,

# THE TRAIL OF THE CAT

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FADE IN:

EXT. IRAQI DESERT - DAY

We soar and dip high above a windy brown plain until a group of armored vehicles comes into view, hunched in the blowing sand, with two tiny figures standing nearby.

Swooping down, we join ANDREA ARLINGTON, a CNN-style reporter, and MIKE, her cameraman.

Mike aims his lens at her.

The wind whips their clothes.

SUPER: "IRAQ, 2006"

MIKE
Go ahead.

ANDREA
A chill is spreading through the foreign press corps this morning, hours after the kidnapping of legendary reporter Jack Stewart. An organization calling itself the Islamic Justice Front claimed responsibility for the abduction of the quadruple Pulitzer winner and ... shit. I've got sand in my eye.

Andrea tugs on her eyelid.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
This sand -- it's everywhere.
(recovering)
OK.

MIKE
And ... go ahead.

Andrea wears her serious face.

ANDREA
The kidnappers are demanding the release of several high-level Al-Qaeda operatives in exchange for the British national, and have threatened to decapitate him with the quote-unquote Sword of Islam if these demands are not met within thirty days. Officials say Stewart could be anywhere by now, anywhere in these vast, burning sands of terror ... How was that?

MIKE
Sands of terror?

They scurry toward the tanks as the sandstorm thickens.

INT. HEADQUARTERS OF THE WORLD NEWS SERVICE, LONDON - DAY

A big, buzzing newsroom.

SUPER: “LONDON”

IN A GLASS OFFICE

Around a conference table, watching a video, sit SIR TEDDY WINSTON, editor-in-chief, REGGIE, his assistant, HASTINGS, the personnel director, and HOBHOUSE, a crusty old news editor with an eye patch.

THE VIDEO

JACK STEWART sits blindfolded on an oriental rug, his hands behind his back. Arabic script runs backwards across the bottom of the screen.

BACK TO SCENE

SIR TEDDY
Roll that back, Reggie.

Reggie complies.

HASTINGS
Two weeks from his pension.

SIR TEDDY
Reckless idiot.

WHAM!

Sir Teddy slaps the tabletop.

SIR TEDDY (CONT’D)
It’s his own bloody fault.

HOBHOUSE
(nostalgically adjusting eye patch)
I’ll never forget the Gambian coup of ‘81. The entire press corps was fleeing from an angry mob, and when I looked over my shoulder, there was Jack Stewart, running straight at it.

HASTINGS
Anything for a good story.

Fond chuckles all around.

HOBHOUSE
It was his fat that saved him that time.

SIR TEDDY
Turn it off, Reggie.

Reggie complies.

Hastings hands Teddy a sheet of paper.

HASTINGS
The back-up list.

Teddy examines it.

SIR TEDDY
I can't send any of these bloody wankers to the Middle East.
(scanning)
Molly Mustard, who's that?

HASTINGS
The tea lady.

SIR TEDDY
Dash it, Hastings, the tea lady hasn't the proper qualifications to cover a military engagement of this magnitude.

HASTINGS
The volunteer list shrank quite drastically after that mortar hit the Baghdad Bureau last spring, and now with this Sword of Islam business --

HOBHOUSE
They're chopping heads at the drop of a hat.

SIR TEDDY
In my day, a few chopped heads didn't stand in anybody's way.

HASTINGS
There's also a certain feeling about the compensation, sir. The New York Times pays its reporters considerably more --

SIR TEDDY
Bah! A bunch of pampered show cats on satin cushions, that lot.

Sir Teddy crumples the list and throws it in the trash. He rifles around in his pockets, pulls out a paper.

SIR TEDDY (CONT'D)
Let's send him.

He hands the paper to Hastings.

HASTINGS
(reading the paper)
Santiago de la Torre? Who's that?

SIR TEDDY
Damn fine chap. Hired him this morning.

INT. OPTOMETRIST'S SHOP, OXFORD, ENGLAND - DAY

SUPER: "OXFORD, ENGLAND"

SANTIAGO DE LA TORRE, 33, sits in front of a mirror, about to insert new contact lenses.

The OPTOMETRIST, in a lab coat, watches.

OPTOMETRIST
The first time can be awkward.

Santiago balances a lens an inch from his eye.

OPTOMETRIST (CONT'D)
Give it a little pop and it'll adhere to your eyeball tissue.

Santiago faints. His head hits the counter.

INT. HEADQUARTERS OF THE WORLD NEWS SERVICE, LONDON - DAY

Hastings chases Sir Teddy down a hallway, waving Santiago's resume.

HASTINGS
It says here he's a commodities reporter. I mean, really, as a substitute for an old warhorse like Jack --

SIR TEDDY
-- So instead of wheat crops and pork bellies, it'll be bombs and insurgents. None of it's rocket science, Hastings.

HASTINGS
But sir --

SIR TEDDY
-- Get out of my way, Hastings!

INT. ROYAL JORDANIAN PLANE - DAY

Santiago, glasses on, reads “A LIFE IN JOURNALISM.” The cover shows Jack Stewart, heavyset, gray, dashing.

INT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT - DAY

Santiago in the chaotic terminal.

Fleeing Iraqis push and shove, hauling boxes and bags. A Japanese news crew struggles by with TV equipment.

Private security men circulate with automatic weapons.

A long embargo against Iraq accounts for the 60’s decor: avocado carpet, abundant concrete.

An analogue departures-and-arrivals board is frozen, displaying long discontinued connections to Barcelona, Geneva, New York.

Saddam Hussein is painted hugely across a wall, his eyes scratched out.

DAVY and RICKY, World News Service’s security men, approach, carrying a sign that says “SANTIAGO.” They are big, tough Irishmen.

DAVY
(calling to Santiago)
World News Service?

EXT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT PARKING LOT - DAY

Santiago, Davy and Ricky stand beside two older black Mercedes with curtained windows.

Each car has an IRAQI DRIVER. Santiago is putting on a bulletproof vest, backwards.

DAVY
There’ve been a number of attacks this week on the airport road. We may have to speed a bit.
(noticing vest)
May I?

He helps Santiago correct it.

RICKY
If there’s an ambush, stay in the car and await instructions.

DAVY
If for any reason you have to leave the car, crawl under it.

RICKY
And never stick your head out the window.

DAVY
Lovely. Shall we be on our way, then?

IRAQI DRIVER 1 throws Santiago's duffel into the trunk.

Santiago smooths his vest.

EXT. AIRPORT ROAD, BAGHDAD - DAY

The two Mercedes move alarmingly fast.

INT./EXT. MERCEDES - CONTINUOUS

Santiago peeks out the curtain and takes in the low, sand-colored city, the Tigris slogging down the middle.

A BIT LATER

They move into a more urban stretch. The traffic is chaos. The stoplights don't work.

They pass one bombed-out building after another.

Barbed wire spools crazily along walls and fences like an invasive vine.

Davy and Ricky discuss their route via radio.

RICKY
(into walkie-talkie)
There's a bloke in that building to the left with some sort of antenna. Could be an RPG.

DAVY (V.O.)
Better change course.

RICKY
Roger.

Ricky turns left. Davy follows.

SANTIAGO
RPG?

RICKY
Rocket-propelled grenade.

SANTIAGO
Oh.

EXT. BAGHDAD BUREAU - DAY

The cars pull up at a dilapidated palace, lately the Iraq headquarters of the World News Service.

The once-grand main gate hangs crooked on its hinges.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Santiago and Davy walk along an echoing marble passage.

INT. BAGHDAD NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Santiago and Davy enter.

The makeshift newsroom stands in an empty ballroom, a snarl of metal desks and electrical cords in the center of a pink marble dance floor.

A row of televisions show various news channels.

DAVY
Here he is, Dunphy, all in one piece.

DUNPHY, the bureau chief, sets his burning cigarette in an ashtray and rises to meet them. He's a genteel old Alabaman with a heavy Southern accent.

DUNPHY
Santiago de la Torre, I presume? We do appreciate you making the trip all the way out here to lend us a hand.

SANTIAGO
I'm glad to be here.

They shake hands.

DUNPHY
This here's Omar.

Omar, a grouchy Palestinian communist, 40, nods formally.

DUNPHY (CONT'D)
And over there's Chip.

Chip, 35, an Australian, stands on a step ladder with a staple gun, making repairs to a hideous homemade cat-climbing tree. It's a sort of carpet-covered pedestal with jutting limbs and dangling toys.

A big fluffy white cat watches him work.

CHIP
(out of breath)
Santiago de la Torre. Shit that's a long name. How 'bout if I call you ... um ... Santa? Yeah, that's better.

SANTIAGO
Well, I ... What is that?

CHIP
(cheerfully)
It's a cat condo for our baby. Made it myself. A few odds and ends, a bit of carpet, a staple gun, and wah-la!

CHONK. CHONK-CHONK.

Chip staples the tree in a few places.

OMAR
(examining the tree)
Someone call the Hague. I'd like to report an atrocity.

Dunphy hefts Santiago's bag.

DUNPHY
Let's walk and talk.

INT. HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

Santiago and Dunphy move along a series of once-regal, now-dilapidated hallways.

DUNPHY
You probably heard about that old mortar that hit us in the springtime.

SANTIAGO
Um --

DUNPHY
We almost abandoned the place, but it turns out only the north side's unstable.

The building is confusing, with odd, twisting passageways.

DUNPHY (CONT'D)
Here we are.

Dunphy stops at a door, unlocks it.

INT. JACK'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Like the room of someone recently deceased. Silent, neat. A single bed with a tartan blanket. A desk and chair.

Pictures on the walls: Jack Stewart with Castro, with Pope John Paul II, with Elizabeth Taylor.

Atop the dresser stand four Pulitzer plaques.

Dunphy tosses Santiago's duffel bag on the bed.

SANTIAGO
This is Jack Stewart's room.

DUNPHY
Doesn't bother you, does it? ...
It's the only free bed.

They stand awkwardly among the kidnapped man's things.

DUNPHY (CONT'D)
Bathroom's through there.

Dunphy gets out a new cigarette and starts striking his near-empty lighter.

DUNPHY (CONT'D)
I'd lock up anything valuable. One of the maids stole the sheets right off my bed. They're probably up on some roof now.

A BOMB explodes in the near distance. Santiago jumps.

Dunphy goes right on talking and striking his lighter.

DUNPHY (CONT'D)
It gets so hot the locals sleep on wet sheets on the rooftops.

Dunphy finally gets his cigarette lit and moves toward the door.

DUNPHY (CONT'D)
I'll let you get settled in. Then we'll have a nice visit.

SANTIAGO
Thanks.

Dunphy exits in a cloud of smoke.

Santiago explores the room. He opens the closet. Several garments hang on a rod. Slippers and combat boots line up in a row.

He opens the kidnapped man's underwear drawer and contemplates a pair of big white boxers.

The CALL TO PRAYER sounds in a nearby mosque.

He puts away the boxers.

He turns back to his duffel. Out comes a bottle of Spanish sherry and a volume of poems, Baudelaire's "Fleurs du Mal". He places them on the night table.

INT. SANTIAGO'S ROOM - NIGHT

It is very dark.

Santiago is asleep.

A drawer SCRAPES open, then the RUSTLING of someone quietly going through it.

The drawer SHUTS.

FOOTSTEPS.

The room door OPENS and SHUTS softly. Santiago wakes up.

SANTIAGO
(half asleep)
Who's there?

He fumbles for the bedside lamp.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)
Hello?

He gets the light on. Stillness. The clock reads 1 a.m. He looks in the bathroom. All is well. He yanks open the closet. Just clothes.

He peeks out into the dim corridor.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

He walks along in boxers and a T-shirt.

INT. STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

He climbs up. At the top is a door. He opens it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bright lights. POP MUSIC.

Chip and Omar play a violent VIDEO GAME.

Ricky reads a newspaper.

CHIP
Fuck me! I ran over a bomb.

Chip and Omar notice Santiago but are too caught up in their game to stop.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Santa! Come on in.

RICKY
Beer?

SANTIAGO
No, thanks ... Don't you sleep?

CHIP
We're a bit wound up.

OMAR
It proved a rigorous workday.

CHIP
How 'bout a round of Terror on the Tigris? It's very relaxing.

OMAR
(immersed in game)
Quite frankly, it's a stupid game.

SANTIAGO
Something woke me up.

RICKY
I don't hear the helicopters anymore.

SANTIAGO
Something inside, in my room.

OMAR
This building is full of alarming creaks and groans. It is safe to assume that it will collapse at any moment.

Chip leaves his game, gets up in Santiago's face.

CHIP
What was it like?

SANTIAGO
What?

CHIP
The sound.

SANTIAGO
It was nothing.

OMAR
I have no confidence whatever in the so-called engineers who evaluated the foundation. They were arrogant shits.

CHIP
Tell me.

SANTIAGO
Well, it was like a person, moving, opening drawers, looking around.

Chip, stricken, lowers himself onto the couch.

CHIP
Shit. It's Jack. It's Jack's ghost.

RICKY
Chip.

CHIP
He's come back to look for his head.

RICKY
Quit it, Chip! Christ.

Ricky turns to Santiago.

RICKY (CONT'D)
We've also got mice.

INT. SANTIAGO'S ROOM - A BIT LATER

Santiago is about to turn out the bedside light when he notices that his sherry is missing.

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU KITCHEN - DAY

Breakfast.

Santiago sits at a table with Dunphy eating olives, cheese, cucumbers, tomatoes, pita bread, coffee.

Dunphy eats in a tobacco cloud.

SANTIAGO
How many people live here?

