



Combining the Fantastic and the Hyper-Real: Stylistic and Thematic Influences on the Dead and the Desert

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Combining the Fantastic and the Hyper-Real:

Stylistic and Thematic Influences on *The Dead and the Desert*

An Introductory Essay and an Original Feature-Length Screenplay

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Abstract

This critical essay looks at the influences on and inspiration for the original feature-length screenplay *The Dead and the Desert*. Specifically, it explores George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* as a model for developing characters with complexity through moral ambiguity as well as contributing to a literary environment where death is seemingly random. It also examines how military non-fiction such as Andy McNabb's *Bravo Two Zero* contributed to the chase-thriller aspect of the plot. Ill-fated decisions are linked to the film *Tears of the Sun*, and finally the essay examines, through discussion of Jonathan Maberry's *Patient Zero* and Max Brook's *World War Z*, the decision to include zombies in what is otherwise a conventional military-themed action thriller.

The Dead and the Desert is a military action thriller/zombie horror crossover screenplay. It is a feature-length script wherein a team of American Green Berets on a mission in remote Iraq find themselves short on supplies and being pursued across the open desert by an undead enemy that they only begin to understand after the loss of several team members. Meanwhile, at a classified facility back in the US, a team of military researchers race to figure out the nature and origins of the zombie contagion. Their mission: stop the outbreak from spreading out of control by any means necessary, up to and including killing the potentially infected Green Berets on the ground in Iraq. The chase culminates in a heroic last-stand by the Green Berets that is almost certain to fail...if the bombers sent by the research facility don't kill the team first.

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Chapter I

Combining the Fantastic and the Hyper-Real: Stylistic and Thematic Influences on

The Dead and the Desert

The feature-length screenplay for *The Dead and the Desert* is a military action thriller/zombie horror crossover. I, the author, originally conceived of the story as a novel, but later realized it also works exceedingly well as a screenplay – perhaps better, even. In the transition from novel to screenplay, a number of movies inevitably left their mark on the script. Therefore, as *The Dead and the Desert* is influenced in equal parts by novels, military non-fiction, and film, this thesis analyzes it both in the context of the written works that originally inspired it, and the films that have informed and influenced it. Specifically, I discuss the thematic and stylistic connections between *The Dead and the Desert* and the novels *A Game of Thrones*, *Bravo Two Zero*, and *The One That Got Away*, as well as the film *Tears of the Sun*, and the zombie horror genre in general. Furthermore, I discuss how my own experience in combat shows itself in the worldview in which *The Dead and the Desert* exists.

A Game of Thrones: Grey Characters and the Random Nature of Death

Growing up I never thought of myself as a writer. I loved to read, and did so voraciously, but while I possessed great interest and some degree of skill in visual arts,

the literary arts never interested me other than as a consumer. This viewpoint continued well into adulthood until in 1998 I read one singular book that left me possessed of a burning desire to write. This book, George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*, has been the single most important influence on my work. It is this book that led me to become a writer. The novel and its sequels, collectively known as *A Song of Ice and Fire*, have since become a massive commercial success, spawning a multi-season HBO series.

A Game of Thrones is an epic fantasy with strong historical resonance, particularly to England's War of the Roses. In a nutshell, the king dies, resulting in a violent power struggle for succession between the major noble houses. It is a story of political intrigue and the machinations of power. What captured my imagination though was not the plot, however epic, but rather the style and the author's approach to characters.

Stylistically, the world is depicted as one would expect of a *realistic* portrayal of a Medieval Europe-like setting. Life is ugly, dirty, brutish and short. Absent are the romantic imaginings of quasi-medieval life so prevalent in fantasy fiction. In fact, this novel reads as *dramatically* adult for a genre that traditionally caters to younger readers. The few characters holding any kind of romantic notions of how things *should* be quickly have them dashed to pieces by the harsh realities of life and death. The novel is dark. Very dark. I had never seen such nihilism in a fantasy novel. The good guys don't win just because they're the good guys. In fact, more often than not, they just end up dead. Only the cynics, schemers and opportunists succeed and thrive in Westeros. As the Queen, Cersei Lannister herself says in *A Game of Thrones*: "When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die" (Martin 408). And Martin has no qualms about killing his

characters. No one is safe from the headsman's axe. Martin neither promises nor delivers a consolatory tale of good triumphing over evil, and moral virtue does not guarantee survival in Martin's world. Just when you think you know who will rise to be the heroic protagonist, he/ she is suddenly snuffed out. In his introduction to *Beyond the Wall: Exploring George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*, a compilation of critical essays on the series, James Lowder observes: "It should come as no surprise that the essayists don't always agree on the nature, or existence, of the series' moral center" (xvii).

A Game of Thrones rages against the over-romanticized conventions of fantasy life. David Benioff, a screenwriter for the HBO adaptation, criticized the bulk of the fantasy genre in a *New York Times* interview, saying: "Whenever you have the epic conflict of good and evil, it becomes the most predictable story line ever, because we all know who's going to win" (Qtd. in Itzkoff). Martin offers something different: an authentic world that is ugly, uncertain, and true.

In *The Dead and the Desert* I have tried to create a similar stylistic and thematic feel by drawing from my personal experience in war and combat. In my screenplay, as in *A Game of Thrones*, life and death are frequently arbitrary and seemingly random. In contrast to the days when armies lined up across the field from one another, modern warfare so often ends up being a case of "wrong place, wrong time." Who dies in an airstrike or IED blast or who gets hit or missed by a burst of machine gun fire usually seems so random as to appear to be nothing more than the capricious whims of fate. In a scene from *The Dead and the Desert*, this idea is directly echoed when a group of what the protagonists (an Army Special Forces team) believe to be civilians enters the target area of an airstrike just minutes before the bombs are to be dropped. Mark, the Team

Leader, considers calling off the airstrike against an extremely high-value target in order to prevent the deaths of the “civilians”. After briefly weighing their lives against the importance of destroying the target (which should save American lives down the road), the Team Sergeant, Bill, weighs in, pressing Mark to complete the task at hand.

Regarding the civilians: “Wrong place, wrong time – sucks to be them, but we’ve got a job to do.” Later in the story, as the body count on all sides piles up, it becomes clear that who lives and who dies has nothing whatsoever to do with how good or bad someone is, either as a person or as a soldier. Skill at arms and technological advantage will carry a person only so far in battle. Sometimes it simply boils down to luck...or the absence thereof. “Rightness” and “wrongness” don’t enter into the equation.

In another scene in *The Dead and the Desert*, the protagonists are involved in a helicopter crash. Some of the characters survive, some die, and several are injured to various degrees. There is no apparent rhyme or reason as to who survives the crash and who does not (obviously aside from the main protagonist, whose survival is necessary for the story). In my career as a military helicopter pilot, I have had the unfortunate occasion to witness and study the effects of real helicopter crashes, and this theme is played out time and time again. There have been high-energy crashes where the fuselage has been utterly destroyed and one would think it unsurvivable, yet crew or passengers escaped unscathed. In other instances I have studied accounts of benign-looking low-impact crashes where all aboard were killed. In this case, art truly imitates life (and death).

In *A Game of Thrones*, Martin’s characterization also stands out as truly exceptional. His characters are not black or white, good or evil, but a million nuanced shades of grey. Every reader will love and hate different characters as their tastes dictate.

In fact, a great deal has been written about the apparent moral relativism in *A Game of Thrones*. James L. Sutter, in his 2011 Suvudu guest essay, compares Martin's work to the old paradigm of clean and predictable good versus evil, as epitomized by J.R.R.

Tolkein's epic fantasy classic *The Lord of the Rings*:

One answer, as George R. R. Martin so marvelously shows us, is to remove the boundaries altogether and dive headfirst into the world of moral ambiguity. Few of his characters are unimpeachably good or irredeemably evil. Instead, they're weak, or spoiled, or damaged, or lovestruck, or compromised by any one of a thousand other real-world problems. They're too obsessed with honor, or not honorable enough. The protagonists alternate their shining victories with bitter vengeance and war crimes, while the antagonists are often funny, charming, and even sympathetic. It is, in short, a total mess.

Which is precisely why we like it. In making the world a mess, Martin has also made it that much more real—for certainly history has taught us that things rarely break down into clear-cut good and evil, especially where politics are concerned. His works are a cultural relativist field day, and over the course of even the first book many readers may find their allegiances shifting from what they originally expected. Combine this lack of moralistic signposts with the fact that Martin isn't afraid to kill off main characters—another startlingly realistic trait—and suddenly the whole thing feels much more immediate. The characters cease to be cardboard archetypes or representations, and become real. (Sutter)

To be sure, there are a few undeniably polar characters in *A Game of Thrones*, but in general Martin does not spoon-feed his readers a list of protagonists and antagonists, rather letting the reader decide for him or her self. As D.B. Weiss, Benioff's co-writer on the HBO series, puts it "Nobody's doing something because they're evil or they're good. Everybody's doing something because they're following their own very realistic and complex self-interests" (Qtd. in Itzkoff).

Examples abound, but consider Tyrion Lannister: He is a dwarf, despised by his otherwise uniformly handsome, wealthy family. Decidedly un-handsome, bordering on grotesque, he has what many would consider a good heart, sharp mind, and quick wit. On the other hand, he is a self-proclaimed drunken whoremonger whose loyalties still lie with the family that barely tolerates him. He is supremely likeable, but severely flawed from a moral and personal character standpoint. The inverse of Tyrion would be Lord Eddard Stark. A capable warrior, loyal and honorable to a fault, he too is likeable, except that he is so bound by honor and doing what is "right" that he puts himself and those he loves in mortal danger by refusing to compromise or deviate from his moral center.

Jaime Lannister provides yet another example of Martin's complex characterization. He is everything his brother Tyrion is not: tall, handsome, a gifted fighter. He starts out the series as the obvious foil: in an incestuous love affair with his sister the Queen, he attempts to murder a child who witnesses them together. What he is most widely known and despised for, however, is for killing the previous king while serving as a member of that king's sworn personal guard. He seems a simple enough bad guy until later in the series it is revealed that he is genuinely in love with his sister and that he murdered the old king to save the lives of countless innocents as well as his own

father. With that revelation, it becomes difficult to despise the man. His actions become relatable and possibly even forgivable. In their essay on Romanticism in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Linda Antonsson and Elio Garcia Jr. even make the case for Jaime as a Byronic Hero: “there’s a checklist of traits that they often share: cynicism, cunning, disrespect for authority, brilliance, self-destructive behavior, a troubled past, and so on. Once we are in Jaime’s head and see him from his perspective, many of the traits coalesce and make it clear that he is not the stock villain he might have seemed in the first novel” (8-10).

Refusing to label characters as good or bad is a consistent element in all of my writing. I love what I refer to as “grey” characters. They, like real people, are neither black nor white, but a million shades of grey somewhere in between. No one is always good without fault or flaw, and no one is purely evil without some redeeming, or at least *relatable* quality. The protagonist of my story, Mark Brewer, is an alcoholic, though a high-functioning one. He is borderline suicidal, but instead of killing himself, he passively hopes that the job (Army Special Forces) will eventually take care of that for him. To that end, he volunteers not only himself, but his entire team for a dangerous mission when they should be enjoying some well-deserved down time. On the flip-side, Mahmoud Ali Walid, the primary antagonist and anti-coalition insurgent mastermind, is not merely a cookie-cutter jihadist bent on killing Americans, but rather an American-educated businessman whose opposition to the American presence in Iraq is far more intellectual (and possibly legitimate?). I have tried to portray such complexity in my secondary characters as well: Terry is a likeable joker but also a serial adulterer; easy-going surfer-dude Robbie is an ice-cold virtuoso killer with his sniper rifle. Making characters “grey” gives them depth and authenticity. Of course most of the American

soldier characters in *The Dead and the Desert* are ultimately skewed toward the “good guy” side of morality, but at least they are flawed, and hopefully more complex than a simple binary good/bad option provides. They exist, like most of us, on a *spectrum*.

A Game of Thrones was a paradigm shift for me. It was the first book where I encountered such a viscerally unconventional approach to popular fiction. It made me think “you can do that?” I have read other novels since *A Game of Thrones* that have possessed similar qualities of style and characterization, but I will never forget the impact that this particular novel had on me, nor the immediate urge to write that it imparted. I felt liberated by the book—free to write gritty, dark, stories that could be unfriendly and even antisocial. *The Dead and the Desert* is the direct result.

Military Non-Fiction: Real World, Real Heroics

The thematic inspiration of *A Game of Thrones* aside, *The Dead and the Desert* is perhaps most heavily influenced by a large body of military non-fiction that I have accumulated since childhood. Books like Marcus Luttrell’s *Lone Survivor*, Mark Bowden’s *Blackhawk Down*, and *We Were Soldiers Once....And Young* by Hal Moore and Joe Galloway, have been in constant rotation on my reading list. These stories are often every bit as thrilling, evocative, and contemplative as the best of creative fiction. That all three of them have made highly successful adaptations to film only validates their parity with fiction.

The real value of books like these for a writer of militaria, however, is the perspective they can reveal. Such true accounts of battle, written by those who have

experienced it first-hand, have the ability to communicate the unflinching violence and atmosphere of real combat with accuracy and credibility that cannot be faked. As Steven Pressfield, a former U.S. Marine and author of *Gates of Fire*, *Killing Rommel*, and *The Profession* suggests through his recurring character Telamon, “It is one thing to study war, and another to live the warrior's life” (Pressfield).

The most direct inspiration for *The Dead and the Desert*, from a plot/story perspective, comes from *Bravo Two Zero* and *The One That Got Away*. These two works of military non-fiction impressed me with their ability to portray the experiences of soldiers in action in ways that are not only riveting as tales unto themselves, but are also structured and paced like conventional novels, making them all the more readable and accessible. Both books chronicle a disastrous Special Air Service (British special forces) mission during the 1991 Gulf War. The authors, Andy McNabb and Chris Ryan, respectively, were actual SAS operators who survived a harrowing ordeal when their team was compromised while on a deep reconnaissance mission in Iraq. Cut off, hundreds of miles behind enemy lines, their seven-man team was pursued for days across the frozen western desert by the Iraqi army, while trying to make it across the Syrian border on foot. At some point the team got split up and several died either through exposure to the elements or enemy fire. Most, with the exception of Ryan (the one that got away), were eventually captured and brutally interrogated by Iraqi forces. Their story is as action-packed, exciting, and terrifying as it gets, and made all the more remarkable by the fact that it is true!

The stories related by McNabb and Ryan have inspired me for years – not just as a writer, but also as a man and a soldier. These men were real-world examples of the

heroic ideal of never quit, never stop fighting, never say die. *The Dead and the Desert* carries over the theme of a small group of elite soldiers, cut off and on the run from a numerically superior foe. Like the men of McNabb's SAS team, team leader Mark Brewer and his Special Forces teammates are in a fight for their lives, where help is *not* on the way, and simply sitting and waiting for the cavalry to arrive means certain death. It may be a different war and a different enemy, but the overarching themes are the same: grit, survival, and an unwavering faith in the man next to you.

Both McNabb and Ryan bring the reader into their stories through their first person voice and by putting a very human face on each of the men on the team. They make the reader feel almost a part of the team because we are so close to its members. This is certainly made easier by the fact that the characters *are* real people. With all their strengths, their flaws, and their individual idiosyncrasies based in reality, McNabb and Ryan do not have to invent uniqueness to avoid flat characters.

In order to achieve that complexity of character, many of my characters are based on people I know. Master Sergeant Bill Holgrim, Mark's best friend and team sergeant in *The Dead and the Desert* is based on my own closest friend. Terry is an aggregate of two people I worked with in the Army. Lieutenant Donovan started out as the carbon copy of my wartime co-pilot. The list goes on. By doing that, I don't have to create details for all of these characters – they're already there, and they are genuine.

Echoing Pressfield's sentiment, I feel that having been a soldier myself, and having seen combat in Iraq, I can give an up-close and personal perspective that few fiction writers can achieve with authenticity. From the phrasing of radio calls to the

weapons, equipment, and tactics used, the details I write come not from research, but from personal experience as a soldier at war and the from the experiences of people I know. Being part of the military cognoscenti, I strive in my writing to give an authentic voice to scenes and especially characters. I know how soldiers think, what they feel, and how they act, and that none of these things is simple, formulaic, or achievable through a cookie-cutter archetype. I hope to bring that complexity to my screenplay, including those elements that outsiders would avoid, thinking they are cliché, but which to soldiers are *very* real. One such example is the divorce paperwork that Mark is avoiding. I was told in a workshop that the “wife leaving the soldier while he fights overseas” is cliché. It *would be* cliché if it were not, in reality, so common. It happened to me and several other people that I personally know. What is cliché to an outsider is a fact of life to a soldier.

The Ill-Fated Decision: *Tears of the Sun*

The real appeal of McNabb’s and Ryan’s books is the desperate story of survival against overwhelming, seemingly insurmountable odds. From a sub-genre standpoint, both books are classic chase stories, and *The Dead and the Desert* follows this model. The film *Tears of the Sun*, written by Alex Lasker and Patrick Cirillo and directed by Antoine Fuqua, is also a military chase thriller, but it also bears another critical similarity to *The Dead and the Desert* in that both stories are set on their tragic trajectories by an ill-fated decision from the team leader.

In *Tears of the Sun*, a U.S. Navy SEAL team is dropped into hostile territory during a military coup in Nigeria with the objective of rescuing a doctor and some

missionaries. They arrive at the mission to pick up the doctor (played by Monica Bellucci), but she refuses to leave the indigenous refugees she is helping, as they will almost certainly be massacred by the vicious rebel forces. The SEALs eventually get the doctor aboard a helicopter and head for the border and safety. Along the way Lieutenant Waters, the conflicted team leader played by Bruce Willis, makes the decision to defy orders and go back to the mission where the team undertakes a treacherous overland trek on foot to escort the dozens of refugees to safety. From that point on, the rebel army pursues them relentlessly across the jungle. In the end, Lieutenant Waters' morally upstanding but tragic decision to help the refugees costs the lives of over half his team. As a human being, the weight of that decision and its consequences could be crushing.

The Dead and the Desert's critical decision point comes when Mark and his men are on a mission to direct and observe an airstrike on a known enemy camp housing not only the insurgent mastermind and financier Walid, but also a stockpile of portable surface-to-air missiles. Just prior to commencement of the bombing, an unknown third-party group attacks the insurgent camp and sends it into chaos. Mark's team sees Walid trying to escape. Rather than kill him, as should have happened had not the mission been disrupted, Mark makes the ill-fated decision to capture Walid alive. That decision sets off a chain of events that has tragic consequences.

As a direct result of Mark's decision, one of his men is bitten and thereby infected with the killer zombie pathogen. Mark calls for early extraction due to his wounded man, but that man dies and becomes a zombie aboard one of the helicopters. In the ensuing chaos, the helicopters crash, leaving Mark and his men stranded in hostile territory with a

horde of zombies bearing down on them. The rest of the script deals with the fallout of Mark's ill-fated decision.

In writing *The Dead and the Desert*, I felt that it was important for the protagonist to have a hand in the course of events. Like a tragic flaw, Mark could not possibly know the chain-reaction that would be set off by his seemingly (at the time) good decision to capture a high value target alive when the purpose of the mission was to kill Walid. Inevitably, though, he has to wrestle with the fact that not only did he make the fateful decision, but he also volunteered the team for the mission in the first place, when they were supposed to get some time off. The guilt of responsibility weighs heavy on him and adds to an already-traumatized psyche (he suffers from PTSD and survivor's guilt as a result of a previous mission two years prior in Afghanistan).

With *Tears of the Sun* being a big-screen military chase thriller that I thoroughly enjoyed, it seemed a natural template for how to create the narrative structure for a two hour chase story. Act I, the first thirty minutes, is the setup, establishing the stakes and leading to the decision that alters the course of events. Act II, the next hour, involves the chase, constantly increasing the tension and immediacy of the danger. Act III is the climax and resolution. In this case, a final stand to save innocents from gruesome death. This is all fairly standard plot structure, but the chase story has some specific elements that are necessary to both maintain the tension, and fulfill the audience's expectations: close calls, narrow escapes, new obstacles, and occasional relaxed lulls in the action from a false sense of security and safety among the protagonists. These are nothing new, but I used *Tears of the Sun* specifically due to its similarity in genre, plot, and stakes. Much like *Bravo Two Zero*, *The One That Got Away*, and *Tears of the Sun*, *The Dead and the*

Desert builds its significant tension throughout the chase, things become increasingly frantic as the pursuers get closer. In all cases, the stakes for failing to escape are enormous.

Zombies

As I thought about the primal ordeal of heroic survival against overwhelming opposition that the men in all of these stories, both fiction and real life, endured, I imagined what that would be like in the recent Iraq war in which I had fought. Surely new technology and the fact that Coalition forces at least nominally controlled the country would make such a situation unlikely and infinitely more survivable. So I asked myself, what more could I, as a writer, add to the enormous array of hardships these men might face? What could the heroes of *The Dead and the Desert* face that their real-world predecessors didn't? What foe or obstacle could offset the advances in technology that they enjoyed? The answer came to me as easily as breathing: zombies.

Zombies are a massively popular pop-culture phenomenon right now, as evidenced by the fact that the recent season five premiere of the zombie apocalypse-based television drama *The Walking Dead* became the highest rated show in cable television history on the night it aired (St. John). On a practical level, however, zombies can be an incredibly useful tool and plot device to the writer. Metaphorically, zombies can represent so many things, but in my opinion, their greatest value comes in what they do to a setting and what that zombie-altered setting does to the human characters in it. I look at them less for their metaphorical value, and more for their embodiment of a

frightening, dynamic obstacle for characters to overcome. *The Dead and the Desert* is not about zombies. It is about men. It is about soldiers. It is about survival. It is about many things, but it *is not* about zombies. Jonathan Maberry, author of several popular zombie books including *Patient Zero* and *Zombie CSU: The Forensics of the Living Dead*, said that once the presence of the zombie threat is established in a story, “the writer gets to use the majority of the word count to explore the dynamic of ordinary humans facing a shared crisis and how that crisis impacts them” (“Bring a Zombie to Life” 23). George Romero, the Godfather of the modern zombie, whose zombies have been analyzed to death as metaphors for everything from cold war paranoia to repressed homosexuality (Spitznagel), echoes that sentiment: “My stories are about humans and how they react, or fail to react, or react stupidly. I’m pointing the finger at us, not at the zombies” (qtd. in Spitznagel).

