

WHAT GOD ABANDONED

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. BACK OF TOYOTA PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

MERC, mid-30s, Caucasian, wears a dirty sack over his head, has his hands tied behind his back with rope.

He rides in the flatbed of a Toyota pickup truck with four heavily armed rebel soldiers, bouncing fast over an open dirt road.

DIAB (trans. Wolf), hard bitten, late 30s, Middle Eastern, wears battle fatigues, and an AK-47 propped up on his shoulder. He stands looking out like a sea captain of a pirate ship, surveying the desolate land.

DIAB

Take his hood off. I want him to see this.

MAHIR, 40s, Middle Eastern, tough as nails, quickly pulls off the Merc's hood.

The Merc's face is beaten, lip and nose bleeding down his chin, smeared across his cheek.

DIAB (CONT'D)

Look around, Merc. My brother was right. None of this could have been possible if not for you.

The Merc looks around. A beautiful modern Dubai-like city surrounded by sand, burns to the ground.

Tanks speed by the tiny pickup truck with soldiers hitching a ride, waving their victory flags.

Up on a cliff, a giant white crucifix. Next to it, people have been lined up, systematically getting shot in the back of the head by rebel soldiers. Their bodies tumble down the cliff, into a pile down below.

The Merc closes his eyes in disgust.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. BACK OF TOYOTA PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

The Merc has his eyes closed.

He's asleep.

His face is no longer beaten or bleeding. Just in need of a shave and a wash.

Sitting across from him in the flatbed is Mahir. He sneaks out a grin and taps the Merc's boot with his.

MAHIR

You're the only person I know who can sleep through a bumpy ride like this.

The Merc returns the grin, looks up at him.

MERC

I take it where I can get it. We almost there?

MAHIR

Almost, *sadiqi*.

The Merc shakes the sleep off his face and checks his assault rifle. His is a somewhat new looking AR-15 while everyone else uses old soviet Kalashnikovs.

A fleet of vehicles roll down the desert road, each packed full of war torn revolutionary rebel fighters.

The Merc notices some child soldiers riding in a pickup beside them.

MERC

Since when we start usin' kid soldiers?

MAHIR

They belong to Kedar's unit. Certainly not to be fucked with, *sadiqi*.

MERC

Kedar. You ever meet this guy?

MAHIR

Only once when this war started.

MERC

He as batshit crazy as I hear?

DIAB

I'd watch your tongue, Merc.

Diab rests against the truck's tailgate, Kalashnikov in hand.

MERC

And why is that?

DIAB

He's my brother.

MERC

Then you'd be the perfect person to ask.

Mahir awkwardly tries to break the tension with a playful laugh.

MAHIR

I forgot to introduce you two. This is Diab. He led the battle to take the city of Q'run.

MERC

Q'run was a fuckin' bloodbath.

DIAB

It was another victory.

MERC

A lot of civilians died needlessly in that victory. I forget, are we fighting government soldiers or unarmed civilians?

DIAB

If you side with the government dogs for protection, they might as well be government soldiers.

MAHIR

Diab, this is-

DIAB

I know who he is. He's the mercenary my father is paying a fortune to to help us win this war.

MERC

At your service. I'd like to say nice to meet you, Diab. But I know better.

DIAB

That tongue of yours is going to get you killed. Probably by me.

MERC

Sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not an unarmed civilian. You might find it harder to kill me than you think.

The Merc flips the safety off on his rifle.

Mahir clears his throat, the tension in the air can be cut with a knife.

MAHIR

Okay, you two. Enough shit talk. Look, we're almost there.

They look out ahead.

In the distance, a small village is on fire.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAY

The fleet of pickup trucks drive up to the village already in the process of burning to the ground.

The Merc jumps out of the truck and looks around at the horror show.

Bodies litter the ground like pebbles on a sidewalk.

Diab walks over to Mahir.

DIAB

I don't like him and I don't trust him, Mahir.

MAHIR

I've known him for years. As long as you pay him, he's as loyal as a dog.

The Merc shrugs off the slaughter and walks over to the two whispering.

MERC

You were right, Mahir. Your homeland is great. I don't think I've seen a single fucking thing that hasn't been on fire yet. I can see why you're fighting so hard to protect all of this.

MAHIR

Can we talk?

MERC

Okay, sure.

The Merc and Mahir walk off together.

Mahir wraps his arm around the Merc.

MERC (CONT'D)

This have anything to do with what you two girls were whispering about?

MAHIR

What are you doing?

MERC

What?

MAHIR

You're deliberately trying to piss Diab off.

MERC

He's an asshole.

MAHIR

He's the son of the General. He's used to getting a lot more respect.

MERC

He won't get it from me.

MAHIR

I can't have you mouthing off to him or his brother. I vouched for you, man. It looks bad on me. This isn't like the fucking Marines. We fuck up here, they don't toss us out on a dishonorable discharge, they just cut our fuckin' heads off. Watch it with the back talk. Nice and polite.

MERC

I'm nothing but nice and polite.

MAHIR

Good. Keep it that way. Keep things civil.

MERC

Copy that.

They walk back over to Diab.

MERC (CONT'D)
So where's this brother of yours?

DIAB
This way.

Diab leads the way.

They walk past rebels going through dead peoples' belongings, tossing away anything they don't like into the sand.

Some steal the livestock, goats and chickens. Another pair dumps car antifreeze into the village drinking well.

They walk over to the only other building not burnt down to the ground.

Two rebel soldiers guard the entrance.

DIAB (CONT'D)
Kedar! Come out here and see your brother!

A loud gunshot goes off in the building.

Out steps KEDAR.

He's young, in his 20s, Middle Eastern, wears battle fatigues. In his hand, a smoking pistol.

Kedar sees his brother and smiles.

KEDAR
Diab!

The two hug.

DIAB
It has been too long, brother.

KEDAR
And who are your friends?

DIAB
Kedar, this is Mahir. One of our bravest soldiers.

MAHIR
It's an honor.

KEDAR
The honor is all mine, Mahir.

They hug.

KEDAR (CONT'D)
And who is this blue-eyed devil?

MAHIR
This is-

KEDAR
You must be the mercenary I've
heard so much about.

Kedar gives the Merc a hug.

KEDAR (CONT'D)
You're almost part of the family
now.

MERC
You hear that, Diab? We're family.

Diab spits on the ground.

MERC (CONT'D)
Seems we missed the party.

KEDAR
You did. We had balloons ready and
everything. Come, come inside.

INT. SMALL VILLAGE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Kedar shows everyone inside. Half naked girls lie dead on the
floor with bullet holes through their skulls.

KEDAR
Don't mind them. Would anyone like
some tea? Girl, serve the tea.

A VILLAGE GIRL, half dressed, covered in bruises and cuts
nervously walks in holding a plate with several cups of tea.

The tea cups rattle on the plate as she walks.

Kedar leads the men to a table where he has a map of the
region laid out and a bunch of battle plans on display by the
wall behind him.

Some communication equipment has been installed in the
corner. A short-wave radio and sat phone.

MERC
Nice setup you've got here.

KEDAR

We've got ears listening to enemy communications. They're buzzing around like little confused bees right now.

DIAB

Why all the secrecy? Why are we all here, brother?

The girl serves everyone a cup of tea, hands shaking like a leaf. She spills some on the map.

Kedar slaps the plate of tea to the ground.

KEDAR

What is wrong with you?! Worthless like your sisters!

Kedar shoots her in the chest, she's dead before she hits the ground.

Some of Kedar's men rush in, drag the body away.