DUNPHY
Six. Us reporters, plus Davy and Ricky.

SANTIAGO
And them?

Santiago indicates the kitchen staff: a SURLY CHEF, a SOUR CLEANING LADY and a TACITURN HELPER.

They glare at the journalists as if they suspect they are being discussed.

The Chef has a small radio. He adjusts it to a station playing Arabic pop MUSIC.

DUNPHY
They live in the neighborhood.

SANTIAGO
Nobody else sleeps here?

DUNPHY
Just Venus.

SANTIAGO
Who?

DUNPHY
The cat.

Dunphy points down, and there is Venus, in the flesh.

SPLAT! A chicken liver lands at her feet.

The chef, source of the airborne organ meat, looks benevolently at the cat and cracks a black-toothed smile.

INT. NEWSROOM/BALLROOM - DAY

SCRATCH-SCRATCH-SCRATCH

CAT CLAWS violently assault the cat condo.

Santiago, Chip and Omar work at their desks.

ON A BANK OF TV SCREENS

A row of Donald Rumsfelds address the press. (This is a real Rumsfeld clip.)

DONALD RUMSFELD
(on television)
There's another way to phrase that, and that is that the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence. It is basically saying the same thing in a different way. Simply because you do not have evidence that something does exist does not mean that you have evidence that it doesn't.

OMAR
(to Chip)
Your filthy German pornography has once again been mistakenly placed in my workspace.

Omar violently hurls a package at chip.

CHIP
(opening package)
Fantastic! It's my new personal groomer.

Chip plays with the hair-removal device, making a buzzing noise while waving it over his crotch and butt areas.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Brilliant.

OMAR
Quite frankly, you are a repugnant exemplar of current Western values. How much was that?

CHIP
Forty-nine, ninety-five. Euros.

Chip tosses the device to Omar, who examines it between his thumb and forefinger and throws it back with a sneer.

OMAR
Luckily I am up to date on my inoculations. Now sod off.

Omar turns to his computer and starts typing.

Chip examines the unwholesome-looking attachments of his groomer as the TV news continues on a screen behind him.

TV ANCHOR
Suicide bombers struck outside Baghdad's fortified Green Zone on Tuesday, killing sixteen people ...

CHIP
Bzzzzzzzzzz. Bzzzzzzzzzz.

TV ANCHOR
... close to where parliament met in heated session to hear lawmakers warn that civil war was close at hand.

Chip turns to Santiago.

CHIP
That's the style, silky smooth all over.

SANTIAGO
(uneasy)
Uh-huh.

CHIP
(waving the instructions)
Then again, you probably don't need any assistance in the chick department. Handsome guy like you. They go for that Latin lover shit. Bullfighting, flamingo dancing. Am I right? Am I?

SANTIAGO
Somewhat.

Chip's phone RINGS. He answers.

CHIP
(on phone)
Hi. Mohammed. Go ahead.

Chip types.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Sixteen? Did you say with heads or without heads?
(listening)
One unsure. Well mate, either you've got a head or you ain't.

INT. PRESS BRIEFING ROOM, GREEN ZONE - DAY

At the front stand three podiums, flanked by flags of Iraq and the U.S. and a banner that reads, "OPERATION FREEDOM." Portraits of Bush and Cheney.

Rows of seats face the podiums. Reporters stand in clusters, like party guests.

TV cameras stand in back. Photographers line the stage.

Andrea Arlington tests a lapel mike as the Japanese news crew sets up its equipment.

Santiago enters, a press credential around his neck, looking a little lost.

Two American reporters, Roy and Paul, strike up a conversation near Santiago.

ROY
Paul, you're back, man. I heard you guys saw some action in Kirkuk.

PAUL
Affirmative. Our photographer caught a piece of shrapnel in the ass.

ROY
Yeah?

Santiago takes a seat and readies a notebook.

PAUL
Yep. That sucked for him.

ROY
Cool scar, though.

PAUL
I know.

SCOTT KELLOGG, hotshot correspondent for the fancy New York paper, dashes in and slaps Roy and Paul on the back.

SCOTT
Dudes!

ROY AND PAUL
Dude!

The three perform an elaborate handshake ritual.

ROY
Hey. How was the R-n-R?

SCOTT
Great. Kenya. Ten-day safari.

ROY
Utterly sweet. How's your wife?

SCOTT
Ouch. Sore subject.

ROY
Sorry, man. I didn't realize.

SCOTT
It's cool. We're taking a step back to reevaluate our relationship parameters.

ROY
I just figured --

SCOTT
I went with Becky. The girl from Billboard. The hot one.

PAUL
Becky? Great. So you two are --

SCOTT
Yes and no. I'm still committed to my marriage.

PAUL
Good for you, man.

A side door opens and coalition spokesman MAJOR GENERAL GREENLEAF strides to the podium.

CIA JIM follows, sporting dark glasses and a State Dept. badge. He sits off to one side of the podium.

Two soldiers put charts on an easel.

GREENLEAF
A-hem. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

SCOTT
(calling out)
Any word on Jack Stewart, major general?

GREENLEAF
I'm afraid not, Scott, although our most heartfelt prayers certainly go out to Jack and his family.

ANDREA
Any further communications from the kidnappers?

GREENLEAF
I'm not at liberty to discuss that, Andrea, although I will say that the Islamic Justice Front is well known to us as a fanatical organization whose agents will stop at nothing to destroy our way of life ... allrighty then.

Greenleaf dons reading glasses.

GREENLEAF (CONT'D)
Next we're gonna share with you some information about a successful mission that was conducted by the coalition forces in their pursuit of freedom and democracy here in Eye-raq.

Greenleaf turns the page of his notes.

GREENLEAF (CONT'D)
On July 24 at zero three hundred, coalition forces moved in on the Eye-raqi village of Swifiyeh, where terrorists from Sudan and Syria were planning ACF activities.

Santiago turns to a nerdy reporter next to him.

SANTIAGO
ACF?

NERDY REPORTER
Duh. Anti-coalition forces.

Santiago makes a notation.

GREENLEAF
Now I'm gonna ask Private Rodriguez here if he could put up chart number one.

The soldier puts up the chart.

GREENLEAF (CONT'D)
Thank you, Private Rodriguez. Now I'm gonna use the pointer.

A BARRAGE OF CAMERA SHUTTERS as he raises the pointer.

GREENLEAF (CONT'D)
Here we have Mud House Number One, which we'll call MH-1. MH-1 has two entrances, MH-1A, here, and MH-1B, here. ... At zero five hundred we got some information there could be some I.C's inside MH-1.

Santiago nudges the nerd.

NERDY REPORTER
Iraqi civilians.

Private Rodriguez changes the chart.

GREENLEAF
We were pretty sure that MH-1 was cleared of I.C.'s. But we believed certain I.C.'s were sleeping in MH-2 based on sighting of approximately six to eight sandals outside MH-2A, right here, north northeast of this rooster.

LATER

The press conference has ended. Greenleaf strides out the way he came in, followed by his entourage.

Amid the bustle, Santiago slips through a door at the back of the room. It leads into:

INT. A LONG HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He moves confidently, quickly. He turns a corner and an elevator comes into view.

INT. AT THE ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Santiago emerges from the elevator on an upper floor.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He comes to a door marked INTERPOL ANTIQUITIES UNIT.

He KNOCKS.

ETHAN, a young lab assistant, opens the door.

INT. BLAND OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Santiago enters.

ETHAN
I'm Ethan, the lab assistant.

SANTIAGO
Hi.

ETHAN
She's in here.

Ethan enters a code into the keypad of an adjoining door.

INT. TREASURE LAB - CONTINUOUS

Santiago and Ethan enter.

Stunning museum objects await evaluation on a long table.

DR. GOLDHEIMER, 80, a lady with wild white hair like a dandelion gone to seed, examines the hieroglyphic writing on a golden tablet from behind a pair of magnifying goggles.

Engrossed in her task, she doesn't notice the visitors.

GOLDHEIMER
(reading the tablet)
Come quickly/As soon as these blossoms open, they fall.

Santiago looks over her shoulder.

SANTIAGO
(reading)
This world exists/ As a sheen of dew on flowers.

Goldheimer looks up and removes her goggles.

GOLDHEIMER
Ah! Professor Khalidi. My favorite student!

They kiss on both cheeks.

SANTIAGO
Dr. Goldheimer.

GOLDHEIMER
I've been contemplating this piece for ...
(she consults her watch)
... two and a half hours now.

Santiago leans in for a better look.

SANTIAGO
Typical of the Fifth Dynasty.

GOLDHEIMER
Yes.

She puts down the piece, removes her goggles and shows Santiago a chair.

They both sit.

Ethan moves to the far end of the table and starts dusting a pile of cylinder seals.

GOLDHEIMER
Well, there she is.

Goldheimer turns to the wall, and she and Santiago gaze upon a poster-sized photograph of a famous Assyrian statue known as the Lioness Attacking a Nubian.

The Nubian lies on his back, the lioness on top of him, gripping his throat in her jaws. It's violent, sensual, magnificent, made of gold and ivory.

Across the bottom of the poster in large black letters it says "LOOTED, 2003." (Note: The lioness really is a looted Iraq artifact, and really is still missing!)

GOLDHEIMER (CONT'D)
No piece more precious has ever risen from the dusts of ancient Assyria.

Goldheimer touches the poster tenderly, then turns toward Santiago.

GOLDHEIMER
Your dissertation on her was the finest ever done. So when we got this new tip on her whereabouts, I wanted you to be the first to know, the one to try and get her back.

She removes a set of rolled up blueprints from her desk and holds them.

GOLDHEIMER (CONT'D)
We've always believed the lioness to be somewhere in Baghdad. She's simply too famous, too large, too valuable, to risk taking across the border. The going theory was that one of Saddam's cronies had stashed her somewhere during the invasion, to be retrieved later. ... Then two weeks ago, the State Department intercepted some communications that strongly point to the villa where you're living - the villa taken over by the World News Service.

Santiago appears slightly overcome.

SANTIAGO
I'm living under the same roof with her?

GOLDHEIMER
You might be.

She unrolls the blueprints.

GOLDHEIMER (CONT'D)
These are the blueprints for the house. It's a sprawling old ruin. You'll need to go through it room by room.

SANTIAGO
Right.

He scans the blueprints.

GOLDHEIMER
(excited, happy)
And I was afraid you wouldn't feel up to it.

He looks up at her.

SANTIAGO
I'm not sure what you mean.

GOLDHEIMER
Your ... fainting spells. I understand you've curtailed your field work because --

SANTIAGO
(defensive)
-- I had a touch of low blood pressure for a while. That's all.

GOLDHEIMER
I've been misinformed, then. Pardon me.

He returns to the blueprints.

SANTIAGO
Why the undercover act? Why not just tell the World News Service? Send in a whole team. Take the place apart.

GOLDHEIMER
Nobody trusts those loud-mouth news people. Of course we had to tell Sir Teddy, to get you planted in the bureau. That was unavoidable. But if it got out what we were searching for - and I'm certain it would if we told all those busybodies - who knows what new looters would come out of the woodwork.

She takes Santiago's hand and looks into his eyes.

GOLDHEIMER (CONT'D)
I hate to discuss the wonders of antiquity in monetary terms, but the fact is ...
(whispering)
... our lioness is now worth over a hundred million dollars.

INT. TREASURE LAB - SHORTLY AFTER

Santiago has left.

Wiping his hands on a rag, Ethan ambles from his work station over to Dr. Goldheimer, who has returned to her goggle work.

ETHAN
It's a lie, you know.

GOLDHEIMER
What's lie?

ETHAN
That he doesn't faint.

She doesn't answer, but listens.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Khalidi was leading a dig last summer at Al Khums, and he fainted three or four times.

She continues her examination of her plaque.

GOLDHEIMER
Sounds like gossip to me.

ETHAN
Phil was there.

GOLDHEIMER
Ah, Phil. And who might that be?

ETHAN
My old roommate. He thinks Khalidi's got an anxiety disorder. Archeology causes it, you know, those extended periods of unfulfilled longing under the hot sun, year after year, until the body's capacity for stress is almost nil, and can be restored only through some grand orgasmic fulfillment, in this case, in the form of a major discovery. Freud once wrote that -

GOLDHEIMER
Go make us some coffee, Ethan. ...
Better make it decaf.

EXT. CRAPPY GARDEN IN BACK OF BAGHDAD BUREAU - SUNSET

A twisted mound of shrapnel, wreathed in smoke.

It's soon apparent that the smoke is wafting from a goat that is being roasted on a spit by the sour kitchen staff a few feet away.

The shrapnel landed early in the war and now functions as a perverse conversation piece.

OMAR
While composed of rigidly straight lines, visually it suggests waves, folds, cartwheels. It's a contradiction.

CHIP
Just like my ex-wife. Upside down on a StairMaster. Naked.

DUNPHY
You could fry an egg on it. If not for the toxic residue.

The bureau denizens sit on warped lawn chairs and eat off plastic plates, wilted by the 100-degree heat, now ebbing with the dusk, and pestered by big black flies.

The yard consists of dusty crabgrass and patches of dirt.

Dunphy holds an umbrella and smokes.

Chip grips a flyswatter in one hand, a fork in the other.

CHIP
You know what always works on a woman?

No one answers.

CHIP (CONT'D)
You tell 'em you're a foreign correspondent and wham-bam.

WHAM. He nails a fly.

CHIP (CONT'D)
They think you're James Fucking Bond.

The Chef adjusts his radio. An Arabic POP TUNE comes on.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Hey Santa, you know what? You ought to move into my room. I've got space.

