

GAGARIN

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By

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Inspired by True Events

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WGAw registered

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EXT - MURMANSK, ARCTIC CIRCLE - NIGHT

Complete silence over--

The *Aurora Borealis*. Vast, roiling curtains of ghostly light shimmer in the atmosphere.

Suddenly, a DEAFENING ROAR.

Silver wings flash by, a cockpit, the fiery exhaust of a Soviet MiG-15 fighter jet as it shatters the sound barrier and streaks across the sky. A title fades in:

MURMANSK, RUSSIA, ARCTIC CIRCLE - 1958

INSIDE THE COCKPIT (AERIAL) --

The jet roar gives way to WIND WHISTLE and RADIO STATIC.

The pilot's helmet visor reflects the crimson glow of the Northern Lights. On the control panel a little Russian *matryoshka* doll, painted to look like a WWI flying ace, jitters with the rumbling of the jet.

The boyish looking pilot, YURI GAGARIN, 24, struggles to maneuver his craft through turbulent Arctic skies.

ICE HAWK/DERGUNOV (O.C. FILTERED)
Trouble, Yuri? Try easing up on your
forward trim.

Gagarin feels a presence. He looks straight up and sees another MiG slide in UPSIDE-DOWN, ten feet above him, CANOPY TO CANOPY. An impressive feat of flying.

Looking down at him from the MiG is his buddy DERGUNOV.

GAGARIN
No trouble, Ice Hawk. Watch...

Against the pulsating backdrop of the Northern Lights, Gagarin's MiG executes a GIANT ROLL, sliding up, over and around Dergunov's plane, and then back into position.

DERGUNOV (FILTERED)
Not bad... For a rookie.

GAGARIN
C'mon, that was textbook...

Dergunov peels off into a tightly executed BARREL ROLL ATTACK, sliding in astern of Gagarin.

DERGUNOV
Get ready to be schooled, rookie.
I'm on your six.

Gagarin swings mad gyrations, cutting back and forth across Dergunov's nose. Dergunov expertly follows.

GAGARIN
Not for long.

He plunges into a deep SPIRAL DIVE. As Dergunov follows, Gagarin throttles back, and Dergunov overshoots.

DERGUNOV
Damn it!

Gagarin does a hard ROLLING REVERSAL and then pulls up, forcing Dergunov out in front. He slides in behind.

GAGARIN
Now who's on whose six?

Dergunov curses to himself. Yuri smiles.

BASE (O.C. FILTERED)
Hate to break up your little party,
boys, but you need to bring it home.

Gagarin checks his needles.

GAGARIN
Copy, this is Little Eagle. Vector
one-eight-one for base.

Suddenly his view through the cockpit is a white shroud--visibility drops to zero as he descends into the storm.

INT. MURMANSK AIRBASE CANTINA - LATER

Gagarin and Dergunov raise shots of vodka in a run-down, dimly lit bar. They've obviously had a few already.

DERGUNOV
To fast planes, fast cars, and even
faster women...
(Gagarin chimes in)
Not necessarily in that order!

They stand up, clink glasses and down their shots.

Gagarin tosses a few rubles on the table and the two men stagger out together.

GAGARIN
How are Sveta and Misha doing?

DERGUNOV
Sveta got pneumonia waiting on line
in the cold for Misha's baby formula.
I need to make captain so she can
shop at the party member stores.

GAGARIN
That reminds me-- you hear the one
about the housewife who went to the
state grocery store for milk?

Dergunov shrugs.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)

She says to the clerk, 'You don't sell dairy here, do you?' The clerk says, 'No, you've got the wrong store. We don't sell meat here. The store that doesn't sell dairy is across the street.'

Dergunov laughs as he stumbles into his car.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)

You OK to drive?

DERGUNOV

Me? Yeah-- why wouldn't I be?

He peels out of the parking lot and weaves drunkenly away, leaving Gagarin watching.

EXT. KGB HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Floodlights illuminate the yellow brick facade of the massive *Lubyanka* building. A stern-looking scientist, SERGEI KOROLEV, mid-50s, stands at the front door, steels himself, and enters.

TITLE: "KGB HEADQUARTERS - MOSCOW"

Korolev's footsteps ECHO as he hurries down an empty hallway with gleaming parquet floors. He opens a door into--

THE BOARDROOM

A dozen anxious SOLDIERS, KGB AGENTS and OFFICIALS crowd around a bulky radio. GENERAL NIKOLAI KAMANIN, 50ish, rigid, humorless, waves Korolev over.

PRESIDENT DWIGHT EISENHOWER'S VOICE comes over the radio:

EISENHOWER'S VOICE

This is the President of the United States speaking. Through the marvels of scientific advance my voice is coming to you from a satellite circling in outer space. I wish to convey to you and to all mankind America's wish for peace on Earth and good will toward men everywhere.

A brief pause; the message starts again in a recorded loop.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Have you heard this yet, Sergei?

Korolev has a no-nonsense manner with little tolerance for politics or protocol.

KOROLEV

Of course, every idiot on Earth with a radio has heard it!

A menacing senior KGB officer, Alimov, accosts him.

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
Khrushchev wants to know why he
wasn't the first head of state to
broadcast a message from space.

KOROLEV
This is a meaningless stunt. We
could have done this with the first
Sputnik over a year ago.

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
Then why the hell didn't you? It's
not meaningless to the Soviet Union!
This is damaging to the Chairman's
political agenda.

GENERAL KAMANIN
(to Korolev)
This is about diplomacy, Sergei
Pavlovich, not science. It's about
keeping the Americans afraid of us.

KOROLEV
We're ahead of them...

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
(baiting him)
Not far enough. Our intel sources in
Washington say they could beat us.
(threatening)
And there will be consequences if they
do. This is Khrushchev's top priority.

Korolev pales momentarily at the threat. He barks back.

KOROLEV
I've achieved everything that's been
asked of me, Sputnik, Laika, the
ICBM. You want to win this race,
then give me the resources I've
asked for. Without me and my team
there is no political agenda!
(in Alimov's face)
And I don't need to be hauled down
here by the KGB every time the
Americans put on one of their little
circus sideshows.

He turns on his heel and stomps out of the room, leaving
Alimov publicly humbled.

On Korolev's face--

A cloud of doubt; like David in the path of a looming
Goliath.

INT. TITOV'S APARTMENT - DAY

Modern, tastefully decorated. Serious books on the shelves. Photos of pilots and planes on the walls.

ON THE TV: Fuzzy black and white footage of a rocket launch.

Titov's buxom wife, TAMARA, 21, holds a bawling infant.

TAMARA TITOV
Gherman, you'll want to see this!

GHERMAN TITOV, 24, handsome but severe, enters, annoyed.

TITOV
Please, Tamara, I'm trying to rest.

He sees the television and his dour expression brightens. He turns up the volume, then takes the baby.

TV ANNOUNCER (FILTERED)
...And the Americans have announced
their plan to put a man into space by
early 1961...

ON THE TV: The seven Mercury astronauts, wearing silvery spacesuits, stand smiling in front of a rocket capsule.

TV ANNOUNCER (FILTERED) (CONT'D)
Might one of these American astronauts be
the first man into space? Not if the great
Soviet Union's rocket scientists have
anything to say about it...

TITOV
Rocket scientists? Hah! Pilots!
(to the baby)
You see that, Boba? Your daddy's
going to fly like that one day!

Titov watches, enraptured. The baby wails.

EXT. NIKEL AIRBASE - DAY

Gagarin and DERGUNOV stride across the tarmac to their jets. Gagarin heads toward a MiG-21F with a pointed nose cone.

DERGUNOV
(re: Gagarin's jet)
There she is, brand new and ready
for you.

Gagarin notes the jealousy in Dergunov's voice.

GAGARIN
You want to take her up?

DERGUNOV
We'd catch hell from the Colonel.

GAGARIN
(shrugging it off)
I'll tell him I'm not feeling well.

Dergunov smiles, appreciative, excited.

DERGUNOV
Try and keep up with me. They say
this bird can do Mach 3.

GAGARIN
Just keep her steady and whatever you
do don't punch out.

He grins and tosses his *matryoshka* doll to Dergunov.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
For good luck.

Dergunov catches it, looks at it, amiably rolls his eyes,
then tosses it back.

DERGUNOV
You hang on to it.

They climb into their jets. Gagarin gives Dergunov the thumbs-up sign. Dergunov returns the gesture as they taxi off.

EXT. SKY - MINUTES LATER

The jets climb into the sky. Gagarin's MiG-19 flies "chase" behind Dergunov's MiG-21F.

INT. MiG-19 COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin watches Dergunov do a few simple pivots and turns. As they climb higher, the maneuvers become erratic. Gagarin's brow furrows. Something is wrong.

GAGARIN
Ice Hawk, do you read?

DERGUNOV (O.C. FILTERED)
(slurred)
Come in, Little Eagle.

Now Gagarin is worried.

GAGARIN
Ice Hawk, step down your altitude.

DERGUNOV (O.C. FILTERED)
Screw that, Yuri! Eat my dust.

GAGARIN
Base, Ice Hawk looks erratic, maybe
hypoxia. Could be a loose oxygen hose.

BASE (O.C. FILTERED)
See if you can talk him down.

GAGARIN
I read you, base... Come in, Ice
Hawk. Come in!

INT. MIG-21F COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Dergunov is woozy; his head lolls drunkenly.

DERGUNOV'S POV: His view blackens: TUNNEL VISION.

His head dips and he lets go of the joystick. Gagarin's increasingly urgent voice is heard over the radio.

GAGARIN (O.C. FILTERED)
Come in, Ice Hawk! Come in! Can you
read me? Over! Over!

INT. MIG-19 COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin watches helplessly as Dergunov's plane goes into a spin and then plummets, tumbling end-over-end.

The jet SLAMS into the ground in a FLAMING EXPLOSION.

Gagarin bows his head in grief.

EXT. MILITARY CEMETERY - DAY

A dozen PILOTS in military greatcoats and their WIVES attired in black attend a funeral service.

Heavy snowflakes drift down; a quiet, somber scene.

Gagarin puts his arm around his wife VALYA, 24, whose bun hairdo and glasses make her look like a pretty librarian. She holds the couple's 6 month old girl, LENOCHKA.

The widow, SVETA DERGUNOV, wearing a black veil, heaves with sobs. Her two year old son MISHA stands beside her.

The plump, middle-aged officer presiding over the ceremony, COLONEL BABUSHKIN, salutes as the coffin is lowered into the grave.

The pilots all salute as one.

Five MiG jets approach in formation, ROARING as they pass overhead. Gagarin watches them soar off to the horizon.

INT. OFFICER'S CLUB - LATER

Gagarin and the other pilots jabber at the bar, exceedingly drunk. Gagarin is noticeably shorter than the others.

A TALL PILOT rubs the top of Gagarin's head like he would a pet, and laughs.

Valya and another wife, MILA, enter unnoticed by the men.

MILA

Look at these idiots, drunk and happy.
Doesn't it occur to them that they
could be next?

VALYA

They drink to forget.

MILA

Well they forget fast. An hour after
the funeral they're all excited again.

VALYA

About what?

MILA

(looking around, wary)
We're not supposed to know about it,
but my husband talks too much when he's
sloshed...

VALYA

What did he say?

MILA

Something about a new "cosmonautics"
program. They've all applied to get in.

Valya considers this, worried. The pilots raise their glasses for another toast.

TALL PILOT

To Yuri Gagarin, the shortest pilot
in Murmansk!

Gagarin playfully objects. As an attractive cocktail waitress walks by with a tray of drinks he grabs her and pulls her to his lap, spilling vodka and beer.

GAGARIN

Short, yes, but quick and strong!
Look what I caught!

The waitress wriggles from his grasp and continues on her way. The tall pilot nudges Gagarin.

He looks up and sees Valya staring daggers at him. He blushes with guilt.

INT. LADA - LATER

Gagarin drives the family car through a snowstorm, Valya beside him with the baby in her lap. They remain silent, lost in their thoughts.

EXT. GAGARIN HOME IN MURMANSK - EVENING

The Lada arrives at a small military officer's house.

INSIDE--

Valya places Lenochka in a crib. She stands with her back to Gagarin for a long moment, then turns to him, teary-eyed.

GAGARIN
Valya, I was drunk.

Valya shakes her head. She looks more sad than angry.

VALYA
No Yura, it's just... Lenochka...

Lenochka is fast asleep in her crib. He kisses her on the forehead and places his *matryoshka* doll in her tiny hand.

GAGARIN
Lenochka, silly girl, have you been giving your mama trouble again?

VALYA
Svetlana's lost her husband, doesn't that bother you? How will she manage all alone with a baby?

He takes her by the shoulders, looks intently at her.

GAGARIN
Valya, nothing's going to happen to me. I promise.

VALYA
You can't promise that! When we came here there were twenty pilots in your squadron-- now eleven are dead. I've been to more funerals than weddings!
(sighing)
A letter came today. From the Colonel.

GAGARIN
Let me see it.

Valya goes to a table in the vestibule, hands him a letter. He reads the first few sentences and looks up, excited.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
I got an interview.

EXT. TSVNIAG MILITARY AVIATION CENTER, MOSCOW - DAY

A dreary Stalinesque building. Cyrillic letters identify it as the Military Aviation Center.

INSIDE, IN THE BOARDROOM --

An oversized portrait of Khrushchev hangs on the wall.

General Kamanin leads a tense meeting of high-ranking military and government officials, including a hard-eyed Kremlin heavyweight, RUSSAYEV, and a couple of other senior Kremlin officers.

An image of LAIKA, the famous space dog, flashes up on a projector screen behind him as he speaks.

KAMANIN

Sputnik and Laika were major achievements, but they're in the past. We must remain diligent to stay ahead of the Americans.

He turns to scientist MIKHAIL YANGEL, thin, 50ish, graying hair, and the robust, white-haired, medal-chested MARSHAL MITROFAN NEDELIN, who sits next to him.

KAMANIN (CONT'D)

The R-16 team will run their nuclear missile test in October, on Bolshevik Revolution Day.

Korolev interjects, impatient.

KOROLEV

What have you decided about the R-7 team's manned launch program?

Kamanin shoots Korolev a look that says "*cool it.*"

KAMANIN

Military work comes before scientific research projects.

Korolev fumes, while Nedelin nudges Yangel, self-satisfied.

KAMANIN (CONT'D)

But of course with the Americans planning to send a man into space--

RUSSAYEV

We have to send a man first.

KAMANIN

That's right.

(pointing to Korolev)

We're expecting Sergei Pavlovich to run a manned launch in eighteen months.

Korolev looks surprised.

RUSSAYEV

And who's going to fly this...
missile?

GENERAL KAMANIN

We've got 3,500 applicants from across
the Soviet Union. Twenty will be
selected for training, and one will be
the first into space.

(gesturing to a colleague)

Doctor Goldblum here was personally
chosen by comrade Khrushchev as our lead
field recruiter.

DOCTOR GARRY GOLDBLUM, 30ish, gangly, overeager, stands up
too quickly and clumsily spills his coffee across the table.
He wipes it up with an embarrassed blush on his cheeks.

Russayev eyes him with cold irritation. Then, to Kamanin--

RUSSAYEV

How far along are the Americans?

GENERAL KAMANIN

They've already chosen the astronaut for
their first manned flight.

Korolev perks up at this unexpected news.

NEDELIN

Who is this American? What do we
know about him?

GENERAL KAMANIN

He's the product of an extensive search
for their country's brightest and most
capable astronaut.

(off their puzzled looks)

I can see you're all curious to know
who this super American is. In fact,
I've obtained a photo...

The projector flashes; Ham the Chimp appears on the screen,
smiling from behind the visor of his astronaut helmet.

The room erupts in laughter. Even Korolev has to smile.

INT. COLONEL BABUSHKIN'S OFFICE, MURMANSK - DAY

Gagarin sits before the desk of Babushkin, the Colonel who
presided over Dergunov's funeral. Babushkin wears the resigned
look of a man who's been prematurely put out to pasture.

BABUSHKIN

What makes you think they'd pick you?

GAGARIN

I'd like to try, sir.

BABUSHKIN

You're delusional. Out of thousands of applicants they're taking just twenty.

GAGARIN

I'm an excellent pilot.

BABUSHKIN

With only two hundred flight hours logged!

Babushkin sees from the determination in Gagarin's eyes that he won't be dissuaded.

BABUSHKIN (CONT'D)

All right then, let's see... You'll need to pass the written exams in calculus and aeronautics. Then there are the physical tests, very demanding. Most important, you'll need an excellent letter of recommendation from your commanding officer.

GAGARIN

Well... That would be you, sir.

Babushkin nods, regarding Gagarin with deep skepticism.

INT. GAGARIN'S MURMANSK HOME - EVENING

Gagarin and Valya eat a meager looking supper of soup and shriveled vegetables. Lenchka cries in the background.

GAGARIN

I wish you wouldn't fight me on this.
It's hard enough as it is.

Valya chews her dinner, tired of this recurring argument between them.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)

I want to move up, Valya. I want us to live better. This program could be our chance.

(off her doubtful look)

OK, here's what I'll do: You want me to quit piloting? Take up a trade?

VALYA

Your father always says you were a good carpenter as a boy...

GAGARIN

So. If I don't get selected for the program I'll quit piloting and I'll never mention flying again.

(off Valya's nod)

But until that moment comes, you support me all the way.

This sounds fair. Valya's expression softens. She sighs.

VALYA

You never quit, do you?

GAGARIN

That's why you love me so much.
Imagine if I had quit trying to ask
you out for a date. The prettiest
girl in Saratov...

She playfully whacks him on the shoulder.

VALYA

Yuri, you are such a stubborn mule!

BEGIN TRAINING MONTAGE:

Gagarin studies at a library table piled with textbooks. He works through equations with a pencil and note pad.

Gagarin swims hard across the length of a pool, stopping when he reaches the end. Valya checks a stopwatch, shakes her head. He frowns, disappointed.

He pumps through pushups like a machine, the back of his shirt drenched in sweat.

He flies his MiG while reading a book on rocketry that's propped on the control panel.

Valya sits at a classroom desk spread with a picnic meal, feeding Lenchka while reading questions out loud from a book. Gagarin furiously scribbles equations on a blackboard.

Gagarin swims while Valya checks her watch. Her expression says "so-so."

Gagarin and other PILOTS watch the 1955 TV film "Man in Space" featuring WERNHER VON BRAUN.

VON BRAUN (FILTERED)

I believe a practical passenger rocket can
be built and flown within ten years.

Gagarin nears the finish line of a race, leading a pack of RUNNERS. Valya cheers him on. He wins and collapses into Valya's arms.

Dozens of uniformed pilots struggle at their desks with a difficult exam. A PROCTOR paces the room.

