

Sand Castle

by  
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Based on A Really Shitty Experience

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BLACK SCREEN:

We read:

*Here, Bullet.*

*If a body is what you want,*

*Then here is bone and gristle and flesh.*

--Brian Turner, Iraq War Vet

**Super: Based on a true story...**

Wind howls. Hummer engines whisper towards us. Closer. They're roaring now, about to smash through the screen.

FADE IN:

EXT. IRAQI DESERT-DAY

From the turret of a Humvee, an Iraqi village speeds by, surprisingly beautiful and picturesque.

PVT. MATTHEW OCRE, a baby-faced 19, rides in the turret with the M-249 MACHINE GUN. We've been in his P.O.V., surveying his area alongside him.

Sweat covers his every inch.

RADIO CHATTER

Lima One, X-ray this is Charlie Actual,  
over.

RADIO CHATTER (CONT'D)

Go ahead Charlie.

The Chatter continues as:

--IRAQI CHILDREN play soccer at the roadside.

--An IRAQI MOTHER scrubs clothes in a wash basin.

--An IRAQI GIRL in a purple burqa innocently waves.

The radio vomits static then dies. Finally--

MATT

(yells to crew)

Any chance we'll see the FOB before  
nightfall? I can't go another round with  
this heat.

No response. Matt crouches inside the Hummer only to see the tops of helmets, cold and uncaring.

The SPEEDOMETER bounces wildly between 15mph and 30mph. Broken.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Seriously. Can we get the lead out?

Nothing.

Matt pushes himself back into the scorching wind.

FROM AFAR--

Matt's convoy slowly serpentes through a ROUND-A-BOUT.

Up ahead a pile of trash burns. Black smoke blankets the roadway.

BACK IN THE TURRET--

Matt swigs from his CAMELBAK--a sweet moment of relief in the Iraqi heat.

The convoy rolls to a halt in the center of the village.

The idle engine hums.

MATT  
What's the situation here, guys?

A FLOCK OF BIRDS take flight from a nearby rooftop. Matt jumps, turns. Nothing.

RADIO CHATTER  
Talk to us Bravo 4. What do you see, over.

Matt looks rooftop to rooftop. Empty.

A YOUNG IRAQI BOY flies a RED KITE high into the wind.

RADIO CHATTER (CONT'D)  
Bravo 4, we're talking to you. What do you see, over.

Matt grabs his radio, goes to speak--stops.

RADIO CHATTER (CONT'D)  
Bravo 4--

MATT  
(into Radio)  
Bravo 4 clear. Over.

The convoy kicks back to life and rolls toward the bellowing black smoke.

Matt spies movement on a rooftop. An IRAQI MAN stares down at him, locks eyes, then disappears. Something is off.

MATT (CONT'D)  
(into radio)  
Hold tight, Charlie. Repeat, Charlie stop the convoy.

The first vehicle disappears into the black cloud.

MATT (CONT'D)  
(to his vehicle)  
Guys stop the vehicle. Guys--

Matt drops back in the Hummer to find it completely empty. The steering wheel gently guiding itself.

Matt stands back in the turret, is engulfed by the black smoke. Can't see.

He comes through the haze in time for--

BOOM.

The front vehicle is lifted into the sky, comes crashing down on its roof in a fiery blaze.

The symphony of gunfire begins.

Bullets riddle the sides of vehicles.

Radio chatter roars to life.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Get the Machine Gun going. Now, now.  
Return fire.

Matt goes for the trigger, looks down to see his hands are only square blocks of skin. He's useless, his face petrified.

He paws angrily at the metal of his weapon.

Matt's body jolts. He's been hit.

The front of his flack jacket covers in blood. He reaches to his neck, pulls back a fist of blood and skin. Oddly, his hands once again normal.

He collapses, his eyes vacant, looking to the blue sky, and the RED KITE that falls peacefully to earth.

Matt gasps his last breath. Pupils dilate, lifeless.

**TITLE CARD: SAND CASTLE**

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPLANE HANGER--DAY

Matt jolts awake, checks his neck for blood--nothing. He catches his breath, sighs relief.

He rises slowly to find, taped to his chest, a sign: "Iraq Vet. Will Work For Food".

MATT  
(to Himself)  
Assholes.

He crumples the sign, lets it fall. Checks his left hand and the dirty cast wrapped around it.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Fuck.

We pull back to see Matt as the lone soldier amidst a sea of bunks, perfectly uniformed, stretching to infinity.

*Spirit in The Sky* by Norman Greenbaum throws us into--

I/E. AIRPLANE HANGER--DAY

Blinding sun. Matt's eyes adjust, bringing the MASSIVE EXPANSE of the Army Base into view.

Hundreds of soldiers buzz about.

Blackhawks take flight high into the blue desert sky.

Soldiers barbecue, catch some sun.

**SUPER: CAMP ARIFJAN, KUWAIT. 2003.**

EXT. CAMP ARIFJAN--CONTINUOUS

Matt dons his Boonie Cap and journeys through wind and dust.

He pumps a tube of Colgate into his mouth, swigs from his canteen, gargles and spits.

An ARMOR UNIT of M1A1 ABRAMS TANKS are fueled and packed with gear. On the firing well of each is painted the tank's nickname: LONE WOLF, STARS AND STRIPES, ANACONDA, etc.

TANK SOLDIER (O.S.)

Private Ocre.

Matt stops.

Tank Soldier paints the finishing touches on his tank's nickname: POKEY MIRRA LOMA.

TANK SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Whattaya think of the name?

Matt looks blankly.

TANK SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Pokey was my dog's name, and Mirra Loma was the street I grew up on.

Matt still doesn't get it.

TANK SOLDIER (CONT'D)

It's my porn star name, man. I'm going balls deep in Iraq, get it?

MATT

Clever.

TANK SOLDIER

Better than that 'Cold Fury' bullshit.  
Shit's gay.

MATT

You seen Sergeant Baker?

TANK SOLDIER

The gym with the rest of your guys.

Matt nods, steps to leave.

TANK SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Yo, Ocre. Armor's rolling out today.  
Baghdad or bust. If I don't see you the  
rest of the war, be safe.

MATT

Yeah.

Tank Soldier smiles, drops down into the Abrams,  
disappears.

*Pre-Lap: The whizz of a surgical saw.*

INT. MEDIC TENT--LATER

An ARMY MEDIC inches the saw along Matt's cast, revealing  
the atrophied, discolored hand beneath.

ARMY MEDIC

I had this soldier in the other day.  
Electrocuted himself in the shower. Got  
buzzed up something awful. Hold these.

The Medic hands Matt a pair of hospital sheers, then tugs  
at the cast.

Matt winces in pain.

ARMY MEDIC (CONT'D)

Kid thought he was yanking a rope to turn  
the shower on. Turned out it was a  
bundle of exposed wires. They found him  
face down in a puddle of his own piss.

The Medic takes the shears and cuts away.

ARMY MEDIC (CONT'D)

Hold tight, you'll feel some pressure.

The Medic jerks the remainder of the plaster from Matt's  
forearm.

Matt's eyes tear and swell in pain.

ARMY MEDIC (CONT'D)

You young guys got as much brains in your  
head as hair on top.

(beat, suspicious)

A door did this?

MATT

I got it caught in the hummer--

ARMY MEDIC  
Let me see you move it.

Matt tries to wiggle his fingers. They barely move.  
Shooting pain.

ARMY MEDIC (CONT'D)  
Blood seeps into the interstitial tissue,  
that's causing the discoloration. Looks  
worse than it is.

MATT  
There's no fucking way I can go out like  
this.

ARMY MEDIC  
Ice it.

MATT  
I can't make a fist, Doc.

The Medic digs into his medicine cabinet. Produces a  
bottle of TYLENOL.

The Medic leans into Matt.

ARMY MEDIC  
Guys are rolling out with a lot worse.

Matt studies his black and blue balloon of a hand.

ARMY MEDIC (CONT'D)  
Take this form back to your Platoon  
Sergeant.

*Insert: Medical Form. A pen sweeps across the box 'Battle Ready'. Check.*

INT. GYM TENT-DAY

Soldiers pump iron in this sad excuse for a gym: blocks of cement double as dumbbells, huge tires are rolled end over end. Welcome to macho world.

Pounding rock music wails through the space.

SSG. BAKER (28), tall and confident, the leader of our Motley Crew, is the lone man with his eyes fixed to the BBC.

BRITISH NEWSCASTER (O.S.)  
*Explosions and anti-aircraft missiles  
erupt over Baghdad marking the first  
clear sign that war has begun. This is  
the BBC World News--*

*Insert: Stock footage of the bombing raids over Baghdad.  
Superimposed at the lower corner of the screen: 'Day 1'.*

SGT. BARTLES, shaved white head, intimidating physique--  
spots his buddy CPL. MEYERS (24), scrawny and slight with  
a southern drawl, on the bench press.

SGT. BARTLES  
That a boy, Meyers. Finish strong,  
buddy.

A red-faced Meyers powers through his last set.

In the corner, country bumpkin SGT. FALVY (28), shirt off  
and muscles blazing, lifts two TIDE BOXES filled with  
CEMENT. A lit cigarette dangles between his lips, a  
thicket of chaw in his jaw.

SGT. FALVY  
I'm telling you guys. We get back to the  
States you're gonna see my body on 'Men's  
Health'. Two big-tittied girls on each  
arm. The waves splashing all up on my  
pecks and shit.

SSG. Baker returns to his group.

SSG. BAKER  
Falvy, we're gonna see you in 'Out  
Magazine' with a dick in each hand and  
shame in your eyes.

Laughter. Dumbbells hit the floor.

SGT. FALVY  
We'll see, Sergeant Baker. We'll see.

CPL. MEYERS  
We coulda used you in World War II,  
Falvy. All by yourself on the beaches of  
Normandie. Waving the U-Boats in with a  
flashlight and shit.

The guys laugh.

SGT. FALVY  
Either fish or cut bait, Meyers. I came  
to fish.

Matt enters.

MATT  
Sergeant Baker.

ALL  
There he is/'Morning Sunshine/Sup,  
Private Fuckface.

SGT. FALVY  
The Imp, the gimp, America's wimp. You  
look like a bag of smashed shit.

MATT  
Those damn Malaria pills. Giving me  
nightmares.

CPL. MEYERS (O.S.)  
This whole place is a nightmare.

Matt hands Baker his MEDICAL FORMS. Baker studies them.

SSG. BAKER  
Looks like you're good to go.

MATT  
You see Armored is rolling out today?

Ears perk up.

CPL. MEYERS  
That true?

SSG. BAKER  
The LT is with the brass now. He'll  
brief us when he's done.

SGT. BARTLES  
When the briefing start?

SSG. BAKER  
(reluctantly)  
1800. Last night.

Collective huffs. Excitement.

SGT. FALVY  
Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Army's kept me  
in a cage, Sergeant Baker. About time to  
let me out.

SGT. BARTLES  
(re: Hand)  
How's it feel? You good?

MATT

It's not a problem.

SSG. BAKER

Take it easy. I don't want you to reinjure it.

SGT. FALVY

Fuck that. 'Easy' set sail long a time ago.

Falvy steps close to Matt, a little too close.

SGT. FALVY (CONT'D)

What Ocre needs is some 'rehabilitative training'. And because I care so deeply for his well being, I'm making his physical fitness my personal responsibility.

Off Falvy's grin--

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP ARIFJAN, KUWAIT-LATER

The guys jog the camp's perimeter, SSG. Baker leads the cadence and the formation.

SSG. BAKER

(singing)

*Remember JFK...*

ALL

*Remember JFK...*

SSG. BAKER

*He tried to lead the way.*

ALL

*He tried to lead the way.*

SSG. BAKER

*But he was shot one day.*

ALL

*But he was shot one day.*

SSG. BAKER

*In the early morning--*

ALL

*Rai-ai-ai-ain. In the early morning  
Rain.*

The cadence continues as Matt brings up the rear, the boxes of Tide in hand.

Falvy jogs alongside as Matt winces in pain, drops the cement blocks to the sand.

SGT. FALVY

That's all you can give, huh? Don't worry, Ocre. I believe shame is a private thing.

Falvy squeezes Matt's injured hand, pulls him in close--whispers in his ear.

SGT. FALVY (CONT'D)

You're secret is safe with me.

He releases his grip.

SGT. FALVY (CONT'D)

Now gimme these fucking things. You're fucking up my workout.

Falvy snags the Tide boxes and sprints to the front of the formation. Too easy.

Matt's left to suck wind and cradle his injured hand.

EXT. MESS TENT-DUSK

Matt stands in a long line, his M-16 slung over his shoulder, an empty food tray at the ready.

He stares at gobs of unidentifiable food--slop, square pieces of cardboard meat.

SOLDIER

(to Matt)

Hurry it up, Soldier. Staring at it won't make it taste better.

MESS TENT, PICNIC TABLE--CONTINUOUS

Matt slides in next to SSG Baker. The end of day reverie in full swing--CPL. Meyers deep into a story.

CPL. MEYERS

...me and Bartles just finished shoveling this rich prick's driveway. We're talking worst winter in Missouri history. Fuckin' back breakin'. After three hours we ring the doorbell and we're like 'can we have our money, please sir? We're done'. He hands me a \$20 and I'm like, in this little kid voice...

(in high-pitched voice)

'The cost is \$20 A PIECE. For me and my co-worker'. He wouldn't give it. Just stood there. So Bartles looks this diamond-sized prick right in the face and says--

SGT. BARTLES

No, no.

CPL. MEYERS

Come on tell 'em. You always fuck up the story right at the end, man. Bartles says--

SGT. BARTLES

(reluctantly)

Gimme the money, you fuckin' cocksucker.

Laughter.

CPL. MEYERS

This guy looked at us like we punched his mother in the face. This 14 year old just called him a fuckin' cocksucker.

SGT. FALVY

So you're out the \$20?

CPL. MEYERS

No. Old Bartles here pries the rims off the guy's car. With his bare fucking hands. We ride the bus two hours home carrying four rims to an Escalade.

The gang cracks up.

SSG. BAKER

Jesus, Bartles. Glad that yoga shit has mellowed you out.

SGT. BARTLES

(dead serious)

I don't like people taking advantage of  
me. And I don't like people taking  
advantage of my friends.

MATT

You guys grew up together? I didn't know  
that.

CPL. MEYERS

Since we were this high.

SGT. BARTLES

Been in trouble ever since.

CPL. MEYERS

We signed up together. This program  
called The Buddy System.

SGT. BARTLES

I drive Meyers to the recruiter, in my  
mind so I could talk him out of it. Next  
thing I know, that fucking recruiter got  
us both.

The guys laugh.

CPL. MEYERS

He was a real slick Rick, that one.

SSG. BAKER

They always are. Mine said I'd see the  
whole world before my 21st birthday.  
Made it sound like a fucking Carnival  
Cruise.

SGT. FALVY

Hell I walked in, said, 'if I sign up  
could I shoot some guns'? He said, 'Yep.  
Big ones'. Was on a bus the next day.

SSG. BAKER

What about you, Ocre? Why'd you sign up?

MATT

Never put much thought to it. My dad was  
in. So was my grandad. It's just  
something you did, I guess.

SGT. FALVY

Hey, Kidwell. How'd you end up here? Get  
in line for the wrong bus?

PVT. KIDWELL (19), a translucent toothpick of freckled white skin and orange buzz cut, sits alone at the end of the table. He listens to HEADPHONES, doesn't acknowledge Falvy, or anyone for that matter.

SGT. FALVY (CONT'D)  
Hey I'm talking to you, Kidwell.

Falvy pings some food off Kidwell's tray.

Kidwell looks over.

SSG. BAKER  
Falvy. Knock it off.

Baker shakes his head, gives Falvy a hard stare.

PVT. Kidwell grabs his tray and leaves.

SGT. FALVY  
Just trying to be inclusive, Sergeant.

Falvy tosses some food in his mouth, smiles defiantly.

INT. AIRPLANE HANGER--NIGHT

Soldiers play poker, video games, enjoy the evening down time.

Matt sits on his bunk, writing. Baker pops up from the bottom bunk.

SSG. BAKER  
Writing a book?

