

WHAT KEEPS A MAN ALIVE

Screenplay and Analysis

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Abstract

Set during WWII, *What Keeps a Man Alive* tracks the fate of a renowned filmmaker and a crew of concentration camp inmates after they are coerced into producing a fraudulent documentary to deceive inspectors from the Red Cross. Loosely based on events that transpired in Theresienstadt concentration camp in the summer of 1944, the screenplay explores themes of documentary bias, the thin line between truth and fiction, heroism and self-sacrifice, and the strength of familial bonds as they are tested in extreme conditions.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Introduction:	1
Logline:	2
Synopsis:	2
Act 1	2
Act 2	3
Act 3	4
Personal Inspiration:	5
Literary and Cinematic Inspirations:	7
Historical Inspirations:.....	10
Kurt Gerron:	10
Red Cross Visit to Theresienstadt:.....	11
The Fuhrer Gives Jews a City:.....	12
Notable Work on Kurt Gerron:.....	13
Differences and Similarities to Historical Events:.....	13
Writing Process:	16
No Surrender:.....	18
What Keeps a Man Alive:	20
The Family:	21
Truth and Fiction in Documentary Film:.....	22
What Keeps a Man Alive.....	24
Filmography:	125
Bibliography:	125
References:	127

Introduction:

“What Keeps a Man Alive” is a fictional dramatization of the realities of the Holocaust. The film tracks the fate of a Jewish family in a fictional Nazi concentration camp during WWII. It depicts the life of a famous film director who agrees to produce a fake documentary for his Nazi captors in return for his own and his family’s safety. Loosely based on events that transpired in Theresienstadt concentration camp in the summer of 1944, the film explores themes of documentary bias, the thin line between truth and fiction, heroism and self-sacrifice, and the strength of familial bonds as they are tested in extreme conditions.

Although the story was inspired by real event, the narrative has been changed considerably for dramatic effect. In the process of creating the world of the screenplay, creative liberties were taken. Furthermore, the names of the locations and the characters have been changed to avoid historical inaccuracies and reference to real people.

Logline:

A renowned filmmaker and a crew of concentration camp inmates are coerced into producing a fraudulent documentary to deceive inspectors from the Red Cross.

Synopsis:**Act 1**

Victor Levin is a successful actor/director living and working in Paris. Flamboyant, narcissistic, eccentric and extravagant, Victor often neglects the needs of his family in favor of his career. The relationship between Victor and his estranged wife, Hanna, has long been a cold business transaction. His eleven year old son, Petr, wishes his father was someone other than the great Victor Levin.

When WWII breaks out, Victor and his family flee France. Their train is detained and the Levins are placed under arrest. After several days of traveling, they arrive in the Haftlager, a concentration camp in Eastern Europe. Victor is separated from his family. All his belongings are taken away. He is deloused, sheered, and an identification number is tattooed on his forearm.

Victor may have been a big shot in the film circles, but his reputation fails to impress the commandant of the camp – an aging SS captain, Claus Schedr. Unlike some of the wealthier detainees, Victor isn't provided any special treatment and his adjustment into the camp is a difficult one. He is clumsy and unable to withstand the hard labour. He experiences abuse from the guards and camp veterans. The only thing that keeps Victor going is the hope of reuniting with his family. He meets Felix, a privileged inmate, who claims to have the ability to help but such favors do not come cheaply. Victor has lost everything and cannot afford it. Victor's bunkmate, Zev, takes the actor under his wing. When Victor manages to save enough bread, he offers it to Felix in return for information about his family. Victor is robbed and severely beaten. If not for the intervention of the

commandant, Victor would have been marked for extermination. Instead, he is given the chance to recover.

On a visit to the city, Schedr learns that a delegation from the Red Cross has been authorized to tour the Haftlager. The commandant is concerned that if the details of the final solution are compromised, he could be personally brought on trial in the aftermath of the war. Schedr recruits Victor to prepare a fictional documentary about the camp in the hopes to deceive the Red Cross delegates about the conditions in which the people are being kept.

Act 2

Overnight, Victor becomes a big shot. Zev is marked for extermination, but Victor wields his influence to preserve his life. Through their involvement in the “beautification” of the camp, they are able to escape the daily labour and gain a new hope of being saved. Commanding a crew of a hundred prisoners, Victor and Zev renovate the camp. Beams are raised, signs created, rooms cleared. The Haftlager is transformed to resemble a town in the countryside. Felix hints that it is in Victor’s best interest to bring him on board. But Victor now feels untouchable and refuses.

Throughout all of this, Victor never gives up searching for his family. He convinces Schedr to allow him to access the Woman’s Compound and recruit female performers. Among the destitute women, he spots his wife, Hanna, and hiding their relationship from the guards, secures her safety. When they finally get a chance to speak, Hanna begs Victor to save their son. Victor vows to find a way to reunite them.

As soon as Schedr learns that Victor has requested child performers, he is immediately suspicious. He visits the set and observes Victor and Hanna interact with one another. After the filming, Schedr corners Hanna in the dressing room. He is on to them.

The next day, Schedr invites Victor to select child performers. Among the ragged children, Victor finds his son, but Schedr doesn’t allow Victor anywhere near the boy.

Instead, he keeps the son close as collateral to control the father.

Victor is trying to make this production work at all costs. There are many setbacks - an inexperienced cast, the abuse of the guards, the harsh conditions. On top of that, Hanna makes Victor feel guilty about helping the Nazis to conceal their crimes. One night, Felix and his henchmen catch Victor unaware and beat him up savagely. Schedr is furious and punishes the entire camp.

With Victor temporarily out of commission, Hanna must take over his directorial duties. She secretly films the realities of the camp and conceals the footage in the editing room. When Victor discovers what she had done, he is furious, but realizes that this is their only chance to bring the truth to light. Hiding the footage is difficult. The guards frequently perform searches in the studio. At one of those raids, Victor sees his son. The boy is dressed in a Nazi uniform, and has been taught to salute - so different from the child he had known.

Soon, rumors circulate in the camp that, after the Red Cross visit, the population of the Haftlager will be exterminated. Trains arrive in the camp to deport the majority of the population. As the news of the upcoming extermination become more pervasive, the crew begins to demand answers. Victor convinces his crew that everyone associated with the production will remain in the camp at least for long enough to entertain the Red Cross.

But something goes wrong. During one of the performances, Hanna twists her ankle. She is unable to perform and Schedr orders her back to the regular compound. Several days later, Hanna is put on a train to Treblinka while Victor is unable to save her. Petr witnesses his mother's deportation and causes a big scene. Schedr orders him to wait in his office. Petr uses the opportunity to steal several documents from Schedr's desk that provide evidence of the Final Solution.

Act 3

When the Red Cross commission arrives in the camp. Victor is at his lowest. having

lost Hanna. He is guilt-ridden and no longer sure of himself. With Zev's help, he devises a plan to bring the truth to light. The delegates observe the artificial life in the camp – Victor's creation. Victor takes the stage for his very last performance. The commission is shown Victor's propaganda documentary. Petr uses the darkness in the theater as an opportunity to escape. While Schedr is distracted by the news of Petr's disappearance, Zev and Victor swap the reels in the projector. The Red Cross commissioners watch raw footage of the realities of the camp. They observe images of abuse, starvation, and misery. The delegates are horrified and cut their visit short. As the delegates board their plane, Petr runs out to the landing strip and begs for refuge. Shielding the boy from Schedr's fury, the Red Cross delegates bring Petr aboard their plane.

Schedr confronts Victor for his betrayal and orders the entire troupe to be exterminated. Meanwhile, Petr boy tells the Red Cross about Nazi war crimes. He shows them the documents he has stolen from Schedr's office. Thanks to the bravery of Victor and his son, the Red Cross commissioners now know the truth. Unfortunately, the Red Cross can do little to save Victor and his crew. We see them for the last time as they huddle together in the gas chamber listening to the hissing noises of the seeping gas. Several weeks later, as the Germans retreat and abandon the camp, Schedr locks himself in his office and commits suicide. The film ends with the image of Petr writing a letter to his parents telling them that the Allies are winning the war.

Personal Inspiration:

The Holocaust has captured my imagination ever since I was a child. All four of my grandparents are Holocaust survivors and the years of WWII came to shape their lives. Throughout my childhood, I often heard stories of bravery, survival, struggle, danger and death.

Shortly after WWII erupted, my paternal grandfather was drafted into the Soviet Army. He served as a military intelligence officer and led a platoon composed of convicts

released from prison to die in the war. Their mission was to capture and interrogate German soldiers, which they would refer to as “tongues”. My grandfather didn’t like to speak about his experiences during the war, but, toward the end of his life, he attempted to write an autobiographical novel about his time in the Soviet Army. Inflicted with Parkinson’s disease, his hands were too unsteady to hold a pen and so he dictated his prose to his caregiver and my grandmother. My grandfather passed away before he could ever finish his manuscript. To this day, I keep his old notebooks which continue to serve as a constant source of inspiration and memory.

My paternal grandmother spent WWII in “evacuation”. When the German’s bombed Minsk, she and her family escaped into the woods and eventually made their way to the city of Bukhara in Uzbekistan. During the war, my grandmother worked as a nurse in a local Bukhara hospital. She often told stories of her time there, stories filled with characters of Soviet pilots and soldiers, patients suffering from tuberculosis and dysentery, often horrific and always humbling.

Both my maternal grandparents were still only children when WWII broke out. My grandfather was twelve years old and my grandmother was five. Although my grandfather and his mother managed to evacuate, their cousins were not so lucky. A large part of the family died in the Minsk ghetto. Neither my grandfather nor my grandmother ever spoke to me about their experiences in the war but it certainly left a lasting impression on them. To this day, they remain irreparable hoarders and won’t let even a crumb of bread go to waste.

This family history made the Holocaust a topic that I often explored in my writing. I have explored the subject in a novella titled “The Soldier”, as well as short stories “Ravine” and “Sanatorium”. Although the Holocaust is certainly a worn out topic in modern cinema, I firmly believe that it is a story that must continue to be told and retold for new generations of audiences. The Holocaust teaches us important lessons about humanity and

warns us of the dangers of extremist ideology. Having said this, what really gripped me about the idea that eventually led to the present script was not so much the time period in which it was set, but rather the dichotomy between wartime realities and the attempts of the Nazi high command to create an illusion of peacetime. This eerie and absurd paradox is what I wished to explore in “What Keeps a Man Alive”.

Our world is becoming increasingly polarized and objective truth is often neglected in favor of subjective reality and political innuendo. Particularly in the age of the internet and digital media, it has become easier than ever to twist facts, distort images and employ deceptive rhetoric to manipulate public opinion. There is no better example of this in the world today than the current crisis in Ukraine. It has been almost sixty years since the fall of Hitler’s Social Nationalist Party, and yet media outlets on both sides of the Ukrainian conflict are resurrecting the terms “nazi” and “fascist” to promote their political agenda. Furthermore, both sides are effectively using rhetoric and selective evidence to spin narratives of the events that are unfolding on the ground to the point where it becomes almost impossible to separate fact from fiction. With Ukraine on the brink of civil war due to the lack of objective truth, we need to look no further than the Holocaust to see the extent of the danger that can be caused by propaganda when it is left unchecked.

Literary and Cinematic Inspirations:

Mark Twain once said: “All ideas are second-hand, consciously and unconsciously drawn from a million outside sources. We are constantly littering our literature with disconnected sentences borrowed from books at some unremembered time and now imagined to be our own”¹. “What Keeps a Man Alive” had been an exercise in the meaning of originality. The script has undergone multiple revisions, large and small, often because my thesis supervisors told me other stories that had been told in similar ways. Some of them were known to me, others I did not know existed, while others came out while I was already at work on my script. Therefore, through the process of crafting this screenplay, it became

increasingly important to define what makes my screenplay different from all other content on the subject, how my story is unique and original, and why it needs to be told. It had also become vital to acknowledge where the ideas for this screenplay were derived and how each of them had influenced the evolution of the story.

The inspirations for this script came from multiple sources. The first of these was a chapter “Baby Yar” an autobiographical novel by Anatoli Kuznetsov detailing the Nazi Occupation of Kyiv. In the chapter “Football Players of “Dynamo”: Legend and Myth”, Kuznetsov tells the story of former members of the Dynamo Kyiv soccer club who, at the height of Nazi occupation, were invited to hold a soccer tournament against teams from the various divisions of the German Wehrmacht. The athletes defeat the Nazis in several consecutive matches until finally the Nazi High Command comes into their locker room in the middle of the game and threatens that, unless they allow the Wehrmacht to win, members of the team and their families will be executed. According to the legend retold by Kuznetsov, in an act of selfless heroism, the Ukrainian players defeat the Germans with the score of 7-0 in front of the entire city. Immediately after the game, the Ukrainian teammates are arrested and sent to an extermination camp². What really intrigued me about this story was not the heroism of the players, but the inherent paradox created by an event such as a soccer tournament at a time where millions were dying on battlefields and concentration camps, thousands were dying of hunger, and the whole world appeared to be engrossed in nothing but military maneuvers. Such antithetical reality captured my imagination and stayed with me for years until finally culminating in this script. The juxtaposition of peacetime activities and wartime reality remained one of the major themes that I have attempted to illuminate in “What Keeps a Man Alive”.

Another major influence on the script was the Oscar nominated 1997 Russian-French film “Vor” (The Thief) written and directed by Pavel Chukhrai. The film is set in the post WWI era and follows a woman Katya who falls in love with Tolvan, a thief

posing as a war veteran. Tolyan uses Katya and her six year old son, Sanya, to move into communal apartments and rob the unsuspecting tenants of their belongings³. A major plotline in the film is the influence Tolyan comes to inflict on the child as he gradually molds the boy after his likeness. This aspect of the corruption of innocence and the susceptibility of youth is such a powerful aspect of the film that it became something I wanted to emulate in my own dramatic writing. Although “What Keeps a Man Alive” and “Vor” follow distinctly different storylines, I have consciously tried to shape the family dynamic in my narrative after Chukhray’s fabulous film.

Another major inspiration for the tone and atmosphere of the film is the 2000 Ridley Scott epic “The Gladiator”. The Gladiator follows the story of Maximus, a general of the Roman Empire, who seeks revenge on the Emperor’s corrupt son, Commodus, for the murder of his family⁴. The Gladiator is an action-packed, period drama that explores notions of heroism, bravery and justice. What most influenced me about the Gladiator is the cinematic language and the quick pacing of the screenplay by David Franzoni, John Logan and William Nicholson. The mood and tone these writers capture in their screenplay, creating sparse dialogue and emphasis on visual language, were also features that I attempted to emulate in “What Keeps a Man Alive”.

Finally, an important inspiration for “What Keeps a Man Alive” has been Primo Levi’s documentary novel “Survival in Auschwitz”. Primo Levi tells the story of his detention in Auschwitz-Birkenau and provides a very detailed description of the conditions in a Nazi concentration camp⁵. Levi’s novel has been a major inspiration in creating the world of “What Keeps a Man Alive” and providing texture to the fictional Haftlager camp. I have incorporated numerous descriptive elements from Levi’s novel, shaping the topography and conditions in the Haftlager after Levi’s account. Levi’s novel had also helped me incorporate terminology that corresponds to the setting of the screenplay. Even though my thesis supervisors and I eventually opted for toning down some of the German

used in the screenplay in favor for more easily recognizable English equivalents, “Survival in Auschwitz” was instrumental in my attempt to imbue “What Keeps a Man Alive” with a measure of authenticity.