The Merc looks over at Mahir, reaches for his sidearm.

Mahir stops him, shakes his head, silently imploring him not to do anything rash.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

Sorry for the interruption. Where were we again?

The Merc takes his hand off his sidearm.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

That's right, we have the government dogs by the balls, gentlemen. Their last stronghold is the city of Ashqar. After that it's straight for the capital. They don't stand a chance.

DIAB

What about father? Have you heard from him?

KEDAR

He's going to be with us when we take the capital.

DIAB

This is a great day, brother.

MERC

Okay, so what exactly has changed?
If anyone needs a reminder, the
last time we were here we had our
asses handed to us.

KEDAR

It was the attack on Nahr. Without
fuel for their tanks, we've cut
them off at the arms. They're
helpless and they know it.

MERC

We saw the fields on the way here.
That gonna be a problem?

KEDAR

Let them burn. I want it to be a
reminder that this country won't be
a fucking slave to the west for its
oil.

MAHIR

Who else will be joining us in the
assault?

KEDAR

Bahar and his unit.

BAHAR, 40s, face covered in scars, walks into the room
zipping up his pants.

BAHAR

Someone's been talking about me.

Kedar smiles big, walks over to him and pats him on the back.

KEDAR

You're late.

BAHAR

I was occupied elsewhere.

KEDAR

We were talking about our strategy.

Bahar walks over to the map.

BAHAR

Maloof and his squadron of tanks
have been shelling for three days
now from the outskirts of the city.

MERC

Maloof?

MAHIR

Mean old bastard. You'd like him.

KEDAR

Maloof will attack from the left while Bahar advances his troops to the right. While the government fucks are focusing on them-

MERC

We attack from the middle. Box them in and pick them off. I like it.

BAHAR

What about the RPG's you were able to recover?

MERC

About 30 crates full.

MAHIR

More like 10. One of the trucks carrying a shipment ran over a landmine the other day.

MERC

Shit. Just our fucking luck.

DIAB

We will make it work. We have to. When do we advance?

Kedar checks his watch.

KEDAR

In one hour.

(to the Merc)

And I want you by my side when we do.

DIAB

Brother, I-

KEDAR

We wouldn't have even dreamed of taking the capital over a year ago. Now here we are. That's all thanks to him, Diab.

DIAB

--He is an outsider. An American.

MERC

I'm a mercenary. I go where I'm paid to go.

DIAB

You are just a whore with a gun.

Kedar slams his fist down on the table.

KEDAR

Enough! This is my operation. I'll have whoever the fuck I want by my side, do you understand, Diab?

DIAB

Brother, I-

KEDAR

Do you understand me?!

DIAB

Yes.

KEDAR

Good. It's a long drive, I suggest you all rest up or do whatever it is you do before going into battle. Dismissed.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - LATER

The Merc walks around the compound, the rebels have started burning the bodies.

Kedar walks over with his child soldiers by his side.

KEDAR

Have you ever seen a body burn?

MERC

More times than I care to remember.

The Merc looks at the hardened kids.

Kedar pats them on the head.

KEDAR

Go play.

The kids run off.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

I love that smell, don't you?
Reminds me of...

(smiles)

Roasted lamb. If you listen closely
you can hear their eyes popping
like an egg left in the microwave
for too long.

MERC

What did they do to deserve this?

KEDAR

Them? They're scum. Garbage. Only
thing to do with garbage is to burn
it.

He gives the Merc a pat on the back.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

You should get some rest. This
upcoming battle will be hell.

Kedar walks away.

The Merc bends down, picks something shiny out of the sand.

It's a crucifix necklace.

He walks over to one of the bodies, there's a cross around
its neck as well.

He checks another, more crosses.

EXT. VILLAGE DRINKING WELL - DAY

The Merc draws the bucket from the well. He looks down at the
empty jugs of antifreeze on the ground, tosses the water
bucket back into the well.

Mahir walks up to him.

MAHIR

You okay?

MERC

Do you have anything to drink?

Mahir smiles and hands him a flask.

MAHIR

Here, sadiqi.

The Merc takes the flask and gulps it down.

MERC

What have you gotten me into,
Mahir?

MAHIR

What are you talking about?

MERC

Kedar. This guy is fucking
unstable.

He takes another big swig from the flask.

MAHIR

(whispers)

Watch what you say around these
people. They worship him like the
Prophet.

MERC

And what about you?

MAHIR

I'm fighting for my homeland. My
parents' homeland. I'll do whatever
it takes to see it liberated.

MERC

What about them? These are your
people he's slaughtering, Mahir.

MAHIR

Casualties of war, man. You know
that.

The Merc wraps the necklace with the cross around the flask
and hands it to Mahir.

MAHIR (CONT'D)

Where did you find this?

He takes it, looks it over.

MERC

On one of the bodies. You can keep
that one. There's a few hundred
more burning in that pile over
there.

Mahir is left speechless.

MAHIR
I didn't know-

MERC
That's it, tell me you didn't know
about this.

MAHIR
It's the truth. I swear. I didn't
know.

MERC
Would you have done anything if you
did?

Beat.

MERC (CONT'D)
You know my fucking rules, Mahir.

MAHIR
I didn't know this is what they
were doing.

MERC
Rule number one, what is it? I
don't do fuckin' ethnic cleansing.

MAHIR
Keep your voice down.

MERC
They're killing Christians. What is
going to happen to those people in
the capital? It has the biggest
Christian population in the whole
damn country, Mahir.

MAHIR
Everyone has already been evacuated
from the cities.

MERC
That's what they said in Q'run.

MAHIR
You can't back out of this. Not
now. You heard him, he wants you by
his side when we advance.

MERC
That's not happening.

MAHIR
Nothing has changed.

MERC
Everything has changed!

MAHIR
Just think about the money.

MERC
All I ever do is think about the
fucking money.

MAHIR
You need to shut this shit out,
switch it the fuck off like you
always do. You are being paid to
not give a fuck. That's what you're
good at.

MERC
Maybe I'm tired of not caring.

MAHIR
You've picked a perfect time to
grow a fuckin' conscience.

Kedar steps out of the building with his brother and child
soldiers.

KEDAR
Everyone! We go to take the
capital!

Everyone cheers.

KEDAR (CONT'D)
Where is my blue-eyed devil?

MAHIR
I'll leave it up to you, sadiqi.
It's your call. How does this play
out?

DIAB
Mercenary, time to go!

The Merc looks around, not sure what his next move is. The
the futility of the situation sinks in.

MERC
Fine. But after this I'm done.

MAHIR

After this it won't matter.

INT. JEEP - DAY

The Merc rides in the back with Kedar. His brother Diab drives.

The fleet of pickup trucks storm the desert. A few tanks in the front toss up thick black smoke.

KEDAR

Old soviet tanks. They still get the job done, but hell are they bad for the lungs.

Kedar laughs at his own joke.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

Tell me, Merc. What do you think of our little revolution? Compared to others you have seen, how do we stack up?

MERC

I don't know, Kedar, war is war. It's really all the same, no matter where you are.

KEDAR

C'mon, you act like a man who has seen it all. Tell me some stories.

The Merc spots Diab scowling at him in the rearview mirror.

MERC

You wanna hear a story? Let me tell you about Kunto Kwadwoa, a south African drug lord. The guy had the intelligence of a fuckin' gerbil. But here he was leading 10 thousand soldiers to overthrow his government. Why? Because they wanted 15% of the profit instead of their usual 10. Thousands had to die so this child of a man could keep more of his fuckin' drug money. Rebels, drug lords, revolutionaries, it's all the fuckin' same.