MATT  
Journal. Figure war is once in a lifetime, I might as well document it.

SSG. BAKER  
Who says you'll want to remember it?

The joke hits Matt a little too close.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)  
Then again, if we don't remember it how we gonna tell stories that scare the shit out of our grandkids.

Matt laughs.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

Hell, I can't wait to scare kids with  
stories of blood and napalm.

MATT

Like my father and his before him.

SSG. BAKER

That is the natural order of things,  
isn't it?

SOLDIER (O.S.)

Lights out. Lights out.

All through the airplane hanger, soldiers scream 'Light's Out'.

SSG. BAKER

(yells)

Light's out.

(to Matt)

Rest up, take your Malaria Pill. And if  
you're gonna take it, take it easy.

MATT

I'll take it how I can get it.

MATT/SSG. BAKER

And if it's easy I'll take it twice.

SSG. BAKER

'Night, bud.

Baker gives him a pat on the shoulder and disappears to  
the bottom bunk.

Matt grabs his pill bottle, pops one in his hand,  
hesitates--

*Insert Pill Bottle: MEFLOQUIN, MALARIA, 1EACH*

MATT

This whole place is a nightmare.

He tosses it down the hatch, then lays back as lights shut  
off overhead and the rolling blackness continues.

FADE TO:

EXT. CAMP ARIFJAN, KUWAIT--NEXT DAY

Baker's under the hood of a HUMMVEE. Matt's in the driver's seat, checking gauges.

The two struggle to be heard over the sound of a running compressor.

SSG. BAKER

You know the best part of my day?

MATT

Come again?

SSG. BAKER

The best part of my day. Right when I wake up. For about three seconds I think I'm back home, next to my fiance. Happens every morning.

MATT

What happens after those 3 seconds?

Baker considers.

SSG. BAKER

Well, I guess that's the worst part of my day.

Baker shuts off the compressor.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

(Re: vehicle engine)

Wanna give me a hand with this?

Matt grabs a rag and checks under the hood.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

So, let me ask you. What are you doing here?

MATT

Fixing a Hummer.

SSG. BAKER

'S not what I mean. You're a smart kid. Smarter than most of these rock heads. Why aren't you 'being all you can be' somewhere the fuck else?

MATT

Like I said. My dad did was in, his dad.

SSG. BAKER  
So you came to make papa proud. Is he?

MATT  
Wouldn't know. He went AWOL when I was  
eight.

Baker stops.

SSG. BAKER  
It bother you?

MATT  
I'm sure he had his reasons. Fuck 'em.

SSG. BAKER  
Remember him at all?

MATT  
Just the day he left. Said he was going  
for a coke, never came back. Now I only  
drink Pepsi outta spite.

Baker cracks a smile.

SSG. BAKER  
(re: Hummer)  
Try the ignition.

Matt turns the engine over and it sputters to life.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)  
Bingo.

SGM. MCELLIGOT (O.S.)  
Lovely day for the infantry, Sergeant  
Baker.

SGM. MCELLIGOT (50's) approaches--a man carved from stone,  
his face the grizzled pages of past wars. With him is 1LT  
AISLAGER (30's) the Commanding Officer of Matt's unit.

SSG. BAKER  
Huah, Sergeant Major. LT. Which way's  
the shit rolling?

1LT. AISLAGER  
Downhill. As always.

SGM. MCELLIGOT  
Just as gravity intended, my boy.

1LT. AISLAGER  
General wants us in the mess tent in 20  
mikes.

SSG. BAKER  
The General? What's he--

McElligot, Aislager don't respond. Something is up.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)  
We got about an hour left on this Humvee.

1LT. AISLAGER  
20 Mikes. Round everyone up.

SSG. BAKER  
Yes, sir.

McElligot and Aislager walk off.

MATT  
What's up?

SSG. BAKER  
If anyone knew, it wouldn't be the U.S.  
Army, would it? Clean up.

Matt scrubs his hand with a rag, watches McElligot and  
Aislager in the distance.

INT. MESS TENT--DAWN

The might of Matt's unit (300 soldiers strong), pack it in  
the mess tent, oddly pristine. White table cloths don  
each table.

CPL. MEYERS  
Well, look at this. Some Chateau on the  
Green type shit.

A ROW OF KUWAITI SERVANTS enter with large plates of food.  
It's a make shift banquet: bread rolls, sandwich meat,  
ice cream. Nothing too special, but to these men it might  
as well be Spago.

They are served.

CPL. MEYERS (CONT'D)  
Mmm. Mmm. Golden, fluffy ass biscuits.  
If I had some gravy these'd be just like  
back home.

Meyers notices Bartles isn't touching his food.

CPL. MEYERS (CONT'D)

Hey Bartles. You only eat MRE's now?

SGT. BARTLES

(Knowingly)

Meyers, when's the last time the Army did something nice for you?

Meyers keeps chewing, unaware of what's next.

THE GENERAL enters from the side door. The place jumps to attention. A pin could drop and there'd be an echo. God has just arrived.

GENERAL

At ease. Sit down, gentleman. How's the food?

ALL

Huah.

GENERAL

Good. Good. Anybody that don't lick their plate clean gets sent home and misses all the fun.

ALL

(laughing)

Huah.

GENERAL

Now. I consider everyone here lucky for two reasons. One: You were assigned, by the grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, to my Brigade. Which means you have the best military training on God's green earth. You are tough, you are ruthless, you are lions. And whoever's waiting over that border, if they're not scared yet, is about to get scared because we are coming and we are not stopping until Baghdad.

Beat.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Two: The average age in this Brigade... is 20. Now, gentleman, I'm an old man. And I envy your position because tonight we move to the staging area, and before sunrise you young men will lead all the iron and brass of this United States Army over the berm and straight into the heart of Baghdad.

(MORE)

GENERAL (CONT'D)

You will spend the rest of your long lives telling people you meet how you made history. Enjoy tonight. Tomorrow, you get your war.

The men snap to attention as the General exits.

Matt's eyes dart about, palms sweaty, heart pounding through his chest.

EXT. CAMP ARIFJAN, KUWAIT-NIGHT

An approaching SANDSTORM sends gale force winds through camp. Canvas and leather straps flutter in its wake.

RADIO CHATTER

Base to Chalk 3. You are clear to roll, Chalk 3.

AIRPLANE HANGER-NIGHT

Now completely empty--a lonely stretch of bunks--a ghost town.

MATT'S VEHICLE-NIGHT

Matt's in the back seat, SGT. Falvy beside him.

SGT. FALVY

Looks like it's go time. Cigarette?

MATT

Don't smoke.

Falvy exhales a cloud of smoke, chest heaves with excitement.

Outside, Bartles and Meyers do their customary handshake and fist bump.

SGT. BARTLES

Keep me safe up there.

CPL. MEYERS

Will do.

Bartles pulls his balaclava over his mouth, sticks his boot in the tire well, and climbs into the turret.

## FRONT OF THE CONVOY--SAME

SGM. McElligot grabs the radio receiver, hops to the roof of his Hummer, the storm at his back, and speaks to his unit.

SGM. MCELLIGOT

I say unto you, as the Lord said unto the Hittites while standing upon Mt. Arad with his arms outstretched looking down upon the multitudes.

## MATT'S VEHICLE--SAME

SGT. FALVY

I love it when he does this.

## FRONT OF CONVOY--SAME

SGM. MCELLIGOT

In a deep guttural tone the Lord looked down and said, "Hittites. Ateeen-shun".

Laughter from the vehicles.

The Sergeant Major loves this shit--an old man at home at the brink of war.

SGM. MCELLIGOT (CONT'D)

The Hittites responded in kind. The Lord then said, "Riiiiight. Face". Then, unto them he spoke those most feared words in the Hittite infantry, "Double Tiiiiimmmeee..."

ALL

Double Tiiiiimmmeee...

SGM MCELLIGOT

Double Tiiiiimmmeee. March.

The Sergeant Major fires up his engine, horns honk, and the rest follow suit all the way to the back.

Matt's engine fires, he closes his eyes, breathes deep.

The convoy lurches to life, an endless serpent slithering towards the sandstorm, into the heart of the unforgiving desert.

FADE TO:

## EXT. BAGHDAD OUTSKIRTS-DUSK

Oil fields burn. Black smoke mixes with the orange glow of the rising sun. It'd be a beautiful sight if not for RAT TAT TAT--GUNFIRE, crackling like a campfire.

Matt's unit is a few hundred yards behind CHARLIE TEAM-- pinned down in an irrigation ditch, taking fire from buildings in the city.

SGM. McElligot stands calm, his eyes trained on the BAGHDAD AIRPORT.

SGM. MCCELLIGOT

(yells)

All the way to airport, boys. All the way.

Kidwell hunkers in the fetal position behind a hummer, his hands shake as he puts on his HEADPHONES.

A FEW SOLDIERS do the 100 yard dash to a dirt embankment.

SSG. BAKER

(yells)

We're up. Let's go.

Baker, Matt and his team dash to the irrigation ditch to link up with CHARLIE.

Bartles carries his SAW, the massive hunk of weaponry, with one arm and SPRINTS like there's no tomorrow.

Bullets ping around their feet.

The guys arrive safely, take cover and fan out.

Bartles sets up the bipod and unleashes a flurry of rounds.

Matt looks down the barrel of his rifle, sees muzzle flashes coming from a BUILDING in the city.

He breathes, squeezes the trigger but his weapon jams. Half a round's stuck in the ejection port. Can't pry it out.

Falvy runs over.

SGT. FALVY

Sergeant Baker.

SSG. BAKER

Yeah.

SGT. FALVY

Charlie is putting together a flank.  
They're taking the airport. Permission  
to join.

SSG. BAKER

All you, brotha'. If you want in.

SGT. FALVY

Kidding me?

MATT

Watch that building there. I just saw a  
bunch of muzzle flashes in the windows.

Matt points.

SGT. FALVY

Which building?

MATT

Off to your 3.

Falvy and Baker look, don't see it.

SGT. FALVY

(to Baker)

I'm taking the kid. We'll get close and  
he can point out the building.

Matt stops. He just stepped in shit and knows it. He  
looks to Baker for help.

Baker considers.

SSG. BAKER

Take him.

Falvy grabs Matt by the LBE and pulls him to his feet.

The two haul ass to join--

CHARLIE UNIT

They drop down with the others, take cover in an  
irrigation ditch.

Falvy fires. Matt's weapon is still jammed.

Falvy grabs Matt's weapon, yanks back the Charging Handle.  
The stuck round flies out.

Falvy hocks a gob of spit on the expelled round and jams it back in Matt's hand. Slimy.

SGT. FALVY

Spit on your rounds, you're getting sand in the mag.

CHARLIE TEAM LEADER

We're moving. Let's go, go.

We're running alongside Falvy and Matt, the rear men in a TWELVE PERSON chain, as they sprint through the ditch.

The team posts up behind a bullet-riddled building on the outskirts of the city.

CHARLIE TEAM LEADER peeks around the corner.

SGT. FALVY

(to Charlie Team Leader)

Hey, Sergeant. The Private here knows where the gunfire's coming from.

CHARLIE TEAM LEADER

Well get him up here.

Matt's pushed to the front of the formation, leans against the wall.

CHARLIE TEAM LEADER

(CONT'D)

Go on. Get eyes on the building.

Matt doesn't move.

CHARLIE TEAM LEADER

(CONT'D)

Don't worry. These Hajis can't shoot shit.

Matt slowly peeks his head around the corner.

Matt's P.O.V.:

--a BLUE AWNING BUILDING. Gunfire from the windows.

Matt ducks back.

MATT

Blue awning, first floor.

The guys nod.

Charlie Team Leader peels half the platoon off, leads them into the city. We'll call this new team CHARLIE TWO.

Falvy leads a team of SIX GUYS, CHARLIE TEAM ONE, into a nearby DILAPIDATED WAREHOUSE, across from the BLUE AWNING BUILDING.

INT. BAGHDAD, DILAPIDATED WAREHOUSE-CONTINUOUS

Matt, Falvy, and Charlie One charge up a flight of stairs.

A bullet smashes through a window and strikes the soldier right in front of Matt. Blood splatters.

The wall gets pounded with lead, incessant and unending. Falvy returns fire out the window.

SGT. FALVY

(into Radio)

Contact. Contact. Southeast building.

The downed soldier screams in pain, bleeds from shoulder and mouth.

Falvy hoists the downed soldier into a fireman carry.

SGT. FALVY (CONT'D)

(to Matt)

Shoot that mother fucker.

Matt sticks his weapon out the window, FIRES BLINDLY.

Falvy tears ass up FLIGHTS OF STAIRS, the wounded warrior over shoulder, as if the guy were a feather.

EXT. DILAPIDATED WAREHOUSE, ROOFTOP-CONTINUOUS

Falvy kicks in the door to the roof. He dumps the wounded soldier to the ground, posts up against a brick overhang.

EXT. BAGHDAD OUTSKIRTS, BAKER'S CONVOY-SAME

Baker spies the situation through his binocs.

SSG. BAKER

They're made. Let's move, move.

The guys peel off, 2X2, back to their vehicles.

DILAPIDATED WAREHOUSE ROOFTOP, CHARLIE ONE-CONTINUOUS

A medic tends to the wounded soldier. Plunges morphine into his leg.

Matt emerges on the rooftop, slides in next to Falvy.

RADIO CHATTER

Charlie Two, in position. Repeat,  
Charlie Two in position.

SGT. FALVY

(into radio)

Roger, Two. Charlie One ready.  
(yells to soldiers)  
Fire, Fire, Fire.

Falvy and Charlie One send a barrage of brass downrange.

Bullet casings litter the roof.

A SOLDIER lets loose an AT-4 ROCKET LAUNCHER at the BLUE AWNING BUILDING. He fires it inches from Matt's ears.

Matt drops his weapon, cradles his ears in pain.

The rocket hits with a loud boom, sending brick fragments everywhere.

STREET LEVEL, CHARLIE TWO--SAME

The six man team, led by Charlie Team Leader, slides down a narrow alleyway toward the insurgent stronghold.

BAKER'S VEHICLE-CONTINUOUS

Hummers tear ass across a BRIDGE into the city--Meyers in the driver seat, pedal to the metal.

Bartles up top, his machine gun belching rounds into the city.

STREET LEVEL, CHARLIE TWO--SAME

The team enters the BLUE AWNING BUILDING.

ROOFTOP, CHARLIE ONE-CONTINUOUS

Matt watches as Charlie Two lights up the inside of the building with gunfire--clearing floor after floor.

The gunfire ceases. Quiet.

ROOFTOP, CHARLIE TWO--CONTINUOUS

A canister pings across the roof, then bellows purple smoke into the heavens.

Charlie Team Leader steps through the smoke and into view.

ROOFTOP CHARLIE ONE--SAME

CHARLIE TEAM LEADER

(over radio )

Charlie Team to Noble Lion. Building  
secure, over.

Falvy slumps down, beaten and exhausted.

SGT. FALVY

(re: Wounded Soldier)

How is he?

The MEDIC nods. It's gonna be okay.

Falvy looks to Matt, still cradling his ears, his face drained of its color.

SGT. FALVY (CONT'D)

(to Matt)

You gonna puke?

MATT

What? I can't hear--

Falvy laughs, gives Matt a pat on the helmet.

BAKER'S VEHICLE--SAME

They roll past--

ROAD SIGN: BAGHDAD

CPL. MEYERS

I fucking did it. Get ready to drop those panties ladies of Overland Park. Ol' Jared Meyers, Hero, will be home soon.

EXT. BAGHDAD, DILAPIDATED WAREHOUSE--DAY

Matt and Falvy walk out of the building, are met by their convoy.

SMILING IRAQIS crowd the Hummer. They clamor to shake Matt's hand, their liberator.

A battered Falvy throws his gear in the Hummer, hops in the passenger seat next to Meyers.

CPL. MEYERS

I tell you man, back home I was fucking  
broads that were *maybe*, 3's, 4's?  
With a story like this, I'll be banging  
6's, maybe even a 7 if I get a drunk  
patriot.

Falvy cracks a smile.

SSG. BAKER

Ocre. You Okay?

SGT. FALVY

He can't hear you.

