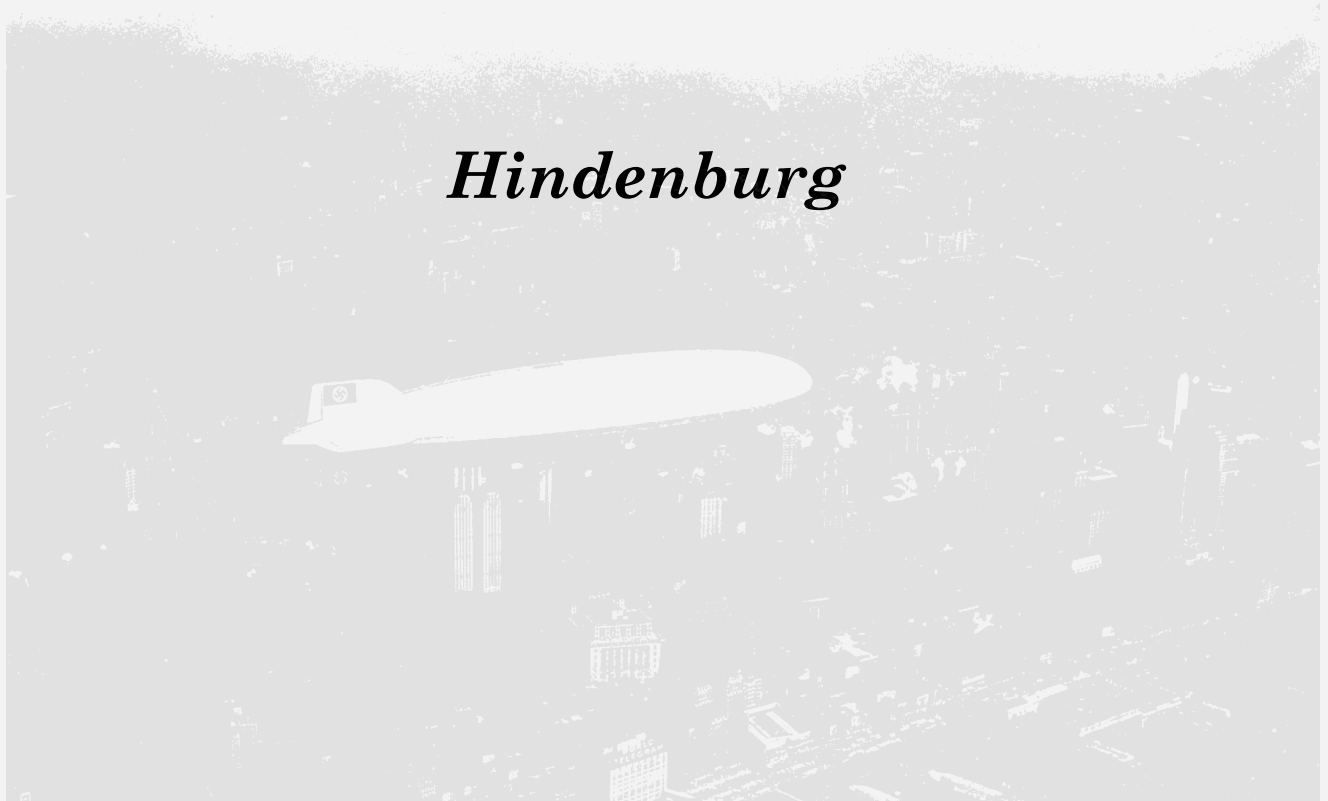


Hindenburg



FADE IN:

FRAME FILLS WITH BLUE - GREY FOG.
A low SWELLING ORCHESTRAL TONE builds. Grand. Proud.
Larger than life.

CREDITS ROLL OVER INTO BLACK.

The sound of a DISTANT CROWD begins to bleed beneath. Voices and
movement - anything with a pulse.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FRANKFURT, GERMANY AIRFIELD - DAY

Ground level. Polished leather boots move through packed dirt.
Worn soles. A CHILD cranes their neck upward. VENDORS call out
over one another.