Historical Inspirations:

However, the greatest influence on this script is perhaps the story of Kurt Gerron and his 1944 film “Theresienstadt. Ein Dokumentarfilm Aus Dem Jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet“ (Theresienstadt: a documentary of Jewish resettlement) also known as “Fuehrer Schenkt den Juden eine Stadt” (The Fuhrer Gives Jews a Town)⁶. Without doubt, “What Keeps a Man Alive” borrows heavily from Gerron’s life and the events that had transpired in the Nazi labor camp Theresienstadt in 1944.

Kurt Gerron:

Wikipedia lists Kurt Gerron as a German Jewish actor and film director⁷. Kurt Gerron was born May 11th 1897 to a wealthy merchant family in Berlin⁸. After being wounded in WWI, Gerron dropped out of medical school and turned to show business⁹. Gerron quickly rose to prominence in German cinema, primarily known for his roles and comedies and musicals. Also a successful stage actor, Gerron famously portrayed the part of the Police Chief of London, Jackie “Tiger” Brown, in the very first production of the Die Dreigroschenoper (The Three Penny Opera) written by Bertolt Brecht with music by Kurt Weill. It was in this production on April 13, 1928 in Berlin that Gerron became the first vocalist to perform the jazz cult classic Die Moritat von Mackie Messer (The Ballad of Mack the Knife)¹⁰.

From Gerron’s first acting credit in the 1914 short *Fräulein Puppe - Meine Frau* (Miss Doll, My Wife) directed by Danny Kaden, he acted in more than 74 films over the course of his career¹¹. His most notable role was in the film 1930 film *Der Blaue Engel* (Blue Angel) based on the novel of Heinrich Mann where Gerron performed the role of Zauberer Kiepert (The Magician) opposite Emil Jannings and Marlene Dietrich¹².

Gerron's directorial debut was the 1921 German film *Im Strudel der Großstadt* (In the Swirl of the Big City). He went on to directed 24 motion pictures, the last of which is "The Fuhrer Gives Jews a Town".

In 1933, after the Social Nationalist Party seized power in Germany, Gerron was forced to leave Berlin and traveled to Paris with his wife and parents¹³. He continued to work in cinema and directed several films before moving to Amsterdam in 1935¹⁴. It is said that Gerron was offered employment in Hollywood several times through the agency of Peter Lorre and Josef von Sternberg, but refused to leave Europe. One famous anecdote describes how Gerron declined to travel to the U.S. after learning that his boat tickets were not first class¹⁵.

When the Nazis occupied Holland in 1940, Gerron fell into the hands of the Nazi war machine. On 20 September 1943, Gerron and his family were sent to Westerbork, a concentration camp in Holland¹⁶. There, Gerron became part of a successful cabaret group and participated in Camilla Spira's last stage performance¹⁷. In late February 1944, Gerron and his wife Olga were transferred to Theresienstadt¹⁸. Gerron was considered a "privileged Jew" because of his fame and former military service. He was permitted to establish his own cabaret, named "Karussell" where he entertained German soldiers and the camp commander¹⁹. Although life in Theresienstadt was far from luxurious, Gerron enjoyed benevolent treatment and received many privileges courtesy of the camp's administration. Then, in the summer of 1944, everything changed.

Red Cross Visit to Theresienstadt:

In June 1944, the German High Command in Berlin succumbed to pressures from the Danish Red Cross and authorized representatives to visit Theresienstadt and ensure firsthand of the conditions in the German labour camps²⁰. The entire visit was an elaborate hoax. Prior to the arrival of the Red Cross representatives, the Germans intensified deportations from the camp and in May 1944 transported more than 7,500 people from

Theresienstadt to Auschwitz²¹. Furthermore, the Nazi authorities in the camp conducted a “beautification” program to ensure the camp was presentable for the arrival of the Red Cross delegates. The population of the camp was forced to renovate the infrastructure, plant gardens and create fake schools, cafes and other civilian establishments²². Moreover, the Nazis prepared staged social and cultural activities to be held during the Red Cross visit, including various performances by the Jewish community of the camp²³.

The delegates from the Red Cross arrived in Theresienstadt on June 23rd, 1944. The commission consisted of two delegates from the International Red Cross and one representative of the Danish Red Cross²⁴. The delegates were treated to a soccer game in the camp square, a performance of a children’s opera, and other civilian activities all of which were accompanied by cheering crowds of the local population²⁵. Although there were some hints to the artificiality of the proceedings, the Red Cross representatives supposedly “swallowed” the charade.

The Fuhrer Gives Jews a City:

In fact, the camp administration considered the Red Cross visit such a success that they decided to create a documentary film about Theresienstadt to be screened before neutral nations such as Switzerland, Sweden and Ireland²⁶. The film aimed to highlight the benevolent treatment of the Jewish “residents” in German labor camps and the “humane” conditions in which they were being kept. The task of directing the film was delegated to Kurt Gerron who would also come to narrate the film.

One of the survivors of Theresienstadt remembers filming a scene in which the inmates were meant to laugh:

bathed in sweat, Gerron urged us, implored us, begged for discipline, for us to follow orders, absolutely ... and he began a contagious, irresistible laugh, during which he wobbled his fat belly, so that we really had to laugh, even though the situation for him and for us was anything but funny ... Thus he stood before us, pale, sweaty, laughing loudly, with a wobbling belly. And thus they filmed peals of laughter from three thousand cheerful country-dwellers enjoying their glorious summer variety show²⁷.

The Nazis captured close to 2 hours of footage depicting scenes such as Jews working happily in factories, planting gardens, creating art, playing soccer, visiting the synagogue and listening to educational lectures. Geron was never allowed to participate in the editing of the film and it had been put together without his input²⁸. Once the filming was completed, Geron, his wife Olga, and everyone who had worked on the film were transported to Auschwitz and died in the gas chambers on 28 October 1944²⁹. They were among the last persons to die at Auschwitz, only several days before Heinrich Himmler ordered the gas chambers to be shut down³⁰.

Although most of the footage from “The Fuhrer Gives Jews a Town” has been destroyed, twenty minutes of the film were discovered in Czechoslovakia in the 1960’s³¹. This footage still survives today and is available for viewing on YouTube³².

Notable Work on Kurt Geron:

Kurt Geron and the visit of the Red Cross to the Theresienstadt ghetto had been the subject of numerous books, plays, films and articles throughout the last sixty years. The most notable of these include the Oscar nominated 2010 Canadian documentary “Prisoner of Paradise”³³, and the German documentary “Kurt Geron’s Karussell”³⁴. The making of the German propaganda film is also an element in the 2007 German film “Spuren nach Theresienstadt” (Tracks to Terazin)³⁵, Roy Kift wrote a play about Kurt Geron titled “Camp Comedy”, published in Robert Skloot’s by The Theatre of the Holocaust³⁶⁻³⁷. Juan Mayorga, an award-winning Spanish playwright, dramatized the events of Theresienstadt in his play Way to Heaven³⁸⁻³⁹. Most recently, the story of the camp was featured in an article in the Guardian⁴⁰, as well as on Glenn Beck’s show on Fox News⁴¹.

Differences and Similarities to Historical Events:

In crafting “What Keeps a Man Alive”, I retained many aspects of the historical events that unfolded in Theresienstadt in the summer and fall of 1944. However, in an attempt to create an original, unique and entertaining story, I have also assumed creative

liberties and departed from the historical events in several key features of the story.

The largest influence and similarity between the history and the script is perhaps the character of Victor Levin whom was based on the real life figure of Kurt Gerron. Like Gerron, Levin is a successful European actor and director. Like Gerron, Levin and his family escape the oppression of Nazism and leave Germany in early 1930s to make a new life in Paris. However, whereas Gerron travels to Paris with his parents, I have chosen not to include them in my script. Instead, I have created the character of Petr, Levin's eleven year old son. The real Kurt Gerron did not have children⁴² whereas the complex relationship between father and son is one of the major plotlines in "What Keeps a Man Alive".

Furthermore, whereas Kurt Gerron lived in the Netherlands at the time of his capture by the Nazis, I've chosen to situate my protagonist in Paris at the onset of the film. I felt that Paris, as hub of European culture, provides a stronger representation of the luxury and decadence of the director's life and allows for greater juxtaposition to Levin's conditions upon arrival in the Haftlager. To further highlight the separation between Levin's life before and after his captivity, I have taken liberties with altering the conditions my protagonist suffers in the camp. According to historical records, Kurt Gerron had been what is called a "Privileged Jew". Gerron and his wife were granted a private apartment in camp and the ability to work in the Cabaret to entertain the troops⁴³. In crafting the screenplay, I chose to make Levin's fate much more gruelling. In the earlier part of the script, I stress the complete loss of power and status that Levin undergoes when first arriving in the camp. I have purposefully attempted to place him in the worst possible conditions and to create as much contrast as possible between his life in Paris and his detainment in the Haftlager. Furthermore, I chose to separate Levin from his wife and son. Reuniting with them serves as a major source of motivation for Levin in agreeing to participate in the Nazi propaganda film

Perhaps the most striking difference between the real life Kurt Gerron and the fictional Victor Levin is the character arc I have crafted for my character. “What Keeps a Man Alive” tracks the story of a man who gradually changes from a cowardly celebrity to a courageous activist. According to holocaustmusic.org, Kurt Gerron never built up the courage to stand up to his Nazi captors. It is said that before being kicked onto a transport bound for Auschwitz, he had got down on his knees begging the Nazis to spare him and his family with the words: “Please, I’ve made a film for you!”⁴⁴ For the sake of dramatic impact, “What Keeps a Man Alive” tells a different story. At the end of the screenplay, Victor Levin heroically marches to his death after having stood up for himself and his fellow crew members in one final act of defiance. Perhaps this character transformation takes away from the realism of the script; however, I feel it makes a more emotionally gratifying story.

At the same time, I have also made it a point to pay homage to the real life Kurt Gerron on numerous occasions throughout the script. The first is conversation between Victor and Max where the actor foolishly declines an invitation to travel to the U.S. due to his inflated ego of a celebrity. As previously mentioned, the real life Gerron had declined several invitations to escape Europe which had eventually led to his tragic demise in the Auschwitz gas chamber. Furthermore, I have paid tribute to Gerron in the script by having Levin perform “Mack the Knife” during the Red Cross visit. This song comes to symbolize Gerron’s legendary status in modern art and commemorates his career and sacrifice.

Another major departure from historical events is in the depiction of the concentration camp. Theresienstadt was a model camp maintained specifically for propaganda purposes⁴⁵. The camp offered privileged prisoners conditions much superior to those present in other camps. Although prisoners were kept in horrid conditions, they were able to engage in art, cabarets, and other cultural activities⁴⁶. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “despite the terrible living conditions and the

constant threat of deportation, Theresienstadt had a highly developed cultural life.

Outstanding Jewish artists, mainly from Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany, created drawings and paintings, some of them clandestine depictions of the ghetto's harsh reality.

Writers, professors, musicians, and actors gave lectures, concerts, and theater performances. The ghetto maintained a lending library of 60,000 volumes” (USHMM)⁶⁷.

The Haftlager is a very different camp. Victor Levin is the only artist in the Haftlager. The cultural aspect that permeated in the camp is not reflected in the narrative of the screenplay to highlight Victor’s importance to the Nazis as an artist and film director and his unique position in the camp. The major inspiration for the conditions in Haftlager is Primo Levi’s novel “Survival in Auschwitz”. The camp is more representative of the realities that Jews all across Poland and Eastern Europe had to endure during Nazi occupations. Not only does it feature death chambers, it also shows the separation of males and females, imposed hard labor, strict supervision and viciousness of the guarding personnel. Therefore, the fictional Haftlager presents characters with a far harsher reality than that endured by the detainees of the real Theresienstadt camp.

Due to these creative liberties, Howard Wiseman, Marie Rickard and I felt that it was best for the script to avoid the use of real names and locations considering how far the narrative departed from the historical events in Theresienstadt. We’ve reached a consensus to not hold back the fictional elements of the story and to attempt to make it as unique and as original as possible. Overall, despite borrowing some elements from history, the screenplay attempts to generalize the conditions sustained by the Jews during WWII and to draw from various sources to create a fictional world that is engaging and entertaining, but also representative of the horrors of the Holocaust.

Writing Process:

When I was in the process of selecting a story for my thesis screenplay, I knew I wanted to challenge myself and attempt to write a screenplay with broad appeal. I decided

early on that whatever story I choose to pursue, it would have to have the potential for spectacle in the vein of big budget Hollywood films such as the *Gladiator*, *Titanic*, *Avatar* and *Sherlock Holmes*. I knew that my strengths lay not in character study and dialogue but rather in action, plotting and structure. First and foremost, I wanted to create a memorable, engaging and entertaining story, even at the expense of historical accuracy and realism. If I had a genre in mind while selecting a suitable topic for my thesis, it would have to have been that of adventure and melodrama. I was influenced by the conventions of romanticism and wanted to project the sensibilities of such authors as Alexander Dumas, Robert Louis Stevenson and Jack London. My greatest cinematic influences were perhaps directors such as Stephen Spielberg, George Lucas and James Cameron. I wanted my screenplay to be fast-paced, and full of action and adventure. I wanted it to appeal to a wide audience and also be relatable to people who don't usually take an interest in Holocaust films. Lastly, I wanted the screenplay to be about something and yet remain potent and emotionally compelling.

I am largely indebted to Howard Wiseman and Marie Rickard for pushing me to aim higher and not only strive to showcase my strengths but also confront my weaknesses as a writer. Throughout the development of the script, they have encouraged me to create complex characters and reminded me of the importance of tracking the emotional arc of my protagonists. They also assisted me in improving my abilities at writing dialogue (an area of particular challenge considering that English is my third language). Furthermore, they have taught me to be more vivid and detailed in my imagery and description of action. They also stressed the importance of grammar, spelling, punctuation, formatting and overall presentability of my work. Although this screenplay had gone through numerous iterations and reimaginings, I have really benefited from the experience and have come out of it a far better writer than when I began.

No Surrender:

When this story was first proposed to the department of film, the plot of the film was much different from the latest version of the script. In fact, at that point, I haven't even heard of Kurt Geron. Instead, I wanted to focus on the soccer tournament between the Kyiv Dynamo and the German Armed forces which I had read about in Kuznetsov's autobiographical novel. I felt that it was a worthy endeavor because Kuznetsov only devotes 4 pages out of his 400 page manuscript to this episode and never really focuses on the players and the psychological struggles they experienced in their decision to pull off a victory in face of certain death.

The first version of the screenplay followed a famous soccer player, Anton Rezin, who runs away from the battlefield as a coward and returns to his native city of Kyiv. There he discovers that his luxury home has been reduced to ashes and his Jewish wife and son have been placed in the ghetto. Anton becomes involved with a corrupt local businessman, Felix Lerner, who helps him reunite with his wife and son. Felix uses the athlete to stage soccer matches for the entertainment of Nazi soldiers. As Anton struggles to adjust to poverty and the realities of war, he fails to be a responsible husband and father and his marriage begins to fall apart. It doesn't help that Felix has his sights set on Anton's wife and uses his son to break apart Anton's marriage. Through Felix's agency, the boy soon becomes entangled in a life of crime much to the dismay of his concerned mother. At the same time, the commandant of the city of Kyiv recruits Anton and Felix to partake in a soccer tournament aimed to dispose the local population toward their Nazi occupants. As Anton's professional career begins to reform, his family life deteriorates completely and his wife leaves him for Felix. This prompts Anton to forgo caution and win a soccer match against the German Wehrmacht. The event breathes hope into the population of the city and the Nazi officials become increasingly worried of the possibility of a citywide rebellion. Anton and his teammates are ordered to lose the final game and restore the status quo.