Baker grabs Matt, leans in and yells--

SSG. BAKER

Ocre. How do you feel?

MATT

Underpaid.

Baker laughs.

SSG. BAKER

I'll pass your complaint to Management.

A grin creeps onto Matt's face. He steps back, looks in awe of the sights around him, a front row seat to history being forged.

FADE TO:

EXT. BAGHDAD--MORNING

The IRAQI CALL TO PRAYER sounds through sparsely populated streets. A MAN kneels in prayer on the roof of his home as the sun rises behind him.

A stray dog rummages through trash on the roadside.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT--SAME

Now a developed, fully functioning Army Base.

A game of Rugby takes place on the tarmac.

A LINE OF SOLDIERS outside a mobile van, the BURGER KING logo across the top.

**Super: Three months later.**

PRE-LAP NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

*...The President announced today the end  
of major combat operations in the war for  
Iraq--*

INT. CMOC COMMAND--SAME

A small TV in the corner plays stock footage of the now infamous MISSION ACCOMPLISHED BANNER. In the lower corner--the date: May 1, 2003. We pull back to reveal--

The CMOC: The heart of military planning and strategy for Matt's unit. A beehive buzzing with activity. Maps wallpaper floor to ceiling.

SSG. Baker observes the MISSION BOARD, mug of coffee in hand.

A COMMUNICATIONS SOLDIER relays info over the radio.

SSG. BAKER

My boys rolling out?

COMMS SOLDIER

Roger that, Sergeant. Psyop convoy's ahead of them.

Baker grabs a radio receiver.

SSG. BAKER

(into Radio)

Eagle One, this is Noble Lion. Take out your tampons and get ready to roll, over.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT, HUMMER--SAME

Meyers in the driver's seat, Falvy beside him--shirt off and chest to the sun.

CPL. MEYERS

(into Radio)

We may need a medic, Noble Lion. One of our guys has developed what can only be assumed to be a fatal allergy to his shirt, over.

SSG. BAKER

(over Radio)

Falvy put your tits away, over.

SGT. FALVY

Just getting in some bronzing time.

OUTSIDE HUMMER--SAME

Matt leans against the Hummer, drives a REMOTE CONTROL RACE CAR through the camp.

SGT. BARTLES (O.S.)

Next one.

Bartles is in the turret, taping the triggers down on the race car guns, and mounting them to the Hummer's roof.

Matt hands him the remote, tears into the packaging of another TOY RACE CAR.

MATT

You think this'll work?

SGT. BARTLES

IED's detonate on frequencies. Same thing that opens garage doors or controls race cars. If the frequency matches, it'll detonate before we're in the kill zone.

MATT

(skeptical)

There's a lot of frequencies, Sergeant.

SGT. BARTLES

Yeah. Well we're safe from six of 'em.

CPL. MEYERS

Anyone see Kidwell?

They look to each other, no answer. Meyer's rolls his eyes.

INT. CMOC COMMAND--SAME

Baker sips his coffee.

SSG. BAKER

(yells)

Who in the hell brewed this shit?

COMMS SOLDIER

I did.

SSG. BAKER

Christ. Well, you're fired.

COMMS SOLDIER

I wish.

1LT. Aislager walks into the CMOC, a concerned look on his face.

1LT. AISLAGER

Sergeant Baker. This way, please.

SSG. BAKER

What is it LT?

1LT. AISLAGER

Just bring your ass and stow the questions.

Baker sets his coffee on the table, whispers to the COMMS SOLDIER--

SSG. BAKER

Brew better shit tomorrow. Take pride in your work, for shit's sake.

Baker follows after Aislager.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT--DAY

PVT. Kidwell fills a sandbag, ties it off, throws it on a pile. His movements robotic, mechanical.

Matt marches toward him, agitated. His gear in hand.

MATT

Kidwell. You know it's your turn on the rotation.

No response.

MATT (CONT'D)

You understand that if you don't go, I have to take your place. It's not fair.

PVT. KIDWELL

Matt, will you help me take these to my room?

MATT

Your room? What--

Falvy calls out from his convoy, about to roll out the gate.

SGT. FALVY (O.S.)

Ocre. Let's go.

Matt puts on his helmet, resigned to go on the mission.

MATT

You know you're pissing everyone off? You'll get in serious shit you keep refusing to leave the wire.

Kidwell hoists a sandbag over shoulder.

PVT. KIDWELL

Do you think we'll get to go home soon?

Matt shakes his head and runs off to join the convoy.

SGT. FALVY

(re: Kidwell)

Let it go. Kid's a waste of space.

Matt hops in the Hummer--with Meyers, Bartles and Falvy--already on the move.

MATT

What's the mission today?

The guys look to each other.

SGT. FALVY

Transport.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAGHDAD--DAY

Matt looks at the corpse of a DEAD TERRORIST, splayed out on a steel slab, it's body frozen blue.

SGT. BARTLES  
One, Two, Up.

Bartles and Meyers grab either side and heft the body up into the back of the hummer.

MATT  
(to Himself)  
Transport. Right.

SGT. FALVY  
Load it up. Ocre, you ride in the back with the Haji.

MATT  
What? Why do I have to ride in the back?

SGT. FALVY  
'Cause Bartles is in the turret, Meyers is driving, and fuck you. That's why.

Matt reluctantly climbs in the back.

SGT. FALVY (CONT'D)  
Hurry it up. We gotta get this popsicle to the morgue.

Falvy zips the canvas, and locks Matt in the dark with the corpse.

INT. HUMMER, CAB--LATER

Meyers drives, Falvy rides shotgun.

CPL. MEYERS  
But that's my point though. Army tells you to go this way, go that way. In a few months this shit'll be over. I'm starting a business. Uncle Sam is the last boss I'll ever have, tell you that much.

SGT. FALVY  
Meyers I respect you, but who in the shit is gonna lend you money for a business? First United Bank of Retards?

CPL. MEYERS  
You let me worry about the specifics.

Honks horn.

CPL. MEYERS (CONT'D)  
(to traffic)  
Make room. Clear a path.

SGT. FALVY  
Wait, wait. Slow up a minute.

CPL. MEYERS  
What is it?

SGT. FALVY  
Stop the vehicle.

HUMMER, BACK--SAME

Matt sits in the dark, stuck listening to the rambling conversation up front, and the commotion outside.

The vehicle slows to a halt.

MATT  
We there?

No answer.

HUMMER, CAB--SAME

SGT. FALVY  
(into radio)  
Noble Lion, this is Eagle One, over.

RADIO  
Go ahead Eagle One.

SGT. FALVY  
We got a pile of trash up ahead with what looks like wires running into the dirt, over.

RADIO  
What's your location, over?

SGT. FALVY  
Center of the marketplace. It's pretty crowded, over.

RADIO  
Hold tight Eagle One. EOD is making the rounds, over.

SGT. FALVY  
(into Radio)  
Copy that.

Meyers bangs on the roof.

CPL. MEYERS  
(yells to Bartles)  
Might as well dismount, Bartles. We're  
gonna be stuck here a while.

HUMMER, BACK--SAME

Matt swigs water--peeks through the side of the canvas to  
see the city outside.

MATT  
Can I get out?

Falvy peels back the canvas.

SGT. FALVY  
Hell, no. These people see us riding  
around with a dead body they'll go  
ballistic. Stay put.

Falvy zips the flap closed.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT--DAY

1LT. Aislager and SSG. Baker journey through camp.

1LT. AISLAGER  
0200 this morning an Apache spotted a  
weapons exchange, unleashed hell on a  
truck filled with RPG's.

SSG. BAKER  
Where?

1LT. AISLAGER  
Small village about an hour north. Town  
called Baqubah.

SSG. BAKER  
A Toyota filled with dead terrorists  
isn't exactly a big problem.

1LT. AISLAGER

No. The big fucking problem is the big fucking hole we left in their Aqueduct when the Apache fired on 'em without clearance.

A SOLDIER walks by, salutes Aislager. He returns the gesture.

1LT. AISLAGER (CONT'D)

Baqubah has no water supply and the townspeople think it's our fault. If this thing boils over, if the village turns on the few SF soldiers holding it together--we lose the town. Command's gonna ask for volunteers.

SSG. BAKER

Are you shitting, me? LT, listen. The guys are already chattering about going home. We've been sitting on our thumbs for months, no one's gonna volunteer for this.

1LT. AISLAGER

Then you volun-tell them. Look, this war is shaping up to be longer than Command expected. And if fixing pipes for a few weeks gets me home sooner, then fine. But I believe in leading by example. Which is why I'm going, the Sergeant Major is going...and so are you.

Baker stops.

1LT. AISLAGER (CONT'D)

Your men are on missions until the end of the day. I suggest you use that time to think of some rousing words. And I mean channel Lombardi, my friend.

Aislager steps off, leaving Baker still amidst the buzzing camp.

EXT. MATT'S VEHICLE--SAME

Falvy and Meyers lean against the hummer, their helmets and kevlars off.

BOOM.

Dust and debris shoots to the sky, blankets the surrounding palm trees.

CPL. MEYERS

Gob Bless EOD. You imagine getting nailed  
by one of those?

HUMMER, BACK--SAME

Matt sits up, puts his sweat-drenched LBE back on.

MATT

Hey Bartles. We all clear?

SGT. BARTLES (O.S.)

Sure enough.

MATT

(to Himself)

Thank God. It's a goddamn sauna back  
here.

Matt leans back.

The sound of CRACK CRACK startles him.

He looks to the body.

CRACK CRACK, the fingers of the body slowly curl.

MATT (CONT'D)

(yells to Bartles)

Hey man. This fucking thing is moving.

SGT. BARTLES (O.S.)

What?

MATT

He's alive, man. This fucking thing is  
moving.

Matt scrambles to the back, rips open the canvas.

Falvy and Meyers take their seats back in the cab, close  
the door.

SGT. FALVY

Ocre. Stop the fucking commotion.

MATT

He's alive, man. I saw it.

Meyers unsnaps the canvas, looks in back.

CPL. MEYERS

What in the shit are you talking--

CRACK CRACK. The leg moves and jumps.

CPL. MEYERS (CONT'D)

Holy shit.

Meyers yells, pulls his 9mm and points it at the body.

SGT. FALVY

Will you nancies please stop screaming in my ear. It's what, 113 degrees? The thing is just thawing out. That's why it's jumping around like a catfish.

Matt and Meyers sigh a deep relief.

From the turret, the muted sound of Bartles laughing.

CPL. MEYERS

(yells to Bartles)

It's not fucking funny, Chuck.

SGT. BARTLES

Oh, I'm gonna have to disagree, my friend.

CPL. MEYERS

Almost had a fucking heart attack.

Matt sighs relief.

MATT

I hate transport missions.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT, MAIN GATE--LATER

Matt's convoy rolls through the main gate. Meyers gives a nod to the GATE GUARD and drives onto base.

EXT. WEAPONS CLEARING STATION--DAY

Bartles helps Matt out of the back of the Hummer. Matt's drenched in sweat, salt stains around his collar.

SGT. BARTLES

Christ, you look like you went swimming?

Matt grabs his M16 and stumbles to the clearing barrel.

MATT

No ventilation back there.

SGT. BARTLES

That's why I ride up top. Cool breezes, sunshine. I see more of the country than anyone else.

Bartles cocks the hammer back on his Machine Gun, clears his weapon into a barrel.

SGT. BARTLES (CONT'D)

(yells re: Weapon)

Clear.

MATT

You can have the cool breeze--

Matt clears his weapon.

MATT (CONT'D)

--couldn't pay me enough to ride the turret. We hit shit, all the gunfire's coming your way, buddy.

SGT. BARTLES

Yeah. But when we get home I'll remember the breeze and the countryside, you'll remember sitting in the dark, sweating your ass off.

Bartles winks, pats Matt on the shoulder and walks back to the vehicle.

INT. MATT'S ROOM--LATER

The guys dump gear on bunks. Matt tips his boot upside down, sand tumbles out.

Baker enters, all eyes turn toward him. He's all business.

SSG. BAKER

Hey, can you guys circle up for a minute?

CPL. MEYERS

Sergeant Baker. What's up my brother from another mother?

SSG. BAKER

Grab a seat, Meyers. You guys know, even without this uniform and this war, I consider you my friends, right? Something came down today--

He stops.

Eyes shoot around the room.

SGT. BARTLES

What is it, Sergeant?

SSG. BAKER

As we sit here, there's a whole village without water. They're dying. And it's our fault. Our fault because our Apaches destroyed their aqueduct. It's our fault because we sit here now and do nothing. But that can change. If you want it to. I need some volunteers to come with me to Baqubah.

Off their reaction.

MATT

What's Baqubah?

SSG. BAKER

Baqubah is no picnic. It's not all Flip-Flops and Yahtzee like it is here.

The guys crack an uneasy smile.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

So look. We all got enough medals to be decorated like a Christmas Tree. But is that why you're here? Get some medals, go home, be in a parade. You're here because you got the balls to believe you matter. If you didn't have balls you'd be at home wearing a backwards cap to a Frat Party. It's time to matter. I need names on the Mission Board before lights out.

Baker looks right at Matt.

SGT. FALVY

If we go, can we get the SAT phone? Make a call home.

SSG. BAKER

I'll make sure it happens.

With that, Baker exits. The room is left to deal with their sentence.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT--NIGHT

Matt sits on the steps outside his building, lost in thought.

A CAMEL SPIDER crawls slowly toward his flip-flop. Inches closer. Matt raises his foot gently, brings it down easy on the spiders back, kills it.

He scrapes the remains on concrete.

PVT. KIDWELL (O.S.)

Hey, Private Ocre.

Kidwell unloads two sandbags, takes a seat next to Matt.

PVT. KIDWELL (CONT'D)

Happy May Day. You know what May Day is?

MATT

No.

PVT. KIDWELL

Me neither. I was thinking, you know, how funny it is no one knows what it is but we celebrate it anyway. Don't you think that's funny?

Matt waits for Kidwell to leave. He doesn't.

MATT

Kidwell. Doesn't it bother you how the guys look at you? They think you're a pussy, man.

Kidwell considers.

PVT. KIDWELL

My Pastor says we're all walking hand and hand to the same finish line. He's right. Some of us cross it a little sooner, I guess. I don't mind being called names. Just want to go home is all.

Kidwell picks up his sandbags and heads inside.

PVT. KIDWELL (CONT'D)

See you in the morning, Private Ocre.

Matt looks under his foot, sees the spider twitching it's last moments of life.

CUT TO:

INT. MATT'S ROOM-NIGHT

In the corner bunk, Bartles has his M-249 disassembled, cleans it.

SGT. BARTLES

I'm going.

CPL. MEYERS

Fuck. I knew it.

Bartles shakes his head.

CPL. MEYERS (CONT'D)

Man, you've done more for this unit than anyone. Take a rest for shit's sake.

SGT. BARTLES

I gotta go.

CPL. MEYERS

Then me, too. You go, I go. You want that on your conscience?

SGT. BARTLES

You're a grown man. You choose to go that's your decision.

Bartles lays back in his bunk. That's the end of that.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT, ROOF-NIGHT

SSG. Baker stands alone on the roof, a SAT PHONE in hand.

The roof door slams, Matt's in the doorway.

MATT

I can come back.

SSG. BAKER

No it's fine. Just called my fiance.

MATT

How is she?

SSG. BAKER

Caught the answering machine.

Baker pats a spot on the roof's edge.

MATT

Get your volunteers?

SSG. BAKER  
No one's said anything.

MATT  
If no one does?

SSG. BAKER  
They will.

Matt sits next to Baker, dangles his feet over the edge.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)  
So why are you up here, Ocre? You here to  
tell me your name's on the mission board?

MATT  
I just think the other guys are better  
for this kind of thing. You know.  
Bartles is tough as nails. Falvy isn't  
scared of anything--

SSG. BAKER  
Falvy's a great soldier, but he's a  
child. He sees a fire he's gotta put his  
hand in it. I need someone there who can  
see the big picture. Who's smart.

MATT  
Sergeant, I'm not like you guys. Hell, I  
throw up every time my name is on the  
mission board. Every time.

Baker looks out into the lights of Baghdad.