Gagarin hunches over his exam booklet. He looks up at the clock then back down at the booklet, determined.

Gagarin swims. This time three OFFICERS stand on the pool deck; one of them shows the other two his stopwatch, impressed. Gagarin smiles when he reaches the wall.

END TRAINING MONTAGE

INT. COLONEL BABUSHKIN'S OFFICE, MURMANSK - DAY

Gagarin is back before the Colonel. Babushkin looks unhappy.

BABUSHKIN
My mind is made up. Forget about this program, Gagarin, move on.

GAGARIN
I don't understand, Colonel. I placed first in the exams and in all the physical tests!

BABUSHKIN
Look, Gagarin... How tall are you? Five-three? Five-four?

GAGARIN
I'm five foot two, sir.

Babushkin shakes his head, growing more agitated.

BABUSHKIN
How much weight can you lift? How much can you bench press?

GAGARIN
Sir, I don't follow you...

BABUSHKIN
Damn it, I won't be made to look like a fool! They want men who are bigger than you, stronger. Better educated. You're a scrawny little farm boy.

GAGARIN
Sir-

BABUSHKIN
It's bad enough I have to bide my time in this dead end post. If I recommend someone like you they won't take me seriously and I'll never get out of here.

Babushkin picks up an official looking document with a photo of a tough-looking pilot and waves it in the air.

BABUSHKIN (CONT'D)
They're looking for men like this.

He thrusts the document at Gagarin to emphasize his point but it slips from his grasp. It flutters to the floor and slips underneath a bulky combination safe.

BABUSHKIN (CONT'D)
Now look what you made me do!

Babushkin tries to slide his fingers under the safe to retrieve the document, but it's out of reach.

Gagarin steps past Babushkin's desk and squats by the safe.

BABUSHKIN (CONT'D)
You'll never reach it.

Gagarin's next move takes the Colonel by surprise--

He wraps his arms around the safe and slowly hoists it well off the floor. Babushkin stares in disbelief.

Gagarin grunts and motions with his eyes to the document. Babushkin finally picks it up and then slumps back into his chair, shaking his head.

Gagarin sets down the safe and stands up straight again, breathing hard. A flash of anger in his eyes.

BABUSHKIN (CONT'D)
Sit down, Gagarin.
(off his defiant look)
Sit down.

Gagarin slowly sits. Babushkin shakes his head again.

BABUSHKIN (CONT'D)
I'm going to regret this...
(extending his hand)
I'll do it. I'll send a recommendation
letter for you.

Gagarin's face brightens. He shakes Babushkin's hand.

GAGARIN
Thank you, Colonel! Thank you.

BABUSHKIN
Don't thank me. This will bring
trouble for both of us, I know it!

Gagarin laughs as he exits.

Babushkin stares at the safe. He squats down and struggles to replicate Gagarin's feat but the safe doesn't budge.

INT. MIG-19 FIGHTER - DAY (AERIAL)

We float like gods above the cloud cover. The mid-day Arctic sun hangs low in the sky.

The wind WHOOSHES and the jet engine ROARS as Gagarin hums a tune, content.

Reflected from the glass cover of the cockpit, a SUN FLARE fills the screen with white light as we

CROSS-FADE TO:

INT. TSVNIAG MILITARY AVIATION CENTER - DAY

Hundreds of white envelopes fill the screen.

The envelopes nearly overflow a mail cart being pushed by a YOUNG CLERK in a mailroom apron. He arrives at the desk of YULIA, 20's, a pretty, well-groomed secretary.

She skims a letter, making notes. Places it on top of a stack which she picks up and carries out of the room.

INT. TSVNIAG BOARD ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kamanin and Korolev converse at the board room table as Yulia enters. She hands Kamanin the files, then turns to leave.

KOROLEV

Yulia, please send in Dr. Goldblum.

The men admire the swing of her hips as she sashays out the door. As Goldblum enters Kamanin hands him a file.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Dr. Goldblum, this is our list of potential recruits. Khrushchev told us to get you out of your office so you can go see what these men are made of.

Goldblum scans the list with dawning dread.

DR. GOLDBLUM

But... none of these are in Moscow.

GENERAL KAMANIN

You think the only talented pilots are in Moscow? The Motherland is full of them, Goldblum. Don't you love the Motherland?

(Goldblum obediently nods)

Then get out there and see it!

INT. VDV AIRBORNE DIVISION TRAINING PLANE - DAY (AERIAL)

Goldblum stands at the open jump bay of a VDV paratrooper plane. He peers nervously at the 6,000 foot drop to Earth.

The trainer, ALEXEI LEONOV, 25, blond, cheerful, mischievous, stands next to him, a packed chute on his back.

They shout to be heard over the rushing wind.

LEONOV

So let me understand-- you want me to leave my job and go through a year of intense training.

Goldblum nods.

LEONOV (CONT'D)

Then maybe, if I'm lucky, I might fly a new kind of craft that no one's tested yet, with a high probability that I'll be killed?

DR. GOLDBLUM

Well...

Leonov checks the chute of a paratrooper, then pats him on the back. Goldblum blanches as the paratrooper jumps from the plane. Leonov turns back to him.

LEONOV

And you came all the way out here just to talk to me?

DR. GOLDBLUM

You're highly recommended, Captain Leonov. We're facing the Americans; we need the best men we can find.

LEONOV

What if I say no?

GOLDBLUM

No one will force you. This is hazardous work, so it's strictly voluntary. But I'd very much like you to join the program.

LEONOV

You'd like me to join. And what will you do for me?

Goldblum is at a loss. Leonov's eyes twinkle.

LEONOV (CONT'D)

Never mind, I have an idea.

He grabs a chute, and before Goldblum can say a word it's strapped to his back. Leonov stands square in front of Goldblum and grabs him by the shoulders.

DR. GOLDBLUM

Oh no!

And with that Leonov pulls him out the bay and off the plane into a tandem free-fall.

EXT. LANDING SITE - MINUTES LATER

Goldblum sprawls on the ground, pale and breathless. Leonov stands over him, smiling.

LEONOV

OK, I'm in.

DR. GOLDBLUM
Are you insane?

LEONOV
Isn't everyone who joins your crazy
program?

Goldblum wipes his brow, almost too stunned to react.

DR. GOLDBLUM
(sardonic)
I love the Motherland...

INT. RUSSIAN BANYA (SAUNA) - DAY

Goldblum's perspiring face rests sideways on a thin pillow.
He wears a felt *shapka* hat.

Across from him, Titov also rests on a pillow and wears a
shapka, his wavy hair damp from the humidity. He frowns.

TITOV
You mean to tell me you visited
other pilots first, before me?

PULL BACK to reveal that the two men are lying naked on
wooden benches in a steaming hot Russian *banya*.

DR. GOLDBLUM
You are certainly one of our top
choices. I didn't mean to-

TITOV
One of? If you have me why would you
need anyone else?

DR. GOLDBLUM
Well, what if something happened to
you? We'd need backups. You know, the
Americans have seven astronauts.

TITOV
You think I'm too weak to survive
your training program?
(he nods to an attendant)
Why don't you take a *venik* massage?

DR. GOLDBLUM
Oh, no thank you. I've never really
been very fond of the *venik*. I guess
you could say I have thin skin.

TITOV
Nonsense! How can you say you're
Russian if you don't like *veniks*?
(to the attendant)
Here, give him a massage. Take it
easy on him though.

He winks at the attendant, hands him some rubles.

The attendant takes up a bundle of leafy birch branches and whacks Goldblum on the back, thighs and calves. It's more like a flogging than a massage.

Goldblum whimpers. Tears roll down his cheek as his skin turns red, and welts appear on his back.

DR. GOLDBLUM
Ow, ow, ow, ouch!

TITOV
Nice, eh! How about his feet?

The attendant now begins whacking the *venik* across the bare soles of Goldblum's feet.

DR. GOLDBLUM
Oh god, oh god, please, stop!

TITOV
Just five more minutes. You can't expect me to risk my life when you won't even endure a tiny bit of pain!

GOLDBLUM
I... love... the... Motherland...

EXT. GAGARIN HOME IN MURMANSK - EVENING

A blizzard whips snow and ice through the air. The wind ROARS.

INT. GAGARIN HOME IN MURMANSK - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin enters the house, bundled in a scarf and a snow-dusted fur *ushanka* hat.

GAGARIN
Any mail from Moscow today?

VALYA
I don't know, I haven't been out all afternoon.

Gagarin opens the front door. The wind HOWLS, snow drives into the room. He raises his voice so Valya can hear him.

GAGARIN
Really? Such a lovely day and you stayed cooped up inside?

He plunges into the blizzard.

EXT. GAGARIN HOME IN MURMANSK - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin cautiously navigates the icy path. He peers inside the mailbox-- nothing.

On the way back he slips and falls, banging his head.

INT. GAGARIN HOME IN MURMANSK - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin enters. Valya focuses on a newspaper.

VALYA
Anything?

GAGARIN
Nothing yet. I don't understand why I haven't heard from them.

Valya emits a tiny sigh of relief, then notices--

VALYA
Oh my god, Yuri, what happened?

GAGARIN
It's nothing... I slipped on the ice.

Valya tries but she can't hold back a giggle.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
Oh, so you enjoy seeing your husband bruised and beaten?

He lifts a rolling pin from the table and hands it to her.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
Here, why not add to my suffering...

Valya laughs. She kisses and caresses his bruises.

VALYA
You fly jets every day and arrive home without a scratch, but a walk to your own mailbox is a dangerous journey.

EXT. GAGARIN HOME IN MURMANSK - LATER

A tall, heavily bundled figure shuffles along the sidewalk to the Gagarins' door. Vapor puffs from his face mask.

Only the eyes are visible, but it is obviously--

GOLDBLUM
(cringing in the cold)
I love the Motherland. I love the Motherland. I love--

Just as he reaches the door, Goldblum slips, stumbles and crashes face first into it with a heavy THUD.

INSIDE THE HOUSE --

Gagarin and Valya exchange a glance. Who could be at the door in this weather?

Gagarin opens the door and looks out, but sees no one.

He hears a GROAN and looks down to see Goldblum sprawled at his feet. Helps him up. Goldblum towers over Gagarin by at least a foot.

DR. GOLDBLUM
Is your father here?

INSIDE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Goldblum holds an ice pack over his eye with one hand while he closes his briefcase with the other. Gagarin is distraught. Valya sits at the table, emotional.

DR. GOLDBLUM
I'm sorry to take up your time,
Lieutenant. I came because your letter
of recommendation was exceptional. But
there was an unfortunate error-- it
says here that you are five foot seven.

Goldblum shows Gagarin his notes.

GAGARIN
I wrote that. Actually, it says five
foot two. But Dr. Goldblum, my height
has never been a problem before.

DR. GOLDBLUM
I'm afraid it is now. We were willing
to overlook your lack of a college
degree. And your flight experience...
(he checks his notes)
230 hours! Do you realize the
American astronauts each have more
than 1,500 hours?

GAGARIN
Dr. Goldblum...

DR. GOLDBLUM
I might have been able to compromise
on the flight hours but... You just
fall too far... short. I'm sorry.

GAGARIN
Wait, I want to show you something.

Gagarin rushes into the other room. Goldblum takes this as his cue to leave. Valya addresses him, adamant.

VALYA
Dr. Goldblum, don't go. You're making a
mistake if you reject my husband.

Goldblum regards Valya with sympathy, but heads to the door.

VALYA (CONT'D)
Please, look at this...

He stops, impatient. She picks up a framed photo of a squadron of twenty young pilots. Gagarin stands proudly in the front row center.

VALYA (CONT'D)
My husband's squadron. This was taken less than a year ago. More than half of these men are dead now.

DR. GOLDBLUM
I really must go, Mrs. Gagarin...

VALYA
Why would a man volunteer to do this? Gamble with his life, risk the chance that his baby daughter might grow up without a father?

DR. GOLDBLUM
Mrs. Gagarin...

VALYA
For glory? For his country? Maybe those things, but I think it must be more than that.

Goldblum pauses. He waits for her to continue.

VALYA (CONT'D)
Imagine you're competing against other men to do your job, and all of them are bigger, stronger, better suited in every way. But this doesn't discourage you, it just makes you even more determined...

Goldblum now gives her his full attention.

VALYA (CONT'D)
Why would a man do this? The only explanation is that he knows, deep in his heart, that it's what he's meant to do, it's the reason he's alive.
(her eyes tear up)
Do you think I want my husband to risk his life for your program? I need my husband. My daughter needs him. I wish you had never shown up at my door. But now that you're here you have to know this: you need my husband. Russia needs him. If you give him this chance he will never, ever let you down. He may be small, but I promise you'll never find a man with a bigger heart!

INT. GAGARIN BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin rushes into the living room with an impressive cache of medals pinned to a cloth. But Goldblum's not there.

The front door is wide open. Gagarin's face falls.

He rushes to Valya's side just outside the open door. Snow whips their faces. Goldblum is nowhere in sight.

GAGARIN

Valya? How could you let him go?

Tears still stain her cheeks even as the corners of Valya's mouth turn up into a smile.

VALYA

We have a week to pack, Yura.

(off his puzzled look)

You're to report to training in Moscow.

You're going to be a cosmonaut!

Gagarin stands there, stone-faced. He spreads his arms out to the blistering storm and deadpans:

GAGARIN

What, and leave all this behind?

He turns to Valya and gives her a huge hug.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. PLOSHAD LENINA, MOSCOW - DAY

The winter sun beams bright over Lenin Square.

Gagarin's yellow Lada traverses Leninsky Prospekt.

TITLE: MOSCOW - MARCH, 1960

INT. LADA AUTOMOBILE - DAY

Gagarin drives toward the city center. In the passenger seat Valya cradles Lenchka, now 11 months old.

INT. GAGARIN'S MOSCOW APARTMENT - DAY

Valya unpacks and settles the family into their new home. Gagarin is on the telephone.

GAGARIN

Yes, Momma, we've arrived... I can't say much about it... yes, it's still piloting work, but a bit different... Come visit us... I'll tell you what I can when I see you and Poppa...

EXT. STATE GROCERY STORE - DAY

Valya stands outdoors in a long queue, empty sack in hand. She stamps her feet to warm them against the bitter cold.

EXT. ZHUKOVSKY ACADEMY OF AERONAUTICAL SCIENCE - DAY

Icicles hang from the building's marble Stalinist facade.

INT. ZHUKOVSKY ACADEMY - CONTINUOUS

The foyer is jammed with young men around Gagarin's age.

Gagarin steps up to a glass window where a DOUR LOOKING WOMAN, 40s, a low-level *apparatchik*, manages reception. She seems both harried and bored.

GAGARIN
(cheerful)
I've arrived from Murmansk!

DOUR WOMAN
Papers.

Gagarin slides his passport through a slot in the window. The woman studies it, suspicious, then consults a list, flipping through several pages.

Alexei Leonov, the paratrooping instructor, stands behind Gagarin, eavesdropping.

GAGARIN
I'm one of the twenty cosmonauts. I was called here by Director Kamanin.

The woman rolls her eyes. She's heard this one before.

DOUR WOMAN
Twenty, eh? Is that what you heard?

She pummels a pass with three different rubber stamps and slides it through the tiny window slot.

DOUR WOMAN (CONT'D)
Go through the turnstile there. Show the guard your pass.

GAGARIN
Thank you!

Leonov, smiling, taps him on the shoulder.

LEONOV
Alexei Leonov.

GAGARIN
Yuri Gagarin. Pleased to meet you.

LEONOV

I don't know if you noticed, but there are a few more than twenty of us here.

Gagarin looks around. There are at least 100 young men.

GAGARIN

They're all here for the program?

Leonov nods. Gagarin's cheer deflates.

LEONOV

Looks that way, *amigo*. But hey, the hardest part is already behind us.

He pats Gagarin on the back and they head to the turnstile.

GAGARIN

(to himself)

Amigo?

INT. TESTING ROOM I - DAY

Gagarin is bound spread-eagled to an upright metal wheel, his hands and feet strapped to the rim. Wearing only his white briefs he resembles da Vinci's Vitruvian Man.

DOCTOR #1, a white-smocked physician, flips a switch and the wheel begins to revolve, gradually picking up speed.

Soon Gagarin is nothing more than a blur.

INT. TESTING ROOM II - DAY

Leonov sits in what looks like a giant steel baby bouncer. Electrode wires run from his bare chest and forehead to measuring instruments nearby.

White-smocked DOCTOR #2 presses a button. The seat bounces violently, the measuring instruments dance crazily.

Leonov tries to protest but can only manage a vibrato squeak.

LEONOV

Hey-ey-ey-ey-ey-ey-ey!

INT. TESTING ROOM I - DAY

Gagarin and his wheel slow to a stop, leaving him upright and nearly nose-to-nose with Doctor #1. He grins at the doctor.

The doctor stares at him like he's inspecting a dead bug specimen. He makes a note, then hits a switch.

Gagarin and his wheel begin to revolve in the other direction. His grin vanishes.

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

PAN across a row of treadmills, each with a large red light bulb mounted on its front panel.

Gagarin, Leonov and BONDARENKO, a baby-faced 23-year-old, stand on treadmills with several other pilots, shirtless, in running shorts. They shiver in the cold air.

A BOOMING, MELODRAMATIC VOICE begins reciting poetry.

BOOMING VOICE

*The waves were gone. The pavement, broad
Was opened, and Evgeny, stressed,
With heart half-dead and stifled throat,
In hope, and fear and awful pains,
Runs to the stream, just now restrained.*

Gagarin and Leonov gape at Titov gesticulating like the featured soloist in a grand opera house. They whisper to each other.

LEONOV

Isn't that...?

GAGARIN

Yeah. He's reciting Pushkin!

LEONOV

Are we in the right place?

Another doctor, ANTONOFF, stands before them scribbling notes and ignoring them. Titov approaches the group.

TITOV

So where are you boys from?

Bondarenko extends his hand.

BONDARENKO

Valentin Bondarenko, from Kharkov.

TITOV

(shaking his head)

Gherman Titov. I'm from the south too, Altayskiy.

LEONOV

Alexei Leonov. From the east, Listvyanka, in Irkutsk.

TITOV

(to Gagarin)

How about you, little man?

Gagarin answers cheerfully despite the insult.

GAGARIN

Yuri Gagarin, from Smolensk, poetry man.

TITOV

A farm boy. You must be the one they
brought to milk the cows.

Bondarenko and Leonov laugh.

GAGARIN

And you must be the one they brought to
recite poems about my space flight.

Before Titov can reply, Antonoff clears his throat to get
their attention.

ANTONOFF

Your goal is to maintain enough speed
on your treadmill to keep the red
light bulb illuminated. The endurance
record is 91 seconds.

The men exchange glances-- a competition. Titov's eyes narrow.