SANTIAGO
Thanks, Chip, but I don't believe in ghosts.

CHIP
Let's say it *was* a mouse. So what. The room's still tainted.

OMAR
That room is nothing more than plaster, nails and assorted textiles adorned with a few sticks of furniture. Why must you impregnate it with your aboriginal mysticism?

CHIP
Don't say "impregnate."

SANTIAGO
Tainted?

CHIP
It's just a feeling that if you get too close to the vortex of bad mojo, you'll be the next one sucked in.

OMAR
I strongly urge you to locate the nearest traveling circus and seek employment as a fraudulent crystal-gazer.

GUNFIRE echoes in the neighborhood, ignored by all except Santiago, who glances nervously toward the sound.

The kitchen staff begin to argue. By their gestures we infer a disagreement over the rotation of the goat.

SANTIAGO
Where was Jack when he was kidnapped?

An awkward silence, and then:

DUNPHY
In Baghdad.

SANTIAGO
I mean exactly where.

Dunphy closes the umbrella, sets it aside.

DUNPHY
Perhaps we should steer our conversation in a more cheerful and pleasant direction.

DAVY
No. Let's just have it out. If you want to blame me and Ricky, just do it outright.

CHIP
Nobody's blaming. Nobody's insinuating.

OMAR
Quite frankly, I've insinuated.

DAVY
(defensive)
I brought him back to this house in one piece.

DUNPHY
We know that, Davy.

CHIP
Isn't anybody gonna answer Santa's question? I'll answer it.

DUNPHY
Chip, so help me, Hannah --

CHIP
He was snatched out of his bedroom.

RICKY
That's fooking nonsense, mate.

DUNPHY
(to Santiago)
There's no basis whatever for Chip's theory. Your room is absolutely safe. Relatively speaking. Within the parameters of a war.

CHIP
What happened to him, then? Where is he?

RICKY
He ditched security and left the bureau on his own. It's the only possibility.

CHIP
(to Santiago)
The doors were locked from the inside.

RICKY
Somehow he got out. He left here in the middle of the night, chasing some worthless story. I'd bet my mother's teeth on it.

WHAM. Chip nails a fly.

CHIP
(to Santiago)
From the inside.

DAVY
Jack Stewart ran around Baghdad like it was bloody Disney World.

CHIP
He was always breaking the 10-minute rule.

SANTIAGO
What's that?

DAVY
Out in public, we never spend more than ten minutes in one place. Ten minutes is how long it takes for a kidnapper to notice you, ring up his cronies and execute the abduction.

SURLY CHEF
(in Arabic, with subtitles)
It pleases me to announce that the goat will be ready in five minutes, God willing.

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU - NIGHT

Santiago skulks around a dark, abandoned room. He's finding nothing.

FOOTSTEPS, laughter, as Davy and Ricky approach. Santiago slips behind a door. Davy and Ricky move off.

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU KITCHEN - NIGHT

Another night.

Santiago slips in, barefoot. Moonlight slices into the room. He opens cabinets, cupboards. He’s rummaging. He moves into

THE PANTRY

And turns to a recumbent freezer. It’s padlocked. He draws a pick from his pocket and jimmies the lock. He opens the lid.

A frozen goat stares up at him!

He drops the lid in horror.

INT. SANTIAGO’S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Santiago sits on his bed with the blueprints. He crosses out two rooms.

He puts the blueprints away and settles down on his bed with the Jack Stewart memoir he’s reading.

LATER

Santiago is asleep. The book lies open on the bed.

Moonlight shines in the room.

He wakes from a bad dream, breathing hard.

SANTIAGO
Who’s there?

A HELICOPTER CLATTERS overhead.

His eyes dart about the room, alighting on the closet. He moves toward it, grips the knob, flings open the door.

There stands Jack Stewart, smiling, clad in the fatigues of a kidnapped man. A moonbeam casts a morbid pallor over his face. He smiles.

Santiago faints.

INT. THE BATHROOM - MORNING

Santiago splashes his face, laughs at his reflection.

INT. SANTIAGO’S ROOM - A MINUTE LATER

He finishes dressing, kicks the closet closed.

INT. NEWSROOM/BALLROOM - DAY

Dunphy, Omar, Chip, Davy and Ricky are gathered around one of the televisions, their faces grim.

Santiago enters, joins the group.

DAVY
(to Santiago)
It's another video of Jackie.

ON TELEVISION

As before, Jack Stewart sits against a blank wall.

BACK TO SCENE

DUNPHY
What's it say, Omar?

OMAR
They want some people released or ... it's the same as before.

INT. NEWSROOM/BALLROOM - LATER

Santiago, Chip and Omar work at their desks.

Dunphy walks up to Santiago.

DUNPHY
Listen, can you take another crack at that feature? It's a little ... dry.

SANTIAGO
Dry?

DUNPHY
Like a bag o' sawdust.

SANTIAGO
Oh.

Dunphy walks away in a smoky miasma.

INT. NEWSROOM/BALLROOM - NIGHT

Santiago is alone, the sickly glow of the computer monitor reflecting on his face.

Chip and Omar enter, in a party mood.

Chip, in a Hawaiian shirt, cozies a haunch on the edge of Santiago's desk and peers over his shoulder.

CHIP
Anything wrong, Santa?

SANTIAGO
My features's dry.

CHIP
You better come with us.

INT. NEW YORK PAPER'S PALACE, BAGHDAD - NIGHT

An Iraqi butler welcomes Chip, Omar and Santiago into the hallowed foyer of the fancy-pants New York paper.

MUSIC and laughter tell of a party in full swing.

Scott Kellogg, hotshot New York Paper correspondent, strides over to welcome the guests. He is extra-friendly, with too-white teeth, and wears a bathrobe, flip-flops and a gun in a holster.

SCOTT
Hey there, Chip, Omar. Glad you could make it.

OMAR
Quite frankly, I've only come to get pissed drunk.

SCOTT
And the newly arrived Santiago de la Torre, correct?

CHIP
Santa, this is Scott Kellogg. He's the bureau chief over here.

Scott and Santiago shake hands.

SANTIAGO
I know your work.

SCOTT
You're a good man to step into the breach. I don't know how you guys keep up the morale.

A waiter appears with a tray of wine, red and white. They each take a glass. Omar takes one of each.

OMAR
Worry not, Mr. Kellogg. We of the wire services shall continue to report from the trenches while you dally pool-side concocting your pro-Israel propaganda.

SCOTT
(chuckling)
And by the trenches you mean hiding in your house across the street?

OMAR
(gulping wine)
Technically, yes.

SCOTT
I'm having a tough time myself. We were very close, Jack and I.

Chip is already rubbernecking for hotties.

CHIP
Anybody new?

SCOTT
Them, from the AP.

Two ugly geeks play at a mini-soccer table.

CHIP
Lovely.

SCOTT
(to Santiago)
Did you bring your swim trunks?

SANTIAGO
I'm afraid not.

SCOTT
If you feel like going in, I'll scare you up a pair, although as you can see, the pool is unofficially clothing-optional.

They look toward a shimmering pool surrounded by palm trees and tiki torches.

A naked couple cavorts about the perimeter, squeals, jumps in.

OMAR
I ask you, is there sufficient chlorine in all the world to disinfect that pool?

SCOTT
Gotta dash. Enjoy.

Scott darts off and greets the Japanese news crew.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Konnichi wa!

Santiago, Omar and Chip recline on a creamy leather sofa. A silver fruit bowl stands on the table between them.

OMAR
Can you imagine the stipends these American fraudsters must receive for their so-called work?

CHIP
My personal groomer's a marvel. Wanna see?

SANTIAGO AND OMAR
No.

Chip unzips his pants and shows them.

OMAR
(cry of agony)
ACK!

Chip zips up and heads for the dance floor.

CHIP
(to Santiago)
Coming?

SANTIAGO
Maybe later.

Chip and Omar move off into the throng.

Santiago picks up an apple from the silver fruit bowl and takes a bite.

He turns to find a SLOSHED WOMAN breathing gin fumes into his face.

SLOSHED WOMAN
I like the way you eat your fruit.

SANTIAGO
Thanks.

SLOSHED WOMAN
You're the new Spanish guy.

SANTIAGO
Uh-huh.

SLOSHED WOMAN
Are you a bullfighter?

SANTIAGO
No.

SLOSHED WOMAN
But you have to be. Come on.

SANTIAGO
Sorry.

SLOSHED WOMAN
I'm going for a fucking swim.

She reels away.

Just then, a one-handed pushups contest begins squarely in front of Santiago's chair.

Roy and Paul are the contestants. A small crowd begins to gather, counting the pushups.

SMALL CROWD
Five. Six. Seven.

Santiago takes a bite of his apple.

SMALL CROWD (CONT'D)
Eight! Nine!

The contestants grunt and strain.

SMALL CROWD (CONT'D)
Ten! Eleven! Twelve!

The contest reaches its mortifying conclusion.

SMALL CROWD (CONT'D)
Thirteen! Fourteen! Fifteen!

Roy collapses.

Paul jumps up, victorious. The crowd disperses with a sense of anti-climax.

Santiago wanders into the

POOL AREA

Scott Kellogg sits in the glow of a tiki torch, his laptop in front of him, talking on a satellite phone.

SCOTT
Even in war, one finds beauty, Larry. The Milky Way seems to hover just beyond my fingertips tonight, and I feel so achingly mortal. How's New York?
(listens)
Uh-huh. Listen, just one more thing. The change in paragraph three. What was the thinking behind that?
(sour chuckle)
For clarity? That's funny.

Scott turns, now inaudible. And then, another voice.

CONRAD VON RICHTER (O.S.)
You're the new man at World News Service, right?

Santiago looks down and, behold, it's the godlike and glistening CONRAD VON RICHTER, another New York Paper correspondent.

He's in the water, performing backwards arm flexes against the pool edge. He contemplates his triceps with a world-weary expression.

SANTIAGO
Santiago de la Torre.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
From London, right? Commodities, right?

A waiter deposits a bottle of Fiji water next to Conrad and moves on.

SANTIAGO
I know your byline. Brussels.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
I covered the European Union until the war started.

SANTIAGO
Interesting beat.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
They needed somebody who speaks a bunch of languages. I speak six, seven if I count Swahili. It seems so long ago now.

Conrad pours the bottled water over his head in a sensual manner, then shakes his hair.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
If only I knew Arabic. Oh well. We employ a battalion of Iraqi translators.

Conrad indicates a group of Iraqis performing an exotic Bedouin circle dance accompanied by CLAPPING.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
God knows what they're telling us. Then again, the written word is but the palest reflection of reality.

A waiter appears with appetizers.

CONRAD VON RICHTER (CONT'D)
Try the stuffed mushroom caps. That's my favorite. Although I'm off dairy right now.

Santiago examines the tray.

SANTIAGO
Still, one might argue, that words, although to a degree subjective, can convey --

He glances back to the pool just as a pair of flippers slip beneath the surface.

Scott, once again audible, paces with the phone.

SCOTT
(on phone)
It's not just a comma, Larry. It changes the whole feel of the piece. I'd have the mother-fucking Pulitzer by now if it weren't for you morons! Larry? Hello?

He heaves his laptop into the pool, where it wings a swimmer.

SWIMMER
Ow!

SCOTT
Sorry.

UNDERWATER VIEW

The laptop sinks gently to the bottom of the pool.

BACK TO SCENE

Santiago takes a seat on a lounge chair. He spies Chip on the dance floor, gyrating with floozies.

The tipsy Iraqis dance faster and faster, their CLAPPING oddly compatible with the Top Ten pop music on tap.

Larry King interviews Siegfried and Roy on a wide screen.

A HELICOPTER clatters overhead.

Chip dances over to Santiago, plops down in the chair next to him, POPS open a beer.

CHIP
I gotta pace myself.

He waves at the girls, takes a swig.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Making friends?

SANTIAGO
I just met Conrad Von Richter.

CHIP
You mean Poseidon?

SANTIAGO
Poseidon?

CHIP
He hasn't written a story in two months. He just swims. I hear he's on medication.

They survey the pool. There's no sign of Conrad, but they spy Omar, in a Speedo, cannon-balling off the high dive.

OMAR
Cowabunga!

Just then, a couple bursts into the pool area. It's Andrea Arlington, in a bikini, chasing Mike, her cameraman.

ANDREA
You fucking asshole! You fucker! Fuck you!

She hurls a glass at him.

SMASH.

She misses.

MIKE
Andrea. Let's be professional about this.

He flees toward the far side of the pool.

ANDREA
You think you can dump me like a piece of trash? I work for CNN. I graduated from Princeton. With honors!

Waiters appear on either side of Andrea but don't know how to proceed.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
You don't know a fucking thing about anything. You know how to plug in cables.

Party guests watch the action with undisguised voyeuristic relish.

Scott comes flapping over.

SCOTT
People! People! This is no way to solve a conflict. Let's talk it out.

ANDREA
I'll drown myself.

She sticks her head under the water.

Then pulls it out and continues her rant.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Why can't you see how good we could be together? Why? Because you're a big dumb douche bag.

SCOTT
What I hear Andrea saying is that she's feeling emotionally invalidated right now.

MIKE
Andrea.

ANDREA
(wild shriek)
AHHHHHHH!

Scott waves off Mike, crouches next to Andrea.

SCOTT
Let me make you a nice herbal infusion. I've got Red Zinger, or Tension Tamer, if you'd care for that.

Andrea bolts away, grabs a tray from one of the waiters and hurls it wildly.