SSG. BAKER  
My dad used to say, 'Joel, there's a  
bullet out there for everyone. Their  
name's carved real small on the side, and  
it's comin'. Now, maybe my bullet is  
waiting out there in Baqubah. Maybe my  
bullet is cancer and it'll catch me  
eighty years from now back in Kansas  
City.

Baker sets the SAT Phone next to Matt. Stands to leave.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)  
But that's not up to me. The stakes of  
the game are always life or death. And  
that won't change, even if you stay  
behind.

MATT  
If I don't volunteer?

SSG. BAKER

If you don't volunteer then I was wrong about you. And I can't have someone I was wrong about watching my back. But if you do decide to go, the SAT phone is right there, and you got a call to make.

The heavy metal of the roof door slams. Matt's left to stare at the phone, and the phone back at him.

He reaches for it, holds it, his thumb over the keypad.

INT. HALLWAY-LATER

Baker uses his flashlight to navigate the halls while his unit sleeps. He comes to--

INT. CMOC-CONTINUOUS

Now dark and lifeless. He finds THE MISSION BOARD.

He finds BAQUBAH, and follows it down to see the list of names: Aislager, McElligot, Baker, Falvy, Bartles, Meyers

And finally, at the very bottom--

Ocre.

Baker smiles his approval. Leaves the room dark.

INT. BATHROOM-SAME

Matt heaves his nervous guts into the toilet, arms wrapped around porcelain.

FADE TO:

INT. MATT'S ROOM-MORNING

The room comes alive. It's barely 0500 but it's Mission Day.

Soldiers pace back and forth across the room. Rounds are loaded into magazines. Gloves are stretched over fingers.

Bartles tapes some loose straps on Meyers's vest--rips the tape with his teeth.

SGT. BARTLES

There. Now you don't look like a soup sandwich.

CPL. MEYERS

Ain't gotta look good. Just gotta do good.

SGT. FALVY

Shit. Looking good's the most important part.

Matt slips into a Flak Vest--visibly nervous, lost in thought.

Baker leans toward him, tries to ease the anxiety.

SSG. BAKER

We're right here next to you, understand? No one's by themselves out there.

Matt nods. Baker pats him on the chest--no body armor.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

Where're your plates?

MATT

Not enough to go around.

SGT. BAKER

Christ.

(to the room)

Yo. Someone cough up a plate.

SGT. BARTLES

Here. Take one of mine.

SSG. BAKER

No, Bartles. You're up top. Falvy give him one of yours.

SGT. FALVY

What? Fuck that.

SSG. BAKER

Falvy. Now.

Falvy relents, slams a plate into Matt's chest.

SGT. FALVY

Here. Now you gotta ask yourself, "Am I more likely to get shot in the chest, or in the back?" Choose wisely.

Matt winces, pries the plate from his chest.

SGM. MCELLIGOT (V.O.)  
Our Route is North up Highway One to  
Baqubah.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT, MAIN GATE-DAY

The team rallies up by their vehicles for the pre-mission briefing.

SGM. MCELLIGOT  
There've been consistent IED attacks  
along the route, as it's the only road  
into or out of the village.

1LT. AISLAGER  
A vehicle got hit there just yesterday.

SGM. MCELLIGOT  
So maintain convoy integrity, and  
maintain radio contact.

The soldiers hang on every word, focused--each a wound top  
ready to spin.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT, MAIN GATE-DAY

The vehicles exit the main gate. The GATE GUARD eyes Matt  
as they pass.

IRAQI CHILDREN smile and wave.

I/E. HUMMER, HWY 1-LATER

Tires crunch blacktop, carrying our guys into the unknown.

Up in the turret, Bartles surveys his territory.

Matt has his M-16 trained out the window. He shifts in  
his seat, trying to find comfort. The silence is broken by--

CPL. MEYERS  
Hey, guys. Eleven O'Clock.

SSG. BAKER  
What do you got, Meyers.

CPL. MEYERS  
Wait for it. Wait for it--

The guys pass A BURNT VEHICLE, the charred remains of a dead Iraqi slouched in the driver's seat. Gruesome.

The guys sit back, each taken aback by the sight.

SGT. FALVY  
(re: The Body)  
You lose, asshole.

SSG. BAKER  
Meyers let's save the alerts for actual threats.

CPL. MEYERS  
Roger that, Sergeant.

Matt taps Baker on the shoulder.

MATT  
We just leave the body on the side of the road?

SSG. BAKER  
Someone'll be along to pick it up.

Back in the turret, Bartles sees an IRAQI CAR speed toward the convoy.

Bartles spins his machine gun, faces the car. He watches the car get closer.

SGT. BARTLES  
(yells)  
Meyers. This guys' gonna try to pass.

Meyers checks the rear view, sees the car right on his tail.

It swerves to pass, honks.

CPL. MEYERS  
Mother fucker.

Meyers swerves to block the advance.

SGT. BARTLES  
Hey. Get the fuck back asshole.

Matt pokes his head out the window and see what Bartles sees: a vehicle right on their ass.

SSG. BAKER  
Shit. Don't let this guy into the convoy.  
(MORE)

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)  
(into Radio)  
Noble Lion 1, this is Eagle Five. We got  
a hostile, over.

No sooner does the message get out, Bartles FIRES A ROUND up over the hood of the car. A warning.

The Iraqi car screeches to a halt.

Bartles watches the vehicle become smaller in the distance.

SGT. FALVY  
Guess he understood that.

Then, the vehicle peels rubber, coming up on the convoy fast.

SGT. BARTLES  
(into Radio)  
Eagle Five making the arrest, over.  
(to his soldiers)  
This thing screeches to a halt, everyone descend on that son of a bitch.

Matt nods, nervous.

The Iraqi car comes up fast.

Meyer's slams the brakes, tires smoke.

Bartles FIRES A FEW SHOTS over the Iraqi vehicle's roof.

The guys dismount. Guns drawn.

But Matt is stuck. His LBE Vest is caught in the seat belt. He jerks, pulls. Nothing.

He leans out the side window to see:

Falvy reach inside the Iraqi car and RIP THE MAN OUT the driver's side window.

Baker, Meyers, and Bartles are right on him, their weapons in the man's face.

Matt sits back. He missed it.

Falvy zip ties the guy, Baker runs back to the vehicle.

SSG. BAKER  
Private Ocre. What the fuck do you think you're doing?

MATT  
I got stuck, Sergeant--

Baker, fuming, reaches over and puts both hands on Matt's chest. He rips at the Velcro and the vest opens.

SSG. BAKER  
When I say get outta the fucking car, that means outta the fucking car. If your vest is stuck, then you take it off and go without it, understand?

Falvy walks back, the arrested Iraqi in tow.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)  
Your safety is not more important than all of ours.

SGT. FALVY  
(to Matt, harsh sarcasm)  
Why didn't I think of that? Staying in the car. It is a lot fucking safer. Good idea, Ocre.

Matt hangs his head. He fucked up.

EXT. BAQUBAH-LATER

Their convoy fights it's way through a crowd of angry Iraqi Protestors.

Fists and bottles slam against the vehicles.

MATT'S VEHICLE--SAME

Hands claw at him. A stark contrast to the welcome he received in Baghdad.

Falvy takes an AXE HANDLE and prods away the masses.

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE, MAIN GATE--SAME

The vehicles wind through a chicane of sand barrels. A sign welcomes them--

CAMP WARHORSE

Spray painted underneath:

SPA & RESORT

Matt sees:

An SF SOLDIER grab the edge of the concertina wire, peel it back--usher in Matt's convoy.

The SF Soldier wears no helmet, only a beige baseball cap with an AMERICAN FLAG Velcro-ed to the front.

The convoy makes its way inside the gate--

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--CONTINUOUS

And we see for the first time the Safe House--a four-story cement structure, crumbling under its own weight. The outside, bullet-ridden. Windows, boarded up.

SAND BARRELS, six feet high, fortify the perimeter. Concertina wire wraps all the way around.

Series of shots:

--Soldiers caked in dirt.

--Guys filling sand barrels.

--Men stand guard on the roof, look over the city.

The full extent of their fucked-ness is now apparent.

INT. BAQUBAH SAFEHOUSE--CONTINUOUS

Matt and the team file through the building.

The safe house liaison and Commander, CPT. SYVERSON (30's), grizzled, tough, the pound pitbull you'd rather put to sleep than rescue, greets them.

CPT. SYVERSON  
S'arnt Major. CPT. Syverson. Pleasure  
to meet you. Let me help get you guys  
settled in.

A few BAQUBAH SOLDIERS help with the unit's gear, lug it up steps. One, we'll call him PEPPS--young, muscled, and filthy dirty--helps Matt.

PEPPS  
(re: Bags)  
Give it.

Pepps, stone-faced, hefts Matt's bag on his shoulder--studies him. A dog that smells fear.

CPT. SYVERSON

We're completely self-sufficient here. Guard duty twice a week. Showers are every Saturday. Make sure your men take care of each other. Down here they will be tired always, but make mistakes never.

(to Machmoud)

Hey, Machmoud. Come here. Come here.

Machmoud (20's), affable young Iraqi tosses his arm around CPT. Syverson.

MACHMOUD

Captain, you got my \$20?

CPT. SYVERSON

These here are the guys gonna fix your water problem.

Machmoud looks the guys over, unimpressed.

MACHMOUD

Are there more?

CPT. SYVERSON

That's what I was thinking. Get out of here, Machmoud. Go on, get.

Syverson gives him a playful shove.

MACHMOUD

I want my \$20.

CPT. SYVERSON

How bout I pay you in freedom and democracy, asshole?

Machmoud gives Syverson the middle finger.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

Taught that fucker Texas Hold 'Em, turns out he's a Goddamn prodigy. Let me show your boys their room.

STEPS--CONTINUOUS

Matt spies every room he passes. Soldiers baby wipe their dirty bodies, a GROUP quickly shuffles past, late for some unknown mission.

CPT. SYVERSON

We have one concern: get this town back to normal.

He stops turns to them.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

And make that roaring crowd out there  
believe we're part of the solution, not  
the problem.

LIVING QUARTERS-CONTINUOUS

The unit piles in a small, dilapidated room. Sunlight streams in through holes in the wall concrete.

CPT. SYVERSON

Your guys will be here. Drop your rucks,  
and be downstairs in 5 mikes. And one  
last thing. At night we go dark.  
Snipers so much as see the reflection in  
your dogtags, they'll take a pop shot.

Syverson exits.

SGT. FALVY

Lovely. Who wants the bunk by the window?

Matt sticks his pinky in one of the holes, clears out the dust. Looks right through the hole to see the protest raging outside.

CPL. MEYERS

(whispers to Matt)

We're in the middle of the fucking city.  
You think 'safe house' is a little  
misleading?

Matt peels back the edge of a WALL POSTER to reveal a big fucking hole. The protest is right at his doorstep.

INT. BAQUBAH SAFEHOUSE, WAR ROOM-LATER

CPT. Syverson stands at the front, an intricate map of Iraq on the wall behind him. RED PINS cluster the map.

CPT. SYVERSON

Gentleman, right now you're in the heart  
of the Diyala River Valley--center of the  
Sunni Triangle. More importantly, you're  
at what is believed to be the crossroads  
of the Iraq War.

CPL. MEYERS

What's all the red pins?

CPT. SYVERSON

The red pins are American casualties. According to M.I., over the past few months attacks have trended out of major cities. North from Baghdad, south from Tikrit, to where you currently sit.

1LT. AISLAIGER

They're spreading us thin.

CPT. SYVERSON

That's right. Outside that gate is the real deal. When you leave the wire, you don't go anywhere without at least a three vehicle convoy. And when the sun goes down you hightail it back to the Safe House. Only the snipers go out at night, huah?

ALL

Huah.

CPT. SYVERSON

Lieutenant.

Aislager takes the floor.

1LT. AISLAIGER

Our mission is clear, pipe up this 200 yard stretch of Aqueduct, get water flowing back to the village. To do that, means recruitment. We need Iraqi workers, guys. Workers who know they could be killed for helping us.

SSG. BAKER

Sir. Why didn't command just task the Engineers? They could pipe up this place in no time.

1LT. AISLAGER

Baqubah's too hot. Until 7th Group secures the city, we're all alone here.

SGT. FALVY

(to Himself)

Fuckin' pussy Engineers.

CPT. SYVERSON

And we will secure it, you have my word. But there will be a fight, and you will participate.

Off Matt's reaction.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

Not a single person outside that gate  
wants you here. Make no mistake, this  
place is one knotted shoe lace of fuck.

Matt's face stays fixed on the red pins that cluster  
Baqubah.

INT. BATHROOM-NIGHT

Matt washes his face. The REARVIEW MIRROR of a Hummer is  
taped to the wall--a makeshift vanity mirror.

The bathroom's in shambles. The sinks, showers, toilets  
are stained by rusty water.

The sounds of the protest rage on outside.

His reflection stares back at him.

The GENERATOR shuts off and the building goes black.

MATT

Shit.

Moonlight streams through bullet holes in the wall.

FADE TO:

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--NEXT MORNING

Mission Day. Stryker vehicles line up, prepare to move  
out the gate.

Matt runs from vehicle to vehicle. Each Stryker loaded to  
the hilt, packed like sardine cans with soldiers.

SSG. BAKER (O.S.)

Hey. Ocre.

Baker waves Matt into his vehicle. The rear hatch pulls  
closed--

INT. STRYKER--CONTINUOUS

Baker and Matt huddle together with EIGHT OTHER SOLDIERS.

SSG. BAKER

How you feel?

Matt nods, 'okay'.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

Don't get too comfortable. We'll have to dismount at the bridge. It's too narrow for the Stryker.

Matt nods.

Machmoud sits across from Matt in flak vest and helmet.

The other soldiers eye Matt. A moment of quiet tension. Matt's far out of his league here, and it's all over his face.

Machmoud crunches into a fistful of crackers, oblivious. He offers some to Matt.

Matt waves him off.

Machmoud spots on Matt's boot: 'A+'. His blood type.

MACHMOUD

Hey. A-positive.

Machmoud points to his helmet, and the 'A+' sharpied on the side.

MACHMOUD (CONT'D)

Me, too.

Thumbs up from Machmoud.

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE, MAIN GATE--SAME

The Stryker vehicles roll out the gate and into the city. Throngs of protestors make way.

INT. STRYKER--SAME

No one moves or talks for what feels like an eternity. The first sounds of gunfire in the city. A burst more.

The PING of rounds as they hit the side of the Stryker.

The fighting intensifies until, in the distance--

BOOM

The explosion rocks the vehicle to life.

HEAVY GUNFIRE

STRYKER DRIVER  
Time to clear the benches.

The Stryker rolls to a stop.

The men stand, lock and load.

SSG. BAKER  
Hey. Why we stopping? You're supposed to take us to the aqueduct.

SF SOLDIER  
I suggest you guys stand, or get run over.

Matt and Baker find their feet, just as the REAR HATCH drops, and they're out to--

EXT. BAQUBAH CITY SQUARE-DAY

The Eight Soldiers run into the streets, the fight already under way.

Matt and Baker remain close to the vehicle, are joined by Bartles, Meyers and Falvy.

CPT. SYVERSON  
(to SSG. Baker)  
Tell your guys to hug the Stryker. You move on foot through the town; we'll meet you at the bridge to the Aqueduct.

Baker nods, signals to his team.

The guys form up on either side of the Stryker and begin the slow crawl though Baqubah's city square.

Matt's P.O.V:

--SOLDIERS kick in doors, clear houses.

--A SIX MAN TEAM takes fire in an alley way.

--A roadblock of BURNING TIRES.

BOOM. A small explosion, cries of pain.

Soldiers run toward the sound, a house yards away.

Matt looks to Baker for instruction.

Baker considers, then leads his guys toward the house.

BACK OF THE HOUSE--CONTINUOUS

A gaggle surrounds a screaming soldier.

The screams belong to Peps--he lies on his back, hands tucked between his thighs, pant legs covered in blood.

CPT. SYVERSON

Is there a medic on the way?

SOLDIER

Yes, sir.

CPT. SYVERSON

Let me see your hands.

