

CHERNOBYL

Episode 4 - "The Happiness Of All Mankind"

Written by

Craig Mazin

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401 OVER BLACK

401

The sound of liquid, intermittently spattering against metal. Rhythmic. FADE IN TO:

402 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

402

Two wrinkled, aged hands work the udder of a COW. Milk spurts down into an old METAL PAIL.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

It's time to go.

REVEAL: an OLD WOMAN, stocky, babushka, sitting on a small wooden stool. She continues to milk the cow.

Her cloudy eyes gaze straight ahead at her task. The job she has done a thousand times.

The SOLDIER, 27, tall, strong, stubbly face, sweating in his uniform, stands a few feet behind her.

They're in a weed-filled front yard. A dilapidated wooden fence, paint faded and peeling, slumps and weaves around the small property.

In the near background, a tiny home. Logs and concrete. A rippled tin roof. At least as old as its owner.

The soldier wipes his brow. Then waves a cloud of gnats away. Frustrated.

SOLDIER

Did you hear me?

She keeps milking.

SOLDIER

This is an evacuation. You understand? You have to come with me.

She does not stop milking. But:

OLD WOMAN

Why?

SOLDIER

Why? Because they told me, so now I'm telling you. Everyone in this village. Everyone. It's not safe here. There's radiation in the air. What's wrong with you?

OLD WOMAN

Do you know how old I am?

The soldier slumps. Hot. Sweaty. This is miserable.

SOLDIER

I don't know. Old.

OLD WOMAN

I am 82. I have lived here my whole life. Right here. That house. This place. What do I care about safe?

SOLDIER

I have a job. Don't cause trouble.

OLD WOMAN

Trouble. Tschh. You are not the first soldier to stand here with a gun. When I was 12, the revolution came.

Oh, for god's sake...

OLD WOMAN

Czar's men. Then Bolsheviks. Boys like you marching in lines. They told us to leave. No. Then there was Stalin, and his famine. The Holodomor. My parents died. Two of my sisters died. They told the rest of us to leave. No.

The soldier softens a bit. Doesn't want to be disrespectful.

OLD WOMAN

Then the Great War. German boys. Russian boys. More soldiers. More famine. More bodies. My brothers never came home. But I stayed. And I am still here. After all that I've seen. So I should leave now-- because of something I cannot see at all? No.

The pail is full. She stops milking.

The soldier takes a couple of steps forward. Reaches down gently to take the pail. She doesn't move to stop him.

He lifts it up, walks a few steps, and then SPILLS THE MILK OUT on to the ground--

--where it SPLASHES into a puddle right next to a SIMILAR PUDDLE... a dark-and-white milky spot on the ground.

She doesn't turn to look at him. Just waits.

Fine. He walks back to her. Hands her the pail.

She takes it, places it under the cow's udder. A small sigh.

And then she begins milking again.

SOUND: a TRUCK HORN. The soldier turns and looks out to THE DIRT ROAD, where a military bus is WAITING. Yeah. He knows. Just a minute.

The soldier looks back at her. Resolute now. All business.

SOLDIER
Please stand up now.

She does not. Nor does she speak. The only sound is the soft moo of the cow. The milk hitting the bottom of the pail.

The soldier puts his hand on his holster.

THE OLD WOMAN - hears the SNAP of a button as the soldier unholsters his weapon. But she doesn't move. Keeps milking.

The soldier draws his Makarov. Chambers a round.

cha-chik

SOLDIER
This is your last warning.

She keeps milking. The soldier purses his lips. Sweat rolling down from his forehead. Then he takes aim.

CLOSE ON THE OLD WOMAN - tired eyes. Ready. Her hands keep milking. Like they always have. All these years. All this--

GUNSHOT

She blinks.

THE COW - topples to the ground with a heavy thud. Milk still leaking from its udder.

The old woman just stares at it. White rivulets dribbling out into the soil. Then they stop.

SOLDIER (O.S.)
It's time to go.

CUT TO TITLES

END TITLES, CUT TO:

403 OMITTED 403

404 EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX COURTYARD - DAY 404

A bloc of IDENTICAL APARTMENT BUILDINGS. In the center courtyard, a small PLAYGROUND. Some young mothers stand together, smoking, watching their children play.

SCORE RISES

TITLE:

KIEV, UKRAINE
AUGUST, 1986

405 INT. UNFURNISHED FLAT - SAME 405

An empty apartment. Lyudmilla enters the frame from behind.

REVERSE TO - C.U. LYUDMILLA - looking at the empty space. This is where she will live now. This is her home.

She looks back at the BUILDING CONCIERGE, a woman in her 50's, who stands waiting by the door. Lyudmilla nods. Yes.

WIDER SHOT - Lyudmilla stands in the empty space. We see that her belly has grown. About five months pregnant now.

The concierge leaves, and now Lyudmilla is alone.

Her hand absent-mindedly goes to her stomach.

No. Not alone.

MUFFLED VOICES (O.S.)
Point five. Point seven. Point five.

406 EXT. AN OPEN FIELD NEAR A POND - MORNING 406

CLOSE ON: A GAS MASK-covered face. It stares dead ahead. In the dark lenses of the goggles, the distorted reflection of men... moving slowly in a pack through early morning FOG...

THE SURVEY TEAM - thirty soldiers, each wearing plasticky green radiation suits, hoods pulled tight over their heads. Their masks make them look like strange, nightmarish birds.

They move in a fanned-out formation holding RADIOMETERS in front of them, like astronauts exploring a distant planet.

THE TEAM LEADER - holds a map in his hand. He makes notations as they call their numbers out.

SURVEY TEAM

Point three. Point seven. Point six.

From off-camera:

SURVEY SOLDIER (O.S.)

Fifteen.

The soldiers stop dead. All turn as one. The lack of expression on the masked faces somehow makes it worse.

REVEAL: a soldier holding his radiometer out toward a tree. A child's RUSTY BICYCLE leans against it. Someone rode here to swim in the pond, and left the bike behind because of a flat tire. The soldier turns back. Repeats.

SURVEY SOLDIER

Fifteen.

The team springs into action. Half the soldiers rush over to the hotspot. Using their radiometers to find the perimeter.

The others grab supplies from the truck. They work in perfect coordination to erect fencing around the hotspot.

A final sign planted in the ground. A yellow triangle. Cyrillic lettering. But we won't need a translation.

The red RADIATION SYMBOL on the sign is enough.

The sound of approaching HELICOPTER BLADES, and the Team Leader looks up, his masked face staring at the sky.

SCORE CARRIES US THROUGH TO:

407 OMITTED

407

408 INT. LYUDMILLA & VASILY'S PRIPYAT APT. - CONTINUOUS

408

Where we first met them... the night of the explosion. The apartment is mostly as we saw it then. Lyudmilla's cigarette in the ASHTRAY, stubbed out a lifetime ago.

But there is plaster dust covering the table where she sat. And rat droppings. The calendar is frozen, and will forever be, on April 1986.

SCORE CARRIES US THROUGH TO:

409 INT. HOTEL ROOM - POLISSYA

409

CLOSE ON: LEGASOV - by the window. Lost in thought. Smoking. Anxious.

PHONE: rings, jarring Legasov back to reality. He picks it up.

LEGASOV

Legasov.

(checks his watch)

Alright. I'll be there to meet him.

He stubs his cigarette out in the ashtray, and:

410 EXT. REACTOR SITE / MOBILE OFFICE

410

A military car heads down the long road toward--

DRIVER'S POV - the approaching CHERNOBYL POWER PLANT

The car pulls into the reactor site area and comes to a stop. GENERAL TARAKANOV emerges. He stops to take it all in. A grim pause. Then he strides toward the MOBILE OFFICE.

411 INT. MOBILE OFFICE

411

CLOSE ON AN BLACK AND WHITE AERIAL PHOTO of CHERNOBYL. The massive, gaping wound in Building 4. Wreckage still covers the roof of the building.

Tarakanov sits at the table with Legasov and Shcherbina. Just staring at the photo. Then he flips to the next. And the next. Images of utter destruction.

LEGASOV

The atom is a humbling thing.

TARAKANOV

Not humbling.

(drops the photos)

Humiliating. Why is the core still exposed to the air? Why haven't we already covered it?

LEGASOV

We want to. But we can't get close enough. The debris on the roof is graphite from the core itself. Until we push it off the roof and back down into the reactor, it will kill anyone who goes near it.

As he speaks, he pulls photos to show Tarakanov.

LEGASOV

You can see the roof has three levels. We've named the sections-- that small one there is Katya. About a thousand roentgen per hour. Presume two hours of exposure is fatal.

(points again)

The one on the side-- Nina. Two thousand roentgen. One hour, fatal.

Tarakanov shakes his head. Hard to believe such a thing could be true. Rocks. Rubble. A building.

