

Untitled Iraq Convoy Project

by
Joshua Marston

Third Draft

August 14, 2006

Copyright © 2005 by Joshua Marston
c/o Journeyman Pictures
225 West 13th Street
New York, NY 10011
212-989-1038 ext.205

ORANGE.

The whole screen glows with orange. A dusky, burnt shade that pulses.

Underneath is the distant, muted sound of wind. And a low, mechanical rumble.

The orange slowly resolves, becoming something physical, grainy. Two small red discs surface, a few feet apart. And then an oval... the back of a fuel tanker with its tail lights, enveloped in orange sand.

Just barely, there appears the pulse of a broken line on the road. We're moving slowly. Fifteen miles an hour, maybe twenty.

JIM "HOUND DOG" JAFFERTY stares intently out the windshield of his truck. He's a big guy, early 40s, fat face, moustache, big hands grabbing the wheel. He's got a blue Kevlar vest and a helmet on. There are photos of his wife and three kids taped to the dash, and next to them a small toy horse, a plastic brown colt wedged above the rack for his radio.

The mood is eery and tense as we move through the murk. Jim pulls back the black Kevlar curtain covering his window and looks into his side-view mirror: the road disappears into orange haze.

JIM

(on his radio)

Hound Dog to Mil Five. I can't see shit in this. Are you back there? Over.

SOLDIER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

Mil Five to Hound Dog, we dropped back a bit. All this damn sand's messin' with our vehicle. Over.

JIM

(on his radio)

It's probably your air filter. You want us to brake it down and drop back for you?

SOLDIER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

Negative. We'll catch up to you.

Another voice comes on over the radio, crackling and full of static.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KENNY (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
 KennyG to Land Rover. We's gettin' way
 too tight back here.

We cut to KENNY, a lanky guy in his 50s with a drawn and leathery face, also in a vest and helmet. He's got a large Betty Boop beach towel tacked up behind him as decoration and he's looking in his side-view mirror as he talks: there's another fuel truck close behind him.

KENNY (CONT'D)
 (on his radio)
 I've got a TCN that's creepin' up my ass.
 Any chance you all could take it up a few
 clicks up there?

And we cut to LAND ROVER, the convoy commander. He's a white man in his 50s, with wide-rimmed glasses under his helmet and a button-down shirt poking up out of his vest. He rides shotgun in the lead truck, holding a Qualcomm keyboard in his lap. His driver is a heavy-set NEPALI MAN with a salt-and-pepper moustache.

Out the front windshield of their truck they have a view of the lead HUMVEE a hundred yards ahead, with a gunner, head-wrapped and goggled, up at the .50-cal. They can see a little bit beyond, but not much.

LAND ROVER
 (on his radio)
 It's getting a little better. Give us a
 minute. Over.

With Jim: he's concentrating on the back end of the truck in front of him when out of the dust, passing on the opposite side of the median, emerges a sedan with a WOODEN CASKET strapped to the top of it, driving fast.

And then there's a second car right behind it also with a casket on the roof. And then a third.

JIM
 (to himself)
 Jesus Christ.

Unnerved, Jim reaches for his toy horse and clutches it as he drives.

LAND ROVER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
 This is Land Rover. It seems to be
 clearing up here. Over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

We cut to Land Rover: the view is slightly better... and then all of the sudden it clears, like driving out the other side of a fog bank, which causes Land Rover's eyes to immediately notice something on the right shoulder, coming up.

LAND ROVER (CONT'D)
 (to his driver)
 Shit! Move left. There's a tire.

It's a perfectly innocuous-looking TRUCK TIRE lying on the shoulder of the road. Land Rover's driver immediately moves into the left lane of the highway.

LAND ROVER (CONT'D)
 (on his radio)
 Tire on the right shoulder comin' up.

We cut to MIGUEL "MIKEY" LOPEZ, a young Mexican guy in his mid-30s, his face round and cherubic, too soft for this job. He's got a small statuette of the Lady of Guadalupe and a photo of his wife and four kids on his dashboard.

The view has cleared out his windshield and as the truck in front of him moves into the left lane he can briefly see the front third of the convoy, about six fuel tankers and a gun truck in front of him. Miguel falls into the left lane and almost immediately afterward he spots the tire going by along the shoulder.

MIGUEL
 (talking to the tire half in Spanish)
 No eres un IED, cierto? No. You're only a tire. Not an IED, right?
 (as it's gone by)
 Una llanta no mas, cierto.

LAND ROVER (O.S., OVER RADIO)
 We're takin' it back up another 30 clicks everybody. Over.

KENNY (OS, OVER THE RADIO)
 Mash the gas. Show us what you got.

We cut to ANIL, a small Indian driver, watching the tire go by. And then we cut to RAJ, yet another South Asian driver, also driving by the tire.

The IRAQI LANDSCAPE is now visible, stark desert with low, mud-brick houses and clutches of palm trees. There is the occasional human figure in the distant fields, robed from head to toe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The rear 2/3 of the caravan (14 tankers with two Humvees interspersed) produces a follow-the-leader ripple as the trucks move successively into the left lane.

We cut to SHIPP, a black driver in his thirties, biceps bulging from under his Kevlar vest. He has a very intense look on his face as he watches the tire go past. He faces front and sees the tanker in front of him pulling away, increasing speed.

Shipp drops it down another gear and punches the gas, but something about the tanker's reaction puts an unhappy look on his face.

Back at the end of the convoy we see the last truck followed by the BOBTAIL - a rig without a trailer - as they come out of the sand storm, into the clear.

We cut inside the bobtail to JIM. He sees the TIRE go by on his right and then sees the truck in front of him drift back into the right lane, briefly exposing a view forward of THE ENTIRE CONVOY, though it stretches much further than we can really make out. Jim follows into the right lane.

He looks into his side-view mirror and sees: his rear Humvee - way, way back - about four hundred yards.

JIM

(to himself)

Is that what you call catching up to me?
Come on.

KENNY (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

This is KennyG to Land Rover...

Cut to Kenny, radio in hand.

KENNY (CONT'D)

(on his radio)

I thought y'all were takin' it up a few clicks. We's still goin' like fifteen clicks back here. What's goin' on up there? Over.

With SHIPP: he's struggling with his gears, punching the gas and still only going about fifteen clicks. He looks out his windshield and sees the front part of the convoy taking off without him, getting further and further away.

LAND ROVER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

We're doin' fifty-five up here, over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

KENNY (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
Well, what the hell? We's creepin' along
back here.

Shipp picks up his radio.

SHIPP
(on his radio)
Shipp to Land Rover. I'm having
mechanical problems. I'm not gettin' any
power. It doesn't wanna get past third
gear.

With Land Rover: sure enough, his truck is speeding along at
about 50 miles an hour.

LAND ROVER
(on his radio)
Alright, we'll brake it down.

With Kenny: he's poking along about fifteen miles an hour and
staring out at the Iraqi landscape looking for anything
unusual.

KENNY
(on his radio)
KennyG to Shipp. How're you doin',
buddy? This ain't the place to be pokin'
along out in the open. Over.

With Shipp. He continues to struggle. There's still a
significant gap between him and the trucks way up ahead.

SHIPP
(struggling)
Goddamn... Son of a BITCH!

The transmission groans.

Cut to the GUNNER on the .50-cal of a Humvee in the middle of
the convoy, scanning the horizon for any threat as they creep
along.

Back with Jim at the tail end of the convoy:

JIM
(on his radio)
Hound Dog to Shipp. Do you want some
help? Over.

There's a pause. And then finally,

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

SHIPP (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
 This is Shipp. The problem has been resolved. Repeat. The problem has been resolved. I'm good to roll. You can take it back up. Over.

With Shipp: he shifts gears and hits the gas, closing the gap between him and the truck in front of him.

LAND ROVER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
 OK. We're gonna take it back up.

Cut to Jim's POV (in his side-view mirror) of the Humvee dropped way back behind him.

JIM
 (to himself)
 Come on...

From the point of view of rear Humvee we see that the gap up to Jim's bobtail is about five hundred yards. Up ahead, at the right side of the road, an IRAQI CAR, a four-door sedan, enters the highway from a side entrance.

Jim is looking at the Humvee in his side-view mirror when he suddenly sees the Iraqi car speeding up from behind.

JIM (CONT'D)
 Fuck.

Jim looks at the truck in front of him. They're still going about 20 miles an hour.

JIM (CONT'D)
 (on his radio)
 Hound Dog to Mil 5. Do you see that car coming up? Over.

From the point of view of the Iraqi car we can see the distance closing on the slow-moving convoy.

In Jim's truck: he sees the car gaining and moving into the left lane. So Jim moves into the left lane to block him.

SOLDIER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
 This is Mil Five. I see him but I can't get to him. And I'm not lightin' him up with you right there. Over.

The Iraqi car, seeing Jim move left, cuts to the right and speeds up.

Jim moves right and blocks it again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

JIM
(on his radio, clearly nervous)
Well, what do you want me to do?

There's no answer on the radio.

Determined to get around, the Iraqi car makes a sudden maneuver trying to whip around to the left again.

Jim sees it in his mirror, and then the car is alongside of him.

JIM (CONT'D)
Shit—

He has a about a second to think of what to do. He draws a breath and whips his steering wheel left and RAMS the Iraqi car, sending it veering off. Jim just catches a glimpse of TWO MEN in the car trying to brace themselves as they careen onto the opposite side of the highway. An oncoming pick-up skids to avoid them and the car continues off the other side of the highway and ROLLS.

Jim catches sight of it rolling in his side-view mirror — once, twice, three times.

Jim faces front, trying to collect himself. The convoy has picked up speed and there's now a gap between him and the truck in front of him. He checks the mirror another time and then reaches for the radio.

JIM (CONT'D)
(on his radio, suppressing his adrenaline)
This is Hound Dog to Land Rover. I just had an Iraqi car, possible V-BED, coming up from behind that I put out to the left. It rolled a few times. But I didn't see it explode. It was coming up damn fast, though. Real aggressive. Over.

Jim waits for a response.

LAND ROVER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
This is Land Rover. Copy that. Good work. Over.

Jim takes a deep breath.

JIM
(on his radio)
My pleasure. Over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

Jim kisses the toy horse, which he's been clutching throughout, sets it back down and then reaches for his extra-large (Wal-Mart size) bottle of Tums. He unscrews the top, pops a couple tablets in his mouth and chews, checking his side-view mirror one more time.

INT. D-FAC, CAMP DEERFIELD - DUSK

At a long sink in the bathroom of the dining facility Jim scrubs his hands and puts water on his face. He dries off and walks through a door into the main chow hall.

The place looks like a small version of a college dining facility. It's essentially a large trailer with a drop ceiling and fluorescent lights, folding tables with red plastic table cloths, and a salad bar with an American flag draped above it. There's a mix of country-western and rock playing through a set of speakers.

In line, Jim pushes a tray. There are brown-skinned South Asian faces on either side of him (Third Country Nationals, or TCN's). A Filipina woman in kitchen whites serves him chicken Cordon Bleu, peas and mashed potatoes on a plastic plate.

He sits at a table with Land Rover, Shipp and Miguel (eating a steak with plasticware). The TCN's sit together at other tables.

Jim is talking more than he is eating, still pumped up from the run. He's got the salt and pepper shakers lined up in a convoy with the Tabasco and the Worcester sauce.

JIM

I don't really care which way the bastard's gonna come. He can come up the left. He can come up the right. There's no way he's gettin' by. No fuckin' way. I'm at the back of that convoy - someone gets between me and that rear Humvee - you better fucking BELIEVE that I'm takin' him out. He should know better. You don't pass an American convoy. You got a death wish, bring it on. I'll push you right off the fuckin' road.

The pepper shaker's ramming the salt off the road. Jim keeps resetting them and ramming them.

LAND ROVER

Stupidest fuckin' drivers in the world.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Kenny sits down with a plate of lobster legs, covered by another plate to keep it hot.

SHIPP

(re: the extra plate)

You do that just so they can bill for two meals instead of one?

KENNY

(smiling)

Hey, I'm tryin' to make sure you don't lose your job.

JIM

I got every fuckin' driver in that convoy - every fuckin' driver speaks English, anyway - comin' up to me and shakin' my hand and thankin' me for looking out for 'em. I tell 'em, you know what? I'm just doin' my job. Fuck, we're pushin' a half million gallons of jet fuel every goddamn day, we're biggest target there is, so you can sure as hell bet I'm gonna be lookin' out for my drivers.

KENNY

It was a clean hit.

JIM

I don't need some behind-the-wire-weasel, who wasn't even there, who hasn't even left his base in six months, talking to me about policy. Don't come to me and ask me, Did the car look suspicious? What, am I supposed to lean out and ask him, Hello Mr. Insurgent are you trying to blow up my convoy or are you just wettin' your pants 'cause you're late for dinner with your momma? Jesus. "Was it suspicious looking?" Hell yeah, it was suspicious - he was a Haji.

MIGUEL

Can I use the salt?

LAND ROVER

TCN's are waiting to get escorted. You done?

JIM

I want ice cream. What flavors do they have today?

EXT. MAN-CAMP, CAMP DEERFIELD - DUSK

Jim and Kenny escort a group of 15 Third Country Nationals (all South Asians) from the dining facility across the gravel camp. They come to an area cordoned off by large coils of concertina wire. It looks like a POW camp.

A uniformed man at a desk checks the TCN's back into their camp. Jim pats one of them on the back as they go through.

JIM
Good driving today.

Given the way the TCN drivers respond - polite but without a word - it's clear that they don't speak English. Behind the concertina wire two teams of men in salwar kameez hit a volleyball back and forth over a net.

JIM (CONT'D)
(to Kenny)
You gonna call Laurel?

KENNY
...I'm not in the mood.

INT. PHONE TRAILER, CAMP DEERFIELD - NIGHT

The phone trailer has about 15 carrels, each with a telephone. On the opposite wall are carrels with computers for internet access. There's a desk with a librarian-type woman signing people in and out. Miguel talks on the phone, a couple carrels away from Jim.

JIM
(on the phone)
...Yeah... No... Uh-huh...

He doesn't look very engaged in the conversation.

JIM (CONT'D)
I said it was fine. Just another run...
Because I don't have anything to say. Do
you want me to make stuff up? ... It was
just a run. We had a sandstorm. I
already told you that... Fine... Is
Joanna there? Well, what about
Brandon? ... Well, can I talk to him?...

Jim covers the receiver.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM (CONT'D)
 (to Miguel)
 Hey, no phone sex in here!

Miguel laughs. Brandon comes on the line.

JIM (CONT'D)
 Hey, buddy how you are you doin'? ... How
 was school? ...

Jim is SMILING now - his whole personality seems to change.

JIM (CONT'D)
 That's great! ... And what did your
 teacher say? ...

INT. TRUCK, STAGING AREA, CAMP DEERFIELD - NIGHT

By the glow of the dome light, Jim pulls the seats forward in the cab of his truck and flips the sleeper down. He unrolls a thin mattress, spreads out a sheet and gets comfortable.

Once he's in he reaches down into his bag and pulls out his LAPTOP. He puts a DVD in the tray, puts on his headphones and turns out the dome light. He lies there in the blue-ish glow of some movie, the sound track bleeding out through his headphones.

INT. "MORALE, WELFARE, RECREATION" ROOM, CAMP DEERFIELD - DAY

The Knicks play the Spurs on a giant screen TV in the Moral, Welfare and Recreation room, a trailer with fluorescent lights and various sofas and overstuffed chairs in rows. Along one wall are four Playstation carrels. Jim and Shipp play "ATV Offroad Fury" while Land Rover and Kenny sit near them half watching the video game, half watching the basketball game.

KENNY
 All I'm saying is, you figure with the days we're on base preppin' we average five days actually drivin' a week. Your average run, take Baghdad to Mosul's what, two hundred fifty miles. That's twelve hundred and fifty miles a week. How many miles were you drivin' a week in the States?

JIM
 Thirty-five hundred.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAND ROVER

That's not the point. It's the hours. Runnin' two-hundred fifty miles takes you six hours here. Six hours that feels like twleve 'cause you're all wound up.

SHIPP

Wound up? Who's wound up?

JIM

The stress is all part of your hazard pay. He's just talking about comparing straight miles.

LAND ROVER

How many miles doesn't matter. It's seven days a week working. Unless you consider being stuck on a base drinking near-beer a day off.

KENNY

(joking)

Well shit, if that's your problem then let's take a stroll into Nasiriah tonight and see if they got themselves a Hooters built yet. Have a few drinks, put the moves on some Haji babes.

Everyone LAUGHS at Kenny. The door opens, letting in a burst of light. Miguel enters holding a large mail envelope.

JIM

What'd you get Mikey?

MIGUEL

I need your opinion.

He removes several color brochures with images of pre-fab storage sheds. All four guys lean in.

KENNY

(teasing)

You putting up a storage shed for that fourth kid?

MIGUEL

We've been paying to keep all this furniture we got from my mother-in-law in a storage space.

SHIPP

Why don't you just sell it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MIGUEL

'Cause we're planning on buying a house.
By the time I finish my year here I'll
have enough for a down payment.

KENNY

(leaning in, teasing)
Land Rover'll give the name of a good
bankruptcy lawyer. Cut right to the
chase.

LAND ROVER

One mortgage payment - I missed ONE after
Bonnie's operation, next thing I knew I
was filing for Chapter Seven.

JIM

I vote for this one with the... (reading)
"Tudor Style Roof." What the hell is a
Tudor Style Roof?

Another driver passes through the room.

DRIVER #2

Hey Kenny, you have a phone card I could
borrow? PX doesn't open for another half
hour.

KENNY

I live in Houston. All my calls are
local.

JIM

(opens his wallet)
I've got one's got a couple bucks left on
it.

DRIVER #2

Thanks.

LAND ROVER

You know how much money I would have
saved on long distance calls by now if I
lived in Houston?