TITOV

Prepare to lose, gentlemen.

ANTONOFF

You may begin now.

The men start to run. PAN their faces as they struggle to
maintain enough speed to power their light bulbs.

On a wall clock, the second hand sweeps past 20 seconds.

Gagarin is the picture of calm determination as he strides
along. His light bulb glows bright red.

Titov is next to him, matching him stride for stride.

Bondarenko and Leonov race to keep up. The second hand of
the clock sweeps past 45 seconds.

Some of the light bulbs begin to flicker, and one by one the
pilots drop out, winded. Leonov clumps along like a wounded
animal, hanging in through sheer force of will.

Bondarenko looks like he's in pain but fights through it. The
clock sweeps past one minute and his bulb begins to falter.
He puts his hand to his aching side and finally drops out.

Leonov's face is bright red. He keeps an eye on the clock as
his light bulb flickers.

The second hand passes 90 seconds. At 93 Leonov throws his
hands in the air in victory and slows to a halt.

LEONOV

There you go, boys, a new record.

He beams with pride, but falters as he hears other
treadmills still going. Antonoff motions with his eyes--

Gagarin and Titov still pump along as though they've just started. Both of their light bulbs shine bright.

The clock passes 2 minutes.

Gagarin finally shows some strain. Though he still runs as hard as he can, his bulb flickers and gradually dies out. He stops and bows his head, spent.

Titov continues on a few more seconds for good measure, and then his light bulb dims. He stops and checks the clock-- 2 minutes and 20 seconds.

Everyone's eyes are on Titov and Gagarin; the two men have just established themselves as the ones to beat.

Antonoff records an observation in his notebook.
Gagarin extends a congratulatory handshake to Titov.

GAGARIN
Congratulations, Gherman, great run!

Titov ignores the handshake and walks away with smug disregard. Gagarin scratches his head.

Antonoff observes this exchange and scribbles another note on his pad.

EXT. STATE GROCERY STORE - DUSK

Valya still waits on line at the store. A shop clerk puts up a sign in the window: "Out of milk."

Queued CUSTOMERS groan. Valya shakes her head and leaves.

EXT. KREMLIN - NIGHT

Aerial shots of Red Square, St. Basil's Cathedral, the Armory Museum, government office buildings.

TITLE: THE KREMLIN - MAY, 1960

INSIDE, IN THE MAIN CONFERENCE ROOM --

Mahogany and brass elegance. Soviet flags. A huge portrait of Khrushchev adorns the wall.

At the head of the conference table sits the man himself, NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV.

Kamanin, Korolev, Nedelin, Yangel and KGB Agent Alimov sit stiffly around the table, in awe of the Party Chairman, while Goldblum threads film into a 16mm projector.

KHRUSCHEV
Show us the damn film already
Goldblum, before I send you back to
that third-rate hospital in
Khabvarovsk where I found you.

DR. GOLDBLUM
All set, Chairman.

Goldblum starts the projector and hobbles to his chair.

KHRUSHCHEV
Why are you limping, are you hurt?

DR. GOLDBLUM
No, I've got something in my shoe.

KHRUSHCHEV
(rolling his eyes)
Stop walking around like a cripple
and take it out!

DR. GOLDBLUM
I didn't think it proper to take off
my shoe in your presence.

KHRUSHCHEV
I'm not a fucking Czar, man, I'm
only the Party Secretary.

Goldblum sheepishly begins to untie his shoe.

ON THE PROJECTION SCREEN --

A shaky handheld shot of a rocket on the number 1 launch pad
at Cape Canaveral.

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
This was obtained by our people in
Washington, at great personal risk. I
expect it will confirm our continuing
technical superiority over the Americans.

KHRUSHCHEV
What are we looking at here? I can't tell
one of these damn machines from another!

He sees Yangel and Korolev exchange a worried glance.

KHRUSHCHEV (CONT'D)
What?

YANGEL
It's an Atlas rocket... with a
Mercury capsule on top.

KOROLEV
We didn't know they were already
this far along.

KHRUSHCHEV
Could there be a man in there?

ON SCREEN: The ignition sequence begins; smoke billows from
the rocket engines.

KOROLEV

No, they would have announced something that big to the press.

YANGEL

But they've solved some problems we're still working on. The heat shield, re-entry procedures, telemetry...

Everyone is quiet as they watch the rocket launch perfectly. It soars straight up into the heavens. Eisenhower beams and shakes Von Braun's hand.

A stunned silence. Khrushchev turns on the lights.

KHRUSHCHEV

(his face reddening)

What the hell happened? You boys told me we were ahead of them!

NEDELIN

It may not be as bad as it looks.

Khrushchev eyes Nedelin, shakes his head. Turns to Kamanin.

KHRUSHCHEV

What about you, Kamanin? You agree?

KAMANIN

(not so sure)

I agree, sir. It's probably not as bad as it looks.

Khrushchev stands up, begins to pace around them.

KHRUSHCHEV

I've got Mao in China calling me a traitor to Communism with a million troops on our border, looking for any sign of weakness to start a war. How do you think this will look to him?

He picks up a telephone set and thrusts it at Nedelin.

KHRUSHCHEV (CONT'D)

Here, you call Castro and convince him to install our nuclear warheads in Cuba even though the Americans are ready to wipe Havana off the map! Tell him he can trust us to protect him because 'it's not as bad as it looks.'

Nedelin and Kamanin both shrink in their seats.

KHRUSHCHEV (CONT'D)

(his anger rising)

Why should Eisenhower be afraid of us when he can plainly see we've lost our military advantage? Am I supposed to tell him 'it's not as bad as it looks?'

KAMANIN
That's not what I meant--

KHRUSHCHEV
If you fuck up and the Americans start
to believe they can beat us in space--

He SLAMS the phone on the table, startling the men.

KHRUSHCHEV (CONT'D)
We'll have their missiles up our
asses before you know it and none of
your heat shields or re-entry
procedures will mean a goddamn thing.

He puts his knuckles on the table and leans forward at them.

KHRUSHCHEV (CONT'D)
You think how it looks doesn't matter?
(bangs his fist down)
It's all that matters! Our future, our
children's future, depends on it.
(glares at Alimov and Nedelin)
Get your act together and give me
something to wipe that stupid grin
off Eisenhower's face before I meet
him in America next month.

Korolev contemplates. Then--

KOROLEV
Sir, we're about to send two dogs into
orbit. We can time it for just before
your arrival in Washington.

KHRUSHCHEV
Good, that'll get his attention.
(to Kamanin)
See that Korolev gets the funding he's
been asking for.

NEDELIN
And my ballistic missile program?

KHRUSHCHEV
I want armed missiles in Cuba by next
year. That means we need a successful
ICBM test launch by October.

A sudden HAMMERING SOUND. They turn to see Goldblum at the
end of the table, pounding his shoe on the wooden surface.

Khrushchev watches with interest, more intrigued than
annoyed. He seems to make a mental note.

KHRUSHCHEV (CONT'D)
What is it? Why are you so angry?

Goldblum looks up, surprised. Then, embarrassed.

DR. GOLDBLUM

There's a pebble stuck in my shoe. I can't get it out.

Khrushchev smiles, amused.

KHRUSHCHEV

The next time you all see me it'll be on the news, from America. Let's show that bastard Eisenhower who's really winning this race.

INT. ZHUKOVSKY ACADEMY AUDITORIUM - DAY

Gagarin, Leonov, Titov and Bondarenko sit in an auditorium packed with young pilots. Soviet flags hang from the proscenium. Kamanin is at the lectern, in full regalia.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Gentlemen, as Chief of Cosmonaut Training I can tell you we're here for one reason: to bury the Americans!

(the pilots CHEER)

I'm looking for just two men: one will be the first to fly into space, the other will be his backup. The rest of you are useless to me.

Gagarin and Leonov exchange a glance.

GENERAL KAMANIN (CONT'D)

So ask yourself this: Am I the best, the strongest, the most capable pilot in the Soviet Union? If not, then save all of us the trouble and leave now.

Kamanin steps down. The audience sits in stunned silence. Except for Titov, who addresses his companions.

TITOV

You better work hard for that second spot, comrades, because I'm taking the first one.

INT. GAGARIN'S MOSCOW APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gagarin and Valya host his parents, ALEXEI and ANNA, for dinner. It's a light-hearted affair with beer and vodka flowing freely. Alexei bounces Lenchka on his lap.

VALYA

I'm sorry I couldn't offer you a nicer supper. Yuri's working hard to get us access to the party member stores.

ANNA

Don't apologize, dear. It's nice to have you in Moscow where we can visit.

GAGARIN

Oh, but poor Valya misses those long nights and the lovely weather in Murmansk. Don't you, darling?

VALYA

(playing along)

It was so hard to leave our little heaven in the Arctic. But we all have to make sacrifices for the good of our country.

ALEXEI

Speaking of the good of the country, how is your work going?

GAGARIN

You know I can't talk about it Poppa.

ANNA

Are you safe? We hear about planes crashing all the time.

Alexei hands Lenchka off to Valya.

ALEXEI

Flying around in circles in the sky! A bunch of foolishness if you ask me.

Valya's mood darkens. Anna notices.

ANNA

You must worry about Yuri, dear. We do.

GAGARIN

Mom, Dad, let's not start this!

VALYA

I do worry. Of course I do.

Alexei slams his fist on the table.

ALEXEI

Damn it then, Yuri. Quit! Smolensk has plenty of roofs to be fixed and fences to repair for a good carpenter like you. We could do a nice little business and your children could get to know their grandma. Leave the plane crashing to someone else.

Gagarin stands up, exasperated, and leaves the room.

VALYA

Yuri!

INT. GAGARIN'S MOSCOW APARTMENT, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin sits glum-faced at the edge of the bed. Valya enters and sidles up to him.

GAGARIN
My own parents...

VALYA
They're afraid their baby bird has
left the nest and they can't do
anything to help him.

GAGARIN
Baby bird?

VALYA
I know you want them to be proud of
you. They will be. Just don't expect
them to understand all this.

GAGARIN
Do you think my father's right?

She smiles a sad smile, trying to put on a brave face.

Over the sound of a baby's WAILING CUT TO:

INT. TITOV'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Titov and his wife Tamara are asleep in bed. Their baby boy
HOWLS in torment in his crib.

Titov turns on a lamp. Tamara grumbles, half-awake.

Titov pads over to the crib and rests his hands on the
rails. The baby is flushed, sickly.

Titov looks on, utterly helpless and terrified.

EXT. ZHUKOVSKY ACADEMY MAIN GATE - DAY

Gagarin, out for a run, jogs to the main gate of the
compound. He passes a GUARD who checks the papers of a
flatbed truck carrying an ICBM missile.

Gagarin flashes an ID as he passes the guard.

GAGARIN
Hey Sash, mind if I get some water?

GUARD
Go ahead Yura.

Gagarin enters the tiny GUARD KIOSK, pours himself some
water from the cooler and sits down to catch his breath.

Outside, Kamanin and Korolev stroll up the gate, conversing. They stop at the kiosk, within close earshot of Gagarin. Korolev flashes his ID. Kamanin fumbles in his pocket.

GENERAL KAMANIN

(to the guard)

Hold on, I'll find it.

(to Korolev)

Why are you so worried? All you have to do is send a couple dogs up and back. One orbit, two hours in space at most.

KOROLEV

The dogs are one thing, but it's the manned launch I'm most concerned about.

The guard waves the two men through. Kamanin glares at him.

GENERAL KAMANIN

This is a secured area! You check everyone's ID, every time! Mine too!

Kamanin continues looking for his ID, growing agitated.

KOROLEV

The human body wasn't made for this, shooting into the atmosphere on top of a flaming missile. Any number of things can happen that could kill a man.

GENERAL KAMANIN

You'll manage it, you're a first-class problem solver. That's why the party rehabilitated you. It's why I put you back in charge.

Korolev pauses at Kamanin's reference to his past. Then he shifts back to the problem at hand.

KOROLEV

We don't know how weightlessness will affect a human. What are the physical effects, the psychological?

Gagarin, still in the guard house, takes this in.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

We need to develop life support systems, reliable communications, telemetry... And we still don't know how to bring a man back alive through the heat and pressure of re-entry. We need to develop new materials, new--

Kamanin cuts him off, angry.

GENERAL KAMANIN

All I know is Khrushchev wants a man in space by next April. Both our necks are on the line so figure it out!

He finds his ID in his shirt pocket. Flashes it at the guard and strides into the compound. Korolev sighs.

Gagarin steps warily from the guard house. Korolev's stunned.

KOROLEV
Who are you?

GAGARIN
Gagarin, sir. I'm a trainee.

KOROLEV
How much did you hear?

GAGARIN
I know I wasn't supposed to...

Korolev spins around to call to Kamanin, who is now far away. He hesitates.

KOROLEV
If Kamanin was still standing here
you'd be gone from this program.

Gagarin smiles broadly in recognition.

GAGARIN
Aren't you the Chief Designer?

KOROLEV
Damn it, stop smiling! What makes you
think I won't just call Kamanin back
here now?!

Gagarin suppresses his smile, barely. He extends his hand.

GAGARIN
It's an honor, sir!

KOROLEV
You're not supposed to know who I
am. You're going to cost both of us
our jobs!

Korolev huffs, but he is also clearly flattered, not used to recognition let alone admiration. He shakes hands.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)
If you breathe a word to anyone of
what was just said I'll personally
throw you out of here!

He turns and walks away. Gagarin ponders all that he heard.

EXT. BAIKONUR COSMODROME - DAWN

One of the loneliest places on Earth: the vast, flat, utterly barren steppes of Kazakhstan.

The dark orange morning sky is striated with black clouds; it resembles the haunches of a crouching tiger.

Man-made structures rise from the dusty brown plain--

A massive rocket assembly hangar... control blockhouses... a launch tower on a huge platform that juts out over a steep slope like a giant balcony on a hillside.

A TITLE: "BAIKONUR COSMODROME, KAZAKHSTAN"

And another

"BELKA AND STRELKA LAUNCH, AUGUST 19, 1960"

INT./EXT. VOSTOK ROCKET CAPSULE

Two small dogs, BELKA and STRELKA, are strapped into the capsule. A pair of hands closes the hatch, bolts it shut.

A lone silhouetted figure walks from the launch pad toward the nearest blockhouse, dwarfed by the gleaming spire of the R-7 rocket.

The R-7's engines hiss with pre-launch exhaust.

EXT. OBSERVATION BLOCKHOUSE - DAWN

The lone figure, Korolev, reaches the blockhouse door. He's more on edge than usual.

INSIDE THE BLOCKHOUSE --

The cramped control center is manned by dozens of SCIENTISTS and TECHNICIANS busy with the myriad tasks of the pre-launch sequence.

Korolev enters; the room changes immediately with his presence-- the technicians become more self-conscious and precise; even the machines seem to hum with more intensity.

Several technicians glance up at Korolev with awe and respect. He speaks out so everyone can hear.

KOROLEV

Are we ready? Let's get it right this time! I want those dogs back safe.

He puts on a radio headset and turns the dials, irked. Not getting the response he wants, he throws the headset down.

A high-strung senior engineer, IVANOVSKY, approaches Korolev.

IVANOVSKY
Chief Designer?

KOROLEV
What is it Ivanovsky?

IVANOVSKY
We double-checked the booster fittings
and the fueling sequence is complete.
Liquid oxygen pressure is normal.

KOROLEV
(re: the radio)
And how about my radio link? Why
can't I get through?

IVANOVSKY
Well, sir, Alimov won't authorize
our use of the frequency.

KOROLEV
Goddamn KGB moron! Does he think
I've got nothing better to do than
cater to his infantile ego? Get him
on the line.

IVANOVSKY
You want to give orders to the KGB?

KOROLEV
You're damn right I do. We don't have
time for their idiotic protocol.

Ivanovsky dials a phone. A brief exchange; he covers the
mouthpiece as he hands it to Korolev.

IVANOVSKY
Major Alimov is on the line sir. He
doesn't sound happy...

INTERCUT between Korolev and Alimov.

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
What's this about using my comms link?
That's strictly reserved for internal
KGB transmissions.

KOROLEV
Not today! How else am I supposed to
track my trajectory and position?
(bellowing)
I need you to turn on that link now! I've
got a launch in five minutes, damn it.

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
Look, you do your job and I'll do--

KOROLEV
 You don't know how to do your job!
 Give me that link or I'll have you
 cleaning piss pots in Siberia...!
 That's what I thought!

He slams down the phone. Ivanovsky stares at him, open-mouthed and awed.

IVANOVSKY
 Sir?

Korolev's mind is already on the next task on his list.

KOROLEV
 Get on with it!

ON THE LAUNCH PAD--

The R-7 stands tall against the bright morning sky.
 The LAUNCH COMMANDER's voice echoes from a P.A. speaker.

LAUNCH COMMANDER (O.C. FILTERED)
 All stations, beacons are on... Radio
 link activated... Magnetic BKRF index
 in starting position... Pressure in
 cylinder: 320 atmospheres... Toggle
 switch on. And... Ignition!

The engines ignite, belching fire and emitting a spectrum of sounds, from SCREAMING WHISTLES to LOW FREQUENCY ROARS.

Korolev pokes his head out of the blockhouse. Pebbles and debris pelt the metal door he uses to shield himself.

The gantry's hold-down clamps fall away from the rocket.
 Huge clouds of smoke billow from the nozzles.

A RIB-CAGE HAMMERING BOOM as the rocket begins its ascent
 and the exhaust flame comes into view.

Inside the blockhouse the technicians CHEER.

Korolev watches as the rocket follows a beautiful, arcing trajectory toward the upper atmosphere.

Several seconds pass. Korolev stands like a statue.

He allows himself the tiniest smile of relief, and then heads back into the bunker.

The rocket streaks skyward.

DISSOLVE TO:

A BLACK AND WHITE NEWSREEL

The MOSFILM LOGO on screen. Then, a shot of the capsule hatch being unbolted. A peek inside reveals Belka and Strelka, alive and panting.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Another milestone in space has been
 conquered by the Soviet Union, as
 space dogs Belka and Strelka are the
 first living creatures to survive
 orbit around the earth!

Eisenhower greets Khrushchev at the White House.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER
 Chairman Khrushchev's visit to
 America was a great success. Once
 again he can boast about Soviet
 technical superiority.

Khrushchev boasts from a podium, Eisenhower at his side.

KHRUSHCHEV (FILTERED)
 We're turning out rockets like sausages,
 and soon we'll have a man in space.

Eisenhower is visibly annoyed.

A new angle reveals Gagarin, Leonov, Bondarenko and other
 trainees watching the newsreel in a screening room.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 After Washington, Mr. and Mrs.
 Khrushchev enjoyed a cultural tour
 of America's movie factories in
 Hollywood.

