

CHERNOBYL

Episode 1 - "1:23:45"

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101 OVER BLACK**101**

A man's voice, tinny, over audio cassette hiss.

RECORDED VOICE

What is the cost of lies?

102 INT. MOSCOW APARTMENT**102**

A CIGARETTE - slowly burns in an ashtray.

RECORDED VOICE

It's not that we'll mistake them for the truth. The real danger is that if we hear *enough* lies, then we no longer recognize the truth at all. What can we do then? What else is left but to abandon even the hope of truth, and content ourselves instead... with *stories*.

The apartment is cramped. Bookshelves. Stacks of scientific journals. Soviet-era furniture. Nicotine wallpaper.

RECORDED VOICE

In these stories, it doesn't matter who the heroes are. All we want to know is: who is to blame? Well. In this story, it was Anatoly Dyatlov. And he was the best choice. An arrogant, unpleasant man, he ran the room that night, he gave the orders... and no friends. Or at least not important ones.

A CAT pads softly over a TYPEWRITER on a wooden desk. Through an open archway, we see a MAN sitting at a kitchen table. Takes the cigarette from the ashtray. Smokes.

RECORDED VOICE

And now Dyatlov will spend the next ten years in a prison labour camp.

IN THE KITCHEN - the soft tick-tick-tick of a small CLOCK on the kitchen table. It's a little past 1:00 AM.

TITLE: MOSCOW - APRIL 26, 1988

Next to the clock: a cup of tea, the ashtray, and a chunky Soviet-era AUDIO CASSETTE RECORDER. Tape playing.

RECORDED VOICE

Of course that sentence is doubly unfair. There were far greater criminals than him at work.

The listening man is: VALERY LEGASOV, 52. Glasses. Pale skin, a bit papery. His hair is thinning in odd patches.

RECORDED VOICE

And as for what Dyatlov *did* do, the man doesn't deserve prison.

Legasov takes a drag on his cigarette. Listening calmly to his own voice playing back through the recorder.

RECORDED VOICE

He deserves death.

Legasov presses STOP on the recorder. Picks up a small microphone wired to the cassette player. Hits PLAY/RECORD.

LEGASOV

But instead, ten years for "criminal mismanagement". What does that mean? No one knows and it doesn't matter. What does matter is that to them, justice was done. Because you see? A just world is a sane world.

(beat)

There is nothing sane about Chernobyl. What happened there, what happened after... even the good we did... all of it... all of it...

(beat)

Madness.

He removes his glasses. Rubs his eyes. Exhausted.

LEGASOV

I've given you everything I know. They'll try to deny it, the way they always do. Will you prevail? I do not know. I only know you'll do your best to try.

Legasov presses STOP. Then REWIND. As the tape spins, we see: FIVE OTHER TAPES on the table, each numbered.

Legasov crosses to a WINDOW. Moves the curtain slightly to the side and peeks down at:

HIS POV - a CAR parked across the street. The interior LIGHT is on. *It's always on. Someone's always there.*

103 EXT. MOSCOW APT. BUILDING - NIGHT**103**

Moscow is dead quiet. Legasov carefully steps outside, remaining in shadow, holding his COAT closed with his hands. There's a slight bulge. Across the street - THE PARKED CAR.

A MAN sits in the car. Dome light on. He's pouring coffee from a thermos into a cup, and while he's distracted, Legasov quickly PASSES through the BEAM of a streetlamp to:

A DARK ALLEY next to his building. Back in shadows. He moves past the rubbish bins and into a small garden area. Then removes the PACKAGE from inside his coat, and stashes it in a small air vent, well out of view.

Now, only one final task remains. He checks his watch. **1:19**. Nearly time. He removes a single cigarette from a nearly full pack. Tosses the rest of the pack away.

104 INT. LEGASOV'S APARTMENT - MINUTES LATER**104**

The cat is now on the kitchen table. It raises its head at the sound of the door opening and closing.

Legasov enters. Removes his jacket. Moves quickly to the window and checks once again.

HIS POV: the car light is still on. But no one's gotten out. He was unseen.

Legasov lights his one cigarette. A long draw. Checks his watch again. Another draw. He's rushing now.

He places four small bowls on the floor in a row. Fills each with scraps of boiled chicken from a plate.

Walks back to the table. Another drag of the cigarette. Looks at the clock. It's now **1:23**. Okay. Rests the cigarette back in the ashtray. Walks out of frame.

We stay with the CAT and the CLOCK. We HEAR: a closet door opening... something jangles.

The second hand ticks. It's 1:23 and 20 seconds.

SOUND: footsteps

1:23 and 30 seconds.

SOUND: a chair is moved

1:23 and 40 seconds

...now silence as the cat lowers its head, bored. Tick tick tick tick. 1:23:41, 42, 43, 44 --

SOUND: a chair toppling and a sharp SNAP.

The cat lifts its head. Startled.

REVERSE TO REVEAL - Legasov's legs, hanging in mid-air, slightly turning, out of focus in the background.

The cigarette still burns. Smoke curls.

DISSOLVE TO:

105 EXT. PRIPYAT - NIGHT

105

VIEW THROUGH GLASS - a small city of 50,000 people, mostly living in large block apartment buildings.

Beyond that, LIGHTS clustered in the distance, perhaps two or three miles away. Some white, some red, some blinking.

The Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant.

**TITLE: PRIPYAT, UKRAINE - USSR
TWO YEARS AND ONE MINUTE EARLIER**

We PULL BACK to see we're:

106 INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

106

Looking out at the blinking lights of the nearby power plant through a WINDOW. This apartment is simple. Sparse. Flat, powder blue walls. Tiny kitchenette.

ON THE WALL - a PHOTO of a young man holding a woman off the ground. She's laughing. Scared. In love. Next to the photo, a calendar. The year is 1986.

We hear: a woman RETCHING off-screen. A toilet flushing.

LYUDMILLA IGNATENKO, 23, emerges from the bathroom. Catching her breath. Sick. But happy. Something beautiful.

She peers in to her bedroom, where her husband VASILY, 25, sleeps soundly. Good. She'll tell him later.

Oh. Her cigarette in the ashtray. No more smoking. She quickly stubs it out. A growing HISS. Lyudmilla crosses out of frame. We hear tea being poured.

THROUGH THE WINDOW - we see but do not hear a small EXPLOSION at the power plant, followed almost instantly by a MASSIVE EXPLOSION that turns night into day. And still, no sound. A mute apocalypse.

One second goes by. Lyudmilla re-enters frame. Oblivious.

Two seconds. She sits down.

Three seconds - SHOCKWAVE - like a massive fist SLAMMING into the side of the building... and she jolts back.

The BEDROOM DOOR flings open, and Vasily emerges. Sleeveless undershirt, pyjama bottoms. Confused. The noise.

He joins Lyudmilla at the window. Sees...

FIRES ringing a terrible crimson-red GLOW at the power plant, as if the building has opened a gate to hell.

And rising out of the inferno-- an unnatural, glowing, BRIGHT BLUE COLUMN OF LIGHT, like a beacon shooting straight up into the sky... seemingly to the stars.

Dogs begin barking. Apartment lights turn on. Pripyat awakens. It's 1:24 AM.

107 INT. CONTROL ROOM - REACTOR #4 - 01:24 AM

107

No sound except distant hissing noises.

All we see is SWIRLING WHITE DUST, illuminated by emergency BACKUP LIGHTS. And now we make out:

MEN - the control room operators, dressed identically in white uniforms. White paper hats covering their heads. All in the same position. Cowering.

Except for one man, who stands. 55 years old, gray mustache, white hair swept back on his head. This is ANATOLY DYATLOV.

CLOSE ON DYATLOV - SLOW MOTION - the white dust swirls eerily around his face. He's bewildered. Shell-shocked.

We hear a voice echoing as if from far away:

VOICE (O.S.)
Comrade Dyatlov? Comrade Dyatlov?

Time SNAPS BACK into rhythm, and Dyatlov registers:

ALEXANDR AKIMOV, 33, black mustache, glasses. Staring at him - saying his name.

AKIMOV
Comrade Dyatlov?

DYATLOV
What just happened?

AKIMOV
I don't know.

BRAZHNIK, 20's, enters the control room in a panic.

BRAZHNIK
There's a fire in the turbine hall.
Something blew up...

Dyatlov pauses. Lost in thought? His face is unreadable. Agonizing seconds tick by. Then he turns coldly to Akimov.

DYATLOV
The turbine hall. The control system tank. Hydrogen. You and Toptunov-- you morons blew the tank.