SHIPP

Bryce Powers took that desk job at BIAP -
his wife dials a 281 number, gets him on
his office line in Baghdad whenever she
feels like it, for free.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

KENNY
 (laughs)
 Sounds like misery.

They all LAUGH.

EXT. STAGING AREA, CAMP DEERFIELD - DAY

The staging area is basically a big sandy parking lot. Concrete jersey barriers (2 feet tall and ten feet long) with spray painted numbers indicate lanes which the convoys are lined up in. A handful of Humvees are parked off to the side.

At the head of their convoy Land Rover holds a clipboard and is leading the pre-trip briefing in front of Jim, Kenny, Miguel, Shipp and about fifteen TCN drivers. There are two SOLDIERS there as well. It's HOT - a few try in vain to catch a little shade standing next to the lead tanker.

LAND ROVER
 So today, obviously, we're going the rest of the way home to Cougar. Heading straight down MSR Tampa. Lets keep the airwaves clear. Don't talk unless you got something important to say. Remember your 6-2-1 rule. Anything happens to another driver you just keep driving and let the bobtail deal with it. (he points to Jim) That's what he's there for. I think everyone's signed the sheet. Anyone didn't sign the sheet?
 (he holds up the clipboard)
 OK... Shipp...

Shipp steps forward. The Americans bow their heads. Some of the TCNs do as well.

SHIPP
 Father, we come to you in honor of your precious name. We ask that we may have eternal life with you, Father. We ask that you forgive us our sins and our shortcomings. We ask you to guide us and direct us, Father. To use us as a tool for your benefit and for your glory, Father. Father, we ask you to give us a safe journey and we pray that you take those who have fallen before us into your blessed kingdom.
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHIPP(CONT'D)

Father, let us drive straight and true
for your divine purpose and let your
enemies' bullets fly away from us. We
give thanks to you, Father. Amen.

ALL

Amen.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS TRUCKS, STAGING AREA, CAMP DEERFIELD - DAY

Jim uncaps his extra-large bottle of Tums and pops a couple
in his mouth.

Kenny rolls up balls of cotton and stuffs them in his ears.

One of the soldiers in the military escort taps his clip on
his helmet and loads up while the gunner behind him situates
himself at the .50-cal of their Humvee.

Shipp slides an identifying sheet of paper (destination,
etc.) into place in his windshield.

Anil straps his helmet on.

Land Rover sits in the passenger seat of his rig arranging
the Qualcomm keyboard while, through the windshield, we see
the lead Humvee move out; Land Rover's driver hits the gas
and falls in behind the military car.

From outside we see the trucks roll out one after the next.
After every handful of trucks a military vehicle inserts
itself in the line.

The head of the convoy passes through a swing-gate into THE
GAUNTLET - a slalom course of concrete Jersey barriers with
twenty-foot blast wall on either side. They snake behind one
another, kicking up clouds of dust.

Meanwhile, back in the staging area Jim's bobtail pulls up
the rear with a final Humvee behind him.

By the time they're entering the gauntlet, Land Rover is
coming out onto a two-lane Iraqi ACCESS ROAD outside the
base.

LAND ROVER

(on his radio)

Hound Dog, this is Land Rover. Let me
know when we're all out of the wire.
Over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Out on the access road, we see the convoy stretching out. It's a bumpy, dusty road. They move slowly, about 10 miles an hour, kicking big clouds of dirt.

As Jim and the last Humvee move through the gauntlet and out onto the access road, Jim gets on his radio.

JIM
Hound Dog to Land Rover. We're all out.
You can kick it up. Over.

LAND ROVER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
Roger. We're kickin' it up.

Land Rover gives the signal to his driver and they pick up speed.

From an aerial shot we can see the whole stretch of trucks and Humvees as it snakes along the two-lane road and approaches a CLOVERLEAF to get on the highway.

LAND ROVER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
(CONT'D)
We got a parked car on the right hand
side going over the cloverleaf.

Shipp spots a parked car up with its hood up and keeps to the left as he approaches the cloverleaf.

Kenny eyes the parked car as he turns onto the cloverleaf. Over the parked car, we watch one truck and then another turn onto the cloverleaf.

Up ahead, Land Rover has come off the cloverleaf and is looking out over the lead Humvee toward a first view of Route Tampa, a wide 6-lane highway.

LAND ROVER (CONT'D)
(on his radio)
How we doin' back there, bobtail?

Jim is two trucks back from the cloverleaf.

JIM
(on his radio)
I'm coming up on the cloverleaf. Over.

Jim moves past the parked car, onto the cloverleaf and snakes around onto Tampa.

JIM (CONT'D)
(on his radio)
We're all on Tampa. Over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LAND ROVER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

Copy.

Jim is scanning the landscape, looking for anything unusual. It feels empty, just a few distant houses, a few palms, and desert.

The radio is quiet. We cut from Jim to a soldier at the wheel of the rear Humvee (with a view of the back of Jim's bobtail), then to Shipp to Anil and finally to Land Rover, who has a view toward the lead Humvee and the road up ahead.

Through Land Rover's windshield we can see a sedan coming head-on on the wrong side of the road. The gunner on the lead Humvee waves it to the right shoulder and it rolls to a stop with its flashers on.

From the point of view of the stopped car, the convoy rolls by.

LATER -

In Shipp's truck: he's got a view of the convoy ahead slowing and crossing left across the median onto the opposite side of the highway. The trucks snake across, one by one.

In Kenny's truck: he's got a view of 30-foot stretch of road that is charred black, leading to a set of black skid marks and a burned-out tanker. He follows the truck in front of him across the median onto the other side of the road.

LATER -

Back on the right side of the road, in Miguel's truck: he drinks from a bottle of water as he drives, then caps it up. We stay with him for a while, staring out the windshield as he passes a series of little stands set up by the side of the road selling cigarettes. He continues rolling.

SHIPP (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

Radio check. Radio check.

JIM (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

Check. Check.

And rolling. He approaches an overpass. Out of nowhere, a BIG ROCK comes sailing down and SMACKS the rock guard on Miguel's windshield. It scares the shit out of him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MIGUEL

Hijueputa!

(on his radio)

This is Mikey. I just got a rock from that overpass. Hit my rock guard.

SOLDIER (O.S., ON THE RADIO)

This is Mil Three. Copy that.

The gunner on a Humvee behind Miguel spots TWO KIDS running away along the overpass.

LATER -

With Shipp - rolling - watching - quiet.

With Kenny - rolling - watching - quiet.

With Land Rover - rolling - looking out the front.

With Anil - rolling - watching - quiet.

With Miguel - rolling - watching - quiet.

With Jim - rolling - watching - TAT TAT TAT TAT - the sound of SMALL ARMS FIRE.

KENNY (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

Small arms fire from the right side.

SHIPP (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

I got it on the left side, too. Over.

JIM

Keep it rolling. Keep it rolling. Go, go, go.

From inside the truck it's like a faint POPPING sound. But we don't necessarily see anything. The convoy just keeps moving straight on through.

HARD CUT to the EAR-SPLITTING sound of the .50-CAL. We're up with a gunner on a Humvee in the middle of the convoy returning fire as they continue to roll.

Cut to Miguel driving. The small arms fire tapers off. Miguel keeps driving when BOOM - an EXPLOSION hits from the right side of his truck, shattering his windshield and blowing the entire 50-ton fuel tanker over toward the median like it was made of paper.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

We cut back to Kenny's POV of Miguel's truck (up ahead)
CAREENING across the median onto the wrong side of the road.

KENNY
(on his radio)
KennyG to Mikey, are you OK? Over.

There's no answer. Miguel's truck continues to drive on the other side of the road, but he's slowing down.

With Land Rover -

LAND ROVER
(on his radio)
What happened? Is anyone hit? Anyone got a visual? Talk to me.

KENNY
(on his radio)
Mikey, can you hear me...? KennyG to Land Rover, Mikey's hit. He's on the other side of the median, still moving but appears to be slowing down.

With Jim -

JIM
(on his radio)
Hound Dog to Mikey, if you can hear me I'll be up there in a minute.

As Kenny comes up he looks across and sees that the whole front-right side of Miguel's rig is blown to hell and the truck is dropping to 10 then 5 miles an hour.

KENNY
Shit-

Kenny passes, takes a second to think, and then does what he's not supposed to: he pulls off to the right shoulder.

KENNY (CONT'D)
(on his radio)
I'm checkin' on Mikey.

LAND ROVER
(on his radio)
No, don't stop. I repeat, do not stop.
Let Hound Dog take care of it.

But Kenny is already hopping out the driver's side of his cab and waving the truck behind him to hurry up and pass.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

With Jim: he's crossing his bobtail to the other side of the road and racing up as fast as he can. Up ahead he can see Kenny running across the road.

Kenny opens Miguel's door and is confronted with a BLOODY MESS, the truck still billowing smoke. Miguel's arm is ripped apart by shrapnel - there's a gaping hole missing from his bicep. Blood spurts from his severed artery. The right side of his face has been sprayed with shrapnel as well, a deep gash below the eye, his ear half missing. He's terrified and panicking.

MIGUEL
My arm. My arm!

KENNY
It's OK. You're gonna be alright.

He leans across for Miguel's radio.

KENNY (CONT'D)
(on Miguel's radio)
KennyG to Land Rover. Mikey's arm's
ripped to hell.

With Land Rover -

KENNY (O.S., OVER THE RADIO) (CONT'D)
We need a medevac out here, now!

LAND ROVER
Copy that. I'm calling in the grid. And
we're pulling over up at RP eleven.

With Jim: a pick-up comes directly at him. Without slowing he moves left toward the shoulder and the Iraqi speeds past.

When Jim rolls up to Miguel's truck a Humvee has already pulled up. Soldiers are pulling security, tense, scanning for insurgents along the horizon. Jim crosses, with his first aid kit, to Miguel's truck.

SOLDIER #2
(yelling, frenzied)
Find a target, FIND A TARGET!

SOLDIER #3
MotherFUCKER. Where are they?!!

SOLDIER #4
I don't see squat!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Jim lends a hand as Kenny and a soldier pull Miguel from his truck. He's SCREAMING in agony. They get him down to the ground and the Army medic grabs Jim's hand and puts it directly on Miguel's gaping wound.

MEDIC

Put pressure on it.

Jim squeezes Miguel's bicep and Miguel SCREAMS. Blood pours through Jim's fingers. Jim lets go.

MEDIC (CONT'D)

(putting Jim's hand back)

Don't let go!

The medic opens his kit.

JIM

Mikey, look at me. Look at me. You're gonna be OK. They're bringing a medevac in.

MIGUEL

(legs twitching)

Hijueputa. Que DUELE!

JIM

(to the nearby soldier)

You guys got a medevac coming in?

SOLDIER #4

(to another soldier)

Cyclops. What's the ETA on the medevac?

SOLDIER #5

It's on its way.

MEDIC

OK. Move your hand.

Jim lifts his hand. Blood spurts. The medic wraps a tourniquet around and tightens it down. Miguel's dangling, shredded arm looks hopeless. His face is going to be permanently disfigured.

Jim leans away, letting the medic work.

SOLDIER #4

The two of you need to get the hell out of here. Your rigs are just making us a bigger target.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Jim clearly doesn't want to leave Miguel. He looks to Kenny then back to the soldier.

JIM
What about his truck?

CUT TO:

A flock of THIRTY SHEEP make their way along the side of the road followed by a shepherd. Jim's bobtail DRAGS Miguel's crippled rig with a ten-foot TOW BAR out from under the tanker. It makes a terrible sound, the rims of the blown tires rolling on concrete.

Miguel has been moved to the edge of the shoulder, away from his truck. A soldier stands nearby, searching for any sign of activity. The medevac chopper is audible in the distance. Kenny runs up and unhooks the tow bar and gives Jim a hand signal.

Jim backs up, around the blown-up rig, and guides his bobtail smoothly under Miguel's tanker until the kingpin bolt engages.

No sooner does he climb down from his rig, into the sheep, than A MORTAR EXPLODES fifty feet away.

SOLDIER #3
FUCK!

Instantly, the soldiers are spraying GUNFIRE blindly in the general direction where the mortar came from. Insurgent SMALL ARMS FIRE pops back at them. The medic covers Miguel with his body.

SOLDIER #3 (CONT'D)
(yelling)
Where the FUCK are they?

SOLDIER #4
God-DAMN it!

The soldier spots a WOMAN running across the field. He points his gun instinctively, but then decides not to fire.

CUT TO: An insurgent's point-of-view, about three hundred yards off, of the tankers and Humvees sitting, exposed. Another MORTAR EXPLODES near the truck, leading us to CUT BACK TO:

Jim ducking down as the explosion echoes. Sheep run past him, frightened. Kenny is isolated over by the blown-out rig, with one soldier by his side.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

SOLDIER #5
OVER THERE! The building at ten o'clock.

SOLDIER #3
LIGHT 'EM UP! LIGHT 'EM UP!

A human form (insurgent? Iraqi civilian?) runs across the field. He's mowed down instantly as the gunner on the .50-cal sprays gunfire toward the building on the horizon. Meanwhile, the medevac HELICOPTER CIRCLES, unable to land.

SOLDIER #2
(to the shepherd)
Get the fuck out. Move back.

The soldier pushes the sheep away from Miguel.

Kenny books at dead run across the thirty feet to Jim as the soldier near him provides cover fire.

More insurgent gunfire pops. The sheep run.

KENNY
(getting to Jim)
Jesus.

JIM
I gotta get the air lines on and the landing gear up.

KENNY
Just pull the pin and leave it.

Sheep move past. Jim bolts toward the airlines at the back of his rig and begins pulling them down and hooking them to the tanker. A BULLET PINGS off of Jim's rig about a foot from his elbow. He instinctively flinches but doesn't stop moving, just keeps on working. Kenny, hunched, looks up in disbelief at Jim who crosses back for the electrical line. It's as if Jim's in a zone, having completely tuned out the shooting around him.

Kenny feels compelled to run under the tanker to the landing gear on the other side and start cranking it up.

SOLDIER #5
Take out the vehicle. TAKE IT OUT!

On the horizon, a beat-up mini-van has pulled up near the building and several figures are racing toward it, while firing their AK-47s. The gunner on the .50-cal spins around and finds his target.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

JIM
(yelling)
You done?

KENNY
Gear's up. I'm takin' off.

With that, Kenny RUNS bolts across the highway toward his parked truck.

The gunner on the Humvee sprays the Iraqi gunmen and the mini-van with the .50-cal, completely ripping them apart, the noise deafening. And then he lets up. There's no movement. It's quiet except for the helicopter, hovering.

SOLDIER #5
(giving the mini-van the
finger)
FUCK YOU, mother-fucker!

Jim climbs into his rig. Kenny is pulling away. The helicopter touches down and medics jump out.

A soldier pushes a sheep out of the way of Jim's tires and the truck begins to move. As Jim rolls past the destroyed rig he looks in his side-view mirror to see the medics running toward Miguel.

JIM
(on his radio)
Hound Dog to Land Rover, Mikey is getting medevacked and I've got his tanker.
Over.

LAND ROVER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
Copy that. KennyG are you back there?
Over.

With Kenny: he sees Jim driving alongside him, on the other side of the median.

KENNY
(on his radio)
I'm back here with Hound Dog. We're on our way to you. Over.

LAND ROVER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
What the hell were you doin' pullin' off?
Over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

KENNY

(clearly rattled, on his radio)
It won't happen again. Believe me.
Over.

He puts his hand-mic in the cradle.

Back on the ground, the medevac helicopter lifts off. The two Humvees are pulled up a hundred yards in front of the Miguel's rig.

The last soldier on the ground opens the passenger side door, pulls the pin on a GRENADE, tosses it into the wrecked cab and then runs to his Humvee. He's just inside when the rig EXPLODES.

EXT. STAGING AREA, CAMP COUGAR - DUSK

Kenny and Jim are the last ones in. As Jim comes down from his truck he can't help looking for the hole left by the bullet that nearly hit him. He rubs at it and turns away.

All the drivers - American and TCN alike - circle and pat Jim and Kenny on the back as they walk in.

INT. JIM'S HOOCH, CAMP COUGAR - NIGHT

Jim comes into his hooch, a 6-by-15 foot trailer that he shares with another driver. It feels like a cross between a tiny college dorm room and a mobile home. The two desks are filled with personal items (CDs, boom box, magazines). Jim's got family photos tacked up, along with his daughter's drawings.

He falls onto his narrow bed, exhausted, rubbing at Miguel's dried blood still on his hands.

INT. BRIEFING TENT, CAMP COUGAR - DAY

The briefing tent has a plywood table up front and about ten rows of wooden benches, each long enough to seat four truck drivers. The space is filled with about 40 convoy commanders and bobtails for the morning meeting.

MAYNARD HICKS, a short, young black man with corn rows that end in beads, stands at the front of the tent, behind the table with a notebook in front of him. He has to call out loudly to be heard all the way in the back. From time to time the door at the back of the tent swings open letting in a burst of light.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAYNARD

Morning everyone. I, uh, wanna start... we're gonna begin today's meeting off with a one-minute moment of silence... in remembrance of Brad Tipton. And also to send our prayers to Mikey Lopez who was hit yesterday. So, before we do anything else, I'd like to ask everyone to bow their heads and take a moment...

Heads bow. The tent falls silent. The generator outside of the tent continues to hum.

Jim, Kenny, Land Rover and Shipp all close their eyes in thought.

During the silence we cut among the varied faces of the men – and the couple of women – in the tent. Most are white (but there's one Korean man), most in their 40s and 50s (but there's a guy who looks in his 20s and a white-haired man in his 60s). Some have a cowboy-truck driver quality to them (bandanas and weathered skin) but most look like a cross-section of ordinary Americans, skinny and overweight alike. There's a sizeable presence of American eagles and flags on the t-shirts they wear. "Dispatch" – a scrawny, black stray cat – rubs up against a driver's leg.