The Khrushchevs pose for photos on a soundstage, the set of
 the musical *Can-Can*. Khrushchev ogles Shirley Maclaine and a
 line of scantily clad chorus girls.

Mrs. Khrushchev is visibly annoyed.

CUT TO: A STOCK FOOTAGE SHOT of Disneyland's Dumbo ride.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER
 But President Eisenhower refused the
 Chairman's request to visit
 Disneyland, citing security concerns.

A SHOT of a red-faced Khrushchev in the United Nations.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 Back at the United Nations in New York,
 the Chairman shows his temper.

Khrushchev BANGS HIS SHOE on a desk in the U.N. Is he angry
 about not being allowed into Disneyland?

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 One can only speculate about what
 made him so upset.

INT. CENTRIFUGE ROOM - DAY

A trainee in the cab of a whirling centrifuge whips past at high speed. The machine whines as it slows-- Bondarenko is the victim. Gagarin waits on deck for his turn.

GAGARIN
Eleven G's Val! That's a record!

He looks over to a FEMALE SMOCK, who shakes her head.

FEMALE SMOCK
Titov did twelve.

Bondarenko steps out of the machine and staggers zombie-like toward Gagarin.

GAGARIN
Great job! How do you feel?

Bondarenko covers his mouth, hastens to a trash can next to Gagarin and noisily vomits into it.

MINUTES LATER --

Now Gagarin whirls on the centrifuge. Bondarenko, Titov, Leonov, and several other trainees watch.

CU on Gagarin's face, his jaw set, determined, though he also looks queasy.

FEMALE SMOCK
That's eight G's... nine...

BONDARENKO
Go Yuri!

Gagarin's cheeks ripple with the terrific pull of gravity.

FEMALE SMOCK
Ten G's... eleven...

Titov looks incensed.

TITOV
Hey farm boy, it's not like riding
around in your little tractor, is it?

The others look at Titov, disapproving of his hostility. They pick up a chant:

TRAINEES
Go Yuri! Go! Go, Go, Go!

Kamanin steps into the room, curious about the commotion.

FEMALE SMOCK
Twelve G's...

Gagarin's eyes roll back in his head.

FEMALE SMOCK (CONT'D)

Thirteen!

A CHEER from the trainees. Even the female smock registers a smile. But Kamanin frowns.

Gagarin tries to raise his arm, but can't. He raises his thumb instead, indicating that he wants to stop. Titov stomps out of the room.

Leonov mimics Titov's angry march, to the amusement of the others. Kamanin clears his throat in disapproval.

Kamanin glares at Gagarin as he steps from the cab.

GENERAL KAMANIN

(to himself)

A fluke, I'm sure...

Gagarin walks toward his welcoming comrades. But he wobbles, his bearings are off, and he smashes face-first into the wall. Kamanin sneers and leaves.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Gagarin, Leonov, Titov and Bondarenko wear paper-thin hospital gowns in a cluttered reception room. Antonoff and Doctor #2 confer nearby.

A NERVOUS TRAINEE staggers past them, mumbling to himself, paranoid and jittery.

LEONOV

What happened to him?

GAGARIN

That's Shonin, just out of the isolation chamber. Ten days alone!

Their faces fill with curiosity and dread as he shuffles past, oblivious to their stares.

LEONOV

Ay carramba! They freeze our asses, shake us up like martinis, spin us silly, lock us up in isolation-- what does any of this have to do with flying into space?

TITOV

(hushed)

Hey, shut up, don't attract their attention. Next thing you know they'll be bending you over and measuring the size of your asshole.

From behind Titov comes the loud SNAP of rubber on skin.

CU: The index finger of a gloved hand motions to Titov.

PULL BACK to reveal that the latex-covered hand belongs to Dr. Goldblum. He wears a self-satisfied grin; he's been waiting for this.

DR. GOLDBLUM
78, time for your prostate exam.

Titov, turns to see who is calling him. His face falls.

BONDARENKO
Gherman, number 78, that's you.

Titov cringes as he follows Goldblum into an examination room, closing the door behind him. The others stare.

A long silence, then a loud GRUNT from Titov.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

Titov is bent over a table, grimacing as Goldblum reaches his hand through the vent in the back of his hospital gown.

DR. GOLDBLUM
What's the matter, 78? You can't expect
to go up into space if you can't even
endure a tiny bit of pain!

INT. RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

Gagarin and Leonov peer at the door, wide-eyed.

Bondarenko appears puzzled. Another loud GRUNT followed by a long, mournful MOAN. Gagarin and Leonov chuckle.

BONDARENKO
I wonder what's going on in there?

Leonov sputters.

EXT. RECEPTION ROOM - LATER

Gagarin, Titov, Leonov and Bondarenko, still in their hospital gowns, waddle out of the reception room, all suffering post-traumatic stress in their nether regions.

INT. ZHUKOVSKY ACADEMY HALLWAY - EVENING

All four leave the building together, hair still damp from the shower.

LEONOV
Dios mio, what a pain in my ass!
These doctors are all loco!

TITOV
What's with all the funny words?

LEONOV
I'm learning Spanish, in case they
send me to Cuba.

Titov huffs with disdain.

GAGARIN
Alexei's hoping that after he goes up
in space they'll send him to Cuba to
meet Castro.

LEONOV
Forget Castro, I want to drink rum and
meet some Latin honeys and make love
on the beach with a Cuban *mamacita*!

TITOV
Well you can forget it. They'd never
send a "loco" like you.

LEONOV
And I suppose you think they want a
nutty poet instead.

BONDARENKO
Do you guys think all of us will
make it into the final twenty?

TITOV
Don't talk about such things.

GAGARIN
No doubt they'll choose you, Gherman.

TITOV
You got that right, farm boy.

BONDARENKO
What about me? Think they'll pick me?

TITOV
Forget it baby face. Maybe after you
start growing facial hair!

GAGARIN
What's with you today Pushkin, leave
him alone. He's worked as hard as
the rest of us.

He throws his arm around Bondarenko's shoulder in a show of
brotherly affection.

Titov leaves in a huff.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
Valentin, if they don't take you
they can forget about getting me.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Titov and his wife watch with apprehension as a pediatrician examines their baby boy with a stethoscope.

DOCTOR
It's tuberculosis. I wish you'd come
to me sooner.

TAMARA TITOV
Is it serious?

DOCTOR
TB is always serious for an infant.

TITOV
Can you... Can you cure him?

DOCTOR
(sighing)
We're just a poor children's hospital
without the right equipment and
medicines. The senior Party member
hospitals are better equipped for this.
(he considers)
Why don't you talk to your supervisors?

TITOV
I have. If I were a Colonel...

DOCTOR
(shaking his head)
I'll just have to do what I can.

This is cold comfort to them. Titov puts his arm around
Tamara, who looks numb.

INT. KOROLEV'S OFFICE - MORNING

Korolev ponders an engineering problem at his desk.

Kamanin steps in and drops a typed page before him.

GENERAL KAMANIN
Here's the final list, Sergei
Pavlovich. Any objections?

KOROLEV
I don't know these men as well as you
do. This is a big responsibility.

GENERAL KAMANIN
Of course, our necks are on the line.

KOROLEV
That's not what I meant.
(holding up the list)
We're putting lives at risk. Don't
you think about that?

GENERAL KAMANIN

That's not your responsibility. The government is responsible, the Party. Besides, these men all want to be chosen.

KOROLEV

You're missing the point. Whether they want to be chosen or not, their lives are in my hands. I am responsible.

Korolev considers the list, and hands it back to Kamanin.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

It's a fine group of men, Yevgeni. I'll just make one substitution.

Kamanin reluctantly yields. Korolev scratches out one name on the list and writes in another at the bottom.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

Let's go give them the news.

INT. ZHUKOVSKY ACADEMY AUDITORIUM - DAY

Gagarin, Leonov, Titov and Bondarenko sit among 200 excited trainees in uniform awaiting their verdicts.

Several PHOTOGRAPHERS wait to record the event.

Kamanin and Korolev stand onstage, Kamanin at the mike.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Gentlemen, the Chief Designer will do the honor of reading off the names of the twenty new cosmonauts.

Korolev takes the microphone.

KOROLEV

Thank you General. Men, please come to the stage when I call your name. We'll be taking you on a tour of our design facilities, and then after a few days' leave you'll move to our new training center in Star City.

(beat)

If you're not called, I'd like to personally thank you now for your valuable service to the Soviet Union.

(clears his throat)

Titov...

Gagarin, genuinely delighted, reaches across and punches Titov on the shoulder.

GAGARIN

I told you!

Titov, despite himself, manages to smile at Gagarin's infectious enthusiasm. He heads up to the stage.

KOROLEV
Popovich... Gorbatko... Leonov...

GAGARIN
Hey, the fair-haired man, a
cosmonaut! Congratulations!

He gives Leonov the traditional Russian three alternating cheek kisses, as though sending him off on a long journey.

KOROLEV
Khrunov... Nikolayev... Rafikov...
Zaykin... Volynov... Nelyubov...

Korolev's voice wavers with unexpected emotion.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)
Bykovskiy... Shonin... Filatyev...

The newly chosen cosmonauts line up as they reach the stage. Korolev and Kamanin shake their hands.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)
Anikeyev... Belyayeu...

Korolev takes a break to clear his throat. Kamanin hands him a glass of water and he takes a swallow.

About a dozen men are lined up across the stage, with several more making their way there. Gagarin's smile fades.

BONDARENKO
(nudging Gagarin)
How many is that?

GAGARIN
Fourteen.

KOROLEV
Komarov... Bondarenko...

Bondarenko leaps up. Gagarin, overcome with pride for his friend, tousles his hair and gives him three cheek kisses.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)
Anatoliy... Kartashov...

A general murmur from the cosmonauts on stage.

LEONOV
(sotto voce)
What about Gagarin?

AD LIBS of support for Gagarin. Titov crosses his arms.

KOROLEV
Varlamov...

A GROAN from Leonov and Bondarenko and a few others.

GENERAL KAMANIN
What is it? If you can't observe
proper decorum then get out!

This quiets them down.

KOROLEV
And the 20th... Gagarin.

Forgetting himself, Bondarenko shouts out.

BONDARENKO
Yuri Alexeyevich!

Kamanin's eyes flash but he restrains himself. Yuri grins wide as he bounds up to the stage. Flashbulbs POP.

EXT. KALININGRAD - DAY (AERIAL)

As we fly above the waves of the Baltic Sea to the shore, the city of Kaliningrad spreads before us. We soar over the Brandenburg gate, the Konigsberg Cathedral, then over a more prosaic, modern structure, the Dom Sovietov.

INT. OKB-1 DESIGN BUREAU - DAY

Ivanovsky leads the twenty new cosmonauts on a tour of the rocket construction facility. They walk past several spacecraft in various stages of completion.

Korolev joins Ivanovsky, then addresses the group.

KOROLEV
Welcome, Little Eagles. You must think
I'm here to say you'll go into space in
about five years. Well, forget it...
One of you is going in less than a year.

Gagarin raises his hand, surprised.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)
Yes, comrade, Gagarin. A question?

GAGARIN
Chief, will you be grading us?

Ivanovsky gasps at this impetuosity.

KOROLEV
(barking)
Yes, if we don't throw you out first.
What on earth are you smiling about?

GAGARIN

Sir, I'm just happy that my studies of Tsiolkovsky's principles on rocket dynamics will be put to good use.

Titov rolls his eyes.

KOROLEV

Well... It's good to know we won't be wasting your time.

(beat)

Come now, little eagles, I have something special to show you.

He leads them over to a corner where a silvery sphere, a VOSTOK CAPSULE, is suspended on a metal scaffold.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

This is the crew cabin of our rocket, your home while in space. Would anyone like a closer look?

The cosmonauts look at each other, anxious-- who will go first? Titov takes a step, but a moment too late, as Gagarin has already stepped up to the capsule's hatch.

GAGARIN

With your permission, Chief Designer?

Korolev signals his approval. Gagarin removes his shoes and climbs up the ladder into the capsule's open hatch.

The others look on in envy as they rush to pull off their shoes. Titov seethes.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin reaches into his shirt pocket for his *matryoshka* doll, which he sets down gently on an instrument panel. He looks around, fascinated by the instruments and gauges.

GAGARIN'S POV: CU on a small panel with a 6-DIGIT KEYPAD.

KOROLEV (O.C.)

You certainly look right at home.

Seeing that Korolev has poked his head in through the hatch, Gagarin tucks the doll into his pocket.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

I've never been able to get comfortable in there. It seems your height is a real advantage.

Gagarin studies Korolev's expression. Is he signaling his intentions? Then he relaxes back into the seat.

GAGARIN

It's a marvelous design, very clever. Though I can't say I understand all of this.

(re: the 6-digit keypad)
What's this?

Korolev, caught off guard, dodges the question.

KOROLEV

Come along, there are others waiting for a turn in here.

He grasps Gagarin's hand and helps him out.

INT. GAGARIN'S LADA - DAY

Gagarin and Valya step into his car, he in his uniform, she wearing a fancy dress over her very pregnant belly.

VALYA

Tell me already, what's the big news?

Gagarin just smiles as he starts the car. Off his silence--

VALYA (CONT'D)

You won't tell me? You can't tell me!

Gagarin just keeps smiling, coy.

GAGARIN

I'm sworn to secrecy...

Valya squeezes him in a big hug and kisses his cheek.

VALYA

Oh, Yuri, I'm so proud of you!

INT. HOSPITAL PEDIATRIC ICU - DAY

Titov and his wife Tamara look down, shattered, at their baby's lifeless form on a hospital bed.

The attending nurse removes several tubes and wires, and draws a sheet over his body.

Tamara collapses, wailing. Titov stands rigid, stoic.

INT. TSVNIAG BOARD ROOM - EVENING

Korolev, Ivanovsky and Kamanin crowd around the television. Vodka is being consumed; the mood is jovial.

ON THE TV: An Atlas 2 rocket stands framed against a cloudless sky. Painted down its side are a big American flag and the words "United States."

GENERAL KAMANIN

It's good of our American friends to televise their launches. Though with their record lately I can't understand why they do. It must be embarrassing.

KOROLEV

They're bound to get one right eventually.

ON THE TV: John Glenn and Alan Shepard smile for the cameras, nervously awaiting the launch.

IVANOVSKY

There's John Glenn! They say he'll be the first for the Americans.

GENERAL KAMANIN

I'm betting on Shepard.

ON THE TV: An enormous cloud of smoke envelops the rocket's lower half as it slowly rises.

INT. STAR CITY OFFICERS CLUB - EVENING

Inside the officers club, Gagarin, Leonov and Bondarenko watch the same broadcast, tipsier than their bosses.

ON THE TV: The rocket has just about cleared the tower when it lurches suddenly to its side.

A monstrous explosion shears it in half, blasting out fiery debris. A second explosion obliterates it.

BONDARENKO

Wow... They sure are good at blowing things up!

The others laugh.

ON THE TV-- Glenn and Shepard, both aghast. Glenn leans to Shepard and says something not audible over the TV.

GAGARIN

What do you suppose he's saying?

LEONOV

He's saying 'I hope they fix that!'

ON THE TV: Now Shepard replies to Glenn.

LEONOV (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And he's saying, "By all means, you take the first ride." "No, no, I insist, you go first."

The cosmonauts whoop it up.

INT. BACK AT TSVNIAG - CONTINUOUS

ON THE TV: Wernher Von Braun looks deeply disappointed.

While his colleagues make giddy, celebratory conversation, Korolev studies Von Braun's face on the television, sympathetic toward his rival.

INT. GAGARIN'S MOSCOW APARTMENT - NIGHT

Valya watches the same broadcast, pale and distraught.

EXT. BAIKONUR COSMODROME - DAWN

TITLE: BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION ANNIVERSARY - OCTOBER, 1960

Mikhail Yangel, Korolev's gray-haired rival, stands by the launch pad beneath his R-16 rocket. He speaks with Marshal Nedelin, his medal-chested military supervisor.

TECHNICIANS rush around preparing the R-16 for launch.

YANGEL

I understand your impatience Marshal Nedelin, but I have to put safety first.

NEDELIN

Damn it, Yangel, we'll launch today. We made promises and now we have to deliver.

YANGEL

Yes, but not at the cost of--

NEDELIN

I won't tolerate any further postponements-- we go now!

Yangel points to a stream of liquid trickling from beneath the rocket.

YANGEL

That's a nitric acid leak. We can't proceed.

NEDELIN

A leak?! Fix it! We've only got four men out here. Let's get more crew, have them tighten valves, get our best technicians on it!

(off Yangel's worried look)

Khrushchev is expecting us to launch today. He'll have our heads if we don't.

MOMENTS LATER --

Dozens of worried TECHNICIANS swarm past Nedelin toward the R-16. Nedelin sits on a folding chair only 30 yards from the rocket, yelling and urging them on.

INSIDE THE CONTROL CENTER BLOCKHOUSE --

Yangel, frantic, shouts to the launch control team.

YANGEL
Shut down the launch sequence and re-
calibrate. And be careful!
(to himself)
This is insane.

PAN a row of technicians at consoles, flipping switches. The SOUND OF A HEARTBEAT fades up on the soundtrack.

The motion of the PAN slows, then stops, ZOOMING in on a single, fateful switch as a man's thumb flips it.

EXT. LAUNCH PAD - CONTINUOUS

SFX: The AMPLIFIED SOUND OF THE SWITCH as it toggles.

At that instant the lower stage of the R-16 explodes, blasting flame and smoke over a wide area. Everyone at the foot of the rocket and on the gantry is immediately killed.

The upper stage of the R-16 tumbles unsupported to the ground, spilling fuel everywhere. This ignites into another wave of fire that bursts out from the launch pad.

Nedelin stands up, horrified, just before he and dozens around him are incinerated. Those farther away try to run but the conflagration races across the tarmac, burning everyone in its path.

EXT. STAR CITY TRAINING FACILITY - DUSK (AERIAL)

We fly over a heavily wooded area. A sprawling, walled military compound comes into view.

A jeep with a red star on its hood drives along the compound's perimeter, stopping at the entrance post.

An ARMED GUARD waves the jeep through the gate, and it continues down a wooded drive, past a small duck pond, some dormitories, and a few buildings under construction.

The jeep arrives at a four-story limestone and glass building. A Cyrillic plaque on the facade reads "Star City Cosmonaut Training Center."

KGB Officer Alimov hops out and rushes inside.

TITLE: STAR CITY COSMONAUT TRAINING CENTER - NEAR MOSCOW

INT. STAR CITY CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Korolev conducts a classroom lecture for the 20 trainees.

KOROLEV
Now turn to Tsiolkovsky's Rocket
Equation on page 144. This elegant
little piece of mathematics is the
foundation of our space program.