(MORE)

MERC (CONT'D)

Weak men leading other weak men to
their deaths so the fat cats can
get more of their share and fuck
others out of theirs. War is war.

Diab is visually irate and Kedar is left speechless.

Not sure how Kedar is going to react to his rant, The Merc
carefully slips his hand over his holstered handgun strapped
to his leg.

Kedar just laughs, breaking the tension.

KEDAR

Indeed you're a man who has seen
and done too much. You are jaded,
my friend.

Kedar quickly pulls out a buck knife, shows it to the Merc.

Startled, the Merc's grip around his gun gets tighter.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

What about this? Have you seen
anything like this? It's one of a
kind.

He shows the Merc the handle on the blade. It's white, looks
like bone, has elaborate carvings etched into it.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

Made from real human bone. I forget
which part. But I want you to have
it.

MERC

What?

KEDAR

Go ahead. It's a gift.

MERC

I can't.

KEDAR

In this country it is very
disrespectful to not accept a gift.

The Merc takes his hand off his handgun, grabs the knife and
sheathes it.

Up ahead, another beautiful rich city caught in a war zone.
Bombs blast in the distance. Tall buildings collapse, thick
black smoke rises, machine gun fire echoes.

This is war.

EXT. CITY OF ASHQAR - DAY

Government troops try their best to hold off the onslaught of rebel soldiers who keep advancing.

A rebel tank creeps through the streets, smashing into a few parked cars, ramming into the side of a building.

It's terrifying. Clanking.

The government troops spot the tank and flee. A blast from the tank follows them, sending them straight to hell.

ELSEWHERE IN THE CITY

Bahar leads his men to storm the streets of Ashqar. They gun down civilians and soldiers alike.

BAHAR
(in arabic)
Push them back!

Tall buildings topple to the ground, debris flying everywhere.

Bahar pushes through, leads his men bravely into battle. An ATTACK HELICOPTER circles around in the sky, fixes its sights on Bahar and his men.

BAHAR (CONT'D)
Attack chopper! Run!

The Attack Helicopter guns them down.

ELSEWHERE IN THE CITY

MALOOF, 60s, wears an eye patch, has skin made of leather, stands atop an old Syrian T-34 tank.

Soldiers run to their death, getting blasted by mortar shelling.

MALOOF
(in arabic)
We need to take out those fuckin'
mortars!

The tanks grind down the street, running into enemy tanks, blasting away at each other.

TANK OPERATOR (O.C.)
 (in arabic)
 Mortars spotted on that building
 top up ahead!

MALOOF
 Fire!

A deafening blow from the tank, in the distance, a tall building explodes, crumbles to the street.

BAHAR (O.S.)
 (walkie)
 Attack chopper! Ru-

The communication dies there.

MALOOF
 (in arabic)
 That was Bahar. Get him back on the-

The Attack Helicopter swings around a tall building, sneaks up behind Maloof and his squadron.

The Attack Helicopter fires its missiles at them, wiping them out.

ELSEWHERE IN THE CITY

A squadron stands ready, machine guns in firing position.

Diab and Mahir crouch-run over to Kedar and the Merc.

KEDAR
 Report.

MAHIR
 Maloof is dead. They're throwing everything they have at us.

KEDAR
 How many tanks do we have left?

MAHIR
 Two from Maloof's unit and still the three from Diab's.

KEDAR
 We need to keep advancing.

Kedar's child soldiers yell and race into battle.

The Merc looks on as they race needlessly to their deaths. He looks over at Kedar who watches gleefully.

MAHIR

Move out!

They continue their advance into the city.

Boots running up and down the streets.

The Merc stands by Kedar's side. Mahir advances forward with Diab on the other side of the street.

Government troops fire at them from around a corner.

MERC

I got this.

The Merc raises his assault rifle, scope attached. He takes aim, gets them in his cross hairs.

RIFLE SCOPE

The Merc focuses on a government soldier popping his head out to fire. Quickly, the Merc takes his head off. The other trooper in hiding makes a run for it. The Merc puts a bullet square in his chest.

KEDAR

Splendid. Just splendid.

Kedar smiles and pats him on the shoulder.

DIAB

Let's go!

Diab and Mahir go on up ahead with the rest of the rebel soldiers.

The Merc is stopped by Kedar.

KEDAR

No. This way.

They run off in the opposite direction.

A few government troops fire at Kedar, but he stands his ground and shoots at the troops with just his pistol.

KEDAR (CONT'D)

You fucks! Do you know who I am?!
You can't kill me!

The Merc swiftly takes them out with his rifle.

MERC
What are we doing?

KEDAR
Just having some fun. C'mon, I
heard something this way.

He runs off, stops and turns around a corner.

A child cries in the distance.

KEDAR (CONT'D)
There it is again. You hear that?

MERC
It just sounds like a child.

KEDAR
Exactly.

INT. DESTROYED FAMILY HOME - DAY

Kedar kicks open a door to a building that's already been
damaged by shelling.

A PREGNANT WOMAN and her three terrified children hide under
the kitchen table.

SALMA can't stop crying. She's about 5 years old, scared to
death, wrapped in a dirty crimson colored cloak.

The eldest, NADIA, is 15 years old, very pretty, holds her
crying sister in her arms.

AAFIYA, a brave 8 year old boy coughs into his hand, hiding
his sisters behind him.

Their father lies dead on the floor, shrapnel sticking out of
his back.

KEDAR
What do we have here?

Kedar smiles sinisterly and walks over to them.

He grabs the mother and pulls her out from under the table.

KEDAR (CONT'D)
Get over here, whore.

PREGANT WOMAN
Stop it!

She pushes him away.

MERC
What are you doing?

KEDAR
Watch the door.

AAFIYA
(in arabic)
Stay away from my mommy!

Kedar laughs.

KEDAR
Merc, kill this little brat. He
might be trouble.

PREGANT WOMAN
No! Stay away from him!

She scratches Kedar's face, breaks free from his grip, runs over to shield her son.

The Merc hesitates, not sure what to do.

KEDAR
What are you doing? Give me that!

Kedar takes the Merc's assault rifle away from him and shoots the Pregnant Woman in the back.

MERC
What the fuck is wrong with you?!

Kedar aims the gun at the Merc.

KEDAR
Bring me those girls and maybe I'll
forget-

The Merc swiftly knocks the rifle away, pulls out the buck knife Kedar gave him and plunges it deep into his throat.

Kedar drops to his knees, gurgling up blood, spilling it everywhere.

The Merc takes back his rifle.

REBELS (O.C.)
(in arabic)
Over here!

I/E. DESTROYED FAMILY HOME - CONTINUOUS

The Merc looks out the doorway, sees Diab headed his way with a group of heavily armed rebels behind him.

MERC

Shit.

The Merc looks back at the kids under the table but they're gone.

He steps over Kedar's body.

MERC (CONT'D)

Hello? Kids? I'm not gonna hurt you.

Through the giant hole in the wall, he sees them running off down the street.

He steps through the wall after them.

MERC (CONT'D)

Hey! Don't go that way! It's dangerous!

REBEL 1

(in arabic)

Over here!

The Merc hides behind the crumbling wall.

Diab runs over to Kedar's body.

DIAB

No! Who did this?!

He pulls out the knife stuck in Kedar's neck.

Mahir runs in.

MAHIR

We need to get out of here, more troops are headed this way.

DIAB

Find him.

MAHIR

Find who?

Diab shows Mahir his bloody hands.

