you.

VALYA

But?

YURI

But, I have to go. I have no choice. I belong in the sky. I knew that the moment I saw my first plane. I *need* to fly. I'm good- no I'm *great* at it. But that's not why I'm going.

VALYA

Then why?

Yuri holds up his wrist, showing Valya Zoya's ribbon.

YURI

Years ago, I made a promise - that the terrible things my family faced during the war would mean something. That no child would experience what I had to. Flying - becoming the best pilot I can - is the only way I know to do that. That's why I have to go. You understand?

Valya nods, moved and saddened by Yuri's words. Then--

VALYA

I guess it's settled. We're going to Murmansk.

YURI

You can't come. They only let family on the base.

VALYA

I can think of a solution for that.

YURI
(instantly brightening)
You're going to adopt me?

VALYA
Maybe I should. It's probably
cheaper than a wedding.

Yuri kisses Valya so passionately, it knocks the wind from her. Then, pulling away--

YURI
You serious?

VALYA
Serious as Tolstoy.

YURI
That's very serious.

Yuri hops to his knees, absolutely euphoric, He HOWLS naked at the stars. Grabs two fistfuls of sand and chucks them--

INTO THE AIR

The sand disperses against the sky -- which at once brightens to morning blue. We hear CHEERS and WHISTLES. Celebration as rice rains back down onto--

EXT. ORENBURG CITY HALL - STEPS - DAY

Newlywed Yuri and Valya descend through a raucous crowd of loved ones. Valya, resplendent in her gown, turns to embrace Sveta. Boris, welling with emotion, pulls Yuri into a hug.

CLOSE ON: Derg's hand as it grabs Yuri's shoulder.

DERG (O.S.)
Yuri...

The sounds of celebration vanish as we pull back into--

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Peeling sleepy eyes open, Yuri sees Derg bent over him.

DERG
It's time.

INT. HOSPITAL NURSERY - MINUTES LATER

A NURSE steps from the only occupied bassinet, revealing **NEWBORN YELENA**. Sensing her papa, the infant holds out chubby pink arms.

IN THE HALLWAY

We hear a steady HEARTBEAT as Yuri presses a hand to the observation window, reaching back.

REVERSE ON: Yuri's palm pressing against the glass - the HEARTBEAT gets louder, faster - as we find ourselves in--

EXT. THE OCEAN - UNDERWATER

A hand pushes desperately against the glass canopy of a MiG-15 as the plane sinks slowly down, away into the icy depths.

HEARTBEAT THUNDERING, a PILOT'S helmet pushes into the shrinking air pocket as water pours into the cabin around it. The man tears off the helmet--

Derg takes his final breath as water covers his face, and the plane is swallowed by the darkness below. The HEARTBEAT slows. Stops entirely. Leaving an eerie vacuum of SILENCE.

SUPER: NICKEL AIR BASE, MURMANSK

Then we quickly pull up through the water. Light from above pours through the ceiling of sea ice, and just as we hear the dim WAIL of EMERGENCY SIRENS we break out--

ONTO THE SURFACE

A frozen landscape, pierced by red flashes of the SIRENS.

Another MiG BLASTS through the blizzard ahead of them. Landing gear barely extended, it hits an icy runway.

IN THE CABIN

Yuri is completely snow blind. A sheet covers the canopy. The plane utterly out of control. Yet he's calm. Confident. Still.

OUTSIDE

The plane maintains its grip on the ice as Yuri muscles it to a tenuous stop.

He's out before the canopy is completely open.

Yuri searches the distance, stopping dreadfully on--

A DISTANT PILLAR OF DARK SMOKE

A wail of despair as he takes off through the deep snow.

YURI

DERG!!

EXT. OCEAN - MOMENTS LATER

Yuri pushes through waist-deep water and hunks of salt ice. Oblivious to the VOICES approaching from behind.

MEN'S VOICES (O.S.)

Yuri! Yuri stop!

The water is now throat-deep. Wind picks up. Snow thickens. Yuri loses the smoke. Whips around, disoriented.

YURI

Derg! I'm coming!

No match for the sea, Yuri dips below the surface. Still, he stubbornly presses forward. Just then, hands reach out and grab him. Concern becomes desperation as Yuri is yanked back toward--

THE BEACH

Yuri THUDS onto his back. Soaked. Lips blue. Teeth chattering. He struggles against TWO PILOTS pressing him into the snow.

YURI (CONT'D)

Let me go!

PILOT 1

Gagarin, stop.

YURI

Let me go, I said! DERG!

PILOT 1

You have frost bite. You won't make it out of-

Freeing an arm, Yuri socks him. As he falls back, Yuri elbows the wind from the other man. Then breaks back into the water.

PILOT 2

He's gone, Yuri!

YURI
He has a baby!

PILOT 2
You have a baby!

He's right. The heaviness of it sends Yuri to his knees. He doesn't fight as the men grab him beneath the arms and drag him back to shore - icy tears on his cheeks.

ANGLE ON: the silhouette of a LARGE MAN. We see him from the back, his face entirely obscured, as he stands completely still - hulking frame leaning on a cane - watching, thinking.

EXT. OCEAN - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Stillness beneath the sea. The only sign of Derg, the smoke trail winding into the deep. A ghost frozen mid-billow.

INT. GAGARIN APARTMENT - NIGHT

SILENCE persists as Yuri sits at a window of the dark single-room apartment. His swollen, red-rimmed eyes stare past drifting sheets of falling snow toward the moon.

Then, all at once, harsh overhead light comes on, and a CACOPHONY fills the silent vacuum: a BABY'S WAIL, the distant BARKING of a dog, relentless THUMPING from the ceiling above.

Squinting, Yuri sees Valya in a nightgown rubbing sleep from her eyes as she moves to Yelena's crib. She picks up the CRYING baby as more THUMPS come from upstairs.

VALYA
(shouting at the ceiling)
Enough Vera Dmitrievna! We hear you!

More CRYING brings yet more BANGING. Pissed, Valya grabs a nearby broom. And as she climbs onto the bed to thump back, Yuri goes to her and takes the baby off her hands--

Which only makes Yelena CRY harder. As Valya exchanges BANGS, Yuri is clearly out of his depth. He hasn't the faintest clue how to calm a discontent infant. Neither cradling nor bouncing seems to work. Then, in a last-ditch effort--

He lifts his daughter high into the air; and, as he begins flying her around the room like an airplane, Yelena not only quiets, she starts to laugh. The BANGING abates, at once.

Valya looks on, astounded, as papa and baby BUZZ about the room. She sits on the edge of the bed to watch.

VALYA (CONT'D)
Don't do this to me.

YURI
(looking to her, concerned)
What?

VALYA
I can't handle two pilots in the family.

Yuri smiles and lowers Yelena who's fallen back asleep. He lays her in the crib, then goes to sit beside Valya.

YURI
Derg deserved better. I should've been in that plane, not him.

Taking his face in her hands, Valya looks Yuri square in the eye.

VALYA
No. You shouldn't have.

Yuri leans his forehead on Valya's. Deeply grateful for the love of this woman. However, the momentary peace is broken as--

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! Yelena starts to WAIL, again.

VALYA (CONT'D)
GODDAMNIT!

Yuri goes to get the baby, as Valya throws on a robe--

VALYA (CONT'D)
(moving to the door)
I'll be right back.

She opens the door but doesn't leave, because there--

IN THE HALL, stand two affectless KGB AGENTS.

Valya tentatively takes the envelope in the man's outstretched hand. Without a word, the men turn and go.

Valya opens the envelope. Removes a folded page. Reads silently, bewilderment growing with every word. When she finally looks at Yuri, no words come. Instead--

She bolts to a closet. Starts stuffing clothes into a duffel.

YURI
What's going on?

VALYA
You're leaving.

YURI
What? When?

Taking the baby, she shoves the bag at him. Practically yanks his arm from its socket as she pulls him to the door.

VALYA
Now. They're waiting.

She kisses Yuri hard on the lips. Then, with a teary-eyed smile, she closes the door, leaving Yuri alone in the harsh hallway light, utterly discombobulated.

YURI
Where am I going?

EXT. MOSCOW - STREET - DAY

In answer, we see the columned facade of an ornate building.

SUPER: *BURDENKO MILITARY HOSPITAL, MOSCOW*

As a steady TAP-TAP-TAP takes us to--

INT. BURDENKO MILITARY HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON: the base of a wooden cane as it TAP-TAP-TAPS over an intricate marble floor.

We move up, over the cane. Past thick legs moving quickly, despite a pronounced limp. Over a familiar suit jacket. Until we stop on the hard face of a Russian giant--

SERGEI KOROLEV (50s)

The big man moves with determined alacrity belying his disability and size. We stay with him until he barrels through a set of swinging doors. Disappearing into--

THE BURDENKO HOSPITAL GYMNASIUM

TAP-TAP. We follow Sergei as he moves between rows of desks.

At each, a uniformed PILOT sits hunched over an examination booklet. All wear enormous headsets, plainly unsettled by whatever it is they're hearing.

TAP-TAP. As he passes, Sergei glances furtively at the men:

One rocks anxiously, pencil in teeth. Another sits, rubs his head, headset at his neck. Each less impressive than the last.

The TAPS suddenly stop. Sergei stills. Regards one of the testers with intrigue. Bends over his cane toward--

Yuri, blazing through a page of complex math with hawk-eyed focus. Sergei leans until he and Yuri are cheek to cheek. Yuri doesn't flinch, eyes never leaving the test.

Sergei turns a dial on the corner of the desk. As he does, we hear the sound coming through the headset: STRINGS OF NUMBERS. FORMULAS. JUMBLED INSTRUCTIONS.

The CHAOS gets louder as Sergei turns the dial further. All the way up to mind-numbing. Still, Yuri remains unperturbed.

Sergei rises. Pulls a clipboard from under his arm. Face unreadable, he makes a note, then continues down the row. Only then does Yuri look his way. *Who was that?*

He's about to return to the test when he notices a PILOT across the way watching him. The curly-haired man grins at Yuri. Pantomimes shooting himself in the mouth.

This is **VLAD** (20s)

Yuri laughs to himself as PIERCING FEEDBACK sends them both grimacing back to their exams.

POV from above as we pull up from Yuri: we see row after row of PILOTS. Dozens. Hundreds.

The more we see, the louder the DISSONANCE blaring into their ears grows. By the time we see the entire packed gymnasium, it's an absolute CACOPHONY.

Then, one by one, the HEADSET FEEDS fall away. Until only a SINGLE CLEAR STREAM OF NUMBERS remains--

YURI (V.O.)
(strained)
67. 68. 69. 70...

INT. BURDENKO MILITARY HOSPITAL - EXAMINATION ROOM

A white-coated DOCTOR stands over Yuri with a clipboard as he does push-ups. Arms pumping like steady pistons.

We pull back through an observation window into--

THE HALLWAY

Where Sergei takes a last look at Yuri before moving down the hall. Yuri's COUNT grows distant as the TAP of Sergei's cane takes over the rhythm - a steady METRONOME as we--

BEGIN TESTING MONTAGE:

LATER - Sergei TAPS past another window, beyond which Yuri motors across an Olympic pool, a length ahead of anyone else.

LATER - Sergei stops at another window. As he does, the TAPS of his cane are replaced by the THUMPING of feet as we--

ANGLE ON: Yuri, drenched in sweat, pounding over a treadmill, bare torso wired to a monitor. Vlad and a dozen others struggle to keep up as Yuri's treadmill quickens, along with the RHYTHMIC THUMPING of his feet. Faster and faster beneath--

A series of QUICK CLOSE SHOTS:

- A tongue depressor enters Yuri's open mouth.
- MATCH: a syringe needle stabs into his arm.
- MATCH: the gloved hand moves toward Yuri's bare ass.

CLOSE ON: Yuri's hands cutting the pool surface - THUMPS giving way to faster SPLASHES as--

- The syringe fills with blood.
- MATCH: The cup fills with piss.
- Yuri's pupil dilates.
- His bicep threatens to tear his shirt.

THUMPS are replaced by even faster EKG BEEPS, as we see--

- A heart rate line blip across a screen.
- MATCH: a light moves horizontally past Yuri's eyes.
- MATCH: POV down on Yuri swimming across the pool's length.

- A timer DINGS--
- A stopwatch CLICKS--
- A WHISTLE BLOWS--

The BEEPS stop abruptly as--

- Yuri zips his fly.
- His hands grab the edge of the pool.
- He eats floor after his final pushup.

END TESTING MONTAGE

INT. BURDENKO MILITARY HOSPITAL - CAFETERIA - LATER

Yuri, invigorated though sorely in need of a shower, carries a soup bowl through the cafeteria. 1,000 pilots eat ravenously around him. He stops suddenly. Looks toward--

A NEARBY TABLE

Vlad sits with his head buried in the crook of his arm. He peers up as Yuri plants himself at his side.

VLAD

You look like shit.

YURI

(taken aback)

Thanks. You look like you've been ravaged by the entire Russian navy. I'm Yuri. From Murmansk.