Alimov appears at the door.

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
Chief Designer.

Korolev motions to him to come in. He whispers to him.

KOROLEV
(to the class)
Excuse me comrades. Carry on.

He hastens out of the room with Alimov.

INT. STAR CITY CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Korolev and Kamanin huddle in the hallway with Alimov,
speaking in hushed tones.

GENERAL KAMANIN
More than a hundred dead?

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
And they're still finding bodies.

KOROLEV
What did Khrushchev say?

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
He asked Yangel why he wasn't dead
like all the others. He's going to
wish he were!

Kamanin and Korolev share a concerned glance.

GENERAL KAMANIN
Why did he send you to us?

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
Two reasons. He wanted me to deliver
the news to you quietly, in person.
If the Americans were to find out it
would be catastrophic.

KOROLEV
Khrushchev said this?

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV
Those were his exact words.

KOROLEV

Do they really believe we have such a perfect launch record? We've had as many accidents as they've had!

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV

They think we've had nothing but success. Eisenhower even proposed an exchange program to us, to share ideas and technology.

(brash)

Of course the Chairman rejected him.

Conflicting emotions cross Korolev's features as he digests this news.

GENERAL KAMANIN

And the second reason?

KGB OFFICER ALIMOV

He wants you to increase the pace of your work. Any further incidents will be severely punished. Again, the Chairman's exact words.

INT. STAR CITY CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin writes Tsiolkovsky's rocket equation on the blackboard while leading the class discussion.

GAGARIN

...Where U is the final rocket velocity, V is the velocity of the exhaust gases, and U_0 is initial velocity prior to fuel burn. Now we can calculate the necessary starting and ending mass of the rocket...

Korolev walks back into the classroom, ashen-faced. Gagarin mistakes his expression for displeasure directed at him.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)

Forgive me, Chief Designer. I thought it best to continue where you left off.

KOROLEV

No, that's fine, Yuri.
(sees the blackboard)
That's fine.

Korolev gives Gagarin a nod of approval.

INT. STAR CITY TRAINING CENTER LOCKER ROOM - EVENING

Gagarin, alone, changes into swim trunks. A door slams. Titov rushes in and shoves Gagarin into a bank of lockers.

GAGARIN

Hey!

Titov takes an errant swing at Gagarin.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
What the hell?!

Titov swings again, connecting now with Gagarin's jaw.

Gagarin swings at Titov, hitting him hard in the face. Titov crumples to the floor.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
Stay there, or I'll hit you again! What is with you?

TITOV
I see what you're doing, Gagarin.
You're not fooling anyone.

GAGARIN
What the hell are you talking about?

Titov gets up on his feet.

TITOV
Taking over the class. Kissing up to Korolev and the others. Trying to win them over.

GAGARIN
Get over yourself, Titov! I'm just trying to do the job. Just like you.

TITOV
You're not like me, Gagarin! Do you really think for a moment they'll choose someone like you over someone like me? Not in a thousand years!

GAGARIN
I've gotten this far...

TITOV
You're a peasant, a rube, you have no understanding of how the system works!
(beat)
And besides, you can't take the risk, you're a family man, not a martyr.

GAGARIN
What's that supposed to mean?

TITOV
The accident. At Baikonur. You must have heard.
(off Gagarin's look)
There were casualties. A lot of them.

Gagarin is shocked.

TITOV (CONT'D)

You have a wife and child, and
another one coming. You can't focus
on the work the way I can.

GAGARIN

(a long pause)

You're a family man too. Are you so
intent on beating me that you forgot?

TITOV

(softening)

I was... My son... All these goddamn
doctors and scientists everywhere
but no one would do a damn thing for
my baby boy.

GAGARIN

Gherman, I'm sorry. I didn't know.

TITOV

I knew my son might have to grow up
without a father. But I never
considered that he'd...

(beat)

I need this Yuri. It's all I have.

Gagarin nods, sympathetic.

EXT. RUSSIAN VILLAGE - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

Sundown. The sky is a violent watermelon color.

A series of images: A tiny, crumbling Russian Orthodox
church... Haystacks dotting neatly plowed fields... Modest
cottages with smoke curling from their chimneys.

YOUNG YURI GAGARIN, 8, and his brother BORIS GAGARIN, 6,
hide behind a roadside hedge.

They hear the RUMBLE OF heavy VEHICLES approaching. A Nazi
military truck convoy.

YOUNG YURI

They're coming! Let's go!

The boys each pick up a bucket and scatter jagged chunks of
glass onto the road, then race back to their hiding place.

Yuri nervously rolls an object in his hand: the same
matroyshka doll from the jet, but here it's shiny and new.

The trucks drive over the glass. Several tires BURST. The
boys grin at each other in triumph.

A NAZI DRIVER jumps from his truck, shaking his fist.

NAZI DRIVER
 Goddamn Russian pigs! Slavic sons of
 whores! You'll pay for this!

Young Yuri's smile fades. He frowns as he stands up.

BORIS
 Yuri, don't!

Yuri steps out from the hedge onto the road.

YOUNG YURI
 You're the pig, Nazi asshole!

The Driver runs at Yuri, enraged.

NAZI DRIVER
 I'll kill you, you little shit.

Yuri and Boris grab their pails and flee across the fields,
 past peasant women working with hoes and shovels.

Boris falls behind and the driver catches him. He grabs Boris'
 pail and dumps it out. Shards of glass glitter in the sun.

He slaps Boris, who begins to cry. Young Yuri lunges at the
 Driver, kicking him savagely in the shins.

The Driver shoves Yuri to the ground, then wraps his scarf
 around Boris' neck and hangs him from a tree limb.

Yuri jumps but can't reach Boris. He runs for help.

YOUNG YURI
 Mama, Mama! They're hanging Borya.

His mother, ANNA, kerchief on her head, hoeing the field,
 drops her tool and runs to the tree.

Little Boris dangles from his noose, gasping for breath, his
 face a ghoulish shade of gray.

Anna arrives and holds Boris up so he can breathe. As she
 unties Boris, the Driver raises his GUN and aims it at her
 head.

DRIVER
 Stop that.

Anna holds Boris, frozen in fear. Yuri glares at the Driver
 with a ferocity beyond his years.

YURI
 Leave us alone!

The Driver turns his gun on Yuri.

The O.S. VOICE of another soldier, a CAPTAIN--

CAPTAIN

*Think!**(he gestures toward the
women in the field)**You want to start killing peasants?
Who would do the farm work here? Who
would feed us? You?*

The driver holsters his gun. Anna lowers Boris to the ground.

Yuri sees his little *matryoshka* doll. He picks it up.

END FLASHBACK

In bed, Gagarin jolts awake, unglued. A bad dream. He looks over at Valya, sleeping peacefully.

INT. STAR CITY SWIMMING POOL - EVENING

Gagarin, Titov, Leonov and others in swim trunks at the edge of an Olympic-sized pool. Kamanin blows a whistle and they dive in and race to the other side.

Gagarin chops at the water, fighting rather than swimming. Midway he stops and stands up in the chest-high water, breathing heavily, emotional.

Kamanin looks at Gagarin. The others continue swimming.

INT. KOROLEV'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Gagarin appears at Korolev's door, looking gloomy.

GAGARIN

I'm sorry to disturb you, Chief. May
I speak with you?

Korolev scans the hallway, cautious, then nods to Gagarin to enter. He pours two cups of tea from a samovar and hands one to Gagarin, who takes a sip.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)

Is... Is the manned launch program
going to be called off?

KOROLEV

Why would you think such a thing?

GAGARIN

Because if it is I'd like to go visit
my wife. We're having our second
child soon.

KOROLEV

There's been no change in our plans.

GAGARIN

I heard there was an accident.

KOROLEV
 (wondering how he knows)
 It was an R-16 rocket, not the R-7.
 (puzzled)
 What is it, Yuri Alexeyevich? Do you
 need to take a break...?
 (off Gagarin's silence)
 Ah. You're afraid to really talk to
 anyone here, aren't you?

Gagarin looks up, surprised.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)
 It's the same for me. There's no one
 I can talk to either...

GAGARIN
 Sir?

KOROLEV
 You think I never have worries?
 (beat)
 I'll tell you what. We'll share our
 secrets with each other. Not a word
 of it will leave this room.

Gagarin breathes a little easier.

GAGARIN
 I promise Valya all the time that
 nothing will happen to me. But I can't
 really make that promise, can I?

Korolev shudders, feeling the weight of his own
 responsibilities.

KOROLEV
 No...

GAGARIN
 Titov says I don't really have a
 chance anyway.

KOROLEV
 Unfortunately that's out of my hands.
 You know politics dictate everything...

GAGARIN
 Can I ask you something?
 (Korolev nods)
 What did General Kamanin mean when
 he said they rehabilitated you?

Korolev is startled by the impropriety of the question-- no
 one talks of such things. He snorts in reply.

KOROLEV
 They sent me to Siberia for five years.

GAGARIN

Why?

KOROLEV (V.O.)

I wanted to conduct science, not build weapons for Stalin. So I refused. They brought me in and beat me, forced me to "confess" to crimes against the state, and they sent me to the Gulag.

GAGARIN

What happened?

Korolev turns away, overwhelmed by memories.

KOROLEV

You don't want to hear of such things.

Gagarin gives him a sympathetic nod. He continues.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

I nearly-- my wife left me and took away our daughter. It's been twenty years...

He shows Gagarin an old family photo and quietly continues.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

Natalya's your age now. I'd like her to be proud of me, to know that although I wasn't there for her...

(he chokes up)

I'd like to show her-- Listen to me, I must sound ridiculous to you-- an old man and his regrets...

GAGARIN

(deeply affected)

No...

KOROLEV

Whatever happens, whatever they decide, you've done yourself proud. What you're doing here is truly heroic.

GAGARIN

Yes, sir. Thank you sir.

KOROLEV

One thing you can do for me, Yuri...

GAGARIN

Sir?

KOROLEV

You let me know when your wife is due to deliver... I'll see to it that you get a three day leave.

Gagarin grins, happy and relieved.

EXT. STAR CITY COMPOUND - DAY

The cosmonauts run an obstacle course through the woods.

Gagarin leaps over a log, then jumps to use his head and hit a large rubber ball suspended on a rope from a tree. Titov, right behind him, does the same.

INT. MOSCOW SUBWAY BELORUSKAYA STATION - MORNING

The cosmonauts run in pairs up the long escalators that carry Moscow's commuters to the subway trains.

Titov and Gagarin struggle to race up a downward moving escalator. They're side by side until Gagarin stumbles.

Titov stops to give Gagarin a hand up, and together they continue their run to the top. Gagarin grunts his thanks.

Watching from the top, Antonoff makes a note on his pad, impressed. He seems to have made up his mind.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - DAY

Korolev and Kamanin peer inside the capsule at the 6-digit keypad that Gagarin asked about.

KOROLEV

I'm not comfortable with this.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Your feelings are not the issue. This order came directly from the Kremlin.

KOROLEV

They think one of our boys would take the capsule and defect to America?

GENERAL KAMANIN

They're worried the stress of space could make the pilot go mad. They won't risk giving him control of the craft unless there's an emergency.

KOROLEV

So we automate the flight, hide the manual controls, and if there's an emergency we radio the cosmonaut to tell him how to save his ass.

GENERAL KAMANIN

That's what Khrushchev wants.

KOROLEV

It's idiotic. What if the automatic systems fail and our radio link with the pilot is interrupted? We'll have a dead pilot.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Sergei, I raised that possibility with Khrushchev myself. You know better than anyone how difficult it is to reason with the Kremlin.

They step away from the capsule. Kamanin takes a newspaper from under his arm.

GENERAL KAMANIN (CONT'D)

This isn't helping.

He hands Korolev a newspaper with the headline: "Americans Launch Primate into Space" above a photo of Ham the Chimp.

GENERAL KAMANIN (CONT'D)

Khrushchev's nervous. He's afraid the Americans are catching up.

KOROLEV

They have caught up. They've solved problems we're still working on.

GENERAL KAMANIN

You need to work harder than them.

KOROLEV

I'm sure I am, but they have so many advantages. Imagine what we could do with their universities, their money...

GENERAL KAMANIN

But they also have democracy, and that's what will allow us to win.

(off Korolev's look)

For every decision they have a process, they have to vote. That takes time, energy away from the task.

(he nods to the photo of

Khrushchev on the wall)

Just keep him happy so we can stay focused and win this race.

BLACK AND WHITE TV IMAGE of Khrushchev giving a speech.

INT. GAGARIN'S MOSCOW APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The Gagarins host a party with Leonov, Bondarenko, Titov and their WIVES as guests. Bondarenko carries his 4 year old son, SASHA, on his shoulders.

Khrushchev's speech drones on from the TV.

TITLE: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY HOLIDAY - MARCH, 1961

Valya, very pregnant, insists on serving appetizers over the protests of the other women, who want her to sit.

LEONOV
So, Valya, it's just another week
until your launch date, eh?

Leonov points at her belly and smiles. Valya blushes.

TITOV
More like an ejection, if you want
to be technical...

VALYA
You boys are terrible!

GAGARIN
I'm not so terrible Valya, am I? If I
were you wouldn't be pregnant.

BONDARENKO
Yeah, it's a good thing Yuri was
able to achieve lift-off.

Groans all around.

EXT. STAR CITY HEADQUARTERS BUILDING - EVENING

The building is dark but for one illuminated corner window.

INT. KOROLEV'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Korolev skims over his drawings while listening to music from
a radio. The song ends and a mellow-voiced DJ speaks.

DJ (O.C. FILTERED)
This next song is a Women's Day
reminder to the men out there: don't
forget the ladies in your life.

A Russian love song begins to play.

Korolev gazes at the family photo on his desk.

He reaches into a drawer and takes out a stack of letters
addressed to Natalya Koroleva. All have been returned
unopened.

He makes a decision and takes the top envelope, puts on a
coat and exits.

EXT. 1ST FRUNZENSKAYA STREET, MOSCOW - NIGHT

A black Volga sedan with government plates idles in front of
an upscale apartment building.

The engine cuts off and Korolev emerges from the driver's
seat, a porcelain doll in his hand.

He consults the envelope he brought, checks the address, trying to muster up his nerve.

A light comes on in a ground floor window. He straightens his tie, inhales deeply, walks up and rings the doorbell.

A DARK-HAIRED WOMAN, 25, opens the door. Korolev blurts out her name.

KOROLEV

Natalya?

She reveals a glimmer of recognition, but she's not sure. She sees the doll and becomes visibly flustered.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

Do you know who I am?

NATALYA

I-- yes.

KOROLEV

I'm only asking for a few minutes.

NATALYA

Please... I'd like you to leave.

She lowers her eyes and closes the door.

Korolev drops the doll, then slumps down and sits on the doorstep, his back to the door.

He looks up at the full moon and sighs, his eyes redden. He dusts off his pants, gets up and leaves.

CU on the doll's face: the porcelain has cracked.

INT. GAGARIN'S MOSCOW APARTMENT - NIGHT

The party has settled into a cozy after-dinner lull. The men lounge in the living room while Valya and the other wives chat in the kitchen.

VALYA

Did anyone hear about an accident?
Yuri won't talk about it.

SVETLANA LEONOV, 23, a perky brunette, pipes up.

SVETLANA LEONOV

They never tell us anything. We're
only the wives!

ANYA BONDARENKO, 20, a slender, pretty blonde, replies.

ANYA BONDARENKO

At least they're staying on the
ground these days. My nightmares
about Valentin have finally stopped.

The other three women start at her mention of nightmares.

VALYA
What sort of nightmares?

ANYA BONDARENKO
Oh, you know...

VALYA
Plane crashes? Explosions?

Anya nods her head. Tamara Titov takes her hand.

TAMARA TITOV
You're not the only one.

The others nod in agreement.

ANYA BONDARENKO
I'll be happy if my Val keeps his
feet on the ground for a while.

INT. STAR CITY LOCKER ROOM - MORNING

Gagarin, Leonov, Titov and Bondarenko change into gym clothes.

LEONOV
What are you doing here, Yuri?
Valya's about to have the baby.

TITOV
Those bastards won't give you a
pass to go visit the hospital?

GAGARIN
I have a pass.

An awkward silence. Gagarin is troubled.

LEONOV
What's wrong?

GAGARIN
If I leave they'll make someone else
take my turn in the isolation
chamber. It wouldn't be fair.

BONDARENKO
(without hesitation)
I'll do it, Yura. You go.

GAGARIN
You can't Val. If you don't finish
your physio tests this week they'll
disqualify you from the first
launch.

BONDARENKO

Come on, Yuri, everyone knows it'll be either you or Gherman. I doubt they even remember my name.

GAGARIN

It's too much to ask...

BONDARENKO

I know you'd do the same for me.

Gagarin smiles with gratitude. He takes his *matryoshka* doll from his pocket and shyly hands it to Bondarenko.

GAGARIN

This will probably seem silly...

BONDARENKO

(grinning)

Thanks, I'll take any luck I can get.

INT. STAR CITY "SILENCE ROOM" - DAY

The hand-written sign on the wall reads:

"BONDARENKO, V., ISOLATION TESTING"

Bondarenko putters around, trying to keep his mind active.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kamanin and Antonoff watch him on a monitor--

Bondarenko is loopy with boredom. He says "hello" several times direct to camera, then starts making funny faces.

INT. MOSCOW HOSPITAL MATERNITY WARD - AFTERNOON

Gagarin hunches on a bench outside the delivery room, hands clasped over the back of his head, frazzled.

A NURSE enters from the delivery room.

NURSE

Lieutenant Gagarin, you can come in.

GAGARIN

You mean... is...

NURSE

Everything's fine. Come meet your daughter.

GAGARIN

My daughter...

INT. DELIVERY ROOM - AFTERNOON

Valya rests in bed, pale, exhausted, holding a swaddled INFANT to her chest.

GAGARIN
Can I hold her?

Valya nods. He bends down and kisses her on the forehead, then picks up the baby and cradles her.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
My god, she's so tiny. Was Lenchka really this small?

Valya smiles weakly.

VALYA
Galina Yurevna Gagarin. She has your eyes.

Gagarin dotes on his daughter, then looks to Valya.

GAGARIN
Honey, I wish I could stay here with you but I have to get back to Star City.

VALYA
Couldn't you stay one extra day...?

GAGARIN
They're choosing the lead cosmonaut and his backup this week. And I want to be there to thank Valentin for helping us when he gets out of isolation tomorrow.

The baby starts to cry.

VALYA
(smiling)
Look what you've done, you made the baby cry. She wants her daddy to stay.

The baby's cries BLEND INTO the sound of the SHRILL WHISTLING of a teapot.