LEONID TOPTUNOV, 25, blond, thin, terrified. His boyish moustache is a struggling, wispy version of Akimov's.

TOPTUNOV
No, that's not--

Akimov signals Toptunov not to argue.

DYATLOV
(to the room)
This is an emergency. Everyone stay calm. Our first priority is--

PEREVOZCHENKO, 30's, bursts in. Panting. Frantic.

PEREVOZCHENKO
It exploded.

DYATLOV
We know. Akimov-- are we cooling the reactor core?

AKIMOV
We shut it down.
(MORE)

AKIMOV (cont'd)
 (checks the panel)
 But the control rods are still--
 they're not all the way in-- I
 disengaged the clutch. I don't--

Perevozchenko watches Akimov and Dyatlov talking about the reactor.. are they out of their minds?

DYATLOV
 Alright. I'll disconnect the servos
 from the standby console. You two!

ACROSS THE ROOM: BORIS STOLYARCHUK and IGOR KIRSCHENBAUM,
 late 20's, sit together at a control panel. Shell-shocked.

DYATLOV
 Get the backup pumps running. We
 need water moving through the core.
 That's all that matters.

As Dyatlov heads for the door--

PEREVOZCHENKO
 There is no core.

Dyatlov stops. Turns. Everyone in the room stares. Two
 TRAINEES, PROSKURYAKOV and KUDRYAVTSEV, both 30, look at
 each other. For the first time, real fear.

PEREVOZCHENKO
 It exploded. The core exploded.

A beat, then Dyatlov shakes his head in disgust.

DYATLOV
 He's in shock. Get him out of here.

PEREVOZCHENKO
 The lid is off. The stack is
 burning. I saw it.

DYATLOV
 (calmly)
 You're confused. RBMK reactor cores
 don't explode. Akimov...

Akimov hesitates. Stares at the control panel. A plastic
 cover is lifted up over a large black switch labeled AZ-5.
 Then he looks at young, frightened Toptunov.

AKIMOV
 Don't worry, Leonid. We did
 everything right. Something--
 something strange has happened.

Toptunov grabs Akimov's arm. Whispers to him.

TOPTUNOV
 Do you taste metal?

DYATLOV
Akimov.

Akimov tastes the metal in his mouth. Then:

AKIMOV
 Comrade Perevozschenko, what you're
 saying is physically impossible. A
 core can't explode. It has to be the
 tank.

Perevozchenko looks at Akimov in disbelief.

DYATLOV
 We're wasting time. LET'S GO. Get
 the hydrogen out of the generators,
 and pump water into the core.

As Dyatlov turns to exit--

BRAZHNIK
 What about the fire?

Dyatlov looks back at him. Annoyed.

DYATLOV
 Call the fire brigade.

Dyaltov EXITS.

108 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE CONTROL ROOM 4 - CONTINUOUS

108

Battery-powered emergency lights shine into swirls of dust.

We hear a distant ALARM blaring. Someone's shouting.

DYATLOV - strides with purpose. No emotion. Stone cold.
 Then stops. Feels the COLD AIR on his face. Turns to:

A SMALL LANDING with a WINDOW. The glass has been BLOWN IN,
 and shards litter the floor. Dyatlov walks slowly across
 the broken glass to the window...

He walks up to the open window. Looks at the grounds below.

Chunks of DEBRIS litter the ground. Hard to tell in the moonlight just what it is. But some of it is BURNING.

Dyatlov stares at the debris for a moment. Then calmly turns and continues down the hall.

109 EXT. CHERNOBYL POWER PLANT - CONTINUOUS

109

THE BURNING RUBBLE - thick black chunks of GRAPHITE, with smooth channels carved through them.

We lift up from the rubble... and now we see:

REACTOR BUILDING #4 - and the massive GAPING HOLE in its side - tons of steel and graphite and plaster and cinderblock vomited out from the blast...

FIRES burn in scattered pockets where red-hot graphite has ignited the tar-covered roof. Pouring out from somewhere inside the building, BLACK SMOKE. And still, the awful scarlet glow. And still, the impossible BEACON of BLUE LIGHT spiring up...

We hear: crackling static - and a strange, repeating audio tone.

CUT TO BLACK

110 OVER BLACK

110

The tone stops as a new audio signal is connected. Then - voices over a phone or perhaps a radio, speaking Russian.

This is a recording of the actual call made that night.

Translation only is SUBTITLED over black:

PRIPYAT EMERGENCY DISPATCH
Hello, is this Military Fire Station
2?

MILITARY FIRE STATION 2
Yes.

PRIPYAT EMERGENCY DISPATCH
What's happening with the accident?

MILITARY FIRE STATION 2
Explosion in the main building
between third and fourth blocks.

PRIPYAT EMERGENCY DISPATCH
Are there people there?

MILITARY FIRE STATION 2
Yes.

(We hear another voice on the military fire station end)

OTHER VOICE
Wake up the bosses. Call them.

MILITARY FIRE STATION 2
I already called mine.

OTHER VOICE
Wake them up, wake them all up. Wake
up the entire officer's block.

AUDIO TONE - then a new call

FIRE DEPARTMENT
Fire Department.

PRIPYAT EMERGENCY DISPATCH
Hello, Ivankov?

FIRE DEPARTMENT
Yes. Yes?

PRIPYAT FIRE DISPATCH
You've been called to Pripyat.
Hello?

FIRE DEPARTMENT
Yes. Yes I can hear you.

PRIPYAT FIRE DISPATCH
At the nuclear plant over there, in
the third and fourth blocks. The
roof is on fire.

AUDIO TONE - call ends

The black is WIPED OPEN into light, and we're:

111 INT. LYUDMILLA AND VASILY'S APARTMENT - NOW

111

--in a CLOSET, looking out at VASILY, in a t-shirt and uniform pants. He grabs his boots.

Lyudmilla watches him nervously.

LYUDMILLA

You're not on call tonight.

He hustles to get his boots on.

VASILY

They're bringing everyone in. Military and civil. Pripyat, Poleskoe. Even Kiev. It's a big one.

LYUDMILLA

It doesn't look right. The color.

VASILY

Pravik thinks they're shining floodlights or something.

LYUDMILLA

But are there chemicals?

He pulls on his jacket.

VASILY

Chemicals? No, the problem's the roof. It's covered in tar. It's going to burn all night and stink like hell. But that's the worst of it.

She opens her mouth to say something, but he takes her face in his hands. Gives her a kiss.

VASILY

Go to sleep. It'll be over before you wake.

112 OMITTED

112

113 OMITTED

113

114 INT. INSIDE REACTOR BUILDING #4 - SAME TIME

114

Dark hallway. Smoke. Sparks shower down from severed electric lines arcing into flooding water. Steam hissing.

PEREVOZCHENKO lurches into view.

We LEAD him through the twisted, mangled maze. A disaster area of debris, collapsed ceilings, spurting steam...

But he pushes through until he gets to an OPEN DOOR - and we follow him in to:

DOSIMETRY - NIKOLAI GORBACHENKO is cowering under his desk. SPARKS exploding down from a hole in the ceiling.

GORBACHENKO

Is it war?

Perevozchenko searches frantically through the debris.

PEREVOZCHENKO

Where's the dosimeter?

GORBACHENKO

Here... here...

Gorbachenko crawls out and hands Perevozchenko a brown leather case with the DOSIMETER. We hear something heavy COLLAPSING above them. Gorbachenko flinches.

GORBACHENKO

Are they bombing?

Perevozchenko doesn't answer. Just stares at the dosimeter in disbelief.

PEREVOZCHENKO

What the fuck is this? 3.6 roentgen?

GORBACHENKO

That's as high as it goes. The good one's locked in a safe. I don't have the key--

(sees)

Valera-- your face...

Perevozchenko's face has DARKENED. A reddish brown TAN. He doesn't know. Doesn't care.

He throws the useless dosimeter aside and grabs Gorbachenko, lifting him to his feet.

PEREVOZCHENKO

I'm going to find Khodemchuk. You
get Shashenok. He's in 604. Go. Go!

Perevozchenko wanders DOWN A TUNNEL away from us and we
swing around to Gorbachenko, who is terrified.

Now WE FOLLOW GORBACHENKO as he heads up a steep staircase
into DARKNESS - coming around on him so we're leading him,
watching his face as it's illuminated by sparks and the
orange flicker of SPOT FIRES...

A MAN LURCHES OUT OF THE DARKNESS into Gorbachenko and
VOMITS BLOOD in a violent ejection, spattering
Gorbachenko's white uniform with red.