VLAD

Vlad from Kaliningrad. And it sure feels like it, Yuri from Murmansk. In just one week, I've had more fingers in me than Catherine the Great. I swear, the next doctor who puts a hand up my ass isn't getting it back.

(off Yuri)

How in god's name are you smiling? What's wrong with you?

YURI

I don't know. Just feels good to be part of something important, I guess.

Vlad looks at the 1,000 exhausted, miserable men around them.

VLAD

We're part of *something*, all right.

MAN (O.S.)

Helicopters...

They turn to see **GRIGORY** (18 going on 12) standing behind them.

GRIGORY

(sitting next to Vlad)

They're assembling helicopter squads. They need pilots.

VLAD

(pinching Grigory's cheek)

This is Grigory. He's stationed with me in Kaliningrad. Face like the *Mona Lisa*. Dick like Michelangelo's *David*, but he's sensitive, so don't tease him about it...

LAUGHING, Yuri looks uncertainly at Grigory, who shrugs.

VLAD (CONT'D)

This is Yuri from Murmansk.

(to Yuri)

Say, Yuri from Murmansk, is Father Christmas's asshole bad as they say?

YURI

Worse.

(to Grigory)

All this to find helicopter pilots?

GRIGORY

My uncle drives for the Kremlin. When I told him I was coming here, that's what he said.

VLAD

Never mind, Grigory. No one cares what you think.

(to Yuri)

No one cares what Grigory thinks. Except his wife. She tells me all his hopes and dreams when we're in bed together. You know, they tried to stick me in Murmansk. I told them to screw themselves. Ask me why.

YURI

Why?

VLAD

I'm allergic to nuts, and Murmansk
is so cold, my nuts would constantly
be crawling into my throat.

GRIGORY

This is why you have no friends,
Vlad. Nobody finds your balls
amusing. Except my wife. She says
they're hilarious.

Vlad doesn't laugh. Yuri does. Then, after a moment, Vlad
breaks. Reaches across the table. Squeezes Yuri's shoulder.

VLAD

I knew I liked you, Yuri from
Murmansk. The only man in all Russia
besides me and this idiot with a
sense of humor.

COMMANDING VOICE (O.S.)

ATTENTION!

Instant SILENCE as 1,000 heads turn in unison toward--

THE WINDOWS, where **GENERAL NIKOLAI** (50s) marches rigidly into
the room. He's Stalin on a bad day. An armored grizzly -
chest completely covered in medals.

VLAD

Shit.

YURI

Who's that?

GRIGORY

The Savior of the Chelyuskin.

YURI

General Nikolai? The war hero?
What's he doing here?

VLAD

Ruining my fucking day.

UNIFORMED MEN enter, lining the wall behind the General.

Sergei limps in and joins them. The lone civilian, he sticks
out like a sore thumb in a line of middle fingers.

GEN. NIKOLAI

The Soviet Union's most promising
young pilots.

(MORE)

GEN. NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

Every one of you excited for life's possibilities. Sadly, one day, most of you will realize that your lives amounted to little more than shoveling shit or making bedpans. On that day, remember this one. Because, though you'll smell like the inside of a cow's ass, you'll always have the memory of the time you came *this* close to touching greatness. The few of you who aren't completely worthless will have an opportunity to change the course of history. Your own. Russia's. The world's...

As he raises a clipboard, a MURMUR rises among the men.

GEN. NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

I've visited every flight school and airbase in the country. And it's a big goddamned country. I'm tired. I'm out of patience, and I had little to begin with. So let's make this quick and easy. If you hear your name, there are buses waiting outside to take you home. I'm sure your fat mommies will be thrilled to see you.

As the General is about to read the first name we--

ANGLE ON: the tables, full of countless bewildered men.

INT. BURDENKO MILITARY HOSPITAL - CAFETERIA - TIME-LAPSE

The tables sit mostly empty now, save a few dozen remaining men scattered throughout. Among them--

Yuri, Vlad, and Grigory marvel at their survival as General Nikolai and his men march from the room.

Only Sergei lags behind. He looks at the remaining pilots. Stone-faced. Betraying nothing. Then--

SERGEI

Congratulations.

He moves to leave, barely taking a step as Yuri leaps up.

YURI

On what!?

The question echoes around the room, nobody more surprised than Yuri, himself. Sergei stops, studies the small pilot. Then, without a word, he goes.

YURI (CONT'D)
ON WHAT!??

Yuri steps urgently after Sergei as SPLAT--

CLOSE ON: a boot splashing into a mud puddle as it runs past.

SUPER: **STAR CITY, MOSCOW OBLAST**

EXT. STAR CITY - ROPES COURSE - DAY

YURI'S POV: heavy rain blurs Yuri's shaky vision as he barrels along a muddy obstacle course. His QUICK, HEAVY BREATHS joined by the distinct, flat baritone of JFK.

JFK (V.O.)
Distinguished guests. Members of
Congress...

YURI'S POV: accelerating toward the lip of a large man-made hole. A huge INTAKE OF BREATH as the shaking stops and we--

ANGLE ON: Yuri as he lifts off the ground. Soars over the chasm with a dancer's grace. Still, his legs aren't long, the edge barely in reach--

YURI'S POV: CRUNCH. He lands hard, feet catching the edge. His BREATHING resumes as his shaky run commences once more.

JFK (V.O.)
The fundamental problem of our time
is the critical situation created by
the erosion of American power
relative to that of the Communists...

Yuri throws a glance over his shoulder. Speeds up as he sees--

A group of men running toward the chasm, Vlad and Grigory among them. One by one they launch over the hole.

JFK (V.O.)
Communism has advanced. Now it rests
90 miles from the city of Miami...

Yuri turns back just in time to see a tall wall flying at him. He motors up and over its rain-slicked bricks.

Lands in the mud on the other side. Then tears forward, RHYTHMIC THUDDING behind him as others leap the wall. They're closing.

JFK (V.O.)

It is here the danger to our survival is greatest. Talk is cheap, words are not enough, waving our finger under Khrushchev's face does not increase the strength of the United States...

A man appears at Yuri's side, pacing him. Yuri looks over at--

TITOV. A Soviet colossus -- tall, strapping. A black-haired, dark-featured storm cloud of a man. The opposite of Yuri in every way. His face a permanent mask of self-seriousness. He sneers. Doesn't look at Yuri.

JFK (V.O.)

Soviet power has increased. Cuba has been lost...

YURI'S POV: Ahead, Titov seems to have vanished. *Where'd he--*

At the last instant, Yuri sees the quagmire of wire on the ground before him. Dives headfirst into it, vanishing inside.

JFK (V.O.)

Communist influence, propaganda, and subversion are moving. They could control great sections of the Earth...

AMID THE WIRES

Titov lizard-crawls through the muddy tangle as Yuri comes up from behind. This time, Titov looks at him. Seethes as Yuri gives a smile and wink, before slithering past, back onto--

THE COURSE

Yuri scrambles to his feet. Runs forward and tosses himself onto a cargo net. He climbs, Titov latching on just behind.

JFK (V.O.)

I do not wish to be the President of a nation being driven back. A nation declining in strength, with the world coming to an end, as T.S. Eliot said, *Not with a bang, but with a whimper...*

Passing Yuri, Titov grabs for the top of the net. He misses, however, as the net shakes beneath him. He looks down to see--

Baby-faced Grigory climbing rabidly at their heels.

Yuri uses the distraction to catch up. He reaches the top, flushing with relief as he glimpses--

THE FINISH LINE. Where General Nikolai waits beneath a tarp with a handful of his men.

JFK (V.O.)

After the Spartans were wiped out
at the Battle of Thermopylae...

Yuri is about to swing over but freezes as he hears a PAINED GRUNT below. Looking down, he sees--

Titov's boot smashing into Grigory's face. The bloodied young man goes limp, dropping as he releases the net.

As Titov swings guilelessly over the wall, Yuri hangs horrified, looking at Grigory, unconscious in the mud.

CLOSE ON: a young, grainy, black/white JFK at a podium.

JFK

There was carved in the rock above
their graves, *Passerby, tell Sparta*
we fell faithful to her service...

We pull back from the boxy tv set, into--

SERGEI'S OFFICE

Sergei turns from the ardent climax of JFK's *Missile Gap* speech, deeply disquieted. He crosses the room, navigating half-built prototypes, moving blueprints aside with his cane. He leans out an open window. Looks toward--

THE FINISH LINE. Where General Nikolai pats a smug Titov on the back, the losers stumbling in around them--

JFK (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Now, I ask you to live faithfully to the
service of the cause for freedom...

Sergei has no eyes for Titov. Instead, he watches--

YURI -- last to slog to the finish, Grigory slung motionless over his shoulder. Yuri's eyes slit as they meet Titov's, a current of mutual hatred flowing between them.

JFK (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And the cause of the United States!

APPLAUSE calls Sergei to the tv. Tributaries of concern line his forehead as a rapturous American crowd rises to its feet.

YURI (V.O.)

Titov!

INT. STAR CITY - PILOTS' BARRACKS - LATER

Titov's muddy boot flies off as Yuri pile drives him off his bunk. Others turn mid-sentence as the two tumble to the floor.

Still catching his wind, Titov throws himself on Yuri. By the time Grigory - face grotesquely swollen - pushes between them, they're already an angry mass of fists.

Yuri wriggles free. SOCKS Titov in the face. Titov wavers, blood surging from his nose. Yuri rears again but is pulled backwards, thrashing violently in Grigory's bear hug.

YURI

Not so nice when it's your own
face, is it, bastard?

Grigory looks around, overwhelmed as others shrink away. He calls to Vlad, watching raptly from his bunk, girlie mag in hand.

GRIGORY

Vlad, fucking help, for god's sake!

VLAD

Why? This is great!

TITOV

(running at Yuri)
Peasant garbage!

WHAM! His fist misses. Clocks Grigory instead who drops Yuri.

TITOV (CONT'D)

Grig-

WHAP! Grigory backhands him--

Blood sprays Vlad's magazine. He looks at the streak with annoyance as Yuri and Grigory take Titov to the ground.

VLAD

Well... shit.

And tossing away the ruined mag, Vlad leaps onto the pile.

INT. GENERAL NIKOLAI'S OFFICE - LATER

Yuri, Vlad, and Grigory sit before an empty desk. They look horrible, caked in mud and blood. They stare ominously up at--

A huge Lenin portrait glaring imposingly down above the desk.

They almost fall from their chairs as the door SLAMS behind them. They don't dare turn, staring dreadfully ahead as General Nikolai approaches. Leans SILENTLY on his desk, until, one by one, they look up at his disconcertingly placid face.

GEN. NIKOLAI

I would get rid of every one of you...

He strolls around the desk. Sits. Pulls a memo from his coat.

GEN. NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

However, I've been overruled.
Which, though unfortunate for me,
is rather fortunate...

He flattens the typed page on the desk. Slides it across.

GEN. NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

For two of you...

They share a worried look as he flings a pen at them.

GEN. NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

One of you hooligans will sign this
letter admitting responsibility for
today's disgrace.

(off their silence)

I'll be honest. It makes not a tit
of difference to me which of you is
sent back to the slag heap they
found you in. But I need a name...

Yuri moves for the pen. However, another hand grabs it first. Yuri watches, dismayed, as Grigory signs the page instead.

GEN. NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

Excellent...

The ink isn't even dry as the General grabs the page. Folds it neatly into his coat. Rising, he goes to the door. Opens it.

GEN. NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

Grigory Nelyubov. A car will take
you to Moscow in 20 minutes. Leave
your credentials on the desk.

GRIGORY

Know what? Bashing in that smug prick's face was the most fun I've had since coming here. I'm ready to go...

Rising, Grigory pulls off his ID and heads toward the door.

GRIGORY (CONT'D)

Keep your helicopters. I miss my wife.

With a weak but defiant smile at his friends, he drops the ID in the General's hands and makes through the door. He freezes, halfway out, at the General's CHORTLE.

GEN. NIKOLAI

Helicopters! That's rich! We're not looking for helicopter pilots. We're deciding which of you buffoons will be the first man we send to space.

Every heart in the room stops beating as the Earth shifts. Grigory leans on the door frame. His shoulders quiver as the shattering gravity of this loss settles over him.

He turns and looks back at Yuri. Absolutely crushed. Yuri aches for his friend. He must speak up. His mouth opens--

And yet... the stunning elation of the General's words has paralyzed his tongue. *Space??* It's more than he's dreamed of.

The air leaves Grigory. He's done, and he knows it. Without another word, he's gone.

YURI

Grigory, wait!

(to Nikolai, panicked)

Gen--

GEN. NIKOLAI

Save your breath. I know, you started it. I'm not an idiot.

YURI

Then why--

GEN. NIKOLAI

Somehow, you've made yourself a top contender. I know, I hardly believe it myself. And it seems I have little recourse in the matter. You're like syphilis, Gagarin. I can't rid myself of you.