TARAKANOV

We used remote-controlled bulldozers in Afghanistan. Maybe--

SHCHERBINA

Too heavy. They'd fall right through.

TARAKANOV

So then-- ?

LEGASOV

Moon rovers.

Tarakanov looks at Legasov. I'm sorry, *moon rovers?*

LEGASOV

Lunokhod STR-1's. They're light, and if we line them with lead, they can withstand the radiation.

SHCHERBINA

We couldn't put a man on the moon, at least we can keep a man off a roof.

LEGASOV

That is the most important thing, General. Under no circumstances can men go up there. Robots only.

Tarakanov looks back at the photo.

TARAKANOV
What about this large section?

Legasov and Shcherbina fall silent. Then:

SHCHERBINA
Masha.

Tarakanov picks up the tone in the older man's voice. Reverence. Or is it dread?

LEGASOV
Twelve thousand roentgen. If you stood there in full protective gear, head to toe-- you would receive a lifetime dose in ninety seconds. At two minutes, your life expectancy is cut in half. By three minutes-- you're dead within months.

Tarakanov looks down at the photo of MASHA. Graphite chunks enlarged in the photo as blurred, ominous shadows...

LEGASOV
Even the lunar rovers won't work on Masha. That amount of gamma radiation penetrates everything. The particles literally shred the circuits in microchips apart. If it's more complicated than a light switch, Masha will destroy it.

SHCHERBINA
I think it's fair to say this piece of roof is the most dangerous place on the planet.

TARAKANOV
(stunned)
So... what do we do?

SHCHERBINA
That's what we were going to ask you.

412 EXT. REACTOR SITE - CONTINUOUS

412

In the far distance, a small LINE OF BUSES is barely visible, moving toward us.

413 INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS**413**

Men. All men. 20's and 30's. Two in each seat. No expressions. Hard faces. Most have the look of men who have seen war. Except for:

PAVEL, 23, the thin boy we saw at the end of the last episode. He sits in a window seat, nervous. Crowded slightly by the huge man next to him.

PAVEL'S POV - through the window, nothing but open country. And then, as the bus slows... MILITARY VEHICLES. A checkpoint. Two soldiers in gas masks.

As the soldiers wave the bus through, Pavel sees a third soldier on his hands and knees, vomiting on the ground.

Pavel quickly looks away from the window. Stares straight ahead. Afraid.

414 EXT. LIQUIDATOR CAMP - LATER**414**

The buses are parked in a field. The men stream out. Pavel exits, clutching his conscript papers in his hand.

Ahead of him - TENTS. Scores of them. Makeshift shelters, large enough to house eight men each. As Pavel follows along with the others toward a check-in point, we see:

COOKS - stir enormous vats of god-knows-what over field stoves. SUPPLY MEN unload crates from trucks and stack them on the ground. Each crate holds the same thing.

VODKA. Hundreds of crates. Thousands of bottles.

In the background, a row of men squatting over a trench latrine. Other men throw garbage into a fire pit.

415 EXT. TENTS - LATER**415**

Pavel carries a pile of folded UNIFORM CLOTHING, two boots, and a cap. A small BLACK AND WHITE PIECE OF PLASTIC - like a rectangular badge - is now clipped to his shirt.

He's checking the numbers posted on the tents. 101... 102...

416 INT. TENT - MOMENTS LATER

416

Pavel pushes through the flap and enters the small tent. Inside, we see it's the kind you'd set up on a battlefield for temporary quarters. In fact, the exact kind.

Except for the empty vodka bottles scattered around. Most of the cots are empty, but messy, as if their occupants have already left to do their jobs. But there is one man... sitting on his cot, cleaning a RIFLE. This is GARO, 30, Armenian, thin. The same PLASTIC BADGE clipped to his shirt.

Garo turns to Pavel, and we see: his right eye is CLOUDED OVER. Dead. A small scar winds around the socket.

PAVEL

I was sent here? Tent 103?

Another MAN, face down on a COT, groans. Turns over, wakes up. Disoriented. As he sits up, an empty bottle rolls off his cot, and hits the ground with a dull *thunk*.

This is BACHO, 36. Tall, muscular. Pants but no shirt. His entire body-- his posture, his build, the way he juts his head-- appears to be designed to commit violence.

He squints at Pavel through bleary eyes.

BACHO

New?

PAVEL

Yes.

Bacho rises... all 6'1" of him. Picks up a nearly-finished vodka bottle and a METAL CUP. Walks with a slight sway to Pavel. Offers the bottle.

BACHO

It's okay. It's free.

PAVEL

It's a little early.

Bacho shrugs. Yes, that's true. He holds out his hand. Pavel shakes with him, wincing a bit as the big man squeezes his hand.

BACHO

Bacho.

PAVEL

Pavel.

Bacho picks up a shirt. Also a PLASTIC BADGE on it. He puts it on while he talks.

BACHO
So what unit were you in?

PAVEL
They had me in the motor pool in Kiev, but--

BACHO
No no, not this bullshit. Afghanistan. What unit?

PAVEL
I wasn't in Afghanistan. I'm not in the military.

Bacho takes that in. Wooooow. He turns to Garo.

BACHO
They're running out of men.

Garo nods. Yup.

Bacho wipes his nose. Then SLAPS his own cheeks with his hands. Takes a huge breath. Shakes the cobwebs out. Then claps Pavel on the arm. Hard enough to leave a bruise.

BACHO
Alright. Let's go.

Bacho exits the tent. Pavel just stands there. Then sees Garo staring grimly at him with his one good eye.

417 EXT. TENTS - MOMENTS LATER

417

Pavel rushes to catch up with Bacho, who starts pointing things out to him as they go.

BACHO
Showers. Food. Those guys over there? They dig up the ground. Those guys, they cut down trees. Those guys I think evacuate people, you know? Like villagers?

Pavel gestures toward a different group of men.

PAVEL
What about them?

BACHO
 I don't know them. Fuck them.
 (sees, yells)
 Janek, you Latvian whore!

JANEK, 25, picks through a PILE OF STUFF... boots, caps, tin cups, pots, pans. He looks up and sees Bacho walking at him with purpose. Shit. That's not good.

JANEK
 I'm not Latvian, I'm Estonian.

BACHO
 Well guess what, no one gives a shit.
 Give me an egg basket.

JANEK
 I only have one, I promised it to--

Bacho juts his face toward Janek. Fist cocked.

BACHO
Give me the fucking basket.

JANEK
 Okay, okay...!

Janek pulls a CURVED PIECE OF FLAT GRAY METAL from the pile. It has four small holes punched into it, with shoelaces running through them. Like... a metal loincloth?

Bacho snatches it out of Janek's hand. Then makes a motion to smash Janek in the head with it. Janek FLINCHES back. Then Bacho points to Pavel. Eyes still glaring at Janek.

BACHO
 He's with me, you understand? Nobody messes with him.

Janek raises his hands up... doesn't want trouble. Bacho, still scowling, gives a satisfied grunt. Then he turns to Pavel-- instantly calm again-- and hands him the bent metal.

BACHO
 We make these from lead scrap. Put it on under your balls.

His balls? Pavel looks at the metal. Then realizes that Bacho is staring at him. As in... waiting.

PAVEL
 Now?

BACHO

No, you should wait until the radiation gives you a cunt. Yes now.

Pavel looks around. Okay. He drops his trousers.

BACHO

Over your clothes. Holy shit.

Embarrassed, Pavel pulls his trousers back up. While he puts his egg basket on, Bacho continues to smoke. And talk.

BACHO

You ever go hunting?

PAVEL

No.

BACHO

Well, today's your lucky day. You, me, that one-eyed Armenian in the tent? Garo? We do animal control.

PAVEL

Animal control?

Bacho makes a gun gesture with his hand.

BACHO

They're radioactive, so that's that with them. And the best part? It's mostly pets. They're happy to see you, they run right up to you! Bang! Load the bodies on a truck, dump them in a pit, bury them in concrete... and then we drink.

Pavel finishes tying the egg basket on.

BACHO

As much vodka as you want, plus a thousand rubles. It's almost worth it, you know?

Without warning, he SLAPS his hand hard against Pavel's crotch. Right in the egg basket. Pavel flinches in pain.

BACHO

Good. Let's go get you a gun.

Bacho strides off, and once again, Pavel follows.

418 EXT. MOSCOW UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY 418

The foreboding building, with its jutting central tower covered in bone-white tile, looks more like a prison fortress than a repository of knowledge.

419 INT. SECURITY CHECK-IN - CONTINUOUS 419

Khomyuk waits by a check-in desk in front of a security gate. A SECURITY OFFICER - male, 30's, has her credentials in front of him on his desk.

He painstakingly records her information into a LOGBOOK. No sound but the scratching of his pen, a *tunk-tunk-tunk* of an unseen clock, and the hum of overhead lights.