GORBACHENKO

Shit!

The man stumbles away from us, and we WHIP around to
PROSKURYAKOV and KUDRYAVTSEV, the trainees, running down
the stairs at us.

PROSKURYAKOV

We need to get to the reactor hall.
The lift's destroyed.

GORBACHENKO

(points)

Across to the stairs. That way.

The trainees run off in that direction. Gorbachenko yells
after them...

GORBACHENKO

Why are you going there?

No answer. They're gone. Then he sees: a METAL DOOR ahead.
The number 604 stencilled in the concrete beside it.

We follow him in to the DEVASTATED ROOM - debris
everywhere, and in a puddle of water, under a fallen BEAM--

Oh god. SHASHENOK - pinned. Bloody foam bubbling from his
mouth. But breathing.

A FIGURE STUMBLES BY in the doorway. Gorbachenko sees.

GORBACHENKO

HEY!

A BUILDING 4 WORKER STUMBLES BACK - trickle of blood down
the side of his face. DUST in his hair.

GORBACHENKO

Help me.

The Building 4 Worker joins Gorbachenko. They ROLL the beam off Shashenok, then PULL HIM UP by his arms...

They support him from under each armpit, his arms around their necks. Gorbachenko presses Shashenok's RIGHT HAND tight to his chest to keep him steady, and as they MOVE:

--we LEAVE THEM and DROP DOWN through a HOLE in the floor, past a cross-section of torn up plumbing and wires, and arrive one floor below in the complex to find:

PEREVOZCHENKO - his face even DARKER now - skin beginning to swell - wading through more floodwater and debris, including CHUNKS of BLACK MATERIAL...

From somewhere, the steady sound of BANG, BANG, BANG - metal on metal...

Perevozchenko climbs upstairs out of the water and:

BANG - a bent metal DOOR pops open, and a new face - YUVCHENKO, emerges holding a fire extinguisher.

PEREVOZCHENKO

Have you seen Khodemchuk?

YUVCHENKO

No-- where's Viktor?

Perevozchenko starts to shake his head "I don't know" - then vomit cascades out from his mouth, his nose. Yuvchenko backs away in fright, drops the extinguisher and--

--now WE FOLLOW YUVCHENKO, 25 years-old, 6'5", powerful and athletic, as he RUNS deeper into the complex, jumping over LIVE WIRES and debris, as fast as he can... until he sees--

YUVCHENKO

VIKTOR? VIKTOR?

--a body next to a large PUMP. Yuvchenko runs over to:

VIKTOR DEGTYARENKO, 31 - burned and covered in blood... we can barely make out a face at all beyond the whites of his eyes.

He's trembling. Seizing.

YUVCHENKO

Can you stand?

VIKTOR
Kh-- dem-ch-- Khdem--

Viktor stops trying to make his mouth work. His eyes roll to the left - toward a BLASTED OPEN WALL.

Yuvchenko stands up, and we FOLLOW as he walks slowly through the opening into:

THE PUMP ROOM - in ruins. Massive chunks of concrete embedded in the enormous machinery.

From underneath one massive column, a steady trickle of blood. We can't see Khodemchuk under there.

But we know he's dead.

One section of wall - three foot thick concrete and rebar - rocks back and forth as if it were rubber.

We follow Yuvchenko's eyes to: A PUDDLE OF WATER on the ground, coming from a broken pipe.

In the reflection of the shimmering water - strange WHITE DOTS...

We come up and around on Yuvchenko and look down on him as he lifts his head - stunned beyond words--

And we TURN to see what he sees. An enormous, impossible hole in the ceiling of the building.

And the stars shining down.

115 INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE CONTROL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 115

CLOSE ON - DYATLOV - walking back toward Control Room 4. His face as stoic as ever. Granite jaw. Unblinking eyes.

He stops at the sound of SIRENS approaching from outside... a lot of them... and growing louder...

Then he resumes walking. No change in expression.

116 INT. CONTROL ROOM - REACTOR #4 116

Akimov is at the panel. Toptunov is dialing a phone.

TOPTUNOV
No answer. The internal lines are
down.

AKIMOV
Keep trying. Try all of them.

Dyatlov enters.

DYATLOV
I dropped the control rods from the other panel.

AKIMOV
They're still up.

DYATLOV
What?

AKIMOV
They're only a third in, I don't know why-- I already sent the trainees to the reactor hall to lower them by hand.

DYATLOV
(frustrated)
What about the pumps?

TOPTUNOV
I can't get through to Khodemchuk. The phones are down.

DYATLOV
Fuck the phones and fuck Khodemchuk. Are the pumps on or not?

AKIMOV
Stolyarchuk?

STOLYARCHUK, looks up like a deer in the headlights. Doesn't want Dyatlov's eyes on him.

STOLYARCHUK
My panel's not working. I tried calling for the electricians but--

DYATLOV
I don't give a shit about the panel! I need water in my reactor core. Get down there and make sure those pumps are on.

Stolyarchuk looks at Akimov, but Akimov won't look back. No one will challenge this. Kirschenbaum wants to say something, but the words stick in his throat.

DYATLOV

Now.

Cowed, Stolyarchuk scurries out of the control room. Dyatlov turns back to Akimov.

DYATLOV

What does the dosimeter say?

AKIMOV

3.6 roentgen. But that's as high as the meter--

Dyatlov waves him off.

DYATLOV

3.6 -- not great, not terrible.

Toptunov looks at Akimov. Scared. And once again, Akimov comforts him... his mantra...

AKIMOV

We did everything right.

117 EXT. REACTOR #4 BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

117

SIRENS BLARE.

POV through the windshield of a fire engine as it approaches the reactor building. A few fire engines are already there, lights flashing.

Firefighters are rushing... connecting fire engines to the power plant water supply...

We follow VASILY out of the truck. He and his fellow firefighters are dressed the same. Boots and jackets and helmets... but no gloves. And underneath the jackets... white t-shirts.

He looks at the building. From here, he can see the spot fires up on the roof. But there's a MASSIVE plume of smoke billowing up from somewhere inside the building.

And fainter now, but still there, the trace of that impossible blue light...

Now that he's close to it, Vasily realizes this is much bigger, and much worse, than it seemed from afar.

MISHA (O.S.)

Vasily...

Vasily looks over at MISHA, 23, another firefighter. Misha is standing next to a pile of the BLACK RUBBLE. There are strange SMOOTH GROOVES running through it. It almost looks like bits of SCULPTURE.

MISHA

What is this?

Misha picks up a piece of the rubble with his bare hand.

MISHA

It's warm.

VASILY

I don't know. Don't fuck around with it. Let's just get these hooked up.

Misha tosses the rubble aside.

Vasily begins pulling connection hoses from the side of the engine. As he pulls, the smoke wafts by him, and he SPITS.

VASILY

You taste metal?

MISHA

Yeah. What is that?

VASILY

(worried)

I don't know. The valves, Misha!
Let's go!

As Vasily pulls the hoses, MISHA starts opening a water supply valve with a wrench.

Misha takes his hand off the wrench-- the hand he held the warm rubble with-- and SHAKES it in the air.

It hurts.

It hurts more than it should.

118 INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

118

Gorbachenko and the Building 4 Worker emerge from smoke, stumbling ahead as best they can, still carrying SHASHENOK around their shoulders.

GORBACHENKO

Someone!

Another PLANT WORKER heads over to sub in for Gorbachenko.

Relieved of his burden, Gorbachenko immediately falls to his hands and knees and begins VOMITING.

As he wretches, he winces in pain... his right hand hurts. And his chest. He pulls his uniform shirt open to reveal:

ON GORBACHENKO'S CHEST, there's a strip of FAINT RED, and then below in BRIGHT RED, a round shape and four smaller RED OVALS.

An arm. A palm. *Fingertips*.

A BURN MARK in the shape of Shashenok's HAND.

119 INT. REACTOR #4 BUILDING - BOWELS - CONTINUOUS

119

PROSKURYAKOV and KUDRYAVTSEV enter a long corridor. As they move down the seemingly endless hallway, they see:

A FIGURE in the distance, moving slowly toward them, carrying something large over his shoulder.

They walk toward each other, meeting in the middle of this strange purgatory, and now Proskuryakov and Kudryavtsev see the figure is YUVCHENKO. And he has a limp, bloody VIKTOR slung over his shoulder. Oh god. They stare, unsure of what to say. Finally:

YUVCHENKO

What do you need?

Oh. Right.

PROSKURYAKOV

We have to get into the reactor hall to lower the control rods. But the door is jammed in.