(MORE)

GEN. NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
(leaning close)
Tread carefully. Next time, I'll
make sure you don't see the inside
of a cockpit again as long as
either of us is still breathing.
(amused)
Helicopters.

He rises and goes to the door, leaving Yuri and Vlad reeling.
Neither dares look at the other as Nikolai steps from the
room, dropping Grigory's ID in the bin.

POV up from the bottom of the bin: as the card falls down
toward us until it fills the entire screen with--

BLACK

Momentary SILENCE. Then the sound of 200kph winds, deafening
in their velocity. The middle of a HURRICANE. Flashes of
blinding light punctuate the blackness as we--

REVERSE ON: Yuri, spinning wildly as he free-falls through--

EXT. OPEN SKY - DAY

He grabs at a blindfold tied over his eyes, but his arms keep
splaying akimbo--

Effortfully, he flattens them at his sides, streamlining into
a spear. Yuri's head tilts toward the ground, and he
instantly stabilizes. He manages to snake his arms up to the
blindfold, yanking it off with huge relief just as--

He javelins past a gray blur. Cranes his neck up. As his eyes
adjust, the shape resolves into--

Vlad beneath his parachute, SCREAMING, pointing frantically
at the ground as he shrinks into the sky above--

Yuri looks down. He almost shits himself as he sees the
ground blazing up at 500kph. He grabs his ripcord--

Yet he doesn't pull. Instead, he extends into a high dive. His
fall now practically supersonic.

It's only when he blows past Titov, floating gently beneath
an open parachute, does Yuri grab his rip cord and--

WHOOSH

Something massive blurs by, wiping away sky, leaving behind--

INT. STAR CITY - CENTRIFUGE CHAMBER

A large curved metal wall. WHOOSH. The thing moves past again. Faster this time. WHOOSH. Faster still--

WHOOSH. WHOOSH. Our POV holds as the centrifuge spins at 20Gs, completing a full rotation in less than a second.

As it reappears, the machine's WHIR warps. Everything distorts into SLOW MOTION. Now as it passes, we see--

Yuri, strapped onto a vertical slab. Jaw clenched in focused determination as he swings from sight.

Slow motion continues as the centrifuge spins round and round. Each time, a different man in its restraints--

— TITOV: G forces pulling back his haughty face.

— VLAD: slack with motion sickness.

POV from above: the centrifuge now spins at normal speed in the round chamber, like the hand of a giant runaway clock.

The WHIRRING quiets. Replaced by a steady TICK TOCK. Loud. Reverberating. As if we're inside the clock, itself. The centrifuge decelerates, and the TICKING slows as we--

ANGLE ON: each of the men in the centrifuge.

— TITOV: eyes rolled unconsciously inward, head lolling.

— VLAD: green. Body heaving as he projectile vomits.

— YURI: his poise losing the battle to an ever widening smile.

POV from above: the TICKS come slower and slower. The centrifuge comes to rest as a huge TICK SLAMS US TO--

AN ACTUAL CLOCK FACE - MATCH CUT

The second hand sits in the exact position of the centrifuge then — TICK TOCK — continues its lap around the clock.

YURI (V.O.)

I never thought of time as
something you could *feel*. But it
is. Hard like earth as it stacks on
top of you. Heavier and heavier...

INT. STAR CITY - ISOLATION CHAMBER

Yuri steps tentatively into a stark, sterile box.

YURI (V.O.)
The first few days in here were the
hardest. Waiting for that door to
open. To be let out...

ANGLE ON: a one-way mirror on the wall. Yuri's reflection
takes in the chamber's claustrophobic tightness: bed, tiny cook
stove, tin cans on a small table, toilet and sink in the corner.

His perpetual smile falters as the hatch door shuts with a--

TICK. CLOSE ON: the clock. Second hand moving steadily.

YURI (V.O.)
How long has it been now? 7 days? 8?

LATER, Yuri lies on the bed, glassily watching the clock.
Each TICK LOUDER, more oppressive than the last until--

YURI (V.O.)
I stopped counting...

CLOSE ON: the clock as the second hand stills. Its enormous
final TICK reverberating in the SILENCE.

YURI (V.O.)
Time lost shape. Seconds became
longer than hours. Days quicker
than minutes...

LATER, Yuri lies face up in the bed, eyes closed, stubble-faced.

YURI (V.O.)
And in that stillness. That
silence. I began to feel free...

We pull up from Yuri. As we do--

The chamber drops away like the first of a multi-stage rocket.
Leaving Yuri's bed afloat thousands of kilometers above Earth.

Then the bed also falls away. Plummets to the ground below.
Yuri remains, floating weightlessly in contented stillness.

EXT. MEADOW - DAY - (YURI'S IMAGINATION)

5 year-old Boris stops his run. Awed, he points upward, beyond the white kite. Val and Zoya pull up short behind him. Follow his finger high into--

THE SKY

Where Yuri floats over the meadow, passing the kids below.

YURI (V.O.)
Being up there ignites my heart...

EXT. LAKESIDE BEACH - NIGHT - (YURI'S IMAGINATION)

Valya and Yuri lie entwined in the sand. Naked. Eyes trailing--

THE NIGHT SKY

Except instead of Sputnik, it's Yuri's body that radiates light as it soars through orbit.

YURI (V.O.)
Yet, no matter how high I fly...

INT. GAGARIN APARTMENT - NIGHT - (YURI'S IMAGINATION)

Sleepy Valya kisses a slumbering year-old Yelena goodnight. She moves to the bed that she and Yuri share. Gets in as we--

ANGLE DOWN ON: Valya pulling up a blanket as she curls on her side. And as we see her big, pregnant belly, the screen splits--

On the left: Valya looks out toward sleeping Yelena as--

On the right: Yuri floats down onto his bed in the chamber.

They're a world apart, yet, in this moment, they share a bed.

YURI (V.O.)
I always return to you...

On the left: sensing Yuri, Valya turns over. Faces him.

On the right: feeling her gaze, Yuri moves to roll toward her, as well. Yet, just as his eyes are about to meet Valya's--

The split screen ends and we--

ANGLE ON: Yuri, lying in the isolation chamber. All alone but for his own reflection staring back.

YURI (V.O.)
But I can't seem to stay. I fear I
can't have both. And more, that the
only reason I'm on this Earth...

CLOSE ON: Yuri's face as he speaks directly to us.

YURI
Is to get off it.

He barely has a moment to reflect on the sentiment as the chamber's door GRINDS open, and Sergei leans in.

SERGEI
Come. I have something to show you.

EXT. STAR CITY - STREET - LATER

Yuri paces Sergei on the otherwise quiet road.

SERGEI (O.S.)
When I was a child, I told my mother
I wanted be a cosmonaut. Not in so
many words, of course. That word
didn't exist back then. Few could
even imagine such a thing. She called
me a fool for having such ideas. I
told her she was the fool.
(stopping to regard Yuri)
We never know where this life will
take us, do we?

With that he vanishes into the darkness between two buildings.

YURI
No. We do not.

And Yuri follows, stepping into--

AN ALLEY

Sergei navigates the dimness with surety. On his heels, Yuri looks around, unfamiliar with this part of the complex.

SERGEI
Titov lasted seven days in that
chamber.
(MORE)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

No one else made it past five. Do you know how many days you spent in there, Yuri?

YURI

Eight?

SERGEI

14.

He turns and steps into shadow. Stepping closer, Yuri sees a recessed door. One obviously seldom used. He follows into--

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - CONTINUOUS

Darkness. Barely any visibility beneath the work lights as Yuri's FOOTSTEPS ECHO in a vast space. He practically plows into Sergei, who stands waiting.

SERGEI

Do you understand what we're trying to do here?

YURI

Of course. Send a man to space.

SERGEI

No. We're trying to win a war.

YURI

You're talking about Cuba?

SERGEI

That's noise. We can launch three, maybe four rockets from there, at most. And only one at a time, at that. This isn't a war of force. Nor is America the true enemy...

Reaching out, he lifts a knife switch on the wall with a SNAP. The flood light over their heads SPARKS awake. Then another. Yuri follows the current as it moves down the line of lights, illuminating the long hangar.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

We're fighting for the mind and heart of every Soviet. Kennedy calls it *Thermopylae*, but he's wrong. This is Troy. And while the world sits in awe of America's golden walls...

Both men stare transfixed at the far end of the hangar – not breaking their gazes for even a moment.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
I've built us a horse...

Sergei towers over Yuri, alight with jarring intensity.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
Are you my Ulysses? My chosen one?
If so, you'll become immortal. Or
you'll be dead. I know the math. One
is just as probable as the other.
Have you considered, little eagle,
what you're prepared to lose?

Yuri's answer, when it comes, is full of conviction.

YURI
Everything.

The word is as terrifying as it is true. Yet even as he says it, Yuri is already moving – gravitationally pulled toward--

VOSTOK 1

The pristine orb calls across the hangar. It's otherworldly in a pool of light – pulsing with possibility. Then--

Pulling back, we realize we're no longer looking at the actual ship – but a scale model atop a desk.

A flashlight moves over the mini Vostok, landing on a photo of young Sergei with his wife and daughter, as we find ourselves in--

INT. BAIKONUR - SERGEI'S OFFICE - DAYS LATER

A NIGHT GUARD leans in through an open door, shining the flashlight around the darkened office.

VALYA (V.O.)
(sleepily, through a phone)
Hello..?

ANGLE ON: Yuri, crouched, phone in hand, behind the desk on the dark side of the little ship.

INT. GAGARIN APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Valya, hugely pregnant, stands in a nightgown in the small apartment. Moonlight glints off the phone at her ear. Hearing no reply, she pulls the phone away, looks at it oddly.

VALYA

Hello? Yuri? Is it you?

IN THE OFFICE

The flashlight CLICKS off, and the door SHUTS.

YURI

Sorry to ring so late. It's been
hard to sneak away. Did I wake you?

IN THE APARTMENT

VALYA

Not at all...

After a peek at sleeping Yelena, Valya brings the phone into--

THE APARTMENT HALLWAY

VALYA (CONT'D)

My lovers are just leaving...
(down the empty hall)
Thanks, everyone! Especially you,
Big Igor! Dasvidanya! Till
tomorrow!

IN THE OFFICE

Yuri laughs. So in love with this woman.

VALYA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Well that's that. Sorry to keep you.

YURI

No problem. It isn't as if I snuck
into Sergei's office just to talk
to you.

VALYA (O.S.)

Don't get yourself in trouble.

YURI

Don't worry about me. How do you feel?

IN THE APARTMENT HALLWAY

VALYA

Enormous. If they painted stripes on me and stuck me atop St. Basil's, no one would know the difference. I blame you for doing this to me.

YURI (O.S.)

Are you sure it isn't a Little Igor growing in there?

VALYA

(as the baby kicks)

This restless child can be no one's but yours...

A quiet moment as they listen to each other BREATHE. Then--

YURI (O.S.)

I miss you terribly.

VALYA

Talk louder then. Let them catch you. Send you home...

She's only half joking, and they both know it--

When no reply comes, Valya's eyes flutter. Instead, a LOUD METALLIC GROAN comes through the phone, startling her.

VALYA (CONT'D)

Yuri? What was that? Yuri?

IN THE OFFICE

ANGLE ON: the phone dangling in the spot Yuri had just been.

AT A WINDOW, bright light from outside silhouettes Yuri as he presses into the glass, enraptured as he looks toward--

THE LAUNCHPAD

Where an R7 ROCKET rises into vertical launch position -- VOSTOK secure atop its 10 story-tall frame. It tips higher. Then higher still. Until finally, it aims heavenward, locking into the gantry with a shattering CLANG.

LAUNCH CONTROLLER (V.O.)

6-5-4...

INT. VOSTOK 1 - LATER

The orb shakes violently in the dimness. Yuri, in his spacesuit, flips a series of switches. He tenses his muscles. Grits teeth. Prepares for impact.

LAUNCH CONTROLLER (V.O.)
3-2-1.

However, no impact comes. The orb stills as lights SNAP on.

GEN. NIKOLAI (O.S.)
AGAIN! GAGARIN OUT! TITOV IN!

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - CONTINUOUS

General Nikolai stands at full seriousness, looking at--

A FULL-SIZE MOCKUP OF VOSTOK 1

CREWMEN have Yuri out of the duplicate pod in seconds.

Stepping off the entry ladder, Yuri removes his helmet. Throws a tense look at Titov, on his way into the fake ship. Then looks anxiously at a clock. They've been at it for hours.

INT. GAGARIN APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Pregnant Valya stands on a chair, painting a wall. She drops the brush as a contraction brings her hand to her belly.

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - LATER

GEN. NIKOLAI
GAGARIN! AGAIN!

Again?? Yuri has to peel himself off the wall. Shoving on the helmet, he forces himself toward the fake ship as--

INT. AMBULANCE - DAY

Valya, in labor, GROANS as the ambulance WAILS down the road.

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - LATER

GEN. NIKOLAI
AGAIN!