CPT. Syverson pries Peps hands from between his thighs to reveal TWO MANGLED HANDS, fingers missing, pinky hanging by a thread.

Syverson searches the ground to find AN EXPLODED LUNCH PAIL. He picks up the hunk of metal, hoists it over his head.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

How many times do I have to tell you dumb fucks not to pick anything up off the ground? If you wanna do stupid shit, fine. Go home without hands. Now, if anyone else is feeling especially curious, I suggest you call it quits or wise the fuck up.

Syverson slams the pail to the ground. It bounces to Matt's feet, the mangled hunk of metal, pieces of flesh on the jagged edge, stares back at him.

SSG. BAKER

Come on. Let's go.

Baker pulls him away.

EXT. BAQUBAH OUTSKIRTS--DAY

Matt's vehicle crosses a bombed out BRIDGE, the tire a mere inches from tumbling them into the river below.

EXT. AQUEDUCT--DAY

A V-Shaped cavern of mud and dirt, six feet deep. A few IRAQI WORKERS dig with their hands, doing what good they can.

SGT. Falvy walks the trenches, pulling security.

The rest of the guys assess the damage.

1LT. AISLAGER

The A-system runs about 210 miles up into the hills. We estimate the damage here to be roughly 200 yards.

SSG. BAKER

What's the state of the rest of it?

1LT. AISLAGER

Not our concern. We care only about this 200 yards.

CPT. SYVERSON

We've tried incentivizing the Iraqis. We offer pay for a day's work.

1LT. AISLAGER

How much have you given?

CPT. SYVERSON

They won't take a penny. Just show up, work, and go home.

SSG. BAKER

Sir, maybe we get some water up here. Keep 'em hydrated.

1LT. AISLAGER

Good idea. Captain, have you had contact with the tribal leader? We get him on our side he can convince his people to help.

CPT. SYVERSON

The Sheik? Yeah. We've had contact. Trust me he's a waste of fucking time.

1LT. AISLAGER

I should meet him.

CPT. SYVERSON

You can try. The Sheik is scared shitless. Won't talk to anyone but me.

FURTHER UP THE AQUEDUCT--

Matt walks beside Machmoud who pulls dried dirt from the ground, squeezes it.

MACHMOUD

See how the soil won't clot. No water  
means it can't form.

Machmoud spits in his palm. The dirt becomes a clay ball.

MACHMOUD (CONT'D)

Even before your planes bomb here, water  
was problem. Sunni farmers north steal  
water before it came south to Shiites in  
Baqubah.

MATT

How'd you stop it from happening?

MACHMOUD

Always fighting. Now you come to make it  
normal again? Normal may not be good  
enough.

A distant shot rings out. The workers scurry for cover.

Falvy takes the prone, trains his weapon in the distance.

SGT. FALVY

Mountain side, 6 O'clock. I got 'em.

Our guys post up and train their weapons towards a rocky  
overhang in the distance.

CPT. SYVERSON

No one return fire. Sniper's too far  
out. Last thing we need is these workers  
thinking they're in a fire fight.

1LT. AISLAGER

They're trying to scare us.

CPT. SYVERSON

They know why you're here.

(yells)

Ten til sundown. We're Oscar Mike.

Matt stays trained on the mountain.

FADE TO:

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--NIGHT

Matt and the guys unload their gear. Falvy bumps past  
Matt, leaves him alone at the vehicle.

Matt sees: TWO SNIPERS, clad in ghille suits, journey out the gate on foot, and into the night.

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--NIGHT

Soldiers stand guard on the roof, watch over the quiet evening.

INT. MATT'S ROOM--NIGHT

Matt lies awake in his bunk, twirls his dog tags in his fingers.

CUT TO:

EXT. AQUEDUCT--DAY

Matt lugs two JERRY CANS of water up the steep hill to the Aqueduct. He slips, falls.

Baker breezes by with his water cans.

SSG. BAKER

You alright?

Matt nods.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

Good. Still got a dozen more trips.

Matt crouches over in defeat. A few BEADS OF RAIN splash his forehead.

He looks to A GRAY SKY.

AQUEDUCT, TOP OF THE HILL--LATER

Heavy Rain. Matt plops down the Jerry Cans in the mud. His arms like jelly. His body soaked.

In the distance, Iraqi's take a break, share cans of water.

Matt takes his boots off, rubs his scabbed feet.

Falvy tosses a JERRY CAN down next to Matt, splashes him with mud.

SGT. FALVY

Fucking bullshit, right? A whole village  
at the bottom of that hill and we're  
scabbing our hands like chumps.

(yells to the village)

Don't worry, assholes. We got it.

MATT

They're just scared, Falvy.

SGT. FALVY

Is that supposed to be an excuse?

MATT

No.

SGT. FALVY

'Cause it ain't. Fuckers shake my hand  
in the day, shoot at me at night.

MATT

Give it time, man.

SGT. FALVY

You need to crawl out from behind your  
faggotty little rainbow. I know a loaded  
deck when I see one.

He points to the aqueduct.

SGT. FALVY (CONT'D)

This game we can't win.

COMMOTION at the bottom of the aqueduct.

A voice screams for help.

Falvy takes off down the hill, Matt tosses his boots aside  
and follows.

FURTHER DOWN THE AQUEDUCT--

Matt runs barefoot to find an Iraqi with a LARGE STONE  
crushing his leg. He screams in pain.

Soldiers and Iraqis work to wedge the stone off.

Matt and Falvy jump in, push. Finally, the stone tumbles  
over revealing the man's leg, horribly shattered.

CPT. SYVERSON

Goddamn it. What happened?

1LT. AISLAGER

These guys are overworked. They're tired.  
They're gonna make mistakes.

CPT. SYVERSON

(shaking his head)

Fuck.

1LT. AISLAGER

This doesn't get done without the Sheik's  
blessing. We show him some trust, he's  
gotta do what's right. His people are  
dying for shit's sake.

CPT. SYVERSON

Sheik ain't interested in what's right.  
Only thing that excites him is self-  
preservation.

1LT. AISLAGER

If he won't tell his people to trust us,  
then we're at a stalemate. Captain?

Aislager won't look away, stays trained on Syverson.

Syverson considers.

CPT. SYVERSON

(yells)

Gimme three vehicles. Load 'em up.

Soldiers hop to.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHEIK'S HOUSE--DAY

Matt's convoy speeds to a stop in front of the Sheik's  
house.

Syverson tosses his weapon in the Hummer.

He and Machmoud hop out and dart toward the building,  
Aislager close behind.

CPT. SYVERSON

Lieutenant, stay in the Hummer.

1LT. AISLAGER

I need to talk to him, sir.

CPT. SYVERSON

Lieutenant if you walk in that door, one of his guards will dot your eye with an AK round. No questions. Just done. Get it?

Syverson and Machmoud head into the building, leave Aislager and the guys outside.

INT. SHEIK'S HOUSE-DAY

Ornate, covered in colored rugs. The SHEIK--a bearded, grossly overweight man in his 50's, sits and enjoys tea. Two GUARDS stand by his side.

The door opens, in walks Syverson and Machmoud.

The Guards jump to attention, reach for their guns.

As they speak, Machmoud translates.

CPT. SYVERSON

Sheik. We need the inclusion of your people. You must give them your blessing.

The Guards rush Syverson and Machmoud, pat them down.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

Tell them we will protect them.

The Sheik calmly sips from his cup, then speaks--

MACHMOUD

(translating)

He say, you no can protect. Anyone help the Americans will be slaughtered. You cannot protect.

CPT. SYVERSON

I understand your fear. But if we do not have help, there will be no water. No water. You understand.

(to Machmoud)

Tell him. Tell him NO WATER.

The Sheik leans in to Syverson and unloads a load rambling of venom.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

What's he saying, Machmoud?

MACHMOUD

He say to leave his house. You make promises that are dangerous.

CPT. SYVERSON

(to Sheik)

We will pay. We pay, understand? Money for economy.

The Sheik continues to yell, not listening to Machmoud's translations.

EXT. SHEIK'S HOUSE-SAME

The convoy pulls security outside the building, hears the Sheik yelling.

Matt eyes the bustling market square. The threat is everywhere--windows, villagers, rooftops.

CPL. MEYERS

(re: Sheik yelling)

Sounds like we're winning hearts and minds.

SHEIK'S HOUSE-CONTINUOUS

The Sheik stands.

MACHMOUD

He say there is other way to use your American money.

CPT. SYVERSON

What the fuck does that mean?

MACHMOUD

He say his town will grow more violent. He will give blessing if you provide a safe haven for him. Jordan. Beautiful home with white curtains.

CPT. SYVERSON

White curtains? Wait, is he talking about a bribe?

(to Sheik)

You think I like waking up in this shit hole either? I'd rather watch you rot in this room than let you leave your people, you piece of shit.

Machmoud begins to translate.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)  
Shut up, Machmoud. Don't translate that.  
Tell the Sheik I appreciate his time.

CPT. Syverson stands to leave, hugs the Sheik, gives him the customary kiss on each cheek.

EXT. SHEIK'S HOUSE-DAY

CPT. Syverson and Machmoud come out of the house, Syverson puts his helmet on.

1LT. AISLAGER  
How'd it go?

CPT. SYVERSON  
Like I said. Big fucking waste of time.

The guys load it up and move out.

INT. BAQUBAH SAFEHOUSE--NIGHT

The room is quiet, except for the sound of SSG. Baker scrubbing his weapon with a bore brush.

MATT  
This mission's a loser, Sergeant Baker.  
We all know it. 210 miles.

Baker stops.

SSG. BAKER  
200 yards. That's all we can think about.

MATT  
Machmoud said, even before we showed up, there was fighting over the water.

SSG. BAKER  
Yeah.

MATT  
And if we put it back to normal, that's what normal is. Fighting.

Beat.

MATT (CONT'D)  
You know why the workers won't take our money? Because they know if they spend it they'll be killed.

(MORE)

MATT (CONT'D)

There's only one way a poor farmer from Baqubah can get cash--from us.

SSG. BAKER

If the wheels in your brain are turning, I suggest you speak up.

MATT

You asked me in Kuwait why I was here.

SSG. BAKER

And you gave me bullshit.

MATT

My recruiter asked me, 'What do you see when you watch the news, son'. I said, 'Lot of suffering. Same as anyone'. 'Wouldn't it be nice' he said, 'to watch the news one day and know your phone was gonna ring? Because it was your job to fix it'. I signed up because I wanted to make things better. Same reason those workers risk their lives, same reason Machmoud is on our side. No one wants to die to make things normal. We need to let every person in this town know, we didn't come here to make things normal. We came to make them better.

For Baker, the words land. Off his reaction--

MONTAGE: Upbeat music over the following.

EXT. BAQUBAH MARKETPLACE--DAY

A convoy rolls through a crowded square.

Speakers pump the Army's message in Arabic.

PAMPHLETS are thrown into the sky, the wind litters them through the village.

Matt hands a pamphlet and a bottle of CHLORINE TABLETS to an IRAQI MOTHER and her children.

MATT

If you can get water, this will make it clean. Tell her Machmoud.

Machmoud translates.

The Mother cautiously takes the tablets and ushers her kids back inside.

INT. BAQUBAH SCHOOL--DAY

Matt is at the head of a class of 3rd graders. Baker, Bartles and Meyers pass out toothbrushes.

As Matt speaks, Machmoud translates.

MATT

Brushing with clean water can make your teeth brighter. Just like this.

Machmoud holds up posters of various Hollywood celebrities with pearly whites.

MATT (CONT'D)

And stronger.

Picture of a guy pulling a truck with his teeth.

The kids laugh, brush their teeth joyfully.

INT. BAQUBAH HOUSE--SAME

CPT. Syverson sits with IRAQI ELDERS.

CPT. SYVERSON

Our new pipe system means no upkeep.  
Understand?

The Iraqi's look at him clueless.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

Goddamn it, where's Machmoud?

1LT. AISLAIGER

At the school still, sir.

CPT. SYVERSON

Water cleaner. Crops bigger.

Syverson points to his A-system graphic.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

Food like this.

Syverson pulls from his bag LARGE CALIFORNIA GRAPES.

INT. BAQUBAH SAFEHOUSE--DAY

An LMTV beeps it's way in reverse to the front gates. A gaggle of soldiers guide him in.

SOLDIERS

Keep it coming. Back it up. Stop. Stop.

The LMTV hits the side of the brick wall. SHOVELS AND EQUIPMENT spill out the back.

EXT. BAQUBAH AQUEDUCT--DAY

The IRAQI WORKERS are now outfitted with new shovels.

Matt turns the release on the WATER BUFFALO, fresh water spews from the hose.

The workers drink ferociously. A THANKFUL IRAQI shakes Matt's hand, hugs him.

EXT. BAQUBAH AQUEDUCT--DAY

Matt's convoy approaches a long line of Iraqis at the base of the hill winding up to the Aqueduct.

CPL. MEYERS

Shit. Look at the size of that protest.

SSG. BAKER

Not a protest. They got our shovels.

MATT

They're here to work.

CPL. MEYERS

Jesus. It's working.

END MONTAGE

EXT. BAQUBAH AQUEDUCT--DUSK

Soldiers and Iraqis, faces stained with mud, stare at--

The pipe--a black, lifeless hole. Until finally, a THIN STREAM OF GRAY WATER spews into the dirt. It's working.

Muted cheers, exhausted sighs of relief build to outright revelry.

Matt and Baker shake hands.

MATT

50 yards down.

SSG. BAKER  
Still got a ways to go.

MATT  
50 yards at a time, Sergeant.

The two hug.

Falvy steps close to Matt, a little too close.

SGT. FALVY  
The only thing I give a shit about,  
Private, is the shot of Knob's Creek and  
the piece of pussy waiting for me back  
home.

Falvy's anger softens.

SGT. FALVY (CONT'D)  
And if that brain of yours is what's  
gonna get me there sooner. Then, I guess  
I'm okay with that.

Falvy walks off, leaving Matt and Baker confused.

MATT  
Was that a Thank You?

SSG. BAKER  
As close to one as he's capable. Yeah.

Matt spots Machmoud, unmoving in the sea of celebration.

MATT  
I'm gonna check on something. I'll be  
right back.

As Matt leaves--

SSG. BAKER  
I was right about you, Ocre. The big  
picture.

Matt smiles, then makes his way through the crowd.  
Heading towards--

MATT  
Machmoud. Look alive, buddy. Water's not  
safe to drink, but we can at least  
irrigate the farms.

MACHMOUD  
I am very grateful.

MATT

We're not leaving until it's finished. I promise. Now get over there with your people and celebrate.

MACHMOUD

By tomorrow, everyone know water working again. Maybe more people come to help. Or, maybe tomorrow, a whole new war come to Baqubah.

With that, Machmoud, still and quiet, steps off towards the celebration.

INT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE-LATER

CPT. Syverson stands before every soldier in the Baqubah Safe House. Each face as battered as the next.

CPT. SYVERSON

I know you're all hurtin'. Your bones are bruised, your muscles sting. But, let me ask. Does anybody feel it?

Whispers of 'No, sir' from the crowd.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

You don't feel pain because pride has taken its place. And you should be proud. Outside that gate are the quiet sounds of trust.

Faces crack proud smiles.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

And you've proven what every Infantry Captain already knows. You give U.S. Soldiers a wad of gum and a toothpick, they will build you a mother fucking amusement park.

SOLDIERS

(laughing)

Huah.

CPT. SYVERSON

I wish I had more to offer you for your hard work. But, all I have is that time honored Warhorse tradition. It's Saturday, gentleman. You know what that means?

SOLDIERS

Shower day.

CPT. SYVERSON

Shower mother fucking day. Hoo-rah.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE-DUSK

CPT. Syverson stands with a GIANT WATER HOSE at the ready.

The hose roars to life, espousing gallons of frigid, icy water.

CPT. SYVERSON

2,3,4...

Syverson sways the hose out over A CROWD OF SOLDIERS, clad only in their underwear, a bar of soap in hand.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

(singing)

*Tiny Bubbles.*

ALL

*Tiny Bubbles.*

CPT. SYVERSON

*In my wi-yi-ine.*

ALL

*In my wi-yi-ine.*

CPT. SYVERSON

*Makes me happy.*

ALL

*Makes me happy.*

CPT. SYVERSON

*Makes me feel fi-yi-ine.*

ALL

*Makes me feel fi-yi-ine.*

Matt, and each of our guys, are pelted in the face with water. They scrub furiously and hop out of line.