YUVCHENKO

I don't think there are control rods. I don't think there's a core.

PROSKURYAKOV

No, you're mistaken. Akimov said.

Yuvchenko considers. Then lowers Viktor to the ground. Rests him against the wall.

PROSKURYAKOV

Does he need a doctor?

YUVCHENKO

No.

120 INT. REACTOR BUILDING - LEVEL 36 - MOMENTS LATER

120

Yuvchenko leads the two trainees down a dark, SPARKING hall. They're SWEATING. Tremendous heat up here. Smoke.

They're close to the fire.

PROSKURYAKOV

Up there.

Ahead: a LARGE METAL DOOR, covered in DUST, bent slightly toward them, as if punched by a huge fist.

Yuvchenko turns to the trainees.

YUVCHENKO

Are you sure?

PROSKURYAKOV

Akimov--

Yuvchenko puts his hand up. Doesn't matter. If they're right, they need to go in. And if they're wrong...

YUVCHENKO

I'll hold it open. Move quickly.

They nod. Yuvchenko tests the door. It barely gives.

Yuvchenko presses the side of his body against the door, plants his powerful legs, and with a grunt:

PUSHES the door open - just wide enough for the trainees to pass through.

The door's weight is pushing back... Yuvchenko's brute strength is the only thing keeping it propped open.

YUVCHENKO

Go go go--

The trainees SQUEEZE through into:

121 INT. MAIN REACTOR HALL - CONTINUOUS

121

The trainees enter the UPPER LEVEL of the hall, on a catwalk high above the reactor pit.

They stare in utter shock at:

THE UPPER BIOLOGICAL SHIELD - a massive 1,000 ton, 45 foot diameter STEEL circle.

It's the cover of the reactor core. Except it's not covering the core anymore. It's been blown nearly UPRIGHT, like the lifted-up top of a soup can.

And spidering out from its exposed underside, hundreds of TWISTED FUEL CHANNELS, like bristles on the end of a brush.

And underneath that, like a bomb crater in the floor:

THE OPEN REACTOR PIT - burning graphite, torn fuel rods.

Their minds cannot comprehend.

They are staring into a wide-open nuclear reactor.

One of them finally gasps in a breath. Already feeling a wave of nausea. He looks at the other trainee. The man's face is dark brown. An instant nuclear tan.

And the way the other trainee is staring back at him, he knows he looks the same.

They STUMBLE BACKWARD...

122 INT. REACTOR BUILDING - LEVEL 36 - CONTINUOUS

122

Yuvchenko grits his teeth... digging in... and then:

THE TRAINEES run back out of the room. They don't stop. They just run.

Yuvchenko lets the door finally CLOSE. Shouts after them.

YUVCHENKO

Hey!

No answer. And then: pain. Intense, searing pain.

He lifts his uniform shirt. His shoulder... bright red.

He lowers the waist of his trousers. His hip, BURNED to the flesh below the skin. The movement of the cloth against it nearly makes him pass out...

He looks back at the door.

IN THE DUST - the pattern of where his body had been pressed against the door.

Shoulder. Hip. Lower leg.

He backs away in horror, then HOBBLER off, his burnt leg barely working... shouting into the dark after the trainees-- as if they could help him now.

YUVCHENKO

HEY!

123 EXT. REACTOR #4 BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

123

The night is lit up by the flashing lights of emergency vehicles. Dozens of firefighters are already at work getting water on the fire they can see.

FROM O.S. - a man SCREAMS in agony. Vasily stops and turns to see:

MISHA - on the ground, screaming, held in place by their commanding officer, PRAVIK, 24.

A MEDIC has begun to slowly REMOVE the GLOVE from Misha's hand. With every inch, Misha howls in pain.

Pravik sees Vasily.

PRAVIK

Ignatenko! Get on his hose!

Vasily runs a few feet to the pump truck Misha was stationed on. He picks the hose up from the ground. He's joined by a truck pump operator, TITENOK, 24--

--who quickly opens the valves on the truck. Vasily begins spraying a BLAST of water into a burning pile of rubble.

ANOTHER SCREAM, as the medic finally pulls the GLOVE OFF of Misha, and now Vasily sees:

Misha's HAND is burnt beyond recognition. Strips of skin hanging off of it.

Pravik and the medic stare at it, stunned.

Vasily sees the BLACK RUBBLE Misha held. Just feet away from him.

He takes one step back from it.

And keeps spraying.

124 EXT. VASILY & LYUDMILLA'S APARTMENT BLDG.- SAME

124

Lyudmilla stands outside along with other people from the building, looking up at the sky, which reflects the unseen fire with an eerie glow.

No one seems nervous. No one except her.

OKSANA (O.S.)

Lyudmilla!

OKSANA, 30, walks with a CROWD of people from the building next door. Men, women, children... about fifteen of them.

Some of the women carry infants. Some, like Oksana, push BABY PRAMS.

OKSANA

You want to come with us?

LYUDMILLA

Come where?

OKSANA

We're going to the railroad bridge to get a better look. It's not like anyone can sleep with all the sirens.

LYUDMILLA

I don't think you should. It could be dangerous.

Oksana's husband, MIKHAIL, scoffs.

MIKHAIL

What do you mean dangerous? It's a fire. It's over there, we're over here.

Oksana gives Mikhail an angry whack on the arm.

MIKHAIL

What?

(realizes)

Oh.

Oksana crosses to Lyudmilla. Puts a comforting hand on her.

OKSANA
Is Vasily-- ?

Lyudmilla nods.

OKSANA
Did he say it was bad?

LYUDMILLA
No. He said it was just the roof.

There. You see?

OKSANA
He's never gotten hurt before. None
of the boys have. Yes? He'll be
fine. Get some rest.

Oskana gives her a hug, and then rejoins the rest of the
group on their way to the railroad bridge.

Small children skip along, laughing, excited to be out in
the middle of the night.

Lyudmilla looks out at the distant glow.

She couldn't say why or how she knows. She just does.
Something's wrong.

125 INT. CONTROL ROOM - REACTOR #4 - 1:50 AM

125

CLOSE ON: Dyatlov. Standing with his back against the wall.
Palms together in front of his mouth. Tapping his fingers.
Thinking. Then:

DYATLOV
The tank. It's big enough.

Akimov and Toptunov turn to look at him.

DYATLOV
This kind of explosion. The control
tank on 71, it's 100 cubic meters.

AKIMOV
110.

DYATLOV
(see?)
110. It could do this. Definitely.

He's nodding to himself. As if someone else is convincing him of this fact. Then:

The door OPENS. And before we can see what they see, Toptunov covers his mouth with his hand. *Jesus...*

It's PROSKURYAKOV. His face is now DARK BROWN. Eyes nearly swollen shut.

PROSKURYAKOV

It's gone. I looked right into it. I looked into the core.

Akimov stares in shock at Dyatlov. Panic rising inside him. But Dyatlov doesn't even flinch.

DYATLOV

Did you lower the control rods or not?

Proskuryakov turns to him in confusion.

Then begins RETCHING.

DYATLOV

(disgusted)

Take him to the infirmary.

(beat)

Toptunov! Take him!

Toptunov rushes over to the trainee, and as he helps him out of the room--

TOPTUNOV

Where's Kudryavtsev?

PROSKURYAKOV

He fell...

Toptunov exits with Proskuryakov, shouting:

TOPTUNOV (O.S.)

I need a medic! Anyone?!

Dyatlov resumes leaning against the wall. Fingers back in front of his mouth. Then he feels Akimov's eyes on him.

DYATLOV

He's delusional.

AKIMOV

His face.

DYATLOV
 (waves it off)
 Ruptured condenser lines. The
 feedwater is mildly contaminated.
 He'll be fine. I've seen worse.

Akimov looks down. That can't be true. But the alternative
 is unthinkable.

DYATLOV
 Do we still have a phone line to the
 outside?
 (beat)
 Akimov?

Akimov looks back up. Nods.

DYATLOV
 Call in the day shift.

Oh god.

AKIMOV
 But... if--

DYATLOV
 We have to keep water flowing
 through the core. We need
 electricians, mechanics-- we need
bodies. How many times do I have to
 say it?

Akimov still hesitates.

Dyatlov deliberately walks toward Akimov. Unblinking. Cold.

DYATLOV
 I'm going to the Administration
 Building now. To call Bryukhanov.
 And Fomin. They're going to want a
 full report. I don't know if I can
 make things better for you. But I
 can certainly make them worse.

He stops just inches from Akimov's face.

DYATLOV
 Call in the day shift, Comrade
 Akimov.