Yuri and Titov slog past one another again. Barely upright--

INT. DELIVERY ROOM - DAY

Drenched in sweat, Valya pushes in a hospital bed, the wrong Gagarin at her side--

Boris, a man now, squeezes Valya's hand as his and Yuri's parents, **ANNA** and **ALEXEY** (50s) look on.

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - VOSTOK - LATER

YURI shakes violently inside the ship, sweat flying.

GEN. NIKOLAI (O.S.)

AGAIN!

TITOV, exhausted, fights to keep his eyes open amid the rattle.

GEN. NIKOLAI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

AGAIN!!

GENERAL NIKOLAI screams into frame, veins bulging.

GEN. NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

AGAIN!! AGAIN!! AGAIN!!!!

SERGEI (O.S.)

ENOUGH..!

All stills. Heads turn to Sergei as he enters the hangar.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Enough. It's been hours Nikolai.
How much longer must-

GEN. NIKOLAI

Until one drops.

SERGEI

Until one drops dead, you mean.

GEN. NIKOLAI

Whatever makes the decision easier.
AGAIN! GAGARIN BACK IN!

Once more, Yuri looks helplessly at the clock. Then, to everyone's surprise, he makes, not for the ship, but for Sergei. Brushing past the incredulous General.

GEN. NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

GAGARIN!

YURI
Please, a moment.

Speechless with rage, the General scribbles furiously in his note pad as Yuri approaches Sergei.

YURI (CONT'D)
Any news? How's the labor?
(off Sergei's confusion)
What?

SERGEI
Your new baby girl was born hours ago. I sent word. Nobody told you?
(glowering at the General)
Of course not. I should've come my-

He startles as Yuri SLAMS down his helmet.

YURI
I'm going.

He begins peeling off his suit — a roil of excitement, exhaustion, frustration. However he stops as he hears CLAPPING. Turns to see the General approaching genially.

GEN. NIKOLAI
Congratulations!

YURI
Thank you, General.

GEN. NIKOLAI
Not you. Titov is the last one left in the race to be the first. Go Gagarin. But don't dare show your face here again.
(to Sergei)
We go in 48 hours. You should spend less time meddling and more ensuring that samovar of yours actually flies.

SERGEI
Yuri, it's your decision.

Yuri's head pounds with conflict. An impossible choice. Then, hardening, he looks the General square in the eyes.

YURI
AGAIN!

SERGEI

Yuri-

Sergei reaches out, but Yuri brushes him off, already moving back to the ship, yanking the suit back on. Sergei watches sadly as Yuri pounds past Titov. Races up the ladder.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

You don't have to-

Halfway in, Yuri spins around. The heat of his conviction crosses the hangar with the intensity of a solar flare.

YURI

AGAIN, I SAID!

And with that he disappears inside. General Nikolai addresses the hangar, though his self-satisfied grin is solely for Sergei.

GEN. NIKOLAI

You heard the man! AGAIN!!

At once, everyone jumps to action as the lights in the hangar SNAP off plunging everything to darkness.

INT. GAGARIN APARTMENT - NIGHT

Yuri lies on his side. Valya, in bed next to him, looks up from her book. Admires his bare back.

Yuri shudders as a soft finger runs down his spine. He rolls toward his wife. However, just as he's about to see her face--

She vanishes, as Yuri finds himself lying on a bunk in--

INT. BAIKONUR - CABIN - TWO DAYS LATER

The first hints of dusk pour into the cabin from the Kazakh steppe. Yuri stares at the bunk above. He hasn't slept a wink.

YURI

Would you have done things
differently, if you could've?

ANGLE ON: the top bunk, where Titov stares up at the ceiling, in the exact position as Yuri. Equally wide awake.

TITOV

I went to the most competitive
military school in Russia.

(MORE)

TITOV (CONT'D)

Did nothing but study. Other boys
went to parties, took out girls.
But I was always alone.

YURI

(thrown by the admission)
Sorry.

TITOV

No. It happened like it was
supposed to. I got into the Air Force
Academy. Graduated top of my class.
Then I was called to be the first
man in space. I was doing just fine.
(darkening)

Until you. I sweated. Sacrificed.
Thought I deserve it. That no one
could want it more. Least of all,
some peasant from god-knows-where.

YURI

But you were wrong.

TITOV

Yes. Turns out, we're not so
different. We both want the same
thing. A few moments in the sky...

Titov's words resonate with Yuri. An unexpected connection.

TITOV (CONT'D)

Should I have done things
differently? Should you? What
difference would it make? We are
who we are. Our fate's our fate.
And see, that's where we are
different, Yuri. I may have been born
for this. But you? You'll die for it.

Yuri is unnerved. *Die for it?* He starts to object, only to find--

He can't. Which is scarier than the sentiment itself. Yuri's
mind is mid-summersault as he tries to convince himself Titov
is wrong, when--

TAP-TAP-TAP. The men stiffen as they hear Sergei's approach.
When he stops at the cabin door, neither breathes in the ensuing
SILENCE. Then after what feels like eons, the door CREAKS open.

EXT - BAIKONUR - VOSTOK LAUNCHPAD - MORNING

Yuri steps off a bus in his cosmonaut suit. Heart palpitating, he moves toward--

VOSTOK 1, towering above in its gantry.

Something WHACKS Yuri's helmet. He turns to see a grinning Vlad, who dwarfs Yuri as he pulls him into an embrace.

Yuri nods as he passes General Nikolai, who offers an unexpected salute. Yuri can't help but grin.

The smile drops as he sees Titov, visibly upset. Yuri stops. Extends a hand. Titov shakes it. Deep respect between them.

EXT. ATOP THE GANTRY - MINUTES LATER

Yuri is high in the air about to step into Vostok as a YOUNG ENGINEER approaches, holding out his id card.

ENGINEER

Yuri Alekseyevich. An autograph?

YURI

Is this necessary? I'm nobody.

SERGEI (O.S.)

You're as far from *nobody* as it gets...

Yuri turns to see Sergei, who puts a hand on his shoulder.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

It's the rare, the few, the exceptional among us, willing to bleed, to sacrifice who make a mark on this world. But you? You've earned a place among the stars. Go take it.
(head to Yuri's helmet)
Fly high, little eagle.

Touched, Yuri nods. *I will*. He turns toward the ship, only to stop at its entrance.

Unseen by the others, Yuri's hand moves to his wrist, to Zoya's ribbon that he's worn every day since she was taken.

YURI

Thank you.

And, with a deep breath, Yuri Gagarin finally enters Vostok 1.

QUICK SHOTS

- Yuri's seat belt SNAPS into place.
- Vostok's door CLANGS shut.
- Yuri raises a triumphant fist in the air.

YURI (CONT'D)
 (let's go!)
 POYEKHALI!!

- Enormous multi-story FLAMES blast from Vostok's R7 rocket.
- The craft lifts from the ground with a monstrous RUMBLE.
- Vostok soars impossibly up. Higher and higher into the sky.

INT. VOSTOK 1 - EARTH ORRBIT

Earthrise illuminates the cosmonaut's smile, just as when we first saw him.

Yuri radiates almost as brightly. Brimming with triumphant joy at a sight infinitely more magnificent than he'd ever dreamed.

Every action taken - every sacrifice made - every loss suffered having led to this historic moment. This place. This view that's graced no eyes but his--

Eyes that well with emotion as they watch planet Earth spin below. *The eyes in the skies.* Then--

Everything begins to shake, and we hear a DEAFENING ROAR as we--

ANGLE ON: Vostok's porthole. Ground rushing up at devastating speed as Yuri plummets through Earth's atmosphere--

SUPER: PART II, FALL

Yuri white-knuckles the ejection seat as FEEDBACK bursts through Vostok's com.

SERGEI (V.O.)
 Welcome home, Yuri. How is it up there?

YURI
 (through gritted teeth)
 Just great.

SERGEI (V.O.)
Good. Initiating ejection in-

A massive RUMBLE muffles Sergei.

YURI
Repeat, please. How long-

Another RUMBLE. Yuri looks apprehensively THROUGH THE PORTHOLE--

Black smoke rises outside. Vostok is burning. Yuri squints at the dials. Can't discern anything amid bone-rattling shaking.

YURI (CONT'D)
What's my altitude? I can't-

He gets FEEDBACK in reply, which is punctuated by deep GROAN from the ship. This thing won't hold.

Yuri's hand darts to the control panel. Dances a code onto a keypad. Hovers over the last number.

YURI (CONT'D)
If you can hear me, I'm initiating
manual ejection. 10-9-8-

CRACK! A spiderweb fracture stretches over the porthole.

YURI (CONT'D)
Fuck it.

He pushes the button, and everything happens at once--

The circular door above him EXPLODES into the sky like the lid of a herring tin. Yuri doesn't even have time to flinch as jets beneath him IGNITE, ejecting his seat into--

OPEN AIR

We stay on Yuri as he meteors toward Earth. The burning Vostok falling in tandem, just meters behind, until a huge parachute blooms over the sphere and--

Vostok vanishes into the sky above. Yuri's smile returns. A smile of deep contentment and pride -- the smile of a man who knows for one fleeting moment, what it means to truly live.

WHOOSH! The ejection seat's parachute deploys, pulling Yuri up out of sight. Revealing bright sun swirling in the sky.

EXT. POTATO FIELD - MINUTES LATER

REVERSE ON: Yuri, on his back in the ejection seat, squinting into the sun, gazing toward the unimaginable place he'd been mere moments before as--

BUZZ. A honey bee lands on his helmet. He watches it move over the glass before ZOOMING off.

Spell broken, Yuri CLICKS out of his restraints. Rises.

Finally on terra firma, he teeters unsteadily. Turns in place, finding his bearings amid the lush farmland.

YURI'S POV: Nearby, a SMALL FIGURE stands watching him. Blurred by the sun, the diminutive shape with red atop its head bears a startling resemblance to--

YURI
Zoya..?

He stumbles back. Almost loses his footing as he yanks off his helmet, welcome air flooding his lungs. He looks back--

YURI'S POV: It isn't his sister, at all. A YOUNG FARM GIRL in a red kerchief stares wide-eyed at the alien interloper.

Thawing with relief, Yuri steps toward the girl.

YURI (CONT'D)
Hello.

As he nears, she backs away, spilling potatoes from her basket. Yuri picks one up. Holds it out, but the girl keeps her distance, as she tries to make sense of the scene.

FARM GIRL
Where did you come from..?

Yuri points upward.

FARM GIRL (CONT'D)
The sky!?

YURI
Higher...

As the girl looks up toward the heavens in amazement, Yuri crouches before her. Looks at his ejection seat.

YURI (CONT'D)
Guess my landing still needs work.

She grins. Holds out the basket, and Yuri puts the potato in.

FARM GIRL
Who are you?

CLOSE ON: Yuri, smile at full wattage. Incandescently proud.
In response, we hear YURI'S VOICE projected over a PA SYSTEM--

YURI (V.O.)
I'm a simple man...

EXT. MOSCOW - RED SQUARE - DAY

POV onto a sea of SILENT, staring faces: Every stone of the majestic square pulses with anticipation. Hundreds of banners rise above the crowd. One huge likeness of Yuri after another.

ATOP LENIN'S MAUSOLEUM

Flesh-and-blood Yuri tenses at the odd ECHO of his own amplified voice. He's palpably uneasy behind the podium.

At his side, Valya looks past her husband as he squirms in the heat of 10,000 gazes. A line of indistinguishable BUREAUCRATS extends to his other side - featureless PARTY LEADERS growing concerned by his silence.

Valya reaches discreetly behind the podium. Takes his hand. This restores Yuri's orbit. He leans into the bloom of mics.

YURI
I'm a Soviet. I was born a peasant
in the Smolensk region. My parents
were peasants. My grandparents were
peasants. There are no kings and
queens in my family tree...

A BLAST of APPLAUSE. It's as if the entire world has exhaled.

YURI (CONT'D)
My oldest dream was to fly. So I'm
immensely thankful to our party for
entrusting me with this honor.
Which I've completed in the name of
our Motherland. In the name of the
great Soviet people!

Raising a triumphant arm, Yuri glances at the line of men to his right. They seem pleased now. None more so than--

NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV (65)

Yes, THAT Khrushchev – who CHORTLES gleefully. The Soviet Premier looks more like a jolly, bald bear than the most powerful man in the world.

TITANIC CHEERS. Children on shoulders clap, babushkas weep, people reach rapturously. Raw emotion unlike anyone present has ever witnessed. The Mausoleum SHAKES beneath Yuri's feet.

INT. GRAND KREMLIN PALACE - GEORGIEVSKY HALL - HOURS LATER

CHEERS still ring in Yuri's ears as a VIOLIN lilts the opening of a KHRENNIKOV SYMPHONY. From atop a grand staircase, he takes in the spectacular ballroom. A line of chandeliers, each big enough to live in, hangs overhead.

Gowns, tuxes, and uniforms bustle throughout. DIGNITARIES from every corner of the globe, all there to honor him. Yuri has no eyes for these people, however, focused instead on--

THE OTHER END OF THE HALL

There, Valya, exquisite in a black dress, watches the dancing violin bows. Wow. Pulled to her, Yuri moves into the crowd.

