

Race to the Dragon's Den

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. PERSIAN GULF - DAY

An ENORMOUS WOODEN WARSHIP, ornate and audacious in scope, cuts through still waters, gigantic sails booming in the sea winds, rows and rows of oars paddling onward.

TITLE: "The Persian Gulf, 325 B.C."

INT. GREEK WARSHIP - HOLD CORRIDOR - SAME

The interior of the ship CREAKS and MOANS as the wood flexes against the current.

At the floor of the dark, foreboding corridor, a RAT gnaws at a small piece of wood, then scurries into the shadows as THREE LARGE, SHADOWY FIGURES pass by, walking with purpose.

INT. GREEK WARSHIP - HOLDING ROOM - SAME

A dim, grimy room, the air thick with despair. Under the flickering light of a lantern, EMILIUS, 40s, filthy, haggard, and chained to the wall, prays in a hushed, anxious voice.

From the other side of the thick, wooden door, the sound of ominous FOOTSTEPS draws nearer and nearer. Emilius begins praying faster.

The door SWINGS OPEN, and two pike-wielding GREEK GUARDS step inside, followed by a STOCKY, TOUGH-LOOKING MAN of about thirty wearing a regal cloak. Beneath his curly, boyish golden locks, intense determination burns in his eyes - one brown, and one blue. This is ALEXANDER THE GREAT.

He stands over Emilius, looking him over before speaking.

ALEXANDER
(Ancient Greek, subtitled)
Do you know who I am?

Emilius stares down at the ground, lip trembling with fear. He nods.

EMILIUS
...Alexander.

Alexander nods gently, squatting down to match Emilius' eye level.

ALEXANDER

Look at me.

Reluctantly, Emilius raises his head, staring Alexander in the eye.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Where is it?

A beat passes. Finally, a toothy smile slowly spreads across Emilius' face, growing into the mad laughter of a man who knows that he is doomed.

Alexander is not amused. He DARTS his hand out, clenching his fingers around Emilius' throat. Fear returns to the prisoner's face as he stares, transfixed, at Alexander's menacing gaze.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Answer me.

Trembling, Emilius swallows a lump in his throat.

EXT. GREEK WARSHIP - DECK - LATER

Alexander stands at the front of his ship, gazing out at the DISTANT MOUNTAINS that sit atop the horizon. He narrows his eyes with obsessed determination.

MAERON, one of the guards, appears beside Alexander, joining him in gazing across the sea. A silent beat passes between them. Finally:

ALEXANDER

Your thoughts?

MAERON

I think that mad men will say anything.

(then)

We should go home, Alexander. The war is over. We won.

Alexander nods softly, pulling an ornate DAGGER from his cloak. Maeron eyes it, then watches with subtle relief as Alexander reveals an APPLE, cutting a piece off of it and offering it. Maeron declines - Alexander shrugs and eats it himself.

ALEXANDER

He mentioned the mountains. That is where we will go.

Alexander turns and heads back into the ship, leaving a concerned Maeron. He looks back out over the sea: orange-grey skies above open waters. An unsettling calm before the storm.

From the silence, a growing ROAR...

FADE TO:

EXT. PERSIAN GULF - PRESENT DAY - DUSK

High above the water, an American F-22 RAPTOR streaks into view, chasing the horizon.

TITLE: "The Persian Gulf, Present Day"

INT. RAPTOR COCKPIT - SAME

Wearing a helmet that reads, 'TRIGGER,' the pilot calmly radios in.

TRIGGER (FILTERED)
Ranger One to base command, system
checks are go. Ready to begin
"BOREX" when you are.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - CONTROL BUNKER - INTERCUT

TITLE: "Combined Air Operations Center, United States Air
Force - Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar"

SAM PENDLETON, a pencil-pushing systems officer, chuckles and rolls his eyes.

PENDLETON
Your sarcastic disdain for this and
all other boring exercises is
noted, Ranger One. Now let's take
them up to max altitude, please.

TRIGGER
Roger that, base command. As high
as you can fly 'em, gentlemen.

EXT. PERSIAN GULF - SAME

All three Raptors from Ranger squadron pull up, their jets soaring high into the sky.

INT. RAPTOR COCKPIT - SAME

Trigger glances at his altimeter, the shaky dial maxing out around 70,000 feet.

RANGER TWO (FILTERED)
Ranger Two, punching in.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - CONTROL BUNKER - INTERCUT

Pendleton starts chewing on the tip of a pencil as he squints at his radar screen.

PENDLETON
We've got you at 73,000 feet,
Ranger Two.

RANGER THREE (FILTERED)
Ranger Three, punching in.

PENDLETON
Maxing out at angels 74.

Back in the cockpit, Trigger winces and gives another pull, struggling to best his squadron.

TRIGGER
Punching in, Sam.

Pendleton smiles and shakes his head, impressed.

PENDLETON
Well look at you, Ranger One.
75,000 feet.

RANGER THREE
Son of a bitch, Trig!

Trigger grins, pleased.

TRIGGER
Looks like you guys are buying
drinks tonight.

HAWK (FILTERED)
Base command, this is Hawk,
requesting a punch-in while I'm in
the neighborhood.

TRIGGER
Hawk? What are you doing on this
frequency?

Pendleton squints in confusion at his readings, scrambles to flip through a series of FLIGHT PLANS.

PENDLETON

Didn't know you were flying today,
Major... Don't even have a call-
sign for you...

(then, looking back to the
radar)

I'm, ah, I'm not seeing you here...

Trigger scans the skies - there's no one else out here.

TRIGGER

He's full of shit, Sam. We're all
alone up here. Quit jerking him
around, Hawk.

HAWK

Look higher, fellas.

Pendleton squints and adjusts a knob on his screen. A small green blip appears, stopping him dead. The pencil drops from his mouth - he mouths out a silent, "Wow." Then, with forced calm:

PENDLETON

Hawk, uh, Base Command has you
cruising at... 142,000 feet.

HAWK

First round's on you tonight, Trig.
You boys be careful with your
exercises, now.

The radio goes quiet, the blip disappears from Pendleton's radar screen. Trigger flies on in stunned silence.

RANGER TWO

What the hell kind of craft is Hawk
flying at angels frickin' 142? A
space station?

Pendleton can only shake his head, nervously sliding the pencil back between his teeth as he leans back in his seat.

PENDLETON

Beats the hell outta me.

EXT. PERSIAN GULF - SAME

High above the Raptors, a sleek, obsidian-black jet soars through the sky, scraping the top edge of the stratosphere.

From its curved, futuristic-looking design, it's clear that this is an aircraft unlike anything the world has ever seen. This is the ARTEMIS 6, the most technologically advanced spy plane ever built.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - SAME

Inside the craft's cockpit, MAJOR KIP 'HAWK' HAWKINSON, 30, with a rogue twinkle in his eye, chuckles to himself. In the compartment behind him, reconnaissance officer CLAYTON MCGUIRE, 28, bookish and intense, shakes his head in mock disapproval.

CLAYTON (FILTERED)

Why the United States Air Force trusts you with their most highly-classified technology, I will never know. General Tyson's gonna have our asses, Hawk.

HAWK

It'll be worth it to see the look on Trig's face when we get back.

CLAYTON

Yeah, provided the Iranians don't blast us out of the sky, first.

HAWK

Don't be like that now, Clayton. You know nothing can touch the Artemis. It'll be just like it was in Syria - in and out. Piece of cake.

(then)

And remember - if we *do* get shot down, *you're* the spy and I'm just the idiot pilot.

Clayton snickers and rolls his eyes.

CLAYTON

Just keep the pointy end moving forward, all right?

As the jet zooms onward toward hostile territory...

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - NIGHT

On a large table-top monitor, a yellow triangle representing the Artemis pings in above the Persian Gulf, flying straight towards Iranian airspace.

A thick, sturdy, weathered-looking finger comes down, idly tapping the triangle as it moves across the map. GENERAL GUS TYSON, 60, stares down with intense focus, the light shining up ominously across his face. He takes a breath, then lifts a SATCOM receiver to his mouth.

GENERAL TYSON
Hawk, this is Mission Control, come in.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - INTERCUT

Clayton groans and shakes his head again.

CLAYTON
Told ya so.

HAWK
Shut up.
(into SATCOM)
Mission Control, this is Hawk. Go ahead.

GENERAL TYSON
Do you mind explaining to me why I have low-level service officers alerting me to your mysterious presence in an unknown craft cruising at angels 142?

HAWK
Hallucinogens in the coffee?

General Tyson exhales, unamused.

GENERAL TYSON
I shouldn't need to remind you that the Artemis 6 is one of the most closely-guarded secrets of the US military. We'd prefer to keep it that way. Now, if you can't handle that, I'll be glad to have you stationed in Greenland tracking civilian UFO sightings for the rest of your foreseeable future. Do you hear me?

HAWK
Loud and clear, sir.

GENERAL TYSON

Good. Now since, unfathomable as it may be, your focus seems to be lying elsewhere, allow me to also remind you of the critical importance of your mission. Photographic proof that Iran is weaponizing weapons of mass destruction could very well justify military action. The national security of this nation is in your hands. I need you at your best, Hawk.

HAWK

Absolutely, sir.

GENERAL TYSON

And for God's sake, do not under any circumstances get shot down.
(beat, then a dry smirk)
We *really* like that jet.

HAWK

Nice to know you care, sir.

General Tyson chuckles under his breath, in spite of himself. His steely focus returns to the map, where the triangle inches closer toward the Iranian border...

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - NIGHT

The Artemis cuts through the night air, the lights of an Iranian port glimmering far below.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - SAME

Clayton toggles a set of controls.

CLAYTON

All frequencies are silenced, plasma stealth is engaged. So far, so good.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - SAME

The yellow triangle disappears over the north coast of Iran. Hawk and Clayton have gone dark.

General Tyson takes a sip of coffee, his eyes never leaving the map.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - NIGHT

Hawk tightens his grip on the throttle, then squirms in his seat a bit.

CLAYTON

You all right there, Kip?

HAWK

Still getting used to these new flight suits. You know, as high-tech as they're supposed to be, you'd think they could find a way to make them wedgie-proof.

(then)

Oh, and Clayton?

CLAYTON

Yeah?

HAWK

Don't ever, ever call me Kip.

CLAYTON

(mock apologetic)

You know, for eight years now, you've been telling me that, Kip, and each and every time, stupid me, I just keep on doing -- wait, I just did it again there, didn't I? Damn it!

HAWK

I hate you so much.

CLAYTON

Not as much as you hate your parents for naming you, "Kip."

Hawk shakes his head, but can't help but smile.

HAWK

All right, let's stay focused. We're almost there.

CLAYTON

Yep. Time to see if they're ready for their close-up.

HAWK

Any idea how you say, "Say cheese" in Farsi?

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - LATER

The Artemis begins to descend, its target approaching.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - SAME

Hawk glances at the altimeter and grimaces. The lower they fly, the higher the risk.

HAWK

Now would be a good time to make sure the lens cap is off.

Clayton stares at a monitor showing a night vision display of the ground rushing by below. He frowns and shakes his head.

CLAYTON

We're synced to the target, but we need to come down a little. And can you slow it down at all?

HAWK

Christ, Clayton, are you serious? The cloud cover's already bringing us down way too low, and we might as well be half-naked at this speed...

CLAYTON

We aren't just photographing a building - we need munitions, vehicles, even personnel...

Hawk sighs, reluctantly pulling back on the throttle.

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - SAME

The jet's air flaps lift, slowing the Artemis and bringing her down even further.

INT. IRANIAN MISSILE DEFENSE BUNKER - SAME

With a soft PING, a small green dot appears on a radar screen, just as a chubby Iranian STATION AGENT sneezes loudly into a handkerchief. He snorts and wipes at his nose, oblivious to the display beside him, then turns in his seat, yawning as he comes to face the radar. Mid-yawn, he notices the dot, furrowing his brow for a moment in confusion.

Then, as if startled, he darts out of his seat, racing across the room to a RED PHONE on the wall. As he YANKS it to his ear:

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - NIGHT

Clayton stares unblinkingly at his monitor.

CLAYTON
Just hang in there. Thirty more
seconds...

A loud alarm sounds in front of Hawk - an angry-looking red missile icon flashing to life on his screen. He jolts his head to the side, looking out of the craft to see:

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - HAWK'S POV

Two tiny, orange bursts of light appear from the ground.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - SAME

Hawk gives a quick, heavy sigh, then turns back to his controls, the alarm continuing to sound.

HAWK
Damn it, we're too low. How long,
Clayton?

CLAYTON
Ten seconds!

HAWK
Try five!

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - NIGHT

The missiles fly upward through the air, drawing closer and closer to the Artemis.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - SAME

Hawk glances back and forth from his radar screen to the visibly approaching missiles, the angry alarms ringing.

HAWK
Clayton!

CLAYTON
(staring at his monitor)
I'm almost there!

HAWK
We're almost *dead*!

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - SAME

The missiles continue toward the Artemis, seconds away from impact...

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - SAME

On Clayton's monitor, the facility passes into view, captured perfectly by the jet's camera.

CLAYTON
GOT IT!

Hawk grunts and pulls at the stick with all of his might.

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - SAME

The Artemis sweeps upwards in a sharp turning motion, raising its wing to the sky. The missiles pass by, practically grazing the bottom of the jet.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - SAME

Hawk exhales sharply - too close. He glances up out of the cockpit, watching as the missiles begin to curve back around.

HAWK
Let's show 'em what the American
taxpayer is capable of.

Hawk punches at the controls...

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - SAME

With a sudden ROAR, the Artemis' rear engines flare to life. The jet BURSTS forward with astonishing speed, producing a rumbling SONIC BOOM that seems to rattle the very air where the jet used to be. It isn't the Millennium Falcon jumping to light speed - but it's close.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - SAME

Clayton cranes his neck to watch as the missiles DETONATE behind them. They're moving so fast, it looks more like an implosion than an explosion.

Hawk can't help but laugh.

HAWK

I've been DYING to try that out!

Clayton closes his eyes and tilts his head back, breathing deep, relieved to be alive.

CLAYTON

Check please.

Hawk grins.