Ordinary people in extra-ordinary circumstances are a potent recipe for any fiction, especially if suspense is the goal. But the heroes of *The Dead and the Desert* are not ordinary men. They are Special Forces—Green Berets, and they are anything but ordinary. The training, skills, and mindset of Special Forces soldiers are truly exceptional. They deal with situations on a daily basis that would make most ordinary humans simply seize up and cease functioning. So what kind of obstacle do I, as a writer, need to put in front of them that will shake these unshakeable men? I need to give them an obstacle that falls outside their frame of reference for how the world works. This obstacle must call into question their worldview and their understanding of the very laws of nature. What will these men, expert killers, do when their foes won’t die? In Maberry’s *Patient Zero*, Joe Ledger, the hardened detective and former Army Ranger protagonist,

sums this up perfectly in the opening line of the first chapter: “When you have to kill the same terrorist twice in one week, then there’s either something wrong with your skills or something wrong with your world. And there’s nothing wrong with my skills” (*Patient Zero* 3). Zombies are *extra*-ordinary obstacles for extra-ordinary protagonists. They provide me a vehicle to put my protagonists under incredible physical and psychological pressure, and allow me to explore how my characters attempt to cope, persevere, and survive in an unknown and horrifying landscape.

Zombies are hardly new to film, and go back to its early days with 1932’s *White Zombie*, starring Bela Lugosi. Then, in 1968, George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* introduced the world to what we now think of as the modern zombie and made it a fixture of popular culture. The cause of the zombie state, or “zombification”, was originally typified by the black magic voodoo-type zombie, as in *White Zombie*. In such older depictions, the zombies were usually under the control of a human master. *Night of the Living Dead* popularized the notion of the uncontrolled, mindless, flesh-eating zombie of supernatural or unknown origins. These zombies raised the fear quotient, as there was no rationalizing, no begging, no supplication to appease a fickle master that could save you. These zombies only wanted to eat the flesh of the living, and thereby turn them into zombies as well. They moved slowly, but they had numbers on their side, and they never grew tired. Over the years, successive depictions have changed the cause of zombification to a mothballed government experiment (*Return of the Living Dead*), a comet (*Night of the Comet*), a virus (*28 Days Later*), and assorted other unsavory plot devices. 2004’s remake of *Dawn of the Dead* was the first major zombie film to make the

creatures fast and agile. To this day, debate rages among zombie fans as to which is scarier: fast zombies or slow zombies.

For *The Dead and the Desert*, I chose a different tack. To the best of my knowledge, there has not been a zombie movie based on a fungus as the cause. Around the time I was sketching out the specifics of *The Dead and the Desert*, I read that it had recently been discovered that fungi could make adaptive evolutionary changes far more easily than ever realized (unattributed), and that fungal spores found in Egyptian tombs could still be viable after millennia of dormancy (unattributed). Whether true or not is irrelevant, as these kernels of information formed the basis of my zombie fungus. Adding true scientific validity is the actual existence of a fungus that alters the normal behavior of, then eats the brains of, ants in the Amazon (*Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*). To explain how *my* fungus works, I will quote Dr. Michael Corgan, the medical mycologist in *The Dead and the Desert*:

...once the spores are introduced to a new hosts' bodily fluids, they begin replicating at an incredible rate, overwhelming the immune system. They pass through the blood-brain barrier and take up residence in the brain, creating a sort of colony and infiltrating it at every level. When the colony gets big enough, the host dies, as if from a massive systemic infection.

Using bioelectric impulses, the fungal colony is able to piggyback on existing neural pathways and replicate gross motor and sensory function of the host organism. Consistent with the aggressive nature of the host

takeover...this thing has evolved to a point where rather than wait for a chance infection, it can actively use the host to reproduce.

... the fastest and most effective method of transmission is fluid to fluid transfer. So by biting a victim, it introduces contaminated saliva into the victim's blood stream. Voila: another carrier (69-70).

My goal is to create an original (to my knowledge) cause using just enough of an actual scientific base to make the premise sound plausible, thereby creating reasonable suspension of disbelief, à la Michael Crichton in *Jurassic Park*. I believe that in order to make the zombies believable, there has to be a set of “rules” that they follow. Most science fiction works this way too. The reader/viewer does not need to know these rules, but a savvy reader/viewer would pick up on the *absence* of a consistent set of rules.

As far as locomotion is concerned, I chose to make the speed and agility of my zombies dependent on the condition of the body and the recency of zombification. If a body is fresh, not too decomposed, and generally structurally sound (no broken legs, etc.), it is capable of running, albeit a lumbering, semi-coordinated run (it is, after all, a fungal colony controlling a foreign body – one should not expect ballerina-like grace). Explosive movements, such as lunging, are possible, as they are gross muscle functions that do not require fine motor skills. In the event a zombie’s body is damaged, the zombie suffers appropriate reductions in function, but without the hindrance of pain, as a living person would experience. So, if a zombie had its legs crushed, it would attempt to crawl, or drag itself with its arms just like a human, except that the human would likely be incapacitated by pain and shock, neither of which the zombie experiences. Similarly, if decomposition is too far advanced, muscle and connective tissue is degraded, affecting

mobility. By taking this approach, *The Dead and the Desert* straddles the fence on fast vs. slow zombies: there are effectively both.

Yet another zombie-genre influence on *The Dead and the Desert* is Max Brooks' novel *World War Z*, which has been made into a major motion picture starring Brad Pitt. In *World War Z*, Brooks depicts the Battle of Yonkers, in which the whole weight of the modern US Military was unable to stop the infected population of Manhattan from escaping the island. What was both shocking and thought-provoking was Brooks' depiction of the ineffectiveness of massed firepower on zombie hordes. I had never thought of it before, but most bombs and missiles kill primarily by fragmentation and secondarily by blast effect. Unless a fragment destroys the brain of a zombie it will carry on. The blast effect that destroys internal organs through overpressure would likewise be relatively ineffective on zombies

I loved the idea that most heavy weaponry would be fairly ineffective, but I had to work out a solution for those in the know, like Major Rebecca Stone and Colonel McDeere. How would they, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the zombies, deal with killing them to keep outbreaks contained? Once again, I relied on my own experience and first-hand knowledge of weaponry. Thermobaric weapons, the most commonly known subset of which is the fuel-air explosive, are a type of explosive that uses the surrounding oxygen, in concert with a dispersed fuel mist. The effect, as compared to a conventional explosive, is a significantly prolonged blast-pressure wave (long enough to affect the less-vulnerable-than-normal soft tissues of zombies) combined with an extremely high temperature component hot enough to incinerate zombies, and likely kill any exposed infectious agent (spores, in this case). These weapons can be

launched from aircraft or drones, making them ideal for Rebecca's and the Colonel's mission to contain the outbreaks. Then, when Rebecca calls in the cavalry to rescue Mark's team, she tells her friend Lieutenant Colonel Tom Fields to have the helicopters loaded with flechette rockets (that part happens behind the scenes). Flechette rockets airburst before hitting their targets, dispersing a thirty-meter-wide cloud of 1179 fin-stabilized steel "nails". Such a cloud of brain-penetrating projectiles would be ideal for a non-precision attack on a crowd of zombies, as the chance of scoring head hits is excellent, given so many flechettes. Without *World War Z*, I may have never thought that through.

For all the reasons elaborated above, zombies are simply the perfect foil for the heroes in *The Dead and the Desert*. They are frightening, as they violate the "rules" of how the characters' world works. They are effective, because they are fearless, tireless, and tough. They are believable, because we, as a society, are terrified of the idea of infectious disease outbreaks, and we know that microscopic organisms can render a death sentence before we even show signs of infection.

Closing

Epic fantasy, military realism, infectious plagues, and walking corpses – *The Dead and the Desert* is the product of a great many influences, both directly and indirectly, and its themes range from very specific (ill-fated decisions) to universal (the drive to survive in the face of adversity). I believe that this screenplay appeals to several distinct audiences all at the same time, but all for different reasons. Given the massive

popularity of George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* and AMC's *The Walking Dead*, and the inescapable stream of news headlines about wars in the Middle East and the Ebola epidemic, one could argue that a heroic action film combining elements of all of them not only has the potential for great commercial success, but is also incredibly relevant.

My sincere hope is that in drawing a little inspiration each from film, fiction, non-fiction, pop-culture, and my own combat experience, I have been able to transcend an easy genre pigeonhole, and create something that truly is a hybrid of the fantastic and the hyper-real. To say that *The Dead and the Desert* is merely another zombie screenplay is gross oversimplification. To call it a war movie script with a twist might be closer to the truth, but still misses the point. Labels being what they are, however, and as such virtually unavoidable, I would be happy to settle for something simple; something like military/ action/ thriller/ zombie-horror crossover.

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THE DEAD AND THE DESERT

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FADE IN

MONTAGE - NEWS FOOTAGE OF THE US INVASION OF IRAQ

- A) President Bush addressing the nation...
- B) The Shock and Awe Campaign...
- C) Combat footage...
- D) Toppling Saddam statue...
- E) Footage of looting...
- F) Coverage of insurgency...

EXT. ABANDONED DESERT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE - DAY

A small pit excavation surrounded by a chain link fence.
SUPERIMPOSE: NORTHWESTERN IRAQ. JANUARY 2004. EIGHT MONTHS
AFTER THE FALL OF THE SADDAM REGIME.

A truck pulls up to the gate and three Iraqi men jump out, carrying flashlights. MAN 1, the driver, is powerfully built. He grabs a pickaxe from the bed of the truck as he dismounts. MAN 2 picks up a crowbar and bolt cutters. Man 3 slings an AK-47 over his shoulder.

The men walk to the gate, which has a sign reading (in Arabic): [DANGER! SITE UNSTABLE, RISK OF COLLAPSE. KEEP OUT! BY ORDER OF THE MINISTRY OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTIQUITIES.]
NOTE: Arabic language will be enclosed in brackets. On screen, this text will appear in English subtitles.

MAN 1

[You worked all the way out here? I
hope you were paid well.]

He cuts the padlock on the gate with his bolt cutters.

MAN 2

[I was paid very well, until the
war broke out and the site was
abandoned.]

They enter the site and descend into the dig, making their way down to the excavated ruins. An entrance is covered by a wooden framework, sealed in plastic sheeting.

They tear through the plastic, revealing a steel gate bolted into the stone of an ancient entrance. Man 2 cuts the lock on the gate.

MAN 2 (CONT'D)
(to Man 3)
Wait here.

Man 3 unslings his rifle and stands guard while the other two enter.

INT. ANCIENT BURIAL RUINS - DAY

Using flashlights, the men make their way through several chambers strewn with pottery in various states of preservation.

Man 2 stops, shining his light on a crumbling mosaic.

MAN 2
[Here. Behind this wall. The burial chamber is supposed to be on the other side.]

Man 1 readies his pickaxe and pauses.

MAN 1
[There is writing in this mosaic. What does it say?]

MAN 2
[Some nonsense about a curse on anyone who opens the tomb.]

Man 1 hesitates.

MAN 2 (CONT'D)
(annoyed)
[They all say that. When did you become superstitious? Dig.]

Man 1 begins swinging his pick. After a few swings, the wall crumbles, creating a hole several feet across. Black dust billows out of the chamber beyond. The men cough violently as they inhale it.

MAN 1
(covering his face)
[It smells like death and rot.]

MAN 2
[It's a tomb, you idiot, did you expect it to smell of rose water?]

Man 2 erupts into an uncontrollable fit of violent coughing. In a moment it subsides. He looks up.

His eyes have turned jet black and black spittle dribbles from the corner of his mouth.

EXT. ABANDONED DESERT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE - DAY

Man 3 yawns and looks at his watch. A shuffling sound comes from the tomb entrance and Man 3 turns his attention to it.

MAN 3
[It's about time! I thought you two
were never coming out.]

Man 2 staggers out of the entrance, his head down.

MAN 3 (CONT'D)
Zaid?

Man 2 pauses and looks up at Man 3. His eyes are jet black and his lips and chin are covered with black spittle.

MAN 3 (CONT'D)
[Zaid, are you okay? Where is
Ayman?]

Man 2 attacks Man 3, overpowering him and biting him viciously in the face and neck.

EXT. HIGH ABOVE A CITY - NIGHT - TRAVELING

A Hunter Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) orbits thousands of feet above the city. Its camera scans the area below.

SUPERIMPOSE: TAL AFAR, IRAQ. 15 FEBRUARY 2004, 0257 HOURS.

UAV'S POV (THERMAL CAMERA):

POV scans the outskirts of the city from above, then zooms in on a small compound consisting of a one story residence with a 20'x30' outbuilding behind it, all surrounded by a high masonry wall.

EXT. INSURGENT SAFEHOUSE COMPOUND - NIGHT

The area is dark for blocks in every direction except for floodlights inside the compound and main house.

In the courtyard between the house and the outbuilding, a large, trailer-mounted generator hums.

Some movement can be seen inside the house along with muted conversation in Arabic.

EXT. SUV 1 - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Chief Warrant Officer 3 MARK BREWER and three other commandos ride on the running boards outside of a blacked-out SUV. Mark and the other men are wearing bulky tactical kit and body armor.

A radio crackles to life. CAPTAIN JOSEPH WEI's voice is heard.

CAPTAIN WEI (V.O.)
(filtered through radio)
All Knight elements, this is Knight
Six-Six. Nine zero seconds to
target. Check in in sequence.

Mark looks at each of the other men riding outside the vehicle who all give a thumbs up. He presses a push-to-talk switch mounted on his tactical gear.

MARK
Knight Six-One, Green.

EXT. SUV 2 - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Master Sergeant BILL HOLGRIM, slightly older than Mark, sporting a salt-and-pepper goatee, rides with three other men outside the second vehicle.

BILL
Knight Six-Two, Green.

EXT. ELEVATED CRANE ARM 300 METERS EAST OF SAFEHOUSE - NIGHT

Staff Sergeant ROBBIE HOWELL, a sniper, lies concealed on the end of the crane arm, scanning the compound through the night vision scope of his silenced rifle.

ROBBIE
Six-Three in position. I have the
generator in sight. Ready for
lights-out on your "go".

CAPTAIN WEI (V.O.)
(filtered)
Roger, Six-Three, You are "go" for
lights-out.

ROBBIE'S POV THROUGH NIGHT VISION SNIPER SCOPE:

ROBBIE
Roger, lights-out in five...

Robbie sights in on the trailer-mounted generator at the back of the house, steadies his breathing, and fires off one silenced round.

EXT. INSURGENT SAFEHOUSE - NIGHT

There is an audible "clank" and the generator behind the house sputters to a stop. The lights of the compound flicker and die. There is commotion inside the house.

EXT. SUV 1 - NIGHT - TRAVELING

From outside the SUV the lights around the compound are seen to go dark.

ROBBIE (V.O.)
(filtered)
Six-Six, this is Six-Three. Lights
out.

Mark and his men flip down the PVS-14 night vision monoculars attached to their helmets.

MARK
Roger, Six-Three, good copy. Sixty
seconds to target.

EXT. ELEVATED CRANE ARM 300 METERS EAST OF SAFEHOUSE - NIGHT

ROBBIE'S POV THROUGH NIGHT VISION SNIPER SCOPE

Two armed insurgents emerge from the back door of the house.

INSURGENT 1 carries a flashlight and has an AK-47 slung across his back. He examines the generator.

INSURGENT 2 yawns, slings his AK-47 over his shoulder and fumbles to light a cigarette.

ROBBIE
All teams, this is Six-Three. I've
got two bozos exiting the rear door
right on cue. Engaging.

Insurgent 1 is inspecting the generator when Robbie takes aim at his head and fires, spraying the generator with gore. His body drops and the flashlight falls to the ground.

Insurgent 2 looks up, confused, and attempts to unsling his rifle when Robbie takes him out with two rapid shots to the chest.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)

This is Six-Three. Targets down.

Exterior is all-clear.

EXT. INSURGENT SAFEHOUSE COMPOUND - NIGHT

The two SUVs slow as they pass the front gate of the compound but do not stop. The eight commandos hop off and stack in two clusters against the compound's exterior wall. The SUVs drive away.

In front of Mark, Staff Sergeant GINO MARELLI scans the compound with a silenced MP5 submachine gun at the ready.

Beside Gino, 6'7" Sergeant First Class TERRY FEIST, his shotgun slung, snips the lock off a chain securing the gate with a pair of bolt cutters. He silently lifts the chain off of the gate. Glancing back, he gives a thumbs up and spits a wad of tobacco juice into the dust.

GINO

(whispering)

I ever tell you that's a nasty
fuckin' habit, T?

Terry grins.

Mark makes a hand gesture and Bill's team of four rush through the gate, disappearing around the side of the house.

Terry discards the bolt cutters and pulls an explosive breaching charge from a pouch on his tactical gear.

Gino trains his gun on the front of the house, covering Terry, who rushes to the front door and affixes the explosives before dashing back to the safety of the wall.

MARK

(into radio)

Team, this is Six-One. Breaching
charge in place.

BILL (V.O.)
(filtered)
Six-Two is in position outside
building 2.

CAPTAIN WEI (V.O.)
(filtered)
Roger, Six-One, this is Six-Six. Go
loud.

Mark's team crowds behind the wall. Mark gives Terry a thumbs-up and a nod. Terry pulls the ring on a fuse igniter.

INT. SAFEHOUSE FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

The room is dark with five insurgents in various states of alarm and confusion. A powerful blast tears the door apart.

One insurgent is impaled by a large chunk of the door and thrown against a wall. Another holds his hands to his bloodied face, screaming. The rest are deafened and stunned as Mark's men rush into the room with Terry in the lead.

TERRY
(in a thick Texas drawl)
Drop the gun, motherfucker!

The only armed insurgent attempts to raise his AK-47 and Terry blasts him at close range with his shotgun.

Another insurgent reaches for a pistol and Gino fires a short burst into the man's chest, dropping him.

Mark sweeps the screaming man, who is still holding his bloody face, off his feet and kneels on his chest, pinning him down.

MARK
Shut up! Be quiet!

Another man at the back of the room stands, knocking over a hookah he was smoking. Without breaking stride, Terry kicks him in the chest, sending him flying. He lands stunned. Gino kneels on him and secures his hands with flexcuffs.

Terry scans the adjacent kitchen and bedroom through open doorways.

TERRY
Clear!

GINO
Clear!

Staff Sergeant ENRIQUE "RICKY" GOMEZ, the 4th man in Mark's team, makes a visual sweep back out the door they came in.

RICKY

Clear!

Mark finishes securing his prisoner, who is whimpering in pain.

MARK

All clear. Watch for Six-Two. He should be coming in through the back...

He steps on a small Persian rug and the floor creaks. He freezes and gestures to his teammates. They move the rug, revealing a trapdoor with a rope handle.

They surround the trapdoor, weapons trained on it.

Mark bends down to grasp the handle. Bullets and splinters explode from beneath the trapdoor, striking Mark and knocking him backwards.

Without hesitation, the other men return fire through the trapdoor. Terry rushes to Mark's side while the other two reload.

TERRY

Chief! Chief, are you hurt?

Terry runs his hands over Mark's body, looking for blood.

Silence except for the sound of shell casings gently clinking. Then the sound of labored breathing accented by a gurgling sound. Then a long, raspy wet sigh. Then nothing.

Mark coughs.

MARK

No...no, I'm good, T. Caught a few in the plate, but I don't think anything got through.

He sits up.

MARK (CONT'D)

You know, normally you'd have to buy me dinner before I'd let you touch me like that.

They clasp hands and Terry helps Mark to his feet.

MARK (CONT'D)

Now if you don't mind, let's finish clearing this fucking building.

TERRY

Roger that!

Gino inspects the hole with an infrared flashlight.

GINO

All clear except for one dead asshole at the bottom of the stairs. Looks like we found the neighborhood gun store.

Mark keys his radio.

MARK

This is Six-One. All secure building 1. Four enemy K.I.A., two E.P.W., over.

INT. SAFEHOUSE FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Power has been turned back on and the lights are working. There is debris everywhere. All the windows are blown out. The three dead insurgents still lie around the room.

Mark and Bill stand in the middle of the room with Captain Wei, finishing a hasty debrief. Ricky escorts one of the bound prisoners outside. Clay is gathering up weapons.

The sound of trucks pulling up outside.

CAPTAIN WEI

Alright, there's the B team and intel weenies. Let them take charge of the prisoners and clean up the mess. Bill, take your guys and go get Robbie at the crane. I don't want him humping back here by himself.

Bill nods, checks his weapon's magazine and reinserts it.

CAPTAIN WEI (CONT'D)

Mark: I know you're fine, but have Harris give you a once-over, just in case, before we head out.

Mark grumbles something under his breath, but the Captain ignores it.

CAPTAIN WEI (CONT'D)
And oh yeah, nice job, guys.
Seriously, that was one helluva...

The "ping" of a grenade spoon rings out followed by a thud and the sound of something heavy rolling on the floor.

SEVERAL VOICES
GRENADE!

Everyone scatters, mostly running outside. The insurgent who was impaled by the door holds a grenade pin.

Captain Wei grabs the dying insurgent, heaves his body on top of the grenade, then lays on top of the doomed man a half-second before the grenade detonates.

Mark rushes back in, kneeling beside Captain Wei, who rolls, coughing, off the now-dead insurgent.

CAPTAIN WEI
(in pain)
Fuck me, that was one hell of a
ride, Chief.

MARK
Jesus, what the hell were you
thinking, Sir?

The Captain points at a computer sitting on the floor only feet away.

CAPTAIN WEI
Intel. We need that machine.

Mark, speechless, shakes his head.

CAPTAIN WEI (CONT'D)
Mark?

The Captain reaches out, grabbing Mark's leg. He squeezes hard.

CAPTAIN WEI (CONT'D)
(pained)
Get me a medic.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY OPERATIONS CENTER - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: UNITED STATES. 16 FEBRUARY 2004.
CLASSIFIED RESEARCH FACILITY, NORTHERN VIRGINIA.

Major REBECCA STONE, wearing a white lab coat over camouflage army fatigues, strides purposefully down a sterile-looking corridor to a pair of steel-framed glass doors. She carries a stack of folders under one arm.

A sign on the wall indicates with an arrow that she is coming from the "LAB".

She swipes an ID badge across an access pad and the doors slide open with a whoosh of pressurized air. Further down the corridor, she stops opposite an elevator and stands at attention, waiting.

The elevator opens with a "ding", and COLONEL MCDEERE steps into the corridor with a sense of urgency. He is stern-looking, middle-aged with close-cropped white hair, and wearing a green Class A army uniform covered with ribbons and skill badges.

REBECCA
Good morning, Sir.

COLONEL MCDEERE
'Morning, Major. Okay, fill me in.

Rebecca hands him the folders and they walk down the hall. He leafs through them as they walk.

REBECCA
Last night. Eastern Syria, near the Iraqi border. Bedouins again. They came out of the desert and attacked a remote farming community.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Containment?

They reach a door labeled "OPERATIONS" and pause

REBECCA
As soon as we verified this was a legitimate event, I scrambled two F-16s out of Incirlik. We worked up a bogus targeting request through back channels and vectored the aircraft to the target.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Thermobaric munitions?

REBECCA
Yes sir. The Air Force will take a P.R.

(MORE)

REBECCA (CONT'D)
hit in the media for civilian
casualties, but it will be written
off as a faulty guidance system,
resulting in a "tragic and
regrettable loss."

Colonel McDeere looks up from the folder he's reading,
raising an eyebrow.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Current status?