WHAP! A hand connects with the back of his head.

YURI

OW!

Turning, Yuri sees, his parents, sorely out of place in dowdy peasant garb. Anna in a snit.

ANNA

You have nerve, Yuri Alekseyevich.

BORIS

(swooping in)

Mama would you like to meet Tatiana Samoilova? Papa, introduce mama to Tatiana Samoilova, will you..?

Boris nudges his parents toward a stunning ACTRESS standing nearby, devouring Yuri with almond-eyes. Alexey gladly ushers Anna away as Boris adjusts Yuri's lopsided officer's hat.

BORIS (CONT'D)

Before she turns the Soviet Union's biggest hero into a potato.

YURI

What was that?

BORIS

Mothers don't like it when their sons leave the planet without letting them know.

YURI

I'll promise never to do it again.

BORIS

You'd lie to your own mother..?

Yuri grins as Boris snags a canapé from a passing WAITER.

BORIS (CONT'D)

I don't know what she has to complain about. This food must've cost a fortune. And you can have as much as you want! Look...

He grabs another canapé. Offers it to Yuri. Looks at him like he's nuts when he declines. Throws both in his own mouth as he grabs a shot of vodka from another WAITER.

BORIS (CONT'D)

And this vodka! Have you tried it? My god. I've never tasted anything like it. It must be made from the tears of angels. I tell you, if I had any idea all this existed, I'd have flown you to space myself, years ago.

Yuri laughs as Boris wraps an arm around him, tipsily leans his head on Yuri's as they take in the upper echelons.

BORIS (CONT'D)

(shifting his frumpy shirt)

Mama bought me a new suit for tonight, you know. But they made me wear this ugly thing instead.

YURI

Why?

BORIS

You said it yourself. No kings or queens in the family. You're Russia's favorite peasant now. It would be confusing if your family didn't look like a bunch of milkmaids. In fact, shouldn't you be mingling instead of clucking around with us chickens?

Boris waves to the actress. Though she's rapt in conversation with their parents, she instantly waves back.

YURI
I'll take chickens over wolves, any day.

BORIS
(at the actress)
Mind if I-

YURI
Please. I should find my wife, anyway. Good luck, soldier.

Yuri gives a mock salute, which Boris doesn't return. His face suddenly serious.

BORIS
She'd be proudest of all, you know.

YURI
Valya?

BORIS
No. Her.

Yuri is deeply moved when Boris points to Zoya's ribbon hanging at his wrist.

YURI
Thanks.

With a nod, Boris goes. Yuri looks from his brother to the ribbon. For a bittersweet moment, he runs the ribbon through his fingers. The moment is cut short, however, as--

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Here he is!

Two fat hands grab Yuri's face. Before he knows what's happening, Khrushchev is planting a sloppy kiss on his mouth.

The red-faced man pulls away, LAUGHING UPROARIOUSLY. Obviously drunk. He grabs two shot glasses from an UNDERLING. Shoves one at Yuri, who has no chance to demur.

KHRUSHCHEV
To Yuri Gagarin! First Cosmonaut of the Soviet Union! Order of Lenin...!

Everyone tosses back the shots. Just Yuri hesitates, only to feel the heat of Khrushchev's gaze on him. *Shit.*

Rather than offend the head of the Communist Party, Yuri takes the shot. At once, Khrushchev brightens.

KHRUSHCHEV (CONT'D)

I love this man! Get him another!

YURI

Thank you, Premier Khrushchev, but-

KHRUSHCHEV

(forcing it on him)

Come now. It's my birthday!

Helpless, Yuri finds Valya over the man's shoulder. They catch eyes. Smile longingly. She glows at the sight of him. Blows a tired kiss. That never reaches Yuri as his focus shifts to--

LEONID BREZHNEV (52)

The stocky man bores into him, thick brows heavy with suspicion.

Noting Yuri's tenseness, Khrushchev turns and sees Brezhnev watching. He good-naturedly hails his second-in-command over.

KHRUSHCHEV (CONT'D)

Don't mind President Brezhnev. His idea of a good time is ruining other people's. He's harmless, though. Isn't that right, Leonid?

BREZHNEV

(joining them)

Gentle as a bunny.

Then, a SOPRANO begins an ARIA, and Brezhnev screws up his face as if smelling something rotten.

BREZHNEV (CONT'D)

Shostakovich!? He's not a party member. Isn't this music banned?

Brezhnev spins furiously toward the musicians. He stiffens as Khrushchev throws an arm around him. Turns him back around.

KHRUSHCHEV

It was. Until it wasn't. I sanctioned Shostakovich again months ago.

(to a nearby FUNCTIONARY)

Do us a kindness and see that there's no more Shostakovich tonight. I worry the Moscow State Symphony may end up hauling rocks in the Kamchatka.

The functionary skitters off.

BREZHNEV

How silly of me. Things change so quickly these days. It's hard to keep up. If we're not careful, someday soon, we'll all wake up American.

Everyone but the leaders LAUGHS, a palpable chill between them.

KHRUSHCHEV

Pardon, Comrades. There are important men here who'll be terribly offended if I don't flirt with their wives.
(raising his glass)
May the world forever know what the Soviet Union is capable of!

He drinks. This time, Yuri doesn't wait before grudgingly following suit. By the he's done, Khrushchev and company have gone. Leaving Yuri uncomfortably alone with Brezhnev.

Yuri takes the moment to find Valya again, now mid-conversation with an excited AMBASSADOR. Yuri turns to excuse himself as--

BREZHNEV

That was some speech. The people's hero. Your tide is high, Yuri Gagarin. Enjoy it. Every tide washes out...

Was that a threat? Yuri has barely processed the words when an odd, incongruous smile stretches across Brezhnev's face. He claps Yuri's shoulder. Spins him toward a PHOTOGRAPHER.

Yuri throws a final glance over his shoulder where--

Valya has vanished.

Yuri turns to the camera. Grins through his disappointment as they stand for the photo. Brezhnev speaks through his teeth.

BREZHNEV (CONT'D)

So. You've been to space. Where's there left to go?

CLOSE ON: Yuri, as the question rings in his head. FLASH!

A CLOSE UP OF TIME MAGAZINE - MATCH CUT

The iconic cover image of Yuri in his space helmet. *MAN IN SPACE* slashing through the *TIME* title above his head.

And in answer to Brezhnev's question, the opening riff of The Rolling Stones' *Satisfaction* takes us to--

A SERIES OF PHOTOS

Black/white press shots, double-page technicolor layouts. As the song plays, we see one photo more incredible than the last:

- Yuri in front of the ACROPOLIS.
- Mugging for the camera, side-by-side with THE GREAT SPHINX.
- Waving at a crowd from a convertible on the CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES.
- In a kimono in Tokyo's HANEDA AIRPORT.
- Shaking hands with INDIAN PRIME MINISTER at the TAJ MAHAL.
- Hugging CASTRO at the PLAZA DE LA REVOLUCIÓN in HAVANA.
- Having high tea with QUEEN ELIZABETH at BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

The song WARPS – a record played at wrong speed – as the photographs' tone shifts. The toll of the tour becomes increasingly apparent. Each photo reveals a Yuri that's progressively less sober, more worn, and out of shape.

- Leading a toast surrounded by cosmonauts, Vlad by his side.
- Clinking glasses with Khrushchev, his smile strained.
- Mid-toast at a state dinner, leaning on a table for support.
- A candid, close shot: Yuri drinks alone. Exhausted. Listless.

Pulling back from the last photo, we see panoply of news articles and magazine covers of Yuri and his exploits. Every photo we saw and more – a solid floor-to-ceiling wall in--

INT. GAGARIN HOME - EVENING

Yuri and Valya's living room. Middle of a party. GUESTS bustle through the new apartment – a massive upgrade from their one-room hovel. Nice furniture. Souvenirs from all over the world.

Everyone turns toward the WARPED rendition of *SATISFACTION* coming from the RECORD PLAYER. Valya squeezes through the crowd. Shoots forward with a panicked GASP toward--

Galina (2 and walking) who stands precariously on a shelf, tapping the spinning record with her toes.

Yelena (4 already) GIGGLES as she watches her sister. She hugs the model of Vostok 1 that stood in Sergei's office years before. Just as Galina starts to tip off the shelf--

Valya swoops in and catches her.

VALYA

Enough, you beasts. Come.

Placing the Vostok model back on the shelf, Valya grabs Yelena and heads toward--

THE COUCH. Where Boris sits talking with Vlad. Valya drops the girls into Boris's lap.

VALYA (CONT'D)

Boris, calm your nieces before I
surrender them to the state.

(searching around)

Have you seen the birthday boy? He
seems to have flown away...

Boris shrugs. No idea. Then flips the girls onto their backs, launching a full-scale tickle attack. As they descend into hysterics, Valya turns helplessly to Vlad.

VALYA (CONT'D)

I said *calm*. You heard me say *calm*?

VLAD

I did.

VALYA

What was I thinking? As if one
Gagarin wasn't enough. It's like
living with wild animals.

VLAD

Ever consider starting a circus?

VALYA

I'd have to tame them. I'm just
trying not to get eaten. Tell me
you know where Yuri is.

In answer, Vlad looks at the ceiling as BOOMING JET ENGINES take us into--

OPEN SKY

An aquiline procession of MiG-21 fighters blazes past. Like a school of fish, they drop into a choreographed sideways roll.

INT. MIG-21 CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Yuri's fingers pulse around the yoke as he rolls his plane.
He's radiant - beyond alive.

VALYA (V.O.)
Is it working?

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Yuri's eyes pop open as he's yanked back down to Earth. He sits, legs dangling over on the ledge of the dingy roof. Instead of a yoke, he clutches a half-empty beer bottle, longingly pantomiming the roll of actual planes overhead.

YURI
Is what working?

He looks sheepishly at Valya as she joins him on the ledge.

VALYA
Any of it.
(at the planes)
That?
(grabbing the bottle)
This?

She drinks the rest of his beer.

YURI
Sorry. I stepped out for air and
lost track of time. I'll go back-

Valya stops him before he has a chance to stand.

VALYA
They'll be fine. And I'm the one
who's sorry. A party was a terrible
idea. I thought it might be a nice
break. You've just seemed so-

She trails off, realizing he's already gone, watching the
MiGs shrink into the moonrise.

YURI
I thought getting to space was hard.
That was nothing. This press tour is
the real torture. I haven't been in
a cockpit for months. I'm a
prisoner. A professional handshaker.

VALYA

If it makes any difference-
 (pointing to the sky)
 As impressive as *that* Yuri Gagarin
 may be – the one down here has
 always been enough for me.

YURI

There's nothing for me *down here*.

Yuri regrets the words the moment they pass his lips. For the first time, he seems to see Valya who is visibly wounded.

VALYA

We're not enough?

YURI

I didn't-

VALYA

Are we? The girls and I. Are we
 enough for you?

This breaks Yuri's heart.

YURI

If you asked me not to fly again.
 I'd give it up in-

VALYA

You wouldn't. I'd never ask you to...

She runs reassuring fingers through his hair.

VALYA (CONT'D)

I want you here. At home. But not
 at the cost of your happiness. And
 you won't find that flying an
 imaginary plane between galas. Get
 back up there. Figure out how. You've
 accomplished greater feats. Just
 remember where you're meant to land.

Rising, Valya leans down and kisses Yuri's head.

VALYA (CONT'D)

What's that thing you and your
 brother say? *Eyes to the skies?*

And with that, Yuri's wife goes inside. As he watches after,
 an idea blooms like a firework in Yuri's head. He looks up.

YURI
Eyes to the skies.

YURI'S POV: UP TOWARD THE MOON hanging lustrous above.

Then, at once, the moon's color drains. It becomes a grainy, 2D photo – the front page of a newspaper, which SLAPS onto a desk.

YURI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Send me to the moon.

INT. STAR CITY - SERGEI'S OFFICE - DAYS LATER

Breathless, Yuri slides the paper across Sergei's desk. Sergei turns to the TWO ENGINEERS behind him looking at Yuri in awe.

SERGEI
Excuse us.

As they shuffle out, Sergei spins the newspaper to examine--

The front page: a picture of JFK addressing Congress next to the moon image. Huge letters read, *US SETS SIGHTS ON MOON*.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
A most pleasant surprise, little eagle. Have a seat. I--

YURI
You said we were fighting for the hearts and minds of the people. Nothing we've done will matter if America reaches the moon first. And I must be the one to go. It has to be me. Now, I know what you'll say. I've been grounded two years. I'm out of shape. Drinking too much. Soft. The landscape's changed. Tech's advanced. But know, I'll do whatever it takes to reach the moon.

Sergei takes him in for a long moment. Then--

SERGEI
No...

Yuri's heart plummets, he's about to launch back in, but--

SERGEI (CONT'D)
I wasn't going to say any of that. Though, now that you mention it, you are looking a bit jowly.
(MORE)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Fact is, you're right. It's imperative we beat America to the moon. Gravely so. And *this* will take us there...