Faithful to the Dynamo legend, the athletes refuse to surrender and defeat their Nazi oppressor on the soccer field, sacrificing their lives for a symbolic act of defiance.

The main struggle in writing this story both in the Treatment and First Draft stages was the story structure and my inability to condense the narrative into the length and plot conventions appropriate for a feature film. Throughout several outlines, detailed treatments and numerous pre-drafts, I would continuously fail to achieve correct proportions within the various segments of the narrative. The first act would always drag for far too long, while the third act would be too rushed and fall flat. Furthermore, I struggled to avoid melodramatic elements, particularly in dialogue. This largely stemmed from having underdeveloped characters that lacked depth. These characters largely acted to serve the plot and thus left the reader often unclear about their goals, motivations, psychology and emotional state. Although every draft was a significant improvement over the previous one, the script never really seemed to move in the right direction and I ended up scrapping numerous drafts only to begin from scratch.

Another issue that Howard, Marie and I, debated heavily early on was the originality of the material. Considering that the story was loosely based on historical events, we were concerned that my exposure to existing material on the topic would consciously or subconsciously influence my writing and stifle my creativity. During the writing of the screenplay, I had become aware of the 1981 John Huston film “Escape to Victory”, starring Sylvester Stallone and Michael Caine (as well as numerous soccer legend from the eighties including the legendary Pele) that bore some degree of similarity to the basic premise of my story. Another film I learned about was Yevgeni Karelov’s Soviet Social Realist film Treti Taim (The Third Half). Although it was somewhat disappointing to learn that I was working on something that had already been done, I chose to continue developing the screenplay. However, at that point, I must admit that I was losing interest in the story as well as faith in my ability to pull it off successfully.

Therefore, when the Russian 2012 film “Match” directed by Andrey Malyukov came out, it was at once a blow and a blessing. Ironically, at that point, I was closer than ever to producing a workable draft of the screenplay, though it was still far from the quality of writing that both my team and I expected. But I now could not write a screenplay exactly like the one about to be released in the theaters. I knew that this was my opportunity to salvage my themes by abandoning the script and looking elsewhere for inspiration.

What Keeps a Man Alive:

I started working on a screenplay about a Jewish traitor who is sent by the Nazis to infiltrate a partisan unit in the Belorussian forests. However, after a conversation with Prof. Wiseman, I came to realize that by taking that route I would have to abandon the elements that had initially attracted me to this story, namely, the dichotomy between wartime realities and the artificial illusion of peacetime, the characters of the wife and the son, and the emotional arc of the protagonist who moves from an entitled self-absorbed coward to perform the ultimate heroic sacrifice. Prof. Wiseman felt that there was a better solution and suggested that I replace the soccer matches with producing a propaganda film. Right away, this struck me as a brilliant solution. Not only would I be able to salvage the parts of my screenplay that worked, I would also be able to explore the main themes of my narrative in a much more fulfilling and powerful way.

Having realized the potential of this idea, I began research on Nazi propaganda films and almost immediately stumbled over the story of Kurt Gerron and the Theresienstadt camp. Viewing Gerron’s original footage on “YouTube”, I knew exactly what I wanted my screenplay to be. Very quickly, I produced a treatment and shortly after a first draft of the screenplay. From then on, the main elements of the plot were largely fixed and my challenge became to bring the characters of the story to life in a convincing and realistic manner.

Throughout the numerous drafts, Prof. Wiseman and Prof. Rickard have helped me

better understand what motivates my characters and how to track their emotional journey throughout the screenplay. They have helped me to structure the narrative according to screenwriting conventions and stay within a set page limit. This resulted in reducing the number of beats and plot twists that were bogging down the story. One particularly effective change was getting rid of a plotline involving a botched escape attempt and the public execution of Hanna at the second turning point. The change enabled me to plug several plot holes and made the screenplay much stronger. Howard and Marie also encouraged me to polish up my dialogue. Although I still feel that my writing abilities have room for improvement, I am very satisfied with the current state of the screenplay and owe immense gratitude to my supervisors for their patience, insight and thoughtful feedback.

The Family:

One of the great challenges in writing “What Keeps a Man Alive” was crafting the emotional dimensions of the characters and dramatizing their relationships. Howard Wiseman, Marie Rickard and I have spent a long time talking about Petr and his role in the film. All three of us felt that since he is the only survivor in the film, his perspective must remain central to the narrative. At the same time, we wanted to keep the focus on Victor and ensure that the audience can track his emotional arc at all times throughout the film. This presented a great challenge, particularly considering the fact that Petr is largely absent in the first half of the second act. We explored cutting away from Victor and tracking Petr’s experiences from the moment he enters the camp to the moment Victor finally finds him. Being away from Petr and Hanna for so long seemed a sure way to cause the audience to lose touch with them and subsequently undermine the possibility of catharsis in the third act. However, this route also meant that we would be sacrificing much of the suspense of the second act which would significantly reduce audience engagement in the narrative as a whole.

In writing the screenplay, I was always trying to condense events in order to get

back to Hanna and Petr as quickly as possible. At the same time, in their absence, I tried to convince the reader of the possibility of their demise in order to raise the stakes and make their discovery as powerful as possible. Structuring the events of the narrative and crafting the family dynamics in the film has been incredibly challenging. I have tried to bring these characters to life in a meaningful way and hope that the narrative choices I made in the plotting of this story were the right ones.

Another challenging aspect of the story was tracking the complex relationship between Hanna and Victor. As a male writer, I have always worried that Hanna's character would lack believability and dimension. I didn't want to create a stereotypical female and also didn't want Hanna to be a lesser presence than Victor and Petr. It was also a challenge to track their relationships from beginning to end. In the first act, Hanna and Victor have very distant and cold interactions. Victor is unfaithful and Hanna has no illusions about her role in his life. However, once Victor finds himself in the camp, he suddenly becomes a devoted husband and father taking great risks to protect and preserve his family. Likewise, under the extreme conditions of the camp, Hanna seems to drop all her previous grievances with her husband. It was challenging and important to reinforce throughout the evolution of the story the sort of people Hanna and Victor were at the beginning. Hanna is instrumental to Victor's character arc. It is her bravery and sacrifice that eventually inspire the change in Victor. Not only do I hope that Hanna comes across as a full-fledged authentic character with range and dimension, but also that her strength and resilience is convincing as the inspiration for Victor to find his own inner strength. Creating these characters was one of the most daunting challenges in plotting and writing "What Keeps a Man Alive".

Truth and Fiction in Documentary Film:

One of the central themes in "What Keeps a Man Alive" is documentary bias. Documentaries are often viewed as a medium of objective truth. The captured images appear unmediated and outside of artistic manipulation. This makes the documentary film

one of the most effective tools in moulding public opinion. The old adage tells us that “a picture is worth a thousand words” and often leads the viewer to forget that the image, like text, is simply another form of artistic expression. When viewing a documentary, it is easy to ignore the filmmaker behind the camera and fail to consider their agenda and bias.

Michael Rabiger writes, “it is, after all, a human decision—an insertion of subjectivity—that places a camera in a particular location, chooses a lens by which to render space and perspective, selects a recording medium, each with its own bias in color and contrast, and decides when to turn the camera on.”⁴⁸ If a work of fiction asks the audience to suspend their disbelief yet at all times remain conscious of the artificiality of its premise and plot, the documentary film, by its very definition, makes a bold claim to lack any measure of artifice. From this perspective, the documentary is perhaps the most dangerous of art forms and one that audiences must approach with the greatest measure of skepticism. The documentary bias is one of the central themes of “What Keeps a Man Alive”. The stark contrast between Levin’s film and the footage captured by Hanna aims to highlight the inherent subjectivity of documentary filmmaking. As the audience observes the careful orchestration with which Levin crafts his propaganda film, Hanna’s raw secret footage becomes an unbiased reflection of reality. At the same time, it may be argued that no image can ever be truly objective. From this perspective, Hanna’s footage also lacks crucial context which renders it equally artificial. The great irony is that in an attempt to communicate ideas about truth and objectivity, “What Keeps a Man Alive” takes a great many creative liberties. At the same time, the lack of historical accuracy in the screenplay further emphasises the theme of bias in film. Perhaps, the most honest filmmaking is one that doesn’t profess to speak the truth.

What Keeps a Man Alive

Screenplay

Illia Svirsky

May, 2014

INT. LE GAUMONT PALACE. PARIS. 1939 - EVENING

A sold out cinema. Five hundred eyes under the spell of the
SILVER SCREEN

Black and white. The leading man, VICTOR LEVIN (43), enters into a limo. In the doorway of the hotel, a femme fatale, portrayed by HANNA LEVIN (31), cries into a handkerchief.

HANNA

Will I ever see you again?

Victor holds out his hand to Hanna.

VICTOR

Don't you forget me, love.

PROJECTIONIST BOOTH

The film projector casts patterns of light and shadow into the theater. Victor stands behind the PROJECTIONIST and watches the audience. Without the top hat and the make up, he's a mere mortal with a potbelly and a bold spot.

SCREEN

Victor's limo rides into the sunset. Hanna waves him good bye. The limo stops. The door opens. Hanna runs to Victor. The frame fades into a heart around them.

LE GAUMONT PALACE

The AUDIENCE delivers a standing ovation.

PROJECTIONIST BOOTH

The sound of rapturous applause reaches Victor. He exhales with relief.

INT. LEVIN CHATEAU. PARIS - EVENING

The spacious upstairs corridor of Levin's luxury estate is deserted, except for a curious boy, PETR (11), with his ear pressed to the door of the study. The noise of the party arrives from downstairs. Inside the study, Petr can hear woman's cackle.

WOMAN (O.S.)
(French)
Mr. Levin-

More laughter. Petr pulls away from the door.

INT. LEVIN CHATEAU - MOMENTS LATER

Petr leans over a staircase railing overlooking a spacious hall crowded with GUESTS. A live ORCHESTRA performs jazz. STARLETS smile for JOURNALISTS, INDUSTRY MAGNATES, and POLITICIANS.

In the crowd, Petr spots Hanna in a diamond studded evening dress. She approaches one group of GUESTS after another.

HANNA
(French)
Have you seen Victor?

INT. STUDY - SAME

The doors are locked. The lights are dim. Victor buttons his pants with his back turned to the naked WOMAN on the couch.

WOMAN
(French)
When do we start filming-

Victor tosses her a bra.

VICTOR
(French)
Get dressed.

A KNOCK on the door startles them.

PETR (O.S.)

Mama is looking for you.

VICTOR

I'm a little preoccupied at the moment, Petr.

PETR

I tell her you're here.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Victor emerges from behind the office door and shuts it before Petr can look inside.

VICTOR

How long have you been standing here? You should be in bed.

Victor sends Petr marching upstairs. Victor catches his reflection in the corridor mirror and averts his gaze.

INT. LEVIN CHATEAU - SAME

The hall is flooded with GUESTS. Jazz drowns out the noise of conversation.

ACTRESS

(French)

They arrest everyone. Lawyers.
Writers. Musicians-

MAN

(French)

I wouldn't put too much faith into
what you read in the press.

Victor navigates through the room, distributing handshakes, smiles, pats on the back. Hanna appears in his way.

HANNA

(French)

So good of you to join us.

VICTOR

(French)

I was just about to tell the Deputy
Minister about the time you danced
at the Bolshoi Theater-

HANNA

(French)

Can I steal you for a moment?

VICTOR

(French)

You tell it so much better.

HANNA

Max is on the telephone.

VICTOR

(privately)

I know you're eager for me to jump
into bed with Max, but can I at
least finish my drink?

Hanna takes the champagne glass out of Victor's hands and
places it on a waiter's tray.

HANNA

(French)

Excuse us.

Victor smiles through his teeth.

INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Victor demonstratively slams the door behind him and Hanna.

VICTOR

Leave some booze for the guests,
dear.

Hanna hands Victor the telephone receiver.

HANNA

It's an overseas call.

EXT. PRIVATE POOL. CALIFORNIA - MORNING

MAX FISHER (62), a powerful Hollywood producer, lays pool side, his potbelly glistening in the sun and the water shimmering at his feet.

MAX

Vic, did I catch you at a bad time?

WE CUT BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS ON THE PHONE

INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Victor holds the receiver to his ear.

VICTOR

Never a bad time for you, Max.

(to Hanna)

Give us some privacy.

EXT. PRIVATE POOL - CONTINUOUS

Max lights a cigar.

MAX

I can have you on a plane tomorrow morning. One of my people will meet you in New York.

VICTOR

Level with me, Max. The deal is dreck.

INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS

MAX (O.S.)

You got a real home here. This is Max Fisher telling you.

EXT. PRIVATE POOL - CONTINUOUS

VICTOR (O.S.)
Creative control?

MAX
You will be safe. And your family
will be safe.

INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS

VICTOR
Let's speak again when creative
control is on the table. Thank you
for your call, Max.

Hanna appears behind Victor. She grabs his arm.

HANNA
Don't you dare hang up-

Victor forces down the receiver.

HANNA (cont'd)
How can you be so selfish? Half of
Europe is already occupied-

VICTOR
I'm going back to the party. I
suggest you freshen up and do the
same.

Victor slams the door behind him. Hanna sinks into an
armchair and buries her face in her hands. The door creaks
open and Petr steps into the room.

HANNA
Come. Sit.

Petr sits on his mother's lap.

HANNA (cont'd)
You have to stop listening in on
grown up conversations.

PETR

I wasn't listening-

HANNA

Was she with him? You can tell me.

I won't be upset. I promise.

Petr shakes his head. Hanna kisses her son on the cheek.

PETR

I love you, mama.

HANNA

Let's put you into bed.

EXT. TERRACE - MORNING

Victor reads the paper. A BUTLER refills his coffee. Hanna and Petr eat their breakfast in silence.

VICTOR

Hanna, darling, can you pass the
sugar?

Hanna ignores him. The butler reaches for the sugar bowl.
Victor stops him.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Son-

Hanna rises from the table.

HANNA

(to the butler)

We'll take the rest of our meal in
the dining room.

Hanna takes Petr by the hand and leads him into the house.

VICTOR

Wait!

Victor catches up to Hanna in the doorway.

VICTOR (cont'd)

At least give me a chance to apologize.

HANNA

I've made arrangements for Petr and I to stay with my sister in Barcelona.

VICTOR

The door is that way. But don't think I will allow some two-bit cabaret girl I picked up in the trash to run off with my son-

HANNA

It's over, Victor.

They stare into each other's eyes - measuring each other until...

The silence between them is broken by the piercing shriek of a siren.

PETR

Mama, look!

Petr points to the sky. Black fighter jets have appeared on the horizon.

INT. BOMB SHELTER - AFTERNOON

A young paramedic leads Hanna, Petr and Victor through a crowded militarized facility. They have been issued blankets and gas masks.

PARAMEDIC

(French)

It's best to put the mask on. As a precautionary measure. Until the threat is averted.

Hanna straps the gas mask on Petr.

VICTOR

This is going to be over in a few days. They will never invade. Not Paris-

The roar of an explosion rains asbestos from the ceiling.

HANNA

What are we going to do?

Victor puts his arms around Hanna and Petr. He is terrified.

INT. TRAIN STATION. PARIS - EVENING

A crowded platform. PORTERS push luggage carts and herald PASSENGERS. The announcer's voice arrives over the speaker system.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

(French)

Express to Barcelona is now boarding at Terminal B.