Finally, he hands her credentials back, then hits a button. There's a BUZZ, and the security gate clicks open.

420 INT. LIBRARY ARCHIVE - LATER 420

A large, two-level reading room. Long wooden tables run the length of it. KHOMYUK sits alone at the end of one of the tables. Stacks of books. Journals. Maps. Notepads.

And a THICK BINDER with page after page of a dot matrix printout... an infodump from a computer, no doubt.

We catch bits of her work as she progresses. Mathematical calculations. Notations referring to time of day. Marked-up diagrams of a nuclear reactor. Photographs of control room instrumentation... panel schematics...

She circles **A3-5** (*AZ-5 in Cyrillic*) on a schematic.

Leans back. Thinks. Then checks one of her books. No. What she's looking for won't be in there. She tears a blank page from her notepad and starts writing.

421 INT. LIBRARY ARCHIVE - REFERENCE DESK - LATER 421

An elderly male librarian sits behind an open window... a bit like a bank teller. Behind him, a few desks and walls of card catalogs. The secure reference section.

He looks up from his work. Sees Khomyuk waiting.

LIBRARIAN

Yes?

She hands him the piece of note paper through the window.

KHOMYUK
I need to see the following
documents. They're listed as
permission only.

He takes the paper... and then a LETTER she hands him.

KHOMYUK
I'm working for the Central Committee.

He puts on his glasses. But before he can even read the letter, a MAN IN A SUIT, 40 comes into view behind him.

The KGB agent takes the list from the old man, who meekly looks down without protest. He walks back to a desk. Picks up a phone. Dials.

While he mutters to someone on the phone, Khomyuk waits quietly. The old librarian still keeps his eyes down. Doesn't want to know her. Doesn't want trouble.

THE AGENT - has a BLACK PENCIL in his hand. Whoever he's called is giving him instructions. He swipes the pencil across her list. Once... twice... three times...

Khomyuk holds her anger in. The agent finally hangs up. Walks back to the librarian. Puts the piece of paper down.

Every single request has been CROSSED OUT except for one.

AGENT
She can have that one.

The agent lifts his head to stare at Khomyuk. A challenge for her to argue. But all he gets back is:

KHOMYUK
Thank you, comrade.

He gives a little smile. Oh well. Perhaps next time.

422 EXT. FARMLAND - DAY

422

Over SCORE... no other sound... SLO-MO... dreamlike...

BIRD'S EYE VIEW - an enormous, wide-open cabbage field. NEAT ROWS of vegetables. Then:

THREE BULLDOZERS - enter frame, moving in a line, perfect unison, destroying the harvest in rows just as neat.

423 EXT. VILLAGE - DAY **423**

SCORE/SLO-MO continues:

THREE CHOPPERS glide like mosquitoes over a small, abandoned village, each dumping FOUR EVEN STREAMS of BROWN DECONTAMINANT, which land on everything like paint.

424 EXT. PRIPYAT STREET - DAY **424**

SCORE/SLO-MO continues

PUMP TRUCKS roll down the main street, each spraying an arc of BROWN FOAM DECONTAMINANT to the side.

MEN IN PROTECTIVE SUITS - hoods drawn tight, faces covered in GAS MASKS, walk in front of the procession of trucks, spraying the road in a waving motion with handheld-nozzles connected to TANKS strapped to their back.

It almost seems celebratory. Some kind of sick parade...

FADE TO BLACK

425 OMITTED **425**

426 OMITTED **426**

427 A DARK BLOB AGAINST BLUE - OUT OF FOCUS - RESOLVES TO: **427**

428 EXT. ROOF - KATYA - DAY **428**

A chunk of GRAPHITE. Scattered beyond it, more of the same. The bits of rock sitting on the scorched pitch-covered roof give the impression of an alien surface.

And adding to that eerie sense... in the B.G., we see a FOUR-WHEELED VEHICLE - like a retrofuturistic go-cart, sitting on the roof.

The LUNAR ROVER. It's about eight feet long. Steel piping. Cameras mounted on articulated arms. The tires are paper thin, with barely-there hubs made of needle-like spokes.

A BULLDOZER ARM AND BLADE have been welded onto its front.

429 INT. REMOTE COMMAND CENTER - CONTINUOUS

429

A small, undamaged room under the roof.

OPERATORS sit at a small table. Control equipment and small, square TELEVISION MONITORS are stacked. And a COMPUTER. On the walls, PHOTOS of the roof.

A boxy CONTROL MODULE sits on the desk. Cables running in and out. Two switches. Two rows of LIGHTS. The lights are all currently RED.

Legasov and Shcherbina watch, nervous, as Tarakanov waits with a walkie-talkie by his ear. Then:

WALKIE-TALKIE

We're clear.

Tarakanov takes a breath. Then to his operators:

TARAKANOV

Bring up the cameras.

The lead operator, JUGHASHVILI, hits the first switch on the control module. THREE RED LIGHTS - turn GREEN. The other three remain red.

THE MONITORS - flicker to life. Different IMAGES of the roof from the rover's cameras. And ONE REMOTE SITE CAMERA showing the LUNAR ROVER ITSELF.

TARAKANOV

Signal?

JUGHASHVILI

Acceptable. Running onboard diagnostics.

TARAKANOV

Tell me when we can start moving it.

Shcherbina moves in closer to stare at the monitor.

SHCHERBINA

To think that's what they put on the moon...

LEGASOV

Well, not that one.

SHCHERBINA

(glares)

I know not that one.

Legasov shrugs. Sorry.

TARAKANOV

This rover was in storage, and I'm told they can build two more. That should cover Katya and Nina.

SHCHERBINA

And Masha?

TARAKANOV

The Central Committee has informed me they've found something that can work up there. From the outside.

LEGASOV

American?

TARAKANOV

Of course not. No, it's a German police robot. West German, though. You can imagine that wasn't easy.

JUGHASHVILI

Diagnostics complete, ready to engage main power and motor.

Legasov and Shcherbina get ready. If this doesn't work...

TARAKANOV

Begin.

The operator turns the second switch on the control module. Nothing. The lights stay red. Everyone is dead quiet. Then:

TARAKANOV

Again.

The operator goes back to the switch. Off. Then on. Still nothing. Red lights.

The monitors continue to show the rover's view of the roof. Slightly askew. The graphite chunks. The bits of fuel assembly. All at rest.

TARAKANOV

Again.

Like a doctor refusing to acknowledge a patient is dead.

Once more, the operator switches the power off. Then on. And again, nothing. Red lights. Then... in rapid succession...

GREEN.

TARAKANOV

(my god)

Can you move it?

The operator grabs hold of his remote, and begins pushing the small joystick.

ON THE MONITORS - a lag, then... IT MOVES.

The operators react. Breathing. Laughing. On the screen, the rover is moving along, starting to PUSH DEBRIS. Doing exactly what they had hoped.

Shcherbina makes a fist in the air. Triumph. Then sees...

SHCHERBINA

Valery? Is that...? Is that a *smile*?

Legasov sheepishly waves him off. But yes. A smile. The first one we've seen on his face.

Shcherbina puts his arm around Legasov. Hugs him close, laughing. Yes. YES! Hope.

430 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

430

Dyatlov sits in a chair. Smoking. Looking out the window. His hair appears to have come back a bit. A bit of moustache, though it wasn't what it was. The lesions have faded. But he does not look healthy. At all.

Behind him, a knock on the door. He doesn't answer. We hear the door opening, and:

KHOMYUK (O.S.)

I see your condition has improved.

Dyatlov turns. Sees her there, back in her protective clothing. In her hand, a small manila folder.

He waves her away in contempt.

DYATLOV

No. Leave.

KHOMYUK

I need your help.

Dyatlov raises his arms slightly to the side to show her all of the IV tubes running in and out of him. How is he supposed to help anyone? But:

KHOMYUK

Akimov initiated AZ-5. When you gave him the order, was--

DYATLOV

Order? What order? Toptunov called it out, Akimov pressed it. That was the only good decision they made. Incompetent morons.

KHOMYUK

(ignores that)

Can you confirm the reactor exploded after they attempted to shut it down?

He gives her a strange smile.

DYATLOV

How do I even know it exploded? Hmm?

Out of patience, she opens her folder, pulls out a PHOTO, and SLAPS IT DOWN in front of him.

It's an AERIAL VIEW of the EXPLODED REACTOR.

And for a moment, Dyatlov is shaken. He pushes it away. Already doing whatever mental gymnastics are required to forget what he just saw.

But Khomyuk knows he won't forget it. She takes the photo back, and hands him a JOURNAL ARTICLE from her folder.

KHOMYUK

I pulled this from the state archives, written in 1976. It's about the operation of RBMK reactors under extreme conditions.

Dyatlov barely looks at it.

DYATLOV

So?

KHOMYUK

The names of the authors have been redacted. And two pages have been removed.