Outside, a semi-truck is heard rolling by in the staging area. Feet shift.

MAYNARD (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Maynard opens his notebook.

MAYNARD (CONT'D)

First order of business this morning... We're gettin' a lot of Red Cross messages – not emergency messages – just messages for guys to call home. Some of the messages we get is like (laughs) "Haven't heard from my husband in three months..." Ya know...

DRIVER

(calls out)

Do you write back, He's with his girlfriend in Thailand?

This gets a laugh, even from Maynard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MAYNARD

So if you could just call home every now and then - for those of you that tend to wait one or two months, try to cut it down to once a week or twice a week. Next. Tank inspections...

EXT. SMOKING TENT, CAMP COUGAR - DAY

The smoking area is a 15-by-15 foot canopy with benches where drivers gather to light up. People mill about after the meeting. Jim and Kenny talk off in a corner as Kenny smokes.

KENNY

Maynard say if they had any more news about Mikey?

JIM

I heard he was on his way to Germany. Heard he lost his arm.

KENNY

It's time to kick it up a notch around here. Just nuke the goddamn place if that's what it's gonna take. Start over clean.

Kenny takes a drag. Silence hangs.

KENNY (CONT'D)

(changing the subject)
You got anything special planned for R&R?

JIM

No... Just relax. Spend some quality time.

KENNY

Well I hope it rains every day you're there and you don't do nothing but bitch and fight with your wife and kids the whole time.

JIM

Fuck you.

KENNY

You have too good a time and you won't come back. I'll be stuck here with Land Rover tryin' to talk me into bobtailin' for him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM
You don't have to worry.

KENNY
(teasing)
Hey. It's an open-ended contract. You can leave anytime you want...

Jim gives Kenny the finger.

KENNY (CONT'D)
You hear about Rick Sanders? He was before you got here. Eleven months into his contract his mother died. He couldn't even go to his own mom's funeral on accounta he woulda owed seventeen thousand dollars wortha taxes for not finishin' his whole 330 days out-of-country. Just cause she died a month too early.

JIM
That's fucked up.
(beat)
...You talk to Laurel?

KENNY
Shit, she keeps goin' on about how sorry she is, how she hopes she's still my girlfriend. She ain't half as sorry as she'd be if I'da been there to catch her with that guy... I told her I might just skip R&R altogether.

JIM
You're not gonna skip it.

KENNY
Maybe I'll go to Australia like Dan. Or Dubai. Get some Russian pussy in Dubai and spend ten days in a hotel room.

JIM
Then you'll be the one doesn't come back.

KENNY
I'll just stay there and get me a nice, little harem. A international coalition of pussy.

The two of them LAUGH.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Electric doors slide open and Jim comes out with a bag over one shoulder and a suitcase in tow. At the sound of "DADDY" off screen his face lights up. He immediately bends down to hug BRANDON, 11, and SAMANTHA, 8, in a pink shirt with horses on it.

JIM
 Hey, buddy! Oh, I missed you so much.
 (hugging Samantha)
 Rrrrrra. Oh, I've been waitin' for that.

He stands and sees DANA, late-30s, a bit plump with a purse over one shoulder.

There's an awkward moment as they greet each other, as if Jim was going to kiss her on the lips but she was going to kiss him on the cheek, and so they end up with a little peck somewhere around the corner of the mouth.

JIM (CONT'D)
 Where's Joanna?

BRANDON
 Mom and her's fighting.

DANA
 (lightly chastising)
 Brandon, what did I tell you?

EXT. AIRPORT PARKING LOT - DAY

Brandon races ahead of everyone, rolling his dad's suitcase toward the family minivan. Jim's got Samantha up on his shoulders. Dana chirps the doors unlocked.

JIM
 (lifting Samantha off his
 shoulders)
 I'll drive.

DANA
 Aren't you tired?

JIM
 I want to... Come on.

DANA
 (ceding the keys)
 ...OK

INT. MINIVAN (MOVING) - DAY

It's a four-lane road. Jim's driving pretty aggressively - moving around slower cars.

Brandon is scooped forward from the back seat with his chin practically on Jim's shoulder.

DANA

Your sister called last night. Out of the blue. She started talking about driving out to visit. With the kids. I couldn't believe it.

There's an empty TV-box coming up in the right lane. Jim steers just about into the left shoulder, almost at the guardrail - way out of the way to avoid it.

DANA (CONT'D)

You can slow down a bit.

JIM

What?

DANA

You're driving like a maniac. We're not in any rush.

JIM

Hey, don't tell me how to drive.

Dana just LAUGHS at this. Which make Jim have to laugh at himself.

EXT. / INT. JAFFERTY HOUSE - DAY

Brandon and Samantha are through the front door first, followed by Dana and then Jim, pulling his suitcase.

The Jafferty house is a middle-class, suburban cracker box, cheaply constructed and filled with two sofas, a large screen TV in an entertainment unit, and animals - a tropical fish tank, a five-foot high bird cage with two green macaws, an extensive hamster run. The place just feels full of STUFF.

Jim walks up to the bird cage and taps it. Brandon clings next to him.

JIM

Hey Ralphie.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RALPH THE BIRD
(squawks)
Shut up.

JIM
You shut up.

RALPH THE BIRD
Shut up.

JIM
(calling)
Joanna! JOANNA!
(to Dana)
Where is she?

DANA
In her room, probably. Are you hungry?

Dana goes into the kitchen.

JIM
No. JOANNA!

Jim opens up the cage and gets one of the birds on his finger.

JIM (CONT'D)
D'you miss me? Huh?

JOANNA, 16, comes down the stairs. Though she has her father's baby fat she's a cute-looking girl, bare foot, in a jeans skirt and make-up. Her eyebrow is pierced.

She stays over by the stairs. Her arms folded.

JIM (CONT'D)
What the hell is that?

He puts the bird on his shoulder and walks over to poke at her eyebrow piercing.

JOANNA
(waving him off)
Nothing.

JIM
Open up.

JOANNA
No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIM
Come on. I paid for 'em. I wanna see.

She grins at him, annoyed, displaying two rows of BRACES.

JIM (CONT'D)
They hurt?

JOANNA
When they tighten 'em.

JIM
(smiling)
Good.

Joanna can't help LAUGHING.

JIM (CONT'D)
How come you didn't come to the airport?

JOANNA
... 'Cause.

DANA
(coming back in)
The dishes are still in the sink.

JOANNA
I'm gonna do 'em.

DANA
I wanted this house clean before your dad got home. Now he's home and that sink is still full of your dirty dishes.

JIM
Dana, calm down.

DANA
(to Joanna)
Get in there and do 'em.

JOANNA
OK. OK. Jesus.

Joanna stomps into the kitchen.

BRANDON
Can we go to Wal-Mart?

DANA
Not now, Bran. Dad's tired.

INT. LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

The whole family sits down to a real, home-cooked dinner: a roast with potatoes and green beans. There's a pitcher of iced tea, a basket with rolls.

DANA

Lord, thank you for the food we are about to receive. And thank you, Lord, for watching over Jim everyday, for bringing him home to us safely so that we can eat this meal together. Please continue to take care of him and bring peace to Iraq soon. Amen.

ALL

Amen.

They all dig in.

JOANNA

God this feels weird.

JIM

What's that?

JOANNA

Sitting around the table together.

BRANDON

Can we watch CSI?

DANA

Go ahead.

Brandon hops up, gets the remote and brings it back to the table and turns on CSI as they all eat.

JIM

That TV set looks small.

DANA

What are you talking about?

JIM

From all the way back here... it looks small.

INT. BASEMENT – NIGHT

His hair wet and a towel around his waist, Jim comes out of the basement bathroom and sits on the edge of a little twin bed pushed up against the wall and opens his suitcase. He rummages through his clothes – pulls out a t-shirt – and then continues to rummage for a small plastic bag. He looks inside the bag to make sure that whatever was inside it is still there.

INT. HALLWAY / BEDROOM – NIGHT

Jim knocks lightly on the bedroom door. A moment later Dana opens. She wears a long night-shirt with Tweetie bird on it.

JIM
Can I come in?

She hesitates a second and then lets him in. There is a nervous tension between them now that wasn't there when the kids were around.

DANA
You jet-lagged?

JIM
I'm OK...
(beat)
I got you something, from Iraq.

He hands her the plastic bag, unceremoniously.

DANA
What is it?

JIM
Look and see.

Dana looks inside and takes out a GOLD NECKLACE with a word written in Arabic script.

DANA
It's beautiful. What's it say?

JIM
It says "Dana" in Arabic. I got it made.

She moves to the mirror, putting it on. Jim looks at her over her shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DANA

Thank you.

Jim reaches out, brushes her hair aside and kisses her neck. She hesitates, then turns and looks at him. They kiss on the lips. Jim squeezes her ass and pulls her closer to him.

And then he's squeezing her breasts with all the pent-up energy of a guy who hasn't been laid in months. He pulls her to the bed and she collapses onto it. He lifts up the front of her night shirt, kisses her bare breasts, and then gets on top of her. And then he is inside of her.

JIM

Oh god, you feel good.

He's got his eyes closed, thrusting in and out slowly.

She has her eyes open, staring up at him, watching him. And then she begins tearing up, then crying, wiping away tears and sniffing.

He opens his eyes and sees her crying.

JIM (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

DANA

Nothing's wrong.

JIM

Why're you crying?

DANA

I don't know. It just... I don't know what's wrong with me.

He wipes the tears off her face. She tries to turn on her side. They re-arrange.

DANA (CONT'D)

I missed you so much.

JIM

Well I'm here now.

DANA

I know... I just really missed you... I'm sorry. I was really looking forward to this.

JIM

That's OK.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DANA

No, I mean - I was really looking forward to this.

The two of them lie next to each other, awkward, uncomfortable.

DANA (CONT'D)

(wiping her eyes)

I'll stop. I promise. Just give me a minute.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

The basement (with Jim's slept-in single bed) contains a very serious workshop - two walls of tools, a large work table, plastic bins full of parts, a sewing machine, several bolts of brightly colored nylon cloth.

Jim holds a tape measure to a length of 1/8" wooden dowel while Brandon makes a careful pencil mark. Jim then uses a small wood saw to cut it in two.

Jim rolls out a bolt of deep blue nylon on the carpeted floor of the workspace. As Brandon smoothes the material and Jim squats down with a pair of shears, we see in the background two HUGE HAND-MADE KITES. They're beautiful, complicated structures, works of art - Jim's obsession.

In close-up Jim puts a needle to the cloth and sews - one stitch, then another - meticulous, not rushing. And then we begin to hear the muffled sound of VOICES YELLING. Jim and Brandon ignore the sound as best they can.

Finally, Jim stops. He looks at Brandon and then goes up the half-flight of steps to the door to the house and opens it. A screaming fight rips through:

JOANNA (O.S., YELLING)

I'm not doing it!

DANA (O.S., YELLING)

Get back in here!

JOANNA (O.S., YELLING)

Pick the fucking things up yourself.

Jim winces. It's clearly a familiar sound.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

JIM

Would the two of you stop!

JOANNA

Don't tell me to stop. Tell her. She's the one screaming like a crazy woman.

DANA

Don't you talk to me that way.

JOANNA

I'm not talking to you. I'm talking to dad.

DANA

Do you want me to ground you while your father's home? Is that what you want?

JOANNA

They're a pair of shoes! It's not like I took a crap in the middle of the floor.

JIM

STOP IT! Both of you... Jesus Christ. The two of you have to learn to work this stuff out.

DANA

You've got an unmanageable child.

JOANNA

Look who's talking.

DANA

She's not going to school. She's stayin' out 'til all hours. Twice she didn't even sleep at home.

JIM

Where did you sleep?!

DANA

Where do you think?

JIM

(no clue)
Where?
(realizing)
At this guy Chad's?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOANNA

I can't take her. She's totally psycho. You don't even know what she's like when you're gone.

DANA

What is that supposed to mean?

JOANNA

She flips out over the littlest thing. I'm supposed to sit home all the time and do nothing. I'm not even allowed to go out.

DANA

Not when I'm getting calls at eleven-thirty at night on a weekday asking me to come and pick-up my daughter from some party because she and her friends have been written up for minor-in-consumption.

JOANNA

I wasn't even drinking.

DANA

I could smell it on your breath.

JOANNA

That is such a lie. (to Jim) Sheri was drinking all night 'cause her boyfriend just broke up with her. And all I did was taste her drink just to see what she was drinking, and it was super strong. And then the cops came in and they're like, Did you have anything to drink? And I said, Just a sip. And then they wrote me that ticket.

DANA

You couldn't even walk straight.

JOANNA

You're such a lying bitch.

Dana SLAPS Joanna. Joanna immediately raises her hand to hit back and Dana catches it. The two women start struggling, shoving back and forth. Jim steps in and pushes them apart.

JIM

God DAMN it!

Dana and Joanna look afraid of what Jim might do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIM (CONT'D)

Ten days. I've got ten days at home after six months away and this is what I come back to?

JOANNA

It's not my fault.

JIM

Whose fault is it then? Whose fault is it? ... I swear, I don't know what to do.

JOANNA

Do whatever you want.

Joanna storms out.

JIM

Joanna! JOANNA!

The door SLAMS off screen.

Jim looks at Dana.

DANA

She's a fucking terror. She doesn't respect me or anyone else. At all.

Exasperated, Jim moves toward the door.

DANA (CONT'D)

Don't go after her.

JIM

What am I supposed to do?

DANA

She's got you wrapped around her finger. No matter what she does.

This makes Jim furious. Instead of responding, though, he simply turns and walks out.

INT. JOANNA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Joanna's bedroom is filled with teddy bears, dried roses in a bottle, lots of framed photographs. She sits on her bed, clutching her pillow. Jim sits in a chair next to her.

JOANNA

You don't know what she's like. She sleeps all the time.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOANNA (CONT'D)

She's totally depressed. She's taking like all these different pills. She bought that stupid exercycle machine 'cause she said she had to exercise to make herself feel better because I made her life such hell. She spent four hundred dollars on that stupid thing and she used it for like a week and then I ask her for twenty dollars for something and she's like, "No. Why do you need twenty dollars?" - telling me I'm the reason you're over in Iraq and as long as I keep spending money you won't be able to come back.

JIM

Joanna, it's rough on her.

JOANNA

Why are you taking her side?

JIM

I'm not taking her side.

JOANNA

I thought you were gonna get a divorce.

JIM

(setting her straight)

No, we're supposed to be trying to work things out around here and pull it together. It pisses me off that you can't even make an effort while I'm gone.

JOANNA

I do make an effort, but she blows things out of proportion. Like the day you got home, I took a shower 'cause I wanted to get ready to go to the airport and I wanted to look nice, and I was gonna do the dishes as soon as I got out and then I come out of the bathroom and she's yelling at me, saying how I'm useless and lazy and we got in this big fight... (she starts crying) and then she just left without me. And I really wanted to go to the airport. (sobbing) And I just really wanted you there. I wanted to hug you when you came off the plane. And she just left me here.

She breaks down crying.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JOANNA (CONT'D)

I miss you so much. You don't even know.
I hate her. And you're not here... It's
not fair.

Jim takes her in his arms and rocks her.

JIM

(grasping at authority)
You are not allowed to sleep at Chad's
house. Do you hear me?

Joanna gives a sniffing nod, yes.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jim and Dana heave an ENORMOUS 72" TV SET out of a box, the old TV sitting nearby on the floor. Samantha and Brandon (in an Operation Iraqi Freedom t-shirt) watch as Jim and Dana struggle to get it into the entertainment unit.

DANA

It's too big for the cabinet.

JIM

No - just lift your end a little more...

It does, in fact, look ridiculously large. They finally slide it in, just barely.

JIM (CONT'D)

(very satisfied)
No such thing as being too big, right?

He smirks at her. She can't help laughing at the innuendo.

SAME - LATER

Jim runs cables along the edge of the carpet, tucking them in neatly.

Jim stands on a chair with a drill, mounting a bracket in the corner of the room. Brandon passes him a speaker, which he slides into place - surround sound.

Jim stands in the center of the room with MTV playing. He turns in place, eyes closed, zapping the remote to calibrate the speakers.

Jim and Brandon sit on the floor in front of the TV playing Playstation, kickboxing each other joyously.

INT. LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

The whole family is assembled. Jim loads a DVD in the tray, hits play and then sits in the middle of the couch next to Samantha and the dogs.

Joanna comes in with a big bowl of popcorn and goes to sit directly at Jim's feet.

JOANNA
Brandon, move over.

BRANDON
I was here first.

JOANNA
I don't care. Move over.

The THX logo comes on.

JIM
Shh. Shh. Shh.

The THX sound envelopes the room.

JIM (CONT'D)
How 'bout them apples.

He reaches over Joanna for a handful of popcorn and stuffs his face happily.

SAME – LATER ON

The popcorn's been devoured. Samantha is curled asleep at Jim's side. Joanna lies on the floor flipping through stations and lands on Fox News coverage of a car bombing in Iraq, dozens of Iraqi civilians killed. She stays on it for a couple seconds when –

DANA
Joanna would you change the channel,
please.

JOANNA
Why? He's home. You don't have to worry
whether he's OK.

DANA
I just don't wanna watch news about Iraq.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOANNA

Fine.

She turns the TV off.

DANA

I didn't say turn it off.

A tense beat of silence.

DANA (CONT'D)

So, you like your new TV?

JIM

I love it.

He kicks his feet up on the coffee table. Pets the dog in his lap.

BRANDON

What's it like?

JIM

What's what like?

BRANDON

Being in Iraq... Is it scary?

Dana looks nervous. Jim considers the question.

JIM

You know how you feel when you walk down a dark alley and you get all nervous. That's pretty much how it is. A lot of times nothing happens but you're just kinda nervous all the time.

BRANDON

Have you been shot at?

JIM

Yeah, I've been shot at.