DIAB

The mercenary! Find him! Bring him to me!

MAHIR

He didn't do this, Diab.

Diab grabs Mahir by the hair, presses the bloodied buck knife against his face.

DIAB

Do you see this?

MAHIR

Yes. I see it.

DIAB

The last time I saw it, my brother was giving it to that mercenary as a gift. Now it's stuck in his throat. Who could have done that, Mahir? Who?

He lets Mahir go.

DIAB (CONT'D)

Find me my brother's killer. Bring him to me. Now!

MAHIR

Okay. I'll find him.
(in arabic to the soldiers)
Search for him. Go!

The rebels fan out to search the area.

MERC

(whispers to himself)
Fuck.

EXT. CITY STREETS OF ASHQAR - DAY

The Merc runs down the street in the direction the kids went.

A rebel spots him.

REBEL 2

(in arabic)
I found him! He's here!

They open fire at him.

MERC

Fuck!

He returns fire, kills a few before hiding behind a brick wall.

A tank with a WHITE SKULL painted on it grinds its way down the street, the squeaking of the motors draws the Merc's attention.

He looks out-

The White Skull tank spots him.

MERC (CONT'D)

Shit!

The Merc runs as fast as he can before the tank fires a shell at him from its heavy cannon.

The brick wall explodes, sending debris everywhere.

The White Skull tank RUMBLES toward him.

The Merc quickly dashes across the street, moving from cover to cover. FIRING.

Another blast follows him. The building in front of the Merc explodes, knocking him back.

The blow back was harsh, but he's still in one piece.

Government and rebel troops surround the area. They quickly ignore the Merc and fire on each other.

During the confusion, the Merc carefully crawls to safety as bullets snap around him.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Merc crawls into a nearby alleyway. He checks himself for any serious wounds. He's clean. Just a bloody eardrum leaking down his neck, making it seem worse than it is.

He checks on his ammo, almost empty.

MERC

God damn it!

The sound of a kid coughing gets his attention.

He points his rifle at a piece of cardboard box.

MERC (CONT'D)

Who's there?

He reaches over and pulls back the cardboard. Nadia is there huddled up, guarding her little brother and sister.

NADIA

Go away!

MERC

Listen, I'm not going to hurt you.
Do you speak English?

Another bomb blast tosses more rubble their way, smoke fills the tiny alley.

MERC (CONT'D)

English, do you know it?!

NADIA

Yes!

MERC

Good. We need to get out of here.

NADIA

We aren't going anywhere with you.

MERC

Do you wanna die? You wanna see the
rest of your family get killed? No?
Then follow me.

The Merc takes stock of the situation. He gets to his feet, peeks out of the alleyway.

The White Skull tank is still there but most of the troops are dead.

MERC (CONT'D)

It takes about ten seconds for them
to reload and fire. When I say run.
You run like hell. Got it?

Nadia gets up and carefully walks over to him. She holds Salma in her arms and has a death grip on Aafiya's hand.

EXT. CITY STREETS OF ASHQAR - CONTINUOUS

The Merc runs out into the street. He waves down the tank.

MERC

I'm over here!

The White Skull tank slowly moves into position, taking aim at him.

MERC (CONT'D)
Okay. Run.

He looks over at the kids.

MERC (CONT'D)
I said run!

The White Skull tank stops. Grinds its gears. Turning its turret towards the kids.

Nadia and the kids make a run for it.

The White Skull tank fires at them, missing, hitting the building beside them. It crumbles to the ground.

The Merc grabs Nadia and they run down the street, away from the White Skull tank.

MERC (CONT'D)
Don't look back!

The White Skull tank fires the heavy cannon again, hitting the sidewalk. A few parked cars explode in front of them, freezing them.

MERC (CONT'D)
This way!

The Merc runs them down an empty street. Another blast from the White Skull tank knocks over a building in front of them.

Government troops advance behind them.

The Merc quickly shoots at them before they can fire back.

MERC (CONT'D)
Through here!

The Merc kicks open a door to a cafe-

INT. DAMAGED CAFE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

The Merc shoves the kids inside. He fires his rifle through the windows at the troops advancing toward the building.

A blast from the tank rips the cafe apart, knocking the Merc on his back.

Glass flies everywhere, cutting the Merc on the face and hands.

The walls erupt with gunfire.

The frightened kids scream out.

Government troops storm the building.

The Merc swings into action, grabs his sidearm and quickly guns them down.

MERC

Their weapons, grab them!

Nadia holds the two young children tightly to her.

MERC (CONT'D)

Now!

She gets up and collects the weapons.

The Merc tosses the debris off of him and checks their ammo.

MERC (CONT'D)

Okay. I'm going to get you three out of here, okay? After that what you do is your problem. What's your name?

NADIA

Nadia.

MERC

Okay, Nadia. You need to listen to everything I say. Do everything I tell you to do. Got it?

NADIA

Yes.

MERC

No second guessing. No back talk. What I say, when I say it.

NADIA

I understand.

MERC

We're gonna need a car.

EXT. CITY STREETS OF ASHQAR - DAY

The Merc carefully checks the streets. A few government soldiers flee the war zone, running across the street.

Nadia and the kids stay behind her with Aafiya keeping a close eye on his little sister Salma.

MERC

Alright. Let's move.

They quietly move along the shelled street, unseen and unheard.

The Merc peeks behind a building, sees two government soldiers trying to jump start a Jeep.

MERC (CONT'D)

That's our ride.

I/E. MILITARY JEEP - MOMENTS LATER

The Merc sneaks up behind the two soldiers and quickly executes them with his pistol, a bullet each to the back of the head.

He tosses their bodies out of the Jeep and tries to jump start it.

MERC

Get in.

Nadia hesitates.

MERC (CONT'D)

Get in!

They quickly pile into the small Jeep, Nadia sitting by his side.

MERC (CONT'D)

Safety belts.

NADIA

What?

The Merc reaches over and fastens her seat belt.

MERC

Hold on tight and keep your head down.

NADIA

Okay.

He gets the Jeep started and peels backwards out of the alley, right in front of the White Skull tank.

MERC

Shit!

He shifts gears and darts back through the alley. The tank fires a shell at them, blasting a building, bricks scatter everywhere.

Turning a corner--

They run into government soldiers fighting revolutionary rebel soldiers.

Bullets ricochet off the side of the Jeep.

The Merc's eyes scan for a way out of this hell. He pulls into a side street, through an archway-

Right into a bigger battle being had.

He slams on the brakes and shifts the car into reverse.

The troops open fire on the Jeep.

NADIA

Not this way! Go back!

MERC

Heads down!

A rocket flies after them, hitting the archway, collapsing it.

Two Jeeps squeal around a corner, headed right for them. The Merc grabs his rifle and shoots at them.

He shifts gears and takes off down another street. The reinforcements are right up his ass. They shoot at him from behind.

MERC (CONT'D)

Seat belts?

NADIA

Yes.

MERC

Just checking.

He steps on the brakes, bringing the Jeep to a sudden halt. The Jeeps behind crash into the back of him.

He quickly gets out and guns them all down while they're still trying to recover from whiplash.

He pops out the empty magazine and slaps in a fresh one.

Nadia looks at him like he's impossible.

He jumps back into the Jeep and takes off.

MERC (CONT'D)

You know this city, yes?

NADIA

Yes.

MERC

I'm going to need you to tell me where to go.

He pulls down an avenue, hits traffic. Every civilian seems to be in the street, trying to evacuate the city all at once in a rush.

It's total pandemonium.