ANDREA
(primal shriek)
AHHHHHHHH!!!!!

Crab puffs go flying into the pool and vicinity.

Scott ducks and the spinning tray conks Santiago in the head.

He faints.

CHIP
Santa!

COMMOTION. Scott and the waiters rush to Santiago's aid.

SANTIAGO'S POV: Darkness, then eyes opening.

Omar and Chip hover inches away. Scott rubbernecks.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Santiago. Do you remember your name?

OMAR
(dripping wet)
Now that you've told him who he is, how can we know if he knew who he was?

ANDREA (O.S.)
(to Mike)
Micro-dick jackass!

EXT. NEW YORK PAPER'S PALACE - SHORTLY AFTER

Flanked by the noisy party house, Santiago walks alone back across the dark street toward his house.

A mangy dog HOWLS at the moon.

INT. SANTIAGO'S ROOM - SHORTLY AFTER

Santiago, Bandaid on head, spreads out the blueprints on his bed.

INSERT - THE BLUEPRINTS

All rooms in the good half of the house are crossed out, meaning it's time to search the condemned wing, outlined in red.

INT. HALLWAY - SHORTLY AFTER

Santiago ducks under the yellow hazard tape that says, "DANGER. KEEP OUT" and turns on a small flashlight.

INT. CONDEMNED CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The narrow beam strikes the cracked and crooked interior, illuminating debris from the mortar strike, dust, cobwebs.

He moves along the passageway and tries one of the doors. It opens onto a

EXT. PULVERIZED PARLOUR - CONTINUOUS

Santiago glances in at the wreckage.

A BOMB explodes in the neighborhood.

The crystal chandelier TINKLES and sways on a frayed cord.

A few OMINOUS METALLIC GROANS are heard.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

He comes to a door. It's stuck. He kicks it open, revealing a stairwell. A bat flies into his face. He reels, crouches, catches his breath.

INT. STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Santiago descends the stairway, which has a number of treacherous gaps, and opens a door.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He takes a few steps.

CRACK.

The floor gives way. He falls through.

INT. BOMBED BOUDOIR - CONTINUOUS

He lands on a princely four-poster bed on a lower floor.

He takes stock of his limbs.

INT. LONG HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He emerges from the bedroom.

At the far end of the hall stands a door. At the base of the door, a faint strip of light.

Puzzled, Santiago moves toward it.

INT. AT THE DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Santiago stands with his ear against the door. MUSIC filters through, a delicate Brazilian Samba.

INT. THE BILLIARD ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Santiago pushes open the door.

Before him, seated on a preposterous gilded throne and smoking a hookah, is the legendary Jack Stewart.

They stare at each other for a good long moment as the MUSIC continues.

Santiago notices his sherry bottle, open and overturned on a table.

At last he speaks.

SANTIAGO
You drank my sherry.

JACK
To the dregs, darling.

Santiago ventures into the operatically garish playroom of some toppled potentate.

He circulates among the billiard tables, the lurid oil paintings of harem girls, the red velvet furniture and mahogany bookshelves.

JACK (CONT'D)
Are you a dream?

SANTIAGO
No. I fell through the floor.

JACK
I see.

Santiago pauses at a billiards table, rolls a ball.

JACK (CONT'D)
Wait. I know you. You're the boy in my room.

SANTIAGO
Santiago de la Torre ... Were you in my closet the other night?

JACK
I really couldn't say, my boy. One goes in so many closets after all.

Jack prods his hookah coals with a pair of tongs.

JACK (CONT'D)
Santiago. Mexican?

SANTIAGO
Spanish.

In one corner, Santiago recognizes the oriental rug and the blank wall from Jack's kidnap video.

JACK
Say, have you done the Running of the Bulls?

SANTIAGO
I have nothing whatsoever to do with bulls.

He lifts a set of fatigues, the ones Jack wore on TV. He drops the fatigues.

JACK
I ran with the bulls. In '78. No, '79. As a matter of fact, I was gored in my tender gluteus, in full view of the parade stand.

Santiago wanders some more. He picks up a book from a tabletop. It is the volume of poetry he brought with him to Iraq.

SANTIAGO
This is mine.

He puts the book back down.

JACK
Won't you sit down?

Jack motions to a throne that is the twin of his own.

Santiago takes a seat. His feet dangle.

Jack passes him a glass of champagne.

JACK (CONT'D)
Cheers.

They CLINK glasses, drink. The MUSIC plays.

JACK (CONT'D)
You're wondering why I did this.

SANTIAGO
(re: the champagne)
Excellent.
(beat)
It's fairly obvious that you're a sociopath.

JACK
It's not only that.

SANTIAGO
No?

JACK
They're making me retire. I don't feel like retiring.

SANTIAGO
You're in hiding, then?

JACK
Don't be thick, Sergio. I'm raising my profile. I was already mildly famous and now that I'm kidnapped by terrorists I'm ten times as famous.
(draining his glass)
They'll never sack a person who's been kidnapped by terrorists.

SANTIAGO
Then you've no plans to decapitate yourself with the Sword of Islam?

Jack refills his glass and tops off Santiago's.

JACK
Indeed not. I'm going to escape. A daring escape. Although I haven't quite worked out the details.

SANTIAGO
Such schemes invariably fail.

JACK
Have you fallen through the ceiling only to rain on my parade?

Santiago finds a prescription bottle on the table. He shakes it. It's empty.

SANTIAGO
What's this for?

JACK
Blood thinner. I had a stroke a few months ago. A piddly and inconsequential one. Didn't affect me at all.

SANTIAGO
I can see that.

Santiago pockets the bottle.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)
I'll have it refilled.

JACK
I don't need blood thinner. I've got 10 crates of Dom Perignon.

The building GROANS frighteningly.

Santiago drains his champagne flute.

SANTIAGO
Now then, I must insist you come upstairs before you're crushed to death.

JACK
You're turning me in?

SANTIAGO
You don't expect me to pretend I haven't seen you?

JACK
But I can't possibly come. What would everyone say?

SANTIAGO
You're now my humanitarian responsibility whether either one of us likes it or not.

Jack picks up a candy box and selects a piece, then offers one to Santiago.

JACK
Turkish delight?

Santiago selects a piece.

SANTIAGO
Come on.

JACK
But I'm not packed.

SANTIAGO
In the morning, then.

JACK
I could pencil it in for next week.

SANTIAGO
I'll give you 48 hours. If the walls swallow you up before then, I won't be responsible.

Santiago stands up.

JACK
Drop by any time, senorito. I'm so bored, so lonesome. Poor me. I'd be absolutely bonkers if it weren't for video solitaire.

SANTIAGO
Good night, Mr. Stewart.

JACK
Buenas noches, mi amor.

Jack blows a kiss.

Santiago exits.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Santiago moves along.

JACK (O.S.)
Would you bring me a Toblerone?
Toblerooooone!

INT. SANTIAGO'S ROOM - SHORTLY AFTER

Santiago sits on his bed.

Jack's cry of "Toblerone!" echoes in his ears.

He grips the pill bottle, deliberating. He seems to come to a decision. He exits.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He raises his fist to knock on Dunphy's bedroom door, but stops. Something changes his mind.

INT. NEWSROOM/BALLROOM - NEXT MORNING

ON A BANK OF TV SCREENS

George W. Bush's face fills several big screens. (It's a real clip.)

GEORGE W. BUSH
(on TV)
This is an enemy without conscience, and they cannot be appeased. If we're not fighting and destroying this enemy in Iraq, they would not be idle.

Someone off-screen is VOMITING.

GEORGE W. BUSH (CONT'D)
They would be plotting and killing Americans across the world and within our own borders.

BACK TO SCENE

Omar blows chunks into an office wastebasket. Dunphy stands over him, shaking his head in disapproval.

DUNPHY
Damnit son. You gotta learn when to say when.

Santiago enters.

DUNPHY (CONT'D)
Santiago. You're here. Good. Omar seems to be doing poorly this morning. You'll have to cover his assignment.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Santiago sits with the press at Saddam Hussein's trial. Saddam's lawyer addresses the court in Arabic.

Santiago's pen runs out of ink. He starts to scribble, trying to get the ink flowing. When he looks up, the eyes of the dictator are upon him.

Saddam, across the room, pantomimes shaking a pen. Santiago shakes his pen. The ink returns.

And then Saddam smiles, a friendly, disarming, grandfatherly smile.

INT. BUREAU LOUNGE - NIGHT

Omar, Dunphy, Chip and Santiago play poker at a table.

Davy's RHYTHMIC FOOTFALL sounds as he runs on a treadmill.

Omar SHUFFLES the cards like a casino dealer.

Scott Kellogg enters with a beer, sits.

SCOTT
Deal me in, Omar.

Omar deals.

CHIP
Where, Dunphy? Where are they looking for him?

DUNPHY
Hell if I know.

CHIP
It doesn't seem to bother you at all.

DUNPHY
What do you want me to say, Chip?

CHIP
I want to know what you know.

DUNPHY
The CIA doesn't tell anybody anything.

SCOTT
What I hear Dunphy saying is that he's hurting inside but not yet ready to exteriorize those feelings, OK, Chip?

Dunphy heaves a mortified sigh at this touchy-feely talk.

OMAR
It's a hopeless case. If you Westerners had any concept of the Arab mind, you'd know that.

SCOTT
Poor bastard. I keep trying to imagine myself in his place. Once, when I was in Pakistan, Lahore, to be exact --

OMAR
I fold.

DAVY
(on treadmill)
Remember, if you're ever kidnapped, you've got to be the gray man. Don't cry. Don't get angry. Don't try to be bloody Harrison Ford.

CHIP
Kidnapped. Shit.

Chip grasps his head in anguish.

DAVY
They're holding you because you're merchandise and you have to behave like merchandise. Just be the gray man.

INT. THE BILLIARD ROOM - THE SAME TIME

Jack sits on his throne, wrapped in a red silk dragon kimono. He smokes his hookah, peruses a back issue of Bon Appetit and listens to a rambunctious Strauss waltz.

Venus the cat dozes on his lap.

INT. BILLIARD ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Jack is sprawled on the floor. The Bon Appetit is on his face. He appears to have toppled from his throne.

Santiago enters, spots Jack, rushes over.

SANTIAGO
Jack!

Jack opens his eyes.

JACK
I'm Jack Stewart! Now open the damn gates!

SANTIAGO
Oh God.

JACK
The senate's on fire. I'll have to file from the hotel.

SANTIAGO
Jack?

He grabs Jack by the arms and drags him toward the exit.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)
Hang in there, Jack. I'll find you a doctor.

JACK
Who the devil are you? You can't drag me around Saigon like a burlap sack. We'll miss deadline.

SANTIAGO
It's Santiago.

Jack sits up, lucid at last.

A BIT LATER

Santiago and Jack shoot pool.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)
I still say you need a doctor.

JACK
I was merely taking my siesta.

SANTIAGO
You were delirious on the floor, with Bon Appetit on your face.

JACK
It's good for the spine.

SANTIAGO
I agree wholeheartedly with the personnel department. You should retire before you drop dead.

JACK
And go where? Do what?

SANTIAGO
Go home.

JACK
Home?!

SANTIAGO
Home. Don't you have a home?

JACK
I can't go home. I'm already home. The traveling circus is the only home for a dancing bear like me.

SANTIAGO
My parents retired two years ago. To Martinique. They love it.

JACK
So you've mentioned.
(chalking his cue)
Anyway ... I'm surprised to see you so soon. By my calculation I still have 24 hours before I ascend into Hades.

Santiago digs the medicine bottle from his pocket.

SANTIAGO
Twice a day. Morning and night.

He sets the pills on a bookshelf stocked with glossy leather-bound volumes. The classic titles draw his attention.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)
Can I borrow this "War and Peace"?

JACK
That? It's a decoration, darling. They're all decorations.

Santiago takes the book and quickly sees it is a piece of wood made to look like a book.

He tosses it aside. THUD.

JACK (CONT'D)
(sinking a shot)
Ha. I win. It's wonderful to finally have a guest.

He trots to a cabinet, takes out a backgammon set.

SANTIAGO
I can't stay.

Jack's face falls.

JACK
Why ever not?

SANTIAGO
I've got to rewrite a story. It's very complicated. I'll be up all night.

Jack puts down the backgammon set and turns to his laptop.

He brushes a cube of Turkish delight from the keyboard, then dons reading glasses and scrolls around.

JACK
This one here, about the trial?

SANTIAGO
(incredulous)
You're signed on?

Jack reviews the story.

JACK
Your narrative is essentially incoherent.

Santiago looks over Jack's shoulder.

JACK (CONT'D)
Your last paragraph should be your first paragraph and your fourth paragraph should be your last paragraph and your first paragraph ...
(MORE)

(with a face of mock horror)
I'm chopping it.

Jack hits the "delete" key with a flourish.

JACK (CONT'D)
Chop. That felt good. Meanwhile, here in the middle ...

EIGHT MINUTES LATER

JACK (CONT'D)
Perfect from top to bottom. Wait til London sees that.

He takes a swig of champagne and drops onto a swan-shaped chaise of chartreuse chenille.

Santiago shakes the backgammon dice cup.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)
I'll be white.

INT. STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICE, GREEN ZONE - SAME TIME

CIA Jim and Major General Greenleaf watch a baseball game on TV and shoot the shit.

CIA Jim studies a report.

CIA JIM
Stewart's probably dead.

GREENLEAF
Wishful thinking?

CIA JIM
Maybe.

GREENLEAF
The guy's a major league asshole but I do feel kinda sorry for him in a way.