The cadence continues as we--

FADE TO:

EXT. BAQUBAH--MORNING

The MORNING CALL TO PRAYER. The sun crests the horizon, throws light on a vacant, quiet town.

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--SAME

Matt rests an MRE on the hood of a Hummer. The meal crackles with heat, smokes.

Machmoud leans against the vehicle and stares into the city.

MATT

Skittles?

Matt offers. Machmoud declines.

MATT (CONT'D)

Your morning prayers are really getting on my nerves, Machmoud. I swear it's getting louder every day.

MACHMOUD

That not prayer. Yesterday yes, but today--They say 'Death to America'. Today very bad.

CPT. SYVERSON (O.S.)

Rally up. Let's move it out.

EXT. BAQUBAH MARKETPLACE--DAY

From Matt's window he sees the city square completely vacant, not a soul stirring.

Baker knocks on Matt's shoulder. Gives him a look, 'Where is everybody'?

Matt shrugs.

EXT. BAQUBAH MARKET--DAY

The convoy rolls to a stop.

Matt looks on confused. The engine hums.

Syverson studies the roadway, picks up the radio receiver.

CPT. SYVERSON  
(over radio)  
Dismount, over.

ROADWAY--CONTINUOUS

Matt, Baker, Bartles, Meyers, and Falvy move in formation alongside a brick wall.

They reach the edge, Baker gives the signal to hold.

The others kneel, at the ready.

Baker peers around the edge, studies the city. Safe to move.

He waves the soldiers forward as:

The MOSQUE comes into view. Two dead Iraqi workers,  
bodies burned and laid out for all to see. Shovels are  
splayed out before them.

MATT

Oh, God.

SGT. BARTLES

Jesus Christ.

SSG. BAKER

Someone wants to send a message.

SGT. FALVY

Message read, loud and clear. Fuckin' savages.

The townspeople stand outside their homes, watching the horror of what the U.S. has brought to their town.

A SOLDIER emerges from the other side of the road. Walks towards the bodies to inspect.

SSG. BAKER

(yells to soldier)

Hey. Get back.

The Soldier reaches the bodies, sees A CLUSTER OF WIRES emerging from the body's skin.

The soldier's eyes go wide, knowing what's next.

BOOM.

Debris shoots towards Matt and the rest of the guys, the brick wall baring most of the damage.

As the dust settles--

CPT. SYVERSON

(screaming)

Fuck. Fuck. Get back.

(to Baker/Matt)

You two in the Hummer. Machmoud, come with me.

Syverson grabs a BLACK DUFFLE from another Hummvee, tosses it in back.

He hops in the driver's seat.

SSG. BAKER

Sir, we need three vehicles--

CPT. SYVERSON

Get in the fucking Hummer.

Matt and Baker hop inside. Syverson mashes the gas and tears ass across town.

INT. SHEIK'S HOUSE-DAY

Captain Syverson storms through the Sheik's door, Machmoud cautiously behind.

The Sheik and HIS GUESTS are startled from their meal.

CPT. SYVERSON

Two of your people were burned. Their bodies cut open and a bomb stuffed inside. This is what happens while you sit and drink tea.

The Sheik calmly waves everyone out of the room. Motions the Captain to sit, then speaks.

MACHMOUD

(translating)

He say 'Baqubah is two cities. The day belong to U.S. But night belong to men who murder, who rape. Who burn bodies'.

CPT. SYVERSON

Talk to your people. We could end this.

## EXT. SHEIK'S HOUSE--SAME

Matt and Baker stand guard outside. The streets are getting crowded. They are vastly outnumbered.

SSG. BAKER

(into radio)

The Captain tore ass to the Sheik's house. We need some more guys out here now.

Matt is backed up against the wall, everywhere is a potential threat.

A FLOCK OF BIRDS takes flight from a nearby rooftop.

RADIO

We got a hell of a situation at the Mosque. Sit tight, over.

An IRAQI carrying a large bag approaches from around the corner.

MATT

Hey. Stop it there mother fucker.

The Iraqi looks confused, nervous, still approaches.

## SHEIK'S HOUSE--SAME

Syverson produces the BLACK DUFFLE, unzips it to reveal a large stack of AMERICAN MONEY.

CPT. SYVERSON

The U.S. can provide a safe place for you in Jordan. Until Baqubah is ready for your return.

Syverson slides the bag over. The Sheik smiles.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

Give them your blessing, and get on the right side of this.

Syverson grabs the Sheik's tea cup, and downs it.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

Thank the Sheik for his tea, Machmoud.

The Sheik sits speechless.

CPT. SYVERSON (CONT'D)

And tell him the U.S. Army ain't afraid  
of the dark.

EXT. SHEIK'S HOUSE--SAME

Matt rushes the Iraqi man, gun to his face. The man puts his hands up, pleads innocence.

Matt smashes him to the ground with the butt of his weapon, rips the bag from his hands.

RICE spills in the street.

Matt's anger softens.

The Iraqi scrapes grains of rice off the ground and puts it into his pocket. A week's worth of food for his family tumbled into the dirt.

Matt stoops to help.

SSG. BAKER

Ocre. What the fuck are you doing?

Syverson emerges from the Sheik's house. Without a word he hops in the driver's seat and fires up the engine.

Matt leaves the man to pick up his food.

EXT. BAQUBAH--NIGHT

The dark, foreboding streets of Baqubah. Seen at night for the first time.

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--NIGHT

Matt's beside his Hummer, NVG's mounted to his Kevlar helmet. He looks through them:

Matt's P.O.V, Night Vision:

The green glow of Baqubah, and the bursts of green GUN FIRE that await him.

INT. HUMMER--SAME

Meyer's hummer waits to leave the gate, sits idle at the rear of the convoy.

Meyers has a death grip on the steering wheel, Bartles sits in the back seat, Falvy in the passenger.

CPL. MEYERS

I don't know, man. Sweeping houses at night? Windows, tall buildings. Lotta nooks and crannies.

SGT. FALVY

Yep.

CPL. MEYERS

There's a reason we don't go out night.

SGT. FALVY

Yeah, it's the same reason we're losing. Because we're afraid.

CPL. MEYERS

Falvy will you stow the macho bullshit for once.

SGT. BARTLES

Falvy's right. This was inevitable.

Bartles hops out of the Hummer. Puts on the rest of his gear.

SGT. BARTLES (CONT'D)

Everything is as it should be. We can't see it, but everything is perfect.

(to Meyers)

Keep me safe up there?

Meyers nods, nervous.

Bartles and Meyers do their customary handshake and Bartles takes the turret.

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--NIGHT

Baker cracks a glow stick, duct tapes it to his helmet.

Matt notices BAKER'S SHAKING HAND.

1LT. AISLAGER (O.S.)

Sergeant Baker. Got room for one more?

Aislager runs toward the vehicle.

SSG. BAKER

You sure you wanna come, sir?

Aislager stares hard, nods. He knows the risk, won't let his men fight without him.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)  
Hope you don't mind the tight squeeze.

Aislager smiles, hops in the Hummer.

FRONT GATE--SAME

The GATE GUARD waves his arms overhead, getting the attention of the convoy.

Soldiers don their NVG's.

The Gate Guard holds a fist to the sky, signaling HOLD. Then runs the concertina wire open, unleashing the convoy upon the night.

EXT. BAQUBAH CITY SQUARE--NIGHT

Overhead we see the convoy spilt up, STRYKER VEHICLES veer down different streets--FOOT SOLDIERS dismount, sneak through alleys.

CITY SQUARE, STREET LEVEL--NIGHT

Matt's vehicle skids to a halt.

Matt, Baker, and Falvy dismount.

SSG. BAKER  
(to Meyers)  
Take a breath. You know the route. We'll meet you on the other side of the city.

Meyers is shaking.

Baker shows no fear, can't. He pats the side of the Hummer and it drives away.

Matt, Baker, and Falvy link up with OTHER SOLDIERS kneeling beside a wall.

STREET LEVEL--LATER

Matt, Baker, and Falvy reach the end of the wall, hold. Baker peeks around the corner to see AN EMPTY INTERSECTION, TALL BUILDINGS.

Matt's P.O.V:

--SOLDIERS line up alongside an Iraqi Home.

--CRACK, they kick the door in, rush inside.

Doors are kicked in all over town, commotion, chaos, the first sounds of gunfire.

SSG. BAKER

Here we go. 2X2 formation. We're gonna leap frog to the Southwest corner. Ocre, we're first.

Matt nods. And they're off. Full sprint to cover behind a parked vehicle.

Baker checks windows and alleys--safe.

He motions for the next two.

The soldiers run.

GUNFIRE.

Rounds rip through a soldier's knee cap.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

Contact. Contact.

Baker returns fire to the building. Fire comes his way, obliterating what little cover the car provided.

Falvy makes a full sprint to the downed soldier--grabs him by the LBE harness and drags him to safety.

Baker returns fire.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

(into Radio)

Lima 1 extract, this is Sierra 1 request Medevac at Southwest corner of contact point, over.

RADIO

Hang in Sierra 1. Sniper unit is moving into position. Hold what you got, over.

SSG. BAKER

(into Radio)

Copy that Lima 1, over.

Matt looks at Baker, then stands to return fire.

MEYERS VEHICLE--SAME

Meyer's turns wildly through the empty streets. Bartles struggles to hold on.

Each turn, each street is a roadblock.

CPL. MEYERS

Fuck. Fuck. I can't get anywhere. The route is all fucked up.

1LT. AISLAIGER

We got our asses in the wind, Meyers.  
Where are we?

CPL. MEYERS

I don't know. It all looks the fucking same.

1LT. AISLAIGER

(into Radio)

Noble Lion do you copy, over? Repeat,  
Noble Lion do you copy?

Static.

Meyers jerks the wheel and the vehicle speeds down a narrow alleyway.

EXT. ROOFTOP-CONTINUOUS

TWO SNIPERS take position on a rooftop. Their movements are precise, surgical.

The SPOTTER peeks his head over the roof and eyes Matt and Baker pinned down.

He swoops to spot the enemy, firing out a window.

SPOTTER

Wind SW, 8mph. Range 600 yards. 2 hostiles, top floor. Eyes on.

The Sniper makes the adjustments, CLICK CLICK. Points the .50 Cal Barret Sniper Rifle towards the enemy.

Through the scope we see:

--2 enemy combatants firing out the window of a dilapidated building.

SPOTTER (CONT'D)

Send it.

The Sniper fires.

SPOTTER (CONT'D)

Kill.

The Sniper takes a breath, adjusts slightly. CLICK CLICK.  
Fires.

We see one hostile's head split apart.

SPOTTER (CONT'D)

Kill.

(to radio)

Lima 1, they're clear to move. Over.

BAQUBAH STREETS--SAME

A STRYKER vehicle rolls into position a few blocks down.

Baker hoists the wounded soldier on his back, runs like hell across the street to the Stryker vehicle.

Bullets strike the walls around him.

Matt and Falvy return fire, cover Baker's movements.

An RPG SOLDIER takes the center of the road, shoulders a Rocket Propelled Grenade. He aims to fire when--

An ARMED INSURGENT pops up from a window right behind Falvy and Matt, and shots the RPG Soldier--the rocket sears off into an adjacent building.

SGT. FALVY

Fuck.

Falvy turns, fires at the Armed Insurgent. The insurgent races out the back of the building.

Falvy charges after, full-speed past houses and buildings. A reckless pursuit.

MATT

Falvy.

(back to the other soldiers)

Falvy's got a runner.

No one hears him.

Matt hesitates, then runs after. The CHASE IS ON.

Buildings and lights stream past.

Bullets explode around feet, blast concrete just inches from Matt and Falvy.

EXT. IRAQI HOME--CONTINUOUS

The Insurgent ducks into a door a few houses down.

Falvy's only steps behind. He posts up just outside.

MATT

Falvy. Wait. Hold on.

He doesn't. Falvy kicks in the door and rushes in alone.

A SINGLE GUN SHOT.

Matt picks up the pace, his helmet falls off as he enters-

I/E. IRAQI HOME-CONTINUOUS

Falvy lays there, unmoving, shot in the throat and bleeding out.

The Insurgent, crouched in the corner, moves his weapon to Matt.

Matt fires quickly, reflexively, slams the man between the eyes. Dead.

Matt's stunned. Falvy gasps, gurgles blood in the corner.

Matt presses his palms against Falvy's throat. No use. Too much blood.

Falvy grips Matt's sleeve, tugs at his shoulder. Then, finally gives in to the inevitable.

SGT. FALVY

I couldn't wait. I couldn't--

His eyes go lifeless, Matt his last living sight.

EXT. BAQUBAH STREETS-DUSK

Everything goes SLOW-MOTION, STACCATO.

Matt and Baker run Falvy's stretcher to a Stryker.

Sounds mix and blend into one indiscernible mess.

The edges of Matt's periphery bend and blur.

Falvy's loaded inside. The Stryker hauls ass, kicks up a plum of dust in its wake.

CUT TO:

MEYERS VEHICLE--SAME

Fast and Frantic. Bartles, Meyers and Aislager drive through a narrow city street.

They take heavy fire from the rooftop.

Bartles unleashes on the SAW.

Ahead, Meyers sees the road comes to a dead end, slams on the breaks.

CPL. MEYERS

Shit.

(yells to Bartles)

Hold on.

Meyers throws the vehicle in reverse and mashes the gas.

The vehicle flies BACKWARDS down the narrow street, scraping from wall to wall.

A round strikes Aislager's leg. Another hits his shoulder.

He screams.

EXT. BAQUBAH CITY STREETS--SAME

Matt's stunned, looks around to see:

--Soldiers kicking in doors

--Iraqis being dragged outside

--Weapons seized and piled up

Matt grips his weapon, the blood on his hand now coating weapon.

EXT. BAQUBAH STREET, MEYER'S VEHICLE--SAME

Meyers' vehicle comes flying, backwards, into an intersection.

Meyers slams the brakes and spins the wheel. He scans the area, not a single soldier or vehicle to be found. They are alone.

SGT. BARTLES  
(to himself)  
Not good.

Meyers slams the gas. To where, he's not sure.

BAQUBAH STREETS, IRAQI HOME--SAME

Matt tears through a home, overturns beds, knocks over dressers.

An IRAQI FAMILY kneels in the corner, crying.

MATT  
(yells to Baker)  
Got anything?

SSG. BAKER  
Just a few AK's.

MATT  
Bullshit.  
(to the Iraqi Family)  
Where are your fucking weapons? Don't tell me you ain't go 'em.

The IRAQI HUSBAND, pleads with his hand, guards his family.

RADIO CHATTER (V.O.)  
Lima 1, regroup at Warhorse. Repeat, all activity to Warhorse, over.

MEYER'S VEHICLE-SAME

RADIO CHATTER (V.O.)  
Lima 1 to Warhorse. Beat feet and regroup, over.

CPL. MEYERS  
Hang in there, LT.

1LT. AISLAIGER  
I'm fine. Just get us back to base.

BAQUBAH STREET--SAME

Matt and Baker rush out of the Iraqi Home, run toward an open Stryker. The sound of gunfire overwhelming. Baker leans into Matt's ear.

SSG. BAKER

We're heading back to the Safe House. We gotta regroup.

Matt nods.

MATT

Where's Meyers and Bartles?

Baker doesn't hear. He ducks back into the Stryker.

EXT. BAQUBAH STREETS--SAME

Meyers' vehicle speeds through the city, enters a round-about.

CPL. MEYERS

Almost there guys. Almost--

Their vehicle rounds a corner--

BOOM.

An explosion rips into their vehicle.

Dust and debris.

Ringing dissonance.

MEYER'S VEHICLE--CONTINUOUS

Choppy and disoriented. The ringing continues.

Meyers' head is slumped forward on the steering wheel. His face bloodied and black from smoke.

Aislager in the passenger seat. Covered in blood. Dead.

The driver side door--completely blown off, Meyers' body exposed and vulnerable.