Dyatlov hesitates. An old, habitual paranoia rises. Is she testing him?

DYATLOV

The State must protect its secrets, Comrade Khomyuk. Do you dare suggest otherwise?

KHOMYUK

(quieter)

They made a mistake. They didn't redact the table of contents.

He slowly flips to the first page. Sees it.

KHOMYUK

The missing pages apparently refer to a positive void coefficient and AZ-5. Does that mean anything to you?

DYATLOV

(suspicious)

What are you after here? Why are you asking me this?

KHOMYUK

You worked with this reactor. You know it better than I do--

DYATLOV

So everything's my fault then? Is that what this is?

KHOMYUK

(snaps)

I'm not here to blame you. I'm here to find out what happened. And whether you realize it or not, I am the best chance you have to avoid a bullet. Can you help me or not?

Dyatlov stares at her. Then flips through the article to the missing section. Scans around it briefly. Then, honestly:

DYATLOV

I have no idea what would have gone here. Void coefficients have nothing to do with AZ-5.

He tosses the article at her. Dismissive.

DYATLOV

There. Now you can go.

She picks the article up from the floor. Then:

KHOMYUK
(disgusted)
You're not even curious.

DYATLOV
What for? You think the right
question will get you the truth?
There is no truth. Ask the bosses
whatever you want.

He stubs out his cigarette.

DYATLOV
You will get the lie.
(beat)
And I will get the bullet.

431 INT. TRUCK - DAY

431

A stakebed truck. Bacho drives. Garo sits next to the other window. Pavel is squeezed in between.

Bacho is peering at a MAP he has on the dashboard. It keeps falling. Son of a bitch. He grabs it, then reaches across Pavel to Garo, who hands him a bottle of vodka.

Bacho drinks and drives. Grabs the map again. Drinks again. The truck jostles on the uneven road.

BACHO
Fucking thing.

Pavel is nervous. Bacho offers him the bottle.

PAVEL
No. Thank you.

BACHO
What, are you afraid we're going to
run out? Trust me, we won't. It's the
one thing we always have. In
Afghanistan, when we needed guns,
they sent vodka. We needed
penicillin? They sent vodka. Boots,
morphine, fuel? Never the right
things. Never enough. Except the
vodka. So you might as well drink.

Bacho turns to Pavel. Not looking at the road at all.

BACHO
I'm not asking. I'm telling. Because
of the radiation. It protects you.
(catches the map)
Where the fuck are we? Garo?

Garo shrugs. Takes the vodka bottle.

PAVEL
Do they tell you how much there is?

BACHO
How much what there is?

PAVEL
Radiation.

Bacho laughs. And Garo starts to chuckle along with him.
Pavel isn't sure what that means.

PAVEL
I saw a man throwing up. On the side
of the road.

BACHO
Yeah, that happens.

Pavel touches the white-and-black badge on his shirt. The
one they all wear.

PAVEL
But we have these. To measure. So
they know.
(no response)
The radiation we get.

BACHO
That's right. They check them every
day. You're allowed to get a total of
24 roentgen. If you hit 24, you get
to go home. And if you go over 24,
your commanding officer gets arrested
for negligence. Maybe even shot. Does
that make you feel better?

PAVEL
Yes.
(beat)
How much do you have?

BACHO
Me? They tell me I have 23 roentgen.
Go ahead, ask Garo how much he has.

Before Pavel can ask or Garo can answer--

BACHO

He has 23. We all have 23. And we will never have more than 23. You understand now?

Pavel falls silent. Yes. He does understand.

Bacho points ahead.

BACHO

Ay! There it is. Fuck this map. I told you I knew where I was.

432 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

432

The truck rumbles toward a SMALL VILLAGE - a few dozen buildings... one main street... all quiet. No one left.

433 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

433

The truck squeals to a stop. The three men get out, and walk around to the back of the truck. Bacho pulls the back of the stakebed down, and opens a LARGE METAL BOX.

It's full of BULLETS. Hundreds? Thousands? They're bound in clusters of five rounds each, held together by thin steel stripper clips.

Bacho forks over a fistful of bullets to Pavel. Garo takes three Mosin-Nagant rifles from the back of the truck.

Bacho loads his rifle, then sees Pavel struggling. Wow. Bacho grabs the gun from Pavel. Shows him how to insert the stripper clip. Bullets go in, empty clip comes out. Slide the bolt to chamber.

BACHO

Got it? Okay. Now listen. I only have two rules. One, don't point this gun at me. That's easy, right?

(gestures to Garo)

Point it at this piece of shit, I don't give a fuck. Never me. Two, if you hit an animal and they don't die, you keep shooting until they do.

(gets in Pavel's face)

Don't let them suffer-- or I'll kill you. Understand? I mean it. I've killed a lot of people.

Pavel glances at Garo, who gives a tiny nod. It's true. Bacho has killed a lot of people.

Pavel looks back at Bacho. Yes. Understood.

BACHO
(friendly pat)
Then we're ready.

434 EXT. VILLAGE - MAIN STREET - MOMENTS LATER

434

Eerily quiet. A few cars are where their owners left them. Some clothing hangs on a line, swaying in the breeze.

THE THREE MEN walk down the street. Rifles at the ready. Bacho turns to Pavel.

BACHO
Watch.

Bacho gives a WHISTLE. The kind you might give to a dog.

And sure enough... there's a BARK. And another. And now, tentatively emerging from alleys and empty buildings...

DOGS. And CATS. Hungry. But clearly domesticated. Tails wagging. Hopeful eyes.

Bacho turns to Pavel.

BACHO
When we start, they'll run where they feel safe. Always inside. So we go door to door, okay? Okay.

And without warning, Bacho raises his rifle and FIRES. We hear a YELP, and he FIRES again.

We don't see it. We just hear BARKING and HOWLING as Bacho and Garo keep walking, right out of frame, FIRING. Gunshots. Sliding bolts. Shells hitting the ground. Gunshots.

PAVEL - stands in horror, blinking every time a GUNSHOT rips through the air. He hasn't even raised his rifle.

PAVEL'S POV - Bacho turns back to him. In the B.G., we see some scattered corpses of dogs.

BACHO
HEY!

Pavel snaps out of it.

BACHO
 (points to an alley)
 Door to door. Do your job.

Pavel nods, frightened, and moves toward the alley.

435 EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

435

Pavel walks slowly down the alley. Forcing himself to breathe. Trying not to throw up.

A SHEPHERD MUTT lifts its head from a pile of RUBBISH. Sniffs the air. Even in the bedlam, desperate to be fed.

Pavel stops. Raises his rifle. Shaky hands. Finger on the trigger. But... can't. Lowers the gun. Then: the dog TURNS TO HIM. And BARES its TEETH.

Pavel backs up. The dog stalks forward. Starvation and time have turned it feral. The dog growls, protecting its rubbish pile, and what little food is in it. Snaps and barks.

Pavel waves his rifle at it, as if the animal might understand.

PAVEL
 Go!

The dog keeps advancing. Faster. Pavel keeps backing up.

PAVEL
 GET AWAY.

The dog BARKS... CHARGES, and:

CLOSE ON PAVEL - panicked - he SHOOTS...

We HEAR BUT DO NOT SEE - the dog YELP in pain and thud to the ground. And now the sound of rapid, wheezing breaths.

We stay on Pavel, who moves closer to where the dog fell. Shock on his face. At what he did. Agonizing seconds tick by. A scared man. The sound of a dying animal. Heavy breathing. Pain. And then:

BOOM. A bit of BLOOD spatters up into Pavel's face. No more sound from the dog.

BACHO - stands there. Angrily EJECTS the shell from his rifle, chambers another one, and then gets in Pavel's face. Nose to nose. Dead serious.

BACHO
Don't let them suffer.

PAVEL
 I'm sorry.

Bacho glares into Pavel's face-- then points down.

BACHO
 You're dragging that on the truck.

Bacho marches off, and Pavel stands there, staring down in shock at the dead dog. In the background, steady gunfire.

436 EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - LATER

436

THUNK. A vodka bottle is slammed down on a table. Now wedges of cheese. Salami. A loaf of bread. Bacho and Garo sit at a table outside an abandoned cafe. They use their knives to cut the loaf, stab at the meat and cheese. Big mouthfuls. Deep swigs of vodka.

Bacho looks over at PAVEL - who sits apart. Shellshocked.

BACHO
 (mouth full)
 You going to eat or what?

Pavel stares at the street. Streaks of blood and tracks in the dirt where the animals died... and were dragged away.

BACHO
 Hey.

Pavel shakes his head. No. Bacho shrugs. Takes Pavel's food, adds it to his pile. Then realizes... Pavel is wiping at his eyes. Fighting off tears.

Ah, shit. Bacho and Garo share a glance. Garo nods at him. "Do something." So Bacho pours vodka into Pavel's cup, who shakes his head no.