He spins the blueprint atop his desk. Yuri leans in earnestly.

ANGLE ON: the blueprint. A new vessel – a Vostok-like orb atop a long shaft. Two huge rectangular wings on either side.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

My answer to that Apollo monstrosity.
I call her *Soyuz*.

YURI

She's incredible.

SERGEI

I designed her for you.

Yuri is so relieved, his knees almost buckle. It makes the sorrowful regret on Sergei's face all the harder to take.

YURI

What is it?

SERGEI

You're right about something else. Things are different now. My opinion seems to matter less and less. In my eyes, your value has never been in doubt, little eagle. You convinced me long before today. Unfortunately, I'm not the one who needs convincing.

INT. ARAGVI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

ANGLE ON: a flushed Khrushchev among a crowd of PARTY GUESTS.

Yuri joins the group, sidling up to Vlad. He's serious. Focused. Eyes never leaving the Soviet Premier.

KHRUSHCHEV

...I said, *how do you think it went?*
I fucked him with a telephone pole!

The circle erupts in LAUGHTER, following Khrushchev's lead as he drinks. Vlad notices Yuri doing the same, leans over.

VLAD

I thought you weren't drinking.

YURI
It's water. Who'd he fuck with a
telephone pole?

VLAD
The British Prime Minister.

Yuri almost spits out the water.

KHRUSHCHEV
I need air.

He turns, losing his balance. Then, shaking off the KGB AGENTS that appear at his side, he leaves grumbling. Yuri jets after.

EXT. TVERSKAYA STREET - CONTINUOUS

Yuri's breath steams in the wintry evening. Gray city slush CRUNCHES beneath him as he approaches Khrushchev, who stands smoking a cigar as the KGB AGENTS wait nearby.

YURI
Premier Khrushchev-

KHRUSHCHEV
Gagarin!
(offering a cigar)
Want one? The real deal. From our
mutual Cuban friend.

YURI
No. Thank you. I won't take much
time. As you know, it's been years
since I went to space. Everything
I've done since has been an honor-

KHRUSHCHEV
Oh, out with it already!

YURI
I want to go to the moon.

The LAUGH that escapes Khrushchev's lips is stinging harsh.

KHRUSHCHEV
That sounds wonderful. Me too!
Where do I sign up?

YURI

I know about Soyuz. Its success will be glorious for Russia. I want to bring her that glory. The way I'm meant to. Up there. Planting a flag on the moon for the world to see and forever remember my mighty country.

Khrushchev looks at him, nodding. *Did it work!?* Then. With every word Yuri's hope crumbles like a pillar of sand.

KHRUSHCHEV

Gagarin. You're the people's hero! No one is writing you out of the history books. I need you *here*. You bring hope. Diversion, You want a man to forget his hunger, you have to distract him from his empty plate. Take a vacation. You deserve it. Let's forget this moon business, eh?

And clapping Yuri's arm, Khrushchev drops his cigar in the snow and disappears inside.

Yuri brings a boot down on the HISSING butt with fury as--

DRUNKEN SINGING (V.O.)

Oy moroz, moroz / Ni moroz menya...

EXT. LAKESIDE BEACH - NIGHT

Firelight crackles on Vlad's guitar as he sways drunkenly in the sand. A dozen intoxicated COSMONAUTS ring the bonfire, slurring a FOLK SONG as they pass a vodka bottle around.

SUPER: **KISSELY RESORT DACHA, CRIMEA**

ALL

Ni moroz menya / Moyevo konya...

Yuri sits despondent amid the revelry. Conspicuously silent.

When the bottle makes its way around to him, he moves to pass it. Then reconsiders. Looks at it intently before throwing a guiltily glance at Valya sitting by his side.

He instantly looks away, wilting in her worried gaze. Then to the surprise of the group, he rises and stomps down the beach.

EXT. LAKESIDE DOCK - MOMENTS LATER

The SINGING is distant now as Yuri walks among hundreds of moored boats. He raises the bottle when--

Valya, having caught up, grabs his arm.

VALYA

Where are you going?

YURI

Absolutely nowhere.

VALYA

You are Yuri Gagarin. That hasn't changed. These things will pass, these men will be forgotten, but not you. As long as there's a moon in the sky, you'll get there. I believe it. I know how difficult it's been--

YURI

You don't. You can't.

(yanking free)

My father was a bricklayer. I wasn't meant to be a pilot. Or a cosmonaut. But I wanted it. Gave everything for it. I convinced everyone a bricklayer's son should be the first man in space. And then--

(looking up at the sky)

There I was. Higher than any man had been before. And it was so beautiful. I hadn't felt such peace since I was a boy; because I knew, every child from Kiev to Siberia understood it was one of their own looking down. Telling them their home is the greatest in the world. And they'd always be safe within its borders. It was perfect. You can't possibly imagine.

As he drinks again, a shattering understanding settles in Valya.

VALYA

No. I can't...

With her words comes a flood of emotion she's bottled for years.

VALYA (CONT'D)

You think you're the only one who's felt longing? Known sacrifice?

(MORE)

VALYA (CONT'D)

I'm a woman, Yuri. It was impossible for me to get into university. I had no money. No connections. But I did it. When I met you, I was one course away from medical school. But I gave it up.

YURI

Why?

VALYA

Because your dreams were bigger. They eclipsed mine. Became mine. You're right. I can't imagine how *perfect* it was up there. Or how beautiful. But that's never mattered. Because I had you. I had the girls. And you were enough for me. Beautiful, and perfect, and enough.

YURI

Valya-

Yuri reaches out, but Valya pulls away from him.

VALYA

When nobody believed in you, I was by your side. When you missed our daughter's birth, I stood by you. When the girls cried because they hadn't seen their papa in weeks, when I slept alone, night after night, I didn't budge. Not a centimeter.

(backing away)

But I refuse stand by and watch you drink yourself into oblivion. You want to destroy yourself? Throw away all you worked for? That we worked for? Fine. But I won't be here to see it, Yuri. I refuse.

YURI

What are you saying?

Without another word, Valya turns and walks down the beach.

YURI (CONT'D)

Valya!? Don't walk away from me!

When he gets no reply, Yuri's jaw tightens angrily - shamefully. And as he takes another drink, a LOUD MOTOR HUM takes us to--

EXT. MOTORBOAT - OPEN WATER - LATER

Yuri leans on the boat's wheel, spinning donuts, round and round. He tips back the last dregs of the vodka and chucks the bottle into the lake, absolutely wasted.

He pulls sharply out of the spin, weaving serpentine over the lake's surface until he aims the boat's nose directly at--

The full moon, huge on the horizon. Yuri pushes toward open water, picking up speed.

It isn't flight, but as the little boat rocks with the growing swells, Yuri fills with the exhilaration of freedom.

The moon ahead grows larger. The boat bounces higher and higher until, to Yuri's amazement, it rises from the water--

INTO THE AIR

Yuri soars up, away from the sea. Up, up straight toward the growing moon. A perfect, blissful moment until--

SMASH! He jerks awake behind the wheel. Everything shakes terribly, as the boat careens--

OVER A ROCKY BEACH

He's run aground. Yuri grips the wheel for dear life as the boat GRINDS to an EARSPLITTING halt, chucking Yuri out--

ONTO THE ROCKS

He THUDS hard, face and hands taking the brunt of the impact.

As the boat PUTTERS its dying breath, Yuri tries to slow his own. Hearing approaching VOICES, he forces himself onto his back. In doing so, we see that his face is a mask of blood.

YURI'S POV: For a moment, he can see blurry figures running his way, before a curtain of red overtakes his vision.

VOICES

YURI!

The CALLS become a warped ECHO, distorting until--

REPORTER (V.O.)

YURI!

EXT. MOSCOW - HOSPITAL - DAYS LATER

Yuri and Valya are spotted the moment they step from the hospital. A swarm of REPORTERS descends on them, a barrage of FLASHES illuminates gruesome stitches over Yuri's left brow.

REPORTERS

Yuri! Yuri! Look over here! Etc...

Lifting bandaged hands, Yuri pushes through the swarm toward--

HIS IDLING GAZ M21 VOLGA

Valya gets in the back. As Yuri follows, a REPORTER leans in.

REPORTER

Yuri, are you all right?

Yuri smiles. An ephemeral vision of his younger, lighter self.

YURI

I'm in prime form. Best of my life.
Ready for the next adventure.

REPORTER

What happened?

Yuri's smile quavers as he glances guiltily at Valya. When she leans from the car into the microphone, Yuri starts to panic.

VALYA

Our daughter was playing in the sea.
The waves picked up. Yuri went in
after. Conked his block on a rock.

Amid the crowd's adulation, it's easy to miss the look that passes between them – the icy clench of Valya's jaw – the sweat beading on Yuri's mended brow.

REPORTER

You must be proud of your husband.

VALYA

Yes. He's quite a hero.

Valya kisses Yuri's cheek. A picture of marital bliss.

And as the crowd goes nuts, Yuri gets in the car, pulling the door closed with a--

INT. TAXI - BACKSEAT - DAY

SLAM. Valya pulls shut the door of the idling cab, and the WAILS of both Gagarin girls fill the backseat.

YURI (O.S.)

Valya!

Reflexively, she turns to look out to--

THE STREET

Where Yuri runs toward the taxi. Bare feet plunging into the snow. Open robe flying behind.

IN THE CAB

Valya TAPS the driver to go, just as Yuri BANGS on the window.

YURI (CONT'D)

Stop!

She refuses to look at him as the car SKIDS off.

IN THE STREET

Yuri is suddenly alone as he watches his family vanish around a corner. Then, calmly, he smooths back his hair. Ties the belt of his robe. Makes his way back inside.

INT. GAGARIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Yuri stands before his wall of exploits, eye-to-eye with his TIME cover. Then, he moves placidly to the shelf--

And with a fit of explosive anger, he grabs the Vostok model and hurls it across the room.

As it SHATTERS, Yuri's mouth opens in a scream. However, instead of his voice, we hear the ROAR of a JET ENGINE.

INT. MIG-15 FIGHTER CABIN - DAY

The world outside spins dizzyingly as Yuri corkscrews toward the ground like an absolute maniac.

SUPER: 1 YEAR LATER

Then he pulls up hard, yanking the MiG into a climb. As he rises, a familiar VOICE comes through his com--

VLAD (V.O.)
 Tovarishch! Catch your dingle in
 the landing gear again? Untangle
 yourself and say *hi* to an old friend.

At once, Yuri yanks the plane around. Aims down toward--

THE RUNWAY BELOW

Seeing the plane loop back, Vlad waves his arms in greeting.

His arms freeze in midair. Something's odd. The plane is off-course for the center in the runway. In fact it's--

VLAD
 Oh shit!

He throws himself aside as the MiG tears by. Its landing gear rips through the place Vlad's head had been a moment before--

EXT. RUNWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Despite the stunt, Vlad smiles at Yuri's approach.

VLAD
 Some landing. Comforting to know
 there's still one thing about you
 that hasn't changed...

Yuri doesn't even bother to remove his helmet as he passes Vlad, who paces him.

VLAD (CONT'D)
 I'm no manners expert, but seems to
 me, if you're going to decapitate a
 man, you should buy him dinner first.
 (of Yuri's SILENCE)
 Come on Yuri. What're you doing here?

Rounding on him, Yuri pulls off his helmet. Vlad's smile tightens. Time has taken a toll on Yuri: he's visibly aged. Fatter. Thinning hair long and unkempt.

YURI
 What's it look like? I'm training.
 What about you? Isn't there a moon
 landing you should be prepping for?

There it is. Things haven't gone Yuri's way, and the damage is worse than Vlad imagined. His veneer crumbles.

VLAD

Yuri, it's been over a year since I was chosen for Soyuz...

Yuri's face hardens. He turns away.

VLAD (CONT'D)

Nobody blames you for being angry. Least of all, me. You may not agree. But you must understand, by now, why they picked me instead.

YURI

Why don't you explain it to me?

VLAD

Yuri-

YURI

Go on!

VLAD

(carefully)

You're not yourself. You haven't been for a while. And since Valya and the girls left, it's only gotten worse.

YURI

(getting in his face)

Say what you really mean. I'm a drunk. A joke. They were never going to send me back up, and I was an idiot for deluding myself as long as I did. If you came all this way to say that, you wasted a trip. And you know what else? I'm drunk right now. Does it feel good? Knowing just how far the *mighty* Gagarin has sunk?

VLAD

I'm not here to shame you.

YURI

Then why are you here, Vlad?

Silence as Vlad tries to find the words.

YURI (CONT'D)

WHY ARE YOU HERE?

VLAD

Sergei is dead.

Of all the things Vlad could've said, this rocks Yuri hardest.

YURI
When?

VLAD
Weeks ago.

YURI
What happened?

VLAD
Cancer. He was sick for years. Not even his family knew.

YURI
His leg.