Akimov swallows. Then:

AKIMOV
Yes. Comrade Dyatlov.

Dyatlov stares into Akimov's eyes a beat too long. Then nods, satisfied... and exits.

126 EXT. PRIPYAT HOSPITAL - SAME

126

Near silence. Barely crickets. We're in front of PRIPYAT HOSPITAL - five interconnected buildings, each six storeys tall.

The buildings are oddly generic. Soviet cookie-cutters, made of concrete and institutional white tiling.

There are large letters on the roof. We'll translate.

SUBTITLE: **HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE - RICHES OF THE COUNTRY**

127 INT. HOSPITAL - MATERNITY LABOUR WARD - CONTINUOUS

127

Off-screen, we hear a woman is GROANING and STRAINING in pain. But we're looking at:

SVETLANA ZINCHENKO, 25, wearing a doctor's jacket. She's staring out the window at the distant fire.

OLD MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
You're doing fine. Raise her up. A
little more.

Behind her: THE LABOUR WARD. A large, open space. Bare walls - white tile halfway up, sickly mint-green the rest. Electrical lines are routed up the surface of the walls.

The floor is brown tile, with drains set in every ten feet.

There are a SIX delivery gurneys... simple steel frame cots with thin mattress pads and crude gynecological stirrups.

Bright fluorescents beat down on: TWO WOMEN on the cots, each in labour. Hairnets on, hospital gown covering their tops, nude from the waist down, in stirrups.

Nurses attend to them, along with AN OLD DOCTOR, likely in his 70's.

It may be 1986, but in here, it seems more like 1886.

A nurse HAND-CRANKS a cot to help raise a woman's head.

OLD DOCTOR
Good. There. Okay.

He points to the patients as he instructs the nurse.

OLD DOCTOR
This one, maybe an hour. The other
two, not until morning.

He talks a bit too loudly. Hard of hearing.

OLD DOCTOR
And how is it downstairs, Doctor
Zinchenko?

ZINCHENKO
Quiet.

He removes his gloves. Throughout their conversation, one
of the women in labour continues to GROAN in pain.

OLD DOCTOR
Always is. Nothing at this hour but
babies. You know I once went two
days without sleep? Ten women went
into labour at the same time-- did I
ever tell you this story?

Zinchenko's still staring out the window. Distracted.

ZINCHENKO
Yes.

The old doctor is a bit hurt by that.

OLD DOCTOR
Well, I won't need you in here for a
while. If you want, get some rest in
the break room.

He opens one of the patient's charts. Begins making
handwritten notations. Zinchenko finally turns to him.

ZINCHENKO
They haven't brought anyone in from
the fire.

OLD DOCTOR
What fire?

ZINCHENKO
The power plant.

OLD DOCTOR
Oh? Then it must not be too bad.

ZINCHENKO
Do we stock iodine?

He didn't hear that over the woman's groaning.

OLD DOCTOR
Hmm?

ZINCHENKO
(louder)
Iodine.

He looks up from his chart.

OLD DOCTOR
You mean disinfectant?

ZINCHENKO
No. Pills. Does the hospital stock
iodine pills?

OLD DOCTOR
Iodine pills...
(confused)
Why would we have iodine pills?

Off her face, we hear the shrill RING of:

128 INT. VIKTOR BRYUKHANOV'S BEDROOM - 2:00 AM

128

--a bedside TELEPHONE. One ring. Two. Three. VIKTOR BRYUKHANOV-- 50, wavy dark hair, pockmarked cheeks-- slowly wakes. Fumbles for the light. Answers the phone.

BRYUKHANOV
Hel--

His voice catches on a wad of phlegm that had settled in while he slept. He clears his throat.

BRYUKHANOV
Hello?

He listens for a second, then sits straight up. Behind him in bed, his wife rolls over. Now awake. A beat, then:

BRYUKHANOV
Who else knows this? Have you called
Fomin?

(MORE)

BRYUKHANOV (cont'd)

(beat)

Of course I want you to call him. If I'm up, he's up.

Bryukhanov slams the phone down. Gets out of bed.

BRYUKHANOV

Shit!

129 EXT. POWER PLANT - ADMINISTRATION BLDG. - 2:30 AM

129

NIKOLAI FOMIN, 50, balding, glasses, bad suit, stands waiting by the administration building. He watches as:

A boxy GAZ Volga drives right up to him. Bryukhanov emerges. Also in a suit. He looks down toward the far end of the plant, past the firetrucks and flashing lights, to see where Reactor Building 4 very much on fire.

And in an instant, Bryukhanov can envision a very likely fate for himself. An inquiry. An arrest. A trial. A bullet.

FOMIN

Whatever the cause, the important thing is neither you nor I--

Bryukhanov walks away from Fomin mid-sentence, striding toward the Administration Building.

Fomin checks to see if anyone saw that small humiliation. Then hustles to keep up.

130 INT. ADMINISTRATION BLDG. - CHECKPOINT - SECONDS LATER

130

Bryukhanov enters, striding quickly past guards. A distant alarm sound can be heard in this simple lobby area, as well as the occasional blast of firetruck sirens from outside.

He makes a sharp turn past the reception desk toward a GUARD, who is holding open a METAL DOOR.

131 INT. NARROW STAIRWELL - SECONDS LATER

131

Bryukhanov moves down the stairs with purpose. Fomin still trying to keep up.

They arrive at: a small, bare anteroom. In front of them, two large, STEEL BLAST DOORS - the kind you might see on a bank vault.

A guard cranks a metal WHEEL on the left door, then PULLS THE DOOR OPEN.

132 INT. CHERNOBYL BUNKER - SECONDS LATER

132

Bryukhanov and Fomin pass through as the blast door CLANGS behind them with a heavy thud.

We can no longer hear the alarms or sirens. No sound from the outside world in here at all.

Just the heavy CLACK of their shoes as they walk across the shiny, polished concrete floor.

The bunker contains many rooms... it could almost pass for an office center but for the too-low ceilings, exposed ductwork and repetitive, white-washed cinderblock walls.

Bryukhanov and Fomin enter:

133 INT. BUNKER COMMAND ROOM - CONTINUOUS

133

A simple room with a large oval conference table. Eighteen chairs. A few phones. On the walls, maps, schematics and emergency procedure posters.

Bryukhanov sees Dyatlov waiting for them in the room.

BRYUKHANOV

(pissed off)

I take it the safety test was a failure?

Bryukhanov sits at the head of the table. Fomin takes a chair next to him-- his sidekick-- and scowls at Dyatlov.

DYATLOV

We have the situation under control.

FOMIN

Under control? It doesn't look--

BRYUKHANOV

Shut up, Fomin.

(miserable)

I have to tell the Central Committee about this. Do you realize that? I have to get on a phone and tell Maryin, or god forbid Frolyshev, my power plant is on fire?

DYATLOV

No one can blame you for this,
Director Bryukhanov.

BRYUKHANOV

Well of course no one can blame me
for this. How can I be responsible?
I was sleeping!

Bryukhanov pulls out a pen and notepad from his jacket
pocket.

BRYUKHANOV

Tell me what happened. Quickly.

DYATLOV

We ran the test exactly as Chief
Engineer Fomin approved.

Fomin sees what Dyatlov just did there. Motherfucker.

DYATLOV

Unit Shift Chief Akimov and Engineer
Toptunov encountered technical
difficulties, leading to an
accumulation of hydrogen in the
control system tank. It regrettably
ignited, damaging the plant and
setting the roof on fire.

Bryukhanov glances at Fomin. Does that sound right?

FOMIN

The tank is quite large. It's the
only logical explanation. And of
course, Deputy Chief Engineer
Dyatlov was directly supervising the
test--

Dyatlov registers the return fire. Touché.

FOMIN

--so he would know best.

BRYUKHANOV

(taking notes)

--hydrogen tank, fire. And the
reactor?

DYATLOV

We're taking measures to ensure a
steady flow of water through the
core.

BRYUKHANOV
What about radiation?

Dyatlov hesitates for a brief moment. Then:

DYATLOV
Obviously down here it's nothing.
But in the reactor building I'm
being told 3.6 roentgen per hour.

BRYUKHANOV
That's not great. But it's not
horrifying.

FOMIN
Not at all. From the feedwater, I
assume?

Dyatlov nods.

FOMIN
We'll have to limit shifts to six
hours at a time. But otherwise--

BRYUKHANOV
The dosimetrists should be checking
regularly. Have them use the good
meter. From the safe.

Dyatlov blinks at that. But otherwise... no reaction.