BACHO
 (gentle, but firm)
 Drink.
 (he does)
 Again.

Pavel takes another swig.

BACHO

Look... this happens to everyone their first time. Normally when they kill a man, but for you-- a dog. Eh, so what? There's no shame in it.

This isn't going well. Pavel takes another drink. Wants to get numb. Bacho tries again.

BACHO

Garó, you remember your first time?

As per usual, he doesn't wait for an answer.

BACHO

My first time-- Afghanistan-- we were moving through a house-- a man was suddenly there-- and I shot him in the stomach. That's a real war story. They're never good stories, like in movies. They're shit. Man is there, boom, stomach.

(what can you do?)

I was so scared, I didn't pull the trigger again for the rest of the day. I thought, well-- that's it, Bacho. You put a bullet in someone. You're not you anymore. You'll never be you again. But then you wake up the next morning, and... you're still you. And you realize-- that was you all along. You just didn't know.

A long pause. Then:

GARO

The happiness of all mankind.

The first words we've heard him speak.

BACHO

What?

Garó points across the street at:

A PROPAGANDA BANNER - slung between two buildings over the main street. A picture of Lenin on one side, and a proud Soviet worker on the other.

And in between, Cyrillic lettering.

GARO
 "Our goal is the happiness of all
 mankind."

The three men stare at the absurd sign hanging over the
 blood-stained street in a dead town.

Then Bacho gets up. Oddly chipper. No cracks in his dam.

BACHO
I'm happy. I'm happy every day.

He grabs his gun. Then:

BACHO
 Back to work.

Bacho marches off. Pavel looks at his rifle. Then picks it
 up. Vodka in his veins. Takes a breath.

Yes. Back to work. He gets up, and follows.

437 EXT. REACTOR ROOF - "KATYA" - DAY

437

Seemingly empty, but for the debris. Less, though, than we
 saw before.

And then: a LUNAR ROVER enters frame, PUSHING DEBRIS along
 with its small bulldozer blade... moving toward the edge...

438 EXT. LOOKING UP AT THE EDGE - CONTINUOUS

438

We're twenty feet below the roofline here, pointing straight
 up at the edge of Katya.

The ROVER slowly appears, and pushes GRAPHITE off the edge.
 It cascades down toward us...

439 EXT. THE REACTOR - MIDAIR - CONTINUOUS

439

WIDE - from this distance, we can see it all. The tiny
 rover. The falling graphite.

The debris plummets from the roof and down into THE GAPING
 CRATER where the reactor used to be.

Then we swing around slowly to find the larger section of
 roof. MASHA - the deadliest place on Earth. Still covered in
 debris. Still untouched.

Still waiting.

TITLE:

SEPTEMBER, 1986

440 INT. REMOTE COMMAND CENTER - DAY

440

Multiple rover camera POVs are visible on the monitors. Jughashvili and the other operators drive them with their joysticks.

There are more computers now. More control modules. All of the lights are green.

Shcherbina watches them work. Behind him, Legasov sketches cleanup paths on the photos of the roof.

They turn in unison TARAKANOV enters.

TARAKANOV

It's here.

441 EXT. REACTOR SITE - MOMENTS LATER

441

TRUCK DOORS OPEN

Legasov and Shcherbina watch as Tarakanov organizes the offloading of the truck's sole cargo.

TARAKANOV

Careful now. Slow. SLOW. That's it.

Soldiers gingerly offload an ORANGE, HIGH-TECH ROBOTIC VEHICLE with TANK TREADS. It's far more muscular than the flimsy lunar rovers.

TARAKANOV

(proudly)

Joker.

Legasov and Shcherbina turn to Tarakanov. What now?

TARAKANOV

That's what the Germans named it.
"Joker."

SHCHERBINA
 (heavy sigh)
 Germans.
 (beat)
 Is it ready?

TARAKANOV
 It's ready.

Shcherbina looks at Legasov. Legasov nods.

SHCHERBINA
 So. Let's introduce Joker to Masha.

442 OMITTED

442

443 EXT. MASHA - LATER

443

CLOSE TO THE ROOF SURFACE - black chunks of graphite. One of the pieces has the tell-tale smooth semicircle in it... the channel for a fuel rod...

The wind picks up... granular bits of deadly graphite swirl, and - JOKER lands SOFTLY on the rubble.

The cable coupling detaches, and the helicopter QUICKLY swerves away from the deadly roof.

Joker sits there. Impressive. Armored. Strong. This is clearly a superior vehicle. A match for Masha.

444 INT. REMOTE COMMAND CENTER - CONTINUOUS

444

Legasov, Shcherbina and Tarakanov stand behind the operators. Nervous anticipation.

JUGHASHVILI
 Good signal.

TARAKANOV
 Cameras.

Jughashvili hits a switch on the control module. A GREEN LIGHT immediately comes on.

ON THE MONITORS - views from Joker's cameras.

Legasov and Shcherbina watch intently. So far, so good.

TARAKANOV

Motors.

Jughashvili hits more switches on the control module. The lights go GREEN in succession. Joker is the real deal.

JUGHASHVILI

Motor good, signal good.

TARAKANOV

All right. Let's start easy. Forward one metre, reverse one metre.

The operator pushes a joystick. Legasov and Shcherbina stare at the monitors. Unblinking. *Please*.

ON THE MONITOR - the image SHIFTS... as Joker MOVES.

JUGHASHVILI

Forward one.

The men in the room are all smiling.

SHCHERBINA

(nudges Legasov)
Germans!

JUGHASHVILI

Reverse one.

He pulls back on the joystick, and on the monitor, we can tell Joker is faithfully moving backwards.

Then: THE MONITORS lose signal. STATIC.

CONTROL MODULE - the GREEN LIGHTS start to turn RED... one, two, three.... then ALL of them.

Dead silence in the room. No one breathes. Then:

TARAKANOV

Did you lose the signal?

The operators are flipping switches. Checking the remote TRANSMITTER boxes. Sweating.

JUGHASHVILI

It's not the signal. It's the vehicle.

He turns back to Tarakanov. Pale. At a total loss.

JUGHASHVILI

It's dead.

They all stand there in shock. All but for Shcherbina.

We PUSH IN ON HIM - see the RAGE building inside...

CUT TO:

445 INT./EXT. MOBILE OFFICE - LATER

445

Legasov and Tarakanov. Wincing at the sounds of FURNITURE SMASHING and GLASS BREAKING.

REVEAL - they're in front of the mobile command trailer. It's ROCKING from within. And now we hear Shcherbina's muffled voice, screaming.

INTERCUT BETWEEN - INTERIOR and EXTERIOR of MOBILE OFFICE

SHCHERBINA (O.S.)

*GOOD! GOOD, I WANT THEM TO HEAR! DO YOU KNOW WHAT WE'RE DOING? THE MEN WE'RE BURNING? **BURNING!!!***

The sound of something TOPPLING. Then a STOMPING noise.

Legasov lights his cigarette. He looks over and sees: A SOLDIER, standing nearby. Frightened at the noise and anger coming from inside that trailer.

SHCHERBINA (O.S.)

YOU THINK I CARE? I'M A DEAD MAN! TELL RYZHKOV! TELL LIGACHEV! TELL GORBACHEV! TELL THEM! TELL--

Then the sounds of PLASTIC being battered... the sad clinking of a damaged BELL... and...

WHAM. The trailer door gets KICKED OPEN, and Shcherbina emerges, red-faced.

He HURLS the smashed remnants of a TELEPHONE into the air... the cord trailing behind it... sending it clattering to the ground in pieces.

Legasov and Tarakanov wait quietly for Shcherbina to catch his breath. It takes some time. Then:

SHCHERBINA

The official position of the State is that a global nuclear catastrophe is not possible in the Soviet Union.

(beat)

They told the international community the highest detected level of radiation was 2,000 roentgen.

Legasov is stunned. Oh god. No.

SHCHERBINA

They gave the propaganda number to the Germans. The robot was never going to work.

Tarakanov closes his eyes. Hangs his head. The three men stand there, dejected. Lost.

Then Shcherbina, now drained of all his fight, turns to the nearby soldier.

SHCHERBINA

We need a new phone.

446 INT. BASE CAMP TENT - NIGHT

446

CLOSE ON: two glasses. Vodka pours into each.

Shcherbina hands a weary Tarakanov one glass. Takes the other for himself. A heavy RAIN batters the tent from outside. Water occasionally drips in through faulty seams.

SHCHERBINA

(drinks, then)

What if we don't clear it?

LEGASOV (O.S.)

We have to clear it.

Legasov sits off to the side. Scribbling notations on a pad. Never looks up. Keeps scribbling as he talks.