HAWK

Oh, unclench your asscheeks. There isn't a missile in existence that I can't outrun in this baby. Now let's tell Tyson the good news.

Clayton toggles a switch.

CLAYTON

All right, we're live.

HAWK

Damn straight.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - NIGHT

The yellow triangle reappears over Iran, rapidly making its way out of hostile territory. General Tyson sees it and closes his eyes, relieved.

HAWK (FILTERED)

Base command, this is Hawk. The mission was successful. Repeat, mission was successful. We're headed home.

GENERAL TYSON

Glad to hear it, airmen. Fly safe, and we'll see you soon.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - INTERCUT

Hawk nods to himself, satisfied with a job well done.

HAWK
Roger that, General...

A new alarm begins to sound, the jet's power flashing out.

HAWK (CONT'D)
What the... Clayton, talk to me!

Clayton stares at his dials - they begin spinning out of control.

CLAYTON
Uhh... not good. Not good.

HAWK
Clayton!

CLAYTON
The air intakes are closing up!
We're losing RPMs in all engines.

HAWK
(desperately flipping
switches)
How the hell did this happen?

CLAYTON
I don't know! Maybe you pushed it
too hard back there!

HAWK
Bullshit!

General Tyson watches as the triangle stalls over northern Iran, slowing to a near stop on the map.

GENERAL TYSON
Hawk, talk to me, what's happening?
Why are you slowing down?

HAWK
(staring at his dropping
meters)
We're experiencing critical
mechanical failure. The craft is
locked up. Losing speed and
altitude...

General Tyson slams his fist down onto the map, leaning forward, face twisted with concern.

GENERAL TYSON
Are you telling me that the Artemis
is going down?

HAWK

Not if I can help it, sir, but at this rate, there's no way we'll make it back to Qatar. We'll be lucky just to coast out of Iranian airspace.

GENERAL TYSON

Hawk, listen to me. Allowing the Artemis technology to fall into enemy hands is not an option.

Hawk and Clayton process this.

HAWK

Understood, sir.

GENERAL TYSON

I don't care what it takes - you keep that jet in the air until you're out of Iran, and then you ditch it into the sea. That's an order.

HAWK

General, they know we're up here. Those waters will be swarming with Iranian naval vessels...

GENERAL TYSON

They won't be able to recover the Artemis before it sinks.

HAWK

Sir, my recon officer and I...

GENERAL TYSON

Hawk, I will do everything in my power to get you two home safe. Now you have your orders.

Before Hawk can digest this...

CLAYTON

(re: a new alarm)

Uh, Hawk?

Hawk's attention snaps back to his radar screen, where an ominous RED BLIP is headed in their direction.

HAWK

Son of a bitch!

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - NIGHT

An Iranian F-16 FIGHTER JET cuts through the sky in close pursuit of the crippled Artemis.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - SAME

General Tyson listens to Hawk, the situation quickly spiralling out of control.

HAWK (FILTERED)
We've got a bandit closing in fast,
bearing zero-niner-nero.

A white-faced SYSTEMS OFFICER turns from his radar station to alert General Tyson.

SYSTEMS OFFICER
It's an enemy F-16. Time to
contact, thirty seconds.

GENERAL TYSON
My God...

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - SAME

Hawk stares at his radar, the red blip closing in on them.

CLAYTON
We're sitting ducks here!

Hawk takes a deep breath, thinking over his options. Then:

HAWK
Hang on.

Hawk pushes down, sending the jet into a nosedive.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - SAME

General Tyson stares at the red hostile closing in on the yellow triangle.

SYSTEMS OFFICER
General, the Artemis is
plummeting...

GENERAL TYSON
Hawk, what the hell is going on up
there?

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - INTERCUT

With laser-like focus, Hawk keeps the dive controlled, watching his altimeter spin wildly.

HAWK

We aren't gonna make it to the water, General. I'm bringing her down so we can detonate the Artemis ourselves.

GENERAL TYSON

And then what? You'll just hitch a ride back to Qatar? Are you insane?

HAWK

Believe me, I'm open to suggestions if you've got 'em!

SYSTEMS OFFICER

Angels 22 and dropping sir. Angels 20... Angels 19... Angels 17...

General Tyson closes his eyes and clenches his fist, the gravity of the situation sinking in.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - NIGHT

The jet continues its nosedive, the dark, rocky desert plains growing nearer and nearer.

CLAYTON

There's no way you're pulling this off! We're approaching minimum bailout - we've gotta eject, *now*.

HAWK

I can land this, Clayton. I can do it.

CLAYTON

Hawk, listen to me. *No, you can't.*

Hawk scowls to himself, knowing in his heart of hearts that Clayton is right.

HAWK

Fine. Prepare for ejection.

Clayton pulls his visor down and checks his straps, then opens a panel and grips an emergency lever.

CLAYTON
You ready?

HAWK
(lowering his visor)
Do it.

Clayton YANKS the lever - the cockpit flies open, and Clayton SHOOTs up and out of the jet, the parachute built into his flight suit deploying.

...but Hawk doesn't go anywhere. He looks around, confused, then opens his visor, reading a flashing message on his panel.

"EJECTION SYSTEM FAULT."

For the first time, we can see true fear in Hawk's eyes, if only for a moment. He shakes it off, gripping the throttle and doubling his efforts on pulling the jet into a survivable crash landing, groaning with exertion, giving it everything he's got...

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - SAME

Sweat beads on the systems officer's brow as he stares at his monitor.

SYSTEMS OFFICER
Angels 5... Angels 4...

GENERAL TYSON
(under his breath)
Come on, Hawk...

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - SAME

Hawk winces in pain as he pulls at the controls, the ground rushing up at him...

HAWK
GOD DAMN IT, PULL!

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - NIGHT

A dry, rocky waste beneath a blanket of stars. The Artemis plummets towards the earth, barely beginning to pull up as it nears contact.

It manages to glide above the surface for a few seconds before catching the sand, sending it ricocheting end over end across the desert plain in a vicious-looking wreck. Finally, it lands back on its underside, skidding to a smoky stop at the edge of a sharp, steep canyon.

All is silent.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - SAME

General Tyson watches in quiet horror as the yellow triangle disappears from the map. The red hostile passes on by.

SYSTEMS OFFICER

The Artemis is down, repeat,
Artemis is down.

(then)

Sir, I'm only showing one ejection.

General Tyson winces, knowing what that means.

GENERAL TYSON

Hawk.

(pause - no answer)

Hawk, are you there? Hawk, can you
hear me?

Nothing but radio static. General Tyson draws in a slow breath, lowering his head.

GENERAL TYSON (CONT'D)

(quietly)

I want the first available intel on
the crash site. We've got at least
one man on the ground down there.

(then)

And get the Secretary of Defense on
the line.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - DAWN

Violent winds rip across the desert. In the distance, the first hint of daylight peeks out from behind a mountain range. With jagged, rocky hills and dusty, barren valleys, it's about as unforgiving as country gets.

From above, Clayton descends toward the earth, gripping his parachute straps, bracing for landing. As he plants his feet on solid ground, the winds pick up, dragging him through the dust. He coughs and spits, struggling to catch his footing.

Finally, he manages to plant his feet against a boulder long enough for him to unclip the parachute. He watches as the wind carries it away, and catches his breath.

CLAYTON
(muttering)
Son of a bitch.

The growing sound of a HELICOPTER MOTOR finally catches Clayton's ear. He spins around to find a black IRANIAN ASSAULT HELICOPTER quickly closing in on him, almost from out of nowhere. Clayton freezes as a spotlight hits him - he's trapped, nowhere to run or hide. Slowly, he drops to his knees, placing his hands behind his head.

From inside the helicopter, COLONEL HABIB NAZIR, 45, a shifty, arrogant commander, glares at Clayton, a slight smile curling across his mouth.

Clayton stares back with rigid intensity, the two of them locking eyes as the helicopter lands.

INT. ARTEMIS COCKPIT - DAWN

As the sun peeks out over the mountains, the wrecked jet sits smoking at the edge of the canyon, the occasional spark flying from exposed wiring. In the far distance, the faint sound of a HELICOPTER MOTOR gradually approaches.

Hawk, blood trickling down over his face from beneath his helmet, lies slumped against his restraints, unconscious. The light from the sun rises over his closed eyes, and he winces at the brightness, coming to. He looks around for a few moments, confused, then shakes his head and pulls his helmet off, clutching the wound on his forehead.

Then, he freezes, silent, listening, hearing the approaching helicopter for the first time. He turns in his seat and sees it - the same assault helicopter that captured Clayton - approaching on the horizon.

HAWK
Damn it.

Springing to action, Hawk yanks his restraints off of himself and climbs back into Clayton's section of the jet. He pulls open a panel in the flooring, revealing a RED, PROTECTIVE CONTAINER with a handle that reads 'FLIGHT RECORDER - DO NOT OPEN.' He pulls it out and opens it, finding the FILM from their mission, along with a small TOUCHSCREEN DEVICE, which he pockets before closing it back up.

His attention turns to Clayton's console. He glances over his shoulder at the helicopter landing behind him before opening a small compartment, revealing a keypad. He punches in a code, then hits 'EXECUTE.'

He closes his eyes and takes a breath.

HAWK (CONT'D)
Here goes nothing...

Taking the black box with him, Hawk leaps out of the cockpit.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Hawk jumps down off of the wing to the dusty ground, just as IRANIAN SOLDIERS begin to climb out of the helicopter. One of them yells something at him, raising his gun.

Hawk bolts towards the edge of the canyon, diving for cover behind a pile of rocks as the bullets start flying, narrowly missing him.

Colonel Nazir exits the helicopter, licking his chops at the sight of the intact jet and the trapped pilot. He smiles and raises a hand - his soldiers stop firing. He turns to one of his soldiers and motions towards the jet. The SOLDIER nods and rushes over, climbing into the cockpit.

Behind the rocks, a hard-breathing Hawk peeks out through a crack, watching as Clayton is shoved out of the helicopter, a bag over his head, his hands tied behind his back. KARIM AKBARI, a large, heavily muscled soldier with dark, cruel-looking eyes and a thick, gnarled scar across his throat follows behind, dragging Clayton forward by the arm.

He turns to the cliff's edge behind him and peeks over, his wheels turning. It's a dizzyingly far drop straight down into the canyon - Hawk is trapped.

COLONEL NAZIR
(calling out)
There is nowhere to run. Surrender,
or be shot.

Hawk, a frantic energy in his eyes, glances over to the Artemis, where the soldier is rummaging around in the cockpit, searching for something. Hawk looks down at the black box at his side, then quickly opens it, removing the film drive.

Hawk stands, raising his arms, the film in his hand.

HAWK

I take it this is what you want?
The film?

He takes a step back to the cliff's edge, dangling it over the side. A few of the soldiers step forward, guns drawn and ready to fire, but Nazir stops them with another wave of his hand.

COLONEL NAZIR

Karim.

Karim brings Clayton to Nazir, violently forcing him down to his knees. Nazir calmly takes his gun and holds it against Clayton's temple, then smiles up at Hawk.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)

You're truly prepared to watch your
friend be killed in front of you?

(off Hawk's hesitation)

Give it to me. Now.

Nazir cocks his gun. Hawk doesn't move, glancing nervously at the Artemis, and at Clayton.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)

I'm going to count to three. One...

In the Artemis, the soldier notices the panel with the keypad that Hawk accessed earlier. It displays a COUNTDOWN - and it's currently at 00:02.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)

...Two...

The soldier SCREAMS, just an instant before the Artemis EXPLODES - a booming, fiery blast that disorients the men, sending many of them, including Nazir, flying to the ground.

Hawk makes his move, turning and JUMPING OVER THE CLIFF. One of the soldiers fires at him but misses. He's GONE.

Nazir scrambles to his feet and stares angrily at the wasted jet, then runs to the cliff's edge. He looks down, and finds Hawk gliding beneath the PARACHUTE from his flight suit to a bumpy landing at the riverbed that cuts through the canyon.

Nazir draws his gun, but he's too late - Hawk scrambles out of sight around a bend.

He turns from the cliff's edge, his teeth bared, ignoring his injured men as he returns to the helicopter, passing Karim.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)
 (Farsi, subtitled)
 If he escapes with the data, then
 all our work is for nothing.

SHAHEEN, 30, a proud soldier, kneels over the body of a fellow soldier, killed in the blast. Nazir and Karim stop, standing over him.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)
 He's dead?

Shaheen looks up, fury in his eyes.

SHAHEEN
 (Farsi, subtitled)
 He was my brother.

Shaheen stands, facing the two superiors.

SHAHEEN (CONT'D)
 Sir, I know this valley well.
 Please, allow me to help find this
 murderous dog.

Nazir smiles and nods in approval, placing a hand over Shaheen's shoulder.

COLONEL NAZIR
 Find him. Kill him.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - CANYON - MORNING

Hawk runs along the riverbed, then stops to catch his breath. He looks into the desert, away from the river, where a strong SAND STORM is raging. He turns his gaze down river, evaluating his options, then seems to come to a decision, bolting into the dust storm, blindly stumbling into the harsh desert, away from the ominous sound of the approaching helicopter.

INT. IRANIAN ASSAULT HELICOPTER - MORNING

Shaheen rides alongside Karim, scouring the riverbed for any sign of Hawk.

The HELICOPTER PILOT turns to address the two of them.

HELICOPTER PILOT
 (Farsi, subtitled)
 There's a sand storm ahead - I
 won't be able to fly into it.

SHAHEEN

We'll find him down the river. Only a fool would venture into the desert.

Karim frowns. He seems unconvinced.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - MORNING

Dust and sand swirls through the air as Hawk stumbles onward, his arm over his eyes. He hacks and coughs at the harsh cloudy air - maybe this wasn't the greatest idea...

He takes a step - and FALLS FORWARD, calling out in surprise as he tumbles down an unseen rocky slope. He rolls to a stop at the bottom, bruised, battered, and covered in dust, groaning in misery as he clutches a large, nasty-looking GASH in his leg.

He looks around, sees a rocky formation at the bottom of the slope. He crawls toward it, pulling himself in between the boulders, desperate for any cover from the harsh winds. Off Hawk, as miserable as he's ever been...