VENDOR
Fresh bread! Fresh bread!

VENDOR #2 (O.S)
Bienenstich! Lebkuchen! Bienenstich!

Coins exchange. A woman wipes sugar from her child's mouth.
Beyond them - Groups of wealth and luxury. Mink coats. Fox
scarves. Statued postures. Nazi militia move through the crowd
with quiet authority.

Red arm bands centered by a black swastika. Flags hang overhead.
Hot air balloons fill the sky. A low mechanical HUM cuts through
everything. More heads tilt upward. A large shadow stretches
over the horde of joyous people. Then -

The LZ 129 HINDENBURG enters frame.

Massive and Still. Unnatural against the holy sky. It simply
floats above them. The crowd watches. Most cheering, others
frightened. Observing. REPORTERS. CAMERA FLASHES. A spectacle.

CUT TO:

INT. PRIVATE AUTOMOBILE - PARKED NEAR AIRFIELD

Curtains drawn. Muted sunlight peeks through blue velvet lining. MAXIMILIAN REINHART(late 40s) leans back against expensive leather. Shirt open. Tie loose around his neck. A silver tray balanced on the seat beside him. Cocaine in small mounds and thin lines. Streaks of powder under his runny nose. Lipstick smeared slightly around his mouth.

A YOUNG WOMAN between his legs. Maximilian watches her lazily while rolling a Reichsmark note between his fingers and snorts a line. He drops the tray over the young lady's head. Powder everywhere. Peering through the window curtain revealing the gargantuan Hindenburg behind the festive crowd.

CUT TO:

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - DAY

An endless sheet of blue. A well-sized family sailboat cuts through gentle swells. A FATHER trims a sail. His wife MARY(30s) reads a newspaper. Their son THOMAS(12) sits near the bow fishing. A shadow rolls over the ocean's surface and over the boat. The boy looks up - he sees it. Hovering down into the clouds and onto the fairgrounds. The child drops his fishing rod into the water.

BOY

What is that?

Mary lowers the newspaper. She falls out of her chair. Calls to her husband.

MARY

Otto!?

Her scared voice startles Otto, he loses balance from the turning sailboat and falls overboard. Mary screams for her

husband. He bobs up from the ocean water unscathed. Staring at the chrome oval in the sky.

MARY (CONT'D)
(yelling)
OTTO?! OTTO!?

Thomas waves at the Hindenburg in the far distance.

OTTO
(from the water)
I'm alright...could be those damn aliens "Well's" wrote about.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOARDING AREA

Controlled movement now. Lines of passengers, many languages overlap. A flow of people entering via a retractable gangway staircase led from the ground into the belly of the airship. The crowd funnels upward. Documents checked quickly by GATE AGENTS.

Through the horde - FRITZ and ILSE NEUMANN(early 20's). Hand in hand. Their clothes are neat but slightly behind the fashions around them. Fritz rehearses English. Ilse listens while watching everyone around them as they inch closer towards the airship.

FRITZ
(rough English)
Vis-vis-visit-Visiting?

ILSE
(in German)
That's it.

Fritz nods. They continue. A GATE AGENT blocks their path.

GATE AGENT
(in French)
Papers.

Fritz collects Ilse's papers from her hand before relinquishing them to the agent.

GATE AGENT (CONT'D)
Reason for traveling to the U.S.?

FRITZ
(rough English)
Just visiting.

The agent offers measured glances at the two. A second longer than necessary. Before - HARD PRESS STAMP.

GATE AGENT (CONT'D)
B-24. Welcome aboard.

INT. HINDENBURG - BOARDING CORRIDOR

They move into the zeppelin. The all encompassing shadow towers over them. Yips and cheers from outside are quickly vacuumed away as the couple make their way through the crowd, Ilse rubs her forearm sleeve. Disappearing into the lake of moving bodies.