CIA JIM
You know what's funny? These kidnappers want to swap Jack for all these Al-Qaeda people ...
(waving the paper)
... but we don't have a single one of them in custody.

GREENLEAF
The cradle of civilization and these people can't find their ass with two hands.

CIA JIM
Ain't it the truth? But you didn't hear it from me.

GREENLEAF
Pretzel?

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU CORRIDOR - DAY

Santiago, in a suit and tie, is en route to his room, a reporter's notebook in one hand, a Toblerone in the other.

He opens his door.

INT. SANTIAGO'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Scott Kellogg stands at the dresser, suggestively caressing one of Jack's Pulitzers.

Seeing Santiago, he briskly dusts the award on his sleeve.

SCOTT
The dust is incredible this time of year.

Scott replaces the Pulitzer.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Hey, man. I was looking for you. We're starting a poker game.

SANTIAGO
I heard.

SCOTT
I like what you've done with the room. Good instinct.

Scott ambles around, snooping and CLICKING his pen.

SANTIAGO
I haven't changed it.

SCOTT
I've been in twenty-two countries now and I find having some totemic objects from home keeps me grounded. I never go anywhere without my lacrosse stick.

Scott intentionally drops the pen and peeks under the bed as he retrieves it.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Mind if I wash my hands?

SANTIAGO
Be my guest.

Scott steps into

THE BATHROOM

He turns on the WATER and starts snooping in the drawers and the medicine cabinet.

Santiago doesn't see.

SCOTT
I understand this is your first foreign assignment.

Scott removes the cap from a stick of Old Spice deodorant and takes couple of sniffs.

SANTIAGO (O.S.)
That's right.

SCOTT
You were in London. Remind me what you were doing.

SANTIAGO (O.S.)
Commodities.

SCOTT
You mean like the soy bean report?

SANTIAGO (O.S.)
Don't forget corn.

SCOTT
Big change then, coming here. How's your stress level?

SANTIAGO (O.S.)
So far, so good.

Scott returns to

THE BEDROOM

He sits on the bed and crosses his legs, furthering the uninvited feeling.

He CLICKS the pen.

SCOTT
Really? Because when I look at you, I see a man under stress.

CLICK. CLICK.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
A man with something on his mind.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

SANTIAGO
No more than anyone else.

SCOTT
Then it must be my imagination.

SANTIAGO
Must be.

Awkward pause.

SCOTT
Look. It wasn't just the poker invitation that brought me here.

SANTIAGO
Wasn't it?

SCOTT
I wanted to apologize. It aggressively sucks what happened to you at my party.

SANTIAGO
It's nothing.

SCOTT
A guest comes to your home for some hospitality and ends up getting bashed in the head by a troop of clowns.

SANTIAGO
It's healed.

Scott stares at the chocolate bar in Santiago's hand.

SCOTT
Toblerone. That's Jack's favorite.

Scott is staring at him, studying him. A long, uncomfortable moment.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

SANTIAGO
Poker?

INT. NEW YORK PAPER'S PALACE - LATER THAT NIGHT

POOL BOTTOM

A laptop rests in the phosphorescent water.

POOL DECK

Lit by tiki torches.

Scott Kellogg trains a big telescope on the shabby World News Service headquarters across the street.

Conrad Von Richter floats on his back.

A Mozart PIANO Sonata tinkles from the speakers.

An Iraqi gardener prunes the succulents.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
Scott, I'm genuinely concerned about your mental health. Why not give the telescope a rest?

SCOTT
I just saw flickering lights in the bombed-out half of the building. I saw the same thing yesterday at ...
(consulting a notebook)
... 12:58 a.m.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
Mon dieu. He's keeping a log.

SCOTT
Somebody with a flashlight is going into the condemned side of the building every single night.

He pushes the telescope aside in irritation.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
I've got to know what's going on over there. It's killing me!

INT. BILLIARD ROOM - SAME TIME

Jack and Santiago eat stolen food from the kitchen on fancy china and watch the TV NEWS.

The huge screen looms.

Jack salts his carrots.

JACK
Of course I've been shot. On several occasions. Nowhere vital, mind you. Everything still in tip-top working order. And I do mean everything.

SANTIAGO
(groan)
Ugh.

JACK
Let's see. The last time was in Colombia. It was 1991. Or was it '92?

JACK'S VISUALIZATION

A JUNGLE RIVER

Jack swims, a reporter's notebook in his teeth.

JACK (V.O.)
I had swum across a piranha-infested tributary of the Amazon to pay a visit on la guerilla.

SANTIAGO (V.O.)
And they shot you?

AROUND A BONFIRE

The events transpire as Jack describes them.

JACK (V.O.)
We were dancing, yes, dancing the Vallenato, when Sureshot Marulanda's sidearm discharged, the bullet striking me squarely in the thigh.

BANG! A shot rings out.

JACK (V.O.)
I cried out in agony - ACK! - rousting a bat from a tree overhead. Well, the bat swooped down and sank its fangs into Sureshot's cranium, just over the left ear, depositing several caterpillar larvae which subsequently bored their way into Sureshot's skull and devoured a full quarter of his brainstem before the injury was noticed. Yet to this very day he leads the revolution.

BACK TO SCENE

Jack ladles more rice on Santiago's plate, and on his.

SANTIAGO
Is that true?

JACK
It must be. I wrote a story about it for the New Yorker.

Jack's kidnap video appears on the news.

JACK (CONT'D)
It's me!

The on-screen Jack is bigger than the real Jack.

JACK (CONT'D)
Poor little me. The barbarity.

SANTIAGO
(cutting up chicken)
You should stop changing your socks. The CIA's going to notice.

INT. NEW YORK PAPER'S PALACE - SAME TIME

Scott peers through the telescope. Conrad flexes his triceps. Peter, another reporter, enters.

PETER
A truck bomb just blew one of the bridges. Fifty dead. And two Marines.

SCOTT
Peter, we're really busy, man. Tell the desk to pick it up off the wire.

Peter rolls his eyes, exits.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Santiago de la Torre. There's something sneaky about that guy. This nose for news smells something fishy.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
That's the crab cake stuck in the pool drain.

SCOTT
He doesn't check out at all.

Conrad plucks an errant hair from his smooth chest.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Take his resume, for example.

Scott produces the resume from his notebook.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
Where did you get that?

SCOTT
I e-mailed it to myself from Dunphy's computer while he was playing poker.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
Ethical.

SCOTT
I think it's excusable under the circumstances.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
What circumstances?

Conrad puts on his snorkel mask.

SCOTT
Item one: his university. Nobody by the name of Santiago de la Torre has ever graduated from the University of Granada. I checked.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
The Spanish use two surnames, paternal, then maternal. You need both names to check properly.

SCOTT
(extreme frustration)
Shit! I didn't know that. And I don't have the other name.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
See.

SCOTT
Item two: I don't think he's really Spanish. He doesn't seem Spanish.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
I don't seem Spanish, either, and by golly I'm not Spanish.

SCOTT
Item three: Why would they send the soybean reporter to the biggest story in the world?

CONRAD VON RICHTER
Ah, but they did send him.

SCOTT
Yes. Who knows how high up this thing goes?

CONRAD VON RICHTER
What thing?

SCOTT
(a sudden idea)
Maybe it has some connection to Jack's kidnapping. But what? Poor Jack.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
You hate Jack. Nothing would give you greater pleasure than to look through that telescope of yours and see his severed, Pulitzer Prize-winning head tumbling merrily down the byway.

SCOTT
What's the use of speaking six and a half languages, Conrad, if all that comes out is bullshit?

CONRAD VON RICHTER
I calls 'em like I sees 'em.

SCOTT
Where's that herbal infusion I ordered? Waiter! Awards are absolutely immaterial to me. When I decided to devote my life to the priesthood that is journalism --

Scott sees a pair of flippers slipping under the surface. He wads up the resume and hurls it at the flippers.

INT. SANTIAGO'S BATHROOM - DAY

It's the next morning. The SHOWER stops.

Santiago emerges, wraps a towel around him, walks into

THE BEDROOM

He opens his closet.

A large figure in a black burqa (women's face-hiding dress) stands there, holding a bottle of champagne.

Santiago gasps.

The figure bustles out of the closet. Jack's voice emanates from a mesh square in the hood.

JACK
Good morning.

SANTIAGO
Jack? What are you doing here?

JACK
Isn't it obvious?

SANTIAGO
No.

JACK
I'm past my expiration date.

SANTIAGO
Well past.

JACK
So I'm turning myself in. Sound the alarm. Ring up the CIA.

Santiago starts getting dressed.

SANTIAGO
Not today, Jack. I have a million things to do.

JACK
But you yourself imposed the deadline. Anyway, I'm bored with the whole thing.

SANTIAGO
I've got a miserable champagne hangover. Let's save it.

JACK
Well then, I'll just have to turn myself in. Won't Dunphy be surprised!

Jack flutters to the door.

Santiago, half-naked, jumps in front of him.

SANTIAGO
Wait!

JACK
Stand away from that door my boy.

SANTIAGO
You can't.

JACK
Why not?

SANTIAGO
Well --

JACK
-- Ha! I knew you wouldn't let me.

SANTIAGO
It's just that ...
(rearranging his towel)
... I suppose you might as well see this thing through to its demented conclusion.

JACK
You love me. I can tell.

Santiago smirks.

SANTIAGO
If you want to be crushed by the ceiling of a tasteless billiard room, that's your business.

Santiago towels his hair.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)
But you've grown careless, Jack, out in broad daylight, floating around in that getup. Who'd ever believe you're a woman?

JACK
The same people who believe you're a reporter.

SANTIAGO
What's that supposed to mean?

JACK
Come now, Dr. Khalidi. You're just as fake as I am.

SANTIAGO
You know.

Jack whips off the burqa, revealing himself in a white karate outfit.

JACK
I've always known.

Jack opens the closet hangs up his burqa.

JACK
Really, mon cher, any genuine reporter would have been salivating down a telephone line within thirty seconds of discovering me.

SANTIAGO
But how do you my name?

JACK
Your luggage tag.

SANTIAGO
Impossible.

Santiago crouches to get his duffle from under the bed.

JACK
A few keystrokes told me everything else. That you're one of the foremost experts on Sumerian and Babylonian art. Born in Tunis, raised in London, degrees from --

SANTIAGO
-- I already know it.

Santiago looks at the luggage tag in annoyance. It does have his real name.

JACK
And then I knew I was absolutely safe. If you turned me in, the press would swarm from the very cracks in the plaster, dear boy. Who is this charming young soybean reporter, they'd ask. What does he eat for breakfast? It wouldn't be long before somebody discovered that there is no Santiago de la Torre. Your mission would be down the drain.

Santiago tears off the luggage tag and disappears into the bathroom. The toilet FLUSHES.

JACK (CONT'D)
(calling into the bathroom)
You're looking for museum loot.
(MORE)

You must be. For whom? Where? Here? Why here?

Santiago comes out of the bathroom.

SANTIAGO
I can't say.

JACK
Nonsense. Tell Jackie everything.

INT. PRESS BRIEFING ROOM, GREEN ZONE - DAY

A press conference in progress, with Greenleaf at the podium. Charts displayed.

Santiago sits among an aggressive press corps.

SCOTT
Can I quote you on that?

GREENLEAF
Absolutely not in a million years.

SCOTT
From a coalition official then? Can we say it came from a coalition official who asked not to be named?

Greenleaf turns to CIA Jim, who's sitting off to one side in his dark glasses, taking notes.

CIA Jim nods a "no".

GREENLEAF
Can we make it a Western official? Are you guys happy with Western official?

SCOTT
I don't think my editor will take that. It's too vague. How about "military source"?

Greenleaf turns to CIA Jim, who nods "no".

GREENLEAF
No dice. How 'bout "Western military analyst"?

SCOTT
We used that yesterday. It looks funny.

ANDREA
I agree with Scott. What if we say "an official close to the US-led coalition"?

Greenleaf turns to CIA Jim, who gives a thumbs-up.

GREENLEAF
That's good.

Greenleaf turns to the next page of his notes.

GREENLEAF (CONT'D)
Now then, on a lighter note, I'd like to share some good news about our Thirst for Freedom well-building campaign, bringing thousands of cubic yards of much-needed drinking water to the Eye-raqi people.

INT. PERILOUS PARLOUR - NIGHT

Deep in the condemned wing of the building, Santiago lifts floorboards and searches under furniture.

Jack luxuriates on a tilted canopy bed in white silk Lawrence of Arabia robes and headdress, smoking the hookah.

SANTIAGO
Scott Kellogg was in our room the other day.

JACK
(groan of misery)
Not again.

SANTIAGO
I caught him rubbing your Pulitzers.

JACK
On what?

SANTIAGO
He says you're his mentor.

JACK
Au contraire. I'm his fet-eesh. He'd like to cook me on a spit and eat me all up and digest me. It was almost worth kidnapping myself just to get away from him.

Santiago stands up, sweaty, dusty and exasperated.

SANTIAGO
Nothing.

JACK
I've been plotting my escape. Shall I tell you about it?

SANTIAGO
No.

JACK
I'm going to hurl myself from an imaginary moving vehicle.

SANTIAGO
I'm not listening.

JACK
But you're my accomplice.

SANTIAGO
I most certainly am not.

JACK
I'm helping you with your secret mission. You have to help me with mine.

SANTIAGO
Our missions are not comparable.

JACK
What? They're damn near identical.

SANTIAGO
I'm engaged in restoring world heritage, whereas you're committing a moral and legal outrage.
(beat)
And you're in no condition to hurl yourself from an imaginary moving vehicle.