The Levins are detained at the Customs Desk. An OFFICER examines their passports.

OFFICER

(French)

Open your bags.

Hanna unzips a bulging suitcase. The customs officer rummages through their clothes.

OFFICER (cont'd)

(French)

Your purse.

Victor holds out a gold cigarette case to the officer.

VICTOR

(French)

Virginia tobacco, world's finest.

The thick roll of 100 franc bank notes clipped in the cigarette holder doesn't escape the officer.

VICTOR (cont'd)

(French)

Why don't you keep it? As a
souvenir.

Victor casually places the cigarette case in the officer's side pocket. Hanna attempts a smile as the officer returns their documents.

OFFICER

(French)

Did anyone ever tell you, you look
just like that actor-

Victor takes a suitcase in each hand.

VICTOR

(French)

We don't want to miss the train.

EXT. TERMINAL - MOMENTS LATER

The Levins are among the last passengers to jump aboard the moving locomotive. The steam whistle shrieks.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

(French)

All passengers step back from the
platform. Express to Barcelona is
now departing.

The train pulls out of the station. Victor wraps his arms around Hanna.

VICTOR

A week from now, you'll barely
remember Paris. And we'll start
fresh. Together. As a family.

She squirms out of his embrace and heads inside the car.

EXT/INT. TRAIN - EVENING

The locomotive hurtles past yellow fields stretched as far as the horizon.

The Levins settle into a private compartment. Hanna removes Petr's coat. Victor lifts luggage onto the overhead rack.

PETR

When are we coming back?

HANNA

Oh honey-

VICTOR

When the great explorers sailed to
uncharted horizons, they spent
years, sometimes decades, in
expeditions-

Petr crosses to Hanna's side. Hanna hands Petr a notebook and a pen.

HANNA

Here. Start with your name.

PETR

Do I have to?

HANNA

Yes.

Petr practices writing his name in cursive over and over again. Victor unfolds a newspaper. They ride in silence until...

Brakes SCREECH.

Victor, Hanna and Petr are thrown forward. Luggage comes spilling from the overhead compartments as the train comes to a sudden halt.

PETR

Mama!

Victor pulls the curtain to one side but can only see his reflection in the dark glass.

VICTOR
Stay here.

INT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Victor pushes his way through the crowded aisles. As he comes to the front of the train, through the vestibule door, he sees:

Armored vehicles barricade the railway tracks. GERMAN SOLDIERS are positioned along the length of the train, Swastikas strapped around their forearms, rifles at their sides.

INT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Victor returns to his seat.

VICTOR
Get our documents ready. Quickly.

Hanna digs through her purse. Victor kneels to his son's height.

VICTOR (cont'd)
Listen to me - some men are going to ask your mother and me some questions. Promise me that you won't say a word. Not a word.

Three armed SOLDIERS enter and the cart grows eerily quiet. The Soldier addresses Hanna in German, she replies in French.

SOLDIER
Boarding passes and identifications.

HANNA
Oui, monsieur.

The soldier scrutinizes the documents. Hanna smiles summoning all her feminine charm.

HANNA (cont'd)
Nous sommes des artistes.

SOLDIER
What?

HANNA
Ar-tis-tes... Chant. Danse.

She mimics dancing. The soldier towers over Petr.

SOLDIER
And what's your name, boy?

Hanna steps between the soldier and Petr.

HANNA
Le garçon ne parle-pas-

SOLDIER
Let the boy answer for himself. You understand what I'm saying to you, don't you, boy?

Petr is frightened. He waves his head "no".

EXT. TRAIN - MOMENTS LATER

The soldier pushes Victor, Hanna and Petr off the train.

SOLDIER
Walk!

Victor and his family join a group of DETAINED PASSENGERS.

HANNA
What about our luggage? Our luggage is still on the train.

The soldier's glove cuts across Hanna's cheek. Victor watches helplessly. The family is forced onto an overcrowded truck.

INT. TRUCK - EVENING

The cabin of the truck has no windows. The DETAINEES ride in near absolute darkness. They press against one another with hardly any room to stand.

VICTOR

This is what happens when I rely on
a child.

HANNA

He's eleven years old. He's scared.

Hanna makes room for Petr to lie down and covers him with her coat. The truck rolls forward jumping over potholes in the road.

VICTOR

I shouldn't have yelled. I'm sorry.

HANNA

What will happen to us?

For the first time, Victor notices how frightened Hanna is. He puts his arms around her.

VICTOR

We still have money. We're
together. We're fine. We'll be just
fine.

EXT. MILITARY CHECKPOINT. HAFTLAGER - NIGHT

The truck idles beneath an electric fence lined with barbed wire. Factory rooftops are barely distinguishable in the plumes of black smoke emanating from industrial chimneys.

A PATROLMAN sticks his head into the cabin of the truck. The soldier at the wheel flashes his ID card.

SOLDIER

Twenty seven persons captured on a
train in the south of France.

The patrolman yells back to the checkpoint booth.

PATROLMAN

Let them through!

The truck continues through the gates. It passes beneath a banner with the words: Arbeit Macht Frei.

INT. TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Pandemonium, as the truck comes to a stop. Victor, Hanna and Petr join hands.

VICTOR

Whatever happens, hold tight and
don't let go.

Outside the truck, they can hear dogs barking, voices shouting orders.

EXT/INT. YARD/TRUCK - SAME

The doors are unbolted. A brigade of SOLDIERS remove DETAINEES from the truck. Some get trampled. Others are dragged by the hair.

Victor, Hanna and Petr have locked hands. The crowd pushes them forward.

VICTOR

Don't let go of my hand!

A gloved FIST closes around Victor's shirt collar. He's dragged to the ground, drawing Petr and Hanna after him.

Petr falls, but Hanna quickly pulls the boy to his feet. They find themselves standing in an open square, bathed in beams of searchlights from several watchtowers.

SOLDIER

Faster! On your hands and knees.

EXT. REGISTRATION GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

The DETAINEES are brought before a CLERK at a registration post in the middle of a concrete clearing.

VICTOR

There's been some mistake. We're
French citizens.

The clerk barely looks at them. SOLDIERS grab Hanna and Petr. Victor can't hold on to them.

HANNA

Victor!

Victor breaks towards his son but a blow collapses him to his knees. Hanna and Petr are hauled away in different directions.

SOLDIER

Get up!

A SOLDIER pulls Victor to his feet. He searches for his family but they've disappeared into the darkness.

INT. DETENTION ROOM. MAIN COMPOUND - NIGHT

A hundred MALE DETAINEES of various ages and social standings have been packed into a space of thirty feet.

SS-OBERSTURMFUHRER LUDWIG VON BRUDEN (30), a heavyset lieutenant, addresses the gathering.

BRUDEN

You will undergo sanitation. Your
clothes should be deposited here.

(points to a bin)

Your shoes should be kept
separately. If you have any
valuables - watches, jewelry,
money, place them in this box.

The detainees begin to undress. Victor has a hard time getting his wedding band past the bone of his finger. When it's off, a pale indentation remains in its place.

INT. DETENTION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Victor places his clothes in the designated bin. A GUARD appears in his way.

GUARD
Open your hand. You hear what I
said? Hand!

The guard grabs hold of Victor's fist and pries his fingers open. He finds the wedding ring.

GUARD (cont'd)
Thieving Jew!

Victor narrowly escapes a kick and hurries to rejoin the ranks of shivering nude prisoners.

INT. SANITATION STATION - LATER

The detainees crowd in a tiled room. SANITATION WORKERS, dressed in prison stripes, use razors to remove their hair.

BRUDEN (O.S.)
This is not a sanitarium. Work will
set you free. Refuse to work and
you'll leave through the chimney.
Work slowly, work lazily, work
recklessly - you'll leave through
the chimney.

Victor feels his sheered skull.

INT. REGISTRATION STATION - LATER

Another room. Another line up. The persistent buzz of a tattoo gun. Victor stretches out his arm and a hunched over SANITATION WORKER brands a number onto his wrist - 416451.

BRUDEN (O.S.)

Forget what you were in the past.
Forget your history. Forget your
name. From now on, you are the
number on your arm. Memorize it.
Present it to receive your daily
rations. If your number is called
and you do not respond, you'll
leave through the chimney.

Victor rubs the numerals etched into his skin.

INT. DISTRIBUTION STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Victor is in the back of another queue. A folded pile of
clothes is placed in his outstretched arms: a pair of boots,
and a uniform.

BRUDEN (O.S.)

Maintain cleanliness at all times.
Disinfect yourselves several times
a day. If you let yourself go, get
sick, get lice, you'll leave
through the chimney.

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

The prisoners run naked across the yard with their uniforms
bundled up in their arms. A searchlight tracks their path.

BRUDEN

Welcome to Haftlager.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - MORNING

SS-STANDARTENFUHRER CLAUS SCHEDR (64), the commandant of
Haftlager, slumps in his chair buried in files. His jaded
expression suggests that he can't wait to retire.

Lt. Von Bruden reports from across the room.

BRUDEN

Jacob Edelstein. Steel and
metallurgy. Three enamelware
factories in Prague.

Bruden places an envelope stuffed with money on the desk.

BRUDEN (cont'd)

Found him concealing a small
fortune.

Schedr leafs through the bills. Contemplates.

SCHEDR

Put him in the A-Block. Assign him
over to the clerical department.
Anyone else?

BRUDEN

Victor Levin.

SCHEDR

Levin... Levin... Why does the name
sound familiar?

Bruden unravels a billboard.

BRUDEN

He was using false documents but
we've managed to establish his
identity. That's Levin on the left.

Schedr studies the man on the poster - Victor dressed as a
character from the Arabian Nights hovers on a magic carpet.
The title reads: De Drie Wensen. Holland. MCMXXXVII.

SCHEDR

Wasn't he in a picture with Marlene
Dietrich?

BRUDEN

Levin is a prominent figure in
European cinema. We believe he may
also have ties to the United
States.

Schedr lights a cigarette.

SCHEDR
Victor Levin, huh?

INT. C-BLOCK - NIGHT

The barracks sleep is overcrowded. Hundreds of iron bunks. Thousands of inmates pressed into a solid mass. GUARDS patrolling the exits turn a blind eye to the haggling and petty dealings.

INT. RESTAURANT - SOME TIME IN THE PAST

Victor and Hanna are ushered through a fancy restaurant to the best table as waiters and patrons fawn over them.

INT. C-BLOCK - SAME

Victor shares the bunk with three other inmates. He holds his bundle of belongings pressed firmly to his stomach. Every sudden noise makes him jump. PRISONERS from neighboring bunks watch him the new arrivals with amusement.

INT. C-BLOCK - MORNING

Victor hasn't slept. As the morning bell screams, it finds Victor cornered off on the bunk with his knees pressed to his stomach.

EXT. OUTHOUSE - MORNING

Victor waits outside the outhouse, shuffling from foot to foot.

An INMATE exits and Victor runs in, only to emerge a second later, gagging and pale.

INT. CAFETERIA - MOMENTS LATER

Victor stands in the breadline. FELIX WOZNIAK (54), gruff, robust - steps up beside him.

FELIX

A month from now, you'll know your way around this place better than the rats.

Victor shrinks back.

FELIX (cont'd)

You have nothing to be afraid of.
My name is Felix.

VICTOR

Victor. Victor Levin.

FELIX

Yes, I know who you are, Mr. Levin.
Don't think me too forward, but I'm probably your greatest admirer. If there's anything you need, Mr. Levin, anything at all, you be sure to let old Felix know.

Felix walks to the front of the line but Victor holds him back.

VICTOR

Wait!... My wife. We've been separated.

FELIX

Shh. Keep your voice down.

Felix draws Victor aside and whispers in his ear.

FELIX (cont'd)

I can get you a toothbrush, a cigar, maybe even a bottle of bubbly, but smuggling love notes to the women's compound - a fellow can get sent up the chimney for that sort of thing. I'm sorry.

Felix walks away. Victor catches up to him.

VICTOR

You know where they are? Please.

Felix looks around cautiously.

FELIX

Have you got any money? Valuables of any sort?

VICTOR

Money is not an issue. As soon as I am able to make contact with the outside.

FELIX

That money is no good to you now, Mr. Levin.

VICTOR

They confiscated everything I had - my wallet, my watch, my clothes. They even took my wedding ring.

FELIX

Please, Mr. Levin. The human will triumphs. Even in a place like this.

Victor breaks down and scurries away.

EXT. WORK GROUNDS - DAY

The sun beats down on the workers toiling in the yard. Victor receives a sack of coal from his work partner, ZEV BLOOM (40). Zev's enormous physical strength is matched only by his bad temper.

ZEV

Take it with both hands. We're all
going to get a beating because of
you!

Victor fumbles with the load. His knees buckle under the weight.

EXT. YARD - LATER

INMATES line up in the middle of the yard. Four KAPOS perform a head count.

VICTOR

Haftling vier ein vier fünf sechs
ein...

KAPO

I can't hear you!

VICTOR

Haftling vier ein...

INT. CAFETERIA - LATER

Victor stands by a tall vat of soup. The INMATE in charge of food distribution splashes a ladle of murky brown liquid into his bowl.

INMATE

Don't hold the line. You think this
is a restaurant? Move it!

EXT. YARD - LATER

INMATES are assembled on the yard for roll call. Victor is separated from the rest. His knees shiver as he delivers his salute.

VICTOR
Jawhol, mein Fuhrer!

KAPO
Louder!

Schedr watches over Victor from the height of his office balcony.

INT. LATRINES - NIGHT

The latrines are empty. Victor stands over the splash sink. He covers his face with the palms of his hands. His back heaves with barely audible sobs.

He hears a noise and quickly collects himself. A KAPO steps into the latrines waving a nightstick.

KAPO
Making yourself pretty for the boys
in the block?

Victor keeps his head down and shuffles to the exit.

INT. C-BLOCK - NIGHT

Victor sits on the edge of the bunk. He divides his bread in two portions, careful to collect every fallen crumb. He wraps the bread in a piece of cloth.

ZEV
Keep doing that and you'll be dead
in a week.

VICTOR
Then, maybe you'll finally get the
bunk to yourself.

ZEV

Want my advice? Forget about your family for the time being. Focus on your own survival.

Victor turns his back to Zev. He stuffs the bread bundle into the back of his boot.

INT. CAFETERIA - MORNING

Felix stands in the queue. Victor walks up behind him.

VICTOR

I want you to find out where my family is being kept.

FELIX

Mr. Levin-

VICTOR

I can pay.

Victor indicates his pocket.

FELIX

Not here, meshugane. Come with me.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Felix leads Victor into a clammy unlit space.

FELIX

What did you say your sweetheart's name was?

VICTOR

Hanna. Her maiden name is Rosenblum. My son's name is Petr.

FELIX

You didn't say nothing about a son.

VICTOR

I'm willing to pay you seven rations of bread.

FELIX

Can I see these rations?

VICTOR

You'll see them when I hear from my wife and son.

TWO THUGS appear out of the shadows. They hold Victor's arms down inflicting a great deal of pain.

FELIX

Where is the bread?

Felix presses a knife to Victor's neck.

FELIX (cont'd)

In exactly three seconds I am going to put this blade through your trachea-

VICTOR

It's in my boot! My boot!

Felix pulls Victor's boot off and extracts the bread.

FELIX

Think of this as a lesson, an education, something to carry with you in future machinations - in here, you either let go of what's weighing you down or drown.

The beating is swift and remorseless. Two kicks in the ribs. A kick in the face.

FELIX (cont'd)

That's enough.