VLAD
That wasn't cancer. He spent 7 years in one of Stalin's gulags when he was young.

YURI
7 years? Why?

VLAD
Anyone with education was a threat then. An entire generation of our greatest minds buried in the snow.

YURI
Why didn't I know?

VLAD
For the most famous man in the world, you're fucking hard to find. By the time I did, he was buried.

YURI
Was- was it a nice funeral?

VLAD
He died as he lived. Russia's Chief Designer. Its biggest secret.

YURI
How could- They'd have accomplished nothing if not for him!

VLAD
God, Yuri, how can you still believe there's fairness in this world?
(MORE)

VLAD (CONT'D)

(then)

You're second in line, you know.
For Soyuz. He tried his damndest to
get you on it...

These last words ignite something in Yuri. He startles Vlad
as he leaps to his feet. Moves off with steely determination.

VLAD (CONT'D)

Yuri, where are you going? Yuri?

INT. GAZ M21 VOLGA - LATER

Yuri weaves furiously through Moscow's streets, toward--

EXT. RED SQUARE - KREMLIN - LATER

Yuri pounds up the Kremlin's imposing stairs.

INT. KREMLIN - HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

A large KGB MAN with an even larger gun, looks threateningly
down at Yuri, who fumes as he waits. An attache approaches.

KREMLIN ATTACHE

He'll see you.

Yuri rises, and with a glare at the agent, makes his way into--

INT. KHRUSHCHEV'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

YURI

Premier Khrushchev, I-

He stops dead in the doorway as he sees--

Not Khrushchev, but Brezhnev, in the Soviet Premier's seat.

Masking his surprise, Yuri sits across from him.

YURI (CONT'D)

I'm here for Premier Khrushchev.

BREZHNEV

He's in Abkhazia on a long holiday.
Hurry and you'll catch the last
plane from Vnukovo. He'll be
thrilled to see you. I hear his
dacha is quite nice.

YURI

Please. I won't leave before
speaking with Premier Khrush-

BREZHNEV

There is no *Premier Khrushchev*.

YURI

What? He'd never-

BREZHNEV

He would. He has. Very quietly. Like
a sweet little mouse. Now, quickly,
please. I have a country to run.

YURI

(shaken, gathering himself)
If you have any decency, you'll
acknowledge Sergei Korolev publicly.
He deserves a hero's funeral.

BREZHNEV

You and I are men of the people. So
you understand. The people don't care
about Sergei Korolev. If the people
don't care about Sergei Korolev, I
don't care about Sergei Korolev.

YURI

If they knew all he'd done-

BREZHNEV

Sergei Korolev was just another
cripple, whose days of sucking the
government teat are at an end...

As he talks, Brezhnev takes out a vodka bottle. Fills a glass.
Yuri stares at it, longing to dull the noise pressing in on him.

BREZHNEV (CONT'D)

There's something my mother used to
say. What was it? *Nosy Mikhail died
noseless in jail*. Khrushchev is
finished. Be grateful his favorite
hound wasn't buried alongside him...

He pushes the glass across the desk.

BREZHNEV (CONT'D)

Not that it would make much
difference. You're doing a fine job
of killing yourself already.

Yuri picks up the vodka, but it doesn't reach his lips. Instead--
SPLASH! He throws it in Brezhnev's face.

At once, the KGB man is in the room -- massive arms around Yuri. Constricting so hard, the glass SHATTERS at their feet.

As he's dragged out, Yuri and Brezhnev stare each other down -- neither daring to blink.

Only when Yuri is out of sight, does Brezhnev furiously rub his alcohol-stung eyes.

EXT. BAIKONUR - SOYUZ GANTRY - DAY

Vlad sits, legs dangling off the edge of the empty gantry. The passing of time is evident on him. He's gaunt. Sunken-eyed. Uncharacteristically somber.

Taking a long drag on a cigarette, he looks out over the snowy steppe -- the incredible space complex having burgeoned exponentially in the few years since the Vostok 1 mission.

YURI (O.S.)
Want some company?

Vlad stares ahead as Yuri sits at his side. Yuri has also aged. His hair thinner. The wound on his brow now a permanent scar.

SUPER: STAR CITY, 2 YEARS LATER

VLAD
How'd you find me?

YURI
Easy. I'd have slept on the gantry the night of my flight if I could've.

Yuri grabs the cigarette. Vlad watches, surprised, as Yuri takes his own drag. The pair shares a conciliatory grin.

YURI (CONT'D)
These'll kill you.

Vlad turns to look up at Soyuz.

VLAD
No faster than that will.

YURI
So you know then?

VLAD

That I'm being sent on a suicide mission? Yeah, I know. I'm not recusing, if that's why you're here.

YURI

Soyuz isn't ready. They're finding new problems faster than they can fix old ones. You won't make it back.

VLAD

Let me guess, you should go instead?

YURI

Yes! What do I have to lose?

VLAD

Your life! I'd take it if I was them. You're a spectacular pain in the ass.

YURI

Vlad, this life has given me more than I deserve. But now, what's left? This *thing* I've become.

VLAD

Yuri-

YURI

They kept letters from me. For years. Did you know that?

FLASH. Yuri in his apartment. Valya has left. He's drunk. Disheveled. At the nadir of his tailspin. He opens the door to find a POSTMAN who drops a huge sack of mail at his feet.

YURI (V.O.)

They arrived after Sergei's death. Hundreds of them...

MOMENTS LATER, Yuri stands at the living room table, pulls a letter from the sack by his side. Opens it. Reads.

YURI (V.O.)

Old women whose husbands were wrongly imprisoned...

LATER, Yuri is crestfallen as he reads another letter.

YURI (V.O.)

Jews who couldn't get work or attend university...

LATER, another letter drops from Yuri's hand.

YURI (V.O.)
 Mothers who couldn't afford
 medicine for their children. So
 many letters. All from desperate
 people I could've helped once...

The page settles atop a heaping pile of letters. Pulling back, we see four more untouched burgeoning mailbags. FLASH.

ON THE GANTRY

YURI
 But there's nothing I can do for
 them now. I missed my chance. I've
 failed so many.

VLAD
 No-

YURI
 When I was a boy, Nazis burned my
 village to the ground. Tore my family
 apart. And I couldn't do anything.
 Only watch. I told myself I'd never
 be that powerless to protect the
 ones I love again. I devoted my life
 to becoming a pilot. And for what?
 (his composure cracking)
 I was so busy looking up, I missed
 what was in front of me. I flew
 faster, higher than anyone. All the
 time, sacrificing the ones I love
 most. But not again. I can't- I won't
 stand aside and watch you die.

Vlad looks at him. Moved. Deeply conflicted. Then--

He rises and walks off, leaving Yuri broken by this latest
 crushing failure.

VLAD (O.S.)
 Well come on...

Yuri spins to see Vlad waiting for him on the gantry stairs.

VLAD (CONT'D)
 Before I change my mind.

And as Vlad descends, Yuri scrambles to his feet in pursuit.

INT. BAIKONUR - CABIN - LATER

CLOSE ON: a small wooden box.

VLAD (O.S.)
What is it?

Pulling back, we see Yuri and Vlad seated at a table, both looking down at the object in Yuri's extended palm.

YURI
Sergei dreamed of being a cosmonaut,
but spent his life putting others in
space. Seemed right to return the
favor. I wanted to scatter his ashes
up there. Now I can. Thanks for that.

As Yuri tucks the box snugly into his jacket pocket, Vlad rises. His entire bearing suddenly different – brighter as he walks from the table.

VLAD
I've had enough gloom for one
lifetime, haven't you?

He returns with a bottle of Stolli and a pair of shot glasses. He fills both and slides one across the table to Yuri.

YURI
Funny. You know I can't.

VLAD
You can. One last drink with your
best, most attractive friend.

Yuri pushes the shot back at him.

YURI
I said goodbye to this once. If I've
learned anything from this life,
it's to never say *goodbye* twice.

Vlad shrugs. Throws back one shot. Then the other. Repours both. SLAMS them on the table, SMASHING US TO--

INT. BAIKONUR - CABIN - THE NEXT DAY

GROANING awake, Yuri brings a hand to his pounding head.

YURI
What happened. Vlad..?

Hearing nothing, his eyes snap open. He lifts his head from the table. Looks around, eyes adjusting to the light.

YURI (CONT'D)
Vlad..?

Two Stoli bottles lie on the table. Both as empty as the cabin.

YURI (CONT'D)
No...

He pats his chest in search of the box.

YURI (CONT'D)
Where is it?

Finding nothing, Yuri's dread is instantly confirmed. He SCREAMS in rage as he brings his fist down on the table.

EXT. BAIKONUR - ROAD - MINUTES LATER

Yuri runs in a fevered sweat past the SOYUZ LAUNCH PAD. He doesn't turn to look as he passes, knowing what he'll see--

THE GANTRY - split open on the ground. Soyuz long gone.

EXT. TECHNICAL COMPLEX - MINUTES LATER

Yuri doubles his pace as he rounds the corner toward--

INT. BAIKONUR TECHNICAL BUILDING - HALLWAY

Yuri slow-motion runs down the hall, bathed in the blood-red pulse of emergency light. His eyes dart to the side toward--

AN OPEN DOOR: 5 YEAR-OLD BORIS in the frame, staring ahead, motionless. He turns expressionlessly, locked on Yuri--

Yuri forces his eyes away as he passes. His gaze stays straight ahead as he runs past A SERIES OF DOORS. Figures standing stoically in each - turning toward Yuri as he goes:

- VALENTIN and ZOYA with her red bows in one frame.
- Water leaks from the seams of DERG'S helmet in another.
- GRIGORY.
- Then SERGEI.

It takes every ounce of will for Yuri to keep his eyes forward as he passes VALYA AND THE GIRLS in yet another door.

He's coming apart, face wet with tears. The lights' bloody pulse deeper than ever as he approaches the end of the hall.

ANGLE ON: Yuri as he runs toward us, weeping. His mouth slowly opening into an aggrieved WAIL.

Countless blank-faced PEASANTS fill the hallway behind him. Row after row of them. Emotionless, shoulder-to-shoulder.

REVERSE ON: open double doors at the end of the hall. VLAD stands in the frame, staring straight into--

Yuri who barrels forth, SCREAMING.

INT. TECHNICAL COMPLEX - MISSION CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

Yuri bores through the double doors. Frantic ENGINEERS turn from their emergency protocols toward him as he rages up at--

A HUGE SCREEN

On which Vlad's black/white image shakes terribly. He doesn't even have a spacesuit. Trying with increasing futility to regain control of the wayward Soyuz.

General Nikolai rails at Yuri as five engineers fight to subdue him. Yuri manages to spit in his face before he's pulled kicking and SCREAMING from the room.

YURI

VLAD!

ON THE SCREEN

It's VLAD who SCREAMS now, trapped in the Soyuz, plummeting to certain death without a working parachute. The SCREAMING gets louder, the shaking intensifies until--

STATIC fills the screen. Sudden awful stillness.

EXT. RED SQUARE - KREMLIN WALL NECROPOLIS - DAY

A large portrait of Vlad stands atop his casket before the Kremlin's massive funeral wall.

MOURNERS look on as VLAD'S WIFE lays flowers on the casket. Overwhelmed by sorrow, she leans on the wall to stay upright.

BEHIND THE CROWD

Yuri stands apart from the others. His jaw tightens as he fights to keep a swell of emotion at bay.

A figure approaches. Yuri looks up with utter surprise to find--

Valya standing beside him. Her soft, compassionate gaze fills Yuri with such shame, he can't bear to meet it.

Then, to his astonishment, Valya takes his hand.

ANGLE ON: Yuri and Valya side by side, her hand tenderly locked in his.

Tears roll down Yuri's face. Tears for something lost – and something found.

INT. GAGARIN HOME - LATER

The instant Yuri and Valya step through the door, Galina and Yelena are in Yuri's arms. Valya joins the blissful embrace.

Boris, watching nearby, quietly goes to a nearby shelf and picks up a camera. He lifts it and--

FLASH! The scene freezes as we--

CLOSE UP ON THE PHOTO - MATCH CUT

We move along a wall: a collage of recently tacked-up photos--

- The family on holiday, playing on the BEACH.
- Yuri and the girls, reassembling the shattered Vostok model.
- Yelena and Galina, in costumes for a school play.
- Candid shots from home. Yuri happy in every one.

We pull back from the wall into--

INT. GAGARIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Yuri takes in the wall – a year's worth of family photos in the place where magazine covers and articles about his successes once hung. He looks peaceful. Strikingly so.

YELENA (O.S.)

Papa..!

Turning, Yuri sees Yelena, peeking in from the hall.

YELENA (CONT'D)

Come on!

The excited girl goes out, once more. And as Yuri follows his daughter, the sound of CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER takes us to--

EXT. PARK - LATER

Yelena chases Galina through sun-drenched grass. The younger girl laughs as she runs, pulling a white kite high overhead.

Yuri sits in the shade of a tree. Full of joy and contentment as he watches his family.