CUT TO:

INT. HINDENBURG - PROMENADE WALKWAY

Long windows stretch across the sides of the ship. A little boy presses both hands against the glass. His mother pulls him away by his hair. STEWARDS move about in white uniforms.

CUT TO:

INT. HINDENBURG - MAIN PASSENGER LOUNGE

Open. Elegant. Fine art and live music. Passengers disperse. A man with his back turned, cigarette between his lips. And an impressive mustache retrieves a lighter from his knapsack. Ignites. Footsteps approach him at brisk pace. A pale hand with forest green nail polish grabs his shoulder.

STEWARDESS

(Rough English, German accent)

Sir, If you would be so kind as to put that out.

STERLING WHITMAN turns. Briefcase in hand. He takes in the space. Adjusts his glasses slightly. The STEWARDESS extends a silver ashtray to him. He puts it out.

STEWARDESS

(rough English)

Your cabin, sir?

Whitman quickly fishes his ticket from his jacket's breast pocket.

WHITMAN

C-7

STEWARDESS

This way.

Whitman follows close behind. Spanish overheard. A Mexican family of five all wearing the fanciest attire aboard. Whitman mutters to himself as he disappears around the hall behind the stewardess.

CUT TO:

INT. HINDENBURG - SMOKING LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Dense cigar smoke layers the ceiling. Passengers drink and laugh behind sealed pressurized doors. Cards slapped against tables. A jazz record spins somewhere in the room.

INT. HINDENBURG - UPPER PASSENGER LOUNGE

Warm light pours through circular observation windows. Clouds drift beyond the thick glass as the airship rises from the fairgrounds.

INSERT: EXT. FRANKFURT - AIRFIELD

Dozens of families on the ground level watch in awe. A little girl with ice cream in hand sits over her father's shoulders. The monolithic oval makes her cry. Spilling her ice cream on her father's head.

INT. HINDENBURG - WRITING ROOM - DAY

Quiet. Near empty. Small desks fixed beneath narrow windows. Few passengers writing postcards and letters. One man reads a newspaper detailing the rise of Nazi Germany. Another sketches clouds drifting outside.

INT HINDENBURG - UPPER PASSENGER LOUNGE

Wealthy passengers settle into chairs with velvet lining. Champagne pours. Glasses clink. A LACKEY wheels a serving cart through the aisle. At the far end of the lounge - a small crowd already formed. Circled around one individual hidden amongst the cluster of bodies. The crowd parts -

MAXIMILIAN REINHARDT sits at the center. Dark suit. Sharp cheekbones. Handsome in a deteriorating sort of way. The kind of face that should be on posters. A half empty glass of champagne hangs from between his fingers.

MAXIMILIAN

(in German)

I told the producer to his face - if you don't have the balls to make my picture, you're no better than a woman with two mouths.

The surrounding passengers amongst him laugh. A REPORTER scribbles in a notepad.

REPORTER

And is your picture forthcoming? Mr. Reinhardt.

Maximilian smiles, a wide smile.

MAXIMILIAN

(continues in German)

My films are like war. Always forthcoming. Yet somehow beautiful
in the remains of its wake.

He notices a woman nearby. The same woman from before he
boarded. Hard eye contact as she moves on.

REPORTER

War is beautiful?

MAXIMILIAN (CONT'D)

(in rough english)

It is necessary. War is the juxtaposition of birth.

Ruby red nails run over his shoulders and onto his chest. A
woman kisses his cheek, takes his champagne glass for herself -
drinks.

INT. HINDENBURG - PASSENGER CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS - DAY

DECKHANDS move briskly - Captain MAX PRUSS (50s) walks with
measure alongside his wife HELENA PRUSS (40s). Beautiful. A well
practiced English speaker. A scar of displeasure across her
face. Max speaks to a DECKHAND walking opposite direction.

MAX PRUSS

(rough English)

Check hydrogen pressure in cells four through eight again. And
radio ground control on the weather bands before we reach
cruising altitudes. No surprises.

DECKHAND

Yes sir.

The deckhand hurries off. Helena adjusts Max's tie gently.