Felix and the thugs leave Victor bloodied and folded up on the ground as they vanish into the shadows.

INT. C-BLOCK - AFTERNOON

Bruden reports to Schedr at the entrance to the barracks.

BRUDEN

Kapos found him in the supply room.
Three cracked ribs. A dislocated
shoulder. God knows what other
injuries.

SCHEDR

Who did this to him?

BRUDEN

He won't say.

INT. C-BLOCK - MOMENTS LATER

Victor lays on his bunk in oblivion. Schedr looms over him.

SCHEDR

When I saw him on screen he was ten
feet tall. Look at him now.

BRUDEN

What should I do with him?

SCHEDR

Move him to a single bunk. Let him
sleep it off for a few days. If he
doesn't get better, clear the bunk.

Schedr turns his back on Victor and exits the barracks.

EXT. WENCESLAS SQUARE. PRAGUE - AFTERNOON

The square is flooded with PROTESTORS - waving banners and
yelling out slogans.

Schedr squirms in the backseat of a Mercedes. He's forced to
wait for the militia to clear the road.

CHAUFFEUR

The closer the Soviets get, the
more riots we have to put up with.

At that moment, a hunk of spit lands on the window of the car
directly in front of Schedr's face.

SCHEDR

That could've been a bullet.

CHAUFFEUR

Uhh- the vehicle is armored,
Captain.

Schedr watches MILITIA MEN wrestle the ASSAILANT to the
ground.

SCHEDR

I hate being hated. It's so
demoralizing.

Schedr looks at the saliva oozing down the outside of his
window. He sinks deeper into his seat.

EXT. GRAND HOTEL EVROPA - MOMENTS LATER

A cavalcade of four black limousines pulls up to the gilded
facade of the Grand Hotel. The chauffeur holds the door for
Schedr.

INT. GRAND HOTEL LOBBY - SAME

The chauffeur leads Schedr down the granite vestibule past
flower arrangements and a gurgling indoor fountain.

CHAUFFEUR

Right through here, Captain.

Schedr fixes his tie, takes in the scenery.

INT. GESTAPO BUILDING - SAME

In a lavish office, SS-OBERSTGRUPPENFUHRER JURGEN RADOMSKI (65), the Chancellor of the City of Prague, sits at his desk reading a memo. Schedr is shown into the room.

RADOMSKI

Take a seat, Captain.

Schedr settles into a chair opposite the Chancellor.

RADOMSKI (cont'd)

In six weeks, a commission from the Red Cross will arrive to tour the labor camps.

SCHEDR

A commission?

RADOMSKI

Berlin wants to dispel accusations of human rights abuse. The Red Cross will be in town for an afternoon. Show them around your facilities. Impress them. Make a big show, a concert, a theatre performance. These Jewish vermin can be talented. Let our guests see how we treat our talented Jews, and make sure that our guests have a wonderful time!

SCHEDR

With all due respect, Chancellor, I have seven thousand inmates. Typhus and dysentery spreading like influenza-

RADOMSKI

The Fuhrer personally requested that you would be the one entrusted with this project.

SCHEDR

And what would the Fuhrer have me
do about the chambers?

Radomski stands facing the window with his back to Schedr.

RADOMSKI

Wipe that glib expression from your
face, Claus. The inspectors arrive
on the twenty fifth. You have five
weeks. Think of it as an investment
into your retirement. Now that
you've come so close.

Schder leaves in silence. Radomski watches the door close in
the dark reflection of the windowpane.

INT. BLOCK - EVENING

Victor opens his eyes. Zev sits on the edge of his bunk with
a bowl of soup.

ZEV

How are you today?

VICTOR

Better.

Zev feeds Victor soup. Victor's lip is swollen and the
lukewarm fluid is a source of pain.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Thank you. These last few weeks, if
it wasn't for you-

ZEV

Eat.

At that moment, Zev is overcome with a violent bout of
coughing. Victor steadies the soup so that it doesn't spill.

VICTOR

You need to get that treated. If
they know you're sick-

ZEV

I'm not the one who needs to be fed
from a spoon.

In the distance, Victor catches sight of Felix laughing with
a group of inmates.

ZEV (cont'd)

Usually he leaves his prey much
worse. But I guess not everyone has
your star power.

Catching Felix's stare, Victor lowers his eyes.

ZEV (cont'd)

As for your family, I made some
inquiries-

VICTOR

You saw them?

Victor sits up and grimaces in pain.

ZEV

Easy there, acrobat. I didn't see
your family. But if all goes right,
I may be able to pass on a message.
Anything specific you want the
message to say?

VICTOR

Tell them, I am sorry. I'm so
incredibly sorry.

ZEV

I'll add that you love them. For
symmetry.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The lights are dim. The curtains are drawn. Schedr sits
behind his desk with a bottle of brandy. Next to it on the
table lays his handgun. He stares at the firearm. Rotates it
in a circular trajectory.

BRUDEN (O.S.)

Sir?

REVERSE

Bruden stands awkwardly in the middle of the room.

BRUDEN (cont'd)

You were saying something about an
inspection?

Schedr empties a glass of brandy in one gulp.

SCHEDR

Today we are guarding them.
Tomorrow they'll be guarding us.

EXT. WORK GROUNDS - MORNING

Rain beats down on the WORKERS. The Kapos take shelter under
a tarpaulin cover. The POLE hands Victor a bag of coal.

VICTOR

Hey, have you seen Zev anywhere?

POLE

If you don't stop talking, you'll
see him sooner than you think.

A jeep pulls up level with Victor. The window rolls down.
Bruden's head sticks out.

BRUDEN

Get in.

Victor hesitates.

BRUDEN (cont'd)

You need a special invitation? In
the car. Now!

Victor disappears inside the vehicle. The door closes and the
jeep speeds off.

INT. CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Bruden and Victor ride in the backseat.

BRUDEN

When he asks you a question, reply clearly and succinctly. Don't look at him directly. Don't sneeze. Don't drag your feet. And what's that crap in your hands?

VICTOR

My utensils, sir.

Bruden turns to a SOLDIER escorting them.

BRUDEN

Take this crap away from him.

The soldier pulls on the utensils but Victor won't let go.

BRUDEN (cont'd)

You'll get it back later. And perk up, we're not going to a funeral.

The vehicle climbs the hill to Schedr's villa.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Victor sits on a plush chair across from Schedr, careful not to soil the fabric with his dirty uniform. Bruden waits by the door.

SCHEDR

You ran a motion pictures company in Paris before the war, is that correct?

VICTOR

Yes, sir.

SCHEDR

Have you ever worked with people who weren't professional actors?

VICTOR

I directed community theater for
four years before starting in
cinema.

Schedr extends a cigarette to Victor.

SCHEDR

Do you smoke, Herr Director? I'm
afraid it's my little weakness,
my Achilles' heel.

Schedr sparks his antic lighter and Victor inhales smoke.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Six weeks from now our camp will
entertain important guests. I want
you to prepare a picture to screen
at the festivities. A documentary.

VICTOR

About the camp?

SCHEDR

About what is happening right here
right now. A member of the Social
Nationalist Party having a drink
with a descendant of the tribes of
Israel. As equals.

Schedr holds out a glass of brandy to Victor.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

We built this city to protect you
from racial bigotry. To separate
you from the prejudiced masses. To
give you a home after all your
wandering over the deserts of this
world.

Schedr ashes his cigarette.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

I hope that an experienced filmmaker such as yourself will have little difficulty capturing these sentiments. The Lieutenant will help you renovate the camp. We'll organize a parade. An afternoon of festivities. Maybe we can even persuade you to sing.

VICTOR

I won't let you down, Eure Exzellenz.

SCHEDR

(to Bruden)

Make a list of everything Herr Director requires.

Schedr waves Victor away but he doesn't budge.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Anything else?

VICTOR

There is a man in my block, a cameraman. He's indispensable to me.

SCHEDR

No man is indispensable, Herr Director.

(a beat)

Fine. The lieutenant will find your cameraman.

Schedr offers his hand to Victor.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

I look forward to our collaboration.

Victor and Schedr shake hands.

INT. WASHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Schedr scrubs his hands with soap. Bruden waits by the door.

SCHEDR

Watch him for me. Find more
directors he could be replaced
with. I don't trust him.

BRUDEN

Yes, sir.

SCHEDR

And Bruden.

BRUDEN

Yes, sir?

SCHEDR

Don't let me down.

Bruden exits as Schedr applies a second layer of soap.

INT. CHAMBER - DAY

A white windowless room. A group of INMATES stands in a
single file: frail, discolored, sick, sallow skin stretched
over heavily protruding bones. Last among them - Zev.

KAPOS, adorned in gas masks, rubber suits and gloves, inspect
the prisoners.

INT. CHAMBER - MOMENTS LATER

TWO KAPOs work together to rotate a revolving pulley and open
the door into the chamber.

The inmates are escorted into a vacant, windowless room. They
see the air ducts in the ceiling. The doors close and the
room descends into...

DARKNESS

INMATE

Let me out! I'm not sick! I don't
belong here!

The air ducts hiss as the gas is released. The raspy
breathing of the condemned. They huddle together about to
disintegrate into nothingness. But...

The hiss stops. The doors open and light spills into the
room. Two figures emerge.

VICTOR (O.S.)

That's him.

The guards drag Zev into the light. The doors of the chamber
close and the room again plunges into darkness.

INT. HOLDING CELL - MOMENTS LATER

Unfurnished space. In the corner there is a step ladder,
pails of paint and old paint brushes.

Around a workbench, Zev and Victor sit over soup, bread,
vegetables - a real meal. Zev doesn't touch the food.

VICTOR

Things will be different now. No
more commands. No more beatings.
From here on out, we're the ones
giving commands.

ZEV

I don't know the first thing about
operating a camera.

VICTOR

I don't need you to operate a
camera. Listen to me. I can't do
this alone. I need a crew. I need
mise-en-scène, costumes. I need
people I can trust. Help me find my
people.

ZEV

I can put together a crew but
beyond that-

VICTOR

In the industry, we call it
producing.

INT. YARD - MORNING

The camp population is assembled in the yard. Bruden receives
a list of numbers from Zev.

BRUDEN

If your number is called, identify
yourself and step out of rank.
084326...

PRISONERS exchange worried looks. 084326, a dejected inmate,
STEPHAN KURTZ (52), takes a step forward.

BRUDEN (cont'd)

732487...

As more numbers are called, INMATES abandon the general
assembly and cross over to Zev. We watch Victor's ragtag team
get assembled.

At the very back of the lineup, Felix watches over the
selection with a calculating eye.

INT. DESERTED BLOCK - MORNING

Victor leads Bruden through an empty barracks that will
become the filmmaker's studio. Cots stretch for miles.

VICTOR

We'll need to clear this area.

Bruden makes a note in his notebook.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Bruden leads Victor through a narrow corridor.

VICTOR

We'll need different shades of
paint. Large sheets of cardboard.
Construction tools.

A section of the corridor is guarded by Armed Personnel.

BRUDEN

That area is restricted.

Bruden gesturing Victor to follow along.

BRUDEN (cont'd)

After you.

EXT. LATRINES - NIGHT

Victor now wears a clean uniform. Felix comes up behind him in the queue.

FELIX

Why don't you cast us in that
little production of yours? My
colleagues and I are very
photogenic.

VICTOR

It's not up to me. The Captain
makes all the decisions.

FELIX

Ah, decisions. A second to make,
and a life time to pay for.

Felix blocks Victor's way. This draws the attention of a nearby Kapo.

KAPO

Keep moving!

Felix allows Victor to pass.

INT. LATRINES - MOMENTS LATER

Victor splashes water on his face. He exhales heavily. He turns around and catches sight of Felix, watching him.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - EVENING

Schedr flips through a mud stained notebook. Victor stands solemnly in the center of the office.

SCHEDR

You're asking for primarily female performers.

VICTOR

The camera needs attractive faces.

SCHEDR

So it's not because there's a girl somewhere you are desperate to find?

VICTOR

I assure you, sir, that my only thoughts are of my production.

SCHEDR

Your production?...

(beat)

Alright, alright. We'll get you pretty girls. After all, who doesn't like pretty girls, huh?

Victor stares at the floor. Schedr lights a cigarette.

INT. LATRINES - DAY

Kapos are letting prisoners in one by one. Orders and threats are being yelled. Zev stands behind the Pole in the queue.

ZEV

Keep your mouth shut...

INT. WORK AREA - CONTINUOUS

Stephan passes a bag of coal to the Italian as they work in the sun.

STEPHAN

I heard he's smuggling in ten.

ITALIAN

I heard fifteen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

In a private prep area, the Italian, Felix and a few other inmates are gathered for a game of cards.

ITALIAN

The captain's giving him his own harem.

FELIX

Don't you wish you had his luck?

Felix collects the pot of small coins and cigarettes.

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Victor hangs a mirror on the wall while a teenage boy, IZIK VAINER (17), follows him like a shadow.

IZIK

My mother's name is Victoria Vainer. She's short. Red hair.

VICTOR

We're not running a charity here.
Get back to work.

Izik shuffles away with his head hung low. Victor adjusts the mirror. He comes face to face with his reflection. For a moment he barely recognizes himself. The tension in his face. The vacant stare.

INT. MILITARY CROSSING - MORNING

The two sections of the camp, the MALE and the FEMALE one, are divided by a high voltage fence. The gates open and the truck enters a long tunnel.

In the back of the truck ride Zev and Victor. They are guarded by an armed MILITARY ESCORT. Victor stares out of the window lost in thought.

ZEV

Victor? Listen to me, brother,
don't get your hopes up. Who knows
what might have happened? They may
have been moved somewhere else.

VICTOR

She's in there. I know it.

ZEV

We're here to do a job. That's
where your focus should be right
now. Many people are counting on
you. Me included.

The truck comes to an abrupt stop.

VICTOR

We're here to work.

ZEV

Exactly.

EXT. WOMEN'S COMPOUND - MOMENTS LATER

Victor climbs out of the truck. A dismal concrete square unravels before him. Gray dilapidated barracks stretch as far as the eye can see. Black smoke permanently hangs over the camp. Somewhere in the distance sporadic gunshots resound.

EXT. WOMEN'S COMPOUND - MOMENTS LATER

FEMALE INMATES line up in a semi circle. Skeletal dirty creatures stripped of every last ounce of will. Beauty and tenderness reduced to bones in prison greys.

Bruden energetically marches before them.

BRUDEN

We are looking for performers.
Women with prior acting or singing
experience. Women familiar with the
arts, sports, or any other form of
entertainment.

Victor scans the crowd. They all look the same - haggard, malnourished, lifeless. He moves his eyes from one face to the next when, in the back row, far behind the rest, he spots Hanna.

Hanna's eyes light up - a shadow of a woman he knew. Victor takes a step toward her but Zev's hand rests on his shoulder.

BRUDEN (cont'd)

Remember, this is not a punishment.

EXT. WOMEN'S COMPOUND - MOMENTS LATER

Victor walks past the rows of female inmates selecting the suitable candidates. He chooses the healthier, younger ones. These are led to one line while the sick, skinny, not photogenic ones are brought into another.

Finally, he reaches the back row. He points to Hanna and she is led away by a Kapo.

INT. AUDITION SPACE - MOMENTS LATER

Hanna is brought into a small room. Zev, Victor and Bruden sit behind a table. Hanna's knees grow weak when she sees her husband, but she knows not to show any emotion.

ZEV

Have you any performance
experience?

HANNA

I dance. I sang a bit.

Bruden turns to Zev.

BRUDEN

She looks too thin. They'll think
we're starving them.