Suddenly tensing, he looks at his hand, pulls it close.

CLOSE ON: a golden honey bee crawling over Yuri's palm.

As Yuri watches the small thing with curious fascination, his focus shifts beyond the bee, onto--

Galina who stands in the grass smiling as she waves at Yuri.

In that moment, Galina is an identical vision of Yuri's sister. An impression that's only intensified when she turns, revealing: Zoya's red ribbon tied in her hair. Flapping behind as she runs after Yelena.

Yuri's focus returns to the bee as he watches it crawl down his palm, onto--

His bare wrist, finally free of Zoya's ribbon.

Softly blowing on the bee, Yuri watches it fly up into the tree.

VALYA (O.S.)

Yuri!

A few meters away, Yuri finds Valya beckoning him over, a conspicuous KGB AGENT beside her.

When Yuri approaches the pair, the agent puts a letter in Yuri's hand. Yuri doesn't even read it. He knows what it says. Tries to hand it back.

YURI
Not today. Tell them I'm busy.

Valya takes the summons from him. Reads.

VALYA
You should go. It's a state summons.

YURI
Valya-

She places a reassuring hand on his chest.

VALYA
It's all right. Go.

Yuri kisses her. A long, deep kiss. Each thankful for the other. For the love they share. The sacrifices they've both made.

Then Yuri pulls away. Glances back at Valya one last time as he follows the KGB man toward his idling black car.

OVER BLACK

The EARSPLITTING ROAR of a JET TAKEOFF--

That quickly quiets as it flies up and away. Fades into the distance until we're left in SILENCE. Then--

YURI (V.O.)
My Dearest, Valya. The thought of
you reading these words fills me
with such sadness...

INT. MIG-15 FIGHTER CABIN - LATER

Yuri glides masterfully through the sky. Breathes it in.

Then, a massive shadow moves over the plane's cabin. Yuri looks up through the canopy toward--

AN ENORMOUS GRAY CLOUD filling the sky above.

As he looks ahead, Yuri sees more storm clouds gathering. He remains calm. Focused. Leans on the joystick.

As the plane turns, we pull from the cockpit into--

THE SKY

ANGLE ON: the MiG as it flies into the dark foreboding sky.

YURI (V.O.)
 Not because your reading them means
 I'm no longer living...

As Yuri's plane shrinks in the distance, we hear a KNOCK.

INT. GAGARIN HOME - GIRLS' BEDROOM - EVENING

Valya rises from kissing her sleeping daughters. Spins toward--

YURI (V.O.)
 But because since you've come back
 to me, I've dreaded nothing more
 than losing you again...

INT. GAGARIN HOME - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Valya opens the front door to find TWO UNIFORMED OFFICERS.
 Distressed, despite military formality.

At once, she knows. Collapses to her knees in the doorway.

YURI (V.O.)
We never know where this life will
take us. Someone told me that once...

EXT. RED SQUARE - MORNING

Countless MOURNERS densely pack RED SQUARE, pressing toward--

YURI (V.O.)
 This life took a boy from the
 tiniest of villages to heights
 beyond his imagination. And yet...

A MILITARY CORTEGE moving through the crowd. A tank pulling
 Yuri's casket behind it.

YURI (V.O.)
 Here I am, wondering if things could
 have turned out differently. Did
 they make the right choice by
 sending me up? Would another's
 burden have been lighter? Or does
 Icarus always end up in the sea..?

Pulling up, we see the impossibly long line of people leading
 from the square.

YURI (V.O.)

How can a man know what his life is
worth – if it's worth anything at
all? How do we measure such things..?

Pulling further up, we see the line's full extent. Thousands.
Tens of thousands. More perhaps – winding on and on through
the city toward the horizon for a chance to say goodbye to
the biggest hero they've ever known.

YURI (V.O.)

By what we've gained? What we've
accomplished? By the imprints we
leave on one another..?

INT. GAZ M21 VOLGA - DUSK

Through a film of tears, Valya looks out at the sunset from
the moving car's rear window.

YURI (V.O.)

Unique and permanent like the
records you played for me the first
night we kissed...

EXT. LAKESIDE ROAD - NIGHT

Stepping from the car, Valya stands for a moment, eyes shut,
feeling the spring wind.

YURI (V.O.)

Have I lost you forever? Or are you
imprinted on me? Is a part of me still
with you? Will we find the rest of
each other again someday..?

She steps onto--

THE BEACH

Valya moves over sand toward Boris, who sits, awaiting her.

YURI (V.O.)

I hope so. Until then...

EXT. LAKESIDE BEACH - MINUTES LATER

Valya and Boris sit together in the sand holding Yuri's letter between them. Valya wipes a tear as they read.

YURI (V.O.)
Eyes to the skies.

In the same spot from which she and Yuri watched Sputnik over a decade earlier, Valya looks into the night sky. She smiles. Hopeful to catch a glimpse of another traveling companion.

Boris follows Valya's gaze into the sky. Past the moon. Then--

We move up, up toward the heavens. Faster, until the world falls away, and there is nothing but stars. Then--

The BRIGHT SYNCOPATION of *BEYOND THE SEA* trickles in as a razor-thin blue sliver rises into view. It expands up into frame, resolving into the cobalt sphere of PLANET EARTH.

And we pull back through a round porthole into--

VOSTOK 1

Bobby Darin SINGS. Clear as day. Clearer even, than if he was inside the ship itself.

BOBBY DARIN (V.O.)
*We'll meet beyond the shore / We'll
kiss just as before...*

The cosmonaut in the ejection seat grins more brilliantly than the blue-tinged light seeping into the craft.

BOBBY DARIN (V.O.)
Happy we'll be beyond the sea...

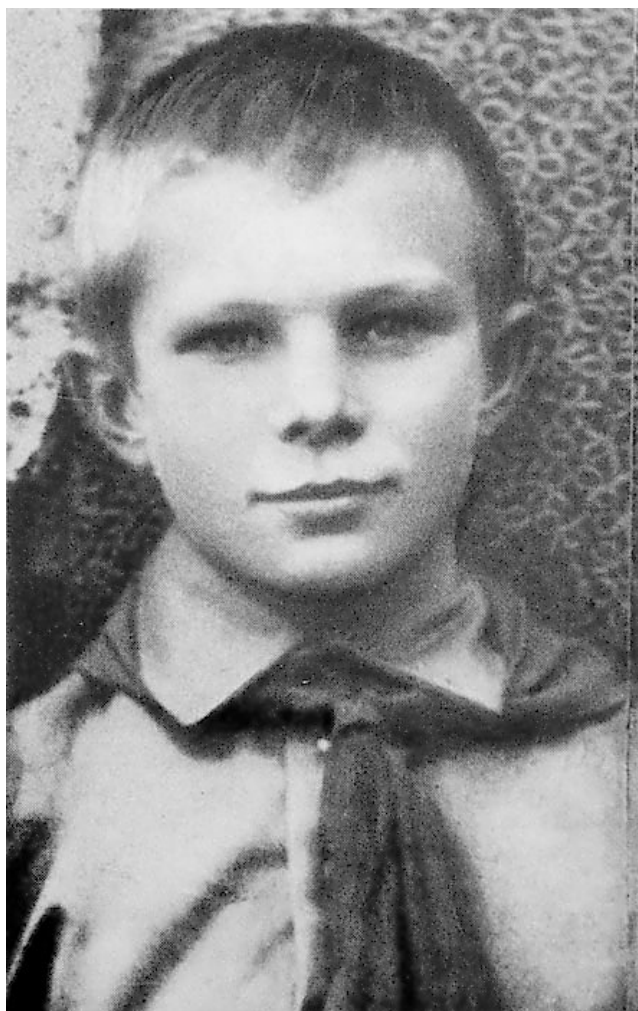
Yuri is ecstatic as he sits on top of the world. Beautiful. Full of love, and joy, and promise.

BOBBY DARIN (V.O.)
And never again I'll go sailing.

Earthrise pours in. Filling Vostok. Covering Yuri. He glows brighter and brighter until all that's left is white.

It ends as it began. IN DARKNESS. And IN LIGHT.

FADE OUT.

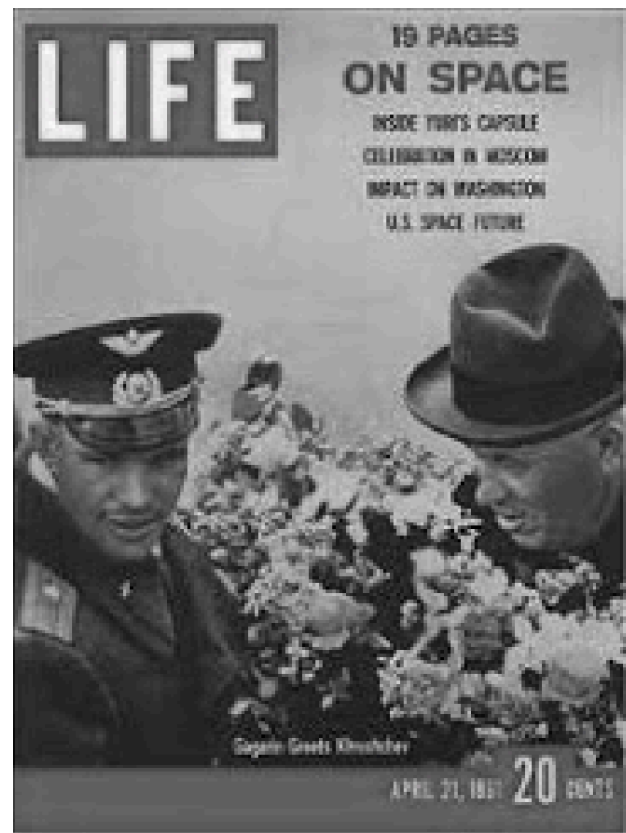


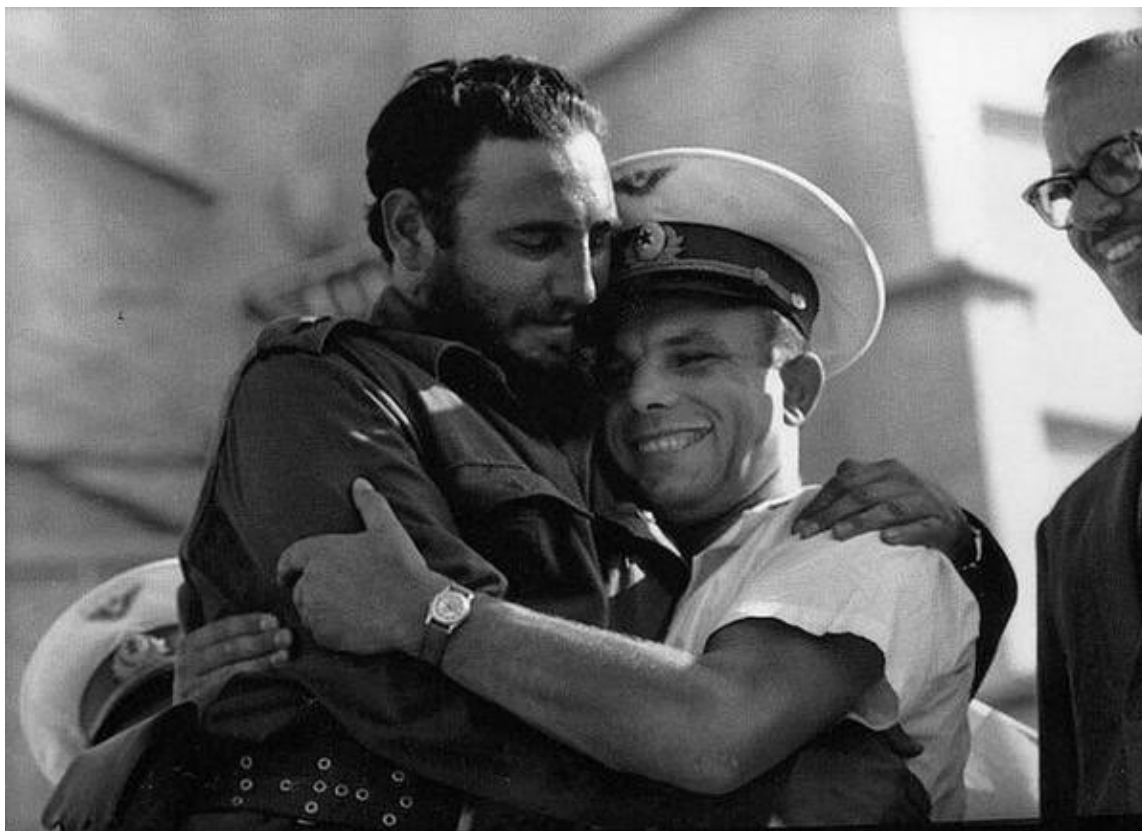
Yuri, Valya, and Yelena





Yuri stands with Khrushchev and Brezhnev atop Lenin's Tomb in Red Square





In Cuba with Fidel Castro





Yuri with
Sergei



Yuri
and
Vlad