NADIA

Try main street.

MERC

Why haven't these people been evacuated?

NADIA

To where?

MERC

Anywhere but here.

NADIA

The government told us we were safe.

A rock comes out of nowhere and smashes into the windshield.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Shit!

A crowd of angry pedestrians riddle their Jeep with stones. The Merc picks up speed and leaves the anarchy behind them.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

The Merc pulls his shot to hell Jeep up to a spookily empty city street corner.

Cars have been abandoned, bodies lie on the ground.

MERC

Where?

She points up ahead.

NADIA

There. The highway will lead you straight out of the city.

He slowly drives the Jeep down the street...

There's a clear way out of the highway but it's blockaded by rebel soldiers.

MERC

Shit. They've got it blocked off.

NADIA

It's the only exit.

MERC

Okay. Seat belts?

Nadia checks on the kids in the back. It's now become the word to say when shit is about to go down.

NADIA

(in arabic)

Keep your heads down.

The Merc revs the engine.

The Attack Helicopter rises up from behind the rebel soldiers.

MERC

Shit!

The Attack Helicopter fires at them. The Merc quickly slams it in reverse and speeds backwards down the street.

The Attack Helicopter chases after them, firing a rocket.

NADIA

Look out!

MERC

Fuck!

The Merc swerves the Jeep, a rocket just missing them, hitting a building behind them.

The building collapses down around them.

The Merc switches gears, heads for a nearby skyscraper.

NADIA

What are you doing?!

MERC

Hold on.

INT. SKYSCRAPER - CONTINUOUS

The Merc SLAMS through the glass entrance to the skyscraper.

He doesn't stop, just keeps pushing it as far as he can, SMASHING through the back entrance.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER - CONTINUOUS

The Merc jumps the Jeep down some stairs, the Attack Helicopter flying low by their side, firing their main guns at them.

MERC

Here we go again!

The Merc jumps the Jeep, SLAMS into another glass entrance to a skyscraper.

The Attack Helicopter fires every missile it has left in its arsenal at the building.

INT. ANOTHER SKYSCRAPER - CONTINUOUS

The Attack Helicopter flies low, fires its minigun into the building.

MERC

Where are you when I need you?

NADIA

Need what?

The White Skull tank BURSTS through the back entrance, fires its turret at the Attack Helicopter, blowing it up.

MERC
There she is.

The Merc smiles and hits it in reverse.

The White Skull tank sets its sights on the Jeep.

NADIA
This is bad.

MERC
It could be worse.

NADIA
How?!

EXT. ANOTHER SKYSCRAPER - CONTINUOUS

The skyscraper starts to cave in on itself, collapsing onto the White Skull tank.

MERC
We could have still been in there.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

The Merc drives up to the blockade.

MERC
Let's try this again, shall we.

The rebels spot him and get into position.

They open fire at him as he speeds toward them.

He SMASHES through them and the barricade, finally punching a way out of the city.

INT. MILITARY JEEP - DAY

The military Jeep speeds down the empty highway.

Nadia undoes her seat belt, checks on the kids in the back.

NADIA
Is anyone hurt? Are you okay?
Salma?

AAFIYA
We're fine.

Something catches Nadia's eye.

Nadia stands up in her seat, looks on in astonishment as the once beautiful city gets turned into rubble behind them.

NADIA
This can't be happening.

EXT. REBEL OCCUPIED BUILDING - DAY

Diab walks out with a heavy duffel bag and a few rifles. He tosses them in the flatbed of a pickup truck.

What is left of Kedar's child soldiers cry and follow Diab around like lost puppies.

DIAB
Everyone, load up.

A group of rebels jump in the flatbed.

CHILD SOLDIER
What about us?

DIAB
There's no room for you. Now leave me alone.

The sounds of war can be heard close by.

Mahir runs over with his men.

MAHIR
What's going on, Diab?

The rebel soldiers in the flatbed grab the rifles and load them up.

DIAB
The mercenary escaped the city. I'm taking my men and we're going after him.

Diab gathers more supplies, puts them in the flatbed of the truck.

MAHIR
With your brother dead, that leaves you in charge of things. You can't leave.

DIAB
Watch me.

MAHIR

This is insane, Diab.

DIAB

He killed my brother in cold blood.
Nothing else matters.

MAHIR

There's a war going on.

DIAB

If I don't present the head of the
man who killed my brother before my
father, he will have mine. Now get
out of my way.

MAHIR

Okay. But I'm coming along.

DIAB

Everyone! We leave now!
(to Mahir)
Don't get in my way.

Everyone gets in the flatbed of their trucks as they drive
off.

I/E. MILITARY JEEP - DAY

The Merc pushes the Jeep as far as it can go. Smoke puffs out
of the engine before coming to a sizzling dead grinding halt,
just off the outskirts of the city.

MERC

She's had it.

The Merc jumps out of the Jeep and collects his things.

NADIA

What are you doing?

Nadia gets out of the Jeep, walks over to him.

MERC

What does it look like I'm doing?
I'm getting the hell out of here.

NADIA

Take us with you.

MERC

That wasn't part of the deal.

NADIA
We'll die out here.

MERC
That's not my problem.

The Merc grabs his rifle, a satchel bag with water and supplies in it.

He turns his back to them and walks away.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

The Merc walks down a desert road. In the background behind him, the city burning. Following in pursuit of him is Nadia, her younger sister and brother.

He looks back at them.

MERC
I wouldn't do that.

NADIA
Do what?

MERC
Follow me around.

NADIA
Why?

MERC
They'll come for me. You sure as hell don't wanna be around me when they do.

NADIA
Who are you?

MERC
I'm just a mercenary.

NADIA
That man was paying you? The one who killed our mother?

The Merc isn't sure what to say.

NADIA (CONT'D)
If that man was paying you, why did you kill him?

MERC

I don't know. Would you have preferred I hadn't?

NADIA

No. I'm glad he's dead.

He continues walking and they continue to follow him.

Beat.

MERC

You got any idea where you're headed?

NADIA

No. Do you?

MERC

Not really.

NADIA

Why did you bother saving us if you're just going to leave us out here to die?

The Merc stops walking.

MERC

What was your name again?

NADIA

Nadia.

MERC

Nadia. What about them?

NADIA

This is my brother Aafiya and my sister Salma. Please, you must help us. Here, you can have this.

Nadia pulls out a gold cross hidden around her neck. She yanks it off and hands it to him.

NADIA (CONT'D)

My mother gave me this. It isn't much but-

MERC

What is this?

Nadia runs over to Aafiya, takes the gold cross from around his neck as well.

NADIA
Please. Here.

She hands the Merc the crosses.

MERC
You're trying to buy me with
crosses?

NADIA
Gold. I know it isn't much. But
it's something.

The Merc stares at the crosses in her hand, not sure what to do with them.

MERC
This so isn't my problem.

He turns to leave, Nadia quickly stops him.

NADIA
Please.

Her eyes plead for mercy.

He sighs.

MERC
Do you have family somewhere?
Somewhere to go?

NADIA
Yes! An uncle in Sha'run.

MERC
Sha'run is several miles back where
we came. That's too dangerous.

He turns his back and keeps walking.

MERC (CONT'D)
Sorry kid, your luck ran out.

Nadia looks at the crosses, at her brother and sister. She glances up at the mountains far off in the distance.

NADIA
Wait! We have a grandmother.

He stops and turns back around.

MERC
And where is she?

Nadia points out at the mountains.

NADIA

Past there.

MERC

Resaba mountains? No way, kid.
That's too far to travel by foot.