SECRETARY PRICE (PRELAP)

And we're certain that the Artemis was, in fact, detonated?

INT. WASHINGTON D.C. TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

U.S. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROLAND PRICE, 60, sits at the edge of his bed in pajamas and reading glasses, the phone to his ear. He carries the petulant air of a man convinced he's always the smartest guy in the room.

SECRETARY PRICE

There's no chance that it's still intact?

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - INTERCUT

General Tyson, looking weary but vigilant, stands on the phone before a large SCREEN displaying a map of the region.

GENERAL TYSON

We're certain, Mr. Secretary. We received automated SATCOM signatures for both the crash itself as well as the subsequent detonation.

Secretary Price rubs at his forehead, processing.

SECRETARY PRICE

Well, thank God for that at least.

GENERAL TYSON

It also tells us that at least one of our men survived the crash and was able to trigger the Artemis' self-destruct mechanism.

(then)

We've got men down in hostile territory, sir.

SECRETARY PRICE

Yes... And what are the Iranians saying?

GENERAL TYSON

They've jumped on it, calling it an unchecked act of US aggression.

SECRETARY PRICE

Well, we'll spin it as best we can.

(then)

Damn it, Gus, how the hell did this even happen? This is the goddamned Artemis we're talking about, the billion-dollar jet. It isn't supposed to get shot down.

GENERAL TYSON

Actually, sir, from what we know, it appears that the jet was disabled by some kind of mechanical failure, not shot down. The enemy never even got the chance to engage it.

A beat as Secretary Price ponders the implications.

GENERAL TYSON (CONT'D)

Mr. Secretary?

SECRETARY PRICE

Yes, I'm here, General.

(reaching for a folder)

Continue monitoring the situation, and keep me informed of any developments. That is all.

Secretary Price abruptly ends the call, thumbing through the folder's contents. He dials another number.

SECRETARY PRICE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Yes, this is Secretary Price. I need to speak with the director of the CIA.

(then, reading from the folder)

And get me everything you have on... Clayton McGuire and... Kip Hawkinson.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - FLATLANDS - DAY

Dry, arid desert stretches as far as the eye can see. Hawk, sunburnt and covered in dust, limps along over the bone-dry earth, his sleeve tied around his leg wound as a makeshift bandage. He's in bad shape.

HAWK

(muttering)

Wander on out into the desert, Hawk, sure. That's a *great* idea. They'll never find you out in the desert. You'll be *fine*. Back in Qatar eating shish-kebabs in no time.

In spite of everything, he begins to laugh, but it quickly grows into a hacking cough. He's weak, dirty, and in desperate need of water. It's a grim sight.

As he staggers on, he unknowingly passes a WRECKED ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE ten yards or so out of his way. After a few steps, he stops, squints in confusion, and turns around, staring at it.

For the first time in hours, he sees a glimmer of hope.

HAWK (CONT'D)

Huh.

Slowly, almost cautiously, he approaches it, standing it up and looking it over. Four tires that spin, handlebars, a seat... Then, he squats down, and stares right through the center of the ride: the entire engine block is missing. He sticks his arm through, deflated.

His face droops - of course, there had to be a catch. He sighs heavily, then turns his head and SPITS in frustration. The ROARING WINDS catch it, sending the brownish gob hurtling away. Hawk watches it, inspiration spreading over his face.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - FLATLANDS - MOMENTS LATER

With newfound energy, Hawk throws open his parachute, planting his feet and gripping it as the harsh winds easily inflate it and push it out in front of him like a kite on steroids, quite nearly pulling him off of his feet. A smile grows over Hawk's face... this just might work...

He grits his teeth, tightly tying the parachute's straps to the ATV's handlebars, then watches in amazement as the force of the wind begins pulling it forward. Hobbling as best he can, Hawk gives the ATV a running start, then, grinning with pride, he hops on, howling triumphantly as the it begins its wind-powered journey across the dry, desolate flatlands.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - EVENING

General Tyson, willing himself through the exhaustion, hovers over his station, looking over scattered documents and maps as he speaks to a SUBORDINATE OFFICER.

GENERAL TYSON

I want to you to focus your search on this region of the Dagah Valley, and keep all channels open for any possible kind of incoming transmission.

(then, to himself)

They're alive out there. I know it.

A beat passes as General Tyson draws in a slow, weary breath. He turns to the officer - she's watching him, concerned.

GENERAL TYSON (CONT'D)

Well, what are you just standing there for? Get to it.

OFFICER

(snapping to attention)

Yes, sir!

He frowns to himself as she hurries away, then leans over his station, resting his elbows and massaging his temples.

KEMPER (O.S.)

General Tyson?

General Tyson lifts his head and turns to find SPECIAL AGENT ELSIE KEMPER, 40. Her hardened, unsympathetic tone undercuts her femininity and natural beauty.

KEMPER (CONT'D)
(flashing her ID)
I'm special agent Elsie Kemper.
Someone should have told you to be
expecting me.

General Tyson looks her over, wary and unsure.

GENERAL TYSON
(shaking her hand)
Special Agent Kemper... yes of
course.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

General Tyson walks with Kemper, struggling to keep up with
her quickened pace.

GENERAL TYSON
Washington is doing everything it
can to open up a diplomatic
channel, but frankly, it's a
formality at this point. Why anyone
thinks the Iranians would ever
cooperate is beyond me.

KEMPER
We're in agreement there.

GENERAL TYSON
Good. Then you also agree that
we're going to need to have
extraction forces prepared in the
event that we make contact with our
men. We may only get one shot at
getting them out...

Kemper slows to a stop, turning to face him.

KEMPER
You're honestly proposing sending
additional forces into Iran to
extract your men?

GENERAL TYSON
It would be a... delicate
operation, I know. But if the
president would authorize...

She starts walking again, a dismissive look in her eye.

KEMPER
It'll never happen, General.
Besides, things have changed...

GENERAL TYSON
Miss Kemper...

KEMPER
Special Agent Kemper, sir.

She comes to a thick door and pulls it open, gesturing for the General to step inside.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - DEPOSITION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He steps into the small room, mid-sentence.

GENERAL TYSON
What does that mean, 'things have changed?' I was told the CIA would be assisting...

KEMPER
General, please.

She gestures across the room to a table and chairs, where two UNIFORMED CIA AGENTS sit waiting. He stares, confused.

GENERAL TYSON
Wait, what is this? Am I being *detained?*

KEMPER
You're being deposed, sir.

GENERAL TYSON
Deposed? I've got men down in hostile goddamned territory! I don't have time for this - I have a rescue to oversee.

KEMPER
For now, the rescue is being called off. We have more important priorities, priorities which *I* will be overseeing.

GENERAL TYSON
I want to speak to the Secretary of Defense.

KEMPER

The Secretary of Defense is the one who requested that we step in. My men will be happy to provide you with a copy of the order.

General Tyson shakes his head, incredulous.

GENERAL TYSON

And just what are these new priorities that you'll be overseeing?

Kemper pauses, frustrated and reluctant. Then:

KEMPER

An Artemis 6 just randomly stops functioning mid-flight? You don't find that odd?

He stares at her in quiet indignation, silent, knowing immediately where this is going.

KEMPER (CONT'D)

This wasn't an accident. Somebody *wanted* that jet to crash. And until we know who that is, and what their motives were, all rescues are off.

(then)

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a command center to re-organize. General, thank you for your patience.

She leaves, shutting the door on a fuming General Tyson.

INT. MILITARY FIELD TENT - EVENING

Shaheen and Karim stand before Colonel Nazir. He stares at them, a silent look of furious disgust across his face. Shaheen trembles at the sight.

SHAHEEN

There was a dust storm... he must have fled into the desert.

COLONEL NAZIR

And you have no tracks, no sign of him at all?

SHAHEEN

He must be dead by now - but he couldn't have gotten very far on foot. We will find him, Colonel, I swear it.

Nazir thinks this over, tapping his chin. He looks up to Karim and gives a soft nod of the head.

Karim, emotionless, draws his KNIFE and grabs Shaheen by the shoulder, then plows the knife into his stomach. Shaheen grunts in pain, locking eyes with Karim's cold, cruel stare, and slowly sinks to his knees and falls to the floor, dead.

COLONEL NAZIR

Intensify the troop presence in every village in the area, and lock down the Turkish border. He cannot be allowed to escape the country.

Karim nods, starting for the exit.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)

And Karim? Do not fail me again.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - FOOTHILLS - EVENING

Hawk cruises along in his makeshift wind-rider, but comes to a rough stop as the ground becomes increasingly uneven beneath him.

He dismounts, wincing as he puts pressure down on his bad leg, and looks up at his surroundings, the base of a LONG CHAIN OF MOUNTAINS.

He staggers forward, falling to his knees at the sight of soft, brown earth. He digs at it with hands, nearly frantic, finally finding WET, GOOEY MUD. He leans down, sucking the moisture from it, spitting out gobs of gunk.

He raises his head, scanning the mountain - there must be a source... He spots a small cave, just a few meters up the rocky slope. Grunting with discomfort, he rises to his feet, determined.

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - NIGHT

From inside the cave, we watch as Hawk's hand appears at the mouth. He groans, gritting his teeth as he pulls himself up into view, tossing the black box in before climbing on up. He falls to his knees as he steps in, puffing for breath.

The faint sound of WATER RUNNING re-energizes him. He rises back up to his feet, venturing deeper into the cave, desperate to find the source of the sound.

HAWK

Water... Come on...

The cave grows darker the further he goes - he pulls a LIGHTER from his pocket, moving carefully in the dim glow of the flickering flame.

Along the wall, he finds a series of THREE STRANGE SYMBOLS etched into the stone, symbols unlike any written language he's ever seen. He brushes away the thick cobwebs covering them to take a closer look - the odd, angular characters don't even look Arabic, and they certainly look old.

Then, something on the ground catches his eye - a shimmering glint. He kneels down, face scrunched in curiosity, and picks up an ANCIENT LOOKING COPPER COIN with a BLUE JEWEL in the center, inspecting it in amazement.

HAWK (CONT'D)

Well, I'll be damned...

He stands back up, pocketing the coin and smiling to himself. Perhaps his luck is finally turning...

HAWK (CONT'D)

(looking down the cave)

Now if I could just find that damn
wat --

Before he can even get the word out, he takes a step and the rock beneath him CRUMBLES away, sending him down through the floor of the cave. He catches hold of the ledge, leaving him dangling thirty feet above a rushing UNDERGROUND STREAM.

He struggles to try and pull himself up, his fingers slipping. Finally, they give out, and Hawk plummets down into the water, disappearing into the stream with a loud SPLASH.

As the current carries Hawk to who knows where, above, back in the cave, the BLACK BOX SITS ALONE on the rocky floor, beneath the mysterious symbols...

RICKERS (PRELAP)

Elsie, you're going to want to take
a look at this...

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - NIGHT

AGENT MILO RICKERS, 30, a geeky, over-eager agent, sits at Genral Tyson's workstation, fingers flying atop the keyboard of a LAPTOP.

Kemper leans in behind him, watching his screen.

KEMPER

What do you have, Milo?

On his screen, Milo shows Kemper a long, confusing looking series of computer code.

RICKERS

I'm tapped into Adana's central database. It's a secure information hub that feeds back to Washington, to the Pentagon.

KEMPER

And what am I looking for?

He points at an errant line of code on the screen.

RICKERS

There. These logs tell us everything that's been accessed through the base's servers, and more importantly, who accessed it. Now, right here, someone with top clearance accessed some *really* sensitive stuff - we're talking high-level intelligence, weapons coding, the Artemis specifications...

KEMPER

And just who was accessing that?

He points again.

RICKERS

See, here, they tried to scrub it - manually rewrite the coding to cover their footprints. But what they didn't know is that I can *unscrub* it.

(he turns in his chair,
smiling proudly)
So I did.

KEMPER

Milo, get to the point.

He nods and turns back to his screen, typing up a storm. The code disappears, and a dossier fills the screen.

It's HAWK.

RICKERS

There. Kip Hawkinson. Our guy from the crash.

KEMPER

Jesus. Are you sure?

RICKERS

Positive. And here's the thing - all this data was transferred to a very specific kind of data drive. It's the same drive used in the Artemis to store the film taken on missions.

KEMPER

You're suggesting Hawkinson used the black box to smuggle intelligence into Iran?

RICKERS

Makes perfect sense, doesn't it? It's the one thing guaranteed to survive a crash...

Kemper tries to digest this - could it be true?

INT. DAGAH VALLEY - RIVERBED - DAWN

The sun rises over the valley, where a winding river cuts through the dry land - a fertile sweet spot in this arid region.

Along the shore of the river lies Hawk, unconscious. He's banged up, but still alive.

A weathered, DARK-SKINNED HAND comes down into frame, grabbing Hawk's face and shaking it. He murmurs quietly but doesn't come to. The man, unseen, shouts in Farsi, and Hawk's eyes flutter open.

HAWK

Uhhh?

He looks up into the deep, soulful eyes of ARDESHER, 70 but still spry. He's a mysterious man, but something about him radiates wisdom and goodness. He looks down at Hawk and says a few words in Farsi, a gentle smile on his face.

Weak and confused, it's only a few seconds before Hawk slips back into unconsciousness.

FADE THROUGH
BLACK:

INT. ARDESHER'S HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

Hawk awakens on a small bed in a humble but homey looking room. The walls are decorated with maps and ancient-looking artifacts, including an African tribal mask. Confusion spreads across Hawk's face - where the hell is he?

He pulls the sheet off of him and looks down - his pants are gone, and the gash on his leg has been cleaned and bandaged. He gives it a ginger touch, wincing, then starts to sit up.

But he freezes when he notices LEILAH, 27, a Middle Eastern beauty with stern, strong features, watching him from across the room. She moves to the doorway, not taking her eyes off of Hawk for a second, and calls out in Farsi.

HAWK
Hey, hey, it's okay, take it easy.

Ardesher hurries in, asks Leilah something in Farsi.

HAWK (CONT'D)
Where am I? Who are you two?
(grimacing)
And why is my back so damned sore?