LEGASOV

If we don't clear the roof, we can't build a cover over it. If we can't build a cover, that's 12,000 roentgen. Nearly twice the radiation from the bomb in Hiroshima, every hour, hour after--

SHCHERBINA

(waves him off)

Yes, okay, I remember.

(back to Tarakanov)

What about lead? We could-- I don't know. We could melt it down, then pour it from above, like a coating.

TARAKANOV

First of all, we've already used most of the lead we had--

SHCHERBINA

There's lead sheeting around instruments in the other reactor buildings. The soldiers are stripping it to make their armor.

TARAKANOV

Are you serious?

Yes. Shcherbina is serious. Tarakanov shakes his head. Embarrassing. But back to the bigger issue:

TARAKANOV

Even if, you're still talking about boiling metal in a *helicopter*-- and it's lead, Boris. It'll weigh a ton...

Shcherbina puts his hands up. All right. It was stupid.

TARAKANOV

What if we shoot the graphite into the hole?

Shcherbina looks up from his drink. *Excuse me?*

TARAKANOV

We have heavy caliber bullets-- exploding bullets, so they won't just ricochet... they push...

SHCHERBINA

You want to shoot *exploding bullets* at an exposed nuclear reactor?

TARAKANOV

(sheepish)

Well--

SHCHERBINA

No, let's go light the roof back on fire. It was so easy to put out the first time.

(frustrated)

What are we even talking about? We need another robot. Something that can withstand the radiation.

TARAKANOV

I've asked. There's nothing.

SHCHERBINA

The Americans--

TARAKANOV

If the Americans have that kind of technology, do you really think they would give it to us? And even if they would-- the Central Committee will never stoop to ask. You know it, and I know it.

(beat)

There are no robots.

LEGASOV (O.S.)

Biorobots.

Shcherbina and Tarakanov turn to Legasov. He's been so quiet, they almost forgot he was there.

SHCHERBINA

What was that?

Legasov removes his glasses. Stares down at the calculations on his notepad. Utterly defeated.

LEGASOV

We use biorobots.

He finally turns to look at them. Grim.

LEGASOV

Men.

And so, the unthinkable has finally been said.

447 EXT. ANOTHER TINY VILLAGE - ANOTHER DAY

447

A cold, gray day. We're in a DEAD FIELD. Plowed earth. The everpresent RADIATION SIGNS stuck in the ground where scarecrows might have once gone.

IN THE DISTANCE - a small farming village. Barely a dozen tiny homes.

GUNSHOTS echo in the air.

448 EXT. TINY VILLAGE - STREET

448

PAVEL - walks slowly. Dispassionately. SHOOTING. Aim. Trigger. Fire. Bolt. Shell. Bolt. Aim. Trigger. Fire.

It's only been a month, but he looks older somehow. A bit thinner. Sleepless eyes. A numbness.

REVEAL - BACHO and GARO walking along side him. Aiming. Firing. The sounds of barking. Yelping. Running.

At last, they stop. Animal corpses are scattered along the street in front of them.

BACHO

A lot today. More than I thought.

PAVEL

(looks around)

Where are they getting food?

Bacho points between two houses, where a large, ramshackle wooden CHICKEN COOP sits. Dark stains near the opening.

BACHO

They eat the chickens.

(loads more bullets)

Then they eat each other.

He tosses the stripper clip aside. Chambers a round.

BACHO

Check the houses.

449 INT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

449

The barest light streams in through thin drapes. We're looking down a narrow hallway toward the front door.

Uneven wooden floors. Cement block walls painted in pastels, and stained with rust from the rain that's leaked through the tin roof. Almost no furniture. Utter poverty.

The door OPENS. Locks are either not needed or not available in a place like this.

Pavel enters slowly, eyes adjusting to the light.

A door to his right. He quietly pushes it open, wincing at the SQUEAK of the neglected hinges. Peers in. Nothing.

He moves down the hall, keeping his footsteps light. Eyes peeled for any movement.

Then he hears... a weird little chirpy noise. A bird maybe?

He MOVES SLOWLY DOWN THE HALL...

450 INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

450

LOW ANGLE - a cramped kitchen. Basin with no tap. Rickety shelves nailed to the wall. Torn-open packages of food, broken jars, a spilled bag of flour on the floor...

And that weird little chirpy noise again. Louder here. And a soft BREATHING.

PAVEL - pushes slowly through the swinging door to the kitchen. He looks down. To the right. To the left.

And stops. Oh god.

PAVEL'S POV - ON THE FLOOR, amidst the garbage... a POODLE MUTT BITCH lies on the ground, panting softly and sitting with her LITTER OF SIX PUPPIES... just a few months old.

BACHO (O.S.)
(yelling from outside)
Pavel?

Pavel looks dumbstruck at the poodle and her puppies. The bitch stares back at him. Helpless.

BACHO (O.S.)
PAVEL?

We hear FOOTSTEPS from outside, and behind Pavel, we see BACHO enter the kitchen from the back door.

BACHO
(so there he is)
You don't hear me?

Pavel doesn't respond. Or turn around. Bacho marches over, already enraged.

BACHO
Hey. I'm talking to--

Now Bacho sees the poodle and her litter. He slumps.

BACHO

Ah fuck.

Pavel finally turns to him. It's clear from his face that this is too much. He can't. He can't do it.

Bacho nods before Pavel has to say it.

BACHO

Just go outside.

(beat)

Go.

Pavel wants to stop this. But he can't. This is their job.

451 EXT. BACK OF FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

451

Pavel emerges. Walks five steps and: GUNSHOT.

He stops. Another GUNSHOT. Another. Another. Another.

A pause. Pavel takes a small CANTEEN from his belt. Unscrews the cap. Takes a drink. Winces. It's not water.

GUNSHOT. Pavel steels himself. Canteen back to his mouth.

GUNSHOT. Pavel keeps drinking.

452 INT. TRUCK - LATER

452

POV - through the TRUCK'S WINDSHIELD as it approaches:

THE BURIAL PIT - a large hole in the middle of a field, maybe twenty feet wide and six feet deep.

Three men stand waiting with shovels. A fourth man is climbing up out of the pit. They've just finished. Behind them, backed up to the edge of the pit, is a CEMENT TRUCK.

ON BACHO - with Pavel and Garo next to him as always. He slows the truck and turns the wheel...

453 EXT. BURIAL PIT - LATER

453

The STAKEBED has been TILTED UP on its arm, and the last of the corpses drop down into the pit.

Garo and Pavel stand aside from the pit. Not looking in. They've seen it enough times.

BACHO - has his hand on the lever controlling the arm. He waits for the last of the corpses to fall, then signals to the men across the pit.

The cement truck operator begins the FLOW of CEMENT into the pit. It slows down, and we watch as it begins to flow over the corpses like a blanket.

SLOW FADE OUT:

454	OMITTED	454
455	OMITTED	455
456	OMITTED	456
457	INT./EXT. REACTOR SITE - THE PASSING OF DAYS - MONTAGE	457

SCORE - a steady pulse. Adrenaline.

TITLE:

OCTOBER, 1986

- MILITARY TRUCKS PULL UP - soldiers hop out the back. Double-timing. No smiles. No chatter. Grim business.

TARAKANOV (O.S.)
Comrade soldiers.

- SOLDIERS grab GEAR from a pile. Dingy mustard-yellow boiler suits. Rubber boots. Rubber aprons. Rubber mittens.

TARAKANOV (O.S.)
The Soviet people have had enough of this accident. They want us to clean it up, and we are entrusting you with this serious task.

- SOLDIERS suit up. Cowls pulled down over their heads. Boots and gloves. Goggles. Respirators. Faces disappear.

- BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS - REACTOR BUILDING 3 - BRIEFING AREA - soldiers in full gear are gathered around Tarakanov. He paces as he addresses them.

TARAKANOV

Because of the nature of the working area, you will each have no more than ninety seconds to solve this problem.

- SOLDIERS help each other don HANDCRAFTED LEAD APRONS, crudely hammered sheets of dark metal.
- BRIEFING AREA - TARAKANOV, different day, unshaven, talking to different soldiers.

TARAKANOV

If you follow instructions and perform your work correctly, you will be fine. There's nothing terrible up there. But safety is our first priority.

- BOOTS clomp up the metal stairs that lead to the roof.

TARAKANOV (O.S.)

You will enter Reactor Building 3.

- THE SOLDIERS - covered head to toe, faces obscured behind masks, move slowly up the narrow stairway, their way lit by work lights strung along the low ceiling.

TARAKANOV (O.S.)

Climb the stairs, but do not immediately proceed to the roof.

- BRIEFING AREA - NEW SOLDIERS listen to Tarakanov's speech. His voice is hoarse. He's done this hundreds of times now.

TARAKANOV

When you get to the top, wait inside behind the entrance to the roof and catch your breath. You will need it for what comes next.

He points at photos of the roof that are pinned to the wall.