Brandon takes this in.

JOANNA

What happened?

JIM

(shrugs)
Just kept on driving. It's all you can do.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIM(CONT'D)

Just mash the gas and get out of the danger zone. Last thing you ever wanna do is slow down.

JOANNA

What if somebody gets hurt? You just leave 'em there?

JIM

No. That's what I'm there for. Bobtail picks up anyone gets hit and we keep on rollin'. Bobtail's the most important job there is along with the convoy commander.

BRANDON

Did you ever shoot back?

JIM

No, we're not allowed to carry guns. Army is there to do the fighting. We're there to support the Army.

JOANNA

You don't even have guns?

BRANDON

Is it exciting?

DANA

Brandon...

JIM

Sometimes it is, yeah.

JOANNA

I think it's dumb you're over there risking your life and they don't let the drivers have guns.

JIM

It's just the way it is.

JOANNA

What if you get killed?

JIM

If it's my time then it's my time. Meantime, the entire American military depends on us doing our job. They won't show it to you on the news but we're making things better over there. I'm proud to be a part of that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Dana hates listening to this – she's certainly heard it before.

JOANNA

Proud enough to die for it?

JIM

Our freedom has a price... Besides, you know how many people die in traffic accidents every day in America? All the drunk drivers on the road, I probably have better chances of staying alive over there than I do here.

DANA

That's a bit of an exaggeration, don't you think?

BRANDON

Did you ever see any dead Iraqis?

DANA

Brandon.

An uncomfortable silence.

INT. HOME OFFICE, JAFFERTY HOUSE – DAY

Jim sits at the desk, with bills spread out. Dana sits at the corner of the desk.

DANA

Don't accuse me.

JIM

I'm not accusing you. I'm just saying, it's double what I was making before. I don't understand where it's going.

DANA

Fixing the bathroom. Joanna's braces... It's not like I'm going out and buying a two-thousand dollar TV, which we don't need by the way.

JIM

What's with that exercycle?
(she doesn't answer)
Do you even use it?

DANA

I use it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

At this rate I'll be in Iraq forever.

DANA

Don't make out like some kind of martyr. Playin' hero with your buddies over there while I'm stuck tryin' to hold everything together on my own.

JIM

I'm over there trying to keep this family together.

DANA

(laughs)

That is biggest load of crap I have ever heard. We're half separated and you're moved into the basement and then you all of a sudden decide, without asking me or anyone else, that the answer to all our problems is you going off to Iraq.

JIM

Well, it's better than than me driving over here. All I have to do is stay over there six more months and we can get enough money to wipe the slate clean and I don't have to keep driving all the time.

DANA

Six months? Samantha cries herself to sleep. Every night. You think Brandon's fine cause he's happy when you're here. But as soon as you leave he turns in on himself. His teacher is saying he might have to repeat fifth grade.

JIM

Since when?

DANA

Joanna's practically in jail. Another six months and you won't have a family to come back to.

JIM

Now you're just exaggerating.

DANA

What if you get shot?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIM

I can't talk to you when you're like this.

He gets up.

DANA

That's it? You're just gonna walk away?

JIM

What do you expect me to do? Do you want me to stay here? We always agreed all you had to do was say the word and I'd come home.

DANA

(exasperated)

I'm not gonna be the one to say you have to come home and then you're hating me for it forever. You're the one that has to decide.

He takes a breath – frustration, remorse and helplessness all mixing together.

INT. SAMANTHA'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Jim lies awake on top of his daughter's bed. Samantha is asleep under the covers, snuggled up to him. And Brandon is asleep on the other side of her. The way the three of them are arranged it's as if both kids are clinging to their dad.

Jim stares into space – his face buried in the back of his daughter's head – thinking, trying to work it all out. He's clearly torn by the situation.

After a beat he looks at the Barbie-clock on Samantha's nightstand (next to her collection of little plastic horses): it's 4:30 am. Slowly, he gets out of the bed, being extra careful not to wake either of the kids up.

Before leaving he kisses them each lightly on the head. As he does, he pinches back tears.

INT. BASEMENT – MORNING

Jim – dressed, hair wet – shuts his suitcase and zips it up.

INT. HALLWAY / JOANNA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Jim knocks lightly on Joanna's door. He waits. He turns the door knob and steps in quietly. Joanna is asleep.

JIM
(from the doorway)
Joanna.

JOANNA
(not opening her eyes)
What?

JIM
It's almost six. I'm going.

JOANNA
(into her pillow)
Bye.

She turns over and pulls the sheets up over her head. Jim looks dissatisfied. He steps back out and sees: SAMANTHA standing at the end of the hallway.

JIM
What are you doing up?

She runs and throws herself at his legs, holding onto them. He lifts her up and hugs her tight.

JIM (CONT'D)
Dadda loves you. I'll be back soon. I promise.

INT. VAN (MOVING) - MORNING

Dana drives. Jim rides shotgun. Neither of them says a word.

He glances over to Dana. Her eyes are damp - she keeps them glued to the road.

Jim sees her right hand resting on her leg. He reaches out and takes it in his. Squeezes.

Dana looks over. They share a beat - he's trying to reach out to her, let her know it'll be OK. She lets go of his hand to wipe her eyes and stares ahead at the road.

Jim looks at the trees. The green. The colors he won't see again for a while.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

When we cut back to Jim staring out the window, he's wearing a HELMET and a KEVLAR VEST. And he's sitting in the passenger seat of a truck. Rolling through Iraq. It's almost as if all of R&R was just a dream.

The Iraqi landscape is dusty and pale. Desert dry.

INT. JIM'S HOOCH, CAMP COUGAR - NIGHT

Jim opens the door of his hooch and comes in with his bags, struggling a little for the lack of space. The place feels smaller than it did before.

He gets bottled up between his rolling suitcase, his roommate's bed, the desk and the bag on his shoulder. He trips and struggles for a second and then just throws it all to the floor.

INT. MORALE, WELFARE, RECREATION ROOM, CAMP COUGAR - NIGHT

An old episode of Everybody Loves Raymond plays on the large TV.

KENNY

HEY! Look who's back!

Kenny and Jim HUG - a big manly hug that feels really, really good.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Wasn't sure if you were comin' back.

JIM

Fuck you!

KENNY

What'd you bring me?

Jim produces a vacuum sealed side of meat and gives it to him.

JIM

Dana cooked a couple roasts and vacuum sealed 'em.

KENNY

What a woman.

INT. KENNY'S HOOCH, CAMP COUGAR - NIGHT

Kenny's desk and the shelf above are crammed with STUFF - tools, rolls of tape, books, a laptop computer, small speakers. There's a Bush/Cheney sticker on the window. He has clearly been here a while and made himself at home.

KENNY

Ben Updike's convoy got hit outside of Taji. Frank Pierce took a IED. Piece of shrapnel took out his right eye... Things been heatin' up.

JIM

Shit.

KENNY

Must be nice having someone to cook you potroasts on R&R.

JIM

(not enthusiastic)

Uh huh.

KENNY

R&R was that good, huh?

JIM

Samantha and me went horseback riding three different times. You should see how she handles the horse. For a kid her size...?

KENNY

Just don't tell me you spent ten days sleeping in the basement.

JIM

Got a new TV. Seventy-two-inch flat screen.

KENNY

Plasma?

JIM

(pained)

LCD.

(off Kenny's look)

Don't get me started... You're lucky I'm here talking to you. I don't know what she expects me to do.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM(CONT'D)

If she had her way I probably wouldn't be back here right now.

KENNY

Did she say the magic word?

JIM

No, but she was crying - saying how she couldn't keep the family together all by herself. Saying how she feels like I abandoned her...

KENNY

(impressed, envious in a way)
...She really wants you home.

Jim takes a beat.

JIM

(conflicted)

Then I get here and half of me thinks what the hell am I doing over here... but then I see the trucks and I see your ugly face, it feels good to be back. It's a crazy thing to say...

KENNY

(opens his arms)

I love you too, honey.

(beat)

Hey - guess what I did while you were gone.

JIM

What?

KENNY

Decided I'm gonna re-up. Year three... Maybe they'll give me a diploma.

JIM

Are you serious?

KENNY

Free room and board, all-I-can-eat buffet every night. I'm sockin' it away. What more could a guy ask for?

Something in what Kenny's saying burns a hole in the pit of Jim's stomach.

INT. BRIEFING TENT, CAMP COUGAR - DAY

Everyone's assembled for the morning briefing. Jim sits near the back as Maynard leads the meeting.

MAYNARD

We have an issue with TCNs not having helmets and vests. If you're responsible for checking out your TCN drivers when they leave their camp make sure each one of them has their helmet and vest so no-one has to go running back to the shed at the last minute, holding up the push.

As Maynard talks Jim looks around at the faces of the other men - like he's not really paying attention to what's being said - he's just looking at this microcosm - feeling apart from it.

INT. MAYNARD'S OFFICE, CAMP COUGAR - DAY

Maynard's office is a twelve-by-twelve trailer which he shares with three other administrative staff. His desk and walls are filled with memos and schedules.

JIM

But they're not pushing until one o'clock.

MAYNARD

The convoy's already formed. It's been formed since you went on R&R.

JIM

Who's bobtailing?

MAYNARD

Hank Bolton. You're going out tomorrow, driving a truck to TQ under Star Gazer. When you get back you'll be bobtailing with Ron Ambrose.

JIM

Why can't Bolton bobtail for Ron?

MAYNARD

Because.

JIM

Because why?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAYNARD

(glares at him)

Because that's the way it is. There's nine hundred drivers in this task order. Things get changed around when you go on R&R.

JIM

Since when is Star Gazer even a convoy commander, anyway?

MAYNARD

Since tomorrow.

JIM

You're sending me on some guy's first run as CC? Does he even know what he's doing?

MAYNARD

You open your mouth one more time and I'll put you drivin' Mogas for him. Now get out of here. I've got work to do.

Jim takes a beat, and then heads to the door.

MAYNARD (CONT'D)

(calling after him)

Jim!

Maynard tosses him a set of keys.

EXT. STAGING LOT, CAMP COUGAR - DAY

Jim unlocks the door of a fuel truck and climbs in.

He sits in the driver's seat of his new truck. There are no personal touches of anyone's. He looks up at the cubby holes over head and pulls down a sunworn box that's been left behind - a Haji MRE (a halal Meal Ready to Eat).

He looks over at the radio, lifts it out of its cradle. Jostles it. He pulls out of his jacket pocket his two family photos (with old loops of tape on the back) and presses them to the dashboard. And then he also pulls out his little TOY HORSE and finds a place for it near the radio.

He puts the key in the ignition and starts the engine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

We stay with him, looking through the lattice rock-guard on the windshield as Jim pulls forward, driving through the lot - past the briefing tent - out through an opening in a line of Hesco barriers.

He goes down a dirt road and then turns into the INSPECTION AREA - a dirt lot with lanes marked off by Jersey barriers. He pulls all the way up to a small tent with a desk, a bridge chair and a guy in an orange vest. Jim kills the engine and gets out.

JIM
How you doin' Red?

Red is a black guy, about forty with early signs of gray in his hair. Jim hands him a piece of paperwork.

RED
Haven't seen you in a while.

JIM
I was on R&R.

RED
Welcome back.

The two of them walk around the truck. Red inspects the trailer, checking for any cracks or signs of stress. When they get back up to the front end Red signs the paperwork and hands it back to Jim.

JIM
Thanks.

INT. JIM'S TRUCK (MOVING), CAMP COUGAR - DAY

Back in the truck with Jim driving into the BAG FARM, moving alongside of a sandy berm toward a line of five other tankers.

There's an empty spot in the middle of the line of tankers which Jim pulls into. A TCN in an orange jumpsuit, head scarf and goggles appears (looking like an alien) out of a plywood shed.

Jim gets out and hands the TCN his paperwork. The TCN walks over to a large spigot with a thick fuel line attached, picks up the end of the fuel line and hooks it up to the side of Jim's tanker.

Jim, meanwhile, walks to the back of the tanker and climbs up the ladder to the top.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Up on top of the tanker, he opens the hatch to release the fuel vapors and equalize the interior pressure as the first gallons of JP8 (jet fuel) gush inside.

From up on top of his rig Jim has a view of the other half-dozen drivers standing on top of their tankers – some of them American, some TCNs with salwar kameez blowing in the wind. There's a view of the million-gallon "bag" of fuel sitting inside a square berm of sand. And there's a view of the rest of the camp. It's as open a view as one gets inside the camp. Listening to the sound of his tanker filling and feeling the sandy wind in his face, Jim begins to appreciate being back at work. It's a good feeling.

At the SEALING AREA Jim stands down on the ground, off to the side as a two-person team checks the purity of the fuel. One man – up on top of the rig – puts a meter through the open hatch into the fuel and calls off –

SEALING INSPECTOR

Eight point thirty-four.

His partner below records the number on the paper work. The man up top closes the hatch and places a tamper-proof seal on it.

Back in his truck, Jim drives along the back of various lines of parked tankers, and then turns into a lane, pulling all the way forward, behind another tanker and boxed in on either side by two other convoy lines.

He climbs out of his rig and walks away, down the narrow passage between the lines of fuel tankers.

INT. PHONE TRAILER, CAMP COUGAR – NIGHT

Jim is on the phone. There are about 10 TCNs at the phones on either side of him.

JIM

(exasperated)

Well what happened? ... Well you must have done something? Jesus... I'm not the one that got in a fight with her? ... Well have you tried calling her on her cell phone?

JUMP CUT:

Jim dials the phone. He listens to it ring. And ring.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM (CONT'D)

Joanna, it's dad. I don't know what's going on but mom says you didn't come home last night. I thought we had an agreement here. I'm very angr - (he stops himself) I wanna talk about what's going on here. Whatever's going on we can talk it through... (not sure what else to say) I'm pushing out soon. Just - send me an email, I guess. I'll call you as soon as I get in tomorrow night. But I want you to go home. I don't want you sleeping at Chad's. Do you underst -

Suddenly he's cut off, his voicemail message too long.

He hangs up and sits there feeling completely frustrated.

INT. JIM'S HOOCH, CAMP COUGAR - NIGHT

Jim's ALARM clock goes off at 4:30 am. He shuts it off. Sits up, groggy. His hooch-mate (whoever it is) rolls over in the dark.

INT. HOOCH BATHROOMS - NIGHT

Jim (wet hair combed back) brushes his teeth and rinses. He stands in front of the mirror and rolls his head from side to side, cracking his neck.

INT. HOOCH - NIGHT

Back in his hooch - dressed - Jim has all sorts of stuff laid out on his bed: a maglight, a change of clothing, toiletries, his laptop, DVDs, 2 MREs, a couple packs of beef jerky, bottles of water, a small first aid kit...

He opens up a large black backpack - his "bug-out bag" - and begins packing.

JUMPCUT: He arranges his ID papers (folded in quarters) - slips them into their plastic pouch. He loops the neck string over his head and drops the pouch under the collar of his shirt.

EXT. ICE REEFER, STAGING AREA, CAMP COUGAR – PRE-DAWN
DARKNESS

The staging lot is dark, the pre-dawn sky just getting blue. In the deep background we can see the office (a trailer) with a fluorescent light glowing, and a few drivers walking through the lot.

Jim - his bug-out bag over one shoulder - climbs up the steps into the back of a refrigerated truck (with a fluorescent interior light, motor humming) FILLED with bags of ICE. He tears open a three foot bag and pulls out 2 smaller one-pound bags.

From the WATER TRAILER he grabs a shrink-wrapped cube of 20 1-liter bottles of water.

He crosses the staging lot with his arms full, the sky getting a little lighter.

Standing on the step of the open passenger door of HIS RIG, Jim dumps the second bag of ice into a blue plastic ice chest, which is strapped into the seat. He then tears open the plastic on the bottles of water, removes four of them, and crunches them into the ice.

He shuts the ice chest, grabs one more bottle of water, and then climbs down.

EXT. JIM'S TRUCK, COUGAR STAGING AREA – DAWN (CONTINUOUS)

The color of the desert sunrise is spectacular as it lights up the long rows of trucks in the sandy lot.

Jim walks to the BATTERY at the back of his rig. He flips it open, cracks the water bottle and then fills up the battery, checking the level. He recloses the battery, tightens the cap on the bottle and then wedges the half-full bottle under a strap so it rides right next to the battery.

From there, he does a final walk-around, inspecting his truck, giving his tires a kick.

As he comes around his truck he spots someone coming toward him with a clipboard.

JIM
You Star Gazer?

STAR GAZER
John?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

Jim.

STAR GAZER

Jim, right.

They shake hands. STAR GAZER is about 50 or 55 and looks more like the night manager of Sears than combat-sturdy truck driver.

JIM

We gettin' ready to do the pre-trip?

STAR GAZER

Not quite. We had two TCNs that turned out to have bad tires. They just went over to maintenance.

JIM

Why didn't anyone catch it yesterday at inspection?

STAR GAZER

Yeah, I don't know. They oughta be back in a bit. They're re-doin' the push order.

JIM

So what time are we pushing?

STAR GAZER

Don't know yet. I'll let you know as soon as I do, though.

Star Gazer steps on down the line.

JIM

Shit.

INT. JIM'S RIG, STAGING AREA, CAMP COUGAR - MORNING

Jim drops the sleeper inside of his rig, unrolls the mat and lies down for a little shut-eye.

INT. JIM'S RIG, STAGING AREA, CAMP COUGAR - LATER

Jim snores - deep asleep.

Someone BANGS on his door and he wakes abruptly, disoriented. He looks at his watch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM
(to himself)
Jesus...

He climbs forward into his driver's seat and opens the door. A driver we haven't seen before stands there. This is JAKE NASH (a.k.a. BLACKJACK) – a skinny man with a bony jaw and an American Eagle bandana around his neck.

JIM (CONT'D)
(looking down)
Hey.

NASH
We got a push time. It's thirteen hundred.