REBECCA
We have eliminated all known active
vectors. It looks like we're clean
for now, but we're continuing to
monitor the region by satellite and
UAV. The problem is that just like
the other attacks, we don't know
the point of origin.

Rebecca swipes her badge and the door to Operations clicks
loudly. She opens the door for the two of them to enter.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY OPERATIONS CENTER - DAY

The room is full of computer terminals manned by half a dozen
soldiers. The front wall is covered by three huge screens
displaying maps of the middle east and unmanned drone camera
feeds.

COLONEL MCDEERE
All right, Major, good work. I'll
take it from here.

REBECCA
Roger, sir. Sergeant Jarvis can
fill you in on the details. I'll be
in the lab if you need me. The
tissue sample recovered from the
last incident arrived last night,
but with this latest attack, I
haven't had a chance to examine it
yet.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Good. Let me know as soon as you
discover anything useful.

REBECCA
Of course.

She turns to leave.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Becca?

REBECCA

Sir?

COLONEL MCDEERE

Nice work. Seriously. I couldn't run this operation without you.

REBECCA

I know, sir.

EXT. FOB DRAGON - TO ESTABLISH - DAY

A former resort complex for high ranking party officials, now occupied and fortified by the U.S. military.

SUPERIMPOSE: IRAQ. 15 FEBRUARY 2004, 1620 HOURS.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DRAGON, 20 MILES WEST OF MOSUL.

A Blackhawk helicopter is on approach to the helipad.

INT. MARK'S QUARTERS - DAY

Sound of a helicopter landing outside. Mark stirs in his cot. He removes his ear plugs, takes a deep breath, exhales slowly then sits up.

Wearing only boxer shorts, Mark is fit and moderately muscled. There is a large scar on his upper right chest and several fresh bruises. He rotates his neck in a wide circle. It makes a crackling sound.

Mark picks up his watch from a makeshift nightstand, checks the time and puts the watch on. He reaches under his cot and retrieves a cigar box, opens it and takes out a silver flask and a chain with seven dog tags.

Gently handling the dog tags like a rosary, he takes a swig from the flask.

MARK

Maybe you guys are the lucky ones.

Begins to replace cap on flask but reconsiders and takes another long pull.

He drops the dog tags back in the cigar box and sets it on the nightstand. Also on the table are an M9 pistol, a battered lamp without a shade, and a paperback Tom Clancy novel.

Mark turns on the lamp and picks up a manila envelope. He halfway pulls out the contents.

INSERT - THE ENVELOPE CONTENTS

A stack of papers on letterhead from a law office in Clarksville, Tennessee. Header reads: Petition for Divorce.

BACK TO SCENE

Mark looks the papers over briefly, runs a hand through his short dark hair, sighs deeply through his nose, and puts them back in the envelope.

He tosses the envelope on the nightstand and picks up the flask again. A knock at his door.

MARK (CONT'D)

Yeah?

BILL (O.S.)

You awake?

MARK

Yeah. Give me a second.

Mark hides the box and flask. He goes to a window and pulls aside the thick blanket that serves as a curtain. Light streams in. He shields his face.

INT. TEAM REC ROOM - DAY

Gino and Terry are playing pool against Ricky and Sergeant First Class HARRIS SWAN, the tall, handsome, African American team medic.

Robbie is playing X-BOX on a large screen TV with Sergeant CLAY DONNER. Robbie sports a shaggy mane of curly blonde hair, well outside of regulation. Clay is young-looking and wears short, spiked hair.

Mark and Bill enter together, Bill is carrying a bottle of scotch.

MARK

All right guys, listen up.

They all stop their various games and give Mark their undivided attention.

MARK (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Apparently we pulled down a major
 intel score last night. Colonel
 Weeks said there's so much good
 info that it's gonna take the intel
 geeks a month to sift through it
 all.

There is a chorus of self-congratulatory responses.

MARK (CONT'D)
 So, for a job well done, the old
 man is giving our team a week off.

TERRY
 Hell, fuckin' yeah!

Another chorus of hoots and cheers.

MARK
 All right, all right, so here's the
 deal. There may even be some passes
 down to Bahrain in the works, but
 keep that on the D.L. until we get
 confirmation.

ROBBIE
 Sweet, man! There's some sick
 surfing down there.

BILL
 Anyway, we thought we'd do a little
 celebrating.

He holds up the bottle of scotch.

BILL (CONT'D)
 Grab some glasses, guys. This stuff
 didn't spend twelve years in a
 barrel to be drunk out of plastic!

The men waste no time scrounging up a few glasses and the
 bottle gets passed around.

RICKY
 You know what we need, guys?
 (beat)
 A party.

HARRIS
 I like how you think, Rick.

RICKY

I mean it. A real party. Chicks,
booze, music--the whole nine.

CLAY

Dude, there's like, what, four
chicks on this whole camp?

GINO

You let me take care of that,
junior. I've got a buddy that used
to be S.F., but now he flies
Blackhawks. He's over at the
airfield, and that aviation unit is
full of top shelf tail.

TERRY

Leave it to the resident pussy
hound to figure out how to conjure
up chicks in a war zone.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY LAB - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: 17 FEBRUARY 2004. 0600 HOURS.

A high tech lab facility. Major Rebecca Stone wearing a blue,
level 4 biohazard suit, looks through a microscope. Two more
lab technicians in similar suits are busy at other work
stations.

Rebecca smiles.

REBECCA

Gotcha, you little bastard.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY CORRIDOR - DAY

Rebecca, still smiling, carries an armload of folders and
documents down the corridor to a door marked:

COL. ALAN B. MCDEERE

Without knocking, she opens the door and walks in.

INT. COLONEL MCDEERE'S OFFICE - DAY

Colonel McDeere sits at his desk drinking out of a Pentagon
coffee mug. On the wall behind him is a large autographed
photo of the colonel shaking hands with President George H.W.
Bush.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Jesus, Becca, don't you ever knock?

REBECCA
Not really, sir, not when there's
good news to deliver.

She dumps the pile of folders and documents on his desk.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Okay, then, what have you got?

REBECCA
It's a fungus.

COLONEL MCDEERE
A fungus. Huh. Well that explains a
lot.

REBECCA
Yes sir. At least now we can focus
our research in the right
direction.

The colonel opens one of the folders and looks at a photo of
a magnified microscope slide sample.

COLONEL MCDEERE
No chance you got a contaminated
sample? Maybe the victim had an
autoimmune disorder or a fungal
meningitis?

Rebecca plops in a chair and snickers at the notion of an
error.

REBECCA
No sir. No chance. The tissue
sample that came in yesterday from
the last outbreak was a godsend.
It's full of this fungus. The brain
tissue, the bodily fluids...it's
completely taken over. I only wish
we had been able to recover one
months ago when this all started.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Okay then, what do you know about
parasitic fungi?

REBECCA
Not much. So I've called in a
specialist.
(MORE)

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Dr. Michael Corgan at Johns Hopkins. He is the man when it comes to medical mycology.

He looks up from the pictures in the folder.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Dammit, Becca. You should've talked to me first. You know I don't like involving civilians.

REBECCA

We need help, sir. Bottom Line. You want to stop this thing before it goes global? Then we need someone who knows their way around the business end of fungal pathogen.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Okay, fine, but make sure he's thoroughly vetted before you bring him in.

REBECCA

Already done, sir. He'll be here this evening.

The colonel snorts a laugh, shakes his head.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Why am I not surprised?

EXT. FOB DRAGON EXERCISE ROOM - DAY

Mark finishes a bench press and sets the barbell back in its cradle. Captain Wei approaches, walking with a cane.

MARK

Hey, sir! Good to see you again, especially up and about.

They shake hands.

CAPTAIN WEI

Yeah, I'll be fine. Blew out an eardrum and took a fragment to the leg, but no permanent damage. Half an inch higher though and it woulda hit my pecker.

MARK

Ouch!

CAPTAIN WEI
Yeah, tell me about it. Say goodbye
to my dream of a post-Army career
in porn!

They laugh.

CAPTAIN WEI (CONT'D)
So there have been some
developments in the last few hours.

MARK
Developments?

CAPTAIN WEI
Yeah. Command needs a team for a
high-priority op, but since our
team is off for the week...

MARK
We'll take it.

CAPTAIN WEI
But you guys deserve some down
time.

MARK
Don't make me beg, sir. We're in.
Command can make it up to us after.

Captain Wei eyes Mark for a moment.

CAPTAIN WEI
Alright then, grab Bill and meet me
in Ops for a briefing in fifteen.

INT. TEAM REC ROOM - NIGHT

Gino, Terry, Robbie, Harris, Clay, and Ricky sit around a
table talking and joking.

GINO
Anybody have any idea what this is
all about?

HARRIS
Maybe those passes to Bahrain came
through.

TERRY
I hope this is quick. I've got
places to be.

ROBBIE

Don't worry, brah. She's not going anywhere.

TERRY

What? Who? What are you talking about? I don't...

Enter Mark, Bill, and Captain Wei. Conversation stops.

CAPTAIN WEI

Hey guys, thanks for getting together on such short notice.

GINO

What's up, boss?

CAPTAIN WEI

Bad news.

(beat)

I know we told you guys yesterday that you were getting the week off.

All around groans and mumbling.

TERRY

Aw, shit.

CAPTAIN WEI

So the intel guys were able to correlate some existing intelligence with new information we picked up at the Tal Afar safehouse. They need a team for a time-sensitive mission, and you guys won the coin toss.

RICKY

Does that mean we can choose to kick instead of receive?

CAPTAIN WEI

Obviously I'm not mission capable, so Chief Brewer will be taking tactical command. I'll let him fill you in. Mark?

Mark pulls a photo out of a folder and tosses it on the table.

INSERT - THE PHOTO

A waist-up black and white shot of an Arab man in a suit with a short, well groomed beard.

BACK TO SCENE

MARK

Mahmoud Ali Walid. A Syrian national, and a businessman with international connections that he uses to smuggle weapons and foreign fighters here. He's on JSOC's most wanted list and now he's bringing a shipment of black market SA-16 shoulder-fired missiles into the country.

ROBBIE

Wasn't it an SA-16 that shot down that Chinook last month?

MARK

Yeah. They're responsible for several recent shootdowns of U.S. and Coalition aircraft. As a result, Theater Command has placed the highest possible priority on intercepting this shipment.

GINO

So no party?

Mark pauses and gives Gino a "this is serious" look.

MARK

Walid is using an abandoned mining camp near the Syrian border as his base of operations in-country. Tomorrow night, we insert and set up observation posts to monitor traffic into and out of the camp. SIGINT reports tell us that both Walid and the missiles will be there on the night of the 19th. We'll verify their presence, and direct a laser-guided bomb strike and take 'em all out.

TERRY

No, G. No party.

MARK

Planning cells begin immediately
with full OPCODE at zero-six-
hundred hours.

More groans and mumbling.

CAPTAIN WEI

Sorry guys. Colonel Weeks says
he'll make it up to you when you
get back.

BILL

Alright, ladies, you heard the man.
Let's get our game faces on.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY BRIEFING ROOM - NIGHT
SUPERIMPOSE: 17 FEBRUARY 2004. 2030 HOURS.

Rebecca and Colonel McDeere sit at a table in a sterile,
undecorated briefing room with MICHAEL CORGAN.

Michael, age 40, is dressed casually in khaki field pants and
a Hawaiian shirt. He is unshaven and looks generally unkempt.

REBECCA

Professor Corgan...

MICHAEL

Michael, please. I don't even make
my students call me Professor.

REBECCA

Okay Michael, we called you in
because we're working on a highly
classified public health program
and we need...

MICHAEL

A public health program that you
don't want the public to know
about? And you need my help.

REBECCA

Michael, please, we...

MICHAEL

You've got a terminator, haven't
you?

The colonel shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

COLONEL MCDEERE

A what?

MICHAEL

A terminator. It's a nickname that some of us in the field use to describe an infectious agent that has the potential to create an extinction-level pandemic event.

He takes a sip from a glass of water.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Doctor, we don't...

MICHAEL

You've got a terminator, and you want to avoid a public panic. Since you called me, I assume it must be fungal.

REBECCA

Um... well, before we get to the specifics, I need to know...

Michael smiles broadly

MICHAEL

Relax. I'm in.

(beat)

Show me what you've got.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP HIDE SITE - TO ESTABLISH - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: IRAQ. 20 FEBRUARY 2004, 0130 HOURS.
Northwestern Ninewah province, near the syrian border.

A camouflaged dugout with light overhead cover perched atop a ridgeline overlooking a former mining camp on the valley floor. Mark and three other men lay camouflaged at the opening.

Mark, from the hide site, observes the camp below through a night vision spotter scope.

INT. MOUNTAINTOP HIDE SITE - NIGHT

VIEWED THROUGH MARK'S POV - NIGHT VISION SCOPE

The camp consists of several large tents, a few concrete buildings and a large garage with trucks parked inside.

There is little activity other than a few guards standing around burn barrels.

Mark swings his spotter scope around to look at the mountain across the valley, past the enemy camp. He scans until he sees Bill's dugout, identical to his.

INT. MOUNTAINTOP HIDE SITE - NIGHT

Robbie lies next to Mark, shouldering a Barrett .50 caliber sniper rifle. Gino, on the other side of Mark, performs a functions check on an AN/PEQ-1 Laser Target Designator.

Clay lies facing the opposite direction, scanning out the back of their hideout. He impatiently flicks the safety of his suppressed M4 carbine.

MARK

(into radio)

Spartan X-Ray, this is Knight Six-One.

SPARTAN HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)

(filtered)

This is Spartan X-Ray, go ahead.

MARK

Target status remains the same: no vehicle traffic for at least an hour. Walid and his crew are still there. Only a handful of lights on. They're pretty well shut down for the night. Most of them are in the sleep tent.

SPARTAN HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)

(filtered)

Roger, Knight-Six One, we are a GO for the op. Break. All teams, this is Spartan X-Ray, execution in thirty mikes. Check in with status.

MARK

Knight Six-One: Green.

INT. BILL'S HIDE SITE - NIGHT

Bill, Terry, Ricky, and Harris occupy this mirror of Mark's hide site. Ricky operates a laser designator.

BILL
(into radio)
Knight Six-Two: Green.

EXT. HIGH ABOVE THE DESERT - TO ESTABLISH - NIGHT -TRAVELING
A flight of two F-15E Strike Eagles cruises in loose formation above the Iraqi desert. The lights of a city are visible far below as they fly over.

INT. F-15E COCKPIT - NIGHT

Helmeted pilot, RAPTOR SIX looks over his shoulder to see his wingman behind him to the right.

RAPTOR SIX
(filtered through oxygen mask)
Raptor Six and flight: Green

INT. HELICOPTER COCKPIT - NIGHT

A medevac pilot, DUSTOFF ONE-NINER sits in his blackhawk helicopter on the ground. Another blackhawk sits beside his.

DUSTOFF ONE-NINER
Dustoff One-Niner: Green

INT. MOUNTAINTOP HIDE SITE- NIGHT

Mark listens as all the participants check in.

SPARTAN HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)
(filtered)
And Spartan X-Ray is good to go.
Kickoff at the top of the hour.

Mark takes his eyes away from the scope for a moment, removes a glove and rubs his eyes.

ROBBIE
This shit gets to you after a while, huh, boss? Especially at your age.

Mark keeps silent, but holds a middle finger up toward Robbie. Robbie lifts his head off the cheek rest of his rifle and gives a playful wink.

GINO

Goddamn, it's cold up here. I think my dick's frozen solid.

CLAY

Man, this isn't cold. This one time in Afghanistan...

ROBBIE AND GINO IN UNISON

Shut up, new guy.

CLAY

Oh, okay, I see how it is.

INT. MINING CAMP COMMAND POST - NIGHT

A windowless concrete building, lit by a single bulb hanging from a temporary fixture over a table covered with maps, documents, and shipping manifests. A dogeared copy of a Tom Clancy novel sits on a nearby cot.

WALID discusses plans with HASSAN. ABDUL, a huge, armed bodyguard, stands in the hallway.

NOTE: Arabic language will be enclosed in brackets. On screen, this text will appear in subtitles.

WALID

[When the trucks depart, I will return to Damascus. I want you to oversee the deliveries and personally distribute the money.]

HASSAN

[Of course. Our enemies will bleed grievously, and your name will be shouted from the mountaintops.]

WALID

(angry)

[No, my name will not even be whispered, do you understand? Let those wretches out there die for the cause. Allah has chosen for me a different path.]

Hassan lowers his head, penitent.

HASSAN

[Yes sir. As always, you are correct.]

Walid places his hand softly on Hassan's shoulder.

WALID

[I am sorry to have spoken so harshly to you, my friend. You have been a loyal aide, and I owe you much, as does the resistance. I would not leave you in charge if I did not trust your judgment. Now, go make sure the trucks are ready to go.]

Walid pats Hassan on the back.

HASSAN

[Yes Sir.] Allahu Akbar.

WALID

Allahu Akbar.

INT. MOUNTAINTOP HIDE SITE - NIGHT

Mark checks his watch.

MARK

Fifteen minutes.

A series of nonverbal grunts and acknowledgments. He goes back to scanning the area around the objective with his scope. Something catches his eye.

MARK (CONT'D)

Shit!

CLAY

(excitedly)

What is it, Chief?

MARK

New players in the field. Robbie?

Robbie shifts his weight on his elbows to bring the rifle in line with the new targets.

ENTER ROBBIE'S POV (NIGHT VISION SCOPE)

On the valley floor, five people clamber out of a wadi heading for the encampment, only a hundred and fifty meters away.

ROBBIE

Got 'em, boss.

MARK (O.S)
What do you make of it?

ROBBIE
Bedouins, probably. No obvious
weapons. Moving funny, like they're
injured, or maybe delirious. (beat)
I range them at nine-fifty.

RETURN TO SCENE

MARK
Nine hundred fifty meters, roger. I
concur.
(into radio)
Six-Two, this is Six-One, do you
have eyes on our new arrivals?

INT. BILL'S HIDE SITE - NIGHT

Bill watches the scene through a similar night vision spotter
scope as Mark's.

BILL
Yeah, roger. We just picked them
up.
INTERCUT AS APPROPRIATE WITH BILL'S HIDE SITE

MARK
What do you make of them?

BILL
They look like civilians to me.
Hard to tell at this range, though.
What do you want to do about it?

MARK
Fuck, I don't know, but I don't
want to kill 'em if I can help it.
Stand by. I'll get back to you.

Mark takes his eyes off the scope and rests his head in his
hands for a second before keying his mic.

MARK (CONT'D)
(into radio)
Spartan X-Ray, this in Knight Six-
One.

SPARTAN HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)
(filtered)
Six-One, Spartan X-Ray, go ahead.

A terrified scream echoes through the valley.

CLAY
What the fuck was that?

MARK
(into radio)
Stand by, Spartan...

INT. MOUNTAINTOP HIDE SITE - NIGHT

MARK'S POV (NIGHT VISION SCOPE)

Mark scans the camp. More distant shouting can be heard. Then the sound of AK-47 fire. There are muzzle flashes in the large sleep tent.

Three men erupt from the tent, the last running backward, firing his AK-47 from the hip back into the tent. A fourth figure bursts from the tent toward the man with the AK who fires a volley at the pursuer.

The pursuer's body is staggered by the impacts, but does not fall. Instead, he crouches and lunges at the shooter, knocking him backward into a burn barrel.

MARK
What the Hell?

The two men and the barrel crash into a heap and fire spills out toward an adjacent tent. The man with the rifle leaps up, his clothes aflame, and runs a half dozen steps before beginning to thrash as flames engulf him.

The attacker rises from the spreading fire and slowly walks to the burning man, embraces him, and drags him to the ground where they both lie, writhing in flames.

RETURN TO SCENE

GINO
(whispering)
Jesus, Chief, what's going on down there?

MARK
(into radio)
Six-Two, this is Six-One, are you seeing this?

Another tent begins to blaze as chaos and fighting spreads throughout the camp.

INTERCUT AS APPROPRIATE WITH BILL'S HIDE SITE

BILL

This is Six-Two. Yeah, brother, I'm seeing it. Hell of a thing, huh?

MARK

What's your take on it?

BILL

Best guess?

MARK

Yeah, best guess.

BILL

My money says it's a rival faction with shitty timing. Now they're gonna get wasted too. Wrong place, wrong time. Sucks to be them.

Fire has spread throughout the camp. Gunfire and hand-to-hand fighting are widespread.

ROBBIE

It's not our problem, boss.

CLAY

Fuck Chief, I can't see shit back here. What's going on?

MARK

I don't know, Clay. Just keep watching our backs. I don't like this at all.

Mark looks at his watch again.

MARK (CONT'D)

(into radio)

Spartan X-Ray, this is Knight Six-One, flash traffic, over.

SPARTAN HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)

(filtered)

Knight Six-One, this is Spartan X-Ray, send your traffic, over.

MARK

I've got fighting on the objective. Possibly a rival faction. The situation is deteriorating rapidly...

An old military truck drives wildly out of the camp with several men hanging on the outside clambering to get in. The truck runs down one of the Bedouins and crashes through the camp's gate.

Outside the camp, the truck careens wildly off the road and hits a ditch, launching into the air, flipping end-over-end. The figures hanging onto the exterior scatter. One is crushed by the truck as it comes to rest on its side.

SPARTAN HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)

(filtered)

Knight Six One, we have aircraft inbound. Confirm the missiles are secure.

MARK

(into radio)

Affirmative, missiles are secure, but we have no idea what's going on in the objective. Please advise.

SPARTAN HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)

(filtered)

Continue mission as briefed. Keep the objective contained. No vehicles get out under any circumstances, even if you have to compromise your position, how copy, over?

MARK

(into radio)

Roger. Continuing to...

CLAY

(whispering urgently)

Chief, I've got movement to the rear!

Mark takes his eyes off the scope, turning his head toward Sergeant Donner.

MARK

What do you got, Clay?

CLAY

Shit, Chief! I've got three of those ragbag Bedouins coming right at us, fifty meters out, moving slow. Permission to engage?

He flips the safety off on his weapon.

MARK

Are they coming at us, or just
moving in our vicinity?

CLAY

(highly excited)
They're coming straight for us, man-
-they know we're here! Let me waste
'em!

Mark kicks Clay's foot hard.

MARK

(whispering forcefully)
Calm the fuck down, soldier. If
they're a threat then take 'em out,
you got me? Just do it quietly.

CLAY

Roger, Chief, engaging.

Clay fires a series of single silenced shots, a pause,
several more, another pause, some cursing, several three-
round bursts, more cursing and more single shots.

MARK

(at Clay)
What the fuck?

INT. MINING CAMP COMMAND POST

Walid, a pistol in hand, frantically burns documents in a
metal trash can. Abdul runs breathless into the room. Walid
raises his pistol, nearly shooting Abdul.

ABDUL

[We're under attack, Sir! The camp
is on fire, and there is fighting
everywhere! Even our men are
fighting each other! We have to get
you out of here now!]