INT. ISOLATION CHAMBER - DAY

Bondarenko, still confined in the chamber, takes a steaming teapot off a hot plate and pours a cup of tea.

EXT. ISOLATION CHAMBER - DAY

Gagarin arrives at the chamber, eager to see his friend. A TECHNICIAN adjusts a pressure gauge on the wall.

GAGARIN
Why can't you let him out?

TECHNICIAN

We're simulating a high altitude environment with pure oxygen. We have to adjust the pressure in there slowly or he'll get the bends.

Gagarin raps on the thick glass of the chamber. Val smiles when he sees Yuri. He holds up the *matryoshka* doll and makes an "OK" sign with his fingers.

Then he writes a note on a pad and holds it up:

"Did Valya have the baby?"

GAGARIN

Yes, it's a girl! Hurry on out of there and I'll tell you about her.

Bondarenko gives him a big grin as he peels the medical sensor pads from his body.

He dabs a cotton pad with alcohol and wipes adhesive off his skin, then carelessly tosses the pad onto the counter.

The cotton pad lands on the hot plate's red-hot burner.

It ignites.

The oxygen in the chamber explodes with a WHOOSH of flame, like lighter fluid over a lit barbecue.

The inferno engulfs Bondarenko. Frantic, he pounds on the thick glass window. Gagarin is horrified.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)

Get him out! Get him out!

He grapples with the large hand wheel that seals the chamber door shut, but it turns slowly.

The technician rushes over and they crank it together.

The door finally swings open. Gagarin dashes inside and finds Val on the floor, badly burned. He drags him out.

Bondarenko cries out in pain. His face and torso are dry and blackened with third-degree burns.

BONDARENKO

It's my fault. I'm so sorry.

GAGARIN

It was an accident, Val.

BONDARENKO

I'm so sorry.

GAGARIN

Val...

BONDARENKO
Yuri, tell Anya and Sasha I love them.

A long look between them. Gagarin is mortified.

BONDARENKO (CONT'D)
Keep going, Yuri. You can be the first.
(off Gagarin's anguish)
Be brave.

His badly burned hand falls open and Gagarin's *matryoshka* doll drops to the floor.

As the ROAR of rocket engines fills the soundtrack --

CUT TO:

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - DAY

Titov, in an orange spacesuit and helmet, sits at the controls of the Vostok.

The ROAR continues as the cabin rocks with engine thrust vibrations.

TITOV
The clock is running...

KOROLEV'S VOICE (O.C.)
Ignition... We have liftoff!

TITOV
Thrust normal. Trajectory normal.

IVANOVSKY'S VOICE (O.C.)
We've cleared the tower in 12:12.

TITOV
Come on!

KOROLEV'S VOICE (O.C.)
Second stage pump sequence commencing.

The sound of FOOTSTEPS, then the VOICE of Antonoff.

ANTONOFF
Chief Designer?

Titov turns to face camera. PULL BACK to reveal he's seated in a flight simulator, a full-scale Vostok capsule mounted on a gimbal. Speakers pump in the engine sound effects.

Antonoff leans over to Korolev and Ivanovsky, observing from their folding chairs.

KOROLEV
Can't you see we're busy here?!

ANTONOFF
There's been an accident, sir!

EXT. STAR CITY COMPOUND - NIGHT

Gagarin stands in a phone booth, illuminated only by the light of the bare bulb in the ceiling above his head. He looks drawn, haggard, as he holds the handset to his ear.

SFX: A TELEPHONE RINGING. Then a voice on the other end.

INTERCUT between Yuri and Alexei on the phone.

ALEXEI

Hello?

GAGARIN

Dad?

ALEXEI

Is that Yuri? Where are you?

GAGARIN

Dad, I... This is so hard, Dad. I didn't think it would be so hard.

ALEXEI

What happened?

GAGARIN

I can't... I'm not allowed to say.

ALEXEI

(after a pause)

I could have used your help today.

GAGARIN

What for?

ALEXEI

I had a roof shingling job out in Zadneprovskiy. The kind of job you used to work with me, but since you're not here I had your mother help.

GAGARIN

How is momma?

ALEXEI

Well, I can tell you she's much better at cooking *blini* than laying shingles. She fell off the ladder.

GAGARIN

Is she hurt?

ALEXEI

She'll be fine. The doctor said her ankle is just sprained, not broken.

GAGARIN

I'm sorry I can't be there, dad.

Alexei looks downcast. He sighs.

ALEXEI

I know you want to serve your country, Yuri, but this business of being a hero... A single man can't defeat an army of foes. This is going to hurt your family. Your friends. Do you ever think about that?

Yuri's pauses, his grief washing over him.

GAGARIN

I think about it every day, dad.

ALEXEI

Well I'd like you to think about coming back home, Yuri.

GAGARIN

Maybe you're right. Maybe everyone's right.

He hangs up, steps out of the booth. Takes the *matryoshka* doll from his pocket and hurls it into the black night.

EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING

A military funeral is in progress. A coffin wrapped in a Soviet flag lies on a berm next to an open grave.

Korolev stands by the grave, with Gagarin, Leonov and several other cosmonauts in their air force uniforms. Anya Bondarenko stands alone.

Gagarin abruptly leaves the funeral. Valya watches.

INT. GAGARIN'S LADA - MOMENTS LATER

Gagarin pulls a half-liter bottle of vodka from his coat pocket and takes a long swig. Grief clouds his face.

Another pull from the bottle, then he starts the car. He revs the engine and screeches away, spraying dust, gravel.

He swerves down the country road, letting out an anguished PRIMAL SCREAM.

He skids to a stop, turns the car and races back, faster than before. A figure stands in the road. He SPEEDS UP.

When he sees it's Valya on the road he slams on the brakes and skids off the road, crashing into a fence.

She runs to the door. Yuri is bleeding from his forehead. She sees the vodka bottle and picks it up.

VALYA

Yuri!

Gagarin slumps in his seat, ashamed, emotionally spent.

GAGARIN

He's dead, Valya. I killed him!

VALYA

That's not true--

GAGARIN

You were right. I can't do this. I'm coming home, for you and the girls.

She gently takes him by the chin and turns his face to her.

VALYA

I know how much you cared for Val.
But this...

(holds up the vodka bottle)

You think quitting now would be a favor to me and the girls? It wouldn't be. You'd come back home to us alive, but always wondering... Regretting it. If you go on, yes, there's risk, but if you don't, well, there's risk too.

GAGARIN

I can't do this anymore Valya.

VALYA

He'd want you to. You're the only one, the only one, who can make sure Val's life counted for something.

(beat)

Now what are you going to do?

EXT. GORKY PARK - DAY

Still in their funeral attire, Korolev and Kamanin walk along the Moscow River.

GENERAL KAMANIN

How are the men holding up?

KOROLEV

It's a terrible shock for them. They could imagine something going wrong up there in a rocket, but none of us expected anything like this.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Could it have been prevented?

KOROLEV

I don't know. Perhaps.

GENERAL KAMANIN
You'll make the necessary
corrections. Quietly.

KOROLEV
We have to let the Americans know how
dangerous it is working in pure oxygen.
They could lose lives too.

GENERAL KAMANIN
Khrushchev will never allow it.

KOROLEV
I won't go on while good men keep
dying.

GENERAL KAMANIN
Don't be so naive, that's what
happens when you're at war. Men die.

KOROLEV
If you won't then I'll call him myself.

GENERAL KAMANIN
Don't you dare go around me.

A long, hard stare from Korolev.

KOROLEV
Is that all you have to say?
(off Kamanin's silence)
Then I'm tendering my resignation.

GENERAL KAMANIN
(stunned)
Sergei...

KOROLEV
Effective immediately.

Korolev takes a few halting steps, staggers, then COLLAPSES
to the ground. Kamanin races to his side and leans in close.

GENERAL KAMANIN
Sergei Pavlovich, are you alright?

KOROLEV
(numb)
We will all vanish without a trace.

INT. KOROLEV'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Yulia speaks to Gagarin in Korolev's outer office.

GAGARIN
I heard he had a heart attack. Is it
true?

YULIA

No one is supposed to know. General Kamanin hasn't even told the Kremlin.

Gagarin races to Kamanin's door and grabs the knob.

YULIA (CONT'D)

The General is busy, you can't just--

INT. GENERAL KAMANIN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kamanin is on the phone.

KAMANIN

I'm dealing with it. For now the official story is that he's away in Baikonur.

The door swings open and Gagarin barges in.

GENERAL KAMANIN

(on the phone)

I'll call you back.

(he hangs up, glaring at Gagarin)

Damn it Gagarin, this better be an emergency or you're asking for a court martial!

GAGARIN

I'm going to Lenin Hospital to visit the Chief Designer and thought I should speak with you first.

GENERAL KAMANIN

The Chief Designer is in Kazakhstan inspecting the launch site.

GAGARIN

That's a lie, General.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Watch yourself, you're on thin ice.

GAGARIN

I've been on thin ice with you all along. You never wanted me in this program and if the Chief Designer is gone--

GENERAL KAMANIN

If the Chief Designer is gone we don't have a program. It's not personal, Gagarin.

GAGARIN

That's hard for me to believe.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Really, just look at yourself-- you have no... refinement. Titov is an educated man, son of a schoolmaster. It's not your fault, you just lack the right--stature--for the job.

GAGARIN

The Chief doesn't care about all that. If he gets better and comes back--

GENERAL KAMANIN

It doesn't matter, he won't come back. Stubborn old goat probably had the heart attack just to spite me.

GAGARIN

I'll get him to. He'll listen to me.

Kamanin considers. What other choice does he have?

GAGARIN (CONT'D)

But I want your assurance first. About my standing.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Hell, I'm not promising you anything!

Gagarin shoots him a disdainful look and heads for the door.

GENERAL KAMANIN (CONT'D)

Damn it, Gagarin, I'm backing Titov, nothing will change that...

(beat)

OK, you win. Make the impossible happen and you can stay.

Gagarin grins. He dashes out to Kamanin's outer office.

GAGARIN

Yulia, I need to get into the Chief Designer's office.

INT. KOROLEV'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Gagarin rifles through Korolev's desk drawers.

He finds the stack of unopened letters to Natalya. Jots down Natalya's address.

EXT. NATALYA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Gagarin knocks at Natalya's apartment door. She opens it and after a brief exchange she invites Gagarin in.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Korolev lies in a hospital bed, pallid and weak. He hears a KNOCK, and Gagarin steps into the room.

KOROLEV
So you've heard the news.

He sees the intensity in Gagarin's face.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)
If you've come to try and talk me out
of resigning, you're wasting your time.

GAGARIN
Sergei Pavlovich, you've got to get
better. We need you.

KOROLEV
Yuri, even if I recover, I'm leaving
the program. I can't do it their way
any longer.

GAGARIN
They'll send you back to Siberia.

KOROLEV
Let them. If I can't live by my
principals I've got nothing left to
live for.

GAGARIN
I've brought someone to see you.
Someone who's hoping to change your
mind.
(to Natalya, outside)
Come on in.

Natalya appears in the doorway. Korolev's heart leaps. He tries to get up but sags back down in pain. Natalya rushes to his side.

NATALYA
Are you alright?

He nods and struggles again to rise.

NATALYA (CONT'D)
Please don't get up. Lt. Gagarin told
me everything.

He holds his palm to her cheek, his eyes moisten. She begins to cry.

NATALYA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry... you tried to see me...

KOROLEV
No, no... I'm the one... I should never
have let you down.

She tentatively reaches toward him. He squeezes her hand. She bends down and they embrace.

Gagarin closes the door and leaves.

EXT. KREMLIN - DAY

The Kremlin's golden church domes glitter in the sun.

TITLE: THE KREMLIN - APRIL, 1961, TWO WEEKS BEFORE LAUNCH

INT. KREMLIN CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Khrushchev, Kamanin, and Ivanovsky are at the table. Goldblum mans a slide projector.

KHRUSHCHEV

You're certain you're ready? Because if there's another disaster like the one in October I swear I'll escort the lot of you to Lefortovo prison myself.

GENERAL KAMANIN

I assure you sir, we're ready. A mid-April launch is essential if we're going to be first.

KHRUSHCHEV

Which means you have less than two weeks and you still haven't given me a pilot.

IVANOVSKY

The truth is, Comrade Chairman, we haven't yet made up our minds. There are two men we're considering.

KHRUSHCHEV

Go on...

Kamanin nods to Goldblum, who flashes a headshot of Gagarin up on the projector screen.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Well sir, the first, Gagarin, is calm, self-confident, knowledgeable. A tactful fellow. A hard worker. Though he's a bit... uncultured.

KHRUSHCHEV

And the other?

Goldblum flashes Titov's headshot onto the screen. Kamanin picks up a pointer and pokes at the screen.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Titov is highly focused, he does his exercises with great accuracy, he doesn't waste time on idle chatter. Physically he's the stronger of the two. And his class background is impeccable.

KHRUSHCHEV

Well then, the choice sounds obvious.

GENERAL KAMANIN

(with an undisguised grin)

Yes, sir.

He is interrupted by a hearty OFF CAMERA VOICE.

KOROLEV'S VOICE (V.O.)

Comrades! Do I still have a say?

Korolev enters, high-spirited and intense, if still in weakened health.

KHRUSHCHEV

Sergei Pavlovich! I thought you were away in Baikonur! Why are you so pale?

Korolev and Kamanin exchange a glance. Kamanin urges him with his eyes and a slight nod to join him privately outside.

KOROLEV

(uncertain)

Ah, yes, Nikita Sergeyevich. I delayed my trip so I could see you.

GENERAL KAMANIN

Would you excuse us a moment, Comrade?

KHRUSHCHEV

Make it quick. I meet the Agriculture Minister in 10 minutes.

Kamanin takes Korolev by the arm as they step outside into the CORRIDOR. He closes the door.

KOROLEV

What's this about Baikonur?

GENERAL KAMANIN

I had to tell him something. I thought you weren't coming back.

KOROLEV

What, and leave the selection to you military morons? I don't think so!

GENERAL KAMANIN

You look like shit. Shouldn't you be home resting in bed?

KOROLEV

You think I'd have survived Siberia if I didn't have the heart of a bull?

(a beat)

It's Gagarin or Titov, right?

GENERAL KAMANIN

Khrushchev has already made his choice. You sure you want to stick your neck out now for Gagarin?

KOROLEV

I'm not sure about any of this. Half our test launches have failed; our odds of success are only 50-50. How do you decide who should be sent to die?

They return to the CONFERENCE ROOM and sit at the table.

KHRUSHCHEV

I'm glad you're here, Chief Designer. Who do you think should go up?

KOROLEV

Both are good men. But my mind is clear regarding the choice.

KHRUSHCHEV

Well?

KOROLEV

The man we choose will become famous, a symbol of the Soviet Union's military prowess. For political reasons, for his class origins and his temperament, I wholeheartedly recommend Gagarin.

KHRUSHCHEV

I was about to go with Titov for the same reasons.

(he turns to Kamanin)

What do you think?

GENERAL KAMANIN

Gagarin is a peasant, nothing more.

Korolev rises to his feet, seizing this crucial moment.

KOROLEV

That's precisely why we want him. He'll be living proof that under Communism anyone, even the son of a peasant farmer, can rise to the greatest heights... Just like our esteemed Party Chairman!

All eyes on Khrushchev. He bangs the table with a smile.

KHRUSHCHEV
 That's right! I'm a farm boy myself.
 (beat)
 We go with Gagarin.

Korolev is delighted; Kamanin stews.

EXT. STAR CITY COMPOUND - DAY

Korolev, in high spirits, crosses the campus. An OBJECT in the grass catches his eye. He picks it up, examines it, and tucks it in his breast pocket.

INT. OKB-1 DESIGN BUREAU - DAY

Kamanin, Korolev, Gagarin and Titov meet in a conference room. Vostok capsules are seen in the background.

GENERAL KAMANIN
 We've decided to go with Gagarin,
 with Titov as back-up pilot. We go to
 Baikonur tomorrow so take a day to
 say goodbye to your families.

Gagarin does his best to contain his excitement. Titov strains to hold in his disappointment.

GAGARIN
 Thank you, director.

GENERAL KAMANIN
 That's all, gentlemen. You're
 dismissed.

Gagarin and Titov exit, Titov biting his lip.

Korolev lays a briefcase on a table before Kamanin and opens it. Inside are three envelopes.

KOROLEV
 I'm giving these to you for safe-
 keeping. They're three letters for
 the TASS news agency, with three
 different announcements.

He holds up each of the letters in succession.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)
 Letter number one is to be opened in
 case of complete success. Number two
 is for a forced landing over foreign
 territory, in which case we appeal for
 rescue assistance. Number three...
 (he hesitates)
 Is for the event of a catastrophe.

He closes the briefcase and hands it to Kamanin.

INT. GAGARIN'S MOSCOW APARTMENT - EVENING

Title: MOSCOW, APRIL 6, 1961 - 6 DAYS BEFORE LAUNCH.

Korolev waits by the door next to two large suitcases.

Gagarin, in an overcoat and hat, changes the diaper of his newborn daughter Galina.

GAGARIN

What an inconsiderate baby! Your
daddy's going into space and all you
can do is dirty your diapers.

Valya enters from the bedroom. Gagarin finishes the diaper, kisses Galina on the forehead and puts her in a crib.

VALYA

Chief Designer, it's good of you to
come personally to take my Yuri to
the launch site. I feel safer
knowing he's with you.

KOROLEV

I didn't want to risk having our hero
oversleep and miss his big trip.

Gagarin picks up Lenchka, now 2, and gives her a hug.

GAGARIN

Daddy's going away now, sweetheart.
I'll come back home to see you soon.

VALYA

Do you have time to call your parents?

KOROLEV

(off Gagarin's look)
Make it quick. But not a word to
them about your flight.

Gagarin puts Lenchka down, and dials the phone.

GAGARIN

Momma? Hello Momma...! Nothing's
wrong, I just called to let you know
I'm going away... on a business
trip... Am I going far? Yes, very
far... I'll be back next week... OK,
thank you Momma. Say hi to Dad.

He puts down the phone, gently takes Valya by her shoulders.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)

Don't worry darling. I'll be back
before you know it. I promise.

Valya tries to be brave, but tears trickle down her cheeks.

VALYA
Oh Yuri, you'd better...

They embrace and kiss sweetly.

VALYA (CONT'D)
When's the launch?

Korolev starts to answer but Gagarin cuts him off with a pleading glance.

GAGARIN
On the 14th.

Korolev looks puzzled.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
Off we go! Goodbye, my loves, I'll see you soon!

They exit the apartment.

EXT. GAGARIN'S MOSCOW APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Korolev stops to ask a question.

KOROLEV
The launch is on the 12th. Why did you tell Valya it's on the 14th?