Bryukhanov pulls a phone closer to him.

BRYUKHANOV
Right. I'll call Maryin.
(to Fomin)
Wake up the local Executive
Committee. There'll be orders coming
down.

Bryukhanov takes a short breath... steels himself... then
picks up the phone.

134 EXT. RAILROAD BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

134

A simple, paved bridge passing 20 feet above the railroad
lines.

The CROWD we saw before-- two dozen people-- has gathered
here to watch the fire. Some share vodka. Some smoke. A few
of the men have their small children up on their shoulders.

The fire occasionally shifts colors... like a rainbow. Mikhail stands with Oksana. She jiggles her pram slightly to keep her baby calm. Her four-year old son is pulling on her dress. He's tired.

FOUR-YEAR OLD

Mama--

OKSANA

Sshh. Here.

She gives the boy a cracker. Then, to her husband--

OKSANA

What do you think makes the colours?

MIKHAIL

Oh, it's the fuel for sure.

OKSANA

"Oh it's the fuel for sure"? What do you know about it? You clean floors at the train station.

MIKHAIL

(defensive)

My friend Yuri works in the plant. He says it runs cool. No fire, no gas. Just... whatever it is.

OKSANA

They should tell us whatever it is.

Mikhail looks at her. Oh come on...

OKSANA

We live near it.

MIKHAIL

It's atoms. Yuri says the only thing is-- you can't walk right up to the fuel. But if you do--

(vodka)

One glass per hour for four hours.

OKSANA

Isn't Yuri a plumber?

MIKHAIL

(yes, but)

At the nuclear power plant.

His point well-made, Mikhail clinks his vodka cup to one of his mate's.

Oksana shakes her head. *Boys.* Then she nestles into Mikhail for warmth. They all watch the fire. Calm. Peaceful, even.

OKSANA

It is beautiful...

The wind picks up, breezing through their hair. And with it, swirls of soot in the air, like tiny bits of paper.

SLOW MOTION - as the particles swirl around them. The people stand there on the bridge, just a mile from the burning power plant, laughing, drinking...

Children laugh and run in circles, trying to grab the black snowflakes of floating soot from the air.

Mikhail, watches excitedly, his baby now in his arms. The infant stares calmly at the distant light.

135 INT. REACTOR #4 BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

135

STOLYARCHUK wanders through the torn open warzone of the reactor building.

Doesn't seem real. A dreamscape of billowing steam drifting across ripped metal and ruptured concrete.

As the steam dissipates, he sees:

A MAN, sitting on a piece of damaged equipment. All alone. Breathing slowly, but heavily. Like a dying animal.

Stolyarchuk walks toward him. Nervous.

The man turns to him. It's YUVCHENKO-- the one who held the reactor hall door open for the trainees.

YUVCHENKO

Do you have a cigarette?

Stolyarchuk fishes a pack from his pocket, and hands Yuvchenko a cigarette. The big man reaches for it with his left arm, as if that's the only part of his body working.

Stolyarchuk lights the cigarette for him. Yuvchenko takes a drag...

SPARKS sprinkle around them, illuminating the steam. It's beautiful in its own way. Yuvchenko nods with his head-- come sit with me...

Stolyarchuk walks around to the right of Yuvchenko and sits on the equipment next to him.

And that's when he sees: BLOOD, seeping through Yuvchenko's shirt in three patches: shoulder, hip, lower leg.

It's wet. These aren't wounds that slowly close. These are wounds that slowly open.

Finally, Stolyarchuk finds his voice.

STOLYARCHUK
Do you need help?

Yuvchenko takes a drag. Savoring every moment. Then:

YUVCHENKO
It's over.

And now the sound of: WATER from outside, being SPRAYED by firehoses. It's penetrating the building from the floor above and begins SPRINKLING DOWN on them... like rain.

Stolyarchuk raises his face to the rain. The world's gone mad. The sound of the water rises, and we're:

136 EXT. REACTOR #4 BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

136

Firefighters battle the blaze. VASILY mans a hose. He glances back at the ladder... the one Kolya went up.

There's no one there.

A firefighter is on all fours nearby. Vomiting.

Pravik emerges from the darkness. Face darkened with soot. Or something else...

PRAVIK
We've done all we can from the
perimeter. We have to start making
our way to the roof.

Vasily glances again at the sick firefighter. Then back to the Chief. Scared.

PRAVIK

There's a fire, Vasily. It has to be put out.

Do you understand?

Yes. The job.

Vasily shuts his hose off and drags it over toward a brigade of men who are heading for the gaping HOLE in the side of the building.

FROM INSIDE THE HOLE - LOOKING OUT THROUGH FLAMES - Vasily, Pravik, Tishchura, and Titenok are climbing up the rubble, their images distorted by the heat.

They open their nozzles as they advance...

From BEHIND THEM - we rise up to see:

They're heading straight toward the exposed REACTOR HALL - and the roaring fire belching out from the OPEN CORE...

ON VASILY - gritting his teeth - the heat is tremendous... but there's something else - a pain he shouldn't be feeling... pins and needles...

And in his visor, a reflection of the fire--

--and strange BLUE FLASHES OF LIGHT...

137 OMITTED

137

138 INT. CONTROL ROOM - REACTOR #4 - 3:30 AM

138

Akimov stands by the control panel. Toptunov next to him. They're silent.

REVERSE TO REVEAL: Stolyarchuk. Looking at them. Also silent.

Behind him, Kirschenbaum. Everyone looks ashen. Then:

AKIMOV

What about the auxiliary-- ?

Stolyarchuk shakes his head. No.

STOLYARCHUK

The pumps are gone. Electrical is gone.

TOPTUNOV

The core?

STOLYARCHUK

I didn't go there. And I won't.

(beat)

I think it's time we faced--

AKIMOV

(not interested)

No. We need water in the core or there's a risk of meltdown. We have to open the valves.

STOLYARCHUK

Sasha--

AKIMOV

What is it you want, Boris? If it's true, then we're all dead. A million people are dead. Is that what you need to hear?

More shocked silence. Then Akimov turns to Toptunov.

AKIMOV

We'll open the valves by hand.

STOLYARCHUK

By hand? The number of valves, the amount of time to turn them-- you're talking about hours in there...!

AKIMOV

Then help us.

STOLYARCHUK

Help you do what? Pump water into a ditch? THERE'S NOTHING THERE.

(to Toptunov)

Leonid-- I'm begging you.

Toptunov is terrified. But Akimov is his boss. His mentor. He averts his eyes. He has no choice.

Akimov gestures to Kirschenbaum.

AKIMOV

Watch the panel while we're gone.

KIRSCHENBAUM

It's not working.

AKIMOV
Just watch it!

He leaves. Toptunov doesn't look back at anyone. Just follows Akimov out. Stolyarchuk watches them go. Knows he'll never see them again.

139 EXT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

139

DOZENS of WORKERS are assembled in a line. Shuffling into the building.

SITNIKOV, 46, waits. Looks nervously at the glow of the SPOT FIRES on the roof at the other end of the plant.

DAY SHIFT WORKER
Guess we know why they called us in early.

SITNIKOV
Is anyone saying what happened?

DAY SHIFT WORKER
They were running the safety test on the turbines and blew the control system tank.

Sitnikov looks at the man. Control system tank? *That?*

DAY SHIFT WORKER
Doesn't make sense to me either.
(quieter)
What about sabotage? A bomb?

NIGHT SHIFT WORKER (O.S.)
Sitnikov!

Sitnikov turns to see a frantic worker running up to him.

NIGHT SHIFT WORKER
Bryukhanov wants us to use the good dosimeter, but it's in the safe, and we can't find the key.

SITNIKOV
It's in Building 2. No one's-- ?

Sitnikov steps out of line. Can't believe the incompetence.

SITNIKOV
(snaps)
Follow me.

As he strides off to Building 2...

140 INT. BUNKER COMMAND ROOM - 4 A.M.

140

Bryukhanov, Fomin and Dyatlov are waiting-- then Bryukhanov rises as: THE PRIPYAT COMMUNIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE enters. Twelve men, ages varying from 30 to 60.

BRYUKHANOV

Gentlemen, welcome. Please, find a seat, there's plenty of room--

The COMMITTEE MEMBERS take their chairs around the conference table. A guard helps an ELDERLY MAN WITH A CANE - 85 years old - over to a single, nicer chair in the corner of the room.

BRYUKHANOV

I apologize for the lateness of the hour. And rest assured, we're all very safe down here. We built this shelter to withstand a nuclear attack by the Americans, so I think we'll be fine.