TARAKANOV

This is the working area. We have to clear the graphite. Some of it is in blocks weighing approximately 40 to 50 kilograms each. It must all be thrown over the side here.

- TOP OF THE STAIRS - a dark landing. Soldiers, all weighed down by their lead aprons, catch their breath from the long climb. BEYOND THEM - looking down a narrow corridor... an OPENING. A rectangle of BRIGHT LIGHT. Waiting.

- BRIEFING AREA - different day, new soldiers. Tarakanov delivers his speech. Pointing to a BLACK-AND-WHITE TELEVISION, on which plays footage of prior soldiers.

TARAKANOV

Here. Watch your comrades moving fast from this opening--

- TOP OF THE STAIRS - a masked soldier stares ahead at the bright rectangle of light. Like a portal to another world.

- BRIEFING AREA

TARAKANOV

--then turning to the left and entering the working area here.

- TOP OF THE STAIRS - four soldiers walk slowly toward the rectangle of light, shovels in their hands.

TARAKANOV (O.S.)

Take care not to stumble. There is a hole in the roof. Take care not to fall. If any part of your skin is exposed, exit the work area at once.

- BRIEFING AREA - new day, new soldiers. Tarakanov finishes his litany.

TARAKANOV

Do you understand your mission as I have described it?

SOLDIERS (UNISON)

Yes, Comrade General.

TARAKANOV

These are the most important ninety seconds of your lives. Commit your task to memory. Then do your job.

458 INT. TOP OF STAIRS - NEAR ENTRANCE TO MASHA - DAY

458

FOUR SOLDIERS are silhouetted against the BRIGHT LIGHT of the opening that leads out to Masha. Shovels in hand.

A radiological soldier straps DOSIMETERS to their waists. We can already hear steady CLICKING. But he shows no worry.

We can't see the faces of the men. But we sense their fear.

THE SITE OFFICER - holds a stopwatch.

SITE OFFICER

It's time to go. After ninety seconds, I will ring a bell. When you hear it, return immediately. Drop your shovels in that bin, and proceed down the hallway for decontamination.

(beat)

Above all-- while you are on the roof, you will throw the debris over the rail. You will not look over the rail. Is that clear?

They nod.

SITE OFFICER

(checks his stopwatch)

Very well. On my mark. Ready. Go.

459 EXT. MASHA - NOW

459

BEGIN UNINTERRUPTED TRACKING SHOT

The following unfolds in real time. The shift will last ninety seconds. We will be with them for all ninety seconds.

The men scramble out on to the roof, moving as quickly as they can. One LOSES HIS FOOTING on a piece of graphite. Catches his balance. Keeps going.

THE DOSIMETERS - will serve as our SCORE. The clicks increase in frequency and pitch. It sounds like heavy rain on a tin roof now.

A soldier PLUNGES his shovel into a pile of BROKEN GRAPHITE RUBBLE. Lifts it. Heavier than it looks.

He carries his load toward the RAILING... his breathing loud in our ears... the dosimeter volume JUMPS in fits and starts... now a constant, heavy STATIC NOISE...

We move away from him and find ANOTHER SOLDIER trying to lift a LARGE GRAPHITE BLOCK with his shovel. Too heavy. A second soldier runs over and joins in.

They LIFT the block in tandem, and as soon as it rises:

The dosimeter SPIKES in volume. They've uncovered a piece of FUEL ROD. The terrifying cacophony of a million neutrons firing against their bodies.

They don't stop. They waddle in unison toward the railing just as the first soldier hurls his graphite over the edge.

We move to find: the FOURTH SOLDIER... striking a hardened patch of BITUMEN and GRAPHITE with the blade of his shovel. It refuses to give way.

He LEANS HIS BODY against the shovel, PUSHES, and then LOSES HIS GRIP on the shovel handle. It clatters to the surface of the roof. He quickly picks it back up. Breathing hard. Fear.

Another soldier APPEARS. Helps. *You're okay. Keep going.*

They both hammer away at the solidified black tar with their shovels until it finally peels up. The fourth soldier lifts it with his shovel.

We lead him as he runs to the railing, his boots crunching on graphite. He gets to the edge and THROWS the shovel-load over the railing, then SLIPS...

...and catches himself on the railing. Nearly went over. And in that split-second, he LOOKS DOWN into:

THE OPEN REACTOR PIT.

DOSIMETER: a tornado of sound. Deafening. Distorted.

He backs off, and now another sound. Distant under the roar of the dosimeter, but growing. Louder now.

THE BELL. *clang... clang... clang...*

It's over. Get back. The soldier turns, but:

HIS BOOT IS CAUGHT between two pieces of REBAR in CONCRETE.

Behind him, the other soldiers are already running back.

Clang... Clang... Clang...

Panic. Can't breathe. Dosimeter noise. Boot. Can't take it off. Can't get free.

CLANG... CLANG... CLANG...

The soldier stabs at the rebar with his shovel blade... if he misses... if he punctures the boot...

CLANG... CLANG... CLANG...

His boot PULLS FREE. He SPRINTS BACK to the opening as fast as he can, slipping and sliding along the graphite, doesn't matter... get off the roof... get off the roof... get off--

END TRACKING SHOT

460 INT. TOP OF THE STAIRS - CONTINUOUS**460**

The soldier returns to the relative safety of the hallway. The DOSIMETER noise subsides to a steady, low clicking. And to think that once frightened us.

The soldier remembers that he's still holding the shovel. His fingers gripped tight. He flings it into the bin.

Then he feels something. PAIN. He looks down at his boot.

There's a SMALL RIP in the rubber. He stares at it for a moment, then:

SITE OFFICER (O.S.)
Comrade soldier.

The masked soldier looks up. The Site Officer stands ten feet away. Safe distance. He points toward a corridor.

SITE OFFICER
You're done.

The soldier hesitates for a moment, as if he's not sure what that even means...

...and then he nods, turns to the corridor that will take him to decontamination, and exits.

We never saw his face. We never even knew his name.

The Site Officer watches him leave, then turns to: FOUR NEW SOLDIERS, masked and suited up.

SITE OFFICER
It's time to go.

461 EXT. KIEV - APARTMENT COMPLEX COURTYARD - DAY**461**

Children run by, bundled up against the cold, shouting and yelling happily as they play.

We're back in the courtyard surrounded by blocky Soviet apartment buildings.

LYUDMILLA - heavily pregnant, sits on a bench, still alone. Watching the children play. Watching the mothers. And fathers.

TITLE:

DECEMBER, 1986

A RUBBER BALL - bounces across the playground toward Lyudmilla. She bends down with effort to pick it up, and a LITTLE GIRL, 6, runs over to get it.

Lyudmilla smiles and hands the ball back to the girl, and the girl smiles back.

Then the pain hits.

Lyudmilla doubles over. A contraction. The little girl's smile fades. She just stares.

WIDE SHOT - from across the courtyard. Women gathered in the foreground, chatting. In the B.G., Lyudmilla is doubled over... the little girl standing next to her.

The PAIN hits again. Harder. She cries out. The little girl RUNS AWAY, afraid... and finally, one of the grown women turns to see Lyudmilla.

Another cry. They all see her now. It's like they're just discovering she exists. And finally, two of the women start running across the concrete courtyard to help her, and:

DISSOLVE TO:

462 EXT. PRIPYAT - LATE AFTERNOON

462

Silent streets. The freezing air is still. May Day banners hang limp and torn. Dead trees line the streets.

And then, at the far end of the street - MOVEMENT. A Red Army UAZ-469, the Soviet version of a Jeep, turns into view. Slowly moving toward us.

463 EXT. PRIPYAT - CONTINUOUS

463

BIRD'S EYE VIEW - the UAZ drives down the street. Nothing else moves in the dead, empty, silent city.

464 EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF PRIPYAT - MINUTES LATER

464

LOW TO THE GROUND - a cluster of dead bramble. The legs of a CHILD'S DOLL stick out obscenely from the branches.

The UAZ enters, and rolls to a slow stop. KHOMYUK emerges from the passenger side. A FILE FOLDER under her arm.

In front of them, an ugly building. Dull white tiles. Four stories. Broken windows. She looks around. No one in sight. No sound in the frigid air. They are completely alone.

She nods in thanks to the driver and turns to the building.

465 INT. DILAPIDATED BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

465

Khomyuk walks slowly down a dim corridor. Broken glass occasionally crunching under her feet. Her breath fogging in the freezing air. This was an ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. Children's artwork shares space on the walls with propaganda posters.

WATER drips down from the ceiling, plinking into puddles on the concrete floor. The barest amount of daylight filters in through the small windows in the classroom doors.

Khomyuk heads up a staircase to the second floor, and:

466 INT. SECOND FLOOR LANDING - CONTINUOUS

466

Peeling paint. Toppled chairs in a corner. Debris. Cards feature letters of the alphabet ring the walls, interspersed with framed pictures of Soviet dignitaries.