JACK
That's just what my imaginary captors think. They'll never see it coming.

Santiago is rapping on the walls.

SANTIAGO
Maybe there is no treasure.

JACK
Maybe you got a bad tip.

Santiago drops the crowbar. THUD.

INT. CRUMBLING BOUDOIR - MINUTES LATER

Santiago yanks up a Persian rug and attacks the floorboards with his crowbar.

Jack poses on a crass raspberry love seat of organdy ruffles.

SANTIAGO
Quit following me around.

JACK
But I've never been on a dig before.

SANTIAGO
This isn't a dig.

Santiago crawls along the baseboards.

JACK
Say, have you ever found a desiccated iceman?

SANTIAGO
No.

JACK
The tooth of a saint?

SANTIAGO
No.

JACK
Well, what the devil have you found then?

SANTIAGO
I don't go on digs anymore.

JACK
But isn't that what archaeologists do?

SANTIAGO
I don't do well at digs. Sometimes I ...

Santiago opens a trunk and starts agitatedly pulling out ball gowns.

JACK
You what?

SANTIAGO
Let's change the subject.

JACK
What? Sometimes you what?

SANTIAGO
(holding a pink tutu)
I faint.

JACK
From emotion?

SANTIAGO
No! I just have low blood pressure.

JACK
Or perhaps your corset is too tight.

SANTIAGO
(irked)
You should put out that pipe. We're getting close to Dunphy's room.

JACK
Bah. That old smoked mackerel couldn't smell Mount Pinatubo erupting in his jockstrap.

Santiago comes to the bottom of the trunk. He RAPS a few times.

Nothing.

He stands and dusts himself off.

JACK (CONT'D)
(suddenly inspired)
I know what let's do! Let's go out for a late supper. There's a little fish place I like over on Abu Nawas street.

SANTIAGO
You're kidnapped.

JACK
Blast.

INT. SANTIAGO'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Santiago sits on his bed, talking on the phone.

The blueprints are unrolled in front of him. All the rooms are crossed out.

SANTIAGO
(on phone)
I can't give up yet.

GOLDHEIMER (V.O.)
I know it's hard to abandon a search, but sometimes we have to.

SANTIAGO
(on phone)
How good was our tip?

GOLDHEIMER (V.O.)
Well, it was fairly detailed. That's what made it so believable. ... The lioness was looted, and then at some point bound for that house, in the care of a pair of couriers. ... Maybe something happened on the way.

SANTIAGO
(on phone)
Give me a few more days.

INT. NEWSROOM/BALLROOM - DAY

All TV screens play George W. Bush's (authentic) address. Santiago, Dunphy and Omar work.

Chip is repairing the torn carpet on the cat condo with a staple gun. CHONK. CHONK-CHONK.

Venus watches him.

GEORGE W. BUSH
(on TV)
We face an enemy determined to bring death and suffering

CHONK. CA-CHONK.

GEORGE W. BUSH
into our homes. If we do not defeat these enemies now, we will leave our children to face a Middle East overrun by terrorist states

CHONK. CHONK. CHONK.

GEORGE W. BUSH
and radical dictators armed with nuclear weapons.

CA-CHONK.

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU KITCHEN - DAY

Santiago sits with Dunphy, Chip and Omar.

They dine on an array of Middle Eastern dishes.

DUNPHY
I gotta hand it to you, Santiago. Your work has really improved.

SANTIAGO
(chagrined)
Thanks.

DUNPHY
Your copy was so dry when you got here. Dry-dry-dry-dry-dry-dry-dry. But all of a sudden, it's terrific.

CHIP
Pass the goat.

DUNPHY
Can't wait to see your next feature. How's it coming along?

SANTIAGO
I'll have to check.

DUNPHY
Don't you know?

SANTIAGO
I mean I'll have to check it over.

INT. BILLIARD ROOM - NIGHT

Santiago slips in the door, draws a Toblerone from his pocket, places it on a table.

SANTIAGO
Jack?

No Jack in the billiard room.

He goes to the bathroom door. It's closed. He RAPS on it.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)
Jack?
(rapping)
Dunphy's asking for that feature.

No answer.

He opens the bathroom door.

IN THE BATHROOM

No Jack.

SERIES OF SHOTS - LOOKING FOR JACK

- Santiago walks down a crooked corridor, glancing into warped rooms.

- He enters a dark room, is startled when his light lands on a life-sized portrait of the wealthy Iraqi family that once lived in the house, smiling deliriously in high gloss.

- He opens a closet, is felled by an avalanche of shoes.

- He jogs up the spiral staircase, hopping over gaps. He jogs back down.

- He slips under the yellow hazard tape back into the good part of the building.

INT. SANTIAGO'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He sits on his bed thinking. And then, a theory.

SANTIAGO
Supper. The madman's gone to supper.

Santiago rummages through Jack's bureau. He finds a checked Arabic scarf.

- He puts in on. It's all wrong.

- He takes it off.

- He puts it on. Even worse than the first time.

- He rips it off.

- He tries to fold it.

- He's tangled in it.

- He shakes it.

- He gets it on reasonably well.

EXT. BAGHDAD STREET - NIGHT

Santiago ventures alone into the neighborhood.

His senses are overpowered by the grit, the smells, the traffic, the surprising vigor and bustle of everyday life, despite the war.

All signs are in Arabic.

He’s left the insulated, claustrophobic world of the foreign media for unfiltered Baghdad.

Garbage is heaped in the gutters. Hunks of shrapnel are scattered about.

A giant rat skitters past his feet.

He walks steadily.

Nearing a cafe, he hears the CLICK of dice, male voices.

He slows to glance inside for Jack.

INSIDE THE CAFE

Men, drinking tea, playing backgammon, smoking.

ON THE STREET

Santiago passes one lively little restaurant after another, glancing in each. No Jack.

The sound of an OUD, an Arabic guitar, floats from an alley off the main street. The tune seems as ancient, lonely, as the desert itself.

Santiago follows the sound.

EXT. BAGHDAD CAFE - NIGHT

He peers through a dark doorway.

INT. BAGHDAD CAFE - CONTINUOUS

The cafe is crowded. Men smoke hookahs and play backgammon.

Santiago enters.

A small old man with a metal scoop moves among the tables, adding coals to customers’ pipes with tongs.

The oud player performs on a raised platform. Santiago takes a seat.

A WAITER appears and offers tea.

WAITER
Shay?

Santiago nods. The waiter leaves. He looks at his watch.

INSERT - THE WATCH

DAVY (V.O.)
Ten minutes is how long it takes for a kidnapper to notice you, ring up his cronies and execute the abduction.

Santiago's fingers set the stopwatch.

BACK TO SCENE

The waiter brings the tea.

Santiago finds himself lulled by the music of the oud.

LATER

Santiago notices two customers in a dim corner. Their faces are obscured in the smoke, but he has the impression that they are watching him, discussing him.

One of the men pulls out a phone and dials.

Santiago checks his watch.

INSERT - THE WATCH

It's passing the 16-minute mark.

BACK TO SCENE

Santiago puts money on the table, leaves the cafe.

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

The WHISTLE of the wind mixes with snatches of NIGHT SOUNDS, the RATTLE OF DISHES, voices, faraway GUNFIRE.

Santiago moves quickly down the alley.

Glancing over his shoulder, he sees the two men from the cafe. They are following him.

They break into a jog.

Santiago bolts.

The two men give chase.

Santiago nearly trips over a group of stray cats grouped around some chicken bones.

The pavement is rutted, uneven. The dark alley twists, and then, he realizes too late, dead-ends. The men come closer.

He's cornered.

DRIVER 1
Santiago. Meester Santiago.

The men smile, their arms open in a friendly gesture.

DRIVER 1 (CONT'D)
I am driver. World News Service. I am Abu Hisham. This my brother Abu Hussam.

Santiago recognizes the man as the driver who brought him from the airport.

EXT. BAGHDAD BUREAU FRONT GATES - NIGHT

THROUGH A TELESCOPE

The lens follows Santiago, Abu Hisham and Abu Hussam through the gates of the Baghdad Bureau.

INT. NEW YORK PAPER'S PALACE - SAME TIME

Scott Kellogg stands at his telescope in the weird glow of the pool lights.

He pulls a notebook from the pocket of his bathrobe, checks his watch, makes a notation.

EXT. BAGHDAD BUREAU KITCHEN - NIGHT

Santiago, Dunphy, Omar, Chip, Davy and Ricky are present.

Dunphy wears a tattered bathrobe, his hair a mess, and sucks hard on a ciggy, frowning at Santiago like a dad whose kid has broken curfew.

Chip eats a bowl of cornflakes.

DUNPHY
What were you thinking?

SANTIAGO
I don't know.

DUNPHY
You don't know.

SANTIAGO
I had cabin fever. A sudden urge.

CHIP
It's that room. There's a lurking evil in that room.

Chip fishes in his shirt and takes out a small tiki figurine, hanging by a chain around his neck. He takes it off and hands it to Santiago.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Here, mate. Take my Hawaiian tiki-man. He'll protect you from the forces of evil.

SANTIAGO
Thanks, Chip.

DUNPHY
If you do anything like that again, you're gone. You're back in London. Understand?

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU CORRIDOR - A BIT LATER

Santiago peeps out his door. All is quiet.

INT. BILLIARD ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Santiago sits on one of the big thrones, pouring himself a drink, alone and wondering.

INT. SANTIAGO'S ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Santiago wakes to find Jack sitting at the end of his bed, drinking a cup of tea.

SANTIAGO
(in bed)
Where have you been?

JACK
I went for a walk.

SANTIAGO
For eight hours?

JACK
Hmm.

SANTIAGO
What were you doing for eight hours?

JACK
Damned if I know. I seem to be suffering from partial amnesia. How's everything with you?

Santiago looks at the clock.

SANTIAGO
(sleepy and grouchy)
Not now, Jack. I have to go see Saddam Hussein in 20 minutes.

JACK
Why so grouchy?

SANTIAGO
The dig's over. It's over. And I've come up empty-handed.

JACK
But you can't have looked everywhere already?

SANTIAGO
I've crossed off the last room, Jack. There's nowhere else to look. At least I can't think of anywhere.

JACK
How sad. ... But don't worry. I think I can help you.

Santiago retreats under the covers.

SANTIAGO
Please don't.

JACK
You claim you came here to restore world heritage. You could restore Jack Stewart. Restore him to his rightful place on the front lines of the world's press corps.

Santiago emerges.

SANTIAGO
That's a stretch.

JACK
I'm a national treasure. It says so on my book flap.

Santiago deliberates.

JACK (CONT'D)
(cajoling)
Tonight's a new moon. It'll be good and dark.

Santiago throws back the covers.

SANTIAGO
I'll think about it.

EXT. COURTHOUSE BUILDING - DAY

Santiago approaches the building where Saddam Hussein's genocide trial is taking place.

He passes Andrea Arlington and her cameraman Mike, who are in the middle of a live report.

ANDREA
(on the air)
Just behind me you can see the former Ba'ath party palace where Saddam Hussein's genocide trial resumes this afternoon. Meanwhile, today marks Day Twenty-Nine since the shocking kidnap of veteran reporter Jack Stewart.

Santiago pauses to listen.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Stewart's captors have offered to exchange Stewart for several coalition-held prisoners, but officials say no deal. Starting tomorrow, we're told the Baghdad morgue will be on high alert, looking for Stewart's decapitated body on their daily conveyor belt of the grisly by-products of war. ... Andrea Arlington reporting live.

MIKE
Conveyor belt of grisly by-products?

Santiago enters the building.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Santiago sits in the press gallery at Saddam's trial.

Saddam, wearing bedroom slippers and shaking his fist, gives a long, rambling speech.

SADDAM HUSSEIN
(in Arabic, with subtitles)
Are you a judge? You are a judge? And judges, they value the law. And they rule by the law, right? Right? Right is a relative issue. I am not talking about Saddam Hussein, whether he was a citizen or in other capacities ...

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU CORRIDOR - SAME TIME

Venus pads along.

Chip rounds a corner just in time to see the cat disappear under the hazard tape.

CHIP
Venus! Come back!

Chip follows, hesitates at the tape, slips under.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The reporter beside Santiago has fallen asleep.

The deposed dictator yammers on.

SADDAM HUSSEIN
(in Arabic, with subtitles)
I'm not holding fast to my position, but to respect the will of the people that decided to choose Saddam Hussein as the leader of the revolution and --

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU CONDEMNED CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Venus scampers down a flight of broken stairs.

Chip follows.

CHIP
Here kitty. Here kitty.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Santiago sits at the trial.

Now reporters on both sides of him are asleep.

SADDAM HUSSEIN
(in Arabic with subtitles)
Therefore, when I say president of the Republic of Iraq, it's not a formality or a holding fast to a position,

One of the reporters SNORES loudly, waking himself up.

SADDAM HUSSEIN (CONT'D)
(in Arabic with subtitles)
but rather to reiterate to the Iraqi people that I respect its will. And furthermore --

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU CONDEMNED CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The cat jumps through broken boards to a lower floor.

CHIP
Venus!

Chip looks through the hole just in time to see Venus land on the four-poster bed and scamper off.

Chip closes his eyes and jumps through the hole himself.

INT. BOMBED-OUT BOUDOIR - CONTINUOUS

Chip lands on the four-poster bed.

INT. LONG HALLWAY - A MOMENT LATER

Chip spies a door a the end of the hallway, with a strip of light at its base.

Puzzled, he moves toward it.