A BULLET pierces his shin.

Meyers looks at the LT, then in the backseat to his friend. He sees--

SGT. Bartles, covered in blood, his right arm gone, his eyes barely open, and spit sliding from his mouth.

Meyers summons the last bit of life he has left.

He mashes the gas, and the Hummer lurches to life, its broken axle wobbling on the blacktop, it, too, gasping its last breath.

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--SAME

Matt's convoy speeds to the gate, the Camp already alive with activity.

Matt's vehicle erupts through the gate, blasting through the concertina wire.

MEYER'S VEHICLE--SAME

The tires of the vehicle continue to bow, look as if they'll break.

Another round enters Meyer's shoulder. He's being shot to shit.

Once more he mashes the gas, but this time the vehicle complies, and guns the two wounded soldiers at full speed.

BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--SAME

Matt and Baker come speeding into camp.

MATT

Line these fucking vehicles up. Now. We gotta go back out.

Helicopter engines turn over, their blades spinning. The Medevac is ready, expecting to extract three dead soldiers.

Suddenly, in the distance, Meyer's vehicle, as battered and lifeless as the soldiers inside, comes speeding over the horizon.

MEYER'S VEHICLE--SAME

Bartles is unconscious, bleeding out, his severed arm nowhere to be found.

Meyer' face is speckled with shrapnel, his body bullet-ridden.

CPL. MEYERS

Hold on. Hold on, Chuck. Don't let go.  
Don't let go, buddy.

Meyers honks his horn, as much to alert the camp as to keep Bartles conscious. The vehicle speeds to the gate of:

BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--CONTINUOUS

Soldiers, Medics descend on Meyers's vehicle.

MEYER'S VEHICLE-CONTINUOUS

Meyers is in pure adrenaline mode--unaware of his wounds.

CPL. MEYERS

Don't let him die.

MEDIC

Come on. We'll take care of him. We gotta treat you.

The Medic rips Meyers from the vehicle, from his friend.

Meyers pushes the Medic back and hobbles over to see Bartles being pulled from the wreckage.

Baker and Matt hold an unconscious Bartles--apply pressure to the wounds.

A Medic administers MORPHINE.

CPL. MEYERS

Is he dead? Is he dead?

Bartles is rushed onto a Blackhawk, Meyers close behind.

CPL. MEYERS (CONT'D)

Put me on the same chopper.

Meyers hops in, a Medic gives the 'Okay' to the PILOT and off they go.

The camp is engulfed in dust as the Blackhawk lifts up into a dark night.

Matt looks at his uniform--red with his friends' blood.

MATT

Come on.

Baker doesn't move, can't. He's stunned.

Matt sprints, pure anger driving his muscles.

SSG. BAKER

(yells)

Ocre. Get your ass back here.

Matt jumps into the turret of a vehicle.

MATT

We gotta go.

Matt slams the hood of the vehicle. Pure rage.

MATT (CONT'D)

We gotta go back out.

No one moves. Whoever set off the bomb is long gone.  
Nothing to be done.

FADE TO:

INT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE, BATHROOM-LATER

Matt's alone. His face, it hangs heavy now, a new stark look in his eyes--soaks his head in water.

The sink mixes brown with dirt and blood.

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--SAME

The camp's illuminated by work lights. Soldiers do back breaking labor filling sandbags, fortifying positions.

No rest tonight.

EXT. BAQUBAH HOUSE, BALCONY--NIGHT

Matt sits on the ledge of the balcony, his back to the city. He lights up a cigarette, exhales smoke.

Baker emerges from the doorway.

SSG. BAKER

I've been looking for you. Bartles is on an emergency evac to Landstuhl. He's--

MATT  
(offering)  
Cigarette?

Baker doesn't acknowledge.

SSG. BAKER  
He's gonna live, Ocre.

MATT  
I don't smoke either.  
(joking)  
Really gets in the way of my yoga.

Matt ashes over the balcony.

SSG. BAKER  
You can't be out here.

MATT  
The Sergeant Major made me see the  
Chaplain? Guess it was obvious I'm not  
feeling too hot.

SSG. BAKER  
What the Chaplain say?

MATT  
Lotta nothing. God's plan. I said anyone  
who planned this needs their fucking jaw  
unhinged.

SSG. BAKER  
And then?

MATT  
Then, Chaplain asked if I smoke. I said  
no. He leaned in, slipped this pack in my  
hand and said 'maybe you should consider  
starting'.

Matt stubs out the cigarette on the railing.

MATT (CONT'D)  
It's gone bad, Sergeant Baker. And if  
it's gonna get worse, if I'm next, then  
fine. I really don't give a shit.

SSG. BAKER  
Easy. The farther you walk down that  
path, the longer the walk back.

MATT  
Maybe we're too far already.

SSG. BAKER

The only way we get out of here is together. If I can't count on you to pull yourself out of this fucking hole, then what hope do I have? You understand?

MATT

(glib)

Proud and Ready, Sergeant Baker.

SSG. BAKER

Good. Get inside. We shouldn't be standing out here at night.

MATT

I just wish one person in my life, one person, would've told me the truth. If my dad had the balls to stick around maybe he'd have told me: Matt, good people die, and cry all you want but the world don't give a shit. So how I see it, is we spend the next 20 years crying by the front door, or we admit it now. Daddy ain't coming home. And we ain't saving this town.

Matt flicks his cigarette butt.

SSG. BAKER

If you've got some mourning to do, do it now. Tomorrow we go back out.

Baker takes one more good look at his friend, then heads back inside.

MATT

Take it easy, Sergeant Baker.

(to Himself)

And if its easy take it twice.

Matt's gaze trails off.

INT. BATHROOM-LATER

Blinding fluorescent bulbs, a white room as artificial as the lighting.

Matt looks out the window.

His P.O.V:

--The calm late night of Baqubah.

We TIMELAPSE--moonlight becomes early dawn. Matt's been in here all night.

--SINK

Gobs of hair fall into the porcelain. The buzz of hair trimmers.

The faucet spews water and swirls the thickets of hair into a wet mitten in the drain.

EXT. BAQUBAH HOUSE--NEXT MORNING

The camp is quiet, lifeless, yet there's Matt his head shaved to a mohawk--the lone soldier in the turret of a Humvee.

SGM. MCELLIGOT

Beautiful day for the infantry, son.

MATT

Hoo-rah, Sergeant Major.

SGM. MCELLIGOT

What the hell is that on your head? No way that thing is regulation.

The Sergeant Major plants a foot in the tire well, climbs to look Matt eye to eye. Studies him.

SGM. MCELLIGOT (CONT'D)

(whispers)

When we get back I want you to dye that thing Infantry blue. Anyone gives you shit, you send 'em my way.

The Sergeant Major winks, and whistles his way off.

Other soldiers pile out of the Safe House for the day's mission.

Baker walks by silent, loads up his gear in the Humvee. Finally--

SSG. BAKER

You're not riding up there.

MATT

Someone has to.

SSG. BAKER

Not having a wild man in the turret. You pull your brain back in your skull then fine.

Matt squats down into the Hummer.

MATT

I'm riding up here and that's the end of it.

Baker stares hard into Matt's eyes, seeing if there is a human being in there somewhere.

SSG. BAKER

Alright. Don't fuck this up.

Matt smiles and stands back up.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

Your head looks like a 70's vagina by the way.

MATT

Fuck you.

The convoy rolls out of camp, Matt atop for the first time.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAQUBAH VILLAGE--CONTINUOUS

Matt's P.O.V.

--People in buildings

--Children hanging over an overpass

--Trash lining the streets

The threat is everywhere. His eyes shift around looking for a fight.

EXT. BAQUBAH AQUEDUCT--DAY

Water spews everywhere. It's chaos.

Matt dismounts, speeds to the center of the crowd. Sees the pipe is ruptured, water blasts in all directions.

MATT

We're not gonna plug this thing. We need to put a new pipe in.

SSG. BAKER

How do we get this one out?

Matt considers. Looks around.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

You got a plan, I suggest you step on it.

Matt runs toward the Humvee and grabs cables.

People clear the way while Matt ratchet straps them around the pipe.

MATT

Where's Machmoud?

MACHMOUD

Here.

MATT

Tell them exactly what I say.

Machmoud nods. Translates for Matt--

MATT (CONT'D)

This pipe has to be replaced. I'm gonna rip it free with the vehicle. But we're gonna need everyone we got to carry a new pipe from the truck. Soldiers, Iraqis, everybody.

Matt points to the PILE OF PIPING at the top of the hill.

MATT (CONT'D)

Let's go. Go, go, go.

With that, everyone disperses, runs fast up the hill.

Matt hops inside the hummer and hits the gas. The vehicle tires spin up mud and burry themselves deep in the earth.

TOP OF HILL--SAME

Baker and a GROUP of Soldiers and Iraqis pick up pipes, lug them on their shoulders.

MATT'S HUMMER--SAME

The engine smokes, but the pipe barely moves.

MATT

Fuck.

The pipe bends, bends more, and finally breaks to the ground.

The Hummer lurches forward and drags the pipe away. Water rushes.

HILL--SAME

The men run the pipe toward the aqueduct. It's heavy. Real fucking heavy.

They all grind teeth, scream in agony, but they make it.

SSG. BAKER

Ready. One, Two, Three.

They heft the pipe off their shoulders. It splashes in the mud.

A WELDING SOLDIER drops his mask, stokes the torch-- Sparks fly, and melted gobs of metal hold the new pipe in place.

As they work, Matt storms towards Syverson.

MATT

Where the fuck is everyone?

CPT. SYVERSON

Excuse, me?

MATT

Where are all the workers?

CPT. SYVERSON

The burnt bodies scared them off. No one wants to work.

MATT

We need the engineers, sir. We can't do this without them.

CPT. SYVERSON

Not gonna happen. Not until we make this place safe.

MATT

Well we better figure something out, because this is about as safe as this place is gonna get.

CPT. SYVERSON  
Is it just me or did we lose good  
soldiers yesterday?

MATT  
Yeah. And it's gonna happen again. If  
you're in charge, then figure this the  
fuck out.

Matt storms off.

EXT. BAQUBAH OUTSKIRTS--LATER

Mud soaked Hummers wheel through the town. Up top, Matt  
looks out over the city once more, dried mud in every  
crevice.

Inside, Baker yanks on Matt's pant leg. Matt crouches  
inside.

SSG. BAKER  
You need to cool it. You can't tell the  
Captain to fuck himself. Get your  
emotions under control.

MATT  
You're right.  
(sarcastically)  
I mean things are going so well, maybe we  
should all just relax a little.

Matt pops back up in the turret.

Baker grabs at Matt's leg again. Matt shakes him off.

From the rear, a CAR ENGINE roars. Matt turns to see an  
Iraqi taxi speeding toward his convoy.

Matt spins his SAW around.

He fires a few shots over the top.

Inside the Hummer, all look to the rear view, see the  
vehicle lurching at them still.

Radio chatter erupts.

SSG. BAKER  
Hold on, Ocre.  
(to Driver)  
Get ready to slam these fucking breaks.

Matt's legs start to draw up the in turret. He's actually climbing up onto the roof.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

Ocre. Get your fucking legs inside.  
You're gonna fly off--

The vehicle screeches to a halt.

IN THE TURRET

Matt holds on tight, then leaps off while the Hummer fishtails.

Matt pulls his 9mm from his leg and rushes the taxi.

Baker and the rest hop out.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

Ocre. Get the fuck back.

But Matt reaches inside the driver's window and rips the man out of the car.

A handheld electronic device goes flying from the Iraqi's hand.

The Iraqi man scrambles along the ground looking for his detonator.

Matt's on him, unleashes a flurry of punches at the back of the man's head.

Baker intercepts, drags Matt off the man.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

Everyone away from the car. Call EOD.

Baker pulls Matt aside

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

What the fuck are you doing? He was gonna blow you sky high.

Matt smacks Baker's hands from his vest. Walks back to the Hummer and climbs in the turret, his new home.

EXT. BAQUBAH-LATER

The city, once alive, is now quiet and terrified.

The markets empty, the store fronts gated shut.

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE--CONTINUOUS

The convoy stops just inside the gate. Baker and Matt dismount.

MATT

This is getting to be a good time.

He cocks back the hammer on the M-249 and clears it. Click, click, snap.

SSG. BAKER

You jump out of the turret like that again and I'll kill you.

He clears his weapon.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

If that guy would have got his hands around that detonator--

MATT

You're welcome.

Matt walks off, that's the end of the conversation.

EXT. BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE, BAQUBAH SAFE HOUSE-NEXT DAY

Matt puts the SAW into the turret. He straps a 9mm onto his right leg, an M-4 leans against the side wall, his spare.

His mohawk now a beautiful infantry blue.

He opens a wooden box to reveal GRENADES. Matt is armed to the hilt.

At the front gate there's loud commotion.

An IRAQI WOMAN screams, cries. With her are TWO IRAQI CHILDREN. She pleads to get inside the gate but the guards hold her back.

SSG. BAKER (O.S.)

What's up at the gate?

MATT

Don't know.

EXT. FRONT GATE-SAME

CPT. Syverson stands with the two GATE GUARDS as the Iraqi woman cries, pleads.

CPT. SYVERSON

What is she saying?

GATE GUARD

She says her husband was killed. It's our fault.

CPT. SYVERSON

Our fault? What the fuck did we do?

GATE GUARD

She says his feet were tied...

(in Arabic to woman)

How did he die?

The Iraqi Woman can barely speak through her tears.

GATE GUARD (CONT'D)

He was beaten, his feet tied to a truck.

He was dragged through the streets.

CPT. SYVERSON

Jesus.

IRAQI WOMAN

...Machmoud Jassim Sarraf.

Syverson stops.

CPT. SYVERSON

Wait. Tell her to say that name again?

GATE GUARD

(in Arabic)

What was that name? Say it again?

The Iraqi woman realizes she has gotten through to the soldiers.

IRAQI WOMAN

Machmoud Jassim Sarraf.

CPT. SYVERSON

Get her and the kids into the CMOC.

GATE GUARD

Yes, sir.

Matt's convoy rolls to the gate to inspect the commotion.

SGM. MCCELLIGOT  
What is it?

CPT. SYVERSON  
Our translator.

MATT'S VEHICLE

Matt sees the crying Iraqi woman and her children being ushered inside.

Starts to piece the scene together. Realization hitting his face.

MATT  
Where's Machmoud?

SSG. BAKER  
Haven't seen him.

The two dismount and check the other vehicles. No Machmoud.

They reach the gate.

SGM. MCCELLIGOT  
Do we have a positive ID?

GATE GUARD  
The body is in the center of town, she says. We'll have to go retrieve it and check.

CPT. SYVERSON  
Sergeant Major, round up a few guys to check. Take EOD, the body could be booby trapped.

MATT  
It's Machmoud, isn't it?

Pause.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Jesus. The aqueduct.

Matt leaps into action, the others follow suit, grasping the severity of what's to happen next.

CPT. SYVERSON  
(yells to convoy)  
Load up now. Everyone, let's move.

EXT. BAQUBAH AQUEDUCT--SAME

An IRAQI WORKER, his eyes cold, produces a little WIRE AND SWITCH from under his sleeve.

He sets his shovel down and walks toward another section of the aqueduct.

EXT. BAQUBAH--SAME

The convoy speeds around corners, the radio chatter ignites.

CPT. SYVERSON

(into Radio)

Eagle One do you copy? Eagle One? Stop the workers. Repeat, stop the Iraqi workers.

EXT. BAQUBAH AQUEDUCT

The radio inside a Hummer chatters with Syverson's warning. It's static-y, hard to understand.

A SOLDIER answers.

SOLDIER

Eagle One, go ahead, over.

A GUARD SOLDIER spots the Iraqi Worker, suspiciously walking toward him.

GUARD SOLDIER

Hey. There a problem?

The Iraqi stops, his face toward the ground. Can't see his eyes.

EXT. BAQUBAH--SAME

Matt's vehicle speeds past the guards at the bottom of the hill and climbs toward the aqueduct.

EXT. BAQUBAH AQUEDUCT--SAME

The Iraqi Worker stops. Stands still, eerily motionless.

