

FADE IN:

INT. CAVERN, AL-HILLAH, IRAQ - NIGHT (2007)

PITCH BLACK. LABOURED BREATHING. RUBBLE falling loose.

A THIN SHAFT OF LIGHT illuminates a HUMAN FACE CARVED IN STONE. Layered with dust. Grinning. Watching.

The light spreads to reveal this human face is only HALF OF ONE STONE HEAD, fused to a LION'S FACE. Snarling. Waiting.

The crumbling stone wall gives way with an echoing RUMBLE. GREGOR STRAUCH, rangy, mid-40s, clad in flak jacket and combat trousers, caked in sweat, steps through the debris and dust. He aims his TORCH around, gazing in wonder.

GREGOR

So you truly are a prophet...

MUSTAPHA, aged, hunched, follows him in, headscarf covers all but his piercing blue eyes, the left one SCARRED. Nods.

EVA 'SCOTTIE' SCOTT, 30s, athletic, same grimy clothes, joins them. COUGHS UP DUST, looks from Gregor to Mustapha.

SCOTTIE

He knew - you knew this was here?

Scottie lifts a TV CAMERA to record. Mustapha ducks, mutters darkly to Gregor. Gregor pats him reassuringly, heads into this vast, eerie CRYPT. Arcane symbols stud the walls.

SCOTTIE (CONT'D)

It's so hot. Shouldn't it be cool down here? It feels like an oven.

GREGOR

That's cremation. This is burial.

CAMERA POV: Atop a dais stands the 8FT MAN/LION STONE IDOL, with its imposing WINGED BULL torso. Its raised arm wields a MACE as if guarding the cracked stone SARCOPHAGUS beneath it.

SCOTTIE

Oh my Lord...

GREGOR

Not ours, that's for sure.

CAMERA POV: The Man/Lion figure seems to grin right at us.

Scottie shivers, glances back. Their forced entrance is beside a wall-etched CIRCLE, carved in 12 SECTIONS, each with astrological glyphs. A GIANT ZODIAC WHEEL.

She hustles over to Gregor, who still stares awestruck.

SCOTTIE

(whispers)

What gives? Out at night in insurgent territory, with no Marine cover and a creepy guide hired from Al-Qaeda-R-Us?

Gregor caresses her cheek. Her stern look melts.

GREGOR

Have I ever let you down?

SCOTTIE

You want to bring that up now?

GREGOR

I meant professionally. Scottie, I've changed our destiny. Forever.

SCOTTIE

I'm a reporter, not Lara Croft. Let's just film our Pulitzer piece and scram, please? That's why we're here, right? To report?

GREGOR

Pulitzer? I see a far bigger prize...

He strolls off. Scottie moodily swigs from the WATER BOTTLE in his open canvas bag. Pulls out a DOG-EARED, CUT-OUT PHOTO of two SMILING YOUNG TEENAGE KIDS, older girl, younger boy.

SCOTTIE

(calls out after Gregor)

No bigger prize than getting back to your family in one piece!

No reply. Scottie hovers, nervous. On the sarcophagus she spies an INSCRIBED AMULET, SHEARED IN TWO. As she cautiously reaches for it, a LOW HUMMING slowly rises.

Mustapha's cue: he slips out of the crypt. The torches flicker out. The hum increases to a VIBRATING THRUM.

SCOTTIE (CONT'D)

What the hell..?

Scottie flicks her camera to NIGHT VISION. In its sickly-green hue, the entire chamber SHAKES, dust swirling.

CAMERA POV: Scottie searches for Gregor - and finds him, kneeling, gazing up at the imposing two-faced idol.

SCOTTIE (CONT'D)

Gregor, this place is coming down!

She stumbles over. Gregor transfixed. She can't budge him.

SCOTTIE (CONT'D)
Move, now! Think of Lily and Josh!

Gregor turns to Scottie, eyes filled with tears. A beat. Then a chilling, beatific smile crosses his face. Scottie SCREAMS.

The canvas bag spills to the floor. The kids' photo falls out as the crypt CAVES IN, burying their smiling faces in debris.

Then silence. And DARKNESS.

INT. LIVING ROOM, STRAUCH HOUSE, ISHTAR FALLS - DAY

FADE IN on an ENLARGED, FRAMED PRINT of the same photograph - the full shot revealing the two kids flanked by a younger Gregor and a PRETTY WOMAN - a beaming, model family. A GIRL'S FINGERS caress the happy faces. Linger on Gregor's smile.

LILY (O.S.)
(softly)
What happened to you?