VICTOR

Her face is extremely sympathetic.
With makeup and the right outfit,
she will look plump as a peach.

ZEV

Could you sing something for us?

Hanna begins to sing nervously, her voice cracking.

BRUDEN

She's horrible.

ZEV

Nervous.

BRUDEN

They're all nervous.

ZEV

I heard some real potential in her
voice.

Hanna gets through the song pitifully.

VICTOR

We'll take her. With your
permission, sir.

Bruden turns to a FEMALE KAPO.

BRUDEN

See that she gets bathed and
changed.

The Kapo leads Hanna out of the room. Victor throws Zev a
look of gratitude.

INT. SHOWERS - MOMENTS LATER

Hanna shivers as she stands in the middle of the room naked.
The female Kapo brushes her hair.

Victor stops in the doorway. Not a word is said between them.
Hanna responds to his presence with emotional anguish.

All these months of separation. Everything she's been
through. Tears well up in her eyes.

Victor suppresses emotion.

INT. STUDIO - MORNING

The studio is dressed to resemble a synagogue. There is
Stephan. Victor. Zev. The Italian. The Pole. And a dozen
other CAST AND CREW MEMBERS.

VICTOR

In this scene we want to capture a
communal prayer. Have any of
visited a synagogue before?

Stephan raises his hand.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Show them.

Stephan recites a prayer, swaying back and forth.

STEPHAN

Baruch ata hadonai...

VICTOR

Pay attention to how he moves. Now
everybody, try it.

The crew sways awkwardly. The results are rather comical.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Good. Move your lips more. We'll
overlay the sound later.

A noise startles them. Bruden steps through the door.

BRUDEN

Tell your men to face the walls.

The men turn away. FEMALE INMATES are led into the studio in
the escort of ARMED GUARDS.

BRUDEN (cont'd)

I want it understood right now -
that this is not a happy reunion.
You are not to touch them. You are
not to talk to them. You are not to
look in their direction.

Victor turns to Stephan.

VICTOR

Prepare the fitting.

INT. DRESSING ROOMS - LATER

The women stand over boxes with jewelry: necklaces, earrings,
rings, broaches and tiaras. They admire these traces of
civilization in wonder. ARMED GUARDS supervise.

Hanna stares at a pearl necklace. An older woman, VICTORIA
VAINER (50), comes up behind her.

VICTORIA

Put it on.

Victoria strings the necklace around Hanna's neck.

VICTORIA (cont'd)

You were made for each other.

Hanna admires herself in the mirror. Her face turns to stone when she encounters Stephan's direct gaze. Stephan waves for Hanna to approach.

STEPHAN

You - follow me!

Stephan grabs Hanna's arm and drags her past an armed GUARD.

STEPHAN (cont'd)

I need her for a costume fitting.

The guard smiles lasciviously.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stephan pushes Hanna into a closed space.

STEPHAN

Get in here. In here, I said.

Hanna stops dead in her tracks. Victor is waiting in the dark.

STEPHAN (cont'd)

I'll be outside.

Victor puts his arms around Hanna.

VICTOR

No one can hear us. It's alright now. An inspection is arriving from the Red Cross. Scared them into putting on this performance and letting me film it and some scenes in the camp - a happy document of hell.

HANNA

Will they let us be together?

VICTOR

During the day, yes. But we must be careful. Do you trust me?

HANNA
What about Petr?

VICTOR
I will find him.

She looks at him, frightened, uncertain.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - SAME

The lascivious guard walks up to Stephan by the door to the dressing room.

STEPHAN
She's just getting changed.

The guards leans to the keyhole.

STEPHAN (cont'd)
Jew dames, heh?

The guard is suddenly apprehensive. He knocks on the door.

GUARD
Tell her to hurry up in there.

The guard returns to his post. Stephan exhales with relief.

A few seconds later, Hanna emerges in a traditional Bavarian dirndl.

STEPHAN
Took you long enough! Move!

Stephan drags Hanna after him into the studio.

INT. STUDIO - LATER

Izik applies paint to the wall. Victor walks up behind him. While the GUARD is turned away, Victor stuffs a note into Izik's pocket.

VICTOR
A redhead asked to give you this.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - DAY

Schedr's desk is buried in papers. Bruden stands in the middle of the room with his eyes pointed at the floor.

SCHEDR

Why does he need all this
cardboard?

BRUDEN

He also requested carpenters,
builders, to help with the
restoration.

SCHEDR

He's got a hundred people. Let them
build. I'm not giving him another
worker. The factories are already
behind.

Schedr waves Bruden away.

BRUDEN

There's one more thing, sir.

SCHEDR

What else does the clown want?

Bruden hesitates.

BRUDEN

Well, sir, as a matter of fact-

SCHEDR

Out with it.

BRUDEN

He's now asking for children.

SCHEDR

Children?

BRUDEN

I made it clear that this is out of
the question.

SCHEDR

Bring me Levin's file. I'll handle
this personally.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Schedr's Mercedes pulls up to the studio. The chauffeur opens
the door and Schedr climbs out.

INT. STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Large mirrors have been mounted on the walls in one corner of
the studio to resemble a dance rehearsal space. The illusion
would've been complete if not for the CREW MEMBERS running to
and fro with lighting and camera equipment.

Schedr lounges on a chair surrounded by Kapos. Victor is
behind the camera.

VICTOR

And action!

Hanna begins to dance in the makeshift studio. Schedr studies
her. He turns to Victor and watches him intently.

SCHEDR

She's quite good, isn't she?

VICTOR

(suppressing anxiety)

Please, sir. While the camera is
rolling, we need absolute silence.

Schedr puts his finger to his lips.

SCHEDR

(softer)

I'll be quiet.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - LATER

Hanna changes out of her costume under the supervision of a
FEMALE KAPO. Schedr stops in the doorway.

SCHEDR

You danced beautifully. I almost forgot women were capable of dancing. All I see to see them do is work, fall over and die. Ugly. Grotesque. Not a figment of femininity.

HANNA

You are going to rape me?

The Kapo raises her hand to smack Hanna.

SCHEDR

Step away from her!

The Kapo obeys promptly.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Now I understand what he sees in you, besides the porcelain figure and your uncanny ability to lift your legs above your head.

Schedr draws closer.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

For two actors, you are not very convincing. I bet there is more. I bet there is a little girl somewhere with Mr. Levin's eyes and your dimples. No. It's not a girl. It's a boy.

Hanna feels his breath on the back of her neck.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

How old were you when you met Herr Director? Was he already grey? I bet your boy is barely eleven years old-

HANNA

Please. Do whatever you want with me but don't hurt him.

SCHEDR

You are the creators of your
destiny. Create well and the star
of Levin may rise again.

Schedr draws away from her. As the door shuts behind him,
Hanna breaks into tears.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - LATER

Black and white footage flickers. Schedr watches the dailies
with a curious eye.

SCHEDR

Why are these people not smiling?
You should tell them to smile more.

VICTOR

We were trying to achieve realism.

SCHEDR

Have the footage sent to my office.
I'd like to have my assistants look
through it.

VICTOR

Certainly, sir.

Schedr lights a cigarette.

SCHEDR

The lieutenant informs me that you
have requested child performers.

VICTOR

Children are extremely sympathetic
on camera.

SCHEDR

Tomorrow. You and I will pick some
out.

Schedr waves Victor away.

EXT. YARD - MORNING

BOYS AND GIRLS in militia uniforms are assembled in front of Victor and Schedr.

SCHEDR

Make your pick, Herr Director.

Victor points to several candidates before approaching Petr at the back of the assembly. Schedr studies Petr from every angle.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Hmm. I don't know. To be honest,
this one doesn't look like a Jew.

VICTOR

He will photograph well.

Schedr steps up to another child.

SCHEDR

Say, why don't you take this one
instead. Look at that nose - now
that's native pride.

VICTOR

Perhaps, sir, picking them at
random is not the best way to
select suitable performers. We
don't even know if they can act,
sing-

SCHEDR

If it's singing you want- Boys!

He begins conducting with the gesticulations of his arms. The boys sing the German National Anthem. Petr joins in but feels Schedr's hand on his shoulder.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Not you.

The boy sing in earnest, mispronouncing the foreign words.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

I believe there's enough singing talent in this squad to delight the Pope. Hell, take them all! But this one, I'm going to hold on to.

Schedr kneels to Petr's height.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

What's your name young man?

PETR

Petr.

SCHEDR

Well, Petr, did anyone ever tell you that you look just like your father.

Victor tenses up.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

You and I are going to be good friends.

Schedr turns to Bruden.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Take these soldiers with Herr Director. He's going to make us a real Verdian slaves chorus.

Schedr puts his arm around Petr.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Come with me, child. Don't worry, Herr Director. Your son is in good hands.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

A CHILDREN CHOIR stands on a small stage. The decorations are bright and happy, making it look like a school play.

VICTOR

And action!

An audience of MEN and WOMEN is cast in the role of parents.
Hanna among them.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Cue in the music.

Stephan accompanies the children on the piano.

CHILDREN

Stille Nacht! Heil'ge Nacht! Alles
schlft; einsam wacht
Nur das traute hoch heilige Paar.
Holder Knab' imlockigten Haar...

Hanna smiles but tears well up in her eye. She hurriedly
ducks out of the studio.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Victor shuts the door behind him. He finds Hanna crying.

HANNA

You can't let them get away with
this.

VICTOR

What choice do I have?

HANNA

If you don't expose them, no one
will ever know. As if this place
never existed.

VICTOR

They've got inspectors scrutinizing
every frame.

HANNA

But you point the camera.

VICTOR

It's too dangerous. Think about our son.

HANNA

I'll never see him again!

Victor caresses Hanna.

VICTOR

As long as we follow orders-

HANNA

When did you ever follow orders?

Zev enters the dressing room.

ZEV

Uhh, sorry to interrupt. But we need you back up front.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Petr sits crouched between the tub and the sink hugging his knees. A knock on the door startles him.

SCHEDR (O.S.)

You intend to stay there all night?
Your supper is waiting. Schnitzel
and sauerkraut. Apple strudel for
dessert. Unless you prefer to eat
them cold?

INT. SCHEDR'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The table is set with all sorts of delicacies. Moments later Petr emerges from behind the bathroom door.

SCHEDR

When was the last time you ate?

Petr hesitantly approaches the table. He is clearly starving.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Our cook makes a scrumptious
strudel. I highly recommend it.

Petr picks up a fork and starts helping himself.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Your German is excellent. Where in
Germany are you from?

PETR

I am not from Germany. I am from
Paris.

SCHEDR

You're eleven, aren't you? When I
was your age, I was already
employed. A man should earn his
keep.

Petr chews silently.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

I need a deputy. A man I can trust.
Can I trust you?

Petr nods.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

How would you like me to appoint
you Deputy Commandant of Haftlager?
What do you say?

PETR

Thank you, sir.

SCHEDR

Good boy.

INT/EXT. STUDIO - MONTAGE

- The crew films the signing choir.
- The crew builds a fake facade of a restaurant.

- The crew films a lecture at a synagogue.
- The crew plants a vegetable patch.
- The crew films a sculpture at work in a mezzanine.

EXT. STUDIO - DAY

Victor is at the camera. The choir concludes their song. Through the window, Victor can see Bruden talking to Felix out in the yard. Both men laugh heartily.

Felix beams Victor a smile.

INT. C-BLOCK - NIGHT

Victor is asleep. A shadow falls over the bunk. Everything happens very quickly. A bag is slipped over Victor's head. He tries to scream but the bag is tight and he's fighting for air, kicking and screaming.

Felix and his thugs wrestle down Victor's arms and legs. They whisk his bony frame off the bunk like a bag of sand.

FELIX

Bring him.

From the darkness, a hundred of eyes watch Victor transported through the air. Not one person makes a sound.

INT. CREMATORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

The world comes into focus. Victor is on his knees in a pit. There is a massive chimney growing over him. He can see the moon in it. Beneath his feet are human remains. Felix looks down from the edge.

FELIX

I asked you politely. Politeness was ignored. You are going to speak to your macher. You're going to tell him you require several talented Haftlinge from A-Block.

(MORE)

FELIX (cont'd)

Or this will be the last time you
see the sky.

Felix pins Victor to the ground with a fire iron.

FELIX (cont'd)

Hanna Roseblum - tell me if I
remember the name correctly.

Felix drives the fire iron deeper into Victor's shoulder.

FELIX (cont'd)

You may have your precious Hanna in
your sights during the day, but at
night... a pretty lady can get into
all sorts of trouble.

The thugs drag Victor out of the pit. Victor curls into a
ball while the thugs shower him with kicks. They hold him
suspended in front of Felix.

FELIX (cont'd)

I didn't survive for fifty-two
years in the womb of this
treacherous world to be putzed by
the likes of you. You will get us
into that studio or you and your
wife leave through this chimney.

The thugs drop Victor on the ground. Felix side swipes Victor
with the fire iron.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - MORNING

A large mirror has been brought into the office. A TAILOR
fits a miniature Nazi uniform on Petr.

TAILOR

Stand still.

Schedr looks on while talking on the telephone.

SCHEDR

We have a wonderful program
prepared. Performances by the
inmates. A parade. Victor Levin is
directing a motion picture.

INT. RADOMSKI'S OFFICE - SAME

Radomski stands by the window with the receiver to his ear.
On the square below, policemen suppress a riot.

RADOMSKI

Victor Levin? The actor?

SCHEDR (O.S.)

Oh, you've heard of him.

RADOMSKI

His pictures always amuse Hilda.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - SAME

SCHEDR

I will introduce you.

RADOMSKI (O.S.)

The Fuhrer will be glad to know he
had made the right choice
entrusting you with this, Claus.

Bruden enters. He looks distraught.

SCHEDR

We'll speak soon, Jürgen.

Schedr hangs up the phone, turns to Bruden

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Am I going to be upset?

BRUDEN

Um, well...

INT. INFIRMARY - MOMENTS LATER

Victor lies unconscious on a cot. A PHYSICIAN wraps bandages around his forehead. Petr watches from a distance.

In another corner, Schedr smokes nervously. Bruden avoids his glance.

BRUDEN

Let me replace him. There is a man
in the A-Block. Felix Wozniak-

SCHEDR

No. I promised the Chancellor he
would meet Levin.

BRUDEN

What if he doesn't wake up?

SCHEDR

Make his wake up!

INT. INFIRMARY - CONTINUOUS

The physician puts away the bandages into his medical case.

Petr reaches out and takes his father's hand in his. Victor's eyes open in delirium.

VICTOR

Hanna?

Petr stands frozen.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Hanna! Hanna!

Victor shakes violently. The physician jumps up, pushing Petr out of the way. He restrains Victor with leather straps. Petr backs away from the cot fearfully.

EXT. YARD - MOMENTS LATER

The entire population of the camp has been assembled in the yard. Thousands of prisoners, hundreds of guards.

Schedr steps out before them. Petr, in his new Nazi uniform, is beside him.

SCHEDR

Last night several of you left the confines of your bunks and assaulted a fellow inmate. He was left unconscious in the crematorium. I will allow those responsible to willingly admit to the abuse and absolve the rest of your comrades from punishment.

The prisoners stand silently.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Fine. So be it. I'll decide who is responsible for this myself.

Schedr yanks Victoria out of the line up and drags her to the center of the yard. Felix calmly watches from the back of the assembly.

Izik watches in horror as Schedr accepts a nightstick from a Kapo. Victoria begs on her knees as Schedr flings the club above her head.

IZIK

(stepping forward)

It was me! I was the one! Don't punish her!