A fluorescent light half-hangs from the ceiling, suspended by a few remaining wires.

SHCHERBINA and LEGASOV - are waiting on the landing.

SHCHERBINA

I'm sorry for all this. But we needed to speak to you without...

The KGB listening. She understands. She climbs up the stairs to them. All three are bundled up against the cold. Shcherbina looks at Legasov. Tell her.

LEGASOV

They're putting Dyatlov on trial. And Bryukhanov. And Fomin. We're going to be called for expert testimony. All three of us. But before that happens--

SHCHERBINA

The Central Committee is sending Legasov to Vienna. It's the headquarters of the International--

KHOMYUK

Atomic Energy Agency, I know what's
in Vienna--

(to Legasov)

What are they asking you do to?

LEGASOV

Tell the world what happened.

She feels a quick excitement. And fear. The promise of revealing the truth. And then a flicker of resentment. Because she's done the work. And he'll be the one in Vienna.

KHOMYUK

Well then you should know what
happened.

She opens her file folder. Hands him a report and additional pages as she speaks...

KHOMYUK

I've constructed a timeline. Minute
by minute. Second by second in some
places. Every decision. Every button
press. Every turn of a switch.

SHCHERBINA

And? Are they guilty?

Legasov is flipping pages. Reading. Scanning. Absorbing.

KHOMYUK

Yes, of gross incompetence, violation
of safety regulations, recklessness
beyond belief... but the explosion?
I'm not sure.

And now Legasov closes her report. He's seen enough already.
His worst fear confirmed.

SHCHERBINA

What do you mean you're not sure?

She's bored of dealing with Shcherbina. He won't comprehend.
Not quickly enough at least. She turns back to Legasov.

KHOMYUK

I've analyzed the data. Toptunov was
telling the truth. They shut the
reactor down, and then it exploded.

She hands him the journal article from her file folder.

KHOMYUK

I think this article may have the answer. But two pages have been removed.

Then she sees on Legasov's face-- foreknowledge. And guilt? She realizes:

KHOMYUK

You know what they are. You've seen them before.

LEGASOV

Please believe me when I tell you-- I did not know it could lead to an *explosion*. None of us knew.

KHOMYUK

(anger rising)

None of you knew what.

Legasov lifts two toppled chairs into position, then slowly sits down. Khomyuk sits in the other.

LEGASOV

In 1975 at the RBMK reactor in Leningrad, a fuel channel ruptured. The operators pressed AZ-5, but instead of the power immediately going down, for a brief moment-- it went up.

KHOMYUK

How is that possible?

LEGASOV

That was the very question asked by a colleague of mine named Volkov. He's the one who wrote this article.

(to Shcherbina)

When the RBMK runs at low power, as it was that night, it's notoriously unstable. Prone to-- swings-- in reactivity. Under normal circumstances, control rods can compensate for that.

KHOMYUK

Under *normal* circumstances.

(her report)

The Chernobyl staff stalled the reactor during the test. They pulled almost all of the control rods to bring the power back up.

LEGASOV

This is what Volkov learned from Leningrad. If the boron rods are completely withdrawn from the core, when they're put back in, the first thing into the reactor *isn't boron*.

(beat)

It's graphite. The boron control rods have graphite tips *that displace water and steam*. Reactivity doesn't go down. *It goes up*. Dramatically.

Khomyuk leans back. In shock. But Shcherbina can only stand there dumbly, waiting for an explanation.

LEGASOV

Imagine there's a fire in a building. You turn on a hose, but instead of water coming out, it sprays petrol instead.

SHCHERBINA

Then why in god's name did they push that button?

KHOMYUK

(finally understands)

They didn't know.

And now Shcherbina takes another chair and sits. *My god...*

LEGASOV

Volkov warned the Kremlin ten years ago. But there must be no doubt about the supremacy of the Soviet nuclear industry.

SHCHERBINA

(realizing)

The KGB classified it as a state secret.

Yes.

LEGASOV

When I saw the reactor blown open, I *still* didn't think it could be this flaw in AZ-5... because the flaw *will not lead to an explosion* unless the operators have first willfully pushed the reactor to the edge of disaster.

SHCHERBINA
So it is their fault.

LEGASOV
Yes.

KHOMYUK
But not *only* their fault.

LEGASOV
No.

KHOMYUK
And is that what you're going to say?
In Vienna? Valery, you have to tell
the truth. All of it.

SHCHERBINA
You can't possibly be that naive.

KHOMYUK
There are 16 RBMK reactors running
right now in the Soviet Union. We
have to fix them, and the only way to
make that happen is to go public. In
Vienna, in the West, and force the
Central Committee to take action.

SHCHERBINA
What you are proposing is that
Legasov humiliate a nation that is
obsessed with not being humiliated.

Shcherbina swallows his anger. Then, to Legasov:

SHCHERBINA
We can make a deal with the KGB. You
leave this information out in Vienna,
and they quietly allow us to fix the
remaining reactors.

KHOMYUK
A deal. With the KGB. And I'm
naive...

Legasov doesn't know how to respond. Caught between the two
of them. Between his heart and his mind.

SHCHERBINA
Valery, they will go after your
friends, your family--

KHOMYUK

You have a chance to talk to the world. If it were me--

SHCHERBINA

But it isn't, is it. I have been a part of this system for 44 years, so listen carefully. I have known braver souls than you, Khomyuk. Men who had their moment and did nothing, because when it is your life and the lives of everyone you love, your moral conviction doesn't mean a damn thing. It leaves you. And all you want in that moment is not to be shot.

A few seconds. Then she turns calmly to Legasov.

KHOMYUK

Do you know the name Vasily Ignatenko?

Legasov shakes his head no.

KHOMYUK

He was a fireman. He died two weeks after the accident. I've been looking in on his widow. She gave birth today. A girl.

(beat)

The baby lived four hours. She had 28 roentgen. They said the radiation would have killed the mother, but the baby absorbed it instead. Her baby.

(quietly)

We live in a country where children have to die to save their mothers. The hell with our names and the hell with your deals. Someone has to start telling the truth.

Legasov looks at them. Khomyuk, who is right. And Shcherbina... who is also right. And only he can decide.

TARAKANOV (V.O.)

Congratulations, comrades.

467 EXT. MASHA - DAY

467

Completely clean of debris. Two men emerge onto the roof. One carries a metal POLE. The other has a cylindrical case strapped to his back.

TARAKANOV (V.O.)
 You are the last of 3,828 men.

468 EXT. REACTOR SITE - CONTINUOUS

468

Tarakanov addresses a group of eight soldiers, still in their heavy gear, but not wearing gloves or masks.

TARAKANOV
 You have performed your duties perfectly. I wish you good health and long life. All of you are awarded with a bonus of 800 rubles.

Tarakanov approaches the first soldier. Shakes his hand.

TARAKANOV
 Thank you.

SOLDIER #1
 I serve the Soviet Union.

Tarakanov moves to the second soldier. Shakes his hand.

TARAKANOV
 Thank you.

SOLDIER #2
 I serve the Soviet Union.

469 EXT. VERY TOP OF THE COOLING TOWER - CONTINUOUS

469

The two men attach a pole and RED FLAG to the top of the tower. It flaps in the wind.

TARAKANOV (V.O.)
 Thank you.

SOLDIER #3 (V.O.)
 I serve the Soviet Union.

470 EXT. LIQUIDATOR CAMP - SAME

470

From here, we can see the REACTOR SITE in the near distance. And the RED FLAG fluttering on the cooling tower.

PAVEL - stands in place, gazing out at it. He's gaunt. Sallow skin. His hair seems thinner. Numb. Blank stare.

He's smoking now.

A YOUNG RECRUIT, 21, fresh-faced believer, walks up to Pavel, and joins him looking out at the flag.

RECRUIT

Makes you proud, doesn't it, comrade?

Pavel doesn't look at him. Just keeps staring out.

RECRUIT

They sent me over to you. For assignment.

(his radiation badge)

They gave me this to wear. I guess everyone has one. We don't have anything to worry about, right?

Pavel still doesn't look at him. But:

PAVEL

You can get up to 24 roentgen before there's a problem.

RECRUIT

Oh. How much do you have?

Pavel keeps his eyes locked on the flag. Takes a long drag on his cigarette. Then:

PAVEL

23.

DISSOLVE TO:

471 INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

471

The maternity ward. New mothers pass in front of us. Some walking, some being wheeled. Cradling their newborns.

But we move through them like we're not there. Like we're a ghost. Until we find an open door... and stop.

In a bare room, LYUDMILLA sits on the edge of the bed, still in a hospital gown, looking out the window. Forgotten. And alone.

She puts her hand to her belly, and:

FADE TO BLACK

END OF EPISODE FOUR