GAGARIN
She'll worry no matter what I tell her. I'd rather she doesn't think to worry until after I'm back.

EXT. AN-22 TURBOPROP TRANSPORT PLANE - DAY

A huge cargo transport plane lumbers across the sky over the steppes of Kazakhstan, now in full spring bloom.

INT. AN-22 TRANSPORT PLANE - DAY (AERIAL)

Korolev, Titov and Gagarin are strapped into their troop transport seats in the forward fuselage. The LOUD DRONE of the plane's engines makes conversation difficult.

KOROLEV
How are you boys doing?

GAGARIN
I'm feeling well, Chief Designer.

TITOV
(grumpy)
Fine, Chief Designer, thank you.

KOROLEV
Come on, I want to show you something.

INT. AN-22 TRANSPORT PLANE, REAR FUSELAGE - DAY (AERIAL)

Korolev leads the cosmonauts through the cavernous rear fuselage of the plane. Two silvery Vostok capsules are strapped down side-by-side.

Korolev opens the hatch of a capsule and points inside.

KOROLEV
See that panel? Yuri, you asked me
about it once.

GAGARIN
I remember. What is it for?

KOROLEV
It's a lock that conceals access to
the capsule's manual controls.

Gagarin and Titov both frown, uncertain.

GAGARIN
You mean the flight will be
automated? All the way?

TITOV
What if something goes wrong?

KOROLEV
You'll only be given control of the
ship in an emergency.

GAGARIN
But that means-- I won't really be
the pilot. I'll just be a passenger.

KOROLEV
If I could do this differently I
would. Orders from the Kremlin.

CU: On Gagarin, profoundly disappointed.

EXT. BAIKONUR COSMODROME - MORNING

TITLE: BAIKONUR, APRIL 11, 1961 - ONE DAY BEFORE LAUNCH

The R-7, lying on its side on a huge flatbed railcar, rolls slowly toward the launch pad. Korolev and Ivanovsky walk solemnly beside it like priests in a formal procession.

EXT. BAIKONUR COSMODROME - AFTERNOON

The R-7 is now upright on the launch pad. Scores of technicians tend to last-minute details.

Korolev looks like he hasn't slept in days. He checks the wiring harness on the capsule's life support system. A LOW-LEVEL TECH addresses him.

LOW-LEVEL TECH
Excuse me, Chief Designer, but I've
already checked that.

Korolev turns on him, snapping.

KOROLEV
Better to check ten times than to
risk making one mistake!

The tech slinks off, embarrassed.

EXT. BAIKONUR COSMODROME - DUSK

Korolev and Gagarin stand alone at the top of the gantry.
The sun sinks into the horizon, casting a spectacular golden
glow off the rocket's metallic skin.

KOROLEV
...And as the retro rockets fire
you'll feel a jolt as a small
explosion detaches the life support
module from the capsule.

GAGARIN
...And my parachute will deploy and
it'll be a smooth descent from there.
We've been over these re-entry
procedures a dozen times, Chief.
Anything else?

KOROLEV
Let me know as soon as you feel
weightless, so we'll be ready in
case there are unexpected effects.

GAGARIN
But how will I know? I'll be
strapped in tight.

KOROLEV
(musing)
That's true... Take a small object
with you that will float freely.
Nothing too big that might damage your
helmet or hurt if it hits you.

GAGARIN
OK.

KOROLEV
Are you ready, Yuri Alexeyevich?

GAGARIN
I'm ready Sergei Pavlovich!

INT. BAIKONUR SUMMERHOUSE - EVENING

Several dozen guests attend a formal dinner with white tablecloths, crystal and silver. Wine and vodka flow.

Leading the ceremonies is MARSHALL KIRILL MOSKALENKO, 60, jovial. Gagarin stands next to him dressed in a splendidly decorated uniform, the man of the hour.

MOSKALENKO

...And so it gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Senior Lieutenant Gagarin, on this high and important task given to you by the Motherland.

Gagarin steps forward to receive his commission, smiling his confident smile, as press photographers snap away.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Goldblum prepares the two cosmonauts for sleep in a single-room cottage near the launch site.

DR. GOLDBLUM

Sleep well tonight. We need both of you rested and alert for tomorrow.

He proudly lifts the blanket from one of the beds, revealing a complex array of wires and sensors underneath.

DR. GOLDBLUM (CONT'D)

We'll be measuring your movements to monitor your sleep patterns.

GAGARIN

(whispering to Titov)

How are we supposed to sleep when they're tracking every breath we take?

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Gagarin lies flat on his back in bed, eyes wide open, barely daring to breathe.

PAN to Titov, in exactly the same uncomfortable pose.

EXT. COTTAGE - MORNING

TITLE: APRIL 12, 1961 - LAUNCH DAY

The sun shines bright over Baikonur, a beautiful morning. Korolev and Goldblum walk together to the cottage.

KOROLEV

Tell me, Comrade Goldblum, how did our cosmonauts rest last night?

DR. GOLDBLUM
Like hibernating bears, Comrade
Korolev. Our instruments show that
they barely moved a muscle.

They enter the cottage. Gagarin and Titov are exactly where
we left them, staring at the ceiling.

KOROLEV
Rise and shine, little eagles! The
Cosmos await!

The two men, bleary-eyed and groggy, share a bemused glance.

EXT. BAIKONUR LAUNCH PAD - MORNING

Gagarin and Titov stand suited up at the rocket's base,
surrounded by photographers and officials.

Kamanin shakes Gagarin's hand, whispers a few words in his
ear, then gives him three alternating cheek kisses.

Titov and Gagarin shake hands, put on their helmets.

TITOV
Good luck, comrade. Don't screw up.

GAGARIN
Thanks Gherman. You're next...

Titov tries to give Gagarin the traditional three cheek
kisses, but with both their helmets on all he can manage is
three comical HELMET CLINKS.

Titov trudges away from the launch pad. Gagarin watches,
sympathetic, then turns to Korolev.

Korolev looks into Gagarin's eyes, proud and worried, like a
concerned father.

He lifts Gagarin's helmet, gives him three cheek kisses,
then a long, sober look. He whispers into his ear. Gagarin
smiles.

As Gagarin turns to leave, Korolev stops him.

KOROLEV
Oh, by the way, I thought you might
want this.

He hands Gagarin a small orange cloth pouch. Gagarin peers
inside. He looks up, puzzled but pleased.

GAGARIN
How did you...?

KOROLEV
Never mind. I had a feeling it was
important. Good luck, son.

Gagarin turns to the waiting journalists and photographers to commence a prepared speech.

GAGARIN

Dear friends, fellow citizens, and people of all nations, in a moment a mighty ship will carry me into the far-away expanses of space. My whole life seems to be condensed into this one wonderful moment. To be the first to enter the cosmos, to engage single handed in an unprecedented duel with nature--could one dream of anything greater than that?

(beat)

I think of the great responsibility I bear: to be the first to do what generations have dreamed of; to be the first to pave the way into space... Am I happy as I set off on this space flight? Of course I'm happy. I say to you now, 'Until we meet again,' dear friends. I would like very much to embrace you all, people known and unknown to me, close friends and strangers alike. See you soon!

Ivanovsky and Gagarin climb into an elevator that runs up a scaffold to a platform high on the gantry.

EXT. BAIKONUR LAUNCH PAD - CONTINUOUS

The elevator opens. Ivanovsky helps Gagarin clamber up a metal stairway to the capsule. They face each other.

IVANOVSKY

This is it, my friend. The last stop.

GAGARIN

Well I hope not! I have to go pick up the laundry on Tuesday!

Ivanovsky laughs as he gives Gagarin three cheek kisses. He helps him to maneuver into the capsule, then tightens straps and plugs in his life support systems.

As he is about to close the hatch a look of panic comes over Ivanovsky's face. Gagarin notices and looks alarmed.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)

What is it Oleg Genrikhovich?

Ivanovsky appears terrified as he opens his mouth.

IVANOVSKY

Yuri, I'm about to break many confidences, and risk my job, but I feel I must tell you this...

GAGARIN

What is it?

IVANOVSKY
 (gulping)
 ...the secret code for the manual
 controls is--

Gagarin interrupts him, laughing.

GAGARIN
 I already know it, 3-2-5!

Ivanovsky stares at him, dumbfounded.

IVANOVSKY
 But.. how?

GAGARIN
 The Chief Designer already told me.
 General Kamanin too. But thanks anyway!

EXT. R-7 ROCKET - CONTINUOUS

A steady cloud of steam and vapor drifts from the R-7's
 exhaust nozzles. Heat waves shimmer around the launch pad.

INT. CONTROL CENTER BLOCKHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Korolev, pallid and fatigued, runs through systems checks.

A red phone on his desk rings. He regards it warily; it can
 only be one person. He picks up.

KOROLEV
 Yes Chairman Khrushchev.

KHRUSHCHEV (O.C. FILTERED)
 How is everything going there?

KOROLEV
 Superbly, Comrade Chairman.

KHRUSHCHEV (O.C. FILTERED)
 Is there a 100 percent guarantee?

KOROLEV
 (a hesitant pause)
 Everything possible has been done.
 Of course there is always a chance
 of something unexpected happening in
 this business.

KHRUSHCHEV
 You'll keep me apprised...

KOROLEV
 Yes, sir. Just remember that the first 40
 seconds of the launch are the most
 dangerous. If you don't hear from me by
 then, it's good news.

KHRUSHCHEV (O.C. FILTERED)
Well, do your best!

A CLICK on the line as Khrushchev hangs up.

The sound of GAGARIN'S HUMMING comes in over the loudspeaker.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin hums a tune, bored. He tucks the orange pouch that Korolev gave him into a stowage cubbyhole.

KOROLEV'S VOICE comes in over the radio.

KOROLEV
Do you read me?

GAGARIN
I read you.

KOROLEV
Don't forget the tubes of food we've provided-- your lunch, dinner and breakfast. I've tried them, they're not bad.

GAGARIN
Just tell me which one is the vodka.

IN THE LAUNCH CENTER

Everyone laughs. But Korolev's laugh seems forced. He is unusually nervous and agitated.

KOROLEV	GAGARIN
How are you feeling?	I feel good, vigorous.

KOROLEV	GAGARIN
We're ready to go...	I read you.

KOROLEV	GAGARIN
Launch key to 'go' position.	I read you, ignition given.
Air purging... Idle run...	
Ignition given.	

The blockhouse walls begin to shake.

EXT. R-7 ROCKET - CONTINUOUS

A growing CACOPHONY of noises and rumblings. The rocket shivers and a huge swirling cloud of dust, steam and vapor rises. Gagarin and Korolev's communication continues O.C.

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)	GAGARIN (O.C. FILTERED)
An interim phase.	Got it.

A THUNDEROUS BOOM as the main engine ignites.

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
Complete takeoff.

An inferno of orange and white flame spits from the R-7 as it fights the pull of gravity to lift itself into the air.

INSIDE THE VOSTOK CAPSULE

Gagarin's nervous anticipation turns to exhilaration.

GAGARIN
Poyekhali! Off we go!

EXT. R-7 ROCKET - MORNING

Five separate rings of blinding white flame erupt from the exhaust nozzles as the R-7 continues its ascent.

The rocket climbs, gradually clearing the gantry.

ON THE GROUND near the launch pad a distorted shadow of the rocket crawls across the steppe, trailing behind it a reflected wake of rippling heat waves.

INT. BAIKONUR LAUNCH CENTER - CONTINUOUS

In the blockhouse, a CHEER rises from the technicians. Korolev growls like a surly bear.

KOROLEV
Silence!

He appears positively haggard, his finger poised over a large red button labeled "Emergency Ejection."

Next to the button is a digital clock display that rapidly ticks off the flight's duration in minutes, seconds, and hundredths. 12... 13... 14 seconds...

Ivanovsky notes Korolev's distressed state.

IVANOVSKY
Don't worry, We're looking good.

KOROLEV
I'm trying to concentrate!

Korolev addresses Gagarin via radio.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)
Confirming call signals: You are "Cedar," and I am "Zarya-1."

GAGARIN (O.C. FILTERED)
Zarya-1, this is Cedar, confirming call signals.

KOROLEV
How is your state, Cedar?

GAGARIN (O.C. FILTERED)
Zarya-1, this is Cedar. I can feel the
overload, the vibration. All is well.

KOROLEV
Cedar, we are on plan. You will make one
complete orbit of the Earth; the entire
trip will last 104 minutes. All of us
here wish you a good, safe flight.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

A television camera mounted on the capsule's ceiling is
pointed at Gagarin, transmitting his image to the Earth.

GAGARIN
Thank you. Goodbye. See you soon,
dear friends. See you soon.

INT. BAIKONUR LAUNCH CENTER - CONTINUOUS

INSERT: A crude, hazy TV image of Gagarin's face.

The clock display reads: 01:20:25. Korolev relaxes just
slightly, his shoulders slump. He removes his finger from
the "Ejection" button.

KOROLEV
Ground station listening post check.
Please confirm contact...

As Korolev calls the stations they each reply in turn.

KOROLEV	KOLPASHEVO
Kolpashevo, Zarya-2.	Confirmed.

KOROLEV	MOSCOW
Moscow, Vjezna	Confirmed.

KOROLEV	NOVOSIBIRSK
Novosibirsk, Vjezna.	Confirmed.

KOROLEV	KHABAROVSK
Khabarovsk, Vjezna-2	Confirmed.

KOROLEV	PETROPAVLOVSK
Petropavlovsk, Vjezna-3	Confirmed, Chief Designer!

KOROLEV (CONT'D)
Petropavlovsk, is that you Alexei?
How are things in Kamchatka?

INT. PETROPAVLOVSK GROUND STATION - CONTINUOUS

Alexei Leonov huddles at a comms console along with a COMMAND POINT CHIEF, a RADIO TECH and a COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER.

LEONOV
Very well, Chief Designer! I arrived on Sunday. How is it in Baikonur?

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
You might say we're a little busy...

LEONOV
I won't detain you. Just one question.

Leonov squints at the hazy TV image of the cosmonaut.

LEONOV (CONT'D)
Who is it in the R-7, Titov or Gagarin? I can't tell.

KOROLEV
(chuckling)
We're keeping our secrets a little too well! It's Yuri Alexeyevich!

GAGARIN (O.C. FILTERED)
My regards to the fair-haired man!

LEONOV
Hey Yuri, say "hola" for me to all the Latin honeys when you fly over Cuba!

Gagarin laughs.

EXT. BAIKONUR LAUNCH CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Korolev leans out the door and looks up into the sky. The rocket hurtles upward, leaving a trail of smoke.

The four booster rockets fall away. After a pause the second stage ignites, blasting the rocket onward.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin is pressed into his seat as the G- forces build.

EXT. TEATRALNAYA PLOSHAD - MOSCOW - MORNING

Valya pushes her baby carriage across the square in front of the Bolshoi Theater, chatting with Svetlana Leonov. The Kremlin's towers are visible in the background.

Suddenly she shudders, turns pale, stops in her tracks.

SVETLANA
What is it, Valya?

VALYA
I just had a strange sensation about
Yuri, like something's happening.

EXT. R-7 ROCKET - CONTINUOUS

The nose cone fairing fires its pyrotechnic charges,
blasting away and then falling to Earth, leaving the Vostok
capsule exposed at the top of the rocket.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

As the fairing drops away the portholes are exposed,
allowing Gagarin a view outside.

GAGARIN
Cedar here. The fairing has been
discarded. I can see rivers and the
folds of the terrain. I can see the
Earth well. Visibility is fine.

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
Cedar, Zarya-1. How are you feeling?
This is Zarya-1, over.

GAGARIN
This is Cedar. I'm feeling fine.

INT. BAIKONUR LAUNCH CENTER

Korolev tries to mask his anxieties, but his breathing is
shallow and he looks ill. Ivanovsky gives him some tea.

KOROLEV
Thank you, comrade. I hope things
will settle down now.

Ivanovsky looks worried about Korolev, but remains silent.

THE CLOCK: 4 minutes. A moment of peace, but only a moment.

The TELEMETRY OFFICER a few stations down from Korolev
suddenly stands up, disturbed. He calls out.

TELEMETRY OFFICER
Chief Designer!

Korolev rushes over to him.

TELEMETRY OFFICER (CONT'D)
The telemeter has been signaling 5's
all along, but now I'm getting 3's.

INSERT: The telemeter, displaying a bright green "3."

Korolev turns even more pale.

KOROLEV
How long?

TELEMETRY OFFICER
This is the third one. If it starts
flashing 2's--

KOROLEV
(snapping)
I know perfectly well what 2's mean!
Don't even think it!

The telemeter becomes their sole focus; everything else
recedes into the background. It flashes another "3"...
Another "3"... Then, for a heart-stopping moment, a "2"
appears, but it changes to a "3." Another "3."

TELEMETRY OFFICER
Should we abort? I can radio Gagarin
to eject...

KOROLEV
That would be extremely hazardous.
Don't alert him just yet. Wait...

A "3." A "3." Then a "5" appears... Another "5." Another.
Sighs of relief all around.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
Cedar, how's your state of health?

Gagarin, still pressed into his seat, begins to feel the G-
forces diminish. His face muscles relax.

GAGARIN
Zarya-1, Cedar. State of health
excellent... I feel a change in
acceleration, less vibration.

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
Good. That is a necessary step. All
normal. Flight is proceeding well.

EXT. BOLSHOI THEATER, MOSCOW - MORNING

Valya sits on the steps of the theater, pale, trembling and
short of breath. A mild panic attack.

Svetlana hovers with motherly concern.

VALYA

I can't explain it. It's probably nothing. I've been panicky about Yuri since Val Bondarenko's accident.

SVETLANA

Let's get to a telephone and see if we can find out anything.

Valya nods, and Svetlana helps her to her feet.

INT. BAIKONUR LAUNCH CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Korolev picks up his radio mike.

KOROLEV

Cedar, you're going to feel a jolt in a minute or so. Brace yourself.

There is a strange sound of radio DISTORTION and STATIC. No reply from Gagarin.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

Cedar, please respond.

Nothing.

What little color there is in Korolev's face drains away. His hands tremble as he sets down the mike.

He checks the TV monitor: only STATIC.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

Zarya-2, this is Zarya-1.
Can you contact Cedar?

KOLPASHEVO

Zarya-2 here. Negative, no contact.

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

Zarya-3, Zarya-1 here. Are you in contact with Cedar?

YELIZOVO

Zarya-3. Negative.

(pause)

Correction, Zarya-1, we've resumed contact with Cedar.

Gagarin's TV image fades back up. Korolev collapses into his chair. His expression says "What next?!"

KOROLEV (CONT'D)

Cedar, Zarya-1, do you read?

GAGARIN

Zarya-1 I read you, Cedar.