Ardesher moves to Hawk's side, bringing a glass of water to his mouth and indicating for him to drink.

HAWK (CONT'D)
What? Oh, yeah, thanks.
(drinking, then)
So I'm guessing you guys don't
speak any English, do you.

Ardesher and Leilah trade a glance. Ardesher gives Hawk a slight shrug and a blank stare.

HAWK (CONT'D)
(indicating the flag on
his flight suit)
You must know I'm American,
though...
(touching his chest)
American.

Ardesher nods.

ARDESHER

American.

HAWK

(sitting up)

Well, it's good of you to help me out, but you're in danger if I stay, and I have a black box to recover, so...

(starting to stand)

Where are my pants?

(indicating his legs)

Pants? You know, pants?

Leilah can't help but stifle a small laugh at the sight of Hawk in his boxer shorts. Ardesher frowns disapprovingly, and pulls Hawk's pants out of a drawer as Hawk and Leilah trade a smile.

HAWK (CONT'D)

(nonchalantly)

It's just my luck that you don't speak English - you're the most beautiful girl I've seen in ages.

The frown on Ardesher's face grows as he unfolds the pants.

HAWK (CONT'D)

Don't let it get to your head though - I spent the last day wandering in the desert, so my brain may be a little fried...

Now Leilah frowns. She grabs the pants from Ardesher and hands them over.

The COIN from the cave falls from the pocket, clanging to the floor. Ardesher stares at it, a dumbfounded look spreading across his face.

HAWK (CONT'D)

(pulling the pants on)

Oh, that...

Ardesher quickly bends over and snatches the coin, inspecting it...

HAWK (CONT'D)

Hey --

ARDESHER

Where did you get this?

HAWK

I found it.

(then)

Wait... You *do* speak English?

LEILAH

(crossing her arms,
eyebrow cocked)

We both do. And your back is sore because we brought you here tied across a donkey's back, hidden under a blanket.

(then)

So what's this black box of yours?

Hawk is dumbstruck, but he shakes it off, frowning.

HAWK

That's classified.

LEILAH

Uh-huh.

Ardesher steps in, grabbing Hawk's attention back from the smirking Leilah.

ARDESHER

Please, tell me where you found this coin.

HAWK

I... I was in the mountains...

ARDESHER

Was it in a cave?

HAWK

Yes. How did you know that?

(then)

Who *are* you two?

Ardesher looks at Leilah, an excited twinkle in his eye.

ARDESHER

My name is Ardesher. This is my daughter, Leilah. Now, this cave, can you describe it for me?

Ardesher pulls a NOTEBOOK out of a desk and begins flipping through the pages. Hawk is beyond confused.

HAWK

Uh, it was... a cave. I wasn't there very long, I fell into some sort of underground waterway.

(then)

There were symbols etched into the walls.

Ardesher finds what he's looking for, eagerly showing the page to Hawk.

ARDESHER

These symbols?

Hawk looks over Ardesher's notebook. Sure enough, the three symbols drawn on the page match what Hawk saw on the walls.

HAWK

Yeah... yeah, these are the ones. What do they mean?

But Ardesher is speechless, almost teary-eyed. He turns to Leilah, also stunned - the two embrace.

LEILAH

The bird that flies, the fish that swims, the snake that crawls... father, you were *right!*

HAWK

Right about what?

Ardesher thinks for a moment, then steps to the wall and points to a TATTERED PAINTING of what appears to be a battle scene.

ARDESHER

Do you see this man here, the one on his knees? This is Darius the Third, king of the ancient Persian empire.

(pointing to another figure on horseback, blade raised high)

And this man here is none other than Alexander the Great.

HAWK

(unimpressed)

Okay...

ARDESHER

Darius controlled almost every gold mine and silver mine in the eastern world while he was king. He amassed an incredible fortune, the largest known to man, and of course, Alexander wanted this fortune for himself. But before Alexander could overthrow him and claim it, Darius hid everything.

HAWK

(starting to grow interested)
Hid it where?

ARDESHER

(smiling excitedly)
The mountains, supposedly. The treasure was so vast, Darius literally needed a mountain to hide it all in. Gold, silver, jewels... They say the caravan of riches stretched for miles through the desert...

LEILAH

It's called the Dragon's Den, and it's the single largest lost treasure known to exist in the world today. My father and I have spent the last three years seeking it.

Hawk is dumbstruck.

HAWK

You two are... *treasure hunters*?

Ardesher gives a modest shrug.

ARDESHER

I was a history professor, actually, but... I suppose you could call us that, yes.

HAWK

So what does all this have to do with the symbols?

ARDESHER
 (increasingly animated)
 After defeating King Darius,
 Alexander spent the rest of his life
 searching for the Dragon's Den...

FADE TO:

INT. GREEK WARSHIP - HOLDING ROOM - FLASHBACK

Alexander scowls menacingly at a terrified Emilius, hand still around his throat.

ARDESHER (V.O.)
 The only clue he had came from one
 of Darius' personal servants, who
 he had captured during the war.

Emilius begins to stammer something out. Alexander leans in close, his ear to Emilius' lips.

ARDESHER (V.O.)
 This servant told Alexander, "*Go to
 the mountains, and seek out the bird
 that flies, the fish that swims, and
 the snake that crawls. There you
 will find the Dragon's Den.*"

Alexander pulls back, releasing Emilius and staring him down, confused... but intrigued...

Slowly, in spite of his fear, Emilius begins to laugh in Alexander's face.

BACK TO:

INT. ARDESHER'S HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

ARDESHER
 But, obsessed as he was, Alexander
 could never find what he was
 looking for.

HAWK
 You lost me right around the fish
 part.

ARDESHER
 You're not alone. After Alexander,
 those words confounded Crassus,
 Ghengis Khan, Ivan the Terrible...
 (MORE)

ARDESHER (CONT'D)

some even say Hitler was interested in finding the Dragon's Den. They were all seduced by the legend, which says that along with his riches, Darius hid the great secret to his power. They tried everything - Nero even had his engineers divert the Quara Chai river, thinking the entrance was hidden underneath. He found nothing. None of them knew what to look for.

HAWK

And I take it you do?

Ardesher smiles proudly.

ARDESHER

I do. You see, most of Darius' servants were illiterate. I came up with a theory that this particular servant must have been describing the appearance of cuneiform symbols, the ancient language of the Sumerians. He couldn't read them, so he *described* them, literally.

(he shows Hawk the notebook again)

You see? A flying bird, a swimming fish, a crawling snake...

Hawk takes a closer look - the symbols do in fact seem to resemble a bird, a fish, and a snake.

HAWK

And what do these symbols mean?

ARDESHER

"The eternal power of Darius." But if you can't read them, they're just --

HAWK

(getting it)

-- A bird, a fish, and a snake...

ARDESHER

Precisely! Find the symbols, find the treasure. And you, my friend, you found the symbols.

HAWK
 ...You're saying I stumbled into
 the Dragon's Den?

ARDESHER
 (grinning)
 The greatest lost treasure in the
 entire world!

LEILAH
 You said you had to recover your
 black box... it's in this cave?

HAWK
 (wary of her enthusiasm)
 Yes, but --

LEILAH
 -- And you know how to return to
 this cave?

HAWK
 Not exactly...

He pauses for a moment, looking the two of them over. Something about their enthusiasm is completely infectious. Finally, he reaches into his pocket, pulling out the device he extracted from the black box back in the cockpit.

HAWK (CONT'D)
 But I do have *this*...

ARDESHER
 What is that?

HAWK
 It's a tracking device. The black
 box emits a signal, and with this,
 I can find it.

Ardesher gives a weak, astounded laugh, and takes a seat across the room.

ARDESHER
 Do you realize that Alexander the
 Great would have destroyed entire
 continents just to have that
 device?
 (he laughs again)
 So many men have searched for the
 Dragon's Den and failed, and now
 you have stumbled into our lives in
 possession of a device that will
 lead us straight to it!

Hawk is genuinely tempted by the thought. But then he shakes his head - there are more important concerns.

HAWK

Look, I appreciate the two of you helping me, but I don't have time to take you on a treasure quest. Besides, I have the entire Iranian army searching for me - I'd only be putting you in danger.

He starts to leave the room.

ARDESHER

But young man, don't you see? Fate itself has brought you to us!

HAWK

(exiting)

Yeah, well then fate's a real piece of work.

Crestfallen, Ardesher and Leilah exchange a glance.

EXT. ARDESHER'S HOME - MORNING

Hawk starts away from the house into the arid countryside. Leilah runs out of the house after him.

LEILAH

Hey. Idiot.

He turns around, amused.

HAWK

Excuse me?

LEILAH

You heard me. You're an idiot.

HAWK

And why's that exactly?

LEILAH

Let's say that you even make it back to that cave on your own - which you won't. What then? You'll still need to find a way out of the country.

HAWK

I'll figure something out.

LEILAH
Oh, *sure* you will.

Hawk sighs - he knows she's right.

HAWK
So what, you're gonna smuggle me across the Qatari border tied across your donkey's back again?

LEILAH
How do you think we, Qatari citizens, got into this country in the first place? My father has friends at the border - if you help us, we will help you.

HAWK
I told you, it's too dangerous.

LEILAH
You don't think we're already in danger? If the Iranian government knew we were here, they would detain us as spies. We'd never be free again.
(then, insistent)
We're already risking everything.

Hawk stares her down, trying to figure her out.

HAWK
Just why is this treasure so damned important to you two, anyway?

LEILAH
It just is.

She stares back, pleading with her eyes. Hawk hangs his head, exhaling deeply.

HAWK
All right. I'll take you to the cave, and you'll help me get back to Qatar.

LEILAH
(extending her hand)
It's a deal.

He shakes her hand, pulling her in close.

HAWK
 But we do things *my way*,
 understood?

Leilah stifles a laugh, intimidated by nothing.

LEILAH
 You don't like cooperating with
 strong women, do you?

HAWK
 In the end, every woman I've ever
 trusted stabbed me in the back.

Leilah cocks an eyebrow.

LEILAH
 I suppose I'll just have to stay
 ahead of you then.

She smiles, then turns and heads back towards the house. Hawk
 watches as she walks.

HAWK
 (following her)
 Can't complain about that.

EXT. ARDESHER'S HOME - EVENING

As the sun sets behind the mountains, Hawk sits by a fire,
 wrapped in a blanket. Leilah joins him, handing him a bowl of
 food.

LEILAH
 Here. Some traditional Iranian
 cuisine.

HAWK
 Thanks.
 (smelling it)
 What is it?

LEILAH
 It's a khoresht - like a vegetable
 stew. My mother's recipe.
 (off his hesitation)
 Go on, try it. You'll like it.

HAWK
 I don't know, I'm more of a fried
 chicken and mashed potatoes kind of
 guy...

He takes a bite, then makes an overwhelmed face. Leilah smiles knowingly.

LEILAH

It's the saffron. There's a lot of it.

HAWK

(through a cough)

Yeah, no kidding.

(then)

But, it's good. Really good, actually. Your mother must be one hell of a cook.

LEILAH

Yes, she was. She died a few years ago. Cancer.

HAWK

I'm sorry.

Leilah puts on a brave smile.

LEILAH

She was at peace with it.

(then)

Broke my father's heart though. I've never known two people as in love with each other as my parents. It's the whole reason we're out here.

HAWK

What do you mean?

LEILAH

The Dragon's Den. It was always their dream. They were on the faculty together, and for years, they studied the legend, obsessed over it, even. It was their shared passion. They always said that one day, they would retire and live out their days searching for it. But then...

(she takes a breath,
composes herself)

When she died, she told him that she wanted him to find it. For her. I think she was worried he would feel lost without her; it gave him something to hold onto.

HAWK

And I take it you were way too stubborn to let him come out here alone.

LEILAH

(grinning)

You're a fast learner.

(then)

To see him like he's been since we found you, giddy as a schoolboy... it would have made her so happy.

Hawk nods sadly through a bite.

HAWK

You're lucky for the time you had with her. I never knew my mother. She died when I was an infant. And with my old man in and out of prison, he might as well have been dead, too.

LEILAH

Who raised you then?

HAWK

My grandfather, out in the badlands of Montana. Every day was an adventure with him.

(looking around)

You know, out here in the countryside, it kind of reminds me of back home. I actually like it. It's a shame this part of the world is so unstable.

LEILAH

That's easy to say as an American. But you're right, it is unfortunate.

(then)

You'll see your home again. I know it.

HAWK

And how do you know that?

LEILAH

Because I believe that my father was right about you. I believe that we have fate on our side.

Hawk considers this - a softening skeptic.

INT. ARDESHER'S HOME - NIGHT

With Hawk and Leilah beside him, Ardesher unrolls a LARGE MAP of the region on the table, placing his finger down along a river.

ARDESHER

Here is where we found you, by the side of the river.

Hawk inspects the map, following the river with his finger to a MOUNTAIN RANGE to the north.

HAWK

So the cave must be in these mountains...

ARDESHER

Precisely. It's a day's journey from here. We'll leave at dawn.

HAWK

What about this populated area? I'm gonna stick out like a sore thumb...

A smile comes to Leilah's face as she eyes Hawk.

LEILAH

You just leave that to me.

Hawk looks at her warily.

HAWK

What does that mean?
(off her silence)
Leilah, what does that mean? You'd better not tie me to that donkey again..

Off her laughter...

EXT. ARDESHER'S HOME - FOOTHILLS - SAME

Through the night-vision lens of a high-power camera, we catch a glimpse of Hawk through the window of Ardesher's home. The shutter CLICKS, capturing the shot.

ZARINA, 30, dressed in black and shrouded in mystery, lies nestled atop the hill neighboring Ardesher's home, camera to her eye. She lowers it - an unknown player carefully considering her next move...

ZARINA
 (adjusting an earpiece)
 I have visual confirmation of
 target...

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - INTERCUT

Special Agent Kemper stands wearing a headset, watching as Zarina's photograph appears on a large screen in front of her. She stares at the image - Hawk, Ardesher, and Leilah standing over the map - her wheels turning at full force.

ZARINA
 Suspect is with two unarmed
 civilians... Do I have a green
 light to move in?