Abdul inserts a fresh magazine into his compact AKSU. He
picks up two duffel bags and slings them over his shoulder.

WALID

[Where is Hassan?]

ABDUL

[I saw him outside. He said he
would meet us at the car. Let's go,
sir. It isn't safe for you here.]

Walid douses the remaining maps, documents, and even his cot with lighter fluid and sets fire to it all. He grabs a briefcase, checks to make sure his pistol is chambered and follows Abdul outside.

EXT. MINING CAMP - NIGHT

Abdul and Walid run to a waiting Toyota Prado SUV. Abdul throws the bags in the back.

Hassan staggers toward them with a bloody wound on his neck.

WALID
[Abdul, help him!]

They help Hassan into the truck and Walid tears a wad of cloth from Hassan's shirt pressing it into the wound. Hassan is pale, his breathing rapid and shallow.

INT. WALID'S VEHICLE - NIGHT

Abdul drives aggressively, avoiding several people on his way out of the compound, ignoring shouts and pleas for help. He passes the overturned truck outside the camp and floors the Toyota, accelerating wildly.

In the back seat, Walid continues to give aid to Hassan, who is fading. Walid expresses alarm when he sees Hassan's eyeballs are turning black.

WALID
[Hassan! Stay awake, brother, we'll be in Syria soon. I will get you to a hospital. Abdul, he needs a doctor!]

ABDUL
[Yes sir, but we need to get far away from here. Something is very wrong.]

INT. MOUNTAINTOP HIDE SITE - NIGHT

Gino is focused on the laser designator, preparing for the airstrike.

MARK
Ok guys, change of plan. Be ready to move out as soon as the bombs hit. We're not sticking around.
(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)
 (into radio)
 Six-Two, this is Six-One.

BILL (O.S.)
 (filtered)
 This is Six-Two, go ahead.

MARK
 (into radio)
 We've been compromised. Three of those Bedouins tried to sneak up on us. They knew where we are. I don't like this. I'm calling for emergency extraction at alternate P.Z. Nebraska as soon as we have impact. Get your team ready to move and watch your backs.

BILL (O.S.)
 (filtered)
 Roger that. Six-Two out.

INT. MARK'S OBSERVATION POST - NIGHT

Mark packs gear into rucksacks. Clay continues to provide rear security, now visibly nervous. Robbie monitors the enemy camp through his rifle scope.

ROBBIE
 Boss, I got a vehicle leaving the camp.

Mark gets back on his night vision and scans.

MARK'S POV THROUGH MAGNIFIED NIGHT VISION OPTICS:

A Toyota Prado leaving the compound and accelerating hard.

RETURN TO SCENE

MARK
 Take 'em out.

INT./EXT. WALID'S SUV - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Abdul drives aggressively, the vehicle bounces violently over the rough ground. In the back seat, Walid tries to stop Hassan's bleeding.

There is a loud noise and smoke pours from the engine compartment. Abdul curses and the vehicle drifts to a stop.

INT. MARK'S OBSERVATION POST - NIGHT

Mark goes back to packing up the team's gear in preparation to leave.

MARK

Nice shot. Keep on them.

RAPTOR SIX (V.O.)

(filtered)

This is Raptor Six. We are I.P. inbound. Sixty seconds to weapons release.

MARK

(into radio)

Roger, Raptor Six, Lasers going hot.

Gino flips a switch on the laser designator and focuses on the target.

GINO

Laser spot on.

BILL (V.O.)

(filtered)

This is Six-Two. Laser hot. Spot on.

EXT. WALID'S SUV - NIGHT

Walid and Abdul crouch outside the disabled Toyota, scanning the area for a safe escape route. Hassan lies motionless across the back seat.

Abdul points.

ABDUL

[There. We can run to the wadi. It will give us some cover and lead us out of the valley to the east. Then we can...]

He freezes, both men listening to the sound of jets screaming high overhead and the crackling sound of inbound ordnance.

WALID

[TAKE COVER!]

The men dive behind the vehicle as two massive, nearly simultaneous explosions rock the camp.

INT. MARK'S OBSERVATION POST - NIGHT

Mark observes the bombs impacting the camp. The buildings are leveled and small secondary explosions begin to detonate at random intervals. Only a few tents remain.

Dozens of individuals have already scattered into the surrounding area, however, and there are numerous small fights still breaking out among the survivors.

Gino packs the bulky laser designator into a case and he and Clay finish packing up the team's gear.

ROBBIE

Hey boss, check out the SUV. Isn't that our guy?

MARK

Fuck me. It is him.

ROBBIE

Take him out?

MARK

No. I want that bastard alive. Take out the bodyguard and keep our guy pinned down.

(into radio)

Six-Two, this is Six-One. New rally point on the valley floor. I need you to pick up a package...

EXT. WALID'S SUV - NIGHT

Walid and Hassan recover their senses after the bomb's shock wave.

WALID

[The Americans are here! We have to go!]

Abdul gets up and prepares to run in the direction of the wadi when a large caliber bullet rips his chest apart. Two seconds later, a rifle report echoes through the valley.

Walid drops back behind the vehicle. He looks back toward the destroyed camp, then to Abdul's body and the massive hole in his back. Walid begins to pray.

INT. MARK'S OBSERVATION POST - NIGHT

Gino and Clay tear down the camouflage netting covering their observation post and pack it up. Robbie is still focused on his rifle, keeping Walid pinned down.

MARK

(into radio)

Spartan X-Ray, this is Knight Six-One, over.

SPARTAN X-RAY (V.O.)

(filtered)

Six-One, Spartan. Go ahead.

MARK

BDA follows, break.

(beat)

Missile warehouse destroyed.
Vehicle park destroyed. Command post destroyed. Estimate thirty enemy personnel killed. Secondary target Walid survived outside blast zone. Knight Six-Two is moving to intercept and capture. Break.

(beat)

Our location has been compromised. I say again, we are compromised, break.

(beat)

Request immediate extraction at secondary PZ. ETA to PZ Nebraska is nine zero minutes. The objective area is extremely hostile. Don't leave us hanging!

SPARTAN X-RAY (V.O.)

(filtered)

Roger, Six-One, be advised that standard extraction aircraft will be unavailable for that timeframe. Dustoff and escort are the only assets available that can service your request. Acknowledge, over.

MARK

Affirmative, Spartan. I acknowledge Dustoff will provide extraction. Set Time On Target for 0330 hours. Knight Six-One out.

EXT. WALID'S SUV - NIGHT

Walid climbs back into the Prado and checks Hassan's pulse. Finding none, he closes Hassan's lifeless eyes, which have turned completely black. His neck wound oozes a thick black fluid.

WALID

[Go with God, brother. Your family
will be taken care of.]

He checks to make sure his pistol is loaded again and retrieves his briefcase. He climbs out of the vehicle and prepares to make a run for it.

Just then, four commandos emerge from the darkness, walking line abreast, weapons trained on him.

BILL

(shouting, in Arabic)
[Put down the gun! Get on the
ground!]

Walid hesitates, considering his options. Bill fires two rapid shots into the side of the vehicle next to Walid. Walid surrenders.

Terry sweeps in behind him and shoves him face first into the dirt. Terry secures Walid's hands with flexcuffs while Bill keeps his rifle trained on Walid's head.

BILL (CONT'D)

Perimeter!

Ricky and Harris fan out and establish a perimeter around the disabled vehicle. Bill sees Hassan's body inside. He brings his rifle to bear on Hassan.

BILL (CONT'D)

We've got another one inside! He's
not moving. T, drag his ass out
here.

Bill continues to aim at Hassan's lifeless head while Terry grabs him by the shoulders and yanks him out of the vehicle, dumping him unceremoniously on the ground face up. He kneels on Hassan's chest and checks for vital signs.

TERRY

He's dead. Looks like he bled out
from the neck wound.

BILL
 (into radio)
 Six-One, This is Six-Two. Package
 secure. Holding position for
 rendezvous.

MARK (V.O.)
 (filtered)
 Roger, Six-Two. Moving to your
 position. ETA five mikes. Be
 advised, there is beaucoup movement
 outside the objective and on the
 valley floor. You are cleared to
 engage anything that isn't us. Six-
 One out.

EXT. WALID'S SUV - NIGHT

Mark's team reaches Bill's location. The two shake hands
 while Mark's men fan out to reinforce the small perimeter.

Mark pulls a laminated photo out of his pocket. He kneels
 next to Walid and holds the photo next to Walid's face for
 comparison.

MARK
 Mahmoud Ali Walid?

Silence

MARK (CONT'D)
 Are you Mahmoud Ali Walid?

Walid remains silent, but locks eyes with Mark. Mark draws
 his pistol and points it at Walid's face.

MARK (CONT'D)
 If you're not Walid, then I don't
 have any use for you, and I will
 kill you right here, do you
 understand?

Walid hesitates for a second, trying to determine if Mark is
 serious. Walid nods.

WALID
 (in English)
 I am Walid.

MARK
 Good. Smart move.

Mark stands and holsters his sidearm.

MARK (CONT'D)
T, search the dead for
identification.

TERRY
You got it, boss.

Terry rummages through Abdul's pockets.

GINO
CONTACT! One dismount, 300 meters
out, coming this way. Engaging.

Mark takes a knee at Gino's side. Gino fires
one...two...three rounds.

GINO (CONT'D)
What the fuck, am I missing him?

ROBBIE
No, I saw your hits through my
scope. Center mass.

CLAY
That's the same thing that happened
to me. I'm telling you, they must
be wearing body armor. You gotta
take head shots.

GINO
I don't know if I can get a head
shot at this distance.

Robbie settles in, aiming.

ROBBIE
I got it. No body armor is gonna
stop a fifty cal, brah.

Terry moves from Abdul to search Hassan, kneeling beside his
body. Robbie fires--the report from the fifty caliber sniper
rifle is tremendous. Terry looks up from Hassan's body.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)
Scratch one bad guy.

HASSAN'S FACE

Hassan's eyes snap open. They are a glossy jet black.

RETURN TO SCENE

Hassan grabs Terry's leg, pulling it to him before Terry can react, and biting into Terry's thigh.

Terry howls in pain and bludgeons Hassan's skull with the buttstock of his rifle. After two vicious stokes, Hassan's grip comes free, but a chunk of Terry's flesh rips out in Hassan's teeth.

Without hesitation, Terry draws his pistol and fires two shots into Hassan's skull. Hassan goes limp.

Walid stares in horror, jaw agape. Terry rolls on the ground, clutching his wounded leg, and screaming through clenched teeth. Immediately Bill and Mark are by his side.

MARK

Harris, get over here!

(beat)

It's alright, T. You're gonna be fine.

Harris, the medic, rushes over, opening an aid bag and going to work on Terry's leg.

TERRY

(gasping in agony)

God damn it! Sorry, boss. It was careless. I thought he was dead. Arrrgghhh! Fuck me! Fuck you, you piece of fucking shit!

With his good leg, Terry kicks Hassan's body.

MARK

Don't worry about it, T. We all thought he was dead. Now just relax, we're gonna get outta here and get you fixed up, alright? Just try to relax.

Mark checks his watch and confers briefly with Bill. Walid continues to stare at Hassan's lifeless black eyes.

MARK (CONT'D)

(shouting)

Collapse the perimeter!

The men fall in to a loose semi-circle around Mark. Harris gives Terry a shot of morphine and it calms him almost immediately.

MARK (CONT'D)

Okay, listen up! It's eight clicks to the PZ and we only have an hour to get there. We have a prisoner and a wounded man. We need to travel light and fast. Ditch all unnecessary gear in the SUV. Leave the designators, leave your snivel gear, leave your food. Robbie, leave the fifty, it'll just slow us down. Take small arms, ammo, grenades, radios et cetera. If it doesn't shoot or communicate, leave it! We move out in three mikes.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY LAB - DAY

Rebecca shows Michael around the lab.

REBECCA

...so after the second outbreak three months ago, the powers-that-be were sufficiently freaked out that they gave Colonel McDeere carte blanche.

She swipes an access card and they enter another secure room lined with wall lockers and benches.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

He pulled me and the other medical and research staff from USAMRIID, operations people from Special Operations Command, and intelligence and surveillance assets from God-knows-where.

(beat)

This is your locker.

MICHAEL

What about this facility? This obviously wasn't built on short notice.

REBECCA

It used to be a military biological warfare lab.

INSERT SIGN:

BIOHAZARD LEVEL 4 PRECAUTIONS REQUIRED BEYOND THIS POINT

RETURN TO SCENE

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Let's get suited up. I want to show you the tissue sample we recovered from this week's outbreak. It's the first time we've been able to recover anything that wasn't totally destroyed during containment.

EXT. WALID'S SUV - NIGHT

Terry lies on a folding litter, the other men stand ready with much lighter loads. Mark looks at his watch and curses under his breath.

MARK

Alright people, we gotta go.
Robbie: take point with Gino.

(beat)

Bill: you and the rest of the guys follow half a klick behind. Clay and I will bring up the rear. Okay, now let's move!

Robbie and Mark bump forearms.

ROBBIE

See you at the PZ, boss.

MARK

Don't let 'em leave without us.

ROBBIE

No chance, brah.

Robbie and Gino take off at a trot.

RICKY

Contact, rear! Four more assholes coming from that overturned truck.

MARK

Me and Clay'll take care of 'em.
You guys go.

Bill and the rest begin walking in the direction Gino and Robbie went. Walid, hands bound, walks in front of Bill, while Ricky and Harris carry Terry on a stretcher. He is delirious.

Mark and Clay drop prone and engage the oncoming hostiles.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - NIGHT

Four figures shamble past our viewpoint. We see them from behind as they shuffle by. One is wearing tattered Bedouin garb.

Muzzle flashes and rifle reports can be seen/ heard a few hundred meters away. Bullets begin whizzing by, some impacting the figures, erupting out their backs, but not stopping them.

The unarmed figures now begin to move faster, seemingly drawn to the noise and light of the gunfire.

EXT. WALID'S SUV - NIGHT

Mark and Clay stop firing momentarily. The four figures now only a hundred meters away and moving at a clumsy, loping trot.

MARK

Fuck, these guys are starting to piss me off.

CLAY

Why aren't these guys going down, Chief. What the fuck's goin' on?

MARK

I don't know, Clay. Drugs? Body armor? This whole situation is just wrong.

The four figures are now nearly running at the soldiers.

CLAY

Jesus...

MARK

Alright, screw this. Kneecap 'em.

They begin shooting rapidly, hitting the legs of their would-be attackers. Soon, all four are on the ground a mere fifty meters out.

MARK (CONT'D)

Okay, let's go catch up with the others.

Mark produces a white phosphorous grenade, pulls the pin and tosses it inside the Toyota which is now full of their discarded gear. He and Clay set off at a run. Seconds later, the vehicle is engulfed in a blinding inferno.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - NIGHT

The four figures lay on the ground, their legs shattered by Mark's and Clay's bullets, but they are still moving, now using their arms to pull themselves along.

THE BEDOUIN'S FACE

What used to be a woman's face is now a dessicated, sunken horror. Her skin is dry and shriveled. Her eyes are dull black and hollow. Her lips are peeled back to reveal half a mouthful of broken teeth.

Fresh blood covers the lower half of her face.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY BIOHAZARD AREA - DAY

Rebecca and Michael exit the airlock in blue Level 4 Biohazard suits. The room is full of microscopes, freezers, vials and diagnostic equipment. The lighting is an artificial, sterile, blue-white.

REBECCA

We still don't know the original source or why its emergence coincided with the invasion of Iraq, but it seems likely that it was a Bio-weapon developed under Saddam.

MICHAEL

And you assumed it was viral until you got this tissue sample from the latest outbreak?

REBECCA

Or bacterial, yes. As a result, some of our precautions at early outbreak sites proved...inadequate.

Michael turns to her and raises an eyebrow.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

We lost a few of our own, so we adopted a sort of scorched earth policy that left very little chance of recovering anything viable.

They approach an operating table with a glass canopy completely encapsulating the table surface. A sheet is draped over it, obscuring the contents.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

So here it is: our prized tissue sample.

She pulls back the sheet. Under the canopy are the dessicated partial remains of a human body. Only the head and part of the upper torso with the upper half of one arm remain.

MICHAEL

Whoa! When you said "tissue sample", I didn't expect...

Michael leans in close, the face shield of his suit practically touching the glass of the canopy. The face is badly damaged, but is clearly the remains of MAN 2 from the archaeological site.

REBECCA

We like to call him Walter. Or just "the sample". Take your pick.

Suddenly the corpse opens its eyes and lifts its head toward Michael, baring its teeth. Michael jumps back.

MICHAEL

Jesus, that thing's alive!

REBECCA

Well, no, not technically. He's dead, but the fungus is somehow controlling the body, keeping it animated.

MICHAEL

How is that possible?

REBECCA

I don't know, Michael. That's why you're here.

EXT. PZ NEBRASKA - NIGHT

A seemingly random point in the open desert. The soldiers lie prone in a wide circle, facing outward for security.

In the center of the circle, Mark, Bill, and Harris kneel around Terry, who is sweating profusely and mumbling incoherently. Walid, sits nearby, hands still bound, with a black hood over his head.

HARRIS

His wound has gone septic, Chief.
I've never seen anything go this
bad this fast. I've blasted him
with a broad-spectrum antibiotic--
strong stuff, but he's spiking a
fever that won't go down and his
vitals are getting weak. There's
not much more I can do. He needs a
hospital ASAP.

He peels back the dressing on Terry's wound, shining a
flashlight on it. Mark and Bill recoil in horror. The wound
oozes a viscous, black liquid.

MARK

Goddammit!
(on radio)
Dustoff One-Niner, this is Knight
Six-One, do you read me?

INT./EXT. DUSTOFF COCKPIT - NIGHT - TRAVELING

The pilots, wearing night vision goggles, are flying fast and
low--only fifty feet off the barren desert landscape. They
are in close formation behind another Blackhawk, their
escort.

DUSTOFF PILOT

Knight Six-One, this is Dustoff, I
read you Lima Charlie. ETA to your
location fifteen minutes, how copy,
over?

INTERCUT WITH MARK

MARK

Roger, I copy one five mikes. I
have one casualty, litter urgent.
He's in bad shape, so if you could
speed it up, I'd appreciate it.

DUSTOFF PILOT

Roger, Six-One, I'll do what I can.
Dustoff One-Niner out.

EXT. PZ NEBRASKA - NIGHT

Two Blackhawks approach the PZ in a tight formation.

MARK

Okay, listen up. We load Terry on
the medevac.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

Everyone else, pile into the escort
bird. It'll be a tight fit, but
make it work. Everybody clear?

A chorus of "hooahs" and "rogers" from the group, who shield
their faces from the enveloping dust cloud as the two
aircraft land.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT - TO ESTABLISH

Establishing shot of the two helicopters flying in tight
formation, low level across the moonless desert vastness.

INT./EXT. CREW CABIN, MARK'S AIRCRAFT - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Mark talks to the pilots via his headset. The senior pilot is
Chief Warrant Officer 4 DON PERRY, in his forties and soft in
the midsection. The other pilot, First Lieutenant ANDY
DONOVAN, is in his mid twenties.

MARK (V.O.)

(filtered)

Yeah, our man is critical, so once
we get back toward civilization, I
want them to split off and go
direct to the hospital at Mosul.
You can drop us at FOB Dragon.

CW4 PERRY

(into mic)

Roger that. Not a problem. We'll
bump up our airspeed as much as
fuel will allow. Your man will be
fine.

INT./EXT. CREW CABIN, MEDEVAC HELICOPTER - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Two FLIGHT MEDICS are tending to Terry's wounds when the
monitor attached to him begins beeping alerts. He convulses
violently.

FLIGHT MEDIC 1

He's crashing.

They work frantically to stabilize Terry and cinch down his
restraints. In a few seconds, he stops convulsing and the
monitor flatlines.

FLIGHT MEDIC 1 (CONT'D)

Charge the defibrillator.

Flight Medic 2 turns to the bulkhead-mounted defibrillator and switches it on. Terry's eyes open. They are jet black throughout.

Terry struggles violently against his restraints. His mouth opens wide and he spews a foul black vomit, covering the medics. His body tenses and the buckle on his upper torso restraint snaps.

Terry reaches for Flight Medic 1, grabs him and bites him viciously in the face before snapping the remaining restraints. He lunges for the pilots.

Flight Medic 2 tries to bear hug him, but a wicked backhand knocks him back across the crew cabin.

Flight Medic 1 writhes on the floor, screaming, a large chunk of his cheek torn away. Terry looks at the pilots again and lunges.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

The trail aircraft (medevac) banks left then right, its nose dipping into an accelerating dive a second before it makes a radical banking climb. Its main rotor clips the tail rotor of the lead aircraft, sending pieces of both flying.

INT./EXT. CREW CABIN, MARK'S AIRCRAFT - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Mark and the other passengers brace themselves as the aircraft lurches violently. The cabin fills with shouts, curses and a cacophony of alarms and system warnings.

LIEUTENANT DONOVAN
(struggling with the
controls)
Shit! Shit! Shit!

The aircraft pitches forward steeply. CW4 Perry, leaps into action, taking control of the aircraft.

CW4 PERRY
I have the controls! I have the
controls!
(beat)
Tail rotor's gone.
(shouting)
Hang on, we're going in!
(into the radio)
Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Dustoff One
Niner Echo is going down,
location...

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

The medevac aircraft's main rotor begins to disintegrate. The aircraft pitches up, and seems to hang in the air momentarily before rolling over and plummeting to the ground inverted. It explodes in flames.

The lead aircraft is nose-low, diving for the desert floor. Smoke pours out of the tail rotor gear box.

CW4 PERRY (V.O.)
(filtered)
Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Dustoff One
Niner Echo is going down, location
Mike Romeo One Four Eight...

INT./EXT. CREW CABIN, MARK'S AIRCRAFT - NIGHT - TRAVELING

The pilots struggle to control the aircraft. They get the nose up, but it begins to spin. Alarms and warning tones sound loudly in the cockpit.

Through the window, the men see the fireball that was the other aircraft.

GINO
(screaming)
Terry!

Mark closes his eyes and braces for impact, a calm, serene expression on his face.

Ricky crosses himself and prays. Bill tightens his harness and Robbie follows suit. Clay's eyes are squeezed shut and his hand squeezes Gino's leg next to him.

CLAY
Oh shit! Oh shit! Oh Shit!

One crew chief, a young black Specialist JONES, sits petrified, his eyes wide and unblinking. The other, a SERGEANT, spits out a wad of chewing tobacco and cinches down the chinstrap of his helmet.

Harris pulls out his dog tags which have a wedding ring attached and kisses the ring. Walid prays softly in Arabic.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Mark's helicopter impacts the ground in a level attitude, but is spinning when it hits. The wheels dig into the sand and the aircraft rolls over.

The main rotor kicks up a massive cloud of sand as it disintegrates.

Seconds later, the aircraft comes to a standstill on its side amid a cloud of dust and smoke.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

The smoldering ruin of Walid's former camp lies in the background. Dozens of shambling figures, many of them bloody, burned or otherwise horribly maimed, mill about aimlessly.