Some of the Members smile. Most do not. The Old Man in the corner has his hands folded over his cane. Eyes closed. Possibly already asleep.

BRYUKHANOV

As you can see, we have experienced an accident. A large control tank malfunctioned, damaging reactor building #4 and starting a fire. I have spoken directly to Deputy Secretary Maryin. Maryin spoke to Deputy Chief Frolyshev, Frolyshev to Central Committee member Dolghikh, and Dolghikh to General Secretary Gorbachev.

An impressive murmur in the room. This is big time.

BRYUKHANOV

Because the Central Committee has the greatest respect for the work of the Pripyat Executive Committee, they have asked me to brief you on matters as they stand. First, the accident is well under control.

Most of the Members express relief.

BRYUKHANOV

Second, because the efforts of the Soviet nuclear industry are considered key state secrets, it is important that we ensure this incident has no adverse consequences.

The Members glance at each other. Here it comes.

BRYUKHANOV

To prevent a panic, the Central Committee has ordered a detachment of military police to Pripyat.

And there it is. PETROV, 30, displeased, speaks up.

PETROV

How large of a detachment?

BRYUKHANOV

(uncomfortable)

Between two and four thousand men.

Whispers. Quiet crosstalk. Four thousand? Martial law? Why so many police?

PETROV

What's really going on here? How dangerous is this?

FOMIN

There's mild radiation, but it's limited to the plant itself.

PETROV

No it isn't.

FOMIN

Excuse me?

PETROV

(stands)

I said no it isn't. Who do you think you're talking to? Some country idiot? I went to university. And I have eyes in my head.

(to the Committee)

You saw men outside vomiting. You saw men with burns. There's more radiation than they're saying. We have wives here. We have children. I say we evacuate the town.

More whispers. Evacuate? To where? No, he's right-- no, he's insane, an alarmist!

BRYUKHANOV

Gentlemen, please! My wife is here. Do you think I would keep her in Pripyat if it weren't safe?

PETROV

Bryukhanov-- the fucking air is glowing!

More crosstalk. Voices rising now. Bryukhanov has lost control of the room. Dyatlov tries to step in.

DYATLOV

The Cherenkov effect-- it's a completely normal phenomenon, it can happen with minimal radiation--

No one listens to him. Loudly arguing with each other now. And then: tap tap tap ... TAP TAP TAP

They turn to: THE OLD MAN in the corner. Tapping his cane on the floor. Everyone quiets down.

The old man is ZHARKOV. He makes a motion to stand. The guard comes over quickly to help him up, but Zharkov waves him off. He can do it on his own. He rises slowly, then:

ZHARKOV

I wonder-- how many of you know the name of this place? We all call it "Chernobyl" of course, but what is its proper name?

They look at each other. No clue. Until:

BRYUKHANOV

The Vladimir I. Lenin Nuclear Power Station.

ZHARKOV

Exactly. Vladimir I. Lenin. And how proud he would be of you tonight--
(to Petrov)
--especially you, young man... and the passion you have for the people. For is that not the sole purpose of the apparatus of the State?

Zharkov looks at them, his old eyes twinkling with memories of great days... of great men...

ZHARKOV

From the Central Committee all the way down to each of us in this room-- we represent the perfect expression of the collective will of the Soviet proletariat.

The Members take this in. Sobered. But proud.

ZHARKOV

Sometimes, we forget. Sometimes, we fall prey to fear. But our faith in Soviet socialism will always be rewarded. Always. The State tells us the situation is not dangerous. Have faith. The State tells us they do not want a panic. Listen well.

Zharkov turns to Petrov once again.

ZHARKOV

True, when the people see police, they will be scared. But it is my experience that when the people ask questions that are *not in their own best interest*, they should simply be told to keep their minds on their labour-- and to leave matters of the State to the State.

Zharkov scans the room. Has them in the palm of his hand.

ZHARKOV

We seal off the city. No one leaves. And cut the phone lines. Contain the spread of misinformation. That is how you keep the people from undermining the fruits of their own labour. That is how your names become inscribed in the hallways of the Kremlin.

The men in the room look back at him in reverence. Dreaming of promotions. Certificates. Maybe even medals.

ZHARKOV

Yes, comrades. We will all be rewarded for what we do here tonight.

(beat)

This is our moment to shine.

A beat-- then: APPLAUSE. The Committee Members rise to their feet. Wonderful! Wonderful! Bryukhanov, Fomin and Dyatlov stand and applaud as well. The system is working. All will be fine.

Petrov looks across the table at another younger Committee Member. They both seem to understand that reason has lost. There's no choice but to clap along with everyone else.

Applause for delusion. Applause for death.

Applause for the Vladimir I. Lenin Nuclear Power Station.

141 INT. BUNKER - OUTSIDE THE COMMAND ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 141

SITNIKOV listens to the applause coming from behind the door of the command room. He's sweaty. Nervous.

The door to the conference room opens, and Bryukhanov sees the Pripyat ministers out. Shaking their hands. Smiling.

But once the ministers are out of sight, the smile drops. Back to business. He sees Sitnikov waiting. What's this guy doing here? A guard whispers to Bryukhanov.

Ah. Fine. Bryukhanov signals for Sitnikov to enter.

142 INT. BUNKER COMMAND ROOM - CONTINUOUS 142

Sitnikov enters. Sees Fomin and Dyatlov there.

BRYUKHANOV

Well?

SITNIKOV

I sent my dosimetrists into the reactor building. The large dosimeter from the safe, the one with the thousand roentgen capac--

DYATLOV

(snaps)

What was the number?

SITNIKOV

There was none. The meter burned out the second it was turned on.

Dyatlov shrugs. Suddenly calm.

DYATLOV

Typical.

BRYUKHANOV

See? This is what Moscow does. They send us shit equipment, and they wonder why things go wrong.

SITNIKOV

We found another dosimeter.

Dyatlov tenses again.

SITNIKOV

From the military fire department. It only goes to 200 roentgen, but it's better than the small ones.

FOMIN

And?

Sitnikov hesitates. All his life, he's been warned not to be the bearer of bad news.

SITNIKOV

It maxed out. Two hundred roentgen.

Fomin, Bryukhanov and Dyatlov register shock. Then:

FOMIN

What game are you playing?

SITNIKOV

No-- I asked him, he took multiple measurements, my best man--

BRYUKHANOV

It's another faulty meter. You're wasting our time.

SITNIKOV

I checked the meter against a control--

DYATLOV

What's wrong with you? How do you get that number from feedwater leaking from a blown tank?

SITNIKOV

You don't.

DYATLOV

Then what the fuck are you talking about?

A long silence. Then:

SITNIKOV

I walked around the exterior of building 4. I think there's graphite. In the rubble.

Bryukhanov looks at Fomin and Dyatlov, who scoff.

DYATLOV

You didn't see graphite.

SITNIKOV

I did.

DYATLOV

You didn't. YOU DIDN'T. Because it's NOT THERE.

Fomin steps in. A calmer voice.

FOMIN

Are you suggesting the core-- what? Exploded?

SITNIKOV

Yes.

FOMIN

Sitnikov. You're a nuclear engineer. So am I. Please tell me how an RBMK reactor core "explodes". Not a meltdown-- an *explosion*. I'd love to know.

SITNIKOV

I can't.

FOMIN

Are you stupid?

SITNIKOV

No.

FOMIN

Then why can't you?

SITNIKOV
I don't-- I don't see how it *could*
explode.

Fomin throws up his arms. Looks at Bryukhanov. See? Not possible.

SITNIKOV
But it did.

Dyatlov slams his fist down on the table.

DYATLOV
Enough!

They all turn to him. Startled.

DYATLOV
I'll go up to the vent block roof.
From there, you can look right down
into Reactor Building 4. I'll see it
with my own eyes.

He stops. An odd look on his face. Then:

He VOMITS violently. The others move back in shock.

Dyatlov stares at the vomit on the floor. In a daze.

DYATLOV
I apologize.

He tries to lean on the table for support, but misses completely and COLLAPSES to the ground.

BRYUKHANOV
Guards!

Three guards run in.

BRYUKHANOV
Take him to the medic. Or the
hospital. Whatever he needs.

Two of the guards lift Dyatlov off the floor. Begin helping him walk out. Dyatlov has a strange look on his face.

We've seen it before. Right after the explosion.

Bewildered.

FOMIN
 (to Bryukhanov)
 It's the feedwater. He's been around
 it all night.

Bryukhanov nods. Then Fomin glances at Sitnikov.