The hand accidentally KNOCKS the frame over. LILY STRAUCH, 16, a little older than in the photo, picks it up. Moves it on the mantelpiece beside an IN MEMORIAM card, a photo of the same smiling woman over lettering 'BETH STRAUCH, 1969-2006'.

Lily stares at her dead mother's image. The pain weighing on her almost dulls her bright eyes and determination. Almost.

Lily turns to the LAPTOP beside her. Taps a key.

ONSCREEN: a WEBCAST. Animated female host RILEY PECK, 20s, yaps at the camera, her homemade set decked with ASTROLOGY SYMBOLS, a 'STARS & STRIPES WITH RILEY PECK' logo overhead.

RILEY (ON THE LAPTOP)
Many a journalist has wished they could tell the future to get the latest scoop. Now there's one who claims he actually can...
Veteran war correspondent Gregor Strauch has traded reporting for our far more exciting astrology!

Riley bangs the desk excitedly. The first 'S' in 'Stripes' falls off. Her head hides the last 'S': 'STARS & TRIPE'.

Lily winces, mostly annoyance, with a little amusement.

ONSCREEN: Images of Gregor reporting in various war zones. These FADE into: Gregor and Scottie, covered in dust and blood, air-lifted from the Al-Hillah rubble by US Marines.

RILEY (LAPTOP V.O.) (CONT'D)
 As we all know, last year Strauch
 and camerawoman Eva Scott both
 discovered and miraculously
 survived the collapse of an ancient
 Babylonian tomb outside Baghdad.
 Immediately afterwards, Strauch
 announced his retirement.

ONSCREEN: Press Conference. Gregor and Scottie bombarded by
 questions. Scottie struggles. Gregor seems not to be there.

REPORTER 1
 What now after finding this tomb,
 Gregor? More fortune hunting?

GREGOR
 Maybe fortune telling.

Laughter from the assembled press. Gregor's not joking.

RILEY (LAPTOP)
 Turns out Strauch was serious,
 announcing an upcoming astrology
 column 'Astral Projections' in his
 hometown local newspaper...

ONSCREEN: ISHTAR FALLS SENTINEL NEWSPAPER headline "GREGOR
 STRAUCH'S HOROSCOPES: FIND YOUR FATE ONLY IN THE SENTINEL!"

Lily's own Sentinel COPY promotes Gregor's column: 'NEARLY
 TIME TO FIND YOUR FATE!' A ZODIAC WHEEL fills the page. Lily
 CRUMPLES it, hurls it away. It lands by a METAL CANE -

- propping up Scottie. She hobbles in, haggard. Awkward
 silence. Lily turns away, refocuses on her laptop screen.

ONSCREEN: COVERT FILMING. A shabby diner. PROFESSOR JAIDI,
 tall, swarthy with glasses, confers furtively with a gaunt,
 greying, bearded Gregor. Riley visible in a mirror, filming.

RILEY (LAPTOP V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Yet Strauch, perhaps typically for
 a moody, private Cancer sign, has
 become a recluse, only consorting
 with controversial Iraqi historian,
 Al-Hillah curator Professor Rachid
 Jaidi - as S&S were tipped off by
 an insider for this exclusive...

ONSCREEN: Gregor spies Riley's camera, races over, HISSING -
 Lily shuts the laptop, glares at Scottie. Scottie blushes.

LILY
 "Insider"? Don't you mean "spy"? Or
 "backstabber"? Proud of yourself?
 Gossiping to a cheap website?

SCOTTIE

I had no choice. And believe me, I tried more established outlets but only that young girl cared. I guess we're yesterday's news.

LILY

Why, Scottie? Because he walked out of that tomb without a scratch? Or because he walked out on you?

Scottie bats back the crumpled paper ball with her cane.

SCOTTIE

You're a smart girl, Lil. We both know this is about more than your father and me. And we both know he's... changed since he got back.

LILY

Maybe it's just a phase. And soon we'll go back to how it used to be.

Scottie follows Lily's longing gaze back to the mantelpiece: her family photo, an image no longer reflecting reality.

SCOTTIE

Some things, once they're done, can't be undone.

(beat)

We can't fight our fate, Lil.

LILY

We can try.

(beat)

Otherwise, why are you here?

SCOTTIE

(smiles ruefully)

Touche... They're both upstairs now?

Lily's silence says enough. Scottie steadies herself, limps away. Lily jumps up, blocks her, their faces inches apart.

LILY

My family. My responsibility.

SCOTTIE

You do have his stubbornness.

Tensions breaks as JOSH, 14, joyfully WHOOPING, bounds in oblivious and starts typing away into Lily's laptop browser.

JOSH

Dad's gonna kill them with this!