April 11th one day before launch

 I am starting to rethink this, why would I sign up to become the first man in space I thought. I woke up and was greeted by my bodyguards. “Good morning!” I muffled,  “Good morning” the guard said in a strict voice with a strong accent.

 This is like a suicide mission. Why why why why? I might not see my family again, I might not see anything else again. It is time for breakfast. Many guards walk through the door to escort me out because I am the only Russian that has been trained for this. I started to make my journey to the cafeteria, the only thing I can think of is why, why, why? Why wouldn’t I just keep my job as a military pilot or a steelworker? I just can't stop thinking about it. I see the doors to the cafeteria.

 Why why why? I walk to one of the chairs and sit down. A guard asks me what I want to eat from the menu and I say “cereal please” I have to keep an empty stomach so the rocket doesn't break considering a three-kilogram difference can kill me slowly over time and I’ll need to either drop something off or come back to the ground and pray it won't be a crash landing. I also need to have a good appetite because I will be the first man in space to eat.

Why and why and why? My thoughts came back to me. This is not even the day of launch, I still have a day to live. I need to go to my last test back on the ground. The machine spun and spun up and down, I felt my guts fly around my body. But I am fine, I was trained for this.  One of the scientists said that the engineers will make sure I will not die, even if the mission is a failure he insisted I will live. I still have concerns but it made me feel better that he tried at least. The USSR wouldn’t even let me off, they are super strict and wouldn’t want to waste more then a year of training. The guards let me off of the training machine and walked me back to my room, I have until the end of the day to just think about my thoughts and rest.

Why and why and why? I started thinking about my childhood and the day I witnessed the Yak fighter plane make a force landing in the field near our home. It was just returning from the battle and its wings were all bullet-ridden. I was extremely surprised when the pilots emerged from the plane covered in  medals. People kept asking him about the battle and who he thought was going to win. He was very calm and collected, answered all the questions and only then left to the military airfield.

I was thinking about my school teachers, you know, I always liked math and science and that’s probably why I am interested in space and engineering. The other reason is that I have read a lot of books by my favorite writer was the Russian rocket pioneer Konstantin Tsiolkovsky.

I send a letter to my mom and dad, the letter reads :

Dear mother and father,

Hi, it's me, Yuri. I have been thinking of why I was selected for the training. Like, am I special? I really do not think I am, this was such an opportunity even though I am gonna go on a suicide mission basically. I really do not wanna leave you alone without me, I just do not know what I can expect. I really hope that it won’t end in a bad way. Like why on earth would I not die, like would they care, or will they just remake the rocket and fix the flaws.

Am I that important? I already have a lot of success with my plane testing career but is this really what I want. Sing up for suicide and pray I will survive. Are money and fame really worth that much? Anyways even if you do read this letter and send one back. I will only be able to read it after my flight. Or I will not be able to read it anyways. I just want to be alive, live a normal life but I sucked myself into this.

How is Zoya doing? She always thought I can do it and I did too, she made me not make dumb decisions and helped me out through life. She was like my voice of reason. Even if we did fight sometimes. Tell her I am sorry and that I will never forget how important she was to shape me into how I am.

And Boris, that guy always makes me laugh, he always manages to make my mood better even if I am an adult now, I just love you guys and I want to be with you guys, you are my dearest family, the people I know the most and the most important to me. If I die my one wish is for you guys to live a happy life and do not suffer for me, I will be ok, I will always help and watch you from above no matter when I die!

Your son,

Yuri

Why am I doing this? Why am I going into the space inside the tin can? Well, it all started after World War II when the USSR and the USA started the space race. The USA has technological advantage because they savage most of the German technologies and Engineers who build V-2 rockets, the first rocket which went into space. The Germans bombed London with those but they were not very good weaponry and did not do much damage. German Engineers and technologies helped Americans start their own space program.

Russians on the other hand could get only parts of the V-2 and need to work a lot to recreate the technology. They managed to create reliable rockets and launched the first artificial satellite, SPUTNIK 1, in October 1957. Sputnik orbited the earth and transmitted radio signals for more than twenty days before it had burned up in the earth’s atmosphere.

Next month November 1957 a second satellite was launched by Russians, SPUTNIK 2, and it was carrying the first animal in space, a dog named Laika, unfortunately it could not make it back to the earth alive. In May 1958 they launched the third satellite, SPUTNIK III, it weighed about one thousand kilograms. Finally in 1959 they sent the first space probe to photograph the dark side of the moon.

All these technological achievements set off alarm for Americans and created intense fear and anxiety among the public because Russians way surpassed the Americans at that point. The National Aeronautics and Space Administrations (NASA) was created in October 1958 as an agency financed by the federal government and the primary responsibility of that agency was the development of civilian aerospace research.

NASA was the attempt to concentrate effort and humans mostly scientists and engineers who were interested in space exploration and had knowledge of aerospace technology. Their immediate goal was to launch a manned vehicle into Earth’s orbit as soon as possible.

But what about Russians, obviously they kept developing their aerospace technology and in August 1960 they launched  SPUTNIK 5. It was hosted by two dogs, Belka and Strelka who were the first leaving creatures to safely come back to the earth from space. They are probably the two most popular animals in the history of humankind. But they were not alone on that flight, a grey rabbit, 42 mice, two rats, flies and several plants and fungi accompanied them for one day in earth’s orbit.

The chief engineer came to see me for the last time before the start, he built that rocket and this might be the last time we actually see each other.