Schedr's club lands with a thud on Victoria's lower jaw. The inmates watch as Schedr delivers blow after blow.

Izik runs toward Victoria but two Kapos hold him back.

Schedr strikes Victoria again and again. Finally, her body sprawls limply on the ground. Schedr gives the club away wiping sweat from his brow.

SCHEDR

Dispose of them both.

The Kapos push Izik to his knees. A gun is placed to his forehead. The Kapo pulls back the hammer when-

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Wait!

Schedr takes Petr by the hand and leads him into the center of the square.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Have you ever fired a gun before?

Petr hesitates.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Did you see what this man has done
to your father?

Schedr takes the gun away from the Kapo and places it in Petr's hand. He forces the boy's hand up until the gun points between Izik's terrified eyes.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Feel the weight of the trigger...

Hanna steps forward.

HANNA

Please, no.

SCHEDR

Block out all external noise.
One...

HANNA

Don't make him do this!

A guard violently pulls Hanna aside.

SCHEDR

Two... Fire!

A gunshot thunders through the yard.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Breathe now, boy. You've done your
father proud.

Schedr takes the pistol from Petr and disarms it. He turns to
the inmates.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Today, I punish two people.
Tomorrow, I will punish ten. If any
of you does anything to interfere
with Levin's project, better say
your good byes ahead of time!

Schedr turns to Petr who is still shaking.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Come, my boy.

Schedr and Petr climb into an automobile.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

(to Bruden)

Find out who is responsible.

The automobile drives off. The guard pushes Hanna into her
place in the line up.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Petr crouches over the toilet. He breathes heavily.

SCHEDR

Hurry up in there.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Zev holds the bullhorn. The crew is gathered around him.

STEPHAN

I need two rolls of film today.

POLE

Where do you want these lights?

ITALIAN

Do I have any lines in this scene?

Zev's head is spinning.

ZEV

Excuse me.

Zev pushes through the gathering.

Hanna stares vacantly while REBECCA (25) applies make up to her face. Zev walks up.

ZEV (cont'd)

I need to talk to you.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zev and Hanna are alone.

ZEV

I don't know the first thing about directing. You have to help me. You are the only one who can.

Hanna stares absentmindedly into space.

ZEV (cont'd)

Look, I know what you are going through right now. But if you don't help us, none of us will be here tomorrow.

INT. STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Rebecca, in a summer dress, waters flowers by the windowsill. Hanna is at the camera filming.

HANNA

Hold the action. Good.

Outside the window, a group of inmates drag the bodies of Izik and Victoria across the yard.

HANNA (cont'd)

Keep going!

The camera ZOOMS past the actors on the activity in the yard.

INT. STUDIO - LATER

Hanna and the rest of the female cast are subjected to a search. A Soldier runs his hands through Hanna's body lasciviously. She looks away to put him out of her line of vision.

INT. DARK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Hanna shuts the door. She removes the wig from her head. Weaved into a braid is a short strip of film.

Hanna holds a strip of film to the light and WE SEE:

Inmates loading up bodies onto the back of a truck. A kapo flings a nightstick over a crouching inmate. Trails on blood on the concrete.

BACK ON HANNA

Hanna rolls the film into a tube. She removes a piece of plastic from the bottom of an aluminum table leg and hides the film inside the table frame.

INT. SCHEDR'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Schedr and Petr are at the dinner table. They are joined by a pretty CZECH GIRL (18). Petr sits not touching the food.

SCHEDR

You didn't finish your supper.

A beat.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

A man never leaves anything on his plate.

Petr forces himself to chew food.

GIRL

Your son is very handsome.

SCHEDR

He's not my son.

The girl blushes but Schedr hardly notices her.

PETR

Petr was a real hero today. He
stood up for his father.

PETR (cont'd)

Did that boy really hurt my father?

SCHEDR

He admitted it, didn't he?

GIRL

What did Petr do?

SCHEDR

He shot him. One bullet right to
the head.

The girl shrinks back horrified. Petr rises from the table.

PETR

Permission to retire.

SCHEDR

Permission granted.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

The room has been dressed to resemble the infirmary. WOMEN in
scrubs hold up trays with medicine.

HANNA

(into bullhorn)

Places everyone. Quiet in the
studio. Roll sound. And action!

The women distribute medicine.

Zev is the first to spot Victor as he limps through the door supported by a crutch. Some of the actors notice him too and momentarily break character.

VICTOR(O.S.)
Sorry for interrupting.

Hanna runs to Victor. GUARDS step up but Zev intervenes.

ZEV
Have a heart.

INT. LATRINES - NIGHT

Zev, Victor, and others gather around a small transistor radio receiver.

ANNOUNCER
After a day of intense fighting,
the 47th Soviet Army has advanced
to Zhytomyr, eighty miles West of
Kyev...

Stephan runs into the latrines.

STEPHAN
The guard is changing. Quick!

Within seconds, the radio is wrapped in rags and buried.

ZEV
Zhytomyr, brother. Zhytomyr.

Stephan and Zev warmly shake hands.

VICTOR
We need to get back to the Block.

The inmates quickly abandon the latrines.

INT. C-BLOCK - DAY

Bruden leads Schedr through the barracks. The inmates stand at attention.

SCHEDR

The camp looks too crowded. I don't want these inspectors to get the idea that we're crowding people.

BRUDEN

With all due respect, sir, where do you want them moved? All of our reserve facilities are over capacity-

SCHEDR

Don't you have ways to dispose of them?

BRUDEN

We're talking about over seventy thousand people. Even if we run all three chambers around the clock-

SCHEDR

Get a freight train. Ship the rest to another camp. I'll file the paperwork.

Schedr runs his finger over the surface of a cot. Looks at the dirt left on his finger tip.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

And get this place dusted. My sinuses are firing like mad.

INT. STUDIO - (SEVERAL DAYS LATER)

Victor enters the studio and finds Zev seated at the window. He can't help but notice the massive freight trains parked out in the yard.

ZEV

They arrived this morning. There are rumors they will relocate the population.

VICTOR

Relocate them where?

ZEV

(shrugs)

Another camp?

VICTOR

And us?

ZEV

That's what I should be asking you.

EXT. YARD - MORNING

The population of the C-Block looks even more miserable in daylight. Haggard, malnourished, gray, bruised, hunched over - a hundred men with vacant eyes.

Schedr walks out before the assembly. He is escorted by Petr.

SCHEDR

You may have heard rumors that the Wehrmacht have suffered setbacks on the Eastern front. Let me assure you that these rumors are completely groundless.

He takes a pause.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

These lies have been perpetrated by the Allied press. They are afraid to admit to the public that they are losing the war. To celebrate the tireless efforts of our courageous troops you will receive two rations for lunch today.

There are whispers in the population.

INT. STUDIO - EVENING

The crew is preparing to film. Rebecca helps Hanna with makeup.

REBECCA

Is it true they are evacuating?

HANNA

They won't take us.

REBECCA

What do you think they'll do to us after the Red Cross people leave?

HANNA

(anxious)

I don't know. Maybe put us back with the others. Maybe let us go.

REBECCA

Ask your husband. He knows. They've shut down all the chambers except the one in the East Wing. Do you think they left it open for us? Do you think that after we're done entertaining the Red Cross- That they-

HANNA

They won't. They won't.

Victor steps through the door.

VICTOR

We are ready for you.

Hanna turns abruptly. Her eyes glazed over tears.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Hanna?

HANNA
I'll be right there.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - EVENING

Schedr and Petr sit side by side in the dark. Victor stands awkwardly behind them. The footage of Hanna dancing flashes on the screen.

SCHEDR
Has the excursion route been
finalized?

Victor unravels blueprints of the camp.

VICTOR
The delegates will be brought
through the main gates.

EXT. MAIN GATES - DAY

A great mass of people work to renovate the camp. Dozens of prisoners sweep the sidewalks. Ornaments are being hung from lampposts.

VICTOR (O.S.)
They will be greeted with a parade.
The elders will present the
delegates with bread and salt.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Schedr lights a cigarette.

SCHEDR
I don't want them coming anywhere
near the East Wing.

VICTOR
We'll take them along the north
delivery route. We've created an
area of shops and cafes.

EXT. YARD - CONTINUOUS

A group of inmates amass a large sign reading "Schule" to the roof of the A-Block. Bruden yells instructions to Kapos.

VICTOR (O.S.)

They will visit a literacy school.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

SCHEDR

Marvelous. I expect they'll want to look at living quarters.

VICTOR

Rooms have been especially prepared.

INT. C-BLOCK - CONTINUOUS

Inmates move bunks out of the C-Block. Another group of inmates installs dividers.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

SCHEDR

How long are we expecting the excursion to last?

VICTOR

There's a four hour program with a lunch break in the middle.

SCHEDR

Excellent. You have done a tremendous job, Herr Director. Perhaps, when this is all over, there still might be a career for you in Berlin.

VICTOR

Thank you, sir.

Victor and Petr exchange a glance, but the boy quickly averts his eyes.

INT. STUDIO - EVENING

The GUARD chats with Rebecca in the corner of the studio. Hanna walks behind him without making a sound and while he's turned away, disappears into the dark room.

INT. STUDIO - EVENING

Victor walks through the studio. Zev removes stage decorations into a large box.

VICTOR

Have you seen Hanna?

Zev shakes his head "no".

INT. DARK ROOM - SAME

Hanna spins around when he hears the door open.

VICTOR

It's me. What are you doing here?

HANNA

Nothing. Just wanted checking
footage.

Victor rearranges the strips of film on the editing desk.

VICTOR

What are these?

Victor holds a strip of film to the light: a Kapo is captured in the frame.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Have you completely lost your mind?

HANNA

Keep your voice down.

VICTOR

Do you really think the British and the Americans are going to storm these walls and save us? Wake up! The world has abandoned us.

HANNA

This is proof- Proof of what they've done. Schedr-

VICTOR

Schedr holds our lives in his hands. Yours. Mine. The life of your son. We live and die at his whim. Our job is to survive.

The door creaks open. Victor and Hanna whip around. Bruden steps in.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Please. Shut the door. You'll ruin the film.

Bruden proceeds deeper into the room. Victor hides the footage in the clutch of his hand.

BRUDEN

What have you been doing here?

VICTOR

She's helping me edit the film.

BRUDEN

Get this footage ready. The Captain would like to screen it again. And hurry up.

Victor and Hanna stand at attention and won't look up at one another.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

The actors are assembled on the makeshift bleachers. Everyone is dressed in civilian clothes. The perfect illusion.

Kids with ribbons in their hair. They wave to the athletes below. Women blow kisses.

Victor speaks into a bullhorn.

VICTOR

Great! Your team is winning. It's a sunny day. It's summer. You are spending the afternoon at the stadium with your kids. Show me how happy you are!

The CAMERA aptures the artificial excitement.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Good. More. Happier.

Zev taps Victor on the shoulder. Schedr walk across the field followed by Petr.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Cut!

Schedr marches up to the camera platform. Victor climbs down to meet him.

SCHEDR

Don't stop on my account. I simply wanted to check in on your progress. Maybe see some dancing.

VICTOR

Certainly, sir. I'll get the dancers ready.

SCHEDR

Marvelous.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Schedr and Petr are handed chairs. They sit down before the lit up stage.

Hanna freezes up when she sees Petr and Schedr sit side by side. Victor puts his hand one her shoulders.

VICTOR

It will be fine. You can tell that
he's safe. Arms and legs still
attached. We'll have him back soon.

Hanna steps toward the stage.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Quiet in the studio.

Hanna closes her eyes.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Roll sound.

All becomes still. Hanna's whole body tenses as she prepares
for the performance.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Action!

Hanna dances. As before, she gives her performance all she's
got. But she's been fed, rehabilitated and tended. Now she's
in full form.

For a few minutes, we get lost in the elegant choreography of
her movements when, suddenly, she yelps and falls to her
knees.

Victor abandons the camera and rushes over to Hanna - other
dancers and crew gather around her. Victor inspects her
ankle.

VICTOR (cont'd)

Is it broken?

HANNA

I don't think so.

VICTOR

Lean on me.

Petr rises instinctively but Schedr holds him back.

SCHEDR

Is the performer intact?

VICTOR

I think it's just a sprain on her ankle. She needs a bit of rest and she'll be as good as new.

SCHEDR

Replace her.

VICTOR

She's fine.

Schedr approaches Hanna.

SCHEDR

Get up!

Victor and Bruden pull Hanna to her feet.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Walk from here to the edge of the stage.

Victor supports Hanna.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

She can do it herself.

Hanna braces herself as she takes the first step. The pain is excruciating but she buries it.

VICTOR

See, she can walk fine. Just needs a bit of rest.

Hanna's knees fold beneath her. Zev jumps up to catch her.

SCHEDR

Put her back in the common area with the others.

VICTOR

That's not necessary. We don't need her to dance. There are other roles.

SCHEDR

My father used to say - never bet
on a crippled mare.

Schedr turns to Bruden.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Get Herr Director another
ballerina.

Schder pulls Petr by the hand.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Come on, boy.

Petr won't budge. His eyes glued to Hanna.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

I said come on!

Schedr drags Petr after him.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Armed guards load Hanna onto a back of a truck.

Victor keeps a twenty meter distance. He runs to Hanna but a
guard slams a club into his back. Victor falls. He is beaten
as he watches Hanna driven away.

BRUDEN

That's enough. Back inside.

Victor's hands clutch into fists. He walks past Bruden into
the studio.

INT. DARK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Victor shuts the door behind him. He sits in the corner and
hides his face in the palms of his hands.

INT. DARK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Victor sits on the floor in the dark. The room is in disarray. The door opens and Zev appears.

ZEV

You can't hide in here forever.

Victor walks past him and out of the room.

EXT. YARD - EVENING

Victor wanders through the yard. The camp looks just like a pretty German town. The transformation is complete. The perfect deception.

INT. DARK ROOM - NIGHT

Victor overturns the editing table. He digs his fingers in the table leg and extracts a tightly rolled up strip of film. He looks at the film roll for a long moment, then begins to unravel it.

EXT. YARD - DAY

The roar of the idling train. The doors of the cars are wide open. SOLDIERS run WOMEN aboard like cattle. Schedr, Petr and Bruden watch.

Hanna limps toward the train. Petr jumps to his feet.

PETR

Mama!

Hanna falls to the ground. A Kapo rises over her.

KAPO

Up!

He whips her with a nightstick as she crawls on all fours toward the train.

Petr bolts toward her, but Schedr drags him back.

PETR

Let go of me!

SCHEDR

Forget her! You have a new mother
now... And a new father.

PETR

You will never be my father. Never!

Schedr smacks him across the face. He motions Bruden to
approach.

SCHEDR

Put him in my office. I'll deal
with him later.

Bruden lifts Petr into the air and carries him, kicking and
screaming toward the villa.

Schedr towers over Hanna.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

That boy over there. He gets to eat
when he wants. He sleeps in a bed.
He wears clean clothes. You should
thank me.

HANNA

Never.

Kapos throw Hanna into the cattle cart. The doors are bolted.
On the side of the cart it reads: Auschwitz.

SCHEDR

Take them away.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Petr hammers on the door with his fists.

PETR

Let me out!

He overturns stacks of papers from the desk. He kicks the chair to the floor.

Then, through the window to the balcony, in the yard below he sees Victor. The boy and his father watch each other for a long moment.

INT/EXT. MONTAGE

The night descends upon the ghetto.

BLOCK

Women are crying. They are lighting candles. Others praying.