Kemper draws a breath, weighing their options. Then:

KEMPER
 Negative. Continue monitoring for
 now - I want to see what he's up
 to.
 (then)
 But don't let him out of your sight
 for a second.

Zarina almost seems disappointed.

ZARINA
 Understood.

Kemper turns to Rickers.

KEMPER
 So the chatter was right. He isn't
 working with the Iranians.

RICKERS
 Yet. Elsie, this guy is rogue. It
 doesn't matter what his endgame is,
 it only matters that we stop it.

Off Kemper, feeling that something isn't adding up...

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - ROAD - MORNING

Ardesher leads the donkey along a road leading into a small village. He passes some VILLAGERS who wish him "good morning" in FARSI - he smiles and acknowledges them.

HAWK (O.C.)
 (hushed whisper)
 You're sure this will work?

Behind Ardeshar walks Leilah, in full Iranian chador and rusari headscarf, per the country's strict dress code for women. All that is visible are her eyes, which stare straight ahead as she whispers a response:

LEILAH
 Just keep quiet and play along -
 you'll be fine. Trust me.
 (she turns, a smile in her
 eyes)
 You actually look quite fetching.

Behind her is Hawk - *also dressed in chador and rusari*. With his rather wiry frame, he's surprisingly convincing dressed as a woman.

HAWK
 I think I would've preferred the
 donkey.

LEILAH
 Oh, hush.
 (then, unable to help
 herself)
 You know, I always wanted a
 sister...

Off Hawk, shaking his head...

EXT. VILLAGE - OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Ardeshar, Leilah, and Hawk make their way down the busy, crowded streets, past cafes, vendors, and pedestrians. Hawk tries his best to blend in and look inconspicuous, keeping his face down as he walks.

It seems to be working. People pass by, he plays it cool, and no one thinks twice. He's blending in.

HAWK
 I can't believe this is really
 working.

LEILAH
 (smirking)
 You're a natural.

HAWK
 Watch it, sister.

They pass a series of PROPAGANDA POSTERS plastered across a dilapidated wall - Hawk frowns at the sight of one with a vertical American flag, the stars replaced with skulls, and the stripes representing falling bombs.

Then, he passes a series of posters featuring KARIM in a heroic pose, the Iranian flag waving behind him.

HAWK (CONT'D)

(stopping)

Hey, hey wait a minute. Who is this guy?

Ardesher looks around to make sure it's safe to talk, then:

ARDESHER

His name is Karim Akbari. He's a soldier who was captured by the Iraqis. They beat him, tortured him, and then slashed his throat and left him to die. But he lived, and he fought his way to freedom. The military enjoys painting him as a great hero of this country.

HAWK

I recognize him... He's one of the soldiers who's looking for me.

Ardesher and Leilah share an uneasy glance.

ARDESHER

Such inhumanity can only rub off on a man. He's cruel and vicious, with much blood on his hands. Some say he survived his ordeal in Iraq by selling his soul.

Hawk weighs this.

HAWK

He has my friend.

A silence passes as this lands on Ardesher and Leilah. Finally, Ardesher places a hand on Hawk's shoulder.

ARDESHER

I'm sorry. But with him, your friend is as good as dead.

It's the truth Hawk's been avoiding.

LEILAH

We need to keep moving.

They continue onwards - Hawk has a difficult time looking away from Karim's cold stare.

EXT. VILLAGE - STREETS - DAY

The streets grow busier and more crowded. Ardesher, Hawk, and Leilah continue to push on, until Ardesher stops dead in his tracks.

LEILAH
What is it, father?

He nods, indicating down the road. Leilah looks ahead to see:
A GROUP OF SOLDIERS, heavily armed, patrolling the streets.

ARDESHER
You two stay here in the crowds
while I go ahead and see how many
of them there are.

LEILAH
Be careful.

He steels his jaw then walks confidently onward, a man on a mission. Leilah looks around, anxious, and sees more SOLDIERS approaching from a side street.

LEILAH (CONT'D)
(grabbing Hawk's sleeve)
This way.

EXT. VILLAGE - MARKETPLACE - CONTINUOUS

As inconspicuously as possible, Hawk and Leilah hurry across the street to a series of fruit stands, and busy themselves inspecting figs and beans as the soldiers pass behind them.

Hawk shuffles along the fruit stands, watching the soldiers out of the corner of his eye, not watching where he's going.

He bumps straight into a TALL WOMAN in a dark, long-sleeved chador. For a moment they lock eyes - something about her fearless gaze commands his attention...

His eyes lower - she holds a GUN, low at her waist and hidden up her sleeve, pointed straight at Hawk.

WOMAN
(gesturing with her eyes)
Into that building, Major
Hawkinson.
(MORE)

WOMAN (CONT'D)
(then, looking to Leilah)
You too.

Hawk and Leilah look to each other, then to the soldiers behind them, oblivious for now. What choice do they have?

INT. ABANDONDED BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Hawk and Leilah step into an abandoned dwelling, closely followed by the mysterious woman. She closes the door behind her, then pulls off her rusari headscarf. It's ZARINA, and with her gun drawn, it's clear that she means business.

ZARINA
You can lose the disguise, Major Hawkinson. It's more than a little bit distracting.

Hawk pulls it off, tossing it aside. He raises his hands.

HAWK
Who are you? You're obviously not with the Iranian military.

ZARINA
I'm CIA. I've been sent to recover the black box from your mission. Tell me where it is. Do the Iranians have it?

HAWK
Why don't you take it easy and just put the gun down - we're on the same side.

She doesn't relent.

HAWK (CONT'D)
Look, I don't have the black box, but it's hidden somewhere safe.

ZARINA
Tell me exactly where.

Hawk begins reaching into the pocket of his flight suit. Zarina, over-cautious, cocks her gun - Hawk immediately puts his hands back up.

HAWK
Whoa, easy, easy. I just need to show you something, okay?
(MORE)

HAWK (CONT'D)

(he reaches in, nice and slow, pulling the tracker out)

It's the tracker from the jet. It'll lead us right to it. That's where we're headed now - she's an American by the way.

Zarina eyes Leilah, then turns back to Hawk and the tracker.

ZARINA

All right then. Give it to me and let me help you.

HAWK

Why do I get the feeling that you have no intention of helping us?

(off her silence)

Maybe it's because of that silencer on the end of your gun there. Wouldn't have that unless you intended to shoot.

ZARINA

Your mission was sabotaged, Major Hawkinson, and you're the guy who got away. It doesn't look good.

HAWK

Wait - sabotaged?

LEILAH

Hawk?

HAWK

You think I'm a *traitor*?

ZARINA

The *United States of America* thinks you're a threat. Now give me the tracker and tell me where the black box is stashed.

(off Hawk's hesitation)

I won't ask again.

Thinking fast, Hawk **THROWS** the tracker out the window. Zarina turns as it flies, distracted, giving Hawk a split second opening...

It's the opening he needed. He **DIVES FORWARD** at her, grabbing her wrist and pushing the gun to the side. It **FIRES** - Leilah screams. Hawk and Zarina struggle, the gun dropping to the ground.

HAWK
(to Leilah)
Get the tracker and go!

Reluctant, Leilah leaves, darting out the door. Hawk and Zarina continue to struggle. She ELBOWS him in the face, dazing him, then goes for the gun. Hawk TACKLES her away from it, the two of them crashing through an old table. Hawk scrambles away from her, crawling towards the gun. He grabs it and spins around just in time. She freezes, putting her hands up and glaring at him as he pants for breath from the ground.

He climbs to his feet, the gun still trained on her.

ZARINA
What are you waiting for? Just do it.

HAWK
I told you, I'm *not* a traitor.

He stuffs the gun in his belt and bursts out the door. Fuming, Zarina pulls a SECOND GUN from an ankle holster, quickly loading it and exiting in pursuit of her target.

EXT. VILLAGE - STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Hawk pushes through the crowd, desperate to escape. Down the street behind him, Zarina flies out of the building, looking around wildly. She spots him, and bolts in his direction, struggling to catch up.

People cry out in surprise at the sight of Hawk - some begin throwing things at him and calling for the authorities. Two SOLDIERS see him shoving through the crowd - they yell out, rushing towards him. Zarina behind him, the soldiers in front of him, Hawk's only option is to duck into:

INT. CAFE - CONTINUOUS

Hawk races through the cafe, knocking over a server and pushing past tables and patrons. He makes his way to the back, where a tight SPIRAL STAIRCASE leads up to a second level. He climbs it, just as Zarina races through the doorway. She sees him disappearing up the stairs, trains her gun on him, and fires as the cafe bursts into panic - the bullet glances off of the steel bannister, narrowly missing him. She curses and rushes to catch him.

INT. CAFE - UPSTAIRS AREA - CONTINUOUS

Hawk emerges in an upstairs dining area. He races through the room to a balcony, where he desperately searches for his next move.

Zarina appears at the top of the staircase, gun drawn.

ZARINA

Hawkinson!

He ignores her, JUMPING from the balcony to:

EXT. VILLAGE - ROOFTOPS

He lands at the adjacent roof's edge, dangling precariously, then pulls himself up and over. Zarina arrives at the balcony behind him, taking a shot at him as he sprints away across the rooftop. It misses.

Zarina makes the jump, landing it perfectly as Hawk makes another jump up ahead of her. She races across the rooftop, ignoring the crowd of EXCITED ONLOOKERS and SOLDIERS following along at the street level, and makes the same blind leap to the next building.

When she lands, Hawk is waiting for - he jumps out from hiding and TACKLES HER, sending the gun SLIDING across the rooftop. She gives him a sharp knee to the stomach - he keels over, winded. She makes a break for the gun, but he grabs her ankle, pulling her down. She kicks him across the face, then grabs the gun out of his belt, holding it on him.

Hawk wipes blood from the corner of his mouth, looking up at her. He's cornered.

HAWK

(standing)

So that's it? You're just going to shoot me?

ZARINA

I have my orders.

Hawk begins backing towards the roof's edge, stalling.

HAWK

Yeah, well, your orders suck.

She cocks the gun and FIRES - but the gun only produces a soft click. She looks at it, realizing:

HAWK (CONT'D)
(holding up the cartridge)
Might need these.

Instantly, she bolts for the other gun. She slides down, grabbing it and spinning around...

...but Hawk is gone. She races to the roof's edge, looking over to see:

EXT. VILLAGE - MARKETPLACE - CONTINUOUS

Down below, Hawk lies amid a mess of SMASHED FRUIT. Instantly, IRANIAN SOLDIERS SURROUND HIM, guns drawn.

Zarina SLAMS her fist down, furious.

As the soldiers scream at the surrendering Hawk, he glances up to the rooftop. She's gone, for now.

EXT. VILLAGE - STREETS - LATER

Restrained, Hawk sits in the back of a military truck, a prisoner. He looks out the back as the truck makes its way out of the village.

In the crowd, he finds LEILAH AND ARDEHER. They stare at him, defeated and unsure as the truck pulls further and further away. The last thing they see as the truck rounds a corner is a BAG being lowered over Hawk's head...

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - DAY

Rickers stares at his screen as a text transmission comes in.

RICKERS
I'm getting word from our
operative... The Iranians have
Hawkinson.

Kemper lowers her head and curses under her breath - a rare flustered moment for the icy cool woman.

RICKERS (CONT'D)
Elsie... Special Agent Kemper...
What's the play?

Kemper refocuses herself, pulling up the image of Hawk, Ardesh, and Leilah on the big screen.

KEMPER

These two. I want to know every goddamned thing about them.

A grave-looking General Tyson enters, escorted with urgency by AGENT BAINES, one of the men deposing him.

BAINES

(practically breathless)
Elsie, we've got something.

KEMPER

Go ahead.

BAINES

We've been cross-checking General Tyson's records with everything we could get from Interpol. Total shots in the dark, but then this came up.

He lays a FILE down in front of her.

KEMPER

(putting on her glasses)
What is it?

BAINES

Just... read it.

Elsie opens the file and reads. Shock spreads across her face.

KEMPER

Oh my God...

INT. MILITARY COMPOUND - HOLDING CELL - EVENING

Hawk, the bag still tied over his head, fruitlessly whips his head back and forth, trying to get a sense of his bearings. The bag is SNATCHED off of his head and tossed aside. He winces from the harsh light shining over him.

He's in a claustrophobic cement room, his arms tied back around a thick pillar. Nazir and Karim stand before him, malicious intent personified. This isn't good.

COLONEL NAZIR

It's a pleasure to see you again,
Major Hawkinson. You remember
Karim, yes?

Karim pulls out his knife, slow and menacing. He twirls it idly against the tip of his thumb.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)
He's not a very talkative man, but he's been dying to speak with you, Major.

Karim's lips curl into the slightest hint of a smile, the knife still twirling. It's a bone-chilling sight.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)
So, let's begin, shall we? Why don't you start by telling Karim about the black box.

HAWK
I don't have the black box.

Nazir rolls his eyes and gives Karim a nod.

Karim GRABS Hawk by the throat and brings the tip of the knife just under his eye. With a sadistic twinkle in his eye, he SLASHES DOWNWARD, leaving a bright red cut down Hawk's cheek. He cringes in pain, but makes no sound.

COLONEL NAZIR
Of course you don't have it, Major. We know this already. But you *do* know where it is, and that's what I want you to tell Karim.

Karim stares at Hawk, enjoying the sight of his captive.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)
But don't worry - we have plenty of time. Karim likes to take his time when he works.

HAWK
You can torture me all you want - I don't know where the black box is. I lost it when I was on the run.
(turns his gaze to Karim)
I know about you, about what you went through in Iraq. Did torture work on you?

Nazir laughs. Karim seems oddly intrigued by the question.

COLONEL NAZIR
Of course it didn't work on him. Karim is one of our finest soldiers.

(MORE)

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)

(then)

But it worked on your friend. Would you like to see?

Rage begins to grow in Hawk's eyes at the very thought of it.

HAWK

You son of a bitch...

COLONEL NAZIR

(calling out into the corridor)

Monzour! Mustafa!

Hawk watches helplessly as MONZOUR and MUSTAFA, two of Nazir's soldiers, drag Clayton into the cell. He's battered, beaten, and disheveled. They dump him on the floor - Hawk winces at the sight.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)

Karim.