KOROLEV

You gave us a scare. You'll feel a jolt now as the main booster falls away. Then weightlessness shortly after.

GAGARIN

Copy, Zarya-1.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin is thrust forward momentarily, then back. He seems to drift now, with no sensation of movement.

He opens the orange pouch from the cubby and, as if handling a precious gem, removes his *matryoshka* doll. He closes his fist around it.

He holds up his fist and slowly uncurls his fingers. The doll lays flat on his palm.

Then, as if drawn upward on a heavenly draft, it floats upright in a balletic pirouette. He watches it, rapturous; a spiritual moment.

GAGARIN
(whispering)
This is for you, Val. We made it.

A tear rolls from his eye and floats upward in his helmet.

He looks out the porthole to a stunning view of the Earth and the halo of its atmosphere. If there is a heaven, it must look something like this.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
(on the radio)
Weightlessness has begun. It's not at all unpleasant, and I feel fine.

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
Describe it for us.

A pencil floats up next to the *matryoshka* doll, and then the orange pouch. Several food tubes as well.

GAGARIN
I feel like I'm made of cotton.
Everything is floating.
(joyfully)
Everything is floating! It's beautiful! So interesting!

KOROLEV
How's the view up there, Yura?

Gagarin's POV: The Earth below. His eyes fill with wonder.

GAGARIN
I've never seen such intense blue.
How wonderful. How beautiful!

AT THE LAUNCH CENTER - LATER

THE CLOCK: 34 minutes and counting.

KOROLEV
Ivanovsky, make a call to TASS. Tell
them to open envelope number one.

IVANOVSKY
Yes sir!

INT. TASS NEWS AGENCY - DAY

A balding, bespectacled RADIO ANNOUNCER in suit and tie
speaks excitedly into a large condenser microphone.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
Moscow calling. Moscow calling.
This is the TASS Press agency.

INT. GENERAL KAMANIN'S OFFICE, STAR CITY - DAY

A radio. PULL BACK to reveal Kamanin listening.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (O.C. FILTERED)
Moscow calling. Moscow calling. All radio
stations are broadcasting this message:
The first flight by mankind into the
Cosmos has been made.

Kamanin shakes a fist into the air in triumph.

EXT. RED SQUARE, MOSCOW - CONTINUOUS

Valya, pushing her carriage, and Svetlana cross the crowded
Red Square toward the GUM department store. P.A.
loudspeakers mounted on lampposts blare out the TASS
announcer's message. Valya looks up at a speaker.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (O.C. FILTERED)
The Soviet Union is the first country
to put a spaceship into orbit around
the earth: the Sputnik Vostok, with a
man on board, Major Yuri Gagarin.

At the mention of her husband's name Valya wilts and sinks
to the pavement, as everyone around her cheers.

INT. MILITARY COMMISSARY - CONTINUOUS

Colonel Babushkin gloats to his dining companion, an officer.

BABUSHKIN
You hear that? I discovered Gagarin
when he was a nobody!

EXT. SMOLENSK FISHING POND

Gagarin's father Alexei fishes alone in a rowboat. Complete silence except for the sounds of BIRDS and INSECTS.

A WOMAN'S VOICE calls from the shore, his wife Anna.

ANNA
There you are! Alexei! Come, quickly, I just heard on the radio! It's Yura!

ALEXEI
What? Did he crash?

ANNA
No, not yet... He's in space!

ALEXEI
Impossible, he's on a business trip.

ANNA
The radio just said that Major Yuri Gagarin is in orbit.

ALEXEI
But our Yuri is a Lieutenant. What a coincidence that there are two cosmonauts named Yuri Gagarin!

ANNA
Alexei, they promoted him!

Alexei reels as this dawns on him. He jumps out of the boat and swims to shore.

EXT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - LATER

The capsule floats in its orbit, slowly, majestically revolving against a background of countless bright stars.

INT. BAIKONUR LAUNCH CENTER - CONTINUOUS

THE CLOCK: 78 minutes.

Korolev braces himself for the mission's home stretch.

KOROLEV
Cedar, this is Zarya-1.

INSERT: TV Monitor. Gagarin looks confident and alert.

GAGARIN (O.C. FILTERED)
This is Cedar.

KOROLEV
Prepare for re-entry. You'll feel a little jolt as the life support module jettisons from the capsule.

On the monitor Gagarin's face registers disappointment that his flight is ending.

GAGARIN (O.C. FILTERED)
Let's bring it home!

EXT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

The capsule hurtles over cloud-covered Southern Africa. A retro-rocket's flame turns the craft so that its heat shield faces the Earth.

Gagarin notes a trickle of SPARKS outside the portholes.

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
Ten seconds until entry interface.
Jettison life support module. Yuri,
you'll feel a little bump now.

There is a silent concussion as explosive bolts dislodge the life support module from the capsule. It floats away.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

A terrifying jolt. The entire capsule begins to vibrate, then shake violently. Gagarin is alarmed.

GAGARIN
Zarya-1, that was a little bump? I
feel like I'm on a carnival ride!

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
Cedar, please elaborate. Our
instruments have not detected any
problems or malfunctions.

The capsule turns end-over-end.

GAGARIN
The vehicle is turning end-over-end.
I'm experiencing severe vibration.

INT. BAIKONUR LAUNCH CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Korolev is shocked: what could have gone wrong?

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
Cedar, are you saying your heat
shield is not in position?

GAGARIN (O.C. FILTERED)
That's correct, Zarya-1. I'm tumbling,
there's a lot of pressure. And noise.
(shouting)
It's getting hotter!

THE CLOCK: 82 Minutes.

THE TV MONITOR: Gagarin looks dizzy, distressed.
Ivanovsky races over. Korolev whispers to him.

KOROLEV
How soon until he can safely eject?

IVANOVSKY
At least 5 or 6 minutes.

KOROLEV
By then he could burn to death...

EXT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

The problem: a large connector plug is only halfway loosened, leaving the life support module tethered to the capsule by its umbilical cable.

Huge plumes of flame envelop the earthward faces of the capsule and life support module as they tumble through the atmosphere like a pair of shoes with tangled laces.

EXT. RED SQUARE, MOSCOW - DAY

Svetlana accompanies Valya, who plods along in shock across the expanse of Red Square. The majestic onion domes of St. Basil's Cathedral loom large behind them.

INSIDE THE CAPSULE--

Still spinning, Gagarin feels intense heat and hears ominous CRACKLING NOISES.

Through the porthole he sees the sky, then the sun, then the Earth, the horizon, over and over in a crazy sequence. Flames intermittently obstruct the view.

The intensity of the G- loads disorient Gagarin. His eyelids flutter. He swoons in the intense heat.

GAGARIN
Stay alert... stay alert... Zarya-1,
this is Cedar.

ON THE RADIO: Korolev's reply is muted in heavy static.

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
...Cedar ...implement ... capsule

ON Gagarin, sweating profusely. His eyelids flutter.

A SERIES OF IMAGES: The fields of Gagarin's boyhood home... His buddy Dergunov's jet tumbling to Earth... His father on the telephone.

ALEXEI'S VOICE (V.O.)
This business of being a hero,
Yuri... A single man can't defeat an
army of foes.

BACK AT THE LAUNCH CENTER--

THE CLOCK: 92 minutes and counting...

THE TV MONITOR: Nothing but static.

Deathly silence fills the room. Korolev barely breathes.

Ivanovsky works the radio.

IVANOVSKY
Cedar, this is Zarya-1. Do you read?
Cedar, this is Zarya-1.

No reply. He sadly shakes his head.

OUTSIDE THE CAPSULE

The umbilical cable is white hot.

INSIDE

A strange, purple light fills the cabin. Gagarin is on the verge of blacking out. He weakly hums a tune in the effort to stay awake.

ALEXEI'S VOICE (V.O.)
This is going to hurt your family.
Your friends.

Closing his eyes, he seems resigned to his fate.

ALEXEI'S VOICE (V.O.)
I'd like you to think about coming
back home.

Slowly, with renewed resolve, Gagarin forces himself awake.

GAGARIN
OK, OK! Manual controls.

His eyes alight on the 6-digit panel. He enters the combination and pulls on the door but it doesn't open. He tries the combination again. Nothing... Confusion and worry in his eyes.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
Come on. Come on!

He bangs on the panel, it pops open. He punches the buttons inside in rapid succession.

EXT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

The retro rockets fire in rapid bursts, one after the other, rocking the capsule roughly from side to side.

The cable snaps, releasing the support module. The module tumbles off into space, its cable flailing behind.

IN THE CAPSULE

A bounce, the gyrations slow. Gagarin sighs with relief.

AT LAUNCH CONTROL

The telemetry officer hands Korolev a slip of paper.

TELEMETRY OFFICER
Chief Designer, I've received a
transmission confirming that the
retro rockets have just fired.

This is cause for hope for Korolev, but not confirmation.

The red telephone rings again; he picks up.

KOROLEV
Yes, Chairman Khrushchev.

KHRUSHCHEV (O.C. FILTERED)
Is he alive? Is he alive?

Korolev bites his lip.

EXT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

Retro rockets firing, the capsule swings around to proper alignment so its heat shield faces the Earth. The Vostok streaks like a comet trailing a tail of fire.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

Gagarin settles in for the final minutes of his wild ride. Flames lick at the portholes. He picks up his mike.

INT. BAIKONUR LAUNCH CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Pin-drop quiet. Then a burst of static, followed by the buoyant voice of Gagarin SINGING "The Motherland Hears, the Motherland Knows."

A ROUSING CHEER from all in the blockhouse.

KOROLEV
Cedar, this is Zarya-1.

GAGARIN (O.C. FILTERED)
How am I doing, Sergei Pavlovich?

Korolev replies with tears in his eyes.

KOROLEV
(euphoric)
If you're asking about your flight,
you're doing perfectly well. If
you're asking about your singing,
well, we should have devoted more of
your training to voice lessons.

Gagarin's joyful LAUGH is heard.

INT. VOSTOK CAPSULE - CONTINUOUS

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
How are you feeling, Yuri?

GAGARIN
Honestly, I'm exhausted, Chief. I
didn't sleep a wink last night.

KOROLEV (O.C. FILTERED)
No? But the monitors said--

GAGARIN
I'm sure the monitors said I didn't
move at all. I think the only reason I
got this job was because Titov rolled
over once in bed last night.

OUTSIDE THE CAPSULE

The main parachute deploys, then the hatch shoots away.

INSIDE THE CAPSULE, Gagarin looks up at the open hatch as
the WHISTLING SOUND of air rushes by. In the next instant he
is shot out of the capsule on the ejection seat.

EXT. SMELKOVKA, RUSSIA - DAY

A small farming village. Haystacks dot the landscape, and
women in kerchiefs work the fields.

A tractor driver hears a loud EXPLOSION and looks up. A
parachute opens and drifts slowly to Earth. Further away the
capsule floats to earth under its own parachute.

GAGARIN'S POV: Far below, the Volga River winds its way
through tilled farmland.

An OLD WOMAN and her 7 year old GRANDDAUGHTER walking their
cow are startled to see a figure in a bright orange suit drop
to the ground by parachute right before them.

Gagarin loosens his spacesuit, takes off his helmet, then
looks up to see them staring.

GRANDDAUGHTER
Did you come from space?

GAGARIN
Would you believe it? I certainly have!

To his dismay the little girl runs away, screaming.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
It's OK, I'm Soviet. I'm a friend!

The grandmother looks at him a moment, seemingly unfazed.
But then she too screams and runs away.

EXT. VNUKOV AIRPORT - DAY

Gagarin, in his military greatcoat and cap, descends the stairs of an airplane to the red carpeted tarmac.

A BAND strikes up. The huge waiting crowd cheers. Gagarin crosses the red carpet, an untied shoelace flopping.

He reaches a broad reception platform, festooned with flowers and ivy, where numerous dignitaries await him.

He mounts the three stairs of the platform, stops and gives a stiff salute to Chairman Khrushchev.

GAGARIN
Comrade Chairman, Party members, and
citizens of the Soviet Union, I,
Major Yuri Gagarin, have completed
my mission.

Khrushchev embraces Gagarin and kisses his cheek.

KHRUSHCHEV
From one farm boy to another,
congratulations Major Gagarin!

GAGARIN
Thank you, Chairman. It is my honor
to serve the Motherland.

He moves down the receiving line. He shakes hands with Kamanin, then squares off in front of Titov.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
What poetry man, no poem for me?

TITOV
From what I hear on the radio
reports, you're Superman. Write one
yourself!

Gagarin gives Titov his trademark smile. Titov begrudgingly returns the smile, then embraces Gagarin.

Next in line is Leonov. Gagarin gives him a big hug.

GAGARIN

The fair-haired man! I thought you were still in Kamchatka!

LEONOV

And miss this party? Never!

Gagarin smiles. Next in line, patiently waiting but barely able to contain her emotion, is Valya. She begins to cry, falls into his arms. A deeply affectionate embrace.

VALYA

Yuri, I'm so proud of you!

GAGARIN

So now can I start my carpentry career?

She smiles. Overcome with emotion, Gagarin's eyes redden.

As he embraces Valya he notices an old acquaintance waiting nearby: Colonel Babushkin, his former commanding officer from Nikel Air Base, looking dapper and vigorous.

Gagarin's eyes widen with surprise and delight.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)

Colonel Babushkin, what a surprise! Thank you for coming all the way from Murmansk to see me!

BABUSHKIN

Don't flatter yourself, Gagarin-- I live in Moscow now. A few weeks ago the air force granted my request to transfer here.

GAGARIN

You've been wanting this for years! What happened?

BABUSHKIN

My wife thinks they approved my transfer because I recommended the pilot who became the first man in space. Personally I think it had more to do with my intelligence and good looks.

Gagarin is genuinely pleased, but then a shadow crosses his face. He looks around, discomfited.

GAGARIN

Where's Sergei Pavlovich? Why isn't he here!

Titov and Leonov shrug. No one knows.

Gagarin spots Korolev on the far periphery of the stand, speaking with his daughter Natalya.

GAGARIN (CONT'D)
(to Valya)
Let's go see Sergei Pavlovich.

Gagarin and Valya walk arm-in-arm over to Korolev. When Korolev sees Gagarin he gives him an enormous hug.

KOROLEV
How does it feel to be the most
famous man on Earth?

GAGARIN
I don't know yet. How does it feel
to be the best kept Soviet secret?

Korolev shrugs philosophically.

NATALYA
Major Gagarin-- How can I thank you?

Gagarin humbly shakes his head. Leonov rushes over.

LEONOV
Yuri, the motorcade is starting.
Khrushchev is waiting.

Gagarin and Valya rush to hop into a huge boat of a blue convertible, where Khrushchev awaits them.

The motorcade drives off the airport's tarmac, with the convertible in the lead. A dozen cars pass before we finally see Korolev and Natalya in a car at the rear.

EXT. TVERSKAYA STREET, MOSCOW - LATER

The motorcade drives down Moscow's grand boulevard, with motorcycle police escorts on either side of Gagarin's car. Cheering crowds throng both sides of the street.

Confetti rains from helicopters above.

A gust of wind blows Gagarin's cap off. The motorcade stops while a motorcycle cop retrieves it for him.

Back in the rear, smoke billows from the hood of Korolev's Volga. He pulls over and flags down another car.

KOROLEV
Go ahead, Natalya, I'll catch up.

Natalya hops into the other car. The motorcade continues.

Korolev sits alone in his car by the side of the road.

EXT. RED SQUARE, MOSCOW - AFTERNOON

A sea of people watches Khrushchev and Gagarin standing atop Lenin's Mausoleum, clasping their hands together above their heads, smiling and waving.

They walk down to ground level and shake hands with people in the crowd. Valya, standing next to Gagarin at first, is separated from him as well-wishers jostle to reach him.

Valya gazes wistfully at Gagarin as he drifts away with the crowd. She knows everything has changed for her family, their lives will never be the same.

VALYA'S VOICE (V.O.)

Like fine caviar and great music and literature, Yuri Gagarin was Russia's gift to the world; a grand hero at a time when the world needed heroes.

(pause)

When I think back on all that my Yuri accomplished, everything he overcame, I fill up with pride. I never imagined that a man could be so fierce and so gentle at the same time. There has never been a man with a bigger heart.

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE: Gagarin stands in an open limousine that drives down the Champs Elysee, waving to a huge throng of admirers and well-wishers.

VALYA'S VOICE (V.O.)

Yuri became an international celebrity overnight. He traveled the world as an ambassador for the Soviet Union. But he was too valuable as a propaganda symbol to be put at risk, so he was never allowed to fly into space again.

SLO-MO SEQUENCE: Valya watches Yuri drift away with the crowd. She blows him a kiss.

Yuri turns back to see Valya. He blows her a kiss too.

Linger on Gagarin's face, a melancholy picture.

A GHOSTLY IMAGE of the Borealis fades up behind Gagarin.

A shot from the opening scene: Yuri's grinning *matryoshka* doll sits atop the control panel, jittering with the rumbling of the jet.

SFX: The TERRIBLE WHINE of a jet plunging to the ground.

VALYA'S VOICE (V.O.)

(somber)

In March, 1968, Yuri was killed when the jet he was test piloting crashed. He had just turned 34 years old.

Complete silence.

SLOW TILT up to the heavens. Day DISSOLVES into night.

The surreal tapestry of the *Aurora Borealis* shimmers in the cold void of space.

We fly toward and then THROUGH the curtain of the Northern Lights, on toward a perfect, luminescent half-moon.

TITLE CARD: On May 5, 1961, 3 weeks after Yuri's flight, Alan Shepard's 15 minute sub-orbital flight made him the second person and the first American in space.

NEW TITLE CARD: In August, 1961, a month before his 26th birthday, Gherman Titov spent 24 hours in orbit in a Vostok capsule, completing 17 trips around the Earth. To this day he remains the youngest person ever to fly in space.

A brief, SLOW MOTION, shaky image of the Apollo 1 fire.

NEW TITLE CARD: In January, 1967, a flash fire aboard an Apollo capsule killed three American astronauts. The main cause of the disaster was the 100 percent oxygen atmosphere in the capsule, the very same cause of Valentin Bondarenko's death 6 years earlier.

NEW TITLE CARD: The Nobel Prize committee twice approached Russia to award prizes to Korolev for his accomplishments, but the Soviets refused to reveal his name, fearing that he might be kidnapped or assassinated by the West. Until his death in 1966, he was referred to only as the "Chief Designer," his name unknown to Russia and the world.

ZOOM IN towards the dark side of the moon's face.

VALYA'S VOICE

On the dark side of the moon there are
four craters named in honor of Gherman
Titov, Sergei Korolev, Valentin
Bondarenko, and Yuri Gagarin.

Continue to ZOOM IN on the dark side of the moon until the screen is completely black.

THE END