EXT. COURTHOUSE BUILDING - DUSK

Santiago and the press corps emerge wearily from the trial.

Santiago's PHONE RINGS.

He stops and answers it.

SANTIAGO
(on phone)
Hello?

SIR TEDDY (V.O.)
Dr. Khalidi? Teddy Winston here.

SANTIAGO
(on phone)
Ah yes. Hello, Sir Teddy.

Scott Kellogg emerges from the courthouse building and spots Santiago on the phone. He creeps near him, hides behind a pillar and eavesdrops.

Scott can hear only Santiago's side of the conversation.

SIR TEDDY (V.O.)
Everything all right? Dr. Goldheimer says you've got to do all your work by night.

SANTIAGO
The dead of night. It's the only way.

SIR TEDDY (V.O.)
Made any progress?

SANTIAGO
Not yet. These things take time, and the right equipment.

SIR TEDDY (V.O.)
Tools?

SANTIAGO
Sharp tools. Crow bars. A drill in some cases.

Scott leans closer.

SIR TEDDY (V.O.)
Smashing how you've posed as a reporter. No one has the faintest idea. Like I'm always saying, journalism isn't rocket science. Any lobotomized imbecile with access to the internet could do it.

SANTIAGO
(laughing)
Lobotomized? You're sure about that?

Scott holds his breath.

SIR TEDDY (V.O.)
How's the bureau? Still got that mouse problem?

SANTIAGO
We've tried poison. It doesn't seem to work.

Scott is stunned, fascinated.

SIR TEDDY (V.O.)
I use a cricket bat on mine.

SANTIAGO
It takes a strong stomach to bash the brains out of a skull. Even one that feeble.

Scott gapes.

SIR TEDDY (V.O.)
Yes, yes. Well, keep up the good work. Happy to cooperate with you chaps. Hope you find your treasure. Must be very well hidden. Up in the rafters, maybe.

SANTIAGO
Or wedged tight under the floorboards.

SIR TEDDY (V.O.)
Cheerio, then.

SANTIAGO
Bye.

Santiago hangs up and walks away.

Scott, highly agitated, emerges from his hiding place and watches Santiago go.

INT. NEWSROOM/BALLROOM - SHORTLY AFTER

Santiago enters.

SCRATCH. SCRATCH. Venus claws her cat tree.

Nobody is around.

SANTIAGO
Hello?

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU CORRIDOR - SHORTLY AFTER

Passing along the hallway, Santiago notices that the hazard tape is broken.

He hurries into the condemned area.

INT. BILLIARD ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Santiago bursts in.

Positioned on thrones and divans are Dunphy, Omar, Chip and Ricky. Davy is JOGGING on a treadmill.

Jack, quite drunk, sits on his throne and smokes his hookah like the Alice in Wonderland caterpillar.

JACK
Santiago, darling boy, do come in.

SANTIAGO
What's going on here?

CHIP
Jack's going to fake his own death.

JACK
(giddy)
I am! I am!

CHIP
Is that not the bitchingest idea you've ever heard in your entire life?

SANTIAGO
It's ridiculous.

RICKY
That's what I said.

JACK
(singing)
Tiptoe. Through the tulips. In the twilight. Won't you marry me?

SANTIAGO
Jack, how can you raise your profile if you're pretending to be dead?

JACK
(singing)
Oh, tiptoe, through the tulips, with me.

DAVY
(jogging)
You've gotta escape, mate. It's the only way. A simple, straightforward escape.

DUNPHY
Dry. Dry. Dry.

JACK
Yes. That's right. I will escape these terrorist wankers.
(warming to the idea)
I must!

Jack drains his champagne bottle and hurls it across the room.

SMASH!

CHIP
OK. OK. OK. But let's make it the greatest fucking escape anybody's ever heard of.

Chip turns to the laptop, balanced on a Dom Perignon crate, and starts typing.

CHIP (CONT'D)
How 'bout this? Quadruple Pulitzer winner Jack Stewart escaped from his captors Friday, disguised as a woman --

JACK
(gesturing with hookah)
I don't fancy that quadruple. It makes me sound like a quadruped, a chimpanzee perhaps. Or a quadriplegic. A quadriplegic chimpanzee Pulitzer winner.

DUNPHY
How 'bout let's take out "quadruple" and put in "four-time."

CHIP
(typing)
Right. Here we go.

GROUP VISUALIZATION

BAGHDAD ALLEYWAY

Extremist kidnappers chase a highly romanticized Jack.

CHIP (V.O.)
Four-time Pulitzer winner Jack Stewart staged a daring daylight escape from his captors on Sunday, leading terrorists on a footrace around a warren of Baghdad alleyways --

BACK TO SCENE

DUNPHY
Might I interrupt you right there, Chip? Saturday's a much better news day to escape. For the Sunday papers. A good long read on Sunday with your coffee and sweet-roll and whatnot. Especially in these warm summer months, out on the front porch.

CHIP
Nobody reads the newspaper anymore, Mr. Brontosaurus, but all right. Tonight it is.

RICKY
That's rather short notice, from a strategic planning standpoint.

OMAR
And why the "warren of Baghdad alleyways"? As if we, the Arabs, live in burrows, or ant farms, or bunny hutches. It's a heinous insult to the entire Arab world!

CHIP
Don't have an aneurysm, Omar. It's gone.

JACK
I prefer labyrinth.

CHIP
(typing)
Lab-y-rinth ... How's this?

GROUP VISUALIZATION

BAGHDAD STREETS

The imaginary Jack carries out the escape as Chip describes it.

CHIP (V.O.)
Kidnapped four-time Pulitzer winner Jack Stewart staged a daring daylight escape from his captors on Saturday, leading heavily armed terrorists on a footrace around a labyrinth of Baghdad alleyways that ended when an exhausted Stewart, disguised as an Iraqi woman, hurled himself into the Green Zone where he was picked up by a Marine patrol.

BACK TO SCENE

SANTIAGO
A footrace?

JACK
It’s perfect!

SANTIAGO
You’re old and fat and you’ve had a stroke, and when they give you a physical, they’ll discover your urine is 75 percent champagne and 25 percent Turkish delight.

JACK
You nasty thing. I may cry.

OMAR
(in a rant)
The Turks have betrayed their Muslim origins. They want to become Europeans because they’re embarrassed by their Muslim identity!

CHIP
Shut up, Omar, you bloody Marxist bore.

JACK
(to Omar)
Really, my dear, how can anybody be a Commie anymore? It’s high camp.

SANTIAGO
We should stick to the original plan. Jack hurls himself from the kidnappers’ car and runs away.

JACK
(inspired)
Into a sandstorm!

CHIP
(typing enthusiastically)
A sandstorm. That’s fucking brilliant. Is sandstorm one word or two?

DUNPHY
One.

GROUP VISUALIZATION

SANDSTORM

Jack chased by maniacs with sword.

CHIP (V.O.)
Jack Stewart, legendary four-time Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, threw himself from his captors' car into a blinding sandstorm, risking death by the elements rather than grisly beheading at the hands of the Islamic Justice Front.

BACK TO SCENE

DUNPHY
Grisly is redundant, Chip. I mean, what other kind of beheading is there?

CHIP
Well, there's bloody, gruesome, brutal, heinous.

DAVY
(running on treadmill)
Ghastly, gory, murderous.

OMAR
Well-deserved!

SANTIAGO
And what if this Islamic Justice Front claims they never kidnapped you?

JACK
They won't.

RICKY
How can you be sure?

JACK
Because I made them up. They're entirely fictitious. Then again, a lot of fictitious people are quite influential. Take Uncle Sam. Or Chef Boyardee.

OMAR
Or God.

DAVY
(jogging)
Fook off, Omar. God's a real person.

DUNPHY
I believe, actually, that Chef Boyardee is real as well.

SANTIAGO
What if there isn't a sandstorm?

CHIP
There is. I just put it in.

GROUP VISUALIZATION

Incredible sandstorm

SANTIAGO (V.O.)
I mean a real one.

BACK TO SCENE

Chip stops typing.

CHIP
Oh.

Uncomfortable silence among the foreign correspondents.

DUNPHY
(sadly)
Better cut the sandstorm.

They hear approaching FOOTSTEPS.

SCOTT (O.S.)
Hello. Hello!

CHIP
Shit. It's Scott Kellogg!

DAVY
(shutting off the treadmill)
I'll go ... Ricky?

RICKY
Yeah.

Davy and Ricky exit.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The two big Irishmen walk with flashlights.

DAVY
Who’s that?

SCOTT (O.S.)
Scott Kellogg.

Davy and Ricky round a corner and meet Scott.

DAVY
You can’t be down here. It’s dangerous.

SCOTT
Then why are you down here?

RICKY
We’re on patrol.

SCOTT
You patrol this ruin? Why?

RICKY
We patrol everything.

SCOTT
You know, this old architecture really fascinates me. I considered becoming an architect at one point.

DAVY
Let’s go.

SCOTT
I think I’ll wander around and take in some of the detail.

RICKY
If the walls collapse and kill you, it’s on us.

DAVY
It’d be a hell of a way to go, mate. Buried in the debris.

RICKY
You might not die right away.

SCOTT
Do you smell that?

RICKY
No.

SCOTT
It’s tobacco.

Scott takes a step toward the smell.

Davy grabs him by the arm.

The two men look at each other tensely.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
(chuckling)
All right, man. No problem.

Scott glances behind him as he is led out.

EXT. BAGHDAD BUREAU FRONT GATES - NIGHT

THROUGH BINOCULARS

Santiago, Dunphy, Omar, Chip, Ricky and Davy and Jack emerge from the front doors.

Jack's wearing fatigues, dark glasses and a fake handlebar moustache.

INT. NEW YORK PAPER'S PALACE - SAME TIME

Scott stands by his telescope and makes a notation.

SCOTT
(to himself, writing)
Zero-one-hundred hours. Subjects leaving bureau accompanied by unknown Iraqi military official.

EXT. BAGHDAD BUREAU FRONT GATES - SAME TIME

SANTIAGO
Hold on. I forgot my glasses.

Santiago goes back into the house.

INT. NEWSROOM/BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

Santiago enters the newsroom.

SCRATCH. SCRATCH. SCRATCH.

Venus claws at the cat condo.

Santiago grabs the glasses from his desk and puts them on. He glances over at the cat, then does a double-take.

Part of the carpet covering the base of the cat condo has been torn off by Venus, revealing a flashing gold object hidden beneath.

Santiago hurries to the cat condo and tears the carpet some more, revealing a stunning cash of treasure, and at the center, the famed Lioness Attacking a Nubian.

Santiago touches the object gently.

He faints.

A FEW MINUTES LATER

FOOTSTEPS are heard, advancing toward the newsroom.

Santiago wakes up and quickly replaces the carpet.

CHIP (O.S.)
Santa! Come on!

SANTIAGO
I'm coming!

Santiago exits.

EXT. BAGHDAD BUREAU FRONT GATES - NIGHT

Under cover of darkness, the residents of the Baghdad Bureau enter their Mercedes sedans with curtained windows.

Davy drives one, Ricky, the other.

Santiago, Jack and Dunphy drive with Ricky.

Omar and Chip ride with Davy.

EXT. THE STREETS OF BAGHDAD - NIGHT

The cars are on the move.

EXT. ON A ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

An Iraqi family bunking al fresco peers over the eaves at the two cars. An ill wind blows. Their clothes flap.

EXT. THE STREETS OF BAGHDAD - CONTINUOUS

The cars traverse the war-damaged maze.

INT. DAVY'S MERCEDES - CONTINUOUS

DAVY
(into radio)
We're gonna take a left here.

RICKY (V.O.)
Yeah.

INT. RICKY'S MERCEDES - CONTINUOUS

Dunphy holds a map.

RICKY
Let's go over this one more time, Jack. We'll drop you one kilometer from the military checkpoint.

Dunphy shows the map to Jack.

DUNPHY
Right here, Jack. On the X.

RICKY
All you have to do is walk one kilometer. A straight shot.

JACK
(singing)
The night is young/The skies are clear/And if you want to go walking, dear...

Santiago peeks through the curtain.

OUTSIDE

Sand whips and whirls.

INSIDE

JACK
(singing)
It's delightful/It's delectable/It's delovely.

RICKY
(into radio)
Take a right, here.

DAVY (V.O.)
Copy that.

The cars turn, arriving at the

DROP-OFF SPOT

The two cars pull up side by side.

The wind HOWLS.

RICKY
This is it. ... Straight that way, Jack.

JACK
I'm off, then.

Jack gets out of the car, salutes at those inside.

Santiago follows him out and pulls a big Toblerone from his pocket.

SANTIAGO
One for the road.

Jack takes the chocolate.

They shake hands, but it turns into a hug.

SANTIAGO
Have a good escape.

Jack tears off his moustache and hands it to Santiago.

JACK
Til we meet again.

Jack turns and moves along the street. Santiago stands and watches his receding figure.

Ahead of Jack, a beat-up pickup comes into view. It slows to look at Jack, passes him, then stops and backs up.

IN RICKY'S CAR

DUNPHY
Oh shit. Oh shit.

AT THE PICK-UP TRUCK

A man in a red-checked head scarf emerges and confronts Jack, gesturing for him to get into the truck.

Jack takes a few steps back.

Now the driver emerges, waiving a machine gun.

Jack flings the big Toblerone into the face of the first man and darts away into an alley, quick as a rabbit, in surprising defiance of his bulk and moderate drunkenness.

The terrorists argue loudly in Arabic for a few seconds, waving their arms in opposing directions, like they can't decide which way to go.