Karim smiles at Hawk, then KICKS Clayton sharply across the face. Blood spurts from his mouth.

HAWK

No!

COLONEL NAZIR

It was the electroshock that finally got him to talk. He told us everything about your mission. Now, he's useless to us.

(then)

We were saving him for you. Would you like to see how slowly Karim can kill him?

HAWK

You touch him again and I'll kill you.

COLONEL NAZIR

Where is the black box, Major Hawkinson?

HAWK

I told you, I lost it!

Nazir nods at Karim, who kicks Clayton in the stomach.

HAWK (CONT'D)

God damn it! Stop!

Karim draws his knife, staring expectantly at Hawk.

COLONEL NAZIR

I can stop him, you know. This can all be over. Just tell me what I need to hear.

HAWK

I don't know where it is!

Nazir looks to Karim again. Karim eagerly bends over Clayton, brandishing his knife.

HAWK (CONT'D)

Ok, ok, wait, stop, please.

Nazir waves a hand at Karim, then looks to Hawk.

COLONEL NAZIR

I'm listening.

HAWK

I made it to the mountains in the north. I found a cave to rest in. The floor gave out and I fell into a river, and woke up back in the valley. The black box is still in that cave, and I don't know how to get back to it. That's the truth.

Nazir shares a look with Karim. Do they believe him?

COLONEL NAZIR

My soldiers know those mountains well.

(thinking, then:)

Karim, come. Let's allow him to stew.

Karim seems disappointed. Nazir stands Clayton up, then takes a set of handcuffs, cuffing him to the bars of the cell door.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)

There. You two can catch up.

They exit, leaving Hawk and Clayton.

HAWK

Clayton. Talk to me. Are you all right?

Clayton is still catching his breath, but he gives a weak nod.

CLAYTON
They're monsters, Hawk. The things
they did to me... The things
they're gonna do to you...

HAWK
We're gonna get out of here,
Clayton.

Clayton laughs.

CLAYTON
I'm glad one of us thinks so.
(then)
So what happened to you? I thought
maybe you made it.

Hawk shakes his head.

HAWK
I had a good run. But then I lost
the black box in that cave and
everything went to hell.

CLAYTON
So it's really in a cave somewhere?

Now Hawk laughs.

HAWK
Yeah. A cave full of lost treasure.

CLAYTON
Treasure?

HAWK
I met some locals. They seemed to
think so. Called it 'the Dragon's
Den.'

CLAYTON
Wow.
(then)
Hey, what about the tracker? Do you
have it? If we give it to them,
maybe they'll let us live...

Hawk glances at Clayton suspiciously. There's something...
off about him...

HAWK
I destroyed it before they caught
me. Figured it was the only way to
keep it out of their hands.

Now Clayton glances at Hawk.

CLAYTON
 (after a beat)
 Good thinking.
 (then, with a laugh)
 Although now, they're just gonna
 kill us.

Hawk silently refuses to give up.

Karim and Nazir return, unlocking the cell door and stepping inside. Karim holds his knife in front of Hawk's face, then reaches behind him, slashing him free.

COLONEL NAZIR
 Time to go, Major Hawkinson. We
 will be continuing our conversation
 in private. We have ways of...
 motivating you to cooperate.

Karim grabs his arm, roughly pushing him out of the cell, where Monzour and Mustafa cuff him and lead him away down the corridor, spitting and struggling all the way.

Karim slides his knife back into its sheath, cracking the joints in his neck.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)
 (shaking his head)
 Americans. So stubborn.
 (then, to Clayton)
 Wouldn't you agree, my friend?

CLAYTON
 You have no idea.

Nazir chuckles and reaches behind Clayton, UNCUFFING HIM. Clayton rubs at his wrists, then gingerly touches his fingers to his jaw.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)
 (to Karim, with a slight
 Russian accent)
 You certainly hit me hard enough.
 Knocked my molar loose.

COLONEL NAZIR
 You'll live. Now what did you learn
 from your friend?

CLAYTON

He isn't lying about the cave.
That's where the black box is
hidden.

COLONEL NAZIR

The black box is of no use to my
government or to yours if it's lost
in a cave.

Clayton GRABS Nazir by the throat, pinning him against the
column, snarling.

CLAYTON

(Russian, subtitled)

*Then maybe you idiots shouldn't
have let him slip through your
fingers.*

Nazir looks genuinely frightened of him. He looks to Karim,
who simply stares back, as if fascinated by the sight.

Clayton relaxes, releasing Nazir, calm once more.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

But there's no need for anger or
blame. There is a tracking device
that will lead us right to the
black box. He claims that he
destroyed it - but he is lying. I
know him too well.

COLONEL NAZIR

So where is this device?

CLAYTON

It must be somewhere safe. Maybe
you can beat it out of him, maybe
not. He is a very strong-willed
man.

COLONEL NAZIR

I take it you have an alternative
solution?

Clayton smiles a wicked smile.

CLAYTON

Da.

INT. MILITARY COMPOUND - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

A dark, claustrophobic, frightening room. Hawk, shirtless, stands in the center, his feet chained to the floor, his wrists chained to the ceiling.

Karim steps in, carrying a CANVAS BAG. Hawk watches him warily, doing his best to hide his fear. Karim shuts the door behind him, then lays the bag out on a table, calmly opening it, revealing an assortment of KNIVES and sinister-looking devices.

HAWK

If you're trying to scare me into talking, you're wasting your time.

Karim ignores him, holding up a blade, examining it, and then putting it back, selecting another.

HAWK (CONT'D)

I already told you everything I know.

Karim ignores him still, running the tip of his thumb over the edge of a blade, testing its sharpness.

HAWK (CONT'D)

If I knew where the black box was, I would tell you.

(off Karim's silence)

You're one hell of an interrogator - can't even ask me any questions.

Karim tests another blade. He seems to like this one.

HAWK (CONT'D)

Although I guess that's the point, isn't it? You don't want to ask me questions. You just want to watch me suffer.

Karim finally acknowledges Hawk, turning to him and smiling like a child with a new toy. He holds the blade up for Hawk to see, directly in front of his face.

Hawk ignores it, staring Karim in the eye.

HAWK (CONT'D)

I pity you. I really do.

Karim SLASHES the blade across Hawk's chest, leaving a bleeding incision in his skin.

Hawk grits his teeth, tilts his head back, and stifles a scream. He breathes deep, weathering the pain, then looks Karim in the eye again.

HAWK (CONT'D)

Is this how it went in Iraq? How long was it before they slit your throat?

Karim brings the knife to Hawk's face, slowly, sadistically running the blade across his forehead, blood trickling down into his eyes. Hawk grits his teeth again, grunting in pain.

Karim turns, tossing the blade into a plastic tub of alcohol. The blood dissipates through the liquid like smoke.

Breathing heavy, Hawk watches as Karim selects his next blade - a scalpel. He smiles at Hawk again, holding it in front of his face almost proudly, showing it off.

Then, his face dropping into a menacing scowl, he STABS the blade into Hawk's bicep in one swift motion, baring his teeth. Hawk can't help but scream in agony, writhing against his bonds.

Karim's snarl grows into a toothy grin. He TWISTS the blade, leaving Hawk howling with pain. Then he YANKS it out, blood spurting from the wound.

The door FLIES OPEN behind him, revealing Colonel Nazir. He snatches the scalpel out of Karim's hand, dropping it into the alcohol.

COLONEL NAZIR

You fool. He's no use to us if he bleeds to death.

Nazir bends down, opening a cabinet beneath the table and pulling out a roll of GAUZE. He quickly gets to work wrapping Hawk's arm, securely taping the dressing in place.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)

Take him back to the cell for now. You may resume your questioning in the morning, Lieutenant.

INT. MILITARY COMPOUND - HOLDING CELL - EVENING

A guard SHOVES Hawk back into the holding cell, slamming the door shut behind him. He groans, rubbing at his injured arm.

Then, he notices Clayton face down on the ground, his hands cuffed outside the bars.

HAWK
Clayton? Clayton, talk to me.

Hawk kneels down beside him, shaking him. No response. He shakes a little harder. Clayton's head rolls to the side - his eyes are open and rolled back, his mouth hangs open... he looks catatonic.

HAWK (CONT'D)
Oh, hell!
(then, out into the
corridor)
Guard! Guard! Help!

The GUARD makes his way back down the corridor to them, he looks down at Clayton, skeptical at first, but increasingly concerned. He looks at Hawk, and sees his genuine fear, then kneels down in front of Clayton to check for a pulse.

Clayton SNAPS to life, grabbing the guard by his uniform and SMASHING his face against the bars repeatedly. Finally, he's out cold in front of them.

Hawk looks at Clayton, stunned. He didn't know he had it in him.

CLAYTON
(out of breath)
His keys. Get his keys.

Hawk hurries down to the floor, reaching out between the bars and searching the guard's pockets. Finally, he finds a large KEYRING.

HAWK
I don't see any handcuff keys
here...

CLAYTON
Forget it, just get the cell door.

Hawk anxiously starts trying all of the keys in the lock - finally, one of them works. The door springs open.

HAWK
Got it!

He peers around the corner to make sure the coast is clear, then races down to the guard, frantically searching for the handcuff key.

HAWK (CONT'D)
It's gotta be here...

Down the hall, Hawk hears TWO GUARDS SHOUT. He spins around, seeing the two guards racing down the corridor towards them.

Clayton reaches out and snatches the unconscious guard's sidearm, angling his arms out to FIRE at the oncoming guards. They duck into a doorway for cover.

CLAYTON
Go! I'll cover you!

HAWK
What about you?

Clayton practically growls at Hawk.

CLAYTON
Just GO!

Hawk hesitates for one more second, then makes a run for it, ducking into a doorway, into.

INT. MILITARY COMPOUND - STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Hawk races down half a flight of stairs, coming to a landing with a window. He can hear more GUARDS talking on the ground floor below him, so he cautiously slides the window open, peering out. It isn't too far down...

EXT. MILITARY COMPOUND - NIGHT

Hawk climbs out the window, dropping down into the bushes below. He looks around, wary - so far, he's undetected.

He creeps along the side of the barracks, peeking around the corner. The compound is large, and the only way out is through the main gate, carefully watched over by a pair of GUARD TOWERS. Hawk will only get one chance at this...

Crouched low, he sneaks over to a JEEP, hiding at the rear, then slowly creeping up along the side. He glances at the side mirror - an IRANIAN SOLDIER is sitting in the driver's seat, reading a BOOK.

Hawk moves forward with slow, careful footsteps, watching the guard in the mirror, never blinking. He makes it to the door and gently places his hand on the door's handle...

In the mirror, the guard glances up from his book, seeing Hawk reflected. He cries out in surprise and THROWS THE DOOR OPEN, slamming it against Hawk and knocking him back to the ground.

The guard tries to hurry out of the vehicle, drawing his gun, but Hawk kicks the door shut against him with all of his might. The guard grunts in pain as the door closes on his head, dazing him. Hawk grabs him and pulls him out, ignoring the shouts of GUARDS beginning to race towards him from across the compound.

INT./EXT. MILITARY JEEP - CONTINUOUS

Hawk scrambles into the driver's seat, starting the Jeep and throwing his foot down on the accelerator. The Jeep PEELS OUT in the dust, racing towards the open gate, leaving the guards running after him, desperately firing their weapons. Hawk ducks down as the bullets shatter his windows. It's a complete Hail Mary...

INT. MILITARY COMPOUND - GUARD TOWER - CONTINUOUS

In the guard tower, the WATCHMAN climbs into position behind a large RAIL GUN. He has Hawk lined up in his sights, and smiles to himself as he prepares to tear the vehicle apart...

COLONEL NAZIR (FILTERED)
(Farsi, subtitled)
Hold your fire! Hold your fire!

EXT. MILITARY COMPOUND - SAME

Nazir stands across the compound, the action unfolding before him. He snarls into a walkie-talkie.

COLONEL NAZIR
(Farsi, subtitled)
Do not fire on the Jeep. Let it go.

INT. MILITARY COMPOUND - GUARD TOWER - SAME

The watchman looks disappointed. He relaxes his finger off the trigger, watching as the Jeep passes by his sights.

INT./EXT. MILITARY JEEP - CONTINUOUS

Hawk presses on towards the main gate, where a chainlink gate has slid into place.

HAWK
I miss my jet...

He grits his teeth, clamping down on the accelerator...

The Jeep SMASHES through the gate in a sea of sparks. He's FREE.

Hawk turns, looking over his shoulder at the compound behind him. He can't help but laugh as the Jeep speeds away.

EXT. MILITARY COMPOUND - NIGHT

Karim and Clayton join Nazir, the three of them watching the Jeep disappear from sight.

Clayton raises a small GPS DEVICE for the three of them to see. A RED DOT representing Hawk flashes as it moves away from them. A smile comes across Clayton's face.

COLONEL NAZIR
A tracker to find a tracker.

CLAYTON
He'll lead us right to it.

Now Nazir is smiling.

COLONEL NAZIR
I'll prepare a helicopter. Be ready
to leave immediately.

He exits, leaving the two of them. Clayton watches as he walks off - then, to Karim.

CLAYTON
You read through the dossier I
provided you, yes?

Karim nods, slow and serious.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)
Good. Then you're prepared for what
you must do.

Again, Karim nods, a sinister eagerness to his demeanor.

INT./EXT. MILITARY JEEP - NIGHT

Hawk drives onward, making his way out of the village, oblivious to the TRACKING DEVICE hidden within the bandages on his arm...

EXT. ARDESHER'S HOME - NIGHT

The Jeep pulls to a stop outside of Ardesher's cottage. Hawk jumps out and races inside.

INT. ARDESHER'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Hawk bolts in, still on an adrenaline rush from escaping the compound.

HAWK

Leilah? Ardesher? It's me.

He turns into the sitting room and finds the two of them seated. They look up at him - their happiness to see him is undercut by a strange apprehension.

LEILAH

Hawk! How --

HAWK

Thank God you two are all right.
Look, we have to get out of here...