JIM
Are you shittin' me?

NASH
No, sir.

JIM
(sighs)
Alright... You runnin' bobtail?

NASH
Sure am.

JIM
Jim Jafferty.

NASH
Jake Nash. Call sign's Blackjack.

They shake. Nash moves on. Jim pulls his door closed and sits there staring at the back of the truck in front him through the rock-guard plated windshield – still a little groggy.

Jim unzips his bag and pulls out his laptop and then a couple DVDs. He opens the computer and as it boots up he looks out the side window: a group of TCNs is gathered by the side of a truck. One of them perches, bird-like, on top of a Jersey barrier.

He looks at the DVDs trying to decide what to watch and then gets a better idea. He clicks on his Mail program, selects "Work Offline" and begins to type an email, "Dear Joanna..."

EXT. STAGING AREA, CAMP COUGAR – DAY

The weather has clouded over. Everyone is assembled by the front of the caravan for the pre-trip briefing – Star Gazer, Nash, Jim and two other American drivers with 15 TCN drivers and 2 Army soldiers from their military escort (one of whom looks barely 18).

It's starting to rain.

STAR GAZER

Keep your speed up but keep a proper following distance. Be sure to pull your Kevlar curtains all the way shut...

He's talking to the TCNs like they were kindergartners. It's hard to tell whether they even understand what he's saying but those who do have probably heard this a hundred times.

STAR GAZER (CONT'D)

Remember, if anything happens to another driver do not stop, do not get out. Just keep on going to the next rally point. Is that clear? It looks like it's starting to rain so let's drive carefully.

(looks to the military)

Today we're going to TQ. We'll be taking Route Jackson...

JIM

Aw shit... In the rain?

STAR GAZER

And then we're gonna cut over to MSR Tampa when we get up near Baghdad. Intel's saying things are heating up north of Deerfield – and we had two IEDs yesterday around RP 14. So keep your eyes open. Has everyone signed the sheet?

He holds up the clipboard. The rain is coming down.

STAR GAZER (CONT'D)

OK. That's it.

Everyone disperses, the TCNs running back to their trucks. Star Gazer starts to take off, too.

JIM

Hey, you wanna know my call sign?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Star Gazer turns back, clipboard over his head in the rain.

STAR GAZER

Yeah.

JIM

It's Hound Dog.

STAR GAZER

OK.

They turn and walk separate ways.

JIM

(muttering)

Jackass.

INT. JIM'S TRUCK, STAGING AREA, CAMP COUGAR - DAY

His Kevlar vest and helmet strapped on, Jim reaches into his extra-large bottle of Tums and pops a couple in his mouth.

He pulls the Kevlar curtain fully shut on the driver's side - pulls it back for a second to check something in the side view mirror - then shuts it all the way.

He starts up his truck and flips on the windshield wipers.

EXT. STAGING AREA, CAMP COUGAR - DAY

The rain comes down turning the sand to thick MUD.

The lead Humvee heads out. Star Gazer and his driver pull out behind him. We PAN with the second truck as it passes to see that it's Jim's. And HOLD as the rest of the convoy trails him, a military Humvee occasionally inserting itself into the file.

EXT. ROUTE JACKSON - DAY

Route Jackson is much smaller than MSR Tampa was. This is a two-lane road with not a lot of shoulder. And it's bumpy, potholes from past explosions.

The convoy rolls in the rain. It's a miserable sight. Mud clogs the road and turns the shoulder to soup. They don't move very fast.

The gunner in the lead Humvee is up at his .50-cal in the rain. Because it's a narrower road there's more traffic.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The gunner waves on-coming cars to the side of the road where they sit with their wipers and hazard lights on.

Further along, we get a view of the rear Humvee with its gunner facing backward. A sign on the back of the Humvee reads: "Caution stay 100 meters back or you will be shot" - in English and in Arabic. There's a line of traffic staying 100 meters behind our slow-moving caravan.

EXT. ROUTE JACKSON - DAY

The rain has let up now. The convoy moves a little faster.

Jim polishes off a bottle of water and throws it aside. A Blackhawk helicopter cuts through the air overhead and crosses into the distance.

Out his window Jim's got slightly different views than we saw on MSR Tampa. There are more houses. We pass farms. A herd of CAMELS.

The convoy rides on the left side of the road, passing a long line of cars on the right that eventually leads to an IRAQI POLICE CHECK POINT (a couple barricades and a handful of Iraqi police) - which the American trucks blow right past.

LATER -

In the open country, the convoy creeps, one truck at a time, over a narrow, temporary bridge, crossing a wide river with lush vegetation on either side.

INT. JIM'S TRUCK / IRAQI TOWN - DAY

The convoy moves tediously around a traffic circle, crossing traffic, into an Iraqi town. Our two-lane has become Main Street. Traffic slows to a crawl.

The lead Humvee tries to wave oncoming traffic to the side of the road but that just makes things worse. Cars pass in the opposite direction right alongside the convoy.

For the first time, we get views of IRAQI STREET LIFE: a donkey cart loaded with tomatoes. A pick-up truck with sheep in the back. A car-seat vendor with a dozen CAR SEATS sitting in lines by the side of the road.

As he drives Jim fixes his attention on all the places an insurgent might be hiding - a second-floor balcony, a narrow alley-way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He sees a shady looking man watching the convoy pass and talking on his cell phone (informing a fellow-insurgent up ahead?). Kids BANG on Jim's slow-moving cab (scaring the shit out of us) and put out their hands for candy, then move on.

Up at the front of the convoy we can see the GUNNER of the lead Humvee YELLING at a car blocking the intersection:

GUNNER

GO! GO, you mother-fuckin' son-of-a-Haji
bitch. MOOOOVE!

The Humvee RAMS the car forward and out of the way, allowing the truck convoy to push on through - dominating the road.

EXT. ROUTE JACKSON - DAY

The convoy rolls through open territory. Moving steadily. Jim adjusts his helmet, trying to scratch at his sweating scalp.

The convoy moves left away from an animal carcass on the right shoulder. The mood throughout the drive is one of steady, unrelenting tension. The truck ahead of Jim's brakes.

JIM

Fuck.

He slows. And slows. And then STOPS.

From outside, we see the entire 20-truck convoy come to a complete stop in the middle of the desert. There's no traffic in the other direction. The road is empty. They just sit there.

STAR GAZER (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

Blackjack this is Star Gazer. We've got a disposal team further up the road removing an IED. Looks like we're gonna be stopped here a while. Over.

JIM

(to himself)
Now you tell us.

NASH (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)

Roger Star Gazer.

Jim waits. Like a sitting duck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The engine continues to run. The noise of it creates a weird sensation – not being able to hear the world right outside. Jim scooches the Kevlar curtain back and takes a peek, as if checking over his shoulder. He faces forward and places a hand idly in front of the AC vent.

SAME – LATER

Empty landscape. It seems utterly desolate.

Up on top of a Humvee in the middle of the convoy, a gunner watches – listless, paranoid. He eyes three older men standing by the side of the road looking at the convoy.

GUNNER #2

I'm watching you... I'm watching you,
watching me...

In his truck, Jim taps on his laptop, revising his email to Joanna – then stops, unable to concentrate. He checks his watch and then pulls the Kevlar curtain aside and gazes out again.

Out of nowhere, figures emerge. About four kids coming toward the opposite side of the road. They hold out their arms.

Jim sets his laptop aside and goes into his bag and pulls out an MRE. He pulls back his Kevlar curtain, opens his door and, as best he can, tosses the MRE out.

It lands in the middle of the road. The kids race up, take it, and race back to the side of the road where they tear it open and divvy it up.

Jim watches for a beat, and then Boom – a dull thudded explosion pulls Jim's attention forward. Up in the distance a small cloud of smoke rises.

AERIAL SHOT – the convoy moves along at a steady pace now, spread out over a good half-mile of the two lane.

From on the ground, the line of trucks blows by, one after another.

In his cab, Jim drives, adjusting his vest, which is making him sweat, when TAT TAT TAT TAT TAT – the sound of SMALL ARMS FIRE. Star Gazer's truck begins leaking out the right side – PING – a shot cracks Jim's 2-inch thick windshield and we can hear shots trailing toward the back of his truck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Star Gazer moves into the on-coming lane. He's leaking fuel onto the road.

JIM
 (on his radio)
 Hound Dog to Star Gazer. You're leaking out the right side. And I think I'm hit too, but still rolling. Over.

There's no answer.

JIM (CONT'D)
 (on his radio)
 Hound Dog to Star Gazer. You there? You're leaking out the right side. Over.

Which is when Jim sees it: an RPG flying in laterally from the right side of the road.

JIM (CONT'D)
 Shit.
 (on his radio)
 Star Gazer. You got an RPG incoming. You see it? Over. Star Gazer—

The RPG SLAMS into the side of Star Gazer's truck in front of him and... NOTHING.

The truck regains control and keeps going, fuel now pouring out the entrance hole of the RPG.

JIM (CONT'D)
 Hound Dog to Star Gazer. Radio check. Radio check... I don't know if you can hear me but I think you're carrying that RPG in your -

BOOM. Star Gazer's tank EXPLODES... and keeps going, a rolling ball of flames, spilling burning fuel that's lighting up the 100 yards between it and Jim's truck. Jim sees the flames coming and steers into the on-coming lane.

He hits the gas to speed up as Star Gazer's flame-engulfed truck slows and moves to the right. Jim's coming up on it. There's nothing but a THICK CLOUD OF BLACK SMOKE completely obscuring his view beyond.

Jim - doing about 50 MPH - passes through the smoke. He catches a passing glimpse of the soldiers in the lead Humvee dismounting when, through the smoke, he sees a car stopped on the road in front of him and he swerves back into the right lane.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He can hear the sound of SMALL ARMS FIRE and he presses down further on the gas - his speedometer climbing past 60. The sound of a distant explosion behind us leads us to CUT BACK TO -

the third truck in the convoy, which was behind Jim, as it gets hit by an IED right at the point between its rig and its trailer. The driver (a TCN) slams on the brakes, skidding and fishtailing on the slick surface, and then JACKKNIFING on its left side.

The whole truck - all 50 tons of it - scrapes and scrapes along the road as it slides toward Star Gazer's burning truck, sparks from the scraping metal igniting - until the whole thing SLAMS into Star Gazer's truck and EXPLODES in another ball of flames.

The fourth truck - a TCN driver - tries at the last second to go around the mess, steering off road, but the embankment is too steep and his truck turns over and rolls onto its side.

INT. JIM'S RIG - SAME TIME

Jim drives on. Pedal to the metal. Trying to get out of the kill zone.

He looks down at his radio, grabs it.

JIM

(on his radio)

Hound Dog to Blackjack. Can you hear me?
I'm still going. I couldn't see Star
Gazer when I went past but he was hit
bad. I'm heading to the next rally
point. Over.

He waits for an answer. Nothing.

JIM (CONT'D)

(on his radio)

Radio check. Blackjack, can you hear me?
Can anybody hear me? I'm driving ahead
to the next rally point. Over.

No response.

JIM (CONT'D)

Damn.

He stares ahead. The road in front of him is clear.

He sneaks back the Kevlar curtain and tries to see into his side view mirror.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

All he can make out is a far-off plume of black smoke receding into the distance. Instinctively, he reaches for his TOY HORSE and clutches it as he drives.

EXT. ROUTE JACKSON, CRASH SITE - SAME TIME

Star Gazer's truck and the third truck blaze.

Because of the way they've landed the road is completely BLOCKED.

The remainder of the convoy - 16 trucks - sit like ducks waiting to get shot. The bobtail races up the opposite side of the road to get to the crash site.

Soldiers pull security, shooting into the desert in both directions.

And then slowly, what is now the lead truck creeps forward and begins to...? To make a 3-point turn?

AERIAL SHOT - with the road entirely blocked the convoy begins laboriously to turn around - 18-wheel trucks making 3-point - more like 7- or 9-point - turns...

...the aerial shot drifts up the road - over the burning wrecks, over the empty road - continuing over nothingness - just empty road - until at last we find JIM'S TRUCK, alone, speeding ahead.

And from up above we can see something we hadn't seen before: FIRE coming off the tanker of Jim's truck.

INT. JIM'S TRUCK - SAME TIME

Jim yells into his radio.

JIM
 (into his radio)
 COME ON GODDAMN IT. SOMEBODY ANSWER ME!
 (to himself)
 FUCK!!

He keeps driving.

Outside his truck the flames are spreading, engulfing all sides of the tanker.

Jim pulls back his Kevlar curtain again to see if anybody's behind him and he now sees BLACK SMOKE coming off the back of his truck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

Christ.

He splits his attention between the road and the mirror trying to get a better look. And then he sees FLAMES licking at the side of his rig.

JIM (CONT'D)

Fuck!

He faces front and steers toward the right shoulder and BRAKES.

The flaming truck SLOWS to a halt.

Jim gets his curtain back, whips open his door, and RACES out of his truck and across the road. He's just getting to the other shoulder when he stops, realizing he's forgotten his bag.

JIM (CONT'D)

Shit!

He turns back to his rig just as it EXPLODES. He shields his face from the fireball and moves down into the DITCH across the road.

From down in the ditch Jim can hear his truck burning.

He peeks his head up and looks. The whole tank is blazing.

He scrunches back down, trying to get his breath, running his hand across his face to wipe the sweat away. Thinking what to do.

He looks up again at his burning truck. He looks back down the road: way off in the distance a plume of smoke rises. And then he sees something else: A group of about five teenagers running up to his smoking truck.

The kids circle the truck, gawking. One of them climbs in the driver-side door that he left open, looting the still-burning truck. The kid comes back out with Jim's bug-out bag. The other kids circle around and they start tearing at the bag's contents. One of the kids excitedly pulls away with Jim's LAPTOP. Another claims the flashlight. A third kid gets a bottle of water.

It is only now that Jim realizes he's been tightly clutching his TOY HORSE this whole time. He slips it into his jeans pocket and sinks back down into the ditch. He spots a sort of brick shed about forty yards away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He opens the small velcro case on his belt and removes a BOWIE KNIFE. He opens the five-inch blade and, knife in hand, he runs low and fast to the shed. It feels like forever. The sound of his boots on the ground seems huge.

When he finally gets to it, the shed turns out to be an outhouse. The smell is apparent on Jim's face. It's about four by four feet and six feet high with a ceramic-plated hole in the ground and a few plastic pitchers inside.

Jim ducks half-inside and turns back to his truck. More kids have circled. Three men are loosening the lugs on the one steer-tire that isn't melted, placing bricks under the axle, and working the tire free from the still-burning truck.

THE SUN beats down on Jim in his Kevlar vest and helmet. Flies buzz. The truck continues to burn.

JIM (CONT'D)

Come on...

He waits. Gripping his knife. Swatting at flies. There is no traffic at all coming from the south.

He turns inside the outhouse, picks up one of the empty pitchers, examines it, and then tosses it down. He takes off his helmet and runs his hand through his hair, scratching his sweating scalp.

He hears the sound of a truck and turns outside to see: a three-axle Iraqi truck backed up to his rig and pulling at it with chains until the tractor comes free of the trailer. The front end of the smoldering tanker smashes down to the ground, and the Iraqi truck drives away at about 10 miles an hour towing the rig behind it (as it rolls horrifically on its rims).

Jim watches grimly. He looks at his watch. Flies continue to buzz. Otherwise, everything is very quiet - a quiet that makes him feel very alone.

He peers out and around the edge of the outhouse: about two hundred yards off there's a low, long building that looks half abandoned.

Jim looks back at the road. He's clearly losing hope that anyone is coming for him. He stares at the patch of daylight through the make-shift window (gap) along the top of the outhouse. The little space feels like a cell. SUDDENLY, he's startled by a boy (RAED), about 10 years old, who is coming in. Raed stops abruptly. He stares at Jim. Jim stares at him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Raed says something in Arabic questioningly. Jim comes just out of the outhouse.

JIM (CONT'D)
(indicating the outhouse)
Go ahead.

But Raed's not coming any closer. He says something else and points to the burning truck. Jim sighs and nods.

JIM (CONT'D)
Yeah, and you tell anyone you saw me and
I'll kill you.

Raed is clueless. He clutches his crotch, needing to pee.

JIM (CONT'D)
(waving him in)
Go ahead. I won't do anything.

Raed dashes inside.

Jim squats at the side of the outhouse, hearing Raed pee. He wipes the sweat off his forehead, swats at flies. His throat sounds parched. The sun bears down.

Raed comes back out and they stare at one another. Raed says something unintelligible.

JIM (CONT'D)
(getting an idea)
You got any water? Water?

Jim makes a drinking motion and adds a few glugs.

JIM (CONT'D)
Water? ... Pepsi?

RAED
Pepsi.

JIM
Yeah, drink...

Jim mimes again. Raed stares at him and then turns sharply and runs off, around the other side of the outhouse. Jim skinnies up to the corner and looks to see where Raed has gone: into the half-abandoned building.

Jim pulls back in and considers what he saw, then moves to get another look.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

He's focusing on a CAR parked off to the side, in the distance. He's calculating how far off it is, judging where it is in relation to some kids who have gone back to playing soccer. He's thinking about making a dash for it, when he sees... RAED walking back from the building in his direction. As the boy gets closer Jim can see that he is carrying A GLASS OF WATER, trying not to spill any as he walks as fast as he can. He gets all the way to Jim and gives him the glass of water.

JIM (CONT'D)
(in slight disbelief)
Thanks.

He takes a cautious first sip, as if testing it, and then drinks the water down almost in one swallow. He passes the glass back to Raed.

JIM (CONT'D)
Car keys?

Raed looks blank.

JIM (CONT'D)
Yeah, I didn't think so.