HELENA PRUSS

(English, German accent)

This thing's a noose. You've tightened it too much again.

MAX PRUSS

I prefer to breathe after we've landed.

A quick smile from her. She kisses his cheek. They continue down the corridor.

CUT TO:

INT. HINDENBURG - CABIN B-24

Fritz lays flat on the bunk. Hands folded over his chest. Eyes open. Ilse sits beside the small circular window looking outward. The enormous field below slowly shrinking. Neither speak. Ilse presses two fingers against the glass.

CUT TO:

INT. HINDENBURG - DINING HALL - NIGHT

Golden orbs wash light over polished walls and an assortment of wooden tables and expensive glassware. Chocolate fondue. Ice cream. Every kind of cake imaginable. Fancy German cuisine. Maximilian Reinhardt sits alone at a dining table.

Three empty champagne bottles adjacent, half eaten steak. Typewriter's keys being smashed by each press from his fingers. Surrounding passengers do their best to ignore. Across the dining hall-

Helena Pruss enters alone. Few heads turn subtly. Green silk dress. Emerald earrings catch low light. Maximilian notices her immediately. His written sentence dies halfway. Helena feels his eyes before she sees him. Then their eyes meet. Only for a moment. Helena disappears down the dining hall. Maximilian watches her disappear toward the observation lounge.

CUT TO:

INT. HINDENBURG - OBSERVATION DECK - NIGHT

Helena leans against an angled window. Floating over the abyss of cloud cover. She kisses the glass leaving a deep lipstick print. A farewell to the known. A reflection suddenly appears behind her in the window. KLAUS BAUER(40s) High ranking Nazi officer, his uniform absent tonight. Civilian attire.

HELENA
(in German)
Why did you come?

A beat.

KLAUS BAUER
(in German)
I didn't have a choice.

Another beat.

HELENA
Your wife's onboard. So are your children.

KLAUS
They wanted to be here...I read about the flight in the paper.

HELENA
That doesn't make you any less stupid.

KLAUS
I had to see you again Helena.

HELENA
Where are they?

KLAUS
Sleeping.

Brief silence between them. Helena finally looks at him.

HELENA
You shouldn't be here.

KLAUS
...I've missed you.

She slaps him across the face with all her strength, and walks out. Exiting through a door in the opposite end of the room Klaus looks to the window, wipes his face with a handkerchief.

CUT TO:

INT. HINDENBURG CABIN C-7 - NIGHT

A small red lamp flickers near the bunk. Whitman sits on the floor beneath the window. Briefcase open. Camera pieces spread carefully beside him. Several developed photographs hang from improvised clips along a thin wire. Photos: Passengers boarding. Crew movement. Security positions. Nazi officials. Fueling crews outside Frankfurt.

Whitman studies one photograph closely through a foldable magnifier. KNOCK. at the door. He freezes. Closes the magnifier. Another knock. Whitman reaches down his pant leg and begins rolling it up his thigh - long blade exposed.

MAID (O.S)
Evening service.

Whitman rolls his pant leg down. Moves to the door. Opens it a crack. The MAID stands outside with a tray. Coffee and three freshly baked chocolate chip cookies on a snack plate. Whitman smiles politely.

WHITMAN
Thank you.

She notices the camera equipment behind him.

STEWARDESS
Journalist?

WHITMAN
Trying to be.

Hands him the tray.

STEWARDESS

Most journalists onboard are already drunk.
Whitman peaks his head out the doorframe, glances down the empty corridor.

WHITMAN

I'll catch up eventually - have a goodnight.

The maid nods. She leaves. He watches her disappear. Then closes the door. Locks it.

CUT TO:

INT. HINDENBURG CABIN B-24 - NIGHT

Moonlight drifts inside, Fritz sits against the wall beside the lower bunk. Shirt unbuttoned. Ilse stands near the small sink washing her face. Wrapped in towels, she's just had a shower. Quiet between them. Comfortable. Fritz watches her reflection in the mirror. Her eyes catch his.

ILSE
(rough english)
What?