Many of the injuries are clearly not survivable.

On the horizon a fireball rises, illuminating the night sky. The light of the fire draws the attention of the throng, who gaze at it with their lifeless black eyes.

No longer milling aimlessly, they collectively set off in the direction of the fiery column of smoke.

INT. CREW CABIN MARK'S AIRCRAFT - NIGHT

The air is filled with smoke and dust, barely illuminated by the soft glow of a blue-green cabin light. The aircraft lays on its side, so the men are all hanging awkwardly in their harnesses. They begin to stir and take stock of their condition.

MARK

Sound off!

GINO

I'm good.

CLAY

Me too.

ROBBIE

My arm's banged up. It might be broke, but I'll live.

Bill touches his hand to an obviously broken nose and grimaces.

BILL

Yeah, I'm okay.

Harris calls out that he is okay.

MARK

Ricky?

(louder)

RICK!

Mark and Harris turn on flashlights to assess those still inside. The crew chief Sergeant is dead, his body half buried under the twisted fuselage amid a pile of loose rucksacks and gear.

Next to him, Ricky's leg is pinned under the wreckage and the side of his face is awash in blood, flowing from beneath his helmet. Harris unbuckles, crawls to him, and checks for a pulse. Finding none, he looks at Mark, shaking his head.

MARK (CONT'D)

God DAMNIT!

Other voices of dismay and sorrow fill the cabin.

HARRIS

Vaya con Dios, my brother.

INT. COCKPIT MARK'S AIRCRAFT - NIGHT

In the cockpit, Lieutenant Donovan unbuckles and leans over to check on CW4 Perry, who is unconscious and bleeding from his mouth and nose.

LIEUTENANT DONOVAN

Mister Perry?

He checks Perry's neck for a pulse.

LIEUTENANT DONOVAN (CONT'D)

Don?

He gets no reply

LIEUTENANT DONOVAN (CONT'D)

Hey guys, Mister Perry's hurt. He looks bad.

OUTSIDE THE AIRCRAFT, FUEL TRICKLES FROM A RUPTURED FUEL TANK, PUDDLING UNDER THE AIRCRAFT AND DRIPPING ONTO A HOT ENGINE.

INT. CREW CABIN, MARK'S AIRCRAFT - NIGHT

Mark and the others begin unbuckling from their harnesses. He sniffs the air.

MARK

Shit! FUEL LEAK! EVERYONE OUT! GET
OUT NOW! GO! GO!

They scramble to climb out of the broken aircraft. Walid struggles to free himself, but can't with his hands bound.

Bill and Gino haul Walid out of the bird. They also help out Specialist Jones, who is conscious but dazed and only semi-responsive.

The hot engine ignites a fire that starts small, but in seconds begins to flare up.

Mark tries to pull Ricky's body out, but is forced to abandon it as the flames grow.

LT. DONOVAN

Help!

Harris helps Donovan unbuckle Chief Perry and drag him out just as the aircraft becomes fully engulfed in flames. All have made it out except the dead. They run for cover, Harris carrying Perry over his shoulder as ammunition begins cooking off in the fire.

They are all well clear as something in the aircraft explodes, sending a ball of fire high into the night sky.

Mark does a quick head count.

MARK

Gino, Bill, go to the other crash
site and look for survivors.
Everyone else, gather up whatever
gear you can salvage.

He runs his fingers through his hair, staring at the burning wreck.

MARK (CONT'D)

FUCK!

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY LAB - DAY

Michael sits at a computer. Rebecca leans over his shoulder as he shows her an animation of microscopic spores replicating. A LAB TECH works in the background with a centrifuge.

MICHAEL

So I introduced a small quantity of spores into a sample of uncontaminated brain tissue, and this is what happened.

REBECCA

This is time-lapse, right?

MICHAEL

No, this is real-time.

REBECCA

(under her breath)

My God.

As she leans in to get a better view, Michael's gaze shifts from the screen to Rebecca, who does not notice.

MICHAEL

Yeah. But that's not the most remarkable thing I found...

An intercom emits a hiss of static.

FEMALE VOICE ON INTERCOM (O.S.)

(filtered)

Major Stone, please report to Operations immediately. Major Stone to Operations.

Rebecca straightens up.

REBECCA

Damn.

(beat)

Okay, keep on it. I want to know everything there is to know about this fungus, including how to stop it. I'll be back when I can.

She exits the lab swiftly. Michael watches her leave.

MICHAEL

(to the lab tech)

So, what do you know about her?

The lab tech doesn't look up from his work.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

No, really - you think there's a chance...

LAB TECH

Don't waste your time, man. She's an ice queen. And if you piss her off, she'll have your balls mounted on her wall.

Michael smiles, his expression indicating that he is undeterred.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY OPERATIONS CENTER - DAY

Operations is abuzz with activity, a small army of soldiers busily man their workstations and communications equipment. Colonel McDeere stands, reading a printout. Enter Rebecca.

REBECCA

What's going on, sir?

COLONEL MCDEERE

We have a problem, Major. Another incident.

Rebecca gazes at the large screens, one of which shows an aerial infrared video feed of the ruins of Walid's compound.

REBECCA

That's a lot of collateral damage.

COLONEL MCDEERE

No, that wasn't us. That was part of a planned airstrike.

Rebecca looks quizzically at the Colonel.

COLONEL MCDEERE (CONT'D)

Apparently a Special Forces team was on a mission to take out a high value target, when an unknown indigenous force attacked. Our guys still completed the mission, but were compromised and called for early extraction. From the confusion in the radio transmissions, it sounds like that "indigenous force" was a bunch of our infected.

REBECCA

So what's the problem? We go in behind them and sanitize the site.

COLONEL MCDEERE

The team reported a man down.

(beat)

One of them may have been exposed
and could be carrying the contagion
back to an Army hospital as we
speak.

Rebecca closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, and lets it out slowly. Then her eyes snap open and she is calm as a machine.

REBECCA

Okay, first priority is
containment. We need surveillance
over the entire area.

(beat)

Sergeant Roberts: Find out what
unit this is and get a line to
their chain of command. I want to
know what these guys had for
breakfast...

EXT. MEDEVAC CRASH SITE - NIGHT

Bill, and Gino approach the flaming wreckage of the medevac helicopter, about a kilometer away from their own crash site. Debris is strewn over a large area.

They quickly find the limp, broken body of a flight medic a few yards from the burning fuselage. Bill examines the body.

BILL

He got thrown clear before the fire
started. Maybe there are more.

They spread out to look for survivors.

Moments later, Gino call out to Bill.

GINO

I got nothing over here.

BILL

Yeah, me eith...

Bill spots Terry's body. His lower half is missing.

GINO

What do you got, Bill?

Gino begins to walk toward Bill.

BILL

Gino, don't come over here. Stay away!

Gino begins to run.

GINO

What is it? Is it T?

Gino stops abruptly when he sees Terry's body. For a moment, they just stand and stare. Then Terry begins to move. The two jump back, startled.

GINO (CONT'D)

T?

Terry lifts his head and lets out a low, unintelligible groan. A portion of his scalp is peeled back, and a viscous black ooze flows from the wound. He reaches an obviously broken arm out toward Gino and Bill.

Gino steps forward, but Bill yanks him back.

BILL

Don't. This isn't right, Gino. I don't know what the fuck's going on, but this isn't right.

Gino stutters a protest, but holds back nonetheless.

Terry begins to scramble in earnest toward the men, using one good arm to drag himself across the rocky sand. His lips curl back in a vicious snarl.

BILL (CONT'D)

(slowly, whispered)

Jesus Christ.

Gino draws his pistol and cocks the hammer. Fighting back tears, he takes a step closer to Terry.

BILL (CONT'D)

What are you doing, Gino?

GINO

He can't possibly be alive. I'm not leaving him like this.

He squeezes his eyes shut against the tears that stream down his cheeks. Only feet away, Terry snaps his teeth at Gino. Opening his eyes again, Gino aims for Terry's head.

GINO (CONT'D)

I'm sorry brother.

EXT. DESERT- NIGHT

View of the desert night sky.

A single gunshot rings out.

EXT. NEAR MARK'S CRASH SITE - NIGHT

A hundred yards from the still burning wreck, Walid sits on the ground cross-legged, his hands still bound behind him. Specialist Jones sits near him, still dazed and disoriented, a bandage on his head.

Robbie is watching Walid and providing security while Clay works on a radio trying unsuccessfully to reach headquarters. Harris tends to Perry, who is unmoving.

Bill and Gino emerge from out of the darkness. Gino walks fast and purposefully toward Walid. Mark calls out to Bill.

MARK
(somberly)
Anything?

BILL
We need to talk, brother.

A few yards away from Walid, Gino breaks into a run and violently tackles the helpless Walid. Mark and Bill run to intervene. Gino clutches Walid's collar and pulls him inches from his own face.

GINO
(screaming at Walid)
What the hell is going on here?
What do you know?

Mark and Bill forcibly separate the two. Gino tries to kick Walid as he is pulled off.

GINO (CONT'D)
(still screaming)
What do you know?

MARK
GINO! Gino, calm the fuck down!
What's going on?

While Mark and Bill restrain him, Gino appears to regain some semblance of composure, but is still seething.

GINO

Why don't you ask our new friend here? He just sits there quiet and smug.

MARK

Talk to me, Gino. What happened?

GINO

I don't fucking know, man, All I do know is that everything was fine until we picked up this asshole. Then T gets bitten. Bitten! Then everything goes to shit and I gotta put a bullet in my best friend's skull!

He fights against Mark and Bill's restraint, trying to get at Walid. Eventually he relents and sits on the ground.

BILL

We found Terry. Or what was left of him. He was torn in half and burned badly...

MARK

Damn...

BILL

No. That's not it.

(beat)

He was...crawling...snarling, like a rabid dog.

Some of the others gather around to hear.

MARK

He was alive?

BILL

I don't know, man. There's no way he could have been. No way. But he was....

(beat)

I think he was trying to bite us.

MARK

And Gino...

BILL

It was the only thing we could do, brother.

Mark is speechless. Gino stands again, pointing at Walid.

GINO

And this motherfucker knows
something. It was his homie that
bit T.

Walid stares at the ground. Mark draws his pistol, walks to Walid and grabs him roughly by the collar, threatening with the pistol.

MARK

All right, mister Walid. I'm done
playing. I've got men down and my
only concern now is getting the
rest of them home alive, so you
just became excess baggage. What do
you know?

Walid meets Mark's gaze, also confused and shaken. He exhales slowly through his nostrils.

WALID

Hassan...the one that attacked your
man...he was bitten too.

He looks at Clay.

WALID (CONT'D)

And I watched him die...

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY OPERATIONS CENTER - DAY

Rebecca talks on a telephone. Colonel McDeere leans over a workstation, holding a headset to one ear.

He slams his fist onto the workstation table, startling the soldier sitting there.

COLONEL MCDEERE

(to the soldier)

Okay, bring that up on the center
screen.

REBECCA

What's up, sir?

COLONEL MCDEERE

I think we may have caught a break.

The large central screen on the wall fills with an infrared satellite image of a helicopter crash site. Several survivors surround the crash.

REBECCA
What happened?

COLONEL MCDEERE
They've gone down. During
extraction. They went down and lost
contact, but we've got them on
satellite.

Rebecca looks concerned.

REBECCA
Casualties?

COLONEL MCDEERE
Unfortunately yes, it looks like
the medevac bird crashed and burned
with no survivors.

REBECCA
(angered)
You call that a break? Men are
dead, and you call it a break?

Colonel McDeere tries to pull her aside but she shrugs off
his grasp.

COLONEL MCDEERE
(whispered, urgently)
Look, damn it, I hate this as much
as you, but if one of them was
infected, he would have been on the
medevac bird.
(beat)
It's a goddamn tragedy, Becca, but
what if they had made it to a
hospital? I can't have you losing
sight of the big picture.

Rebecca hardens her countenance, and walks toward the door.

REBECCA
Yes sir.

COLONEL MCDEERE
(shouting)
And somebody get me a goddamn high
altitude drone over that crash site
before we lose satellite coverage!

EXT. SLEEPING FARM VILLAGE - NIGHT

A few goats in a pen stir nervously. A dog barks in alarm.

A sleepy man steps out of his ramshackle house to investigate. He is attacked by three walking corpses who bite him viciously about the face and neck. His screams wake the village.

Dozens more zombies rush in and attack the villagers in their beds or as they come outside to check on the commotion.

In the distance, maybe a mile away, can be seen the fires and plumes of smoke from the crashed helicopters.

EXT. CRASH SITE - DAWN

Harris tends to CW4 Perry, who lies on a makeshift litter, and Jones, who is still in a catatonic daze. Robbie walks a loose perimeter, scanning the horizon, his left arm in a sling. Lt. Donovan, with his pistol, stands guard over Walid.

Clay and Gino are working with a radio, trying in vain to reach headquarters. Mark and Bill stand together next a small pile of gear and two rucksacks.

MARK

...and wait for the cavalry. Search and Rescue should be on the way by now. What's our equipment status?

BILL

We lost both GPS's and most of our comms gear in the fire. We have the pilots' survival radios, which aren't worth a shit until someone comes looking for us, and our SATCOM terminal dumped its crypto fills, probably from the impact of the crash, so we're S.O.L. on radios.

Mark exhales a sigh through his nose.

MARK

Well, have them keep trying. At least it'll give 'em something to focus on.

He turns to Harris.

MARK (CONT'D)

How's he doing?

Harris has just finished checking Perry's eyes. He looks up.

HARRIS

He's in bad shape. His abdomen is rigid and his pulse is slow. I think he's bleeding internally. He's been in and out of semi-consciousness, but more out than in lately; and I felt a soft spot in his spine around L1, probably a compression fracture from the crash.

MARK

Can he be moved?

HARRIS

Not safely, no. I'm surprised it didn't kill him just moving him away from the fire.

Suddenly, Robbie drops to a knee and raises his rifle.

ROBBIE

(loud whisper)

Contact! Northwest ridgeline!

Everyone stops what they are doing and ready their weapons.

A single figure crests a low rise three hundred yards away, followed by two more. They shamble slowly toward the wreckage, giving no acknowledgement to the Americans.

MARK

(shouting)

Hello friends. Stay back please, for your own safety.

The lead figure turns toward Mark. He is dressed like one of Walid's insurgents with an ammunition bandolier strapped across his chest, but no weapon. He is too far to see more detail.

Suddenly Walid, his hands still tied, rocks to his feet and dashes toward the figure shouting.

WALID

(in Arabic)

[Help! Help! The Americans have me prisoner! Save me, I'll pay you!]

BILL

SHIT!

Clay sprints after Walid, tackling him.

The three figures on the hill begin an awkward loping run toward Mark and his men.

Robbie fires several shots at the lead one, but his aim is hampered by his injured arm. The shots have no effect. He steadies himself better and fires several more. Mark and the others join in, and the three figures go down in a hail of gunfire.

Mark, Bill, and the others walk up to one of the bodies that is still writhing in the dirt, its legs shattered and body riddled with bullets. It is clearly a person who cannot still be alive, but it continues to try to get to them.

MARK

So this is really what we're
dealing with...

He draws his pistol and fires three shots in its head. It stops moving. The group stands around, staring in disbelief.

Then another figure crests the hill, followed by another and another. Robbie raises his rifle, but now there are a dozen...two dozen...fifty.

GINO

Oh fuck me...

MARK

Fall back! Head east! Go! Go! Go!

The horde of zombies charges at the men. The team begins laying down covering fire while they all fall back. Zombie bodies are getting shredded by bullets, but they keep pressing on. A few go down after being hit in the head.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY OPERATIONS CENTER - DAY

Colonel McDeere stands by a command console talking with Rebecca. He drinks from his Pentagon mug.

COLONEL MCDEERE

We'll to continue to monitor them
until we can positively determine
if they're clean.

REBECCA

Roger. I've got an I.S.A. team
gearing up to go in for the
recovery.

The Colonel nods approvingly and takes a sip of coffee.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
What about their own unit? They
must be launching a rescue.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Already on it.

A SOLDIER calls out to Colonel McDeere.

SOLDIER
Sir, I've got Colonel Weeks on the
line from Fifth Group.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Patch him through to my station.

The soldier turns back to his console. A light flashes on
Colonel McDeere's Secure Telephone Unit.

COLONEL MCDEERE (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Colonel Weeks? Hello, this is
General Kauffman with the National
Reconnaissance Office.

Rebecca looks at him with a wry smile and shakes her head.

COLONEL MCDEERE (CONT'D)
We're both busy men, so I'll get
right to the point. You have a team
down in Western Iraq.
(beat)
That's not important, Colonel. We
have an active operation of the
highest priority in that area.
National Command Authority is
ordering you to call off your
search. Immediately...

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - DAY

The group, minus Robbie, is huddled among a cluster of car-sized rocks, Perry's litter in the middle. Mark kneels at the edge, on guard, but his mind seems elsewhere.

He snaps back into the moment as he sees Robbie a hundred meters away, jogging back from an elevated rock outcrop.

Mark looks down at his left hand and sees it is trembling. He makes a tight fist for a few seconds and when he opens his hand, the trembling has stopped.

Robbie jogs up and Mark acknowledges him. Mark lets him past, gives one last glance outward. A glint of reflection in the sky catches his attention for a second before he turns to follow Robbie.

MARK

Two coming in.

Robbie, breathless and panting, retrieves a map from his cargo pocket and unfolds it on the ground for the group.

ROBBIE

I put us right about here.

He points to a spot on the map.

MARK

Are those things still tracking us?

ROBBIE

Like bloodhounds, brah. They're moving with a purpose, and that little jink maneuver didn't throw 'em off our trail at all.

MARK

Damn. How much lead time do we have?

ROBBIE

I'd guess the faster ones in front'll be here within 20 minutes. Even if we take them out, the rest will start showing up inside of an hour.

BILL

How many are still following us? I mean we had to have made a dent egressing from the crash site. We sure as hell spent enough ammunition.

ROBBIE

I estimate at least a hundred. There's probably more if you add slow ones and stragglers lagging behind the herd.

Random mutterings of dismay, frustration, and fatigue.

MARK

Okay, get ready. We move out in 15.

ROBBIE

There's a road about half a mile east of us. If we follow it south, it'll lead us to a small village.

MARK

No. No roads until we get back to friendly-patrolled territory. We don't know who is friendly out here and who isn't. The last thing we need is to run into some of Walid's supporters. We're in no shape for a fight.

ROBBIE

Roger that, boss.

GINO

Look, I know this is gonna make me sound like the asshole here, but I'm just gonna say what we've all been thinking.

(beat)

I know we never leave a man behind and all, but we could move a whole lot faster if we weren't hauling this litter around.

MARK

No.

GINO

The guy's circling the drain anyway. He's not gonna...

Mark steps forward, getting in Gino's face.

MARK

NO! I've lost enough men for one day, goddamnit. If he's got a snowball's chance, then I'm his goddamn refrigerator.

Gino shrugs and backs down. Lt. Donovan pulls out his survival radio and attempts to make contact again.

BILL

Clay, you've still got some grenades, right?

CLAY

Yeah, two. Why?

BILL

Well if these assholes are tracking us, some of them are bound to stumble through these rocks. Take one of those frags and some tripwire, and leave our friends a little token of our appreciation, will ya?

Clay smiles, the idea clearly rejuvenating his sagging spirits.

CLAY

I'm on it.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

Michael stands in front of the room briefing Colonel McDeere, Rebecca, and several other uniformed staff members sitting around the table. A projector screen shows a magnified view of a cluster of spores.

MICHAEL

...once the spores are introduced to a new hosts' bodily fluids, they begin replicating at an incredible rate, overwhelming the immune system.

He advances a slide.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

They pass through the blood-brain barrier and take up residence in the brain, creating a sort of colony and infiltrating it at every level. When the colony gets big enough, the host dies, as if from a massive systemic infection.

He advances another slide. Colonel McDeere leans forward, keenly interested.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Using bioelectric impulses, the fungal colony is able to piggyback on existing neural pathways and replicate gross motor and sensory function of the host organism.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Why does it take over the host's body?

Another slide.

MICHAEL

Consistent with the aggressive nature of the host takeover, it looks like this thing has evolved to a point where rather than wait for a chance infection, it can actively use the host to reproduce. In many ways, it resembles a more advanced version of the zombie-ant fungus found in the Amazon basin.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Zombie ants?

A few chuckles from the assembly.

MICHAEL

Yes sir. Just Google it.

(beat)

Anyway, the fastest and most effective method of transmission is fluid to fluid transfer. So by biting a victim, it introduces contaminated saliva into the victim's blood stream. Voila: another carrier.

Michael stands smiling, obviously very pleased with himself.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Any indication where it came from?
Was it manufactured?

MICHAEL

I don't think so. Recent research has demonstrated that fungi can make adaptive evolutionary leaps much more easily than we ever thought. So it isn't a big stretch to think that it's been around for a long time but only recently adapted to human physiology, or just became more aggressive.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Thank you, Doctor Corgan. Keep us updated as you find out more.

The Colonel stands to leave and the rest of the soldiers file out behind him.

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - DAY

A number of zombies approach the rock formation. One of them sniffs the air and enters the passage where Mark had been guarding, two more close at its heels.

CLOSE-UP OF A GRENADE WEDGED BETWEEN TWO ROCKS, A WIRE ATTACHED TO THE PIN

The zombie's foot catches the wire and there is the sound of a grenade spoon releasing. The zombie stops, bends down toward the grenade, sniffing the air.

The grenade explodes, blowing the lead zombie to pieces, dismembering the second, and blowing the third backward out of the entryway.

The bulk of the herd in the distance begins running (or as close as some of their physical conditions will allow) toward the rock formation.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The team trudges on across the desert floor. Fatigue has clearly set in, but they are still displaying an impressive degree of discipline and grit. Mark and Bill carry Perry's litter now.

The sound of a small but powerful explosion in the distance. Without turning around, Clay holds up a middle finger to an unseen enemy behind him.

CLAY

Merry Christmas, assholes.

Mark chuckles in spite of himself. Walid silently watches Mark. He seems to be gaining a reluctant respect for Mark and his men.

INT. COLONEL MCDEERE'S OFFICE - DAY

Rebecca and the Colonel sit around his desk behind closed doors. The discussion is heated.

COLONEL MCDEERE

We have to keep all our options on the table, Major.

REBECCA

Of course, sir, but I don't see why we don't just send in a covert team to recover them. If one or more are infected, we deal with it then.

COLONEL MCDEERE

No. We send a team only when we're sure these guys are clear and not contaminated. Think about it, Becca. What would you do if a bunch of operators show up to rescue you and say "We'll take you, but first we're going to shoot some of your injured teammates in the head"? How do you think that would go over?

(beat)

Look, I pray it won't be necessary, but we can't rule out the possibility that we'll need to take them out. All of them.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The team is taking another rest. The sun is low in the sky. Gino sits on a rock trying to shake a few more drops of water out of an upended bottle. Unsuccessful and disgusted, shoves the bottle back in a rucksack.