Jim moves to the corner of the outhouse and peers at the car. And then suddenly he's off, moving quickly across the open space, step after step - it's about sixty yards. Half-way there he looks over his shoulder at the soccer game - it hasn't stopped. He keeps going. And finally he gets to the car, a Caprice painted orange and white, probably once a taxi. He reaches into the open rear window, unlocks the driver's door and slips inside the front seat, slinking down immediately.

He pulls at the plastic under the steering wheel. It resists him at first, but he grabs it with two hands and wrenches it free. He finds a bundle of wires - fifteen thin, colored lines.

JIM (CONT'D)
Fuck.

It's clear that Jim doesn't know what he's doing. He tries to separate the wires, tries to see which ones lead to the ignition, but they all seem to. He tries to yank the wires but they won't come free. So he opens his knife, cuts two wires and then immediately realizes he'll have to strip them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

He's trying to strip one but it's impossibly small and his knife is too big and his hands are too clumsy and he's sweating and he's struggling and the wire is slipping and it's probably not even the right wire and he's cussing and swearing - trying in vain to hot wire a car that probably doesn't even work and probably doesn't have any gas and the whole thing seems completely fucked and so suddenly he's hitting the dash with his fist and then with his helmet - over and over, throwing a tantrum at the car.

And then suddenly HE STOPS mid-action and realizes that he is being watched by about FIFTEEN KIDS who peer in at him through the windows of the car and murmur. Raed is among them. One kid puts his hand through the window, tugs at Jim's shirt and says, "Amrikee." The rest of them begin calling boisterously "Amrikee, Amrikee," tapping on the glass, climbing on the hood of the car.

Jim gets out, pushes through them and begins walking away. But they cling and circle him. There's no way to lose the moving swarm.

JIM (CONT'D)

Get off me! ... Stop!

One voice pierces through the din, YELLING at the others. It's Raed, saying something angry, wrangling them, claiming Jim. He may not be the largest but he's clearly the boldest, in an impish sort of way. Another kid screams back but Raed yells him down.

Raed takes Jim's cuff and walks him away from them. At fifteen paces the other kid yells again and Raed turns and yells back at the group of them.

Jim walks along, just trying to get away. Raed follows closely at his side. They continue for a beat, together. And then Jim stops.

JIM (CONT'D)

Jesus, this is crazy. Walking?

He squats - crumples really - to the ground, on his knees.

JIM (CONT'D)

What am I doing?

(to Raed)

I need a car. A car.

He makes a steering wheel gesture to Raed. Raed stares blankly back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

Jim pinches his eyes shut with thumb and forefinger. It's hard to tell whether he's praying or thinking or staunching tears.

Raed says something, tapping at his shoulder. Jim looks up to see Raed making a driving gesture.

JIM (CONT'D)

Yeah. I need a car.

Raed begins pulling him in another direction, away from the road, telling him to follow.

JIM (CONT'D)

Whoa, whoa. Where are we going?

Raed says something, repeats the driving gesture, and grabs at Jim's sleeve.

JIM (CONT'D)

Hold on. I'm thinking.

Raed watches him think.

JIM (CONT'D)

Are you Shi'ite?

Raed looks at him blankly.

JIM (CONT'D)

Shi'ite?

Raed nods and says something back that sounds sort of like "Shia..." but then again, he could be saying anything.

Jim stands.

JIM (CONT'D)

Please God, let this be safe.

Raed takes his hand.

In long shot we see them moving toward a dirt road, away from the highway. They walk toward the outskirts of a small village (a settlement of houses, really). As they get to a corner, there are a couple people up ahead, a few street vendors.

Raed turns and they continue along a side street until Raed stops. He parks Jim in a sort of alleyway behind a house. He says something and motions, palm open, for Jim to stay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

JIM (CONT'D)

You better not be getting your insurgent buddies...

Raed runs up the block and goes through a gate to a school building - with no windows but a fresh coat of paint on it.

Jim stands there. Waiting. His head down.

A gaggle of school children walk past him, taking no notice. A donkey cart goes by with eggs (a few dozen on a too-big cart). The vendor stops and sells some to a woman. Jim eyes it, perhaps contemplating his getaway on the back of a donkey.

Raed comes back out of the building ahead of a GIRL (ZAHRA) about 14 years old. She wears a long abbaya with a green hijab over her hair. Raed leads her over and then pushes Jim deeper into the alley, off the street.

As soon as Zahra sees Jim she SHRIEKS and steps back. Raed curses her. The two of them get into a terse little fight in Arabic and then quiet down.

ZAHRA

(strangely formal)

Hello, Mister. Please to meet you. How are you? My name is Zahra.

There is a strange, lilting melody her sentences, as if they were learned from some recorded English lesson.

JIM

You speak English?

ZAHRA

Not good.

JIM

I'm a truck driver. My truck was attacked. I have to get back to my base.

ZAHRA

Soldier?

JIM

No. I'm not a soldier. I'm a truck driver. Civilian. I need a car. Or someone to drive me.

Raed and Zahra look at each other.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

JIM (CONT'D)
Can you help me?

EXT. STREET - LATER

Jim walks behind Zahra and Raed. Zahra is clearly very nervous even though it's the back of a tiny, tiny village with no-one on the streets. They come around a corner and into a darkened space...

INT. BAKERY - DAY

It's a bakery - about twelve feet wide with a concrete floor, covered in flour and dust. A table functions as a counter, dividing the front and back halves of the place. On the table is a stack of diamond-shaped, puffy bread loaves (samoun).

A 19-year-old kid, TARIQ, and a portly, 45-year-old man with a thick moustache, ABDUL HUSSEIN, bake bread.

Zahra and Raed step with Jim around the table into the back area. Tariq immediately sees Jim and says something questioning, which causes Abdul Hussein to look up. Zahra begins explaining.

There is a conversation back and forth between Zahra and the two men. With each question she seems to get more defensive and they more agitated until Tariq YELLS at her and SLAPS Zahra across the face.

Tariq looks at Jim and says something in a nasty tone of voice.

JIM
(to Zahra)
What is he saying?

She glances nervously to the men, unable to answer Jim.

Abdul Hussein says something reprimanding to Tariq, and then says something else to Zahra.

ZAHRA
My uncle is helping you. One moment.

With that, Tariq, Zahra and Raed walk out of the bakery leaving Jim alone with Abdul Hussein.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Abdul Hussein takes an old, white plastic chair and positions it in the back corner of the space. Jim sits. He clutches his closed knife in one hand.

Abdul Hussein goes back to baking bread, kneading a piece of dough into a diamond shape and placing it onto a long, narrow wooden palette with a line of other dough diamonds. He lifts the palette and puts it inside the deep brick oven. He then jostles another palette and removes it with its dozen loaves of steaming, puffy bread. Without so much as blinking at the heat of them Abdul Hussein removes the bread loaves and sets them on a side table. There is something methodical about all of it – simple yet artisanal.

A customer comes in. Abdul Hussein sells her some bread. She takes no notice of Jim sitting in the far corner. Abdul Hussein returns to the hot bread. He tears off a piece of a loaf and hands it to Jim. Jim eats.

Jim looks at his watch. It has been more than one moment. He's getting antsy.

Abdul Hussein says something to Jim.

JIM
I don't understand.

Abdul Hussein takes Jim by the elbow and they move toward the front of the space. Abdul Hussein puts several loaves of bread in a bag.

Just then a CAR rolls up outside with FOUR MEN in it, Tariq in the back seat.

Two of the men get out – one from the back seat and one from the front – and kiss Abdul Hussein on the cheek three times each. And then Jim is guided into the back seat, next to Tariq. Abdul Hussein gets in the front passenger seat. And the two men who got out go into the bakery as the car begins to move.

INT. CAR (MOVING) – DAY

It's late afternoon. Jim looks through the windshield at where they're driving. Down one small road and then another.

JIM
We have to go north. North.

Abdul Hussein turns back and looks back at Jim, then says a word or two to Tariq.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM (CONT'D)

Camp Deerfield is about forty-five miles north up Route Jackson from here. I don't know what you call Jackson, but it's north.

Tariq says something to Jim, basically telling him to settle down and relax. Jim continues to clutch his closed knife.

They turn onto a 2-lane road. It's not Route Jackson but it's similar in size. Jim is constantly looking around trying to recognize the landscape. It's mostly farms here. They're out of the village.

The driver pops in a cassette of traditional music. The sun is getting lower.

They're doing about thirty miles an hour. If Jim jumped from the car he'd probably survive but then he'd have to outrun them. So instead, he sits.

And then the car begins to slow. There's talk among the Iraqis. Not happy talk.

Through the front windshield Jim sees a long line of cars sitting on the road up ahead. They pull to a stop at the back of the line. In the distance, along the shoulder, Jim can see an IRAQI MAN with an AK-47. It's a CHECKPOINT of some sort, hard to tell how official.

Tariq gets out, walks over to the shoulder where he hails the armed man. They shake hands.

Jim along with Abdul Hussein and the driver watch the two of them talk. Tariq indicates the car and as they continue to talk they move back toward the car.

The driver turns down the music. The armed man shakes Abdul Hussein's hand through the passenger window and they exchange a few sentences. The man glances at Jim and then looks over his shoulder as if to see if anyone is watching.

Tariq gets back in the car. And then the man with the AK-47 opens Jim's door and gets in, causing Jim to slide to the middle of the back seat between him and Tariq.

The man shakes Jim's hand and reaches across to shake the driver's hand. They seem to know each other. The driver pulls out of line and makes a U-turn. And then he begins driving back the way they came.

Abdul Hussein turns back to Jim and says something by way of explanation, using a placating smile.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIM (CONT'D)
 (tense)
 Where are we going?

Jim's tone causes a terse exchange among the Iraqis. Finally, Abdul Hussein faces front. The car settles into a tense quiet as they drive.

JIM (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 Fuck.

Jim's attention focuses on the smallest details – the gristle on the driver's jaw, the way Abdul Hussein's left hand clutches nervously at his pant leg, the stain on the pant leg of the armed man, the way the man's hand rests on the stock of his AK.

The man with the AK pulls out a pack of cigarettes, removes one and offers it to Jim.

JIM (CONT'D)
 No thanks.

He passes cigarettes to Abdul Hussein and the driver and then to Tariq. In a minute, all four of them are smoking.

Jim looks out at the countryside. The sun is setting.

EXT. NARROW ROAD / HOUSE – DUSK

Through the windshield Jim watches as the car turns down a small road and creeps toward a house.

And then they stop. Abdul Hussein gets out. Tariq gets out. The armed man gets out and motions Jim to follow.

JIM
 Where are we?

The driver turns back and says something to Jim.

JIM (CONT'D)
 I thought we were driving to a base.
 This is not a base.

Abdul Hussein puts his head back in the car and says something, smiling.

JIM (CONT'D)
 I'm not going in that house. You understand?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Iraqis look at one another, concerned. Abdul Hussein sends Tariq into the house.

JIM (CONT'D)

I don't know what you boys are planning
but I'm not going for it.

Tariq comes back out of the house, followed by Zahra. She walks up to Abdul Hussein. He says something to her. She takes a beat, then leans her head into the car.

ZAHRA

Mister, this house, my uncle.

JIM

What's going on? We drive one way, then
the other way, now we're back at your
house for Christ sakes. I need to go to
an American base.

Zahra doesn't understand what he's saying.

ZAHRA

Mister, before house. Then Amri-kan.

Abdul Hussein, Tariq, the armed man, Zahra... they're all extending their arms, beckoning him into the house.

JIM

I'm not going in there.

Abdul Hussein says something terse to Zahra. She defends herself. Abdul Hussein YELLS at her.

JIM (CONT'D)

Hey. HEY! Stop yelling at her.

He stops yelling and they all look at Jim. Finally, Jim slides out of the car.

JIM (CONT'D)

(beat)

I'll go in the house. But then we're
going to the American base, right?

No-one responds. Abdul Hussein says something inviting Jim inside.

They give Jim his space as he passes through the front gate into a small dirt courtyard. There's a collection of shoes on the concrete porch. He unties his shoes and slips them off. No sooner has he stepped inside than he realizes that the driver and the armed man are in the car and backing away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIM (CONT'D)

Where's he taking the car?

Abdul Hussein extends an arm and bids Jim to enter into the main room of the house. Zahra disappears down the hall.

INT. HOUSE, MAIN ROOM - EVENING

It is about fifteen-by-fifteen feet square, with white and green concrete walls. There are cushions on the floor (rectangular pieces of upholstered foam) all along the edges of three walls. On the opposite wall there is a TV in a hutch with a few ceramic knick-knacks. The walls are empty save for three framed calligraphies of prayers and a framed portrait of Imam Ali and Imam Hussein. A rug fills the middle of the floor. Aside from the open door leading to the entryway there is also a curtained doorway on the other side of the room.

Jim sits in the middle of one of the cushions and sets his helmet down next to him. He crosses his legs and sits there in his Kevlar vest and white tube socks with a small hole in the toe.

RAED comes in and sits on another cushion. They hear the sound of Abdul Hussein's voice in the next room speaking with a woman. He and Raed look at each other.

JIM

(sighs, to himself)

I never should have followed you.

Jim becomes aware that Raed is looking at the hole in his sock. He adjusts to hide it.

A "Tss, tss" is heard from behind the curtain. Raed crosses to the doorway where a woman's hands hold out a tray with several small (three inch-tall) glasses. Raed comes back and sets the tray in the middle of the floor. He then sets a small glass of TEA in front of Jim.

ABDUL HUSSEIN enters and sits as Raed places a glass of tea for him as well. Abdul Hussein takes out a pack of cigarettes, removes one and gets up on one knee to offer it to Jim.

Jim declines. Abdul Hussein lights up as Raed gets him an ashtray from the cabinet (under the TV). Abdul Hussein CALLS OUT to someone. A moment later Zahra appears timidly through the curtain and stands there, half in half out. Abdul Hussein bids her to come in. She sits at the edge of the cushions, near the doorway.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Abdul Hussein says something.

ZAHRA
Where are you?

JIM
Where am I from? America. Illinois.

Zahra translates "Amri-ka." Abdul Hussein nods.

JIM (CONT'D)
Near Chicago. You know Chicago?

ABDUL HUSSEIN
Chicago.

JIM
More or less. About a hundred miles
southwest of there.

TARIQ comes in with another man, AHMED, about 30 years old, in jogging pants and a t-shirt. Ahmed comes directly over to Jim and shakes his hand, touches his own chest and then sits. Raed places the other glasses of tea in front of Tariq and Ahmed.

JIM (CONT'D)
(broaching the subject)
Thank you for your help.

Zahra translates. Abdul Hussein says something.

ZAHRA
He says, thank you.

JIM
So, when can we go?

Zahra turns to translate but Abdul Hussein, Tariq and Ahmed have gotten into a side conversation in Arabic. Raed then gets involved, ostensibly filling Ahmed in on what happened and who Jim is.

Zahra finally translates Jim's question.

Abdul Hussein responds with a "not to worry" hand gesture. And before Zahra can actually translate what he's saying SOMEONE comes to the door.

Ahmed and Abdul Hussein get up and go into the entryway and have a hushed conversation with TWO MEN who have just come in. Gestures and glances are made in Jim's direction.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

One of the men, HASSAN, is about 60, with a gray beard and dressed in a dishdasha (robe) with a religious skull cap. He has broad shoulders and a tough face.

When the men enter the room Tariq and Raed immediately rise to shake the newcomers' hands. Jim gets up as well. Lots of hand shaking, cheek kissing and mutterings hello.

Hassan sits. And then they all sit back down.

The men talk amongst themselves. Jim watches them. Zahra comes in with more glasses of tea and serves the new arrivals.

Hassan, the eldest of everyone in the room, speaks.

ZAHRA

Why you are here?

JIM

(in pidgin English, with hand gestures)

My convoy was ambushed. I think they turn back. Turn back, you know? My truck was on fire, so I'm stuck. I need ride to Camp Deerfield. Forty-five miles north.

Zahra gives a very short translation. Hassan shakes his head and asks something else.

ZAHRA

Why you are here in Iraq?

JIM

Why am I here in Iraq? I drive trucks. Truck driver?

Zahra translates. Hassan answers.

ZAHRA

You are army.

JIM

No, I'm a civilian. Not a soldier.

Zahra translates. Hassan answers.

ZAHRA

But you working with army.

JIM

Yes, I do. But I'm not a soldier. I'm a civilian, helping the American troops.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Zahra translates. Tariq snarls at his answer. Hassan responds.

ZAHRA

He says, Americans working and Iraqi people no working. My brother no working. It's no good.

JIM

I'm not trying to take anyone's job. I'm just here trying to help out. (as gracious seeming as possible) I want to help the people of Iraq.

Zahra translates. Hassan takes this in and then replies.

ZAHRA

With Saddam Hussein life is very bad. After Americans my uncle happy. But now people killing some people everyday. We are not OK.

JIM

Well, I'm sorry about that...

Hassan continues to speak.

ZAHRA

He talking about my father. American soldier taking everybody. My father doing nothing. The soldiers taking everybody.

Hassan continues, getting more animated, more angry as he speaks.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

How can you do it? Five months he is... (she makes the sign of wrists handcuffed) We know nothing from him. Maybe he is dead. Maybe something other. We don't know.

JIM

I'm sorry about your father but I don't know anything about it. I'm just a truck driver.

Hassan rails now, shaking his fist.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ZAHRA

Where is he? He is dead? You are (she makes a hitting gesture) against this family.

JIM

(carefully)

Look, I don't know. OK? I don't know. I'm not with the military. You offered to help me. That's why I'm here. I need to go back to my base.

Zahra translates. Now Tariq jumps in with something aggressive.

Then Hassan goes on, his voice getting shrill – holding up ten fingers, then pointing to Tariq and saying something about him. The mood in the room is turning very uncomfortable.

ZAHRA

America is killing one Iraqi people, after ten people is against America.

JIM

(more to himself)

You're about to make another enemy right now.

Tariq says something. Zahra hesitates. Tariq yells at her to translate.

ZAHRA

Saddam is better, he's saying.