FOMIN
 You go then.

SITNIKOV
 What?

FOMIN
 Go to the vent block roof and report
 back what you see.

SITNIKOV
 No. No, I won't do that.

Fomin and Bryukhanov stare at him. Did he just say "no"?

BRYUKHANOV
 Of course you will.

Bryukhanov looks to the remaining guard. Gives him a "make
 sure he does it" nod.

Sitnikov turns pale. No way out of this.

FOMIN
 You'll be fine. You'll see...

No he won't. Sitnikov turns, looks at the guard... then
 walks out. Like a man going to the gallows.

The guard follows him.

143 INT. REACTOR #4 BUILDING - 4:30 AM

143

AKIMOV and TOPTUNOV, sloshing through water and debris up
 to their knees. They stop and see:

REVEAL - STANDPIPES - dozens of them in a convoluted array,
 with more VALVES than we could ever count.

AKIMOV
 Okay. Let's begin.

He moves ahead. Toptunov doesn't.

AKIMOV

Leonid.

Toptunov nods. Right. He joins Akimov at the standpipes. Each takes a valve. Begins turning.

The valves are TIGHT. They're straining to make them move at all.

AKIMOV

All the way, okay? All the way open.

No sound but that awful, distant hissing, and the sharp metal squeal of the valves. Then:

TOPTUNOV

I'm sorry.

AKIMOV

There's nothing to be sorry for. I told you-- we did nothing wrong.

TOPTUNOV

But we did.

Akimov stops turning his valve. Doesn't answer. Doesn't look at Toptunov.

Just stands quietly for a second.

Then puts his hands back on the valve and resumes turning.

144 EXT. VENT BLOCK ROOF - EARLY DAWN

144

A metal utility door opens. Sitnikov steps out on to the tar paper and gravel roof. Takes a few steps, then looks back at:

THE GUARD - who waits back - no expression. Just a blank face and an AK-47 slung by a strap over his shoulder.

Sitnikov turns away - looks out at the sky. The horizon is just starting to lighten.

From up here, he can see the flashing of emergency vehicles below. And ahead of him:

THE EDGE OF THE ROOF - and beyond it, coming up from underneath... SMOKE and the glow of FLAMES.

Beyond the edge of that roof is the viewpoint down into Reactor Building 4.

And either it is or is not open to the air.

And either he is or is not about to die.

He looks at his watch. 6 AM.

He starts walking. Slowly. Forcing each step. The crunch of his shoes in gravel. The feeling of his heart in his chest.

THE EDGE - looms closer

Fifteen feet away. Ten feet. Five feet.

He stops.

Closes his eyes. A prayer-- or a memory-- or a goodbye.

Then he opens his eyes, and--

BEHIND SITNIKOV - we watch as he walks to the edge.

He looks over.

Just for a second.

Then lifts his head, turns, and starts walking back.

The guard is watching.

Sitnikov has begun to cry.

And the sound of the world fades away...

145 INT./EXT. VARIOUS - MONTAGE - SLOW MOTION

145

DYATLOV is helped out of the building, stumbling, his arm around an emergency worker. He looks and sees:

Firefighters on the ground. Their friends screaming for help. A female SECURITY GUARD is on her hands and knees. Dazed. Blood streaming from her nose. The left side of her face is red and blistered.

Dyatlov sees VASILY and Titenok carrying Pravik on a stretcher. But Vasily passes out and FALLS... vomiting... Pravik is dumped to the ground... crying out in pain...

Dyatlov looks out toward the damaged end of the plant, the cascade of rubble...

It doesn't make sense. What happened?

SITNIKOV, nuclear tan on his face from that brief moment of exposure, sits in the bunker command room. Bryukhanov and Fomin are yelling at him. Threatening him. Gesturing in disbelief and contempt.

Sitnikov isn't listening. Doesn't care if they believe him or not. He's thinking about what he's lost. Who he's lost.

ZINCHENKO, the young doctor, is ASLEEP in a small exam room by the reception lobby. Nurses are RUNNING in the hallway in the foreground.

Zinchenko awakens, and walks out into the lobby-- toward the main entrance-- and sees through the open doors:

FLASHING LIGHTS - ambulances and fire engines streaming toward the hospital. More than she ever wanted to see heading her way...

And now, the sound of: A PHONE RINGING

146 INT. LEGASOV'S APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

146

The cat lifts its head. Awakened by the sound.

LEGASOV wakes up. It's two years before we first met him, but he looks much younger. Full head of hair. More weight in his face. Healthy color.

He gets out of bed, crosses out of his room, makes his way into the kitchen, and answers the phone.

LEGASOV

Hello?

SHCHERBINA (PHONE)

Valery Legasov?

LEGASOV

Yes?

SHCHERBINA (PHONE)

You are the Legasov who is the First Deputy Director of the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy?

Legasov feels his pajama shirt pocket for his glasses. But left them back in the bedroom.

LEGASOV

Yes. That's--

He picks up the table clock to get it closer to his eyes.
It's 7:00.

LEGASOV

Who am I spea-- ?

SHCHERBINA (PHONE)

This is Boris Shcherbina, Deputy
Chairman of the Council of Ministers
and head of the Bureau for Fuel and
Energy. There's been an accident at
the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant.

Legasov is immediately alert.

LEGASOV

How bad is it?

SHCHERBINA (PHONE)

No need to panic. There was a fire.
It's mostly put out. The system
control tank exploded.

LEGASOV

Control system tank. Is the core-- ?

SHCHERBINA (PHONE)

We've ordered them to continuously
pump water.

LEGASOV

I see. And contamination?

SHCHERBINA (PHONE)

Mild. The plant manager, Bryukhanov,
is reporting 3.6 roentgen per hour.

LEGASOV

Well, no, that's-- that's actually
quite significant. The surrounding
areas should be evacuated--

SHCHERBINA (PHONE)

(cuts him off)

You're an expert on RBMK reactors,
correct?

LEGASOV

Yes, I've studied--

SHCHERBINA (PHONE)

General Secretary Gorbachev has appointed a committee to manage the accident. You're on it. We'll convene at two this afternoon.

LEGASOV

(concerned)

That late? I'm sorry, but I think given the radiation you're reporting, it might be best to--

SHCHERBINA (PHONE)

Legasov. You're on this committee to answer direct questions about the function of an RBMK reactor if they should happen to arise. Nothing else. Certainly not policy. Do you understand?

LEGASOV

Yes. Of course. I didn't mean to--

Click. Shcherbina has hung up. Legasov hangs up as well and rises. Gears already spinning. 3.6 roentgen... ? A strange number. The control system tank? It makes no sense.

He moves to his window. Opens the curtains to the SUNRISE.

MATCH TO:

147 EXT. CHERNOBYL POWER PLANT - 7 AM

147

The SUN, brightening to a glare. BOOM DOWN to find:

The torn-open reactor building, even more horrifying in the daylight.

148 INT. REACTOR #4 BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

148

We move low and slow through a strange MIST - water vapour hovering thick - flooding and debris have almost turned the facility into a swamp...

We turn a corner and as the mist dissipates, we see:

AKIMOV AND TOPTUNOV, still by the valves. Both weak from radiation sickness. Faces swelling. Hands trembling and reddened.

They've been here for hours. Each of them barely conscious. Hardly enough strength to turn the valves.

But still, they try.

We FOLLOW the maze of standpipes, bending around and climbing up damaged concrete walls until at last:

THE END of the pipes. Torn open.

Water gurgling out of them in small spurts. Not cooling a reactor core. *Not doing anything at all.*

Just puddling into broken concrete, and then spilling down a METAL DRAIN GRATE.

149 EXT. CHERNOBYL - MONTAGE - CONTINUOUS

149

The roof fires are out. But the fire within the core rages, unseen. Smoke plumes out, moving in the wind...

OVER THE FOREST BETWEEN THE REACTOR AND PRIPYAT - we can see the path the deadly wind has been taking, because a wide swath of the trees have turned a terrible RUST ORANGE color.

THE HOSPITAL, surrounded by a parking lot of emergency vehicles...

THE STREETS, as concerned shopkeepers open up for the day's business. We see MILITARY VEHICLES passing by in the B.G...

And a line of CHILDREN, 7-years old, in their uniforms and book bags, holding hands and laughing as they walk to school.

Move in and low to the ground now... until we're just looking at the children's shoes as they pass by.

A moment or two, and they're out of frame.

Then a BIRD drops to the ground in front of us, hitting the cement with a sickening sound. It twitches for a moment, then goes utterly still.

END OF EPISODE ONE