GINO

Well, that was the last of the water.

Mark looks up from the map that he, Bill, Robbie, and Lt. Donovan are poring over.

MARK

If we keep heading east, we should hit highway 1 in about 30 miles. The Army patrols that road night and day. It's our best chance for finding friendlies.

BILL

Where the hell is Search & Rescue??

GINO

Yeah, for Christsake, It's not like it would be hard to find us - just start at the crash site and follow the trail of walking corpses!

Mark stands and addresses the group.

MARK

Hey guys, I didn't want to say anything before, but you oughta know. I think we're being watched.

GINO

Yeah, no shit, boss. In case you hadn't noticed, they're following us too.

MARK

No, I mean by our side.

Disquieted murmurs.

MARK (CONT'D)

A couple times now I've caught a reflection in the sky. Probably sunglint off the optics of a U.A.V. High-altitude type.

HARRIS

Well then why the hell aren't they picking us up? If they're watching us, they gotta know we've got a critically injured man.

They collectively pause to contemplate.

MARK

No idea. Maybe they're waiting for nightfall.

CLAY

Or maybe they don't wanna come get us...

BILL

Knock it off, kid.

CLAY

No, really. You've seen what we're up against. Maybe these walking dead fuckers are part of some government experiment or somethin'. Like a super-soldier program.

Robbie, who has started cleaning his rifle, looks up at Clay, then to Mark, then back to Clay. His expression is anything but dismissive.

GINO

(losing patience)
Just shut up, dude.

CLAY

No, I'm serious! There were what, four? Five guys that attacked Walid's camp? Just waltzed right in to an insurgent stronghold and fucked their shit up!

Walid glares at Clay.

MARK

Alright Clay, you've made your point.

CLAY

(increasingly agitated)
And they won't pick us up because we're part of the fucking experiment now too!

MARK

THAT'S ENOUGH!

Clay takes his rebuke and sits down hard. The group is silent for a while.

LT. DONOVAN

It's going to be dark soon, Chief. What do you think - find a place to fortify and hole up for the night, or keep walking?

Mark surveys the group. They look ragged and weary. His own exhaustion and exasperation permeates his voice.

MARK

I don't know. Why don't you decide? You're the ranking officer here anyway.

LT. DONOVAN

I'm just a pilot, chief. And a junior one at that. Out here, on the ground, in hostile territory? This is your world. If I...

MARK

Yeah, yeah, I know.

BILL

Heavy is the head that wears the crown, brother.

MARK

Okay listen up: We move out in ten.
If we find a decent, defensible
spot to hole up before dark, we do
it. If not, we walk until we do.

INT. REBECCA'S OFFICE - DAY

Rebecca sits at her desk, poring over satellite maps and photos. A female sergeant, ANNE ROBERTS, knocks on the open door.

REBECCA

Come in.

ANNE

Here's the latest information on
the S.F. team you requested.
O.D.A. 592, led by a Captain Joseph
Wei.

Rebecca opens the folder handed her by the sergeant.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Captain Wei was wounded in a raid
last week though, and operational
command of the team fell to a C.W.3
Mark Brewer. His personnel file is
in the folder.

Rebecca freezes at hearing the words.

REBECCA

Mark? Oh God. Is he still...

ANNE

Yes ma'am. We're pretty sure he was
one of the survivors. You know him,
ma'am?

REBECCA

He was with my husband Eric in
Afghanistan...

She pauses, fighting back the emotions of a clearly painful memory.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

They were caught in an ambush. It
was bad. When Eric was...hit...Mark
took command. It took a day and a
half for them to be rescued.

(MORE)

REBECCA (CONT'D)

By that time, most of the team was dead, including Eric. Mark was badly wounded too, but it was his defense that kept them from being overrun. He made sure that I at least had a body for the funeral.

ANNE

I...I'm sorry--I had no idea...

Rebecca's gaze drifts, looking at nothing in particular.

REBECCA

It may seem trivial, having a body. I mean I still lost my husband, but...it made a difference.

ANNE

If there's anything I can do, ma'am, just let me know. I know it's important for us to be tough-to show we can hack it just as well as the men, but...well, I'm here if you need someone.

Rebecca shakes it off, wipes the corner of her eye, and hardens again.

REBECCA

Thanks, Anne. I'll be fine. Keep me informed.

Anne leaves and closes the door behind her.

EXT. DESERT - DUSK

The group trudges on across the desert. Their pace has slowed considerably. Gino has developed a limp and Specialist Jones is lagging behind. He stumbles and Bill goes back to help him up.

BILL

Come on, son.

JONES

I can't...

BILL

Yes you can. You can because you have to. There is no other option. One foot in front of the other and eventually we'll get there.

JONES
Roger, sergeant.

Clay and Harris are carrying Perry's litter when he starts shaking. His breathing is labored and choppy. They put him down and Harris listens to Perry's breathing. He rips open Perry's flight suit and listens at his chest.

HARRIS
Damn it. Give me the chest tube kit
from my bag.

Clay opens Harris's medic bag and begins rummaging.

MARK
What's wrong?

HARRIS
His abdominal bleed is seeping into
his chest cavity, causing a tension
hemothorax. It's preventing his
right lung from inflating.

Clay hands Harris chest tube kit. Harris rips the package open and uses a scalpel to cut a hole in Perry's rib cage to insert the tube. When he succeeds, blood spurts out the tube and Perry's breathing becomes easier.

CLAY
That's some impressive shit there,
man.

HARRIS
Yeah, I guess so, but he's still
hanging on by a thread. I don't
know how much longer I can keep him
that way...

Suddenly Robbie drops to a knee facing back from where they came.

ROBBIE
CONTACT! Runners at our six!

Everyone grabs their weapons looks to where Robbie is aiming. Cresting a rise three hundred yards behind the group are several zombies, running in their awkward shambling trot.

MARK
Okay let's move! Robbie, Clay: hang
back and take 'em out. I need you
to buy us some lead time.
(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

Give it five minutes to see if any more show up, but don't linger too long - I don't want us getting separated in the dark.

Bill and Harris heft Perry's litter and the group moves out in a hurry.

Robbie and Clay settle in next to one another, allowing the enemy to get closer.

EXT. DESERT - DUSK

The herd of zombies is strung out over perhaps half a mile, with a few stragglers trailing ever farther back. They walk or crawl as their body's condition allows, but ever onward in the same direction.

The sound of controlled gunfire in the distance. Shiftless eyes look to the horizon and they all increase their pace a half-step.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

The night is clear and a partial moon provides some illumination as the weary survivors march on. Gino is now walking with a pronounced limp. Clay and Robbie have not yet rejoined the group.

WALID

(to Harris)

You know, it does not matter that you saved him. These devils following us will catch up eventually.

HARRIS

You'd like that, wouldn't you?

WALID

No. Because if they catch you, they will catch me too, and I do not want to die like that - to become one of them.

HARRIS

No. You'd rather die by blowing yourself up and taking a crowd of civilians with you.

Walid gives an ironic laugh. Mark is listening in on the conversation, but pretends not to.

WALID

You think you know me? You think I am just a brainwashed terrorist who wants to blow himself up for the glory of Allah, isn't that right?

BILL

Isn't it?

WALID

I don't even believe in God, you imbecile.

BILL

Then why are you fighting us? We came here to help this country. All you are doing is tearing it apart!

WALID

Typical American arrogance. You think you understand us. You think you know what's best for us. You think if everybody just lived like Americans that the world would be a better place.

GINO

Damn straight!

WALID

Did you ever ask us if we want that?

Silence.

WALID (CONT'D)

I am fighting your occupation for the same reasons I fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan. I am fighting against your arrogance, your racism, your imperialism, your marginalization of Arab and Muslim people and cultures! It is long past time that we stopped...

Mark stops and turns toward Walid, cutting him off.

MARK

Enough!

(beat)

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

Mister Walid, I'm sure we could have a lively political debate about our presence here and the history of Western involvement in the region, but right now I just don't care! I really don't. The one thing I do care about is getting my remaining men out of this shithole in one piece. Beyond that, the world could go up in flames and I wouldn't give a damn, as long as they all make it home. So spare me your sanctimonious "hero of the oppressed people" bullshit. I'm not in the mood!

Just then Robbie and Clay come trotting up from behind the group with wearing their night-vision devices (NVDs).

BILL

What's the word?

ROBBIE

Word is they're still back there and they're still on our trail.

CLAY

Yeah, only now there are a few less of them.

The two turn off their NVDs. Clay swaps out his weapon's magazine for a fresh one.

ROBBIE

So it's like we suspected, boss. The only way to kill them for good is a head shot.

MARK

That's good to know.

ROBBIE

You'll also be happy to know that we bought some time.

MARK

Yeah?

ROBBIE

Yeah. They seem to be drawn to movement and sound. So we left a few more trip-wire grenades for 'em.

(MORE)

ROBBIE (CONT'D)

Every time one goes off, they all swarm that area and it takes 'em a while to get back on our trail.

MARK

How much time?

ROBBIE

A couple of hours maybe.

Mark closes his eyes for a second, takes a deep breath, and lets it out slowly.

MARK

Okay guys. Let's hunker down for an hour or two in that rock outcrop over there.

Sighs of relief and happy murmurs.

BILL

Hey! We're getting a break, but stay frosty. Two on guard at all times, and be ready to bug out at a moment's notice.

(beat)

And we need water. We've been paralleling a wadi about a half a klick south. Gino and Clay: how about you guys take a quick run down there and see if there's any water in the low ground.

GINO

Hey Bill? Normally I'd be all over that, but my knee is messed up and I don't know how much longer it's gonna hold.

BILL

What happened?

GINO

It got banged up in the crash. I've been managing okay, but it's pretty bad now and getting worse by the mile.

Lieutenant Donovan steps forward.

LT. DONOVAN

I'll go. I feel like I've been dead weight this whole time. I want to pitch in.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY OPERATIONS CENTER - DAY

Colonel McDeere, Rebecca, and several operations personnel are looking at the large central screen on the wall, which shows a series of photos from a high altitude drone.

INSERT: ONSCREEN PHOTOS

Overhead shots of Mark's team during their march, progressively zooming out.

INTERCUT WITH ANALYST, THE COLONEL, AND REBECCA

ANALYST

Sir, Ma'am. This was the team at
1200 local time. There are ten
personnel, one of them in a litter.

The next photo shows the same scene zoomed out enough to reveal a haphazard group of about a dozen figures following the team maybe a half mile behind.

ANALYST (CONT'D)

Here are the lead pursuers. We have
confirmed that they are infected
individuals that have turned.

The next photo is zoomed out further, covering an area of a few miles. The analyst draws several circles on the screen to indicate what he refers to. Colonel McDeere and Rebecca are glued to the screen.

ANALYST (CONT'D)

It gets a little hard to follow at
this level of zoom, but here is our
team.

(circle)

Here is the group of pursuers from
the previous photo.

(circle)

And here...

He draws a much bigger circle around a large group spread out over a mile or more.

ANALYST (CONT'D)

...is the rest of the pursuing
group.

REBECCA

My God.

Colonel McDeere sits back in his chair and stews silently for a moment, stroking his chin.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Containment has clearly failed,
Major.

REBECCA
Sir!

COLONEL MCDEERE
We tried, Becca. I was hoping those
men would make it out too, but this
has already gotten out of hand.

Rebecca stands. She remains composed, but her tone belies her
desperation.

REBECCA
No sir, I don't think we're at that
point yet.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Any further delay increases risks
we simply cannot accept.
(beat)
I am implementing the Orcus
Protocol.

EXT. ROCK OUTCROP - NIGHT

The team is resting among a rock formation on some high
ground. Clay and Lt. Donovan are absent. Robbie is catching a
cat nap. Jones and Walid are sleeping as well. Bill and Mark
are on watch about 20 meters away from the group.

Harris cuts open the leg of Gino's pants. His knee is
horribly swollen and discolored.

HARRIS
Damn, man - you should have told me
about this sooner.

GINO
Yeah, well, it's not like we didn't
all have other things to worry
about.

Harris squeezes and prods at Gino's leg in various spots. In
several instances, Gino winces in pain, sucking air through
gritted teeth.

HARRIS
I'll get you some anti-
inflammatories and wrap it.
(MORE)

HARRIS (CONT'D)

You'll live, but I think your days of playing point guard are finished.

GINO

I guess I'll just have to stick to soldiering for a living. 'Sides, who wants all that money and fame anyway.

EXT. ROCK OUTCROP EXTERIOR - NIGHT

Away from the rest of the group, Mark sits on a rock, removing rounds from partially full rifle magazines and consolidating them into full mags.

His hands are shaking so badly he can barely perform the task. He pauses, makes a fist, and releases it. His hand still shakes. Frustrated, he stops and puts the magazines away.

Bill, several strides away, sees this and approaches.

BILL

Gettin' cold out, huh?

MARK

Yeah. Guess I caught a chill. Can't stop shivering.

BILL

Yeah, me too.

(beat)

You know you're my best friend on the planet, right? And you're the closest thing to a real brother I got, right?

Mark won't meet Bill's gaze.

MARK

Yeah. Same here.

BILL

Good. So you'll understand when I tell ya you've been worryin' me lately, brother.

MARK

Yeah, well, now isn't the time, Bill.

BILL

Now is exactly the time, Mark. I've seen what's happenin' to you. And if it was only affecting you, I'd let it slide a little longer.

Mark continues looking away, shifting uncomfortably.

BILL (CONT'D)

But all that shit that's eatin' you: it's affecting your judgement. And when your judgement is fucked up, it puts the lives of every man here in danger.

MARK

I told you, I'm fine.

Mark gets up and turns to leave.

BILL

No, you're not fine.

(beat)

I know about the drinking.

Mark stops in his tracks.

MARK

So? We all like a few drinks now and then.

BILL

I know that's why you got the shakes. Ain't no damn chill.

(beat)

And I know about the pistol you keep beside your pillow every night.

MARK

It's not like that.

BILL

Brother, I've sat by and watched this thing eat you up inside for two years, but right now, tonight, we need your head here, not on some fuckin' mountain in Afghanistan.

Mark lowers his head.

BILL (CONT'D)

Each and every one of these guys here is countin' on you to be on top of your game to get us all out of this alive. We survived that night on the mountain; we'll survive this one if you keep your head on straight.

(beat)

So brother to brother...pull your shit together.

Bill pulls a flask out of a pouch in his web gear. And presses it against Mark's chest. Mark takes it.

BILL (CONT'D)

Just to get you even and stop the shakes. We need your head screwed on tight right now.

Bill heads back toward the rest of the group.

Mark looks long and hard at the flask, opens it, contemplates it, and takes a swig.

EXT. DRY STREAMBED - NIGHT

Clay and Lt. Donovan walk along a wadi (seasonal streambed), maybe 10 meters apart, searching for signs of water. Clay is wearing his night vision monocular. Donovan wades into a mass of head-high reeds and cattails.

LT. DONOVAN

(hushed)

Hey, over here. I found some.

He bends down and scoops up some water from a small pool, maybe 6 inches deep, into his hand and sniffs it then tastes a sip.

Clay joins him.

CLAY

Jackpot! Man, I'm so thirsty I could drink a quart of piss filtered through a dirty jock strap.

Donovan shakes his head as they pull out an assortment of canteens, water bottles, and a few Camelbacks.

LT. DONOVAN

There's something wrong with you,
man.

Clay chuckles. Donovan fills bottles while clay opens a jar of iodine tablets and places two in each container.

CLAY

Great.

LT. DONOVAN

What?

CLAY

Battery's dying on the NVGs. Better
save what's left to find our way
back.

He takes them off and stuffs them in a pouch.

There is a rustling noise nearby in the reeds. The two men freeze. Clay sets down a bottle quietly and readies his rifle. Donovan silently draws his pistol. The sound stops.

The men stand frozen, listening. Donovan tries to take a step backward and his boot makes a sucking sound in the mud.

A man lumbers out of the reeds, charging at Donovan. Without hesitation, both men open fire at the figure only 10 feet away. A dozen rounds tear into the figure's body, stopping it in its tracks and sending it to its knees.

They pause. It is eerily quiet.

The figure raises its head and its face is half torn off, flesh ripped away to the bone, mouth frothing with black foam. It snarls and both men fire several rounds into its head, obliterating it. It falls backward, dead.

CLAY (CONT'D)

Come on, lets' grab the full ones
and go...

A zombie leaps/falls off the top of the wadi's bank above Clay, knocking him to the ground. They roll in the dirt, grappling, as it tries to bite Clay's neck and face. Donovan can't shoot without risking hitting Clay.

The foe is strong, but Clay is stronger. He pins the thing to the ground, straddling it and pinning its arms with his. He shouts in its face.

CLAY (CONT'D)

FUCK YOU!

It struggles, snapping at him with its teeth.

CLAY (CONT'D)

I beat you, you piece of shit! I'm
better than you because I am still
aliv...

The zombie opens its mouth wide and spews a stream of vile black projectile vomit directly into Clay's face, filling his open mouth and eyes.

Clay recoils, letting go of the monster. Donovan acts swiftly, steps on its chest and shoots it in the head.

Clay writhes around, spitting, gasping, temporarily blinded. Donovan rushes to his side.

LT. DONOVAN

Here, wash it off!

He pulls Clay to the water and Clay thrusts his face under, scrubbing vigorously. Coming up for air, he continues splashing water in his face, trying to clear his eyes, his nose, his mouth of the vile stuff.

CLAY

Oh shit Oh shit oh shit!

Nearby something lets out an unearthly moan. A second or two later, the sound is echoed by similar moans.

LT. DONOVAN

We gotta go. Now!

He pulls Clay up and grabs his rifle, abandoning the water bottles. Clay stumbles, still half blind. Donovan helps him up the embankment of the wadi and guides him, holding Clay's sleeve as they run.

Behind them, a dozen or more dark figures pursue.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY LAB - DAY

Michael sits at a computer outside of the bio-containment area, dressed in a labcoat. He looks like he hasn't slept in days.

He scribbles some hand-written notes on a pad then gets up to pour a fresh cup of coffee. The pot is empty. Disappointed, he starts to make a fresh pot.

Enter Rebecca.

MICHAEL

Major, it's good to see you again.
Making a fresh pot of coffee, want
some? You look like you could use
it.

REBECCA

Excuse me?

MICHAEL

Not to imply that you look bad or
anything...you...just look...

REBECCA

I'm beat, Michael. Yes, I'll have a
cup. Thank you.

MICHAEL

Well...yes...of course...

She sits down, exhaustion evident.

REBECCA

So, how is the research going? Have
you found us a way to stop this
thing yet?

MICHAEL

Well...no. But I have a theory that
could help us pinpoint the origin
and isolate it. Any kind of vaccine
or antigen isn't likely until I can
complete the gene sequencing, which
could take weeks or even months.

REBECCA

So what's your theory?

Michael finishes prepping the coffee and turns it on. He sits
down across from Rebecca, excited.

MICHAEL

Okay, well I've had this theory for
quite a while, and this case could
be the confirmation I've been
looking for.

REBECCA

Okay. Go on.

MICHAEL

I'm sure you've heard about Ancient
Egyptian mummification rituals,
right?

REBECCA

Of course.

MICHAEL

Right. Well as you know, they removed the brain along with most of the other major organs.

REBECCA

Yes, and?

MICHAEL

Well, the Egyptians are the most famous for it, but they weren't the only ancient civilization to mummify their dead, and they weren't the only ones to remove the brain in the process. It was fairly standard practice among Mesopotamian cultures, especially when dealing with their nobility.

Rebecca leans forward in her chair, showing her interest with where this is going.

REBECCA

Go on.

MICHAEL

Well, the reason for removing the organs in the torso has to do with preserving the body. The bacteria in the gut alone would wreak havoc on any attempt to preserve the body. That just makes sense. But the brain...that's a different story. The brain can be dessicated fairly easily and isn't likely to compromise the mummification process.

REBECCA

So?

MICHAEL

So there had to be a reason to take out the brain.

(beat)

Historians have always assumed that there was some reverence for it, or that they realized it was the key to consciousness.

(beat)

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

But what if there was another
reason? A more pragmatic reason.

Rebecca smiles. She seems to know where he is going with this
line of reasoning, but she pushes to hear it anyway.

REBECCA

Such as?

Michael takes the bait.

MICHAEL

So what if this thing existed back
then?

(beat)

What if they knew about it, and
that's why they took the brains
out?

He pauses for dramatic effect, and leans back in his chair,
very satisfied with himself.

REBECCA

Then why are we just seeing it
after thousands of years?

MICHAEL

Well, that's the million-dollar
question, isn't it?

EXT. ROCK OUTCROP - NIGHT

Robbie is on watch with Gino. Bill, Harris, and Jones are
sleeping. Mark watches over Perry and Walid. Robbie scans
with night vision.

Mark quietly wakes Bill.

MARK

(to Bill)

Hey. You're up. My turn for some
beauty rest.

Bill shakes off the sleep and gets up.

BILL

I'd give anything for a fresh cuppa
coffee right about now.
How you feelin'? Any better?

MARK

Yeah. Rock-steady.

He holds out his hand. No shakes.

MARK (CONT'D)
Thanks, brother.

Bill pats Mark on the shoulder.

BILL
Anything, anytime. But we'll
continue this conversation when we
get back, alright?

The sound of gunfire not far in the distance. Mark and Bill
roust the sleepers. They quietly make ready.

ROBBIE
(hushed)
I got movement. 500 meters.

Mark and Bill rush to Robbie's location, readying weapons.

MARK
Our guys?

ROBBIE
Looks like it. Two bodies, movin'
at a decent clip.

MARK
Full perimeter. I don't want any
surprises. Jones: watch over our
guest, please.

Jones looks scared, but turns his focus to Walid, pistol
ready. The team fans out around the rock formation, giving
360 degree coverage.

ROBBIE
300 meters. Definitely Clay and the
L.T.

More gunfire with muzzle flashes. The shooting is wild,
rapid, undisciplined. Mark dons his night vision.

MARK'S POV THROUGH NIGHT VISION

Donovan is leading a stumbling Clay by the arm. He turns and
fires wildly behind him until the rifle is empty then grabs
Clay and continues toward the team.

This POV cannot see what Donovan is shooting at.

RETURN TO SCENE

MARK
 (through gritted teeth)
 Goddamnit, L.T. Don't waste ammo!

Mark, Bill, and Robbie aim their weapons in the direction of the inbound men.

MARK (CONT'D)
 Harris: Clay may be hurt. Be ready to give him a once-over. Everyone else: get ready to move. If we have to jump, we head due east until we hit the highway. No more stopping!

Harris falls back from his perimeter position and readies his medic bag.

EXT. MILITARY AIR BASE - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: INCIRLIK AIR BASE, WESTERN TURKEY. 0300 HOURS.

A B-1B Bomber takes off from the runway, followed moments later by a flight of four F-15E fighter-bombers, heavily laden with bombs and external fuel tanks.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY OPERATIONS CENTER

On the wall, one of the screens shows a map spanning from Incirlik Air Base in Turkey to Mosul, Iraq.