JIM

Saddam Hussein was a murderer. He was evil. You want to talk about killing people? Saddam was murdering his own people by the thousands.

Zahra translates. Hassan answers angrily.

ZAHRA

America is also killing. America going away.

JIM

Look, I'm not gonna get into some political debate. But the fact is, if we left now your country would rip itself apart. Our boys didn't come over here and die just to let that happen.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5) JIM(CONT'D)

You people need to learn to get along
with each other.

Tariq yells something at Jim. Hassan then speaks, a bit more
calmly but very firm in tone.

ZAHRA

Before Iraqi people liking American
people. Now maybe somebody is taking
you. To have money.

Hassan adds a last little thought with a chuckle. The other
men in the room, especially Tariq, laugh at his joke.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

Maybe we are selling you. Maybe we are
getting much money.

Jim tries to gauge whether he's joking. Hassan takes out a
pack of cigarettes, removes one and offers it to Jim.

JIM

(ignoring the gesture)
I need to go to my base.

Zahra translates. The men confer among themselves. Hassan
gives an answer.

ZAHRA

Now is night, not safe. Tonight you
staying here. You are friend here.

JIM

Tell him if it's alright, I'd really like
to take my chances.
(off her look)
How about if I pay? I can buy his car.
I'll drive myself.

Zahra looks puzzled by this but she tries to translate. They
look equally puzzled. They talk among themselves. Hassan
answers.

ZAHRA

There is no petrol. Morning buying
petrol.

JIM

(getting annoyed)
Tell him that I've been in an accident.
People are going to be worried that I'm
missing. They'll be looking for me. I'm
worried about my family back home.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6) JIM(CONT'D)

If they put this on the news my wife is going to be worrying about me.

Zahra translates as much as she understands. The men seem not to have a good answer for this.

CUT TO:

ENTRYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Jim stands by a small table with a telephone in the entryway, holding the receiver in one hand. Three or four of the men watch him.

JIM
How do I dial international?

Zahra translates the question. There's no answer.

ZAHRA
No international.

Jim sighs and hangs up. He picks up again and thinks for a minute, but then hangs back up again.

No sooner does he do this than DARKNESS descends. The electricity goes out. There's a sudden, disorienting confusion. It's pitch black, nothing but voices and shuffling feet. Jim spins in place trying to see who is moving where around him.

A match is struck. A candle is brought. As it lights up we see that it is held by a WOMAN in her 40s, ZAYNAB.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

On the concrete porch outside, Jim is soaping up his hands. He sets the bar of soap on the ground and holds his hand out over the edge of the concrete. Raed pours water from a pitcher as Jim rinses.

At the sound of a small generator starting up the house lights come on. Jim looks to see Ahmed and Tariq pouring something from a 1-liter bottle - gasoline most likely - into the whirring motor.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Newspaper is being spread out on the floor by Raed and Tariq. The TELEVISION is on - playing a news show in Arabic.

A pair of disembodied female hands holds two plates of food through the curtain. Ahmed and Abdul Hussein move back and forth retrieving rice, bamia (an okra dish), salty cheese, cucumber and yogurt salad, and a large stack of unleavened bread.

Jim sits, no longer wearing his Kevlar vest. The men slide forward (to sit more or less at food level). Abdul Hussein invites Jim to eat, then shows him how to eat with his hands. What ensues is a wordless meal in which all of them help themselves. The mood in the room remains tense.

JIM
(to Abdul Hussein)
It's very good.

Abdul Hussein says something back.

GEORGE BUSH (O.S.)
...I have complete, uh... confidence...
that...

Jim looks up to see Bush on the TV and for a brief second hears his voice speaking in English before it's dubbed over into Arabic. There are images of the White House, the president strolling through the rose garden, looking jokey and playful. To Jim it all seems so familiar and yet so very far away.

Tariq says something nasty, which kicks off a short but angry debate between all of them. The anger seems as much directed at Jim as at the TV.

A KNOCK on the front door stops the discussion abruptly. Ahmed pulls back the curtain and peers out, then turns back and says something.

Suddenly everyone is moving. Ahmed and Abdul Hussein grab Jim by the elbow and pull him up, then push him through the curtained doorway.

JIM
What's going on?

Jim half-resists but they push him along, shh-ing him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He finds himself in a small KITCHEN – concrete floor, a small metal sink, plastic buckets and strainers stacked up. Zahra, Zaynab and two other WOMEN (one in her 60s, the other in her 30s) and a six-year-old girl flee away from Jim into the adjacent room.

Jim looks completely spun around, terrified. Raed runs in with Jim's helmet and Kevlar vest. Tariq comes into the kitchen from the hall holding a HANDGUN and covers Jim's mouth.

Abul Hussein goes back into the main room through the curtain and as he does Jim catches a flash of FOUR MEN in black uniforms with AK-47s coming into the main room, Hassan and Abdul Hussein cordially kissing them on the cheek.

Suddenly Ahmed and Tariq take Jim by the arms and hustle him along the corridor, out the back door of the house and into the back courtyard, past the chickens – crossing twenty feet to a small mud-brick shed with a corrugated metal door. It all feels very frenetic and very scary.

INT. SHED – NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

They get Jim inside and let go of his arms; he backs away from Tariq and Ahmed. Tariq is whisper-yelling at Jim angrily, urgently, waving his gun. Jim looks panicked. He doesn't dare to say anything. He just looks back and forth from Tariq to Ahmed. His face has gone completely pale.

There's a sound at the door and Zahra enters. Tariq says something urgent to her.

ZAHRA

This men very danger. Keeping American
very danger.

(beat)

This people can killing to our family.

Jim takes this in. And as Tariq and Ahmed move away to the other side of the shed Jim remains standing in the corner and begins to tremble. He sinks down and runs his hand through his hair. He clearly thought he was about to be killed.

SAME – LATER

Mosquitoes buzz around the light bulb. Tariq and Ahmed sit on the ground near the door, sharing a cigarette and talking low. Zahra sits a few feet apart from them. Jim sits – quiet, withdrawn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Tariq looks over Jim and then says something to Zahra, indicating for her to translate.

ZAHRA

My brother is reading - American soldiers putting fire to Iraqi dinar. So we must staying poor. Why American soldiers are wanting this?

JIM

What? Do you really believe that?

Zahra translates.

JIM (CONT'D)

Were those men threatening your family?

ZAHRA

I'm sorry. Again please.

JIM

(to Tariq)

Why is your family helping me if it's so dangerous?

Zahra tries to translate, uncertain. Tariq answers.

ZAHRA

When you are asking help you are "dakhil." It's mean we must helping you. It is Iraqi way.

JIM

(to Tariq)

Even an American?

Tariq answers.

ZAHRA

Dakhil is tribe honor.

Tariq and Ahmed have a small exchange (presumably about dakhil) as Jim considers this.

They're interrupted by the sound of the shed door suddenly opening. It's Adbul Hussein. He says something to Tariq and Ahmed.

INT. MAIN ROOM (HOUSE) - NIGHT

The room is dark. Jim lies on a cushion with a sheet, awake. He rolls on his side, then on his back, unable to sleep.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

When he finally sits up we see that he's been trying to sleep in his Kevlar vest. He adjusts one of the velcro straps.

ENTRYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Jim treads carefully out of the main room and past Ahmed, who is asleep, almost leaning against the front door with a RIFLE at his side. Jim continues to the BACK DOOR. He slides the bolt as quietly as possible and turns the metal door handle.

EXT. OUTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

We can hear the sound of urine into liquid as Jim pees. He comes out of the outhouse and pauses a moment, taking in the night. It's quiet except for the insects.

And then his gaze lands on the front gate. He steps over to it, pulls it open and stares out at the small road. He presses a button on his watch to light up the time. He looks over his shoulder and considers walking out. But then he closes the gate and turns back.

INT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Jim comes back into the house and closes the door behind him, sliding the bolt. As he passes into the hallway he turns and sees that there is now a DIM LAMP on in the bedroom. Though others sleep on the floor, ZAHRA and the LITTLE GIRL, about 6, sit at a desk reading. There are posters on the wall - Leonardo Dicaprio in Titanic, Lebanese pop star Nancy.

Zahra and the little girl look up and make eye contact with Jim. He raises a hand. Zahra waves back.

INT. MAIN ROOM (HOUSE) - MOMENTS LATER

Jim sits down on his cushion. He stares at the framed prayers on the opposite wall, the portrait of Imam Ali and Imam Hussein, actually taking in his surroundings for the first time.

He hears FEET SHUFFLING and turns to see TARIQ come in through the curtain. Zahra follows him into the room. She's carrying something in her hand but Jim can't see what. The two of them sit on the floor next to Jim. Tariq says something quietly.

ZAHRA

Can you helping make free our father?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Zahra produces a school copybook.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

Can you writing letter? About our father
does nothing.

Jim takes the copybook from her. It has Winnie the Pooh
stickers on the front. He flips through the first pages,
looking at her homework.

JIM

I don't think I'd know what to write.

ZAHRA

Please, some pretty words.

As Jim hesitates, a head pops into the room. It's Raed.
Zahra shoos him away but he comes in anyway and looks at what
they're doing. Jim uncaps the pen and begins writing.

JIM

To whom it may concern...

Zahra says something about this sentence to Tariq and laughs
a little. Tariq also laughs. They look like completely
different people suddenly. Like kids.

JIM (CONT'D)

When was he arrested? What date...?

He mimes being handcuffed.

ZAHRA

Sixteen March. His name is Ali Hussein.

JIM

(writing)

Ali Hussein was picked up on the
sixteenth of March. He was arrested
in...

(to Zahra)

Where was he...?

He mimes again.

ZAHRA

Diwaniyah.

JIM

Di -wa -ni -yah.

ZAHRA

Alwa market.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIM

At the Alwa market.
 (to Zahra)
 What happened exactly?

Zahra translates. Tariq tells her to explain what happened.

ZAHRA

There's a bomb from car. Killing many,
 many people. My father is helping a
 woman. With much blood - much, much
 blood. She has baby, dead from bomb. My
 father is...

Zahra mimes that he was trying to pull her to safety.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

Woman is crying, crying, crying. My
 father is helping her. American soldiers
 saying, "You, You, You." They taking all
 men. They take our father...

She mimes being handcuffed behind the back.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

And...

She mimes a bag being pulled over her head.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

That is end. We are seeing our father no
 more. Now he is at Abu Ghuraib maybe.
 Maybe dead. We don't know it.

Jim takes this in. He looks down at the copybook and begins writing. He writes and writes, putting the story into the best wording possible.

Tariq and Zahra and Raed watch him. Zahra tries to read the English over his shoulder.

Tariq says something else to Zahra. Zahra takes a beat before turning to Jim.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)

Our father is a good man.

Something about this sentence catches Jim off guard. He looks at Zahra and Tariq for a beat, taking the kids in. He turns back to the letter and thinks about how to add this last thought to it. As he writes his eyes begin to water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

At last, he passes the copybook to Tariq, his eyes clearly teary.

JIM
And then you or whoever should sign it.
In English.

Tariq, Zahra and Raed look at the letter in awe.

Tariq says something.

ZAHRA
(translating)
Thank you.

JIM
I hope it helps.

Jim pushes the button on his watch to light it up. Raed instantly hovers, looking at the watch, trying to push the buttons.

JIM (CONT'D)
That one.

Raed pushes the button and it lights up.

ZAHRA
Good night.

They stand and move toward the curtain.

JIM
Good night.

SAME - DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN

Abdul Hussein, Ahmed and Tariq come into the main without a word. The call to prayer can be heard over a tinny loud speaker in the distance.

Jim sits in the corner of the room and watches as the men kneel down, roll out their prayer carpets and pray quietly in the pre-dawn darkness.

INT. / EXT. HOUSE - DAWN

The early morning light filters into the entryway. Hassan and Tariq have a dishdasha (a traditional white robe) which they place over Jim's head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

There's a funny little moment of confusion as the robe gets twisted and caught on Jim's Kevlar vest. They spin him around and try to untangle it as he tries to pull his arms through.

On the porch they give Jim a pair of typical Iraqi sandals, which he slips on. He sees Zaynab and Zahra watching from the opposite end of the hallway, visible but safely at a distance.

Raed comes up next to Jim. Jim removes his wristwatch and gives it to Raed without a word. Raed lights up instantly and says something to Tariq.

The moment is interrupted by Hassan, who produces a kaffiyeh (scarf) and places it on Jim's head.

The sedan from the day before has been pulled up as close as possible to the front gate. Abdul Hussein (also in a dishdasha) and Tariq move Jim quickly to it and into the back seat. The driver gets out and passes the keys to Ahmed.

Hassan steps up to Jim's open rear window.

JIM
 (to Hassan, through window)
 Thank you... Shukran? Is that how you say it?

Hassan takes Jim's hand in his and says something Arabic.

INT. CAR (MOVING), DESERT ROAD - MORNING

Jim looks out at the village as they drive through. He's in the back seat with Tariq; Abdul Hussein is in the front with Ahmed driving. They move along small streets. Over a bridge. And then onto a two-lane desert road.

Tariq looks at Jim and says something, smiling, referencing what Jim looks like.

JIM
 Yeah, you oughta get a picture.

And then the car stops.

Ahmed gets out, walks to the front of the car and looks around, as if expecting to see someone. He picks up an old, empty 1-liter plastic bottle that had been placed by the side of the road. An instant later a MAN appears jogging toward the side of the road carrying a jerry can.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ahmed and the man discuss briefly and then Ahmed pulls money out of his pocket, counts bills and gives them to the man.

Jim watches through the window as the man comes over to the car, unscrews the gas cap and proceeds, with Ahmed's help, to use a funnel (cut from a plastic pepsi bottle) and a tube to pour gas into the car's tank.

INT. CAR (MOVING), DESERT ROAD - MORNING

Ahmed drives about seventy-five miles an hour. The sun is a little higher. The desert whizzes by.

All of a sudden, up ahead, Jim sees something. It's THREE HUMVEES moving laterally, out of the desert. They turn onto the 2-lane, driving on the wrong shoulder of the road, directly toward us at about 50 miles an hour.

Abdul Hussein and Ahmed exchange words about what to do. The Humvees cross to the other side of the road and keep coming. Ahmed starts braking - too late. Given how fast they were driving and how fast the Humvees are moving, it feels chaotic, like Ahmed is getting too close to them. The gunner on the front Humvee is giving a hand gesture of some sort.

The distance is closing. Ahmed is slowing. By the time he comes to a stop it's only fifty yards in front of the Humvees, which haven't slowed at all.

Jim whips his door open and runs out, around the car toward the convoy. He is just ripping off his kaffiyeh when the gunner in the front Humvee pulls out his M-16 and take a single SHOT, which sends Jim ducking to the side.

It's a direct hit on Ahmed's front passenger TIRE.

The Humvees zoom by without slowing. As they pass the car the gunner extends his arm and gives Ahmed the finger.

It is an utterly confusing moment. Jim takes a second to figure out what the hell just happened. By which point he's yelling at the back of the last Humvee.

JIM

Wait! WAIT!! I'm American. HEY!!!

It's useless. All he can do is watch the Humvees drive away.

Ahmed, Tariq and Abdul Hussein get out of the car cursing and look at the shot-out tire.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM (CONT'D)

Jesus. That was... What the fuck was that?! FUCK!

Jim seems almost more angry and stunned than the Iraqis, who don't seem entirely surprised, actually.

JIM (CONT'D)

I don't suppose there's a spare.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

The four men walk in the blistering sun along the shoulder of the road - Tariq and Ahmed side by side, Jim and Abdul Hussein behind them. The occasional car passes. Otherwise, there's nothing around, no sound other than their feet on the gravel. Jim notices ZAHRA'S COPYBOOK sticking out of Tariq's back pocket, moving rhythmically.

EXT. MAIN STREET, IRAQI TOWN - DAY

The four men walk in a town, bigger than their village. It's mid-morning now, a fair bit of activity on the streets: the butcher hangs half a slaughtered sheep, a vendor sells tea on the street from a tea stand (a filing cabinet with a butane burner and a kettle on top), a baker hawks pastries on the sidewalk.

As they walk, Tariq, Ahmed and Abdul Hussein sort of surround Jim, who has his kaffiyeh on his head.

They stop and contemplate what to do. It is fairly clear by the way they're looking around that none of them knows this town.

Jim's eyes drift to a small storefront across the street. It's full of TV sets and chairs and YOUNG BOYS playing Playstation - a sort of video arcade, where they play Desert Storm (a re-creation of the American invasion).

Because they're standing right in front of it, Tariq, Ahmed and Abdul Hussein step with Jim off the street into a barbershop...

INT. BARBERSHOP - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

The place is a clean, empty area open to the street. There are two battered, red-leather chairs and a couple mirrors. A barber gives a man a haircut while a third man with a thick black beard stands making conversation.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The barber welcomes all of them inside. Tariq begins explaining the situation, asking for assistance. It's the bearded man who chimes in, speaking at length and offering some suggestion.

EXT. SIDE STREET, IRAQI TOWN - DAY

The four of them follow the bearded man and two other men down the street. They walk around a small lake of stagnant water (the result of un-reconstructed water mains) drawing their shirts over their noses to shield them from the smell.

As they all come around a corner Tariq looks over at Jim, a bit nervous. He slips his hand, wordlessly, into Jim's - holding it as Iraqi friends commonly do and saying something in Arabic to Jim. The bearded man glances back at them.

They come to a stop in front of a car parked on the street. The bearded man says something indicating his front tire. Tariq and he talk back and forth. One of the other men goes to the trunk and comes back with a JACK, which he tosses down on the street next to the car. Tariq bends down to inspect the tire.

Jim can feel the people on the street around him. All this feels very exposed.

Tariq consults with Ahmed and Abdul Hussein. They dig into their pockets and come up with all the cash they've got. And now a debate ensues about the cost of the tire. It's clear that Tariq and his uncles haven't got hardly anything on them. And the bearded man isn't about to let his tire go for nothing.