GUARD SOLDIER

Do you need something?

(yells, nervous)

(MORE)

GUARD SOLDIER (CONT'D)

I need a translator. Need a translator over here.

The Iraqi Worker slowly kneels to the ground.

The Guard Soldier, confused, approaches with his weapon half-drawn.

The Iraqi Worker, a tear of regret streams down his face, his eyes looking for the curve of the earth.

EXT. BAQUBAH AQUEDUCT--SAME

Matt's convoy comes rolling into camp just in time for--

A DEAFENING EXPLOSION

The heavens light up with a flash.

Matt is thrown from the Hummer, barely conscious. Water comes rushing toward him and the rest of his unit.

His body tumbles end over end down the hill.

Pieces of metal mix with water. It's from the piping, the aqueduct has been destroyed.

From Matt's P.O.V. we see the ensuing chaos of those who survived the blast tend to the wounded.

Matt stumbles to his knees. His ears ringing.

Arms wrap around him.

It's Baker, bruised and bloody. He hoists Matt to his feet.

Baker screams to Matt, but he/we hear nothing.

Matt looks at the destruction, puts his hand to his face and pulls back a fist of blood and skin.

He screams. No sound.

And, for the first time, Matt weeps.

FADE TO:

BLACK SCREEN:

Hummer engines whisper towards us, as in the opening. They're roaring now.

INT. HUMMER-DAY

Matt stares at the Iraqi countryside--desolate, unending sand. The blood from his face is washed clean, but the open wounds remain.

They roll past a sign: BAGHDAD 50km.

The Hummer holds a heavy silence until--

SSG. BAKER

It can be beautiful, can't it? The country.

MATT

Yeah. It can be.

They pass:

A convoy. A flag draped over reading: 3RD ENGINEERING BRIGADE.

SSG. BAKER

There they go. Army Engineers. Maybe they'll have better luck.

Matt doesn't answer.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT, MAIN GATE-SAME

A stark contrast to the Baqubah Safe House. IRAQI CHILDREN play soccer outside the gate, Soldiers wear clean uniforms. The war barely exists here.

INT. HUMMER-CONTINUOUS

Matt and Baker take in the beauty of home. They are back with their unit, back to safety.

SSG. BAKER

I took a little souvenir.

Baker produces from his rucksack the sign: Camp Warhorse SPA & RESORT.

SSG. BAKER (CONT'D)

I figure it took from me so I wanted something in return.

INT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT--DAY

Matt and Baker carry their gear through the halls. The place is crowded with unfamiliar faces--new faces, innocent faces.

They make their way to the top of the marble staircase to find Kidwell, mopping the floor.

PVT. KIDWELL

Sergeant Baker, Private Ocre. I heard they were bringing you guys back.

SSG. BAKER

Yep.

Awkward silence.

PVT. KIDWELL

Well, I've been doing my part here. Someone's gotta clean the floors, you know. Sorry to hear about what happened.

MATT

We just need to get to our room, Kidwell.

PVT. KIDWELL

(hurt)

Right.

Kidwell gives his attention back to mopping.

CUT TO:

INT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT, SHOWER-LATER

Matt stands naked in the shower, looks amused at the hot and cold faucets. He turns the cold water on. Then off. On. Off.

He smiles. So simple.

INT. MESS HALL-NIGHT

Matt sits by himself, empty chairs in all directions. He quietly munches on a late night meal.

A TV barely audible, spouts sports highlights. The fluorescent lights hum and whiz.

INT. MATT'S ROOM-NIGHT

Matt lies awake in his bunk, staring at the ceiling.  
The churning overhead fan, the hum of laptops.  
He tosses and turns. No sleep.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT, ROOFTOP-NIGHT

Baker paces, SAT phone in hand.

SSG. BAKER

Hello? Anne?

MAN'S VOICE

I'm sorry, who is this?

SSG. BAKER

Could I speak to Anne please. It's a  
friend of hers.

MAN'S VOICE

(suspicious)

Can I get a name?

SSG. BAKER

Please, man. Just put her on the phone.

Muffled arguing in the background.

ANNE

Hello?

SSG. BAKER

Anne, listen I know this hurts but I need  
to talk.

ANNE

You can't call me anymore, Joel. Please,  
this is too much.

SSG. BAKER

I know, I know. It's just--

ANNE

I'm gonna hang up.

SSG. BAKER

I don't know when I'll get the phone  
again.

Anne sighs heavy, resignedly.

ANNE

Are you okay?

SSG. BAKER

I'm fine, yeah. It's just. I had to talk with you. I don't know what's gonna happen. And I miss you.

ANNE

Joel stop. You can't call me up and scare me like this.

SSG. BAKER

Just tell me you'll be there for me when I get back. You don't have to mean it. And I don't care you found someone else. Just tell me you miss me and that you'll be waiting.

ANNE

(stifling back tears)

Please be careful. Please.

She hangs up. Baker drops the phone to his side.

MATT (O.S.)

Didn't get the answering machine this time?

Matt's in the doorway. He heard the whole exchange.

SSG. BAKER

What's on your mind, Ocre?

MATT

The water. It was running. We fucking had it, Sergeant. We had it.

SSG. BAKER

It wasn't ours to have. If Baqubah gets water it won't be because of us.

Baker takes a seat of the roof's ledge, dangles his feet over the side.

MATT

Then why'd we bother?

A heavy silence.

SSG. BAKER

You know what every person on this planet has in common?

MATT

Answer my question.

SSG. BAKER

Every person believes, truly believes, they're the hero of the story. The slayer of the dragon, the rescuer of the princess. And good for them, you know. They get to live life that way. There will never be a moment that fucks up their fantasy.

MATT

What's that gotta do with Bartles and Meyers? And Falvy.

SSG. BAKER

Their moment came, Ocre. Our moment. We coulda stayed outta Baqubah and lived the same fantasy as everyone else, but we went. You went. And maybe reality had a hefty price tag, but at least we know what kind of men we are.

MATT

What kind of men we are?

Matt swallows hard.

MATT (CONT'D)

Back in Kuwait I spent every waking moment thinkin' how I'd get sent home. Hell, I thought so hard I never slept. 'Til one night, an idea. I went out to the motor pool, I put my hand in a Hummer door, and I shut it. Over and over until my skin tore and my bones broke. I sat on the ground crying. Then, I see cigarette smoke from the doorway. Falvy. He didn't say anything, just watched, then dropped his smoke and left. And as big of an asshole as he was, he never told anyone. He let me have my shame. So don't you put me in the same fucking sentence as Bartles and Meyers. Or Falvy. Because I know exactly what kind of man I am.

Baker searches for words that won't come. Instead, he rests his hand on Matt's shoulder. This will have to do.

INT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT, MATT'S ROOM--NIGHT

Matt and Baker sneak into their room, the rest of the guys fast asleep.

A flashlight glides over each of the sleeping soldiers, taking Matt to his cold, empty bunk.

Suddenly, a LOUD EXPLOSION rocks the building.

Soldiers hop to, hit the lights.

SGT. THOMPSON

Mortar round. That's the closest one we've had in a while.

They settle back to sleep.

FADE TO:

INT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT, GENERAL'S QUARTERS-NEXT DAY

Matt and Baker file into the General's quarters and stand at attention. The General is behind his desk, the Sergeant Major in the corner.

GENERAL

At ease.

They do.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

How you men feeling?

MATT/SSG. BAKER

Good, sir.

GENERAL

Sleeping? Anything keeping you up?

MATT/SSG. BAKER

No, sir.

GENERAL

Good.

The General and Sergeant Major exchange looks.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

This whole business of war is, well, uneven.

(MORE)

GENERAL (CONT'D)

And there comes a time when a soldier has to be put back on level ground. The Sergeant Major and I think, for you two, that time is now.

They stand silent, until--

SSG. BAKER

Yes, sir.

GENERAL

There's a convoy outside and you two will be on it. It'll take you to the Balad flight line where a C-130 will take you back to the States.

MATT

Sir, I'm happy to waive my two weeks of leave. If it's all the same, I'll stay.

GENERAL

Son, I'm not talking about paid leave. Your war is over. You two are going home.

MATT

Well we can't, sir. Who's gonna train our replacements?

SGM. MCELLIGOT

You let us worry about that, Private.

MATT

We haven't packed up our gear, or--

SGM. MCELLIGOT

It's being taken care of.

Matt looks around the room in disbelief.

MATT

Sergeant Major, I know because of what happened there's reason to be concerned. But Sergeant Baker and I are fine to Demob with the rest of the unit.

Matt looks to Baker for support. Baker looks straight ahead.

SSG. BAKER

Sir, it's the opinion of both Private Ocre's NCO's that he ADVON back to the States as soon as possible--

MATT

Wait, wait--

SSG. BAKER

(ignoring him)

Furthermore, both the Sergeant Major and I agree from a previous discussion that the Private has nothing more to prove to himself, or anyone else.

MATT

Previous discussion? You knew about this?

Baker finally turns to look at his friend.

SSG. BAKER

(softly)

It's time to go home, Matt.

All eyes are on him.

MATT

I'm not fucking going anywhere.

SGM. MCELLIGOT

Easy, son.

MATT

The Army ripped me from my home. Then it shipped me and my friends to die in some God damn village.

Baker grabs Matt's shoulders, Matt shrugs him off.

MATT (CONT'D)

Not this time.

GENERAL

You two are dismissed.

MATT

I say when it's time to go. There's more to do.

The Sergeant Major steps in to usher Matt from the room.

MATT (CONT'D)

I've got more to do. We're not finished yet. We can fix it, sir. Sergeant Major, please--

Matt tears up as Baker drags him from the room.

INT. HALLWAY--CONTINUOUS

Matt and Baker emerge from the General's quarters. Baker pins Matt to the wall.

SSG. BAKER

Enough is enough. Look. It's over, Ocre. We're done.

They're interrupted by--COMMOTION in the hallway.

Soldiers gather around a doorway.

Matt and Baker run over to--

INT. KIDWELL'S ROOM--CONTINUOUS

The room is lined with sandbags, packed tight and deep, extending to the ceiling.

Soldiers pull a huge mound of COLLAPSED SANDBAGS out of the room, toss them. Sand is everywhere, soldiers work furiously.

Matt and Baker join in the digging.

SSG. BAKER

What the fuck happened?

SOLDIER

The mortar round last night shook 'em loose.

They dig and dig until Matt sees, peeking up from the sand, Kidwell's HEADPHONES.

Matt pulls at it, and finally drags into view the dead body of Pvt. Kidwell, sand in his mouth, his face blue, suffocated by the weight of his own sandbags.

The group is left stunned, speechless, unsure of what to do.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

We need a medic.

Matt checks Kidwell's neck, no pulse.

Matt bends down and looks into Kidwell's lifeless eyes.

He looks the body up and down, his face stoic, no emotion.

The medics arrive and clear Matt away.

SSG. BAKER

Come on, Ocre. Nothing to be done.

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT--LATER

Matt and Baker walk toward their convoy. Their gear already loaded up in the rear vehicle. Matt and Baker climb inside.

The convoy kicks to life and slowly rolls them away from their building.

Matt watches the Baghdad Airport, the commotion surrounding it, get smaller in the distance. Taking him away, once again from a place he called home.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALAD FLIGHTLINE-DAY

The convoy stops alongside the flightline, C-130's lined up, now idle but soon their engines will churn and these soldiers will be on their way home, to safety, to the life they once knew.

Matt hops out of the vehicle. A SOLDIER places Matt's duffels neatly on the ground.

SOLDIER

Any advice on how to make it out of here alive?

MATT

Yeah. Stop thinking about staying alive.

Matt hefts his bags over shoulder and walks to join Baker at--

FRONT OF CONVOY--SAME

Where the Sergeant Major and Baker trade their farewells.

SGM. MCCELLIGOT

It's a confusing feeling, isn't it? All you want is to go home now here it is.

SSG. BAKER

Don't feel anything, Sergeant Major.

SGM. MCELLIGOT

That's what I mean. It takes a while for the experience to catch up to you, but it will. Believe me. A man at war has two choices: spend your life reliving what you've seen, or not living at all.

Matt drops his bags next to Baker's. The Sergeant Major looks the two over, smiles. These are his boys, his sons of war.

SGM. MCELLIGOT (CONT'D)

Well, I guess we better leave you two nancies to it.

(yells to Convoy)

Load 'em up.

The Sergeant Major hops in his vehicle, pats the top of the hood.

MATT

Hey, Sergeant Major. Beautiful day for the Infantry?

SGM. MCELLIGOT

Beautiful day, son. Beautiful. God. Damn. Day.

And with that, the convoy speeds off.

Matt and Baker watch their unit disappear into the distance. Then hoist their bags over shoulder.

SSG. BAKER

After you, Private Ocre.

MATT

Don't mind if I do.

Matt turns to the flight line, walks toward his plane.

SSG. BAKER

The Sergeant Major told me I'd miss this place some day.

MATT

Not fucking likely.

The two march on silently, the C-130's engine fires up, the blades whizz to life.

A LINE OF SOLDIERS march single file up the steps into the belly of the 130.

Matt and Baker exchange looks, the reality of their homecoming rushing toward them.

Matt's boots crunch sand, step after step.

We stay close on his boots as--

The sound of the 130's engine dims, muffles. Until it morphs into the unmistakable sound of an ocean.

Matt's boots stop. Ocean water laps against them.

Matt looks up confused, turns around to see he's at--

MATT'S MEMORY, THE BEACH, SOMEWHERE U.S.A--DAY

The planes have disappeared, so has Baker and the Line of Soldiers.

Just a few yards away, all he sees is a young child building a sand castle. It's YOUNG MATT.

Matt is inside his own memory.

He watches, until-

MATT'S FATHER emerges over a sand pile.

MATT'S FATHER

Matthew. Hey, buddy.

YOUNG MATT

Daddy look. I built a castle. This is my castle and I am the king.

Young Matt flexes his little muscles.

Matt smiles a sad smile. The memory rushing back.

Matt's Father kneels beside young Matt. Matt's Father's face hangs heavy with regret, but young Matt can't detect it.

MATT'S FATHER

Everyone's the king of their own castle, Matt. But look--

The tide touches the sand castle's edge, takes with it a bit of sand.

MATT'S FATHER (CONT'D)

The tide is going to take it.

YOUNG MATT  
I'll sit here and keep it safe.

MATT'S FATHER  
The tide will win, Matt. The tide always wins.

Matt's father hugs young Matt. Looks the boy lovingly in the face, holding back something stronger, deeper.

MATT'S FATHER (CONT'D)  
Hey kiddo. I'm gonna go for a coke. You want one?

YOUNG MATT  
Sit next to me dad. We can keep it safe.

MATT'S FATHER/MATT  
(in unison)  
Sorry, kiddo. Next time.

Matt's Father kisses Young Matt softly on the forehead.

Matt watches his father walk off into the sunset, the last time he will ever see him.

A YOUNG BOY on the beach runs a RED KITE up into the sky. Just like in Matt's dream in the opening. He watches it flutter free against a blue sky.

SSG. BAKER (O.S.)  
Ocre. Ocre.

Matt's snapped back to--

FLIGHTLINE--SAME

The steps of the C-130 are before Matt. Baker's at his side.

SSG. BAKER  
You, okay?

Matt nods, smiles wide.

As Matt walks the steps, his boots leaving Iraqi soil for the last time, we slowly pull back, up and over the flightline. We see Matt as only one of a hundred soldiers, each with their own story of pain and loss, duck into the belly of the bird that will fly them home.

FADE TO:

CPL. MEYERS

Corporal Meyers was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor for his actions in Baqubah on 23 October, 2003.

SGT. BARTLES

Sergeant Bartles spent a year recovering after the loss of his right arm. In 2007 his military contract ended.

He re-upped for another 5 years and now works as a Military Intelligence Officer.

SSG. BAKER

Staff Sergeant Baker left the military shortly after returning from Iraq.

He now works as a Fireman in Kansas City, MO.

PVT. MATTHEW OCRE

Private Ocre also left the military shortly after his tour in Iraq.

At the urging of Sergeant Baker, Matt reconnected with his father.

Matt and Baker remain best friends.

FADE TO BLACK.

\*