DARK ROOM

Victor watches the footage on the wall in silence - the artificial life he's created where everyone is happy and cheerful and never get sick.

OFFICE

Petr lays on the floor in a sea of papers. He ruffles through the papers and stuffs a few documents under his shirt. Among the mess he finds a letter opener and conceals it in his boot.

APARTMENT

Schedr makes love to the Czech girl.

DARK ROOM

The footage of Hanna dancing comes on the projector. Her shadow glides over the wall gracefully. Victor turns the projector off. He sits in the dark staring at the wall.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - MORNING

Petr crouches in the corner. He hears the key turn.

Schedr steps through the door.

SCHEDR

Look at the mess you made! I ought to punish you, but I'm a reasonable man. You have my forgiveness.

Petr stares at the floor.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Look at me! Are you going to behave?

Petr nods.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

Come on. We have a big day ahead of us.

Schedr leads Petr out of the office ruffling his hair.

INT. YARD - DAY

The cast and crew gather around Schedr.

SCHEDR

Today is the day we've all worked so hard for. You have helped transform this place and you will be rewarded. After today we will put the difficult days of war behind us. You will be reunited with your families. You will be given an allowance in a new town we've built for you. There you will be free to seek work and settle with your loved ones. You will no longer be prisoners but free men.

The audience cheers.

SCHEDR (cont'd)

How do they say in show business?
Break a leg!

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

Schedr, Radomski, Bruden dressed in their parade uniforms watch a small airplane promenade over the runway and touch down on the runway.

RADOMSKI

Is everything ready, captain?

SCHEDR

Everything is to the highest standards.

He smiles through his teeth as the delegates appear from the plane walking up the runway.

Bruden gives the command to the orchestra behind their backs.

The band begins to play a march. Boys sing as the DELEGATES step off the plane.

COMMISSIONER ROSSEL - an elderly man with a white beard walks ahead of his entourage.

INSPECTOR MONROE - the commissioner's young aide follows closely behind.

Radomski warmly shakes Rossel's hand.

RADOMSKI

Did you have a good flight.

Schedr and Radomski feign laughter. Monroe admires the singing children.

MONROE

Can't imagine getting my daughters to stand that still.

SCHEDR

We place special emphasis on discipline.

ROSSEL

I hope you are not disciplining them too hard.

He smiles at the choir leader - the gentle kind smile of an elderly sage. Bruden's shadow grows over the girl and she suppresses her excitement.

BRUDEN

Allow me to escort you to your
vehicle, sir.

INT. CAMP - DAY

A cavalcade of black limos rolls through the main gates passing under a banner: Arbeit Macht Frei.

A marching band walks ahead of the equipage. The main road is dressed for a parade. Banners flutter from light posts.

INMATES, dressed in their civilian costumes, crowd on both sides of the street with flags. They hold children on their shoulders to see over the crowd.

INT. LIMO - SAME

Rossel stares out of the window at the parade. Soldiers line up along the sidewalks to barricade the crowd.

ROSSEL

You didn't have to go through all
this trouble on our accord.

RADOMSKI

The natives are just excited. They
wanted to show their appreciation.

EXT. SQUARE - SAME

The car stops in the middle of the square. The driver holds the door for Rossel as he emerges from the car. He's met with wild applause from the crowd.

Felix approaches the car carrying bread and salt.

FELIX

On behalf of the people of
Haftlager, I would like to present
you with this bread.

Rossel accepts the large slab of bread.

SCHEDR

You must taste it, Commissioner.
That's their tradition.

Rossel breaks a piece of the bread. Dips it in the salt. The
crowd applauds.

ROSSEL

Although our tour has only just
begun, this seems to be one of the
best operated camps I have had the
privilege to see.

SCHEDR

We're honored to have you with us,
sir.

INT. CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

The Inspectors are led through the camp corridors. But now we
barely recognize them. They are brightly lit, dressed with
ornaments, banners and decorations.

SCHEDR

And this is where the population
works.

Monroe unfolds a small map.

MONROE

According to the plan of the fort -
there is a large section in the
east that we haven't seen yet.

SCHEDR

It's being renovated. We don't
currently use it.

MONROE

Could we look it?

SCHEDR

I'm afraid it's closed off. With the ongoing construction, it may not be safe.

MONROE

I'm willing to take my chances.

SCHEDR

The people prepared a wonderful performance. We should proceed.

(checks watch)

Lunch should be starting soon.

Rossel steps forward.

ROSSEL

Let us proceed.

Leading by example, he draws the inspectors after Schedr.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

The dressing room is draped in shadows. Only the makeup table is brightly lit.

From somewhere beyond the walls arrive the sounds of the orchestra. Victor prepares for his entrance. Slow and deliberate like a religious ritual.

VICTOR

(vocal warm up)

What a to-do to die today at a minute or two to two.

A bit of mascara to add depth to the eyes. Foundations to hide the wrinkles. A fake moustache.

VICTOR (cont'd)

A thing distinctly hard to say but harder still to do.

Hands flip through a clothing rack. Past the tuxedo, the flannel jacket, the business suit. Then, a series of uniforms: infantry, artillery, cavalry... to finally settle on a white ceremonial gown of a naval officer.

VICTOR (cont'd)

They'll beat a tattoo at twenty to two. Ratatat- tatatat- tatatatoo.

The silver links of the uniform are buttoned. The Medal of Valor pinned to the breast pocket - the final detail in the actor's careful disguise.

VICTOR (CONT'D) (cont'd)

What a to-do to die today at a minute or two to two, at a minute or two to two.

Victor steps back to admire his character. A decorated war hero stares back at him from the mirror.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

The delegates are seated behind a long table. It is covered with all sorts of delicacies.

There are other parties at the tables around them. Actors dressed like local patrons. A young couple dances on the dance floor. We recognize Maria and the Pole.

COMMISSIONER

The food is delightful.

Waiters hover over the tables with trays.

WAITER

I'll be sure to send your complements to the chef.

A waitress drops her tray. The head waiter is about to strike her, but Bruden catches his hand midair.

MONROE

I could've sworn that the waiter
was about to strike this woman.

RADOMSKI

I'm sure you are mistaken, sir. I
believe Victor Levin is about to
perform.

Victor appears on stage. The orchestra transitions into a
fast rendition of "Die Moritat von Mackie Messer".

VICTOR

Und der Haifisch, der hat Zähne Und
die trägt er im Gesicht
Und MacHeath, der hat ein Messer
Doch das Messer sieht man nicht

Other members of the cast join him on the stage. Fast jazz
fills the theater.

The commissioner taps his foot to the beat. Radomski and
Schedr exchange relieved glances.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Radomski addresses the members of the commission.

RADOMSKI

Over the course of the last weeks
Victor Levin and his wonderful crew
have filmed a documentary to show
you a bit more of their day to day
lives here in Haftlager.

The projector starts running behind his back. The film
flickers on screen. Images of peace - Jews working in the
garden - in the sawing factory...

Before us flash images we've watched carefully constructed by
Victor and his crew.

These are images of peace. Images of a different life. A life that never really existed, except through the lens of the camera.

Petr watches the film in the dark theater.

ON SCREEN

Hanna dances. The last footage of her flickering before his eyes. How she dances with abandonment to the sad melody of a violin.

Petr nudges Schedr.

PETR

May I be excused.

Schedr turns to Bruden.

SCHEDR

Accompany him.

Bruden leads Petr out of the theater.

INT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

The Red Cross watches the documentary.

- A chorus of children performs a heavenly melody.
- A woman works in the garden.
- An artist building a statue in a mezzanine.
- A soccer game.

EXT. COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

Bruden leads Petr out of the compound. They turn toward the bathroom when suddenly Petr stabs Bruden in the foot with a letter opener.

Bruden falls down in pain. Petr doesn't lose a second. He dashes across the yard and disappears behind the corner.

INT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

The footage plays on screen. Bruden limps into the theater. He crosses down to Schedr and whispers in his ear.

BRUDEN

The child has escaped.

Schedr rises from this seat. He motions Bruden to follow.

ROSSEL

Anything wrong, captain?

SCHEDR

If you would excuse us a moment.

He exits the theater.

INT. YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Bruden stands with his head bowed. Schedr smokes.

SCHEDR

Find him! Bring him to me! And do it fast by all means! I don't want any more surprises.

BRUDEN

You don't have to worry. He couldn't have gotten far.

SCHEDR

And Bruden...

BRUDEN

Yes, sir?

SCHEDR

I don't want him hurt, do you understand?

INT. THEATER

The projectors projects onto the screen. The actors pray in the fake synagogue... when abruptly the theater goes dark...

Before us FLASH IMAGES. Different images. Kapos escort inmates out of a heavily guarded building. The camera pans at a large chimney spewing black smoke into the sky.

THEATER

Bruden enters the room. Sees the images flashing on screen. He limps out of the theater...

SCREEN

NEW IMAGES EMERGE. A group of naked prisoners huddle in the middle of the yard. Rapid machine gun fire catches them off guard. One by one they fall to the ground in convulsions...

HALLWAY

Bruden climbs to the second floor. Goes through a narrow hallway into the projection room. It's locked...

SCREEN

A brigade of workers transport the dead bodies onto the back of a truck...

HALLWAY

Bruden takes out his gun and shoots at the door.

He kicks it open and enters the room. Zev stands by the projector. Bruden shoots him three times in the chest.

Zev convulses on the ground as Bruden leaps to the projector. He rips the film out and the projector sputters to a stop.

INT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Rossel rises in shock.

ROSSEL

What is the meaning of this?

RADOMSKI

This footage is not from our camp!

ROSSEL

By the authority of the League of Nations I ask that this camp is immediately placed under ICRC jurisdiction.

RADOMSKI

Let's get back to town and we'll get to the bottom of this.

Rossel turns to the inspectors.

ROSSEL

We're leaving.

The inspectors urgently walks toward the exit. They get in their vehicles.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Radomski and Schedr ride in their own car.

SCHEDR

Jürgen, listen to me.

RADOMSKI

Address me by my full rank,
Captain.

INT. RUNWAY - EVENING

Rossel addresses Radomski as the plane revs behind him.

ROSSEL

We will see each other again,
Chancellor.

RADOMSKI

Please, Commissioner. This is sabotage. Isn't that obvious?

ROSSEL

You can be sure that we will launch a full investigation.

The inspectors board the plane when...

Petr appears out of nowhere bolting to the plane. Bruden raises his weapon.

SCHEDR

Put it away!

Petr runs into Rossel's arms.

PETR

Help me! Take me with you!

Rossel shields the boy in his arms. He signals to Monroe.

ROSSEL

Get him on the plane.

Schedr yells over the roar of the engine.

SCHEDR

That child is a dissident. He's an ungrateful liar!

Rossel boards the plane without looking back.

INT. STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Schedr paces before the actors.

SCHEDR

You've failed and now you will pay for your failure.

Victor steps forward defiantly.

VICTOR

You are going to kill us? We are
already dead. We died the moment we
entered this place. All you can do
now is set us free.

Schedr gestures to Bruden.

SCHEDR

Dispose of them.

Schedr marches out of the room.

INT. CHAMBERS - LATER

The actors stand at the entrance of the chamber. Victor,
Stephan, Rebecca - other members of the cast are brought into
a windowless room.

BRUDEN

Remove your clothes. Place them in
the bins and line up.

Two Kapos in rubber suits check the numbers on their arms.
There are the very last numbers remaining on the lists.

A stroke through 416451. A stroke through 318426.

Stephan begins to sob.

VICTOR

Have dignity.

INT. CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Victor walks into the chamber. Rebecca places a small object
into his hand - Hanna's wedding ring.

Victor clutches it in his fist as they enter the chamber.

INT. PLANE - MOMENTS LATER

Monroe hands Petr a cup of steaming tea.

MONROE

Drink this, son.

Petr accepts gratefully. Rossel inspects crumpled records through a magnifying glass.

MONROE (cont'd)

You think it's genuine, sir?

ROSSEL

I want an investigative committee assembled at once.

PETR

Will you help my father?

ROSSEL

I will do everything I can, son.

INT. HAFTLAGER - DAY

Schedr spies on the office bustle through the venetian blinds of his office. Records are being destroyed. Desks emptied.

Schedr shuts the blinds. Locks the door. Seated at his desk, he removes the lid from his inkwell and lays out a clean sheet of paper...

INT. HOTEL ROOM. GENEVA - DAY

Petr closes the window. Locks the door.

Petr sits on the floor. Lays out a scrap of paper and licks the tip of his pencil...

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The fountain pen leaves cursive words on the powdered page.

SCHEDR (V.O.)

Dear Fuhrer,

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The pencil scribbles in messy capital letters.

PETR (V.O.)

Dear mama and papa,

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

SCHEDR (V.O.)

Please consider my resignation from
the position of the Commandant of
Haftlager.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

PETR (V.O.)

The commissioner and his wife have
been very kind. We keep fighting. I
pray for you every day.

INT. EMPTY CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

An armored truck rolls through Prague. German soldiers pass
cigarettes as they ride through the empty city.

SCHEDR (V.O.)

When we first entered Prague, we
met with complete cooperation.

A massive explosion sends the truck flying into the air.

SCHEDR

Currently, matters are no longer
so.

INT. FACTORY - CONTINUOUS

Laborers work the assembly line.

PETR (V.O.)

We wait for the Soviets everyday.

With the corner of their eyes, the workers watch the GERMAN SUPERVISOR, rifle in hand, walking between the rows.

INT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

School children sit properly behind desks reading in unison.

SCHEDR (V.O.)

Our propaganda program fails to
contain the upheaval of the people.

INT. STORE - CONTINUOUS

A German soldier receives his purchases from a clerk.

PETR (V.O.)

They moved curfew by an hour. On
Sunday they give out more food.

The soldier passes a breadline of poor haggard people waiting to approach another counter.

SCHEDR (V.O.)

Attempts to create the illusion of
peacetime remain unsuccessful.

The breadline drags into the street, across the intersection, onto another street, on and on, endlessly...

EXT. MARKET PLACE - CONTINUOUS

A German Soldier walks by a group of Czech laborers.

PETR (V.O.)

They try to hide it, but we all
know they are losing the war.

The Czech stare deadpan. The soldier pulls a brave face, grips the strap of his rifle tighter and quickens his pace.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

SCHEDR (V.O.)

I feel I've not met the
responsibilities entrusted on me.
Respectfully, Captain Claus Schder.

Schedr seals the letter with an official stamp.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

PETR (V.O.)

Your son, Petr.

Petr signs the letter. He folds it neatly and seals it in an envelope.

INT. CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

The last image we see of Victor and his troupe is when they huddle together naked in the centre of the chamber in the column of light left by the open door.

BRUDEN

Close the chamber.

The door is shut. The room plunges into darkness.

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Schedr shoves the gun in his mouth...

INT. CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

The sound of the gas seeping through the air ducts in the ceiling.

We hear the raspy breathing of the condemned as they courageously greet death.

And Victor, wide open eyes and a vacant stare...

INT. SCHEDR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Schedr pulls the trigger.

INT. CINEMA. GENEVA. 1945 - EVENING

Sold out theater. Five hundred eyes are hypnotized by -

SILVER SCREEN

Victor Levin climbs into a limo. In the doorway of the hotel,
Hanna Levin cries into a handkerchief.

HANNA

Will I ever see you again?

Victor holds out his hand to Hanna.

VICTOR

Don't you forget me, kiddo.

THEATER

The audience delivers a standing ovation. Petr claps the
loudest.

SCREEN

The limo stops. Hanna runs to Victor. The frame fades into a
heart around them.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END

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