Ardesher motions across the room. Hawk turns and finds ZARINA seated in the corner, waiting for him. She smiles as he sighs, crestfallen.

HAWK (CONT'D)

I guess I just can't catch a break.

ZARINA

(standing)
I beg to differ.

She tosses a FILE FOLDER onto the table beside him.

ZARINA (CONT'D)

Open it.

He looks at her, wary, then opens the folder. It's a DOSSIER ON CLAYTON.

HAWK

What is this?

ZARINA

We found our saboteur, Major.

HAWK

No... no, this isn't right...

ZARINA

His name is Dmitri Churbanov. You know him as Clayton McGuire.

HAWK

(flipping through the dossier)

This isn't possible... You're trying to tell me Clayton... is *Russian*?

He lands on a RUSSIAN POLICE ACADEMY PHOTO of Clayton. He looks much younger, but it's definitely him.

ZARINA

You were set up, Major Hawkinson. Churbanov wanted us to think you were behind all of this.

(off of his silence)

You're no longer public enemy number one - I thought you'd be relieved.

HAWK

He was... my friend.

ZARINA

How long have you known him?

HAWK

(in near shock)

Since flight school, back in Colorado. The better part of a decade...

ZARINA

(nodding)

That's when we think he assumed the real Clayton McGuire's identity. The poor kid's probably dead at the bottom of a lake somewhere.

Hawk can't look away from the photo. It's the ultimate betrayal.

ZARINA (CONT'D)

Hawk. Look at me.

(he finally looks away)

Churbanov loaded the data drive from the black box with all kinds of sensitive information. He waited years for his chance, and this was it.

(MORE)

ZARINA (CONT'D)

But thanks to you, that black box
is still out there. We have a
chance to stop him.

Hawk nods, the pain of Clayton's betrayal giving way to an
angry sense of motivation.

HAWK

We have to leave now. The military
will be looking for me...
(indicating Leilah and
Ardesher)
...and for them.

Zarina looks them over, then nods.

ZARINA

We'll go through the desert in my
ATV. We can make it there by sun up
if we leave now.

LEILAH

(standing)
Then what are we waiting for?

EXT. MILITARY COMPOUND - HELIPAD - NIGHT

A SHEEK, BLACK HELICOPTER revs to life on the helipad. Karim,
Clayton, and Colonel Nazir climb aboard, Clayton keeping
watch on the tracking unit.

CLAYTON

He's moving north.

COLONEL NAZIR

Then we have no time to waste.

He motions for the pilot to go. The helicopter pulls off of
the ground, on its way to the Dragon's Den...

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - NIGHT

Zarina's ATV SOARS over a sand dune, speeding through the
desert at top speed.

INT. ZARINA'S ATV - SAME

Zarina cruises from behind the steering wheel, glancing
occasionally at the tracking device on the dash. The blip
representing the black box grows closer and closer...

Behind her, in the backseat, a green-looking Ardesher grips the back of her seat for dear life.

ARDESHER

Oh dear...

Hawk can't help but grin from the front seat.

HAWK

You okay back there, Ardesher?

ARDESHER

No.

LEILAH

Why do you think we prefer to travel by donkey?

(then, to Zarina)

Isn't this vehicle a little... conspicuous for the CIA?

ZARINA

(as she dials on a phone)

You would prefer your donkey?

(then, into phone)

Foxtrot six three nine requesting a secure channel.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - INTERCUT

Kemper stands at her station wearing a headset, on edge, but masking it well.

KEMPER

Go ahead Foxtrot, you're clean.

ZARINA

I've secured the two civilians and the tracking device. And, believe it or not, I have Major Hawkinson with me as well.

KEMPER

Hawkinson?

ZARINA

He was able to escape the Iranians. The four of us are en route to the package as we speak.

Kemper closes her eyes and lets out a deep breath. It's the best news she's heard all day.

HAWK

Is that your boss you're talking to?

Hawk SNATCHES the phone away from her.

ZARINA

Hey!

HAWK

This is Major Kip Hawkinson - who am I speaking with?

KEMPER

(taken aback)

Major Hawkinson. This is Special Agent Elsie Kemper with the Central Intelligence Agency.

HAWK

I take it you're the one who figured I was better off with a bullet in my head.

KEMPER

You have to understand the position we were in at the time...

HAWK

You know, maybe if you'd put your efforts into helping me instead of killing me, we might have already had this whole mess figured out.

KEMPER

With all due respect, Major...

HAWK

Is General Tyson there? Put him on.

Exasperated, Kemper shakes her head and motions for General Tyson, handing him the headset.

GENERAL TYSON

Hawk?

HAWK

I'm here, General.

General Tyson smiles. It's been a long 48 hours...

GENERAL TYSON

It's good to hear your voice, son.

HAWK

Yours too, sir, believe me.

GENERAL TYSON

I trust you've been made aware of the situation with Captain McGuire.

HAWK

(after a beat)

I can hardly believe it, sir, but yes.

GENERAL TYSON

Good. Then you must also be aware of how very grave the stakes are at this point. If the information hidden on that black box were to reach enemy hands, the results would be catastrophic.

HAWK

I understand, sir.

GENERAL TYSON

Good. Then finish the mission, Hawk. That's an order.

HAWK

Yes, sir.

The ATV speeds onwards through the desert, the tracker beacon growing closer and closer...

INT. IRANIAN HELICOPTER - NIGHT

High above the desert, Nazir turns to Karim.

COLONEL NAZIR

Your special forces are following on the ground, yes? I want every man available on hand.

Karim stares him in the eye and nods.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)

Excellent. Then they'll have nowhere to run.

(then)

Soon, this will all be over.

Karim and Clayton share a knowing glance.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - FOOTHILLS - DAWN

Zarina's ATV comes to a stop at the base of the mountain range, just as the sun begins to peek over the horizon.

The four of them exit the vehicle. Hawk looks at the tracking device, then up at the mountains.

HAWK

We aren't far. Come on.

He starts the trek up into the foothills, Zarina close behind. Leilah starts to follow as well, but stops when she notices Ardesher hesitating.

LEILAH

Come on, father - we're almost there.

(noticing the look on his face)

What is it? We'll help you with the climbing, don't worry...

ARDESHER

(smiling good-naturedly)

It isn't the climbing...

(then)

We've come so far. Whether we actually find anything or not - I just wish your mother could have been here for this.

Leilah gives him a sympathetic smile.

LEILAH

I know. And she is.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - DAWN

Meanwhile, further down the valley, the stealth helicopter comes to a landing, and Karim, Clayton, and Nazir exit.

CLAYTON

(reading the tracker)

They're not even a half a mile north of us.

COLONEL NAZIR

(watching as the helicopter ascends)

Perfect.

He looks around, curious.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)
 Where are the special forces? This
 is the rendezvous point, is it not?
 (then, angry)
 We have no time to waste, Karim...

Karim looks to Clayton, who gives him a nod. He draws his
 gun, training it on Nazir, intensity burning in his eyes.

COLONEL NAZIR (CONT'D)
 What... What is the meaning of
 this?

CLAYTON
 Your special forces will not be
 joining us, Colonel.

Nazir trembles at the sight of a blood-thirsty Karim.

COLONEL NAZIR
 Karim... You were my most trusted
 soldier...
 (then, with forced anger)
 This is treason!

CLAYTON
 Karim doesn't see it that way,
 Colonel. You see, I knew the truth
 about his detainment in Iraq - how
 you sold him out and left him to be
 tortured and murdered, all for a
 measly bounty. I thought it only
 fair to tell him.

Nazir drops to his knees, tears welling in his eyes.

COLONEL NAZIR
 (to Clayton)
 Why would you...
 (to Karim)
 Karim... please... think of your
 country...

CLAYTON
 Karim will be coming with me back
 to Russia, Colonel. We can use a
 loyal, strong-willed man such as
 him. Of course, we'll be taking the
 black box with us. We thank you for
 your assistance in procuring it.

Karim steps over Nazir and lifts the barrel of his gun to
 Nazir's forehead, staring down at him with righteous fury.
 It's a terrifying sight, but Nazir cannot look away.

Karim opens his mouth, seeming to struggle to form a word - then in a ghastly, mangled voice, he croaks it out:

KARIM

Vengeance.

Karim SHOOTs, the shot echoing out through the desert. Nazir flies backwards, landing dead on his back on the hot morning sand, a bullet in the center of his forehead.

Karim stares down at him, and spits on the corpse. Clayton places a hand on his shoulder.

CLAYTON

Come. Time to finish this.

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - ENTRANCE - DAWN

Hawk pulls himself up into the cave, then helps up Zarina and then Leilah.

LEILAH

Father!

ARDESHER (O.S.)

I'm up here!

She runs ahead to find her father, who, in his excitement, has out-climbed all of them.

ZARINA

(out of breath)

How old is he again?

Hawk smiles as the two of them follow Leilah in deeper to:

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - CONTINUOUS

Leilah rounds a bend and finds Ardesher at the etched symbols, running his fingers along the groove, grinning like an excited child.

ARDESHER

Astonishing. The bird that flies,
the fish that swims, the snake that
crawls...

LEILAH

You were right, father. Down to the
symbol.

Hawk and Zarina appear behind them.

HAWK
(pointing out the
collapsed floor)
Watch your step. Right up there is
where I fell through.

She peeks over the edge at the water rushing below.

ZARINA
(warily)
Doesn't seem very stable in here...

HAWK
-- There.

Hawk quickly moves to the back wall, where the BLACK BOX
still sits. He picks it up and looks inside, happy to see
that it's been left untouched.

ZARINA
Thank God.

She takes out her satellite phone, dialing.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - INTERCUT
Kemper, sitting on pins and needles, takes the call.

KEMPER
Tell me you have it.

ZARINA
We have it.

KEMPER
(excitedly)
All right, just bear with us here.

She presses a button, switching the line over on speaker.

KEMPER (CONT'D)
Mr. Secretary, are you still there?

INT. GOVERNMENT JET - DAY

Across the globe, Secretary Price sits in his jet, high above
the United States.

SECRETARY PRICE
Still here, Agent Kemper.

KEMPER

Sir, we have secured the black box. We have the location pinned down, with armed transport standing by at the Turkish border.

SECRETARY PRICE

I'm glad to hear it. I'll be thrilled when this shit storm is behind us.

(then, warily)

I spoke with the President. I sort of can't believe I'm saying this, but if the black box is secure, you have authorization to enter Iranian airspace.

Kemper pumps her fist. They can end this, *now*.

KEMPER

Thank you sir.

SECRETARY PRICE

Good work, Elsie. And good luck. Try not to start World War III on the way out, understood?

KEMPER

Yes sir, and thank you.

Secretary Price ends the call, then turns to an AIDE.

SECRETARY PRICE

Get me the United Nations on the line.

(then)

And bring me some mouthwash. I've got some ass to kiss.

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - MORNING

Zarina finishes her call.

ZARINA

Yes Ma'am, understood.

INT. AL UDEID AIR BASE - MISSION CONTROL - INTERCUT

KEMPER

Good luck, Foxtrot. We'll be seeing you soon.

She ends the call, then turns to find General Tyson watching her, a wry smile on his face.

GENERAL TYSON
Never gonna happen, huh?

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - SAME

Leilah, Hawk, and Zarina watch as Ardesher continues examining the etchings, his face wrinkled with frustration.

ARDESHER
There has to be more to it...

LEILAH
We'll keep searching, father. Who knows how far back this cave goes.

ZARINA
You'd better find what you're looking for soon. The cavalry's on its way, and we aren't gonna make 'em wait.

Ardesher bangs his fist against the rocky wall, searching for a weak spot.

HAWK
Hey - easy. We don't want this cave collapsing around us.

Ardesher turns and gives Hawk a look.

ARDESHER
I hardly think that a few taps will bring --

A bullet rings out, EXPLODING into the rock wall just inches from Ardesher's head. The group spins to find Karim making his way towards them, gun drawn.

ZARINA
(drawing her gun)
Everybody get back!

She ducks for cover behind a boulder as Leilah, Hawk, and Ardesher flee further into the cave, Karim firing behind them.

Zarina leans out of her cover, firing a few shots at him. A bullet HITS him in the shoulder - he barely reacts, and continues firing.

Zarina howls in pain as a bullet CONNECTS, the force of it spinning her around. She collapses onto her stomach, silent and still.

Karim touches two fingers to the bullet wound in his shoulder, then snorts, unfazed. He moves past her, kicking her gun into the chasm beside her, then heads deeper into the caves, his gun leading the way.

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - BACK CAVERNS - CONTINUOUS

Karim rounds a bend, pulling a flashlight from his belt to help him see. He steps into a large, craggy cavern, shining his light from atop his gun, moving it from nook to nook.

BATS FLUTTER OUT as the light passes over them. Startled, Karim fires his gun blindly, the bats rushing past him.

Hawk LEAPS FROM THE SHADOWS, taking the opportunity to tackle him, grabbing his wrist and fighting for control of the gun. They wrestle over it, both of them grunting with exertion. Hawk manages to squeeze the gun out of Karim's hands - it clatters aside on the cave floor, bouncing into the darkness.

Karim HEADBUTTS Hawk's face, sending him down to the ground, dazed. With a snarling smile, he draws his knife, plunging it downward with all of his might. Hawk rolls to the side in the nick of time, the knife sparking against the thick rock.

Hawk scrambles to his feet, taking a defensive stance before Karim.

HAWK

The gun, Leilah! Get the gun!

She darts out from the shadows, shining her light along the cave floor searching for it.

LEILAH

I can't find it!

Karim smiles at Hawk, then LUNGES at him with knife... but is stopped cold in his tracks by ARDESHER, who appears beside him and throws a handful of SAND into his eyes, disorienting him.

Hawk moves in, quickly KICKING the knife out of Karim's hand, then PUNCHING him in the face. The blow spins Karim to the side, but he SPINS RIGHT BACK with a PUNCH of his own that cracks across Hawk's jaw. Blood trickling from his lip, Karim steps in close, PUNCHING Hawk in the gut, then throwing him down to his stomach, winded.

Ardesher steps in, throwing a large rock against Karim's head. Karim merely brushes it off, then shoves Ardeshher down to the ground and turns his attention back to Hawk.