Col. McDeere is on a secure phone. Rebecca is talking to Anne Roberts.

COLONEL MCDEERE
 Excellent. Thank you for the update, Colonel. We will provide final target coordinates when we have them.

He hangs up.

REBECCA
 What was that, sir?

COLONEL MCDEERE
 This sanitizing package is airborne. Estimated time to target is two and a half hours.

A digital icon of a plane appears on the map at Incirlik. A dashed line shows a flight path to a small circle in northwestern Iraq

REBECCA

Sir, I still think we can pull those guys out. We have no reason to think they are contaminated. We can pick them up and put them in protective quarantine.

COLONEL MCDEERE

The last time I checked, Major, I was the one wearing a bird on his collar here. I appreciate your concern for these men, and I wish I were not in this position, but I have a responsibility far greater than those ten men.

He starts to leave the room, but turns back just before exiting.

COLONEL MCDEERE (CONT'D)

And I want a draft of the press release detailing the friendly fire loss of that team on my desk within two hours.

(beat)

This time point the finger at the Pentagon.

He exits the room, leaving Rebecca seething.

EXT. ROCK OUTCROP - NIGHT

Donovan and Clay approach the rock outcrop. Clay looks weak and Donovan is helping/pulling him along, Clay's rifle slung over his shoulder.

As they reach the team's position, Robbie remains focused on the distance, looking for pursuers. Mark and Bill help the two in. They are winded and Donovan is near panic.

LT. DONOVAN

(gasping for air)

Behind us! At least a dozen...

Mark takes Clay's arm and leads him to Harris. Clay is sweating profusely and his hair and shirt are dripping wet.

MARK

Here Clay, calm down. Harris is gonna check you over. You're gonna be fine.

Mark turns to Donovan.

MARK (CONT'D)

What happened?

LT. DONOVAN

We got jumped filling water bottles. They came outta nowhere.

BILL

Did either of you get bit?

LT. DONOVAN

No, I don't think so. One of them threw up on him, but I don't think he was bitten.

Clay sits, leaning back against a rock. Harris shines a flashlight in his eyes.

INSERT - CLAY'S EYES

The whites of Clay's eyes are being taken over by black and the veins in his eyes are also unusually dark and pronounced.

RETURN TO SCENE

HARRIS

How do you feel, Clay? Are you injured?

CLAY

(weakly)

No, man. I just...one of those things puked in my face. It got in my eyes and mouth, but I washed it out. I...I'm having a little trouble seein' though. You gotta clean out my eyes...

Clay leans to the side and vomits pure black, a trickle of it running down his chin when he is finished.

Harris pulls back.

HARRIS

Oh shit!

He reaches into his bag and pulls out a face mask and a pair of rubber gloves.

MARK

What? What is it?

HARRIS

Nobody touch Clay. Especially don't let him vomit on you. He may be contagious.

CLAY

No, No, I'm not. It's just that nasty shit that thing...

He leans over again, vomiting more black mess. It is coming out his nose now. He grasps his belly and groans in pain.

CLAY (CONT'D)

(pained)

Oh fuck it hurts, Harris. Am I poisoned? Am I gonna die?

Harris rushes over to mark and pulls him aside.

HARRIS

He's got a fever already. I think that black shit is some kind of infectious agent. I think that's what got into Terry's bloodstream when he was bitten.

MARK

He said it got into his eyes and mouth.

HARRIS

Yeah. If it is infectious, he just got a massive dose - way more than Terry got. We have to watch him - I pray I'm wrong, but I think the same thing that happened to Terry is gonna happen to Clay...

ROBBIE

CONTACT! 400 meters. I count ten to twelve.

MARK

Okay, listen up! We're moving out NOW! Harris, you're with Clay. Take all necessary precautions. Gino: You're on point. We can't move any faster than you anyway. Let's go!

Harris pulls Clay to his feet, but keeps him separate from the others,

HARRIS

(to Clay)

Sorry, brother, but we gotta move.

Clay nods and gets to his feet. Gino moves out, hobbling quickly on his bad knee. Mark and Bill pick up Perry's litter. Robbie stays put.

ROBBIE

Go! I'll catch up!

He settles in to take aim.

LT. DONOVAN

I'll stay with him.

ROBBIE

No, You'll just slow me down. Don't fuck up my chi, man.

Mark doesn't argue. He and the team move out, leaving Robbie alone.

EXT. ROCK OUTCROP - NIGHT

Robbie lies against a large rock, using it to steady his rifle to compensate for his bad arm. He taps his night vision monocular. Then again a little harder.

ROBBIE

Not an ideal time to run out of juice, brah.

He flips the device up on its hinged head harness, out of the way. A zombie shambles out of the darkness, only yards away. Robbie lines up an easy shot and the foe goes down in a spray of black brain matter.

Another presents itself, he fires, and it too goes down. He is utterly calm and unhurried. He does this half a dozen more times as they appear with increased frequency.

Then his bolt locks to the rear, his magazine empty. He quickly checks the magazine pouches on his web gear, but finds them all empty.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)

Yeah, thought so. Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'd love to stay and chat, but the surf's lame here. Time to find another break.

He gets up to leave and draws his pistol. Another zombie emerges from the dark and he draws a bead on its head.

Pulling the trigger, nothing happens. He slaps the bottom of the magazine and tries to pull the slide back to chamber a new round. The slide does not move. He tries again, and sees that the slide is bent.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)
(chuckling)
What are the odds?

He turns to leave. Suddenly there is one blocking his path. It opens its mouth and lets out a deep, droning moan. Black spittle drips from its maw. Now a third and fourth enemy appear. He is surrounded.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)
Oh, so it's like that, huh?

He re-holsters the pistol and draws a machete-like kukri knife from a belt sheath.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)
Okay, let's see what you got.

The moaner lunges. Robbie sidestep, spins and takes off the top of its head with a backhanded swing of the kukri.

Another rushes him. He ducks under its outstretched arms and chops its leg off mid-shin. Unable to compensate on its next step, it collapses in a heap and Robbie buries the blade in its skull.

Looking up, he sees the enemy numbers around him have only increased.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)
Well, shit...

INT. BOMBER COCKPIT - NIGHT

The cockpit is dimly lit. The two pilots perform various systems checks.

BOMBER PILOT 1
Time to initial point: one hour,
fifteen minutes.

BOMBER PILOT 2
Roger, one plus one five to I.P.

BOMBER PILOT 1
(filtered)
Strike operations, this is Orcus One. Any update on final target coordinates?

HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)
(filtered)
Orcus One, this is Strike Ops. Negative on final target fix. Continue mission.

BOMBER PILOT 1
(filtered)
Roger Strike, Orcus One out.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY, REBECCA'S OFFICE

Rebecca paces nervously in her office. She checks her watch.

A knock.

REBECCA
Come in.

Anne Roberts enters.

ANNE
You wanted to see me ma'am? It sounded important.

REBECCA
Yes I did. Thank you for coming.
(beat)
You know how last night you asked if there was anything you could do for me?

ANNE
Sure. I meant it too. Whatever you need.

REBECCA
Good. I need you to find a way to get in touch with a Lieutenant Colonel Tom Fields with the 3rd A.C.R. They're operating in the Mosul and Tal Afar.

ANNE
Sure, no problem, ma'am. Anything else?

REBECCA

Yes. I need you to keep Colonel
McDeere occupied and away from his
office for about fifteen minutes.

Anne looks at her suspiciously.

ANNE

Okay, but can I ask why?

REBECCA

Best not. Plausible deniability and
all.

Anne smiles.

ANNE

Oooh, I like the sound of that.
When?

REBECCA

Right now.

INT. COLONEL MCDEERE'S OFFICE - DAY

Colonel McDeere sits at his desk, reading a report. Stacks of
folders and similar reports sit in neat piles on the desk.

Over the intercom calls a female voice.

ANNE (V.O.)

(filtered)

Colonel McDeere to operations,
please. Colonel McDeere to
operations.

The Colonel turns in his chair to retrieve one file from a
stack.

INSERT - THE FILE JACKET

The folder has multiple classified markings and a broken
official seal. The outer jacket reads: "Top Secret
Compartmentalized - Eyes Only COL A. McDeere. Orcus Protocol"

RETURN TO SCENE

He places the file folder in a filing cabinet, locks the
cabinet, and places the keys in his desk drawer before
leaving the room.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY OPERATIONS CENTER

Colonel McDeere enters operations. It is bustling with activity as usual.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Who paged me?

ANNE

I did, sir. Major Stone asked me to have you meet her here.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Well where is she then?

ANNE

I'm not sure, sir. Last I saw her was in the lab. Maybe she got held up there. I think Doctor Corgan has had some kind of breakthrough. Maybe you should stop by and see for yourself.

COLONEL MCDEERE

I don't have time for this. I'm going back to my office. If she needs me, she can find me there.

He turns to leave, but Anne steps in his path.

ANNE

Well, while you're here sir, I have some orders for you to sign. Also, Incirlik has requested a status update on the final target fix.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Give them the latest position of the team and the infected and remind them that it's a moving target. They'll get a final fix when they get on station.

He makes to leave again and she stays in his path.

ANNE

I did, sir. They want to hear it from you. Something about instructions coming from you personally.

He hangs his head in resignation.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Damn it Anne...

INT. COLONEL MCDEERE'S OFFICE

Rebecca slips into the office and looks over the Colonel's desk. Not finding what she is looking for, she checks the filing cabinet. Finding it locked, she looks in his desk drawer.

She finds the keys to the cabinet and unlocks it. Opening one drawer, she looks through the contents. Nothing. She opens the drawer the Colonel placed the Orcus file in.

In the hallway outside, footsteps. Rebecca freezes.

SOLDIER (O.S.)
Afternoon, sir.

COLONEL MCDEERE (O.S.)
Afternoon, Hawkins.

SOLDIER (O.S.)
Sir, Major Stone was just in the lab and asked if I'd send you there if I saw you. She said it was important.

A pause.

COLONEL MCDEERE (O.S.)
Damnit, fine.
(beat)
Thank you, Hawkins. That will be all.

Footsteps recede down the hall. Rebecca resumes her search. Finding the file, she opens it and leafs through the pages until she finds what she is looking for.

Rebecca scribbles a note on a pad. She then returns the file to the cabinet, locks it, and returns the keys before leaving the office exactly as she found it.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

The ragged band is walking, but slowly. Gino is obviously in great pain with each step. Jones and Donovan now carry the litter. Mark keeps looking backward. Gino stops.

GINO
Robbie should have caught up by
now.

MARK
I know.

GINO
We cant just leave him behind, man.

MARK
(agitated)
I know, damn it! But I've got a
responsibility to get eight more of
you out of this alive.

GINO
Fuck that, I'm not leaving without
Robbie!

BILL
Robbie's a big boy. He can take
care of himself. He works solo all
the time. He'll catch up.

Mark scans the horizon in front of them.

MARK
Look, we're not leaving without
him, but we have to be smart about
it. If we go looking right now,
we're half blind. We'll just risk
getting separated or attacked.
It'll start getting light in about
a half hour. If he's not back by
then, we'll go looking for him.
Okay?

GINO
Fine. But first light, I'm going'
looking.

Clay drops to his knees in a fit of coughing. He shudders all
over, grabs onto Harris's sleeve, and pulls. Harris tries to
pull away, but Clay has a death grip on his arm.

Panicking, Harris reaches for his pistol. As his hand grasps
the pistol's grip, Clay speaks.

CLAY
(weakly)
Just help me up, man.

Relieved, Harris pulls Clay to his feet.

Bill approaches Mark, a cylinder in his hand.

BILL

Here's a thought. All of our night vision's dead. Maybe Robbie's is too and he's having trouble finding us. We could pop a parachute flare - give him something to orient on.

LT. DONOVAN

Yeah, but it'll attract those things too.

BILL

Those things are tracking us somehow anyway.

MARK

Fine. Do it.

Bill preps the flare and fires it. A small ball of white fire arcs across the night sky. A few seconds later, it deploys a small parachute and begins to fall slowly, pendulum-like toward the ground.

The light from the flare illuminates a large swath of the desert floor where the men just came from. In the illuminated area, not more than 500 meters behind the team is a teeming mass of walking dead coming toward them.

Awestruck at the horror before them, they stand and stare for a moment.

HARRIS

Oh sweet Jesus...

WALID

[Allah protect us from this evil]

GINO

Are you shittin' me?

Mark breaks the collective trance.

MARK

(shouting)

RUN!!

And they do. Harris helps Clay, while Jones and Donovan take the litter. Gino grimaces and grits his teeth against the pain, but manages a hobbled jog in spite of his crippled knee.

EXT. DESERT - DAWN

The team is struggling to stay ahead of the dead horde, but the faster zombies are catching up while the larger mass lags behind. It is now a running gun battle.

At the rear of the column are Gino, Harris, Clay, and Bill. Bill turns around and fires several shots, taking down a zombie only ten meters behind. His bolt locks open.

BILL

I'm out!

HARRIS

Take mine, I can't shoot now anyway.

Harris tosses Bill his rifle and goes back to helping Clay, who is struggling to stay on his feet.

BILL

Mags?

Harris shakes his head grimly.

Gino, armed only with his pistol fires a few shots, taking another enemy down. He changes magazines as he turns back to continue

GINO

Hey guys: I'm sorry about what I said earlier about leaving the pilot. Looks like I'm the weak link holding us back now.

BILL

Forget it. Just suck it up and keep moving.

Mark calls out from ahead. He is holding a pistol in one hand, and the map in the other. His rifle is slung across his back.

MARK

(shouting)

The highway should be just over that ridge!

He points to a low ridge maybe half a mile distant. There are some abandoned mud-brick buildings at the crest of hill.

MARK (CONT'D)

Make for those ruins and we'll get our bearings there.

Jones stumbles, nearly dumping Perry from the litter.

JONES

I can't carry anymore...

WALID

(to Mark)

Cut me free! I will help carry your man.

Mark hesitates.

Bill fires a few more rounds, putting down another zombie. There is now a sizeable gap between the group and the main horde.

BILL

(shouting)

Clear for now! Let's go while we have a lead!

WALID

Please! Let me help!

Mark draws a large combat knife and steps close to Walid. Walid does not flinch.

MARK

If you do anything to interfere or harm my men, I will make sure you are still alive when those things eat you.

He cuts Walid's ties. Walid Rubs his raw wrists and replaces Jones at Perry's litter. Donovan looks at him with uncertainty.

WALID

Go! Go!

The group makes takes off for the buildings on the ridge with renewed vigor, increasing the gap between them and the horde.

INT. BOMBER COCKPIT - DAWN

The sun breaks the horizon and floods the cockpit with daylight. Outside, just off the wing, one of the F-15s can be seen.

BOMBER PILOT 1

(into radio)

Roger, Strike Operations, that's a good copy on the new target coordinates. Adjusting flight path.

BOMBER PILOT 2

E.T.E. to new I.P. is zero plus four five.

BOMBER PILOT 1

Strike Operations, be advised time to new Initial Point Is four five minutes.

HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)

(filtered)

Roger Orcus One, understand forty five minutes to start of bomb run. Strike Operations out.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY, REBECCA'S OFFICE

Rebecca sits alone at her desk on a secure telephone.

REBECCA

Thanks, Tom. I owe you one. And watch your ass over there. Just because you're in the cavalry, doesn't mean you can go all cowboy. Rachel and little Tommy are expecting you back in one piece.

(beat)

Okay. Thanks again. Out.

She hangs up and rests her head in her hands, elbows on the desk. She exhales slowly.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

She inhales deeply and exhales more quickly this time, bringing her face out of her hands.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

The right thing.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY LAB

Michael is back at his computer terminal, deeply engrossed in what he is reading.

He is disheveled, unshaven, and wearing the same clothes he has been wearing for two days. Enter Rebecca.

MICHAEL

Well hello, stranger. I was beginning to think I said something to offend you. Though I admit, I could use a shower.

REBECCA

Any new news?

MICHAEL

As it happens, yes. I've been looking into the possible point of origin, and I may have something.

Rebecca brightens at the news.

REBECCA

Let's have it.

MICHAEL

Well, I've been operating off the assumption that my theory about ancient burial practices is correct, and I found a few potential sites - one in particular.

Rebecca pours herself a cup of coffee and sits next to Michael. His eyes follow her form as she does this.

REBECCA

Sites?

MICHAEL

Archaeological sites.

She makes a face suggesting that this is a waste of time. He holds up both hands in supplication.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Wait. Bear with me. There was an excavation led by a well-known British archaeologist that's practically dead-center in the middle of all your outbreaks.

(beat)

The archaeologist suspected that the site was the tomb of an Assyrian prince, but the dig was called off due to the war.

REBECCA

So? There must be dozens of those around the region.

MICHAEL

There are. But they are almost always in or around population centers. This one is out in the middle of nowhere. It's fifty or sixty miles from the nearest known existing settlement at that time.

Rebecca sips her coffee and nods her head in understanding.

REBECCA

So you think the remote-ness of the burial site was a kind of quarantine for an infected prince.

Michael smiles at her insight.

MICHAEL

Bingo. Give that pretty lady a prize.

REBECCA

That's a pretty big stretch, Michael. A theory based on a theory based on a theory.

Michael's shoulders slump, the wind sucked from his sails.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

But it's the best we have to go on. I'll put a team on it.

Michael's demeanor changes again. He smiles, ecstatic.

MICHAEL

Excellent!

REBECCA

There's one more thing...

MICHAEL

What is it?

She heads for the door.

REBECCA

I may not be working here much longer, so make sure you document everything and that nothing you do relies on me alone for backup.

Exit Rebecca, leaving Michael looking stunned and puzzled.

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

The group approaches the cluster of six old, semi-collapsed mud-brick buildings. All the doors, windows, and roofing materials have long since been scavenged, leaving only half-collapsed walls.

Mark is in the lead of the ragged crew. He reaches the first of the buildings and stops to take a breath.

Looking back, the rest of the group is catching up, winded from a hard push up the hill. Gino and Clay, supported by Harris, pull up the rear.

Some distance behind them, the mass of walking dead are spread out on the desert floor, still nearly a hundred in number, and still pursuing relentlessly.

MARK

Break here. Take five. Bill: come with me. Let's see what's over the hill.

Bill turns to Donovan, who is just reaching the ruins carrying the litter with Walid.

BILL

First order of business, sir: Ammo count and cross-level. Make sure everybody has at least a few rounds.

Donovan sets the litter down and nearly collapses against a wall, exhausted.

LT. DONOVAN

Roger that. Ammo count.

Walid, also spent, sits beside him and watches Bill and Mark trudge on up the hill.

WALID

Those two. They are like machines.

EXT. RIDGELINE - DAY

Walking up another 50 meters, Mark and Bill reach the crest of the ridge. In a wide valley below, about a mile away, a highway stretches across their path. Traffic flows along it.

Mark smiles for a second. Then his expression turns sour.

MARK

No.

Below them in the valley, between the team and the highway, lies a small farm village, less than a kilometer away. Civilians can be seen going about their business, tending to goats and crops.

BILL

Oh shit...

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

Mark and Bill stand in the center of the group. The others are sitting or lying down, exhausted. Bill looks at the map.

BILL

No, you're right. It's not on the damn map.

GINO

So fucking what? We bypass the village, hit the highway and flag down some help. Then we come back and find Robbie.

MARK

If we bypass the village, those things following us will kill everyone there. We've basically served them up on a silver platter.

GINO

So? Sorry, boss, but that's not our fucking problem!

Mark loses his temper and shouts at Gino.

MARK

It IS our fucking problem! We're supposed to be here helping these people! If we let these things get to them to save our skins, we might as well kill 'em ourselves!

Walid is watching Mark closely, listening to his every word.

MARK (CONT'D)

No. We dig in.

He looks back toward the approaching horde, which has become divided into roughly two groups now, one faster and one slower.

MARK (CONT'D)

We dig in and make our stand here.
If we can stop them, we can save
that village.

Gino turns to Donovan.

GINO

Come on, L.T. - we're not in any
condition to fight.

LT. DONOVAN

Sorry, Gino. He's right. I don't
want to die here, but this is the
right thing to do. We can't just
let those people get slaughtered.

GINO

I say we vote on it.

MARK

No. No vote. We fight. We can't let
people like Walid be right about
why we're here.

The group is dead silent for a moment. Then a voice
interrupts the moment of reflection.

ROBBIE

Hooah!

Robbie has snuck up on the group during the heated
discussion. He is dirty and battered, but alive.

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

The men perform various tasks to prepare a defense. Jones and
Donovan are repairing a low rock wall that forms a waist-high
defensive barricade 30 meters wide.

Robbie emplaces a claymore mine well in front of their
position, reeling the wire out back to the buildings.

Gino is preparing a defensive position and checking proper
function of his M4 rifle.

Bill is lashing a large combat knife to the end of a five
foot stick, making a makeshift spear.

Mark points to one of the ruined buildings.

MARK

Harris, make this one your casualty collection point. Bring Clay and Perry in here and be prepared to receive wounded.

Harris nods. He is checking Clay's vitals. Clay is unresponsive. The veins in his neck and face have turned dark.

MARK (CONT'D)

Walid!

Nothing.

MARK (CONT'D)

Bill, have you seen Walid?

Bill looks around.

BILL

No, last I saw, he was helping the L.T. And Jones.

Mark calls out to Donovan.

MARK

L.T.: is Walid with you?

LT. DONOVAN

No, I thought he was with you.

Mark turns and runs to the crest of the hill. In the valley below, Walid is halfway to the village.

MARK

Shit!

From behind him, Robbie calls out.

ROBBIE

Boss: we got hostiles approaching!
Five minutes, tops.

INT. BOMBER COCKPIT - DAY

Bomber Pilot 2 is entering a series of numbers - coordinates - into a keyboard on the instrument panel.

BOMBER PILOT 1

(into radio)

Roger, Strike. That's a good copy on final target fix. Understand target one is now stationary. E.T.E is two five minutes to initial point, break.

(beat)

Also, Orcus One and flight are crossing R.P At this time...

He looks outside the cockpit, and sees the F-15s break off and head in different directions.

BOMBER PILOT 1 (CONT'D)

I confirm Eagles have broken off to service their secondary targets. Will call I.P. inbound. Orcus One out.

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

Mark stands on a wall, surveying the men and the makeshift defenses arrayed before him. Beyond them, maybe three hundred meters now, several dozen shambling, lumbering animated corpses of the first wave close on the hilltop ruins.

Mark looks at his left hand. It is shaking mildly. He pulls out the flask Bill gave him, opens it, contemplates it, and then pours its contents into the dirt.

Bill makes eye contact with Mark. Mark nods. Bill nods back. Volumes are spoken in those nods.

The enemy is 150 meters out and those that are capable are picking up speed.

Mark addresses the group.

MARK

Gentlemen: it has been the greatest honor of my life to fight beside you all. I'd love to give you some inspirational speech, but...well that's just not me. You know why we're making this stand.