FRITZ
(in German)
Nothing.

She dries her face, walks to him.

ILSE
You staring at me?

FRITZ
No?

Ilse studies him for a moment. Wet strands of hair hanging against her cheek.

ILSE
You do it when you're nervous.

FRITZ

I'm not nervous.

Ilse

You peeled an orange for twenty minutes before we boarded.

FRITZ

It was a difficult orange.

Ilse stands over him. She bends forward - rubbing her nose against his.

ILSE

You remember our old apartment? And the old woman downstairs with her hellbound cats?

Fritz smiles.

FRITZ

Watched you throw a brick at them once.

ILSE

I would never hurt an animal. - I threw it at her.

They smile together. Sharing a long kiss. An abrupt KNOCK at the cabin door. Both freeze. Fritz stands - brushes Ilse behind him. A second KNOCK.

LUKAS ADLER(O.S)

(in German)

Hey. Hey. You disappeared on me. Open up!

Fritz glances toward Ilse.

FRITZ

A moment.

Fritz opens the door partially. LUKAS ADLER stands outside holding two small glasses and a half-empty bottle of schnapps. Fairly drunk, well dressed. He looks past Fritz immediately - confused.

LUKAS
(in German)
This isn't C-24?

FRITZ
No.

Lukas looks up and down the corridor trying to understand the layout. Fritz says nothing. Lukas notices Ilse behind him now. Immediately straightens himself. Embarrassed.

LUKAS
(in German)
Damnit - my friends are upstairs somewhere.

FRITZ
Downstairs - C deck is downstairs.

Lukas burps a drunk burp.

LUKAS
(in German)
I Was looking for the pool lounge earlier and somehow lost myself in the kitchen with the chocolate cakes.

Lukas falls out laughing. His cheeks are bright red - sweating now. Fritz looks back to Ilse and rolls his eyes.

FRITZ
Stairs are at the end of the corridor
(points his finger)
Left side.

Fritz slams the door.

CUT TO:

INT. HINDENBURG - DINING HALL - NIGHT

Abandoned tables covered in silverware and wine stained cloth. Helena sits alone near the edge of the room with a fresh piece

of carrot cake, reading Eugen Roth's *Ein Mensch*. The orchestra is slower now. The room is tired. A hand rests two cocktails on the table behind her book.

HELENA PRUSS

(English)

Do you enter every room like you own the place?

MAXIMILIAN REINHARDT (O.S)

(rough English)

Only when the mood calls for it.

He pushes a drink in her direction. She eyes it.

HELENA PRUSS

What's that?

MAXIMILIAN

(in German)

Poison.

That gets the faintest smile. Maximilian sits.

HELENA

You enjoy bothering strangers as well?

MAXIMILIAN

I enjoy people before they become disappointing.

A beat. Helena doesn't touch the drink.

HELENA

And how long does that usually take?

MAXIMILIAN

However long a woman like you has been sitting alone.

She closes her book. Across the room - Klaus Bauer watches from beside the orchestra. Out of Helena's view. His jaw tightening as Helena laughs quietly at something Maximilian says. A WAITER passes between them briefly. When Klaus looks again - Maximilian's hand now rests against the back of Helena's chair.

CUT TO:

INT. HINDENBURG - PROMENADE WALKWAY - NIGHT

Passengers drift quietly through the corridor in loose evening clothes and robes. Some drunk. Lukas Adler jumps down a flight of stairs carrying a silver cigarette case. Still flushed. He notices Fritz carrying an empty pitcher.

LUKAS
(to Fritz, broken English)
Hey! B-24.

He waves, approaches. Fritz stands in place.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
Found C deck.

FRITZ
Congratulations.

Lukas laughs through his nose. The ship creaks faintly around them.

LUKAS
Your woman looked ready to shoot me dead.

FRITZ
She's selective.

LUKAS
Smart woman.

Lukas opens the cigarette case. Offers two. Fritz hesitates. Then takes one.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
You smoke often?

FRITZ
When they're free.