NADIA

Then we go around, okay? We go
around.

MERC

It's a wasteland out there. The
revolutionary army burnt everything
down to the ground.

NADIA

We have to do something. Please.

AAFIYA

We don't need your help.

MERC

It speaks.

AAFIYA

You're a bad man.

MERC

Yeah, kid. I'm the worst there is
and ever will be. You don't want
someone like me around.

NADIA

Be silent, Aafiya. We need his
help.

AAFIYA

He killed ommee!

Salma starts to cry again. Nadia runs over and picks her up.

NADIA

Enough, Aafiya. You're upsetting
your sister.

MERC

Ommee? Who is that?

NADIA

Means his mother. Our mother.

Aafiya kicks the sand and pouts.

MERC

Listen, I did my job. I got the three of you out of there. Now it's up to you how you survive.

NADIA

Just like that?

MERC

Just like that.

NADIA

How many women and children have you slaughtered already? What is three more, right?

She walks off the sandy road and through the desert, Aafiya follows her.

The Merc watches her walk off. He's conflicted. His survival or theirs.

Beat.

MERC

Wait!

She stops and turns around.

MERC (CONT'D)

Okay.

NADIA

You'll help us?

MERC

I'll do what I can.

NADIA

Thank you.

MERC

Don't thank me. A job is a job.

He grabs the gold crosses and walks off. The kids quickly follow him.

EXT. MILITARY JEEP - DAY

Diab checks the shot to hell Jeep the Merc left behind.

DIAB
I want people watching the roads.
Go.

A pickup truck flatbed full of rebel soldiers drives off down the road.

Mahir stays behind with the second truck of soldiers. He walks over to Diab.

DIAB (CONT'D)
Which way would he have gone?

MAHIR
To the mountains?

DIAB
Maybe.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The Merc and kids trek through the nothingness. All around them there's nothing but sand dunes, mountains in the distance and some shriveled up dead trees.

NADIA
Do you have water?

MERC
Yeah. But we need to conserve it.
There isn't much.

Aafiya coughs into his hand.

MERC (CONT'D)
What's wrong with him?

AAFIYA
I'm fine.

NADIA
He's just sick.

The Merc grabs the canteen, hands it to Nadia.

NADIA (CONT'D)
Thank you.

MERC
Don't let him drink directly from it. Pour it into his mouth.

Nadia lets Salma take a sip of water.

SALMA
(in arabic)
Thank you.

NADIA
Aafiya, open up.

Nadia pours a little water into his mouth.

MERC
C'mon. We need to keep up the pace.

The Merc takes back the canteen.

LATER

They keep walking.

NADIA
Where were you born?

He's ignoring her.

NADIA (CONT'D)
We were born in Mostaqell.

MERC
What are you doing?

NADIA
It's a long walk, we need something
to do to kill the time.

He keeps walking, taps his thumb on his assault rifle.

MERC
Mostaqell?

She smiles at finally getting some interest or acknowledgment
out of him.

NADIA
Yes. You know it?

MERC
That's the state the Irish
occupied, right? Is that why your
English is so good?

NADIA
Having both parents as teachers
helped.

The Merc glances over at Salma. She hides behind Nadia, just her red cloak peeking out.

MERC

The little one, she speak English too?

NADIA

A little. Not much.

MERC

How did you end up all the way out in Ashqar?

NADIA

When the revolution started, Mostagell was the first to be liberated. Our parents took us here, figuring the closer we were to the capital, the safer we'd be.

An uncomfortable awkward silence fills the air...

AAFIYA

Are you American?

The Merc looks down at Aafiya who has caught up to him, now walking by his side.

MERC

I guess you could say that. Though I wouldn't exactly be welcomed if I ever went back.

AAFIYA

How come? Because you're so bad?

The Merc shoots a look of annoyance at him.

MERC

Any chance one of you knows how to fire a weapon?

NADIA

Me? No.

MERC

We're gonna have to do something about that.

AAFIYA

Do I get to shoot a gun?

MERC
You gonna shoot me if I give you
one?

AAFIYA
No.

MERC
That sounds a bit unconvincing. Try
again.

AAFIYA
You saved me and my sisters. I'll
let you live for now. But I'll be
keeping an eye on you.

MERC
Well thanks, buddy.

The Merc pulls out his handgun and tosses it to Aafiya.

MERC (CONT'D)
Here, kid.

Aafiya catches it. The gun is way too big for him.

AAFIYA
Wow. Cool.

Aafiya can't hide his elation.

The Merc's sardonic attitude cracks a little under the weight
of Aafiya's large grin.

NADIA
What are you doing? Aafiya, put
that down.

MERC
You too. You're gonna need to learn
how to shoot.

NADIA
I don't think so.

MERC
Those men I was talking about will
catch up with us sooner or later.
If you wanna live, you and that kid
are gonna want to pick up a gun.

NADIA
I don't know how.

MERC
Then I'll teach you.

EXT. DESERT TREE - DAY

A wilted tree twisted by the sun gives our Merc and his companions a little shade.

The Merc lifts up a log and carries it a little ways out. He stacks some rocks on top of it.

He walks back over and hands Nadia his rifle.

MERC
Aim for the rocks.

NADIA
I don't think I can do this.

MERC
Sure you can.

NADIA
I mean kill a real living person.

MERC
Just think about what they did to your family. Feel that anger? All that sadness? Good. Use it.

She looks through the scope... squeezes the trigger, MISSES, strikes sand.

NADIA
Damn it.

MERC
Hold on.

He gets behind her and helps her get into a better position, putting his hands in her hips.

MERC (CONT'D)
Put your hand around the grip.

NADIA
Where is that?

MERC
Here.

He takes her hand and puts it on the grip of the rifle.

NADIA

Okay.

MERC

Rest it against your shoulder.

She does.

NADIA

Okay.

He touches the side of her neck, slides his hands down her shoulders.

MERC

Tilt your head a little and look
down the sight.

It's almost like he's trying to seduce her, she's clay in his hands.

MERC (CONT'D)

Close your eyes.

(beat)

Now open just the one looking
through the sight. See your target?

His body presses up against hers.

NADIA

Yes.

MERC

Slowly breathe in and out.

She takes in some air...

Breathes out.

NADIA

Now what?

MERC

Now you fire.

He backs away from her.

NADIA

Salma, cover your ears.

Salma cups her ears.

Nadia squeezes the trigger, shoots a stack of rocks off the log.

MERC
Bullseye. You nailed it.

She celebrates.

NADIA
I did it!

MERC
You might just be a natural.
(to Aafiya)
Alright, kid. Now it's your turn.

AAFIYA
I'm ready.

He points the handgun at the log and quickly fires. The kickback of the gun knocks him on his ass.

Salma laughs at him.

AAFIYA (CONT'D)
That's not funny!

The Merc helps him up.

MERC
Relax. You at least hit the log.

Aafiya smiles.

AAFIYA
Really?

MERC
Fuck no. Not even close. But you will.

He puts his hand on top of Aafiya's head.

AAFIYA
What are you doing?

MERC
Balance. Put your leg more back here. Arch your back. You felt the kick, so now you need to compensate.

AAFIYA
How do I do that?

MERC
Like I said. Balance. Try it now.

Aafiya takes aim.

MERC (CONT'D)

Look down the barrel. Aim it a little higher to compensate for the kick. Now fire!

He shoots, hits the log.

Aafiya stumbles back but stays standing.

AAFIYA

Wow. That was so cool. Can we try again?