He pauses, searching for his next words. The enemy is 100 meters out.

MARK (CONT'D)

Let's give 'em Hell.

50 Meters.

BILL
Claymores!

Gino activates the clacker detonator and 50 meters out, a pair of claymore mines detonates, sending a spray of 1400 steel ball bearings into the front ranks of the enemy.

Some are thrown aside by the blast, or have limbs torn off or torsos ripped open. A few take hits to the head and go down for good. The rest get back up and keep coming.

The 60 degree forward arc of the claymores, however, only affects a small section of the advancing wave. Some are practically running now.

BILL (CONT'D)
Grenades!

Donovan and Jones stand up, pull pins, and throw a grenade each.

LT. DONOVAN
Frag Out!

They land among the enemy and detonate. Less potent than the claymore, several zombies are knocked down or damaged, but only two are killed. Dozens remain.

Robbie and Gino, the only ones armed with rifles now, begin taking deliberate, aimed shots at the lead zombies, they make a few hits and some go down, but the enemy's fast and erratic movement cause them to miss several shots.

MARK
Engage at will!

As the lead zombies get within feet of the defensive walls, the rest open fire with their pistols.

Behind them, inside the makeshift aid station, Clay convulses violently for several seconds, then stops. He opens his eyes. They are jet black.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY, REBECCA'S OFFICE

Rebecca is sitting at her desk, looking at a 5x7 picture frame.

INSERT - PICTURE

The photo is a wedding picture of her and a man in dress blues.

RETURN TO SCENE

REBECCA

I miss you, Eric. No matter what happens, we owe him this.

She opens the notepad she had in Col. McDeere's office, picks up the handset of her secure phone and begins dialing.

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

Dozens of mangled corpses lay jumbled in front of and on the waist-high rock wall the team had arrayed behind. Several have made it over the wall now and the team is beginning to fall back, each engaged in their own private battle.

Gino fires one last round from his rifle, taking down a charging corpse only feet away, it's momentum carrying it over the wall.

GINO

I'm out!

He hobbles backward on his good leg, using his empty rifle to support himself.

ROBBIE

Me too!

Gino looks toward the other end of the defensive line to see Robbie draw a huge machete-like kukri knife and cleave the skull of an enemy in two with a powerful one-handed stroke.

Bill spears a zombie through the mouth but another crashes into him, and they go down together. It tries to bite him, clawing at his face. On his back, he holds it at bay with one hand, picks up a rock with the other and smashes its head.

Mark is engaged in a vicious melee with three enemy, knife in one hand, empty pistol in the other. He stabs one through the eye and as another rushes him, he sends it reeling with a back-handed pistol-whip.

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

Donovan, on the left flank of the defensive line, calls out.

DONOVAN

Medic!

Donovan is dragging an unconscious Jones out from under an unmoving body. He pauses to shoot another approaching zombie. Jones is bleeding from a gash in the back of his head.

Harris rushes to his aid, and they are joined by Robbie.

HARRIS

What happened to him?

DONOVAN

He hit his head. He wasn't bitten.

HARRIS

Help me get him to the C.C.P.

Harris and Robbie begin dragging Jones toward the makeshift aid station, Donovan covering their withdrawal with his pistol.

INTERCUT DONOVAN / GINO / MARK BATTLE SCENES AS APPROPRIATE

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

Gino, momentarily distracted watching the others, is grabbed and yanked around by an emaciated and withered figure in Bedouin garb.

GINO

Shit!

Instinctively, he chops at the arm with a vicious swing of his rifle butt. The arm snaps mid-forearm, leaving splintered bones protruding through skin and muscle.

The Bedouin presses its attack, lunging at Gino and trying to bite him. They grapple and Gino end up on top, kneeling on its chest and pinning its good arm with his free hand.

GINO (CONT'D)

Die already, motherfucker!

As he raises the rifle for the killing blow, the Bedouin stabs the exposed, jagged forearm bones of its mangled arm deep into Gino's side.

Gino screams in agony as he smashes its head with a mighty blow of the rifle butt, then falls over, writhing on the ground.

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY - SIMULTANEOUS

Meanwhile, reaching the CCP, Harris pulls back the poncho liner he hung in the doorway and freezes.

Inside, Clay is kneeling over Perry's body. Perry's face and chest is covered in a vile black slime that drips from Clay's slaverling maw.

HARRIS

Oh Jesus...

Clay leaps at Harris, knocking him backward into Donovan, who is sent sprawling. Clay and Harris tumble for a second before Clay's jaws find Harris's throat.

Harris gets out half a scream before his trachea is ripped out, spraying blood everywhere. Clay straddling Harris, lets a lump of bloody flesh fall from his mouth, and looks at Donovan.

BILL

HARRIS!

Bill. Only a few yards away rushes toward the melee.

Donovan, on his back, swings his pistol in line with Clay's head and fires his last bullet.

P.O.V. FOLLOWS THE BULLET IN SLOW-MOTION AS IT LEAVES THE GUN, ENTERS AND EXITS CLAY'S HEAD, AND TRAVELS ON AMIDST A SPRAY OF BLACKENED BRAIN MATTER UNTIL IT HITS BILL (APPROACHING) IN THE SHOULDER.

RETURN TO SCENE

Clay's lifeless body goes limp. Bill staggers and grabs on to a low wall to keep himself from falling.

BILL (CONT'D)

I'M HIT!

It takes Donovan a second to grasp what has happened. He briefly contemplates helping Harris but Harris is already bleeding out, gurgling bubbles coming from his destroyed throat.

Robbie grabs Harris's medic bag and runs to Bill's side.

DONOVAN

Oh Christ! I'm sorry man! I'm so sorry!

Robbie pulls out a dressing from the bag and they begin to dress Bill's wound.

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

Mark kills the last zombie he is facing.

MARK
(Shouting)
FALL BACK! CONSOLIDATE AT THE
C.C.P.!

Mark rushes to Gino's side.

MARK (CONT'D)
I've got you, brother. Harris is
down, we gotta fall back.

He quickly checks Gino's wound. It is bad and bleeding profusely.

GINO
(pained)
How bad is it, boss? Hurts like a
motherfucker.

Mark packs the jagged wound with a dressing.

MARK
It's nothing you can't handle. A
little Quick-Clot and a band-aid
and you'll be fine.

Mark finishes the hasty bandage and prepares to move Gino when he looks up and there are a dozen more zombies climbing over the wall only twenty feet away.

Mark's shoulders sag. He slumps back down as Gino's breathing gets shallow and rapid.

MARK (CONT'D)
Just think of all the sympathy
pussy you'll get when we make it
back home.

GINO
(very weak)
I don't need...
(beat)
Mark?

MARK
Yeah, brother?

The zombies close in. Gino reaches in a pouch and pulls out a grenade.

GINO

Don't let me become one of them.

Gino passes away.

Mark wraps his hands around Gino's, both of them now holding the grenade. He slips his finger into the pull-ring.

MARK

No chance, brother. I got your back.

As Mark's finger grips the grenade pull-ring, there is the sound of automatic rifle fire and two of the nearest zombies are torn apart by bullets to the torso and head.

Mark turns to see Walid with an AK-47 blasting the remaining zombies that had climbed the wall. He has a backpack and an old Mauser bolt-action rifle slung over his shoulder.

INT. BOMBER COCKPIT - DAY

The pilots now have their oxygen masks on. A light flashes on a navigational display.

BOMBER PILOT 1

(filtered)

Strike Ops, this is Orcus One.

HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)

(filtered)

Orcus, Strike Ops, go ahead.

Bomber Pilot 2 flips a series of switches. A display indicates a change in weapon status from "ready" to "armed".

BOMBER PILOT 1

(filtered)

Orcus One is I.P. Inbound, switches hot. Sixty seconds to weapons release.

HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)

(filtered)

Roger, Orcus One, you are cleared hot to primary target. Happy hunting. Notify Strike Ops following weapons release. Strike Ops Out.

Bomber Pilot 2 finishes some more button pushing.

BOMBER PILOT 2
(filtered)
Final bit checks complete. All
ordnance operational and ready for
release. Opening bay doors.

INT. BOMBER WEAPONS BAY - DAY

The bay doors open, flooding the weapons bay with daylight.
Three very large bombs sit on racks directly above the door.

Thousands of feet below, the ground rushes past.

INT. BOMBER COCKPIT - DAY

The pilots continue their duties.

BOMBER PILOT 2
(filtered)
Weapons release in thirty.

The radio crackles to life.

HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)
(filtered)
Flash! Flash! Flash! Orcus One,
this is Strike Ops. Abort! I say
again, Abort! Weapons release not
authorized. How copy, over?

BOMBER PILOT 1
(filtered)
Strike Ops, Orcus One. Understand
abort. Break.
(beat)
Strike Ops: Authenticate Venture.

HEADQUARTERS (V.O.)
(filtered)
Orcus One, I authenticate: Paragon.

BOMBER PILOT 1
(filtered)
Roger, Strike Ops, Orcus One
aborting.

Bomber Pilot 2 flips a switch to close the bay doors and
unsnaps his oxygen mask.

BOMBER PILOT 2

Wow. Somebody just won the goddamn lottery.

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

The zombies that were threatening Mark are dead. All eyes are on Walid. For several seconds, no one speaks. Then he sets down his rifle and unshoulders the backpack.

WALID

I have water. A little food. Some ammunition.

He takes out two bottles of water, tossing one to Robbie, and carrying one to Mark.

MARK

What are you doing here?

Despite his obvious desire for it, he eyes the water suspiciously.

WALID

I will not let it be said that Americans gave their lives for innocent civilians while Mahmoud Ali Walid ran to save his own life.

(beat)

I believe America is here to enrich itself at the expense of these people and I have vowed to fight your occupation until my last breath. I hate your presence here. I hate you.

He hands the AK-47 over to Mark.

WALID (CONT'D)

Prove me wrong.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY OPERATIONS CENTER

Colonel McDeere stands staring at the map screen on the wall. The aircraft icon shows it on its way back toward Incirlik.

He shouts at a private holding a telephone receiver.

COLONEL MCDEERE

What do you mean called off? By whose authority?

PRIVATE

I...I don't know sir. They just
said...

The Colonel storms out of Operations, shouting as he leaves.

COLONEL MCDEERE

(receding)

I'm going to have someone's HEAD
over this!

At a workstation, Anne Roberts watches him leave.

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

The group of survivors huddle around the wounded. Jones is conscious again. He and Walid are busily loading pistol magazines from a small cardboard box of ammunition.

Mark and Robbie lay the bodies of Harris, Gino, and Clay in the room beside Perry's. Harris, Gino, and Perry's bodies are tied up, hand-and-foot.

Bill stands watch at the perimeter wall, his shoulder bandaged.

Beyond him a mass of undead shamble toward his position, 60-80 in number. Many are slower moving than the previous wave, their bodies more damaged, but they drive on relentlessly.

MARK

Bill: how much time do we have?

BILL

Three or four minutes.

Mark picks up the AK-47, checks the magazine, and reinserts it.

MARK

Okay listen up!

Everyone gives him their full attention.

MARK (CONT'D)

I don't know if we have enough ammo
and able bodies to stop these sons
of bitches. If we get overrun and
killed, those villagers are gonna
die anyway.

(beat)

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

So I'm gonna stay here and hold them off as long as I can while the rest of you go get help.

BILL

What?!?!

MARK

L.T: take Jones and head for the highway and flag down some friendlies.

(beat)

Bill, Robbie: you guys head to the village and get them ready to evacuate.

A chorus of protests erupt.

MARK (CONT'D)

Listen to me! If we all die here, these things will reach civilization. If that happens they'll spread out of control before anyone figures out how to stop 'em. We have to let the army know what happened and that there's an infectious biological agent here. This is way bigger than any of us!

Bill walks up to Mark.

BILL

(reluctantly)

You're right, brother. But if you think I'm leaving you to make a last stand by yourself, you obviously don't know me very well.

MARK

I know you well enough to know that arguing with you is pointless.

ROBBIE

Boss, I'm not leavin' either. My team's here, brah. And where my team is, that's where I am.

Mark shakes his head, resigned.

MARK

Fine, but somebody still has to be told about this.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

Lieutenant Donovan: I know your gut is gonna tell you that you need to stay here and try to be a hero too, but you know in your head that I'm right. You gotta do it.

Donovan hangs his head.

DONOVAN

Yeah, chief. I know.

(beat)

Jones: You ready?

JONES

We're really gonna go?

DONOVAN

He's right, somebody has to get word out.

From the perimeter wall, Walid, armed with a pistol, calls out:

WALID

Here they come! Two hundred meters!

MARK

Go, lieutenant. Go now.

Donovan makes to leave when his survival radio crackles to life.

VOICE ON RADIO (V.O.)

(filtered)

...calling Knight Six-One or any Knight element, do you copy? Over.

All heads turn to and eyes lock on the pouch on Donovan's survival vest that holds the radio. Donovan reacts, ripping the pouch open and extending the antenna on the handheld radio.

DONOVAN

(hurried)

Last calling, this is Dustoff One-Niner. I am with Knight Six One. Break. Need immediate assistance. Under imminent attack, over!

VOICE ON RADIO (V.O.)

(filtered)

Dustoff One-Niner, this is Eagle Two-Two.

(MORE)

VOICE ON RADIO (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We are a flight of two OH-58D's
inbound to your position armed with
rockets. Understand you are in
danger of being overrun by
hostiles, break.

(beat)

Can you mark your position with
smoke?

MARK

Yes! Tell him we're popping smoke
now.

Mark pulls out a smoke grenade, pulls the pin and tosses it
near their position. He rips the radio out of Donovan's
hands.

MARK (CONT'D)

Eagle Two-Two, Knight Six-One
popping YELLOW smoke. Direct your
fire on anything outside perimeter
wall, danger close, over.

Mark throws the radio back to Donovan. On the wall, Walid
begins firing at zombies that are now rushing the wall.

Mark with the AK-47, Robbie with the Mauser 98k, and Bill
with an M9 pistol, walk toward the wall, line abreast, firing
controlled, aimed shots. The zombies fall, one after another.

ROBBIE

Reloading.

He takes a knee and jams a fresh stripper clip into the
breach of the rifle. The other two pause beside him,
continuing to fire while he reloads.

Adjacent and forward of them, Walid's pistol runs dry. He
turns to fall back and reload but he is grabbed by a zombie
that yanks him back to the wall and bites deeply into his
arm.

Walid screams and is pulled over the wall by two zombies that
chew into him repeatedly.

Donovan and Jones appear beside Mark and crew, Donovan
holding Bill's makeshift spear.

Bill's slide locks to the rear.

BILL

I'm out!

EAGLE 22 (V.O.)

(filtered)

Knight Six-One, Eagle Two-Two has
you in sight. Rolling inbound hot
with flechettes.

The two small recon helicopters fly overhead in a rapid climb
then nose over into a dive pointed at the advancing throng of
enemy. Their rocket pods flash and 70 mm rockets streak
toward the earth in pairs.

The rockets burst open in the air each releasing a cloud of
1179 fin-stabilized steel darts. The effect on the advancing
enemy is devastating.

The zombie horde is cut to pieces as thousands of the flying
"nails" find their marks with plenty of head hits.

The helicopters pull out of their dives and break off to
circle around for another pass on a different axis.

The devastation is immediate and Mark and his men cheer as
they kill a few more zombies too close for the helicopters to
risk shooting.

EAGLE 22 (V.O.)

(filtered)

Knight Six-One, be advised, the
cavalry is on its way with tanks
and Bradleys to mop up. E.T.A. five
minutes, break.

(beat)

Also medical assistance is enroute.
We have been informed of potential
chemical or biological agent
contamination and will be taking
all necessary precautions. You're
in good hands now, boys. Welcome
home.

Mark is unable to hold back tears as he drops to his knees.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY CORRIDOR - TRAVELING

Rebecca and Colonel McDeere walk side-by-side down the
hallway.

REBECCA

So all of the secondary targets
were still hit and containment
looks to have been successful?

COLONEL MCDEERE

With the exception of the S.F. Team, yes. The survivors are under observation in a bio-containment quarantine facility.

(beat)

You'll be happy to know that the team leader, a C.W.3 Mark Brewer is among the survivors. You know Mark, don't you?

Rebecca fakes innocent ignorance.

REBECCA

Mark Brewer? Yes sir, he was with my husband in Afghanistan.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Hm. Well lucky for him someone aborted Orcus, and the regular army unit that found them happened to have bio-agent protective measures on hand.

REBECCA

Yes sir, very lucky.

COLONEL MCDEERE

I suppose if I really want to keep critical abort codes hidden in the future, I shouldn't leave my keys just sitting right there in my desk drawer where anyone can find them, should I, Major?

REBECCA

No sir, that's...

Rebecca's pace slows to a halt. He stops walking too. She looks him in the eye.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Wait, you knew?

COLONEL MCDEERE

We all have our part to play, Becca.

(beat)

I couldn't very well have been the one to violate procedure.

She stands there, dumbstruck and speechless.

COLONEL MCDEERE (CONT'D)
Keep this little conversation
between the two of us though, will
you? I can't have anyone thinking
I've gone soft.

(beat)
Oh, and Becca?

REBECCA
Sir?

COLONEL MCDEERE
This was a one-time thing. If you
ever undermine me or circumvent my
authority again, I will bury you.

He resumes walking, leaving her behind.

COLONEL MCDEERE (CONT'D)
I understand you and Doctor Corgan
are flying out to investigate a
possible point-of-origin for this
thing?

REBECCA
Yes sir.

COLONEL MCDEERE
Be careful out there.

He rounds a corner out of sight. Rebecca shakes her head,
smiling.

EXT. HILLTOP RUINS - DAY

The site of the battle is now overrun by soldiers in Tyvek
biohazard suits. Two M1 Abrams tanks and a number of M2
Bradleys and assorted other armored and unarmored vehicles
are parked around the ruins.

Mark is talking to a fully bio-suited Major and gesturing
toward the building housing their dead.

MAJOR
(filtered)
Roger that, chief. We'll take care
of it. Docs will be here any minute
for you and your men.

The Major walks away and Mark sees Bill sitting alone on a
wall. He approaches his friend. Bill looks grim and is
holding a pistol, rolling it around in his hands.

MARK

Come on over, Bill. The docs will be here in a minute to get that wound dressed properly.

BILL

Sorry brother, I don't think I can come with you.

MARK

What? Why? What are you talking about?

Bill gestures to his shoulder.

BILL

The bullet. It's the bullet that killed Clay.

MARK

Yeah, so?

BILL

It went through his brain. It had to be contaminated, which means I'm contaminated. I saw what happened to Terry, to Clay...I know what's going to happen to Harris, Gino, Perry.

(beat)

I ain't goin' out like that, brother. Better to do it myself and not risk infecting anyone else.

MARK

Shit. I didn't know.

(beat)

But it doesn't matter. You don't know if you're infected. You're not showing signs. You might be fine.

(beat)

Man, I can't lose you right now. Not after all this. Please. For me. Give the docs a chance...

INT. HOSPITAL QUARANTINE UNIT

Mark lies in a hospital bed in a quarantine room, IVs in his arm and a number of monitoring devices attached to him. A technician in full protective gear finishes a blood draw and leaves through an air-lock door.

He picks up a remote and turns on the TV. Fox News is on. He immediately changes the channel.

There is a bang at his door. He ignores it until there is another. He looks and sees Bill's face pressed up against the plexiglass. Black fluid oozes from his mouth and smears on the window.

Mark sits bolt upright then starts backpedaling in he bed, pressing himself against the wall.

MARK

No.

(beat)

No!

The door opens and Bill lurches into the room. Marks eyes scan frantically for a weapon or an escape. He reaches for a lamp beside the bed and picks it up like a cudgel.

BILL

Whoa! Hey, hey, hey, it's me brother! It's all good.

MARK

What?

Bill wipes his mouth and holds out a hand covered in black.

BILL

It's ink, man. I broke open a pen.

Mark drops his guard. Bill laughs.

BILL (CONT'D)

Jesus, I thought you were about to club me to death!

MARK

Well asshole, I thought you were dead! What are you doing here? Aren't we under quarantine?

BILL

Just released. We're both negative. No signs of infection.

Mark lays back, obviously relieved.

MARK

Your wound?

BILL

They think the heat of the bullet
killed any organism it may have
carried with it. I got lucky.

(beat)

Anyway, I wanted to see you and
they let me come deliver the news.
I'm two rooms down, so stop in when
you get up and about.

They shake hands, the grip lingering for several moments.

MARK

Will do, brother. Will do.

Bill walks out and Mark smiles, relaxes, and closes his eyes
for some rest.

INT. HOSPITAL QUARANTINE UNIT - LATER

Mark wakes up and opens his eyes. Colonel McDeere is standing
over him in dress blue uniform.

Mark sits up. There are two medals lying in presentation
cases on the bedside table. They are a Silver Star and a
Purple Heart. The Colonel smiles as Mark sees them.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Relax, Chief Brewer, I'm Colonel
Alan Bedford McDeere. I have some
good news for you.

MARK

I could use a little good news.

COLONEL MCDEERE

We have contained and stopped the
spread of the illness that caused
the "crazed behavior" of the
indigenous people you encountered.
We are unsure of the nature of the
pathogen, but I assure you that
USAMRIID is looking into the
matter. You will also be happy to
know that it appears to have been
an isolated occurrence.

Mark frowns.

MARK

Crazed behavior, huh? So that's
what we're calling that?

COLONEL MCDEERE

Yes, Mark, it is. And it is best kept that way.

The Colonel indicates the medals.

COLONEL MCDEERE (CONT'D)

I am deeply sorry for the loss of your men, and I know these medals are no consolation, but they reflect the Army's eternal gratitude for the sacrifice and heroism of you and your men.

MARK

Thank you, sir.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Of course, you understand, the details of your medal's citation will have to remain classified. Likewise, you are to direct any query about the events you witnessed to my office's Public Affairs department. We will handle all public dissemination of information about this incident. I trust you understand.

Mark nods.

MARK

Yeah. I understand.

The Colonel lays a business card beside the medals.

COLONEL MCDEERE

Oh, and if you are ever looking for a different line of work, give me a call. I could use a man like you.

He turns and walks out without another word. Mark picks up his card.

INT. LEVEL 4 BIOHAZARD CONTAINMENT FACILITY

Two men in full protective suits lay a body bag in a coffin-like storage crate. The body bag is wrapped tight with a number of heavy nylon straps. One of the technicians unzips the bag enough to expose the face. He snaps a photo.

CLOSEUP - THE BODY'S FACE

It is Walid. The veins in his neck and face are dark.

RETURN TO SCENE

The technician zips the body bag back up and closes the crate, sealing it with several heavy-duty latches.

TECHNICIAN 1

This one goes to cold storage.

TECHNICIAN 2

Not the incinerator?

TECHNICIAN 1

No. I guess somebody wants to keep
this one.

Technician 2 wheels the crate down the sterile-looking white corridor.

THE END