Tariq starts getting aggressive and he and the bearded man yell back and forth for a minute.

Jim steps forward and taps Tariq on the shoulder, motions him away from the bearded man.

Without saying anything in English, Jim pulls up his dishdasha just enough to get into jeans pocket and pull out his wallet. The bearded man and his two friends notice the flash of Jim's bluejeans, not exactly typical under-attire for a dishdasha.

Jim takes a TWENTY-DOLLAR BILL out of his wallet and hands it to Tariq. Tariq, Ahmed and Abdul Hussein look at one another, considering how to use this.

Tariq turns to the bearded man and holds out the twenty-dollar bill making an offer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The bearded man looks at it, confused. Then he looks toward Jim. He says something to Jim - aggressive, questioning.

Jim, of course, says nothing. It's clear the bearded man is expecting a response. He steps closer to Jim, getting a better look at Jim's face... He pulls at Jim's kaffiyeh.

YELLING immediately ensues. A huge argument between the men. People on the street stop and look. Some approach. Jim is completely exposed.

Instantly, they are encircled. It's a small mob of about fifteen, maybe twenty people. Pushing and yelling. Someone tugs at Jim and he shoves back. Jim starts doing some yelling of his own.

Tariq and the bearded man come to blows. The bearded man and his friends overpower Tariq and get his arm twisted behind his back and push him to the ground. Jim lunges forward to help him and is immediately hit on the side of the head with a BRICK, knocked toward the wall of a building where four men try to pin him down. He's fighting back when MACHINEGUN FIRE rings out causing everyone to stop.

Five Iraqi POLICE get out of a car and approach, trying to break things up. A young CAPTAIN - short, with a moustache and a very ballsy attitude - waves his handgun in the air and pulls Tariq free of the men who had him pinned on the ground.

The captain asks for an explanation and gets it from a man who points to Jim. The captain steps over and realizes that he's dealing with an American, that the situation is far from normal.

The captain fires his gun in the air three times and yells at the crowd to disperse. And then he yells at his policeman to pick up Tariq, Abdul Hussein and Ahmed. Jim sees the cops putting Tariq and his uncles in the police car.

JIM

What's going on?

The captain grabs Jim's arm and starts pulling him. Jim resists.

JIM (CONT'D)

Hey!

The captain points his gun at Jim, yells, and then pushes Jim into the back of the second police car.

INT. POLICE CAR (MOVING), TOWN STREETS - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

The captain gets in up front and the driver begins rolling through the crowd. Another policeman sits next to Jim with his gun drawn. They proceed around a corner and through the streets of the town.

They finally come to a stop in front of the police station, which is just a small building, newly painted - blue and white.

EXT. / INT. POLICE STATION, IRAQI TOWN - DAY

Jim is brought into the station behind Tariq and his uncles. The place is very rudimentary - an empty office basically with a table, a phone, a few chairs and an Iraqi flag. An Egyptian soap opera plays on a small color TV set in the corner. At the far end there are two cells opposite one another.

The police lead Tariq and his uncles into one of the cells (with a couple of men in it already). Tariq speaks up but the captain yells (from over by the desk) and the cop holding the keys shoves Tariq hard, into the cell.

JIM

Why are you locking them up?

None of these police officers speaks any English, clearly.

JIM (CONT'D)

They weren't the ones doing anything wrong. If you wanna lock someone up you oughta be lockin' up the other guys.

No response.

JIM (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ.

The Captain says something to Jim and points to a chair.

JIM (CONT'D)

No, thanks.

The Captain and his officers have a brief discussion in Arabic. The Captain picks up the phone and dials. Says something in Arabic.

Jim watches him carefully. The Captain is clearly speaking about him. And then the Captain passes Jim the receiver.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM (CONT'D)

Hello? ... I don't speak Arabic...
Hello? (relief visible) Damn, it's nice
to hear an American voice... Yeah...
(surprised) Jafferty. How did you know?
... You have? Well where the hell have
you been looking for me? ... I don't
know. A police station... (looks
around) Hell if I know... OK... Hold on.
(to the Captain)
You gotta give 'em some directions.

The Captain takes back the receiver from Jim and speaks in Arabic.

SAME - LATER

Jim stands by the steel door of one of the cells. Tariq's face is visible on the other side of a small, open window in the door.

Jim pulls his dishdasha over his head, balls it up and dabs his forehead where he was hit. Tariq asks Jim a question in Arabic through the window.

JIM

I'm alright.

He pulls off his Kevlar vest.

JIM (CONT'D)

Don't worry. We'll have this all settled soon enough.

Tariq and his uncles stand in the cell without talking. Jim looks to the front of the station house.

The Captain smokes a cigarette and talks in a quiet voice to one of his officers. There are no other police visible.

The quiet is pierced by YELLING. Up front a group of a about EIGHT MEN burst in carrying AK-47s and pistols. They immediately point their guns at the police and in a matter of seconds have stripped them of their sidearms.

We immediately recognize the BEARDED MAN and his two friends. The bearded man seems to be the leader of the group. He yells something at the Captain. The Captain yells back. And the bearded man SHOOTS the Captain point blank in the face and then again in the body.

Jim gets up and backs up toward the back wall.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The bearded man turns and yells at the other police officer. The officer moves quickly to open Tariq's cell.

Three of the other men grab Jim by the arms.

The bearded man steps inside the cell and yells something at Abdul Hussein. By his gestures he's clearly yelling something in reference to Jim. And then, without any other warning, he SHOOTs Abdul Hussein in the head. He then SHOOTs Ahmed.

And he then grabs Tariq by the shirt collar and PISTOL WHIPS him in the face.

His two friends drag Tariq out of the cell.

The bearded man steps to Jim, raises his gun at him and YELLS at him.

As a group, they drag Jim and Tariq out the front door and into the street.

EXT. POLICE STATION, IRAQI TOWN - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

A 1980 white Toyota pick-up truck and an old sedan wait out front. The gunmen whip open the back door and start shoving Tariq in when AK FIRE bursts out.

Jim ducks instinctively and looks to see one of the gunmen firing up the street. When Jim turns to see what he's shooting at he spots THREE AMERICAN HUMVEES coming down the street. All hell breaks loose.

The top gunner immediately lays down suppressing fire as American soldiers get out. It's a hail of bullets.

Jim and Tariq duck for cover inside the back of the sedan.

One by one the Americans kill the Iraqis. It's completely lopsided in favor of the US military, though one American takes a hit in the leg.

A woman bystander is hit; it's hard to say by whose bullet.

Some of the Iraqi gunmen hop in the pick-up truck (behind the sedan) and put it in reverse, trying to back out of the street. The American gunner immediately tears apart the pick-up with his .50-cal, killing the three men inside.

Tariq sees one of the men get killed on the street right next to him by the back door. He reaches down for the dead man's gun. Jim watches him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Tariq aims the gun at the back of the BEARDED MAN's head who is shooting from inside the front seat of the car. Tariq hesitates. Jim watches. Tariq squeezes the trigger and SHOTS the bearded guy point blank from behind.

The shooting quiets.

SOLDIER
(yelling)
Cease fire! Cease fire!

Two Iraqis – one wounded – put their hands up. The American soldiers make their way slowly toward them. When they get to them they force them down on the ground, YELLING at them constantly in English.

Jim and Tariq finally exhale. Jim cautiously slides out of the passenger-side back door.

JIM
(his hands up)
Don't shoot. I'm American. Don't shoot.

Jim turns to Tariq and indicates for him to get out of the car. From the reverse point of view, up by the soldiers (their attention drawn to Jim by his calling out), we see that Tariq is getting out of the car slowly, still holding the gun, and that it could appear he's using Jim as a human shield.

Suddenly an American soldier SHOTS Tariq. He spins and falls by Jim's feet. The whole thing happens quicky – a coda of confusion that flares and subsides.

Tariq puts his hand to his upper chest, near his shoulder, and cries out. The soldiers are approaching. Jim still has his hands in the air, looking trapped, stunned, afraid to move but wanting to kneel down to Tariq. Tariq is wailing in pain.

SOLDIER
(calls out)
I got him.
(to Jim)
You James Jafferty?

SOLDIER #2
(yelling at Tariq)
Don't fucking try to move. Or I'll shoot your ass. Hey! You hear me?

JIM
He's not one of them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The soldier doesn't hear Jim. Jim moves to Tariq and pushes the soldier back.

JIM (CONT'D)
He was trying to help me.

SOLDIER #2
He was armed.

JIM
It wasn't his gun. He was trying to help me.

The soldier looks annoyed by the complicatedness of the situation.

JIM (CONT'D)
(to the soldier)
Do you have a medic?

SOLDIER #2
This was just supposed to be a simple, fucking taxi ride.

JIM
(getting angry)
I said do you have a medic?!

SOLDIER #2
(yelling)
Get McAllister over here. We got a man wounded.

Tariq SCREAMS in pain and quickly it turns into tears and wailing, physical pain mixed with grief and anger.

JIM
(squats down)
You're gonna be OK.

Jim tries to put a hand on Tariq's other shoulder but Tariq bats it away and CURSES at him angrily in Arabic through tears.

The MEDIC pushes past Jim to begin examining Tariq. Jim stands and takes a couple steps back. He notices Zahra's COPYBOOK on the ground near his feet. He picks it up and holds it, then watches Tariq wince and cry as the medic pulls away his shirt to get to the wound.

EXT. ENTRANCE, CAMP DEERFIELD - DAY

THREE HUMVEES come through the swing-gate entrance of a Camp Deerfield.

EXT. / INT. CLINIC, CAMP DEERFIELD - DAY

The clinic is a series of very large TENTS with wood doors bearing large RED CROSSES on the outside. The humvees pull up outside. Jim gets out of the lead car and watches from a distance as two Army medics in green t-shirts and camo pants, with stethoscopes around their necks, unload Tariq from the second Humvee and transfer him to a green canvas stretcher with wheels.

MEDIC

Looks like a gunshot wound to the upper right quadrant. His right lung doesn't sound good.

They wheel Tariq away through the clinic doors. Jim stands staring, alone.

EXT. STAGING AREA, CAMP DEERFIELD - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Jim walks across the base in the direction of the staging area. He stops for a convoy of trucks passing noisily on one of the interior base roads. As soon as it clears he sees something he hadn't expected up ahead: it's KENNY, SHIPP, LAND ROVER and the rest of his old crew standing by their trucks, having just come in.

Kenny turns and sees Jim. The two of them make eye contact.

CUT TO:

Kenny and Jim hugging each other, slapping one another's backs, with Shipp and Land Rover standing by.

KENNY

They turned us around at TQ so we're headin' up to Taji. Are you OK? We heard what happened.

INT. KENNY'S TRUCK, STAGING AREA, CAMP DEERFIELD - NIGHT

Jim and Kenny sit in Kenny's rig, his Betty Boop towel tacked up behind them. Jim holds Zahra's COPYBOOK in his hands. We're coming in on the end of a conversation.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

...And they're yelling at me because they blame Americans for not making things better, like I thought they're were going to kill me, but then they're feeding me dinner and giving me a place to stay 'cause it's a question of honor to help me. And then what happens...

None of it makes any sense.

KENNY

We thought for sure you were kidnapped.

JIM

The whole thing is just so... fucked up.

KENNY

You talk to Dana yet?

Jim doesn't say anything. He just turns the pages of the copybook, not reading really, just thinking, frustrated.

INT. OFFICE, CAMP DEERFIELD - DAY

It's a trailer-type office - maps on the walls, a flag in the corner. Jim stands, copybook in hand, opposite the desk of a LIEUTENANT COLONEL about his own age. The man stands, speaking on the phone. Jim looks somewhat nervous, watching as the Lieutenant Colonel finishes his call and hangs up. He shuffles some papers on his desk.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

There'll be an investigation into what exactly went wrong. There'll be an official debriefing... You holding up OK?

JIM

I wanted to ask about the kid who was wounded. His name's Tariq.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

What about him?

JIM

He's got a father who's being held as a security detainee. Got picked up in a sweep after a suicide bomb... I wonder if you could help getting him released.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

You wanna get a security detainee released?

JIM

He's innocent.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

No offense, but how the hell would you know? Do you even know the man?

JIM

I know his family. They're good people. They risked their lives to help me.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

Well, then send them a thank you note.

(off Jim's look)

There's nothing I can do.

JIM

That kid saw two of his uncles shot in front of his face and then got shot himself all because he was trying to get me back to safety. In spite of the fact that the American military locked up his father.

There's a slight tremor in Jim's voice.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

Nobody's gonna go letting out a security detainee just because he had other family members get killed. I could stand here and take down the man's name and pretend I was gonna do something but I can't. That's just the way it is.

JIM

(getting angry)

He's got a younger sister and a younger brother, and they're missing a father 'cause we locked him up. Just because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I wouldn't be back here safe and sound if it weren't for that family. (forcefully) So, I'm asking you to write down their father's name and to make a call and to keep on calling until you get some information... If that's not too much.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Jim stares the Lieutenant Colonel down.

CUT TO:

INT. CLINIC - DAY

The clinic is a strange mix of modern technology and improvised camping-style environment: tented roof, a plywood floor, bays with basic canvas cots. Copybook in hand, Jim walks uneasily past American soldiers who lie connected to IVs and hi-tech monitors.

Toward the end of the tent the atmosphere changes as Jim gets to a section reserved for a handful of IRAQI PATIENTS on cots. He passes various men, arrives at an empty bed and then looks around - confused, not seeing Tariq.

He turns and sees Tariq walking - shuffling, really - slowly toward him. His bare upper body is bandaged around his wound.

Tariq stops in front of Jim. They stare at one another. Jim seems a little nervous, not sure how Tariq is going to take to his presence.

JIM
(carefully)
I brought you this.

Jim holds out the copybook. Tariq looks at it, then takes it from Jim.

Jim watches as Tariq moves painfully toward his cot. As the boy turns to get in he loses his balance and begins to crumple.

Jim reaches out to support him and they come together in an awkward arrangement. Tariq clutches Jim's shoulders. Jim tries to carry Tariq's weight without falling. They edge over to the cot and Jim struggles to get him in, dumping his weight.

For a brief second their faces are inches apart. The intimacy is uncomfortable. Yet, at the same time, there's something of a relief to it-Jim feeling the boy in his arms.

Jim breaks the moment in order to shift the rest of Tariq's body onto the cot. He stays at eye level with the boy. There's a pause.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM (CONT'D)

I spoke to a Lieutenant Colonel on the base about your father. He took down his name and said he'd look into it. I don't know if it'll do much of anything, but at least—

Tariq is staring intently at Jim, trying to figure out what he's saying. The intensity of Tariq's eyes causes Jim to break off mid-sentence. He's suddenly aware of the falseness of his giving Tariq any hope, the inadequacy of anything he might do. Tariq's look completely disarms him and Jim now finds his eyes watering.

He begins crying, in spite of himself, in front of Tariq, the stress and grief of everything that has happened surging forth.

JIM (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm just so sorry... Jesus.

Jim's emotion causes Tariq's eyes to water.

Finally, Jim begins to regain himself.

Tariq looks at him. And then he says something—a few sentences in Arabic, calm, knowing.

Jim looks at the boy. He has no idea what he's said. But the connection between the two of them is unquestionable.

INT. PHONE TRAILER, CAMP DEERFIELD — DAY

Jim sits at the last phone in the phone trailer, which has the same basic set-up as the phone trailer at Camp Cougar. He stares at the phone for a long beat, collecting himself, before finally picking the receiver up and dialing. He waits nervously.

JIM

Hey, it's me... How are you? ... I'm fine. It's good to hear your voice.

The relief is evident in his face.

JIM (CONT'D)

...Nothing. It's just really good to hear your voice. I've been thinking about you...

EXT. STAGING AREA, CAMP DEERFIELD — SHORT TIME LATER

Jim, still in his same clothes, stands in the staging area looking at rows and rows of FUEL TRUCKS.

JIM (O.S., FROM PHONE TRAILER)
Dana listen, I've got something to tell
you. Our convoy got hit pretty bad.

In the distance, a cluster of drivers finishes their safety briefing and disperses toward the convoy at Jim's side. One YOUNG TRUCK DRIVER heads toward Jim.

YOUNG TRUCK DRIVER
I hear I'm giving you a ride back to
Cougar.

The two of them get into the young driver's truck, Jim in the passenger seat.

JIM (O.S., FROM PHONE TRAILER)
No, no I'm fine now. But it made me
think about things.

Jim straps on a Kevlar vest and puts on a helmet.

VOICE (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
Big Sir to bobtail, we're movin' out.

VOICE #2 (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
Sir, yes sir. Over.

The tanker in front of them begins to move and the young driver puts his truck in gear.

They kick up dust as they move out.

OUTSIDE THE BASE the convoy comes out onto an Iraqi road.

JIM (O.S., FROM PHONE TRAILER)
That's what I'm trying to tell you...

Inside the truck, the young driver shifts gears.

VOICE #2 (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
Bobtail to Big Sir, we're all on the
road. Over.

VOICE (O.S., OVER THE RADIO)
Roger. We're all out. Everyone look
alive. We're rolling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The young driver crosses himself. Jim notices. It causes him to think - he reaches into his pocket and pulls out his TOY HORSE, which he holds lightly to his lips as he looks out the passenger-side window: Iraqi kids by the side of the road hold up cartons of cigarettes for sale... On the opposite side of the road two cars pass, each with a coffin strapped to the roof.

On Jim-

JIM (O.S., FROM THE PHONE TRAILER)
I'm coming home. I decided.

We cut back to Jim's view of the Iraqi landscape moving by - date trees in the distance, a shepherd with his flock... slowly it is overlaid with a rural American landscape moving by (farmlands, American houses, etc.)... the combined image does not resolve, however - it remains double... until at last we FADE OUT.

The end.