MERC

We're a little short on ammo. We need to head out before the sun starts to drop.

Nadia hands back the rifle.

NADIA

Where exactly are we headed, anyway?

MERC

Do you know the best route past the mountains?

NADIA

Not really.

MERC

We're gonna need a map.

NADIA

Where are we going to find one of those?

MERC

I know a place. Hopefully it's still there.

He walks over to her and touches her cheek.

MERC (CONT'D)

Your cheeks look a little flushed. Are you feeling sick?

She shies away.

NADIA

I'm fine.

He looks over at Salma.

MERC

Don't think I forget about you. You get to use the rifle next time, okay?

She hides behind Nadia.

NADIA

She's shy.

MERC

All the cute girls usually are.

EXT. BACK OF TOYOTA PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

Diab rides in the flatbed of the pickup truck as it storms down the desert valley. AK-47s bouncing between everyone's knees.

MAHIR

It's going to be night in a few hours.

DIAB

How well does he know this area?

MAHIR

Not very. But he can survive just about anywhere.

DIAB

I'm guessing that Jeep had enough water to last him a day. He's going to need to find more.

MAHIR

What about that village? Would he go back there?

Diab bangs on the roof of the truck. The speed slowly decreases...

DIAB

Make a right. Head for the village my brother liberated.

The truck turns around and heads in another direction.

MAHIR

The second truck is probably closer.

Diab snaps his fingers to one of the rebels.

DIAB

Radio.

Mahir grabs the radio and hands it to Diab.

EXT. MILITANT TRUCK - DAY

The second truck carrying the rebel soldiers blocks off the road.

A family trying to escape the city has been mowed down by gun fire.

Their small jam-packed car has blood smeared everywhere.

A rebel soldier runs over with the radio.

DIAB (O.S.)

Do you copy? I want you to head there immediately.

REBEL 3

(in arabic)

Let's go!

Everyone jumps into the flatbed of the truck and they take off, leaving the grizzly slaughter behind.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE SMALL VILLAGE - DAY

The Merc and company are just off the outskirts of the village ransacked by Kedar and his men.

NADIA

Why are we stopping?

MERC

Listen. What you're about to see won't be easy, okay?

NADIA

What do you mean?

MERC

I mean the little ones. I suggest you keep those eyes shut until I say otherwise.

Salma puts her hands over her eyes.

NADIA

Good girl.

MERC

You too, little man.

AAFIYA

No way. I want to see.

MERC

I warned you.

The Merc heads for the village.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The Merc enters the still smoldering village. Bodies litter the blood soaked ground.

A pile of corpses burn like kindling, their remains turned to charcoal.

NADIA

My god, this is terrible. Who did this?

Aafiya hides behind his big sister, not so brave anymore. Salma keeps her eyes tightly shut.

MERC

The man who killed your mother.

The village is eerily silent.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

The Merc stands outside the building used as a base.

MERC

Wait here.

He enters the building with his pistol drawn.

Nadia looks around at all the horror.

NADIA

Aafiya, are you okay?

She looks around for him.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Aafiya?

She walks around the building and spots him looking at something in the sand.

NADIA (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

She walks over to him. Hundreds of dead children have been tossed in a ditch.

She covers her mouth in horror.

INT. SMALL VILLAGE BUILDING - DAY

The Merc grabs the map of the region off the table. He quickly checks it.

Nadia screams.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

The Merc runs out of the building.

MERC
Nadia?

NADIA
Get away from there, Aafiya!

MERC
What's going on?

Tears run down Nadia's face.

NADIA
Children.

MERC
What?

He walks around the building and sees the death hole dug for the kids.

NADIA
Why did they do this?

MERC
I had no idea they were killing-

NADIA
Liar!

She storms off.

MERC

I suspected, I didn't know.

NADIA

What do you care, you just do it
for the money!

MERC

I have rules.

NADIA

Good for you!

MERC

I killed the man responsible,
Nadia. What else do you want me to
do?

NADIA

I don't know!

MERC

I couldn't save those kids. But I
can save you. I can save your
brother and sister.

NADIA

That won't make up for all the
terrible things you've done.

MERC

I don't expect it to.

(beat)

I found the map. I need your help
locating where you think your
grandmother lives. Can you do that?

She wipes away her tears, calms herself.

NADIA

Yes. I think so.

MERC

Okay. Good. In here.

He enters the building.

INT. SMALL VILLAGE BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

The kids slowly walk into the building. The Merc lays a sheet
over the half naked dead women on the floor.

He takes out the map and lays it on the table, points to a spot on the map.

MERC

We're here. Where do we need to be?

Nadia looks it over.

NADIA

There's a village just past the mountains called Adjiki. Here.

She points to a spot on the map.

The Merc grabs a red marker off the table and marks it down.

MERC

Question now is what's the best way to get there...

He draws a red line.

MERC (CONT'D)

Damn.

NADIA

What?

MERC

It's going to take at least three days.

NADIA

We don't have enough water, do we?

MERC

We barely had enough to come here.

NADIA

What do we do?

AAFIYA

I know!

Aafiya runs out of the building.

NADIA

Aafiya, come back!

EXT. VILLAGE DRINKING WELL - DAY

Aafiya runs over to the drinking well. Everyone runs out of the building after him.

He pulls in the bucket to the well.

AAFIYA
See? Water.

He goes to take a sip.

MERC
Stop! Don't drink it!

The Merc quick draws his pistol and BLASTS a hole in the bucket.

Aafiya falls back, dropping the bucket on the ground, spilling the water.

NADIA
Have you lost your mind?! Why did you do that?!

MERC
They poisoned the well.

NADIA
Why would they do that? Everyone here is already dead.

MERC
It isn't for them. It's for the ones who come after. It's an old soviet union tactic. Burn and pillage everything so your invading force can't pillage for themselves.

The Merc walks over and helps Aafiya up.

MERC (CONT'D)
You okay, buddy?

AAFIYA
Yeah. I'm fine.

He dusts himself off and walks over to his sisters.

The sound of a truck driving through the desert is heard in the distance.

NADIA
You hear that?

The Merc spots the truck full of rebels headed their way.

MERC
Fuck, that was fast. Everyone hide.

AAFIYA
No, I want to fight.

MERC
Next time, kid.

NADIA
Aafiya, come.

The kids run for the only building still standing.

The Merc gets down behind the well, loads his rifle, checks his pistol.

He lays out the extra ammo clips he has for each weapon.

Now he waits.

The truck drives into the village, the soldiers jump out of the flatbed and fan out.

The Merc quickly pops up, shoots one square in the chest, takes another out by popping him in the head.

The rebels open fire.

The Merc ducks behind the stone well, bullets ricocheting all over.

A rebel takes cover behind the truck, gets on the radio.

EXT. BACK OF TOYOTA PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

REBEL 3 (O.S.)
(in arabic)
Are you there?! Do you read?

Mahir grabs the radio.

MAHIR
We hear you.

REBEL 3 (O.S.)
(in arabic)
We're taking fire. We found him.

MAHIR
They have him.

Diab grabs the radio.

DIAB
Hold him off until we get there!

Diab bangs on the roof of the truck.

DIAB (CONT'D)

Faster!

The truck picks up speed.

EXT. VILLAGE DRINKING WELL - DAY

The Merc reloads his rifle, slaps in another magazine. Bullets snap past him as the well little by little gets chipped away.

A rebel runs across the street to get a better angle, the Merc quickly shoots him, bullet ripping through his knee.

The soldier falls to the ground, holds his dangling leg as he beats at the ground in agony, claws at the sand to get away.