Karim stands over Hawk, stepping down between his shoulders and pulling his arms back. Across the room, Leilah finally spots the gun. As Hawk writhes in pain from the backbreaking position, his shoulders nearly dislocating, she GRABS it and spins around, pointing it straight at Karim.

LEILAH (CONT'D)

Let him go!

Karim looks up at her, pure hatred in his eyes. Finally, he releases Hawk, leaving him moaning in agony on the cave floor.

LEILAH (CONT'D)

Now step away from him, you monster.

Karim bares his teeth, not moving an inch. Leilah cocks the gun.

LEILAH (CONT'D)

I *said* step away from him --

A gun appears against the side of her head. She freezes.

CLAYTON

I think that's enough from you.
(then)
Drop it.

Trembling with sudden fear, she reluctantly drops the gun. Clayton grabs her shoulder and SHOVES her to the ground with Hawk and Ardeshher.

Hawk lifts his head, glaring at Clayton, furious.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

(his American accent back)
Oh, come on now Hawk, don't give me that look.

HAWK

I trusted you. Eight years I've known you.

Clayton shrugs.

CLAYTON

Don't take it personally. It isn't always all about *you*, you know.

HAWK

God damn it, I was your *friend*,
Clayton!

CLAYTON

I know, and I do appreciate the good times. It's why this is so difficult. Hell, I felt bad enough just rigging your ejection seat to fail, believe me. But then you just *had* to go and survive the crash and you just *had* to detonate the Artemis. Do you have any idea how furious my superiors will be when I get home? We'd been working to get a prototype of the Artemis for *years*, but you went and ruined everything. Such a damned hero.

(then)

But that's behind us now.

(holding up the black box)

This here was the real prize, anyway.

HAWK

So what now? You're just going to kill us and make your way back to Moscow?

CLAYTON

Well, can you blame me? Sure beats this shithole desert.

(then to Karim)

No offense.

Karim snorts and rolls his eyes.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

But you do make a valid point. We *were* friends. I am not a totally cold-hearted man.

He picks up the gun Leilah dropped, holding it out for Karim.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

So, Karim, would you do the honors instead?

(he hands the gun over)

Start with the old man. And make it quick.

LEILAH

No!

Karim nods, then trains the gun on Ardesher.

A SHOT RINGS OUT - but it isn't from Karim's gun. He winces in pain, dropping the gun and clutching his suddenly bleeding hand, a bullet hole straight through his palm.

ZARINA stands in the doorway, weak and bloody, but alive, gun drawn. She turns her gun to Clayton, who immediately fires back, jumping to the ground for defense. The shots ring back and forth, a chaotic firefight.

A stray bullet CHINKS off of the wall - a large section of rock comes CRASHING DOWN. The entire cavern begins to quake, rocks clattering all around.

Zarina steps back in fear, but loses her balance, stepping over the edge of the chasm. She cries out in surprise as she plummets down into the darkness towards the water below.

The cave-in intensifies, endangering all. A MASSIVE SECTION OF THE WALL comes rolling down, PINNING CLAYTON and BURYING LEILAH.

ARDESHER

Leilah! No!

The dust settles and a frantic Ardesher immediately begins digging through the rubble, searching for his daughter, while Hawk, horrified, watches on.

From out of nowhere, Karim KICKS him across the face, diving on top of him, snarling, wrapping his bloody hands around Hawk's throat, squeezing the life out of him. Hawk gasps for air, his eyes bulging.

Karim grits his teeth, squeezing harder and harder until... he tenses, a look of shock on his face.

He looks down, finding the JAGGED TIP of something sharp protruding from his chest. His grip loosens on Hawk's throat, and he collapses to the ground beside him, a LARGE, ANCIENT-LOOKING JEWELLED STONE SWORD in his back.

Leilah looks down at him, her pulse racing, then turns to Hawk, giving him a hand and helping him to his feet. They look down at Karim, his face frozen in death.

LEILAH

Well, I suppose you were right
about us women.

Hawk smiles in spite of himself, and shakes his head.

Ardesher rushes over, embracing her, practically sobbing.

ARDESHER
I thought I'd lost you... but
how...?

Hawk bends down over Karim, inspecting the sword.

HAWK
And where exactly did this come
from?

Leilah smiles at them, then turns to the collapsed wall.
Behind it, a SECRET ROOM has been revealed.

ARDESHER
My God...

In awe of the moment, he steps over the rubble, into:

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - DRAGON'S DEN ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Ardesher steps into the room, shining his light, face full of
hope.

But then, the face falls.

The room is practically empty, save for a few SCATTERED COINS
and an ancient-looking SKELETON in disintegrating armor.

LEILAH
(indicating the skeleton)
The knife belonged to him.

HAWK
(entering)
This is the Dragon's Den?
(then)
Didn't take much to be king back
then, did it?

ARDESHER
It would seem someone beat us here,
and kept the discovery a secret.
Could have been centuries ago.

LEILAH
We'll never know.

HAWK
I'm... I'm really sorry, Ardeshher.

Ardesher puts on a brave smile, burying his disappointment.

ARDESHER

Don't be. Just think of it - for all we know, the three of us are the only ones on the planet who know for certain that the Dragon's Den exists.

HAWK

You mean *existed*.

Leilah appears beside her father, gently placing her hand on his shoulder.

LEILAH

We did it, father. We're actually standing in the Dragon's Den.

He smiles at her, gives her a kiss on the cheek.

ARDESHER

Yes, Leilah. Yes, we are.

LEILAH

Mother would be so proud of you.

ARDESHER

She *is* proud. Proud of us both.

Leilah smiles. It's good to hear.

Hawk, seemingly wearing the most disappointment of any of them, bends down, inspecting one of the coins. It's minted from pure copper, and worn down from the ages.

HAWK

Hey, how come these coins don't have jewels in them like the other one?

Ardesher's head cocks. It's an interesting thought.

He reaches into his pocket, retrieving the coin that Hawk found, inspecting it, thinking.

HAWK (CONT'D)

(watching him)

What, is that one worth more or something?

ARDESHER

Maybe...

He finds a horizontal line etched into the wall. Curious, he traces his finger along it, until he comes to the center of the back wall, where he finds a SMALL, CIRCULAR GROOVE.

ARDESHER (CONT'D)

No...

Biting his lip to contain his excitement, he slowly takes the jeweled coin and SNAPS it into the slot...

The entire room begins to rumble violently.

HAWK

What did you do?!

ARDESHER

Just wait!

To their astonishment, the slab making up the lower half of the back wall TILTS BACKWARDS, revealing a passage.

Ardeshar watches it open, unable to stop from grinning. He waits until the rumbling stops, then eagerly crawls in.

HAWK

Careful!

But he's gone.

LEILAH

Father? Father, speak to me.

No answer. Hawk and Leilah exchange a glance, then follow him into:

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - THE DRAGON'S DEN - CONTINUOUS

The two of them climb up into a large chamber, nearly pitch black, save for a SMALL POOL OF LIGHT that shines from a mountainous crack high above in the cavern's ceiling. Ardeshar stands in it, eyes closed, breathing in deep.

LEILAH

Father? Is everything all right?

He nods happily.

ARDESHER

Take a breath, my darling. This... This is sacred air.

HAWK

Sacred... air?

Ardesher opens his eyes and smiles at Hawk, then turns his light on, shining it out into the dark room.

THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS OF GOLDEN COINS, ANCIENT ARTIFACTS, AND JEWELS SHINE BACK AT THEM.

ARDESHER

Fate brought you to us, and now
fate has brought us here.

Hawk and Leilah stare at the riches in stunned amazement.
THIS IS THE DRAGON'S DEN.

Leilah can't help but laugh in wonder, tears welling in her eyes. She staggers out into the unbelievable treasure trove, more amazed with each passing second.

ARDESHER (CONT'D)

And come. Look at this.

He leads them back into the cavern, where ROW AFTER ROW of TALL WOODEN RACKS sit, each one holding hundreds of ancient scrolls, covered in dust.

ARDESHER (CONT'D)

(gleefully)

The secret to the power of King
Darius!

LEILAH

Knowledge.

She picks one up, unrolling it, eyes wide.

LEILAH (CONT'D)

Father, these must predate even the
Library of Alexandria! All the lost
secrets of ancient history... here
before us!

Ardesher takes the scroll from her, eyes filled with wonder as he examines the ancient cuneiform writing, unseen for twenty-five hundred years. He can only give a weak laugh, in sheer awe of what he's looking at.

But before they can celebrate any further, another LOUD RUMBLE shakes the cavern. Behind them, a segment of the slab above the passageway COLLAPSES, nearly blocking the entire exit.

The three share a look of horror.

HAWK

Grab what you can and run!

As the rumbling continues, they each grab handfuls of coins, jewels, and trinkets, then race out of the cavern as quickly as they can. Before exiting, Ardesher turns, taking one final look at the cavern.

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - BACK CAVERNS - CONTINUOUS

The three of them climb under the wall and out of the Dragon's Den, making for the exit. They run past CLAYTON, still pinned beneath the rocks. He watches them, his eyes wide at the sight of their newfound riches.

They dash for the exit, only to find it blocked off. With the cave continuing to collapse around them, they have no other choice:

HAWK

We're gonna have to jump for it.

Ardesher peers down into the crevice, and the water rushing below.

ARDESHER

I... I don't know...

Hawk looks to Leilah, urgency in his eyes.

LEILAH

Father, I love you, but so help me,
I will push you in myself if you
don't jump right this instant.

ARDESHER

(still hesitant)
I really need to retire.

He swallows the lump in his mouth, then closes his eyes and JUMPS.

CLAYTON

(calling out)
Hawk, please... don't leave me...

The two turn to him, conflicted. Hawk turns back to Leilah.

HAWK

Go ahead. Jump.

LEILAH

What about you?

HAWK
 I'll be right behind you.
 (then)
 I promise.

She nods and starts towards the crevice, but then stops and turns back to him, grabbing him and pulling him in for a DEEP KISS.

LEILAH
 You'd better be.

They lock eyes for a knowing moment, then she turns back to the crevice, JUMPING IN.

Hawk immediately goes to Clayton, struggling to pull the rocks off of him.

CLAYTON
 Thank you... oh, thank you...

HAWK
 Shut up.

Finally, Clayton is free. Hawk grabs his arm and pulls him to his feet, dragging him towards the crevice.

Clayton ELBOWS Hawk in the stomach, dropping him to his knees. He turns, making a run for the Dragon's Den.

HAWK (CONT'D)
 Clayton, no!

But Clayton ignores him, ducking under the wall and into:

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - THE DRAGON'S DEN - CONTINUOUS

Clayton practically dives into the treasure, stuffing coins and jewels into every spare pocket and flap of clothing he can find.

CLAYTON
 Come on, come on...

Finally satisfied, he turns and starts for the exit, pulling a SECOND GUN from an ankle holster...

...But the rest of the slab COLLAPSES, blocking the exit off before he can get through.

He looks around in horror, trapped, the room starting to crumble all around him. As the ceiling finally gives out above him, he lets out a piercing howl of despair...

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - BACK CAVERNS - SAME

Hawk winces at the sound of Clayton's scream, and the way that it's quickly snuffed into silence. But he has no time to mourn the loss - he grabs the black box and jumps into the crevice, just moments before the entire cavern collapses in on itself.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - FOOTHILLS - MORNING

The base of the mountain. The underground stream rushes out into the open air through a SMALL OPENING at ground-level. Along the shore, Leilah and Ardesher work to tie a MAKESHIFT BANDAGE around Zarina's gunshot wound.

Hawk BURSTS out, hollering wildly, and lands in the somewhat calmer waters at the base of the mountain. Leilah grins, running over to help him out of the water.

He smiles at her, happy to be alive, and she makes him even happier, KISSING HIM AGAIN. Behind her, Ardesher smiles approvingly at the sight.

LEILAH

What about Clayton?

The smile fades from Hawk's face. He shakes his head.

LEILAH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Hawk.

HAWK

Yeah. I am, too.

Hawk, Leilah, and Ardesher look up at the mountain, knowing just how much is buried within, lost forever.

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - LATER

A US BLACKHAWK HELICOPTER jets through the sky, escorted by RAPTOR FIGHTER JETS.

Far below, Hawk, Leilah, Ardesher, and Zarina wave their arms at the approaching aircraft.

TRIGGER (FILTERED)

Beta Leader reporting visual contact with objective. Repeat, objective is within our sights.

EXT. DAGAH VALLEY - FOOTHILLS - SAME

Hawk, Leilah, Ardesher, and Zarina watch as the Blackhawk arrives, descending for a landing in front of them. They make their way towards it, helping Zarina hobble along.

The pilot salutes as they draw near - Hawk salutes back.

They climb in one at a time - Zarina, then Ardesher, then Leilah, then Hawk. The door closes, and the helicopter begins to lift off.

EXT. IRANIAN AIRSPACE - LATER

The helicopter approaches the sea, soaring toward the sun. It's a peaceful, beautiful flight.

INT. BLACKHAWK HELICOPTER - SAME

Hawk rests his head back in his seat, eyes closed, far past the brink of exhaustion.

Beside him, Leilah watches him sleep, a soft smile across her face. Gently, careful not to wake him, she places her hand over his.

A smile forms across his "sleeping" face. He gives her hand a squeeze.

She turns to her father, sitting across from her, translating the SCROLL they rescued from the Dragon's Den.

LEILAH

What does it say?

Ardesher looks up, a wry smile on his face. Hawk opens his eyes, curious.

LEILAH (CONT'D)

Well?

ARDESHER

Perhaps I'm not ready to retire from treasure hunting after all.

(then)

Tell me... have the two of you ever wanted to explore the sands of Egypt?

He turns the scroll for the two of them to see. They lean in for a closer look...

...Their eyes grow wide.

Beneath the extensive cuneiform symbols is a series of HIEROGLYPHICS, and below them, what appears to be a MAP, and finally... an ancient drawing of a VAST EGYPTIAN TREASURE ROOM...

Hawk and Leilah look at each other, stunned smiles growing across their faces. Off the three of them - one adventure ending, another perhaps beginning - we:

CUT TO BLACK.