Finally, one heads into the alley where Jack went and the other takes another alley nearby.

IN DAVY'S CAR

General panic.

DAVY
Quick! Where's that alley come out at? Chip? Omar?

OMAR
There's no way to tell. The alleys around here, they twist and crisscross. It's an ant farm!

RICKY (V.O.)
(through radio)
Can we follow?

DAVY
(into radio)
Negative. We'd all get lost. Better go back to the office. If they catch him, we'll be getting a ransom call.

INT. RICKY'S MERCEDES - NIGHT

Dunphy cries in the front seat.

DUNPHY
Damn. Damn. Damn.

RICKY
Calm down, mate. Jack'll make it. Jack's a tough old rhinoceros.

SANTIAGO
Bear. ... Dancing bear.

EXT. THE STREETS OF BAGHDAD - CONTINUOUS

The cars veer toward home.

INT./EXT. MERCEDES - A BIT LATER

The cars approach the Baghdad Bureau; nearer, nearer, until an enormous cave-in is visible, right in the center.

EXT. BAGHDAD BUREAU GATES - CONTINUOUS

A crowd has gathered.

Several MARINES stand guard, their armored vehicle and an ambulance nearby.

Floodlights are trained on the building. The press swarms; in their midst are Conrad, Roy, Andrea, Mike, Paul, the Japanese.

The occupants of the two Mercedes rush to the Marines guarding the exterior.

Santiago arrives last to find Dunphy already in conversation with a MARINE GUARD.

MARINE GUARD
I don't think that's wise, sir.

DUNPHY
Just a minute. Or five minutes.

MARINE GUARD
It's still collapsing, sir.

SANTIAGO
Anyone inside?

MARINE GUARD
Your staff over there says no.

IN THE CROWD

The Surly Chef, holding his small radio, stands with the Sour Cleaning Lady and Taciturn Helper.

Andrea, microphone in hand, seems to be trying to interview them.

AT THE GATES

MARINE GUARD (CONT'D)
They heard some loud cracks and evacuated. They're lucky.

IN THE CROWD

Andrea struggles with the language barrier.

ANDREA
(to the Chef)
Is anyone else inside? You know, people. Persons. Humans.

CHEF
Meow.

ANDREA
(thrilled)
The cat! The cat's inside!

CHEF
Meow.

Andrea looks toward the front gates as Dunphy, Chip, Omar, Davy and Ricky file recklessly into the building.

AT THE GATES

MARINE GUARD
There's nothing in there that's worth your lives.

Santiago follows them.

MARINE GUARD (CONT'D)
(to Santiago)
Don't do it, sir.

SANTIAGO
I'll be right back.

MARINE GUARD
At least take this.

He tosses Santiago a flashlight.

SIDE OF THE BUILDING

Medics carry Scott Kellogg out through a broken window. He is semiconscious and covered in dust.

Reporters rush him like seagulls on a sardine.

SCOTT
(delirious ranting)
They kidnapped Jack Stewart. They were all in on it! All of them! Teddy Winston hired Santiago to give Jack a lobotomy!

CONRAD VON RICHTER IN THE CROWD

He's bare-chested, wet, in swim trunks, a snorkel and mask still attached to his head, marvelling at Scott.

CONRAD VON RICHTER
(hushed, to himself)
Jesus Christ, Scott.

AT THE AMBULANCE

Scott is being loaded in.

SCOTT
I saw the evidence! It's that guy Santiago! It's him! He doesn't exist!

His rant is stifled as the ambulance door SLAMS shut.

INT. BAGHDAD BUREAU - NIGHT

Santiago's flashlight illuminates the wreckage: chunks of plaster, trickling dust.

He hears the GROAN of bending metal.

He makes his way to

INT. NEWSROOM/BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

A generator HUMS. The overhead lights waver as the power surges and wanes.

The pink marble dance floor glows strangely.

Standing unnoticed in the doorway, Santiago watches the lot of them, Davy and Ricky, Omar, Dunphy and Chip, gathered around the cat condo, transferring the last of the loot into a bag.

He directs his flashlight beam on the group.

They look up in surprise.

SANTIAGO
Give me the bag.

They squint into the beam of light.

CHIP
This is none of your business, Santa. Walk away.

SANTIAGO
I'm working for Interpol.

Mute shock among the smugglers.

CHIP
Shit!

DUNPHY
Interpol? Since when?

SANTIAGO
Since I got here.

OMAR
Quite frankly, I suspected you all along.

DAVY
I don't believe it. You don't look like a cop.

CHIP
Yeah, let's see your badge, Santa.

Santiago pulls out his Interpol I.D.

DAVY
(reading)
Dr. Ahmed Khalidi, antiquities recovery. ... I'll be damned.

He hands it back.

SANTIAGO
I'll take this.

Santiago walks over and picks up the bag.

CHIP
I know what you're thinking, Santa, but we didn't loot it. We've been um ... storing it. Yeah! Like, protecting it.

SANTIAGO
Protecting it? For how long?

CHIP
Eight months. We found it when we moved in.

DUNPHY
We would have given it back someday.

CHIP
Probably.

Santiago continues toward the door, the stops and turns.

SANTIAGO
I'm curious. Which room did you find it in?

CHIP
It wasn't in the house. We found it in the ravine, behind the house.

DAVY
Next to a couple of dead bodies.

SANTIAGO
And you brought it in here and hid it in this, this -

OMAR
Kitty-cat condo.

CHIP
Not hidden, Santa. Stored.

SANTIAGO
Uh-huh. Did Jack know?

DUNPHY
No. He was off in Kurdistan then taking folk dancing lessons.

SANTIAGO
You kept it a secret even from him.

DUNPHY
Jack's nuts. You can't tell him a thing like that.

Santiago moves toward the exit with the bag.

SANTIAGO
See you in court.

DUNPHY
No you won't.

Santiago stops.

SANTIAGO
Why not?

Dunphy gets a pen out of his pocket and starts writing in a reporter's notebook.

DUNPHY
Well, son, mainly because we buy our ink by the metric ton. ... Khalidi. How do you spell that?

DAVY
K-H-A-L-I-D-I. Ahmed.

Dunphy sits down at a computer and starts typing.

We move to one of the television screens, which shows Andrea Arlington doing a stand-up in front of the collapsing building.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. BAGHDAD BUREAU - SAME TIME

Andrea reporting live.

ANDREA
It's a story that tugs at the heartstrings, Jim.
(MORE)

Reliable sources confirm that these war-hardened correspondents, amid the horror of war and without regard to their own safety, have rushed into this deathtrap to rescue their beloved mascot, a cat named Venus. We'll stay with this story as long as it takes. Back to you, Jim.

Mike films her.

MIKE
Heartstrings?

INT. NEWSROOM/BALLROOM - SAME TIME

Dunphy types.

DUNPHY
I've got a great scoop here, Dr. Khalidi. It's about how an Interpol agent colluded to deceive the CIA.

Dunphy reads as he types.

DUNPHY (CONT'D)
... helped Stewart fake, falsify --

CHIP
-- Let's go with "stage."

DUNPHY
(to Chip)
That's good.
(typing)
S-T-A-G-E his own kidnapping ... Kidnapping. I always forget. Is that one "p" or two?

DAVY
One.

RICKY
I think it's two, Davy.

Santiago turns and advances toward Dunphy.

SANTIAGO
That's a lie.

DUNPHY
Is it? You helped, or, what's the term I'm looking for?

RICKY
Abetted.

DUNPHY
That's it. You, a supposed agent of law and order in whom the public trust had been placed, abetted Jack Stewart in his despicable charade.

OMAR
Did you not, for several weeks, secretly provide him with food, medicine and several stolen chocolate-raspberry souffles?

SANTIAGO
Was I supposed to deny medicine to a sick man?

CHIP
It falls into a gray area, like us adopting this poor, lost loot.

DUNPHY
And you helped him plan his phoney escape.

SANTIAGO
So did you.

DUNPHY
Yes, but I'm not a cop.

SANTIAGO
Neither am I.

The building GROANS.

CHIP
I think it's safe to say we're all guilty of something.
(to Venus)
Except you, poopsie.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)
(giving in)
All right. We'll bury everything. Except this bag. It goes back to the museum.

A beam falls with a loud CRASH. The lights go out.

DUNPHY
(panicked)
That seems fair.

They all make a frantic beeline for the exit.

INT. CRUMBLING CORRIDORS - CONTINUOUS

They race through warped funhouse corridors in the bouncing beam of Santiago's flashlight, leaping over beams and downed chandeliers, ducking falling debris, lurching crazily through the maze, until the entire group arrives, dusty, bruised and breathless at the

EXT. FRONT GATES - CONTINUOUS

Santiago and the others emerge. Chip holds the cat. A CHEER rises from the crowd.

ANDREA
We can see them coming out now. And yes, awww, there's the kitty cat, safe and sound. I believe it's a Persian cat, Jim. What a feel-good story.

Santiago and Ricky walk side by side.

SANTIAGO
(to Ricky)
Can you give me a ride to the Green Zone?

RICKY
Sure. ... What are you going tell them?

SANTIAGO
The truth: that Chip found the treasure in a ravine. I'll just say it happened today. Saturday's a good day to find loot.

RICKY
For the Sunday papers.

CRACK.

They turn.

CRASH. KA-BOOM!

The Baghdad Bureau collapses.

INT. FANCY HOTEL BATHROOM - DAY

It is the next afternoon. Santiago stands at a mirror.

SUPER: “AMMAN, JORDAN”

He raises a finger, a contact lens poised at the tip. With a quick pop, he places it on his eyeball.

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM - A MINUTE LATER

He reclines on his bed, flips through the channels with his remote. He catches Andrea Arlington in mid-report.

ON TELEVISION

ANDREA
... Stewart was rescued last night as Marines patrolling the area confronted a suspicious vehicle.

BACK TO SCENE

Santiago sits bolt-upright, turns up the volume.

INT. WORLD NEWS SERVICE, LONDON - SAME TIME

A whoop of joy rises to the rafters. Teddy Winston hugs Hobhouse. The staff dances for joy.

ON THEIR TELEVISION

ANDREA
... Stewart had suffered a single gunshot wound to the buttocks but was otherwise unharmed.

The report cuts to footage of an ARMY DOCTOR.

ARMY DOCTOR
We’re talking a flesh wound. And fortunately the bullet struck an area of more than ample flesh.

BACK TO SCENE

HOBHOUSE
His fat! It’s saved him again!

SIR TEDDY
(to Hastings)
Draw up a new contract for Jack right away and send it over to that hospital.

HASTINGS
But isn’t he being sacked?

SIR TEDDY
Hastings, you nitwit. We can't sack a man who's been kidnapped by terrorists.

INT. JORDAN HOTEL ROOM - SAME TIME

Santiago shakes his head in happy disbelief.

ON HIS TELEVISION

Major General Greenleaf comes on screen. A snippet from a press conference.

GREENLEAF
At zero three hundred hours, Mr. Stewart was liberated from his captors by Marine units that happened to be in the area investigating reports of a V.B.I.E.D.

BACK TO SCENE

SANTIAGO
(with satisfaction)
Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.

ON HIS TELEVISION

ANDREA
And in a totally unrelated but no less electrifying development, a cache of museum objects valued at over two hundred million dollars was confiscated from Al-Qaeda today in Baghdad. A Western diplomat who asked not to be named has told us that the terrorist group had planned to sell the 3,000-year-old pile of gold loot to purchase uranium from Iran to power its weapons of mass destruction.

BACK TO SCENE

Santiago smiles and clicks off the TV.

INT. ARCHAEOLOGY LAB, OXFORD UNIVERSITY - EVENING

Santiago, now fully returned to his life as Dr. Khalidi, sits at a long table of artifacts, examining one with a magnifying glass.

SUPER: “OXFORD, 2007”

A few student interns are packing up to leave.

STUDENT
Have a nice weekend, Dr. K.

SANTIAGO
Thanks, Dennis

The students leave. Santiago studies the object.

JACK (O.S.)
It’s a fake.

Santiago looks up and yes, it’s Jack, dapper in a tweed suit, strolling toward him, twirling a walking stick.

SANTIAGO
Takes one to know one.

JACK
My darling. It’s simply wonderful to see you again. I’m fully recovered from my harrowing ordeal, as you can see.

He does a twirl.

SANTIAGO
Is that a suntan?

JACK
Why, yes it is. Thank you for noticing. I’ve retired, you know. To Martinique.

SANTIAGO
Retired? But the dancing bear?

JACK
I took your advice and found myself a home.

SANTIAGO
Did you really? Where is it?

JACK
Martinique. I’ve got the most wonderful villa overlooking the sea. Superb nightlife. And my neighbors, a charming couple. They’re Tunisian.

SANTIAGO
Not my parents?!

JACK
Why, yes. Right next door.

Santiago is dumbstruck.

JACK (CONT'D)
I spent the entire weekend in their wine cellar. Quite impressive. I could practically live down there.

SANTIAGO
They mentioned they had a new neighbor but --

JACK
We play bridge every Tuesday. Your mother cheats, and ... I'll tell you all about it over drinks.

Santiago has not quite digested this news.

SANTIAGO
You moved in next door to my parents?

JACK
And if you don't mind my saying, you don't visit us nearly enough.

Jack takes Santiago by the arm, hands him his jacket and steers him toward the door.

JACK (CONT'D)
I know what let's do. There's a marvelous club, just around the corner. They've got hot buttered rum and ...

The two men head out the door.

Santiago switches off the light.

FADE OUT.