The Merc whips around, puts a bullet in his head, ending his wailing.

Now there are only 3 rebels left.

INT. SMALL VILLAGE BUILDING - DAY

Nadia peeks out of the door, gets a better look at the situation.

SALMA

I'm scared.

NADIA

I know. Me too.

Nadia searches the small house for a weapon. There's a Kalashnikov propped up next to the radio.

She grabs it and checks to see if it's loaded.

It is.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Aafiya, stay with your sister,
okay?

SALMA

No, don't go.

NADIA

He needs my help.

EXT. VILLAGE DRINKING WELL - DAY

The Merc is pinned down, the soldiers move in closer to his position. He slaps another magazine into his rifle when-

Nadia runs out of the building blasting her machine gun. She sprays the streets with bullets and manages to hit a rebel.

The Merc smiles and uses the surprise attack to get the drop on the remaining other two rebels.

Nadia runs over to him.

MERC

Damn, kid. That was nuts. I love it.

He kisses her forehead. She blushes.

MERC (CONT'D)

Collect their guns and ammo.

The Merc runs over to the truck.

NADIA

Okay, it's safe to come out now!

Aafiya and Salma run out, straight for Nadia.

AAFIYA

That was so cool!

NADIA

Go to the truck.

EXT. MILITANT TRUCK - DAY

The Merc checks on some of the bullet holes on the side of the truck.

MAHIR (O.S.)

Do you read? Come in, over.

The Merc walks over to a dead rebel with the radio lying next to him.

He picks it up and mulls over the thought of answering it.

MERC

Mahir.

EXT. BACK OF TOYOTA PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

Mahir looks at the radio like a ghost is talking to him.

MAHIR
Is that you, sadiqi?

MERC (O.S.)
A long time ago you told me sadiqi
meant I was your friend. Am I still
your friend, Mahir?

Mahir looks over at Diab.

DIAB
Give it here.

Mahir hands him the radio.

DIAB (CONT'D)
I'm going to kill you, Merc.

MERC (O.S.)
You'll try at least.

The radio goes dead.

DIAB
Merc! I'm going to kill you!

INT. VILLAGE DRINKING WELL - DAY

The radio slowly sinks down into the poisoned well water.

INT. MILITANT TRUCK - DAY

The Merc honks the horn to the truck.

MERC
C'mon, let's get out of here.

Nadia and the kids come running over to the truck carrying supplies.

NADIA
We're coming!

INT. MILITANT TRUCK - LATER

The truck speeds down the desert with the Merc behind the wheel and the kids by his side.

They each sip from their own canteens of water.

MERC

Easy on that, guys. Still needs to last us a couple of days.

AAFIYA

Mine kind of tastes funny.

MERC

Let me see.

The Merc reaches over, grabs the canteen away and takes a sip.

He chokes on it.

MERC (CONT'D)

Fuck. This is alcohol. How much of this did you drink?

AAFIYA

Not much. Can I have it back?

NADIA

No, you can't.

The Merc chugs it down.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Where are we headed?

MERC

According to the map, the best route is through the oil fields.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAY

Diab bends down, shoves his fingers into some leaked fuel on the sand. He digs out an empty shell casing.

DIAB

He has their truck.

Mahir and the other rebel soldiers are laying out their dead comrades.

MAHIR

He also took their supplies.

Diab gets up and paces around.

DIAB

Shit! He now has water and a vehicle.

(beat)

But it's leaking fuel and the water won't last him long.

Mahir walks over.

MAHIR

He could be anywhere now. Let's just-

DIAB

What?! What, Mahir?

MAHIR

Nothing.

DIAB

He's going somewhere. Why did he come back here?

MAHIR

I don't know.

DIAB

He's looking for something.

MAHIR

There's nothing for miles. It's going to be night soon.

REBEL 4

Sir!

A rebel comes running over to them holding the map.

DIAB

What is it?

REBEL 4

We found this.

He hands Diab the map.

MAHIR

What is it?

Diab smiles sinisterly as he looks over the map.

DIAB

I think we're in luck. I know where he's headed.

Diab folds the map, puts it in his back pocket, heads for the truck.

DIAB (CONT'D)
We're leaving!

MAHIR
What about the men we lost?

DIAB
Leave them for the buzzards.

MAHIR
That's-

DIAB
Just do what I tell you, Mahir.
Nothing else.

EXT. BURNING OIL FIELDS - NIGHT

The Merc drives the truck through the giant acres of burning geysers.

The mile high flames light up the sky.

INT. MILITANT TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The kids look on in amazement.

AAFIYA
Wow.

NADIA
What happened here?

MERC
War. The first thing the government did when they heard we were advancing was burn their oil fields.

The thick black smoke engulfs the whole area.

MERC (CONT'D)
It's kind of beautiful at night.

The truck putters.

MERC (CONT'D)
Shit.

NADIA

What?

MERC

We're getting low on fuel.

Nadia snarks at the irony.

MERC (CONT'D)

There's an old fuel station a few miles up ahead.

EXT. MILITANT TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The truck's front wheel runs over a piece of sharp shrapnel, suddenly punching out the tire.

The truck digs into the sand, flips into the air, lands on its side, skidding...

DARKNESS

INT. TIPPED OVER TRUCK - NIGHT

The Merc searches around in the blackness, he finds Nadia. He moves some hair away from her face.

She's unconscious.

MERC

Nadia.

He touches her neck for a pulse.

MERC (CONT'D)

Okay, you're alive. You kids okay?

(silence)

Someone talk to me, damn it!

EXT. TIPPED OVER TRUCK - NIGHT

The Merc kicks open the door to the truck. He painfully lifts himself out, searches the wreckage for supplies.

MERC

C'mon!

He finds a flashlight.

Salma is crying in the truck.

MERC (CONT'D)

Salma! I'm coming!

He runs over and kicks out the already shattered windshield. The thick black smoke suffocates him, he uses his shirt to cover his mouth and nose.

He pulls Salma out of the truck.

She's fine, just a little frightened.

He runs behind the truck and wraps some cloth around her face.

MERC (CONT'D)

Here. Keep your face covered.

He reaches back into the truck and pulls out Aafiya.

He's unconscious.

The Merc lightly taps his face.

MERC (CONT'D)

C'mon, kid. Wake the hell up.

Aafiya wakes up coughing.

The Merc puts him down and grabs Nadia.

EXT. BURNING OIL FIELDS - NIGHT

The Merc carries Nadia in his arms. Salma and Aafiya are behind him carrying what is left of their supplies.

Acting as the Merc's pack mules, Aafiya drags behind him two machine guns and a duffel bag. Salma has the water canteens strapped to her.

The wind has picked up, smoke from the burning oil blows at their covered faces.

Nadia wakes up in the Merc's arms.

She flings the sheet off her face.

NADIA

Salma! Aafiya!

MERC

They're okay. They're behind us.

Nadia looks, sees them trekking the terrain.

NADIA

Put me down.

The Merc stops and puts her down. She quickly runs over to the kids and hugs them.

MERC

We need to keep moving.

NADIA

We can't see anything, which direction are we even going?

MERC

It doesn't matter, just keep moving forward until we find some shelter.

EXT. TIPPED OVER TRUCK - NIGHT

Diab and his men investigate the downed truck.

DIAB

He's here! Find him!

The rebels shoot out flares. They explode out into the darkness, illuminating the smoky sky with phosphorescent reds and oranges.

EXT. BURNING OIL FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Nadia notices the flares in the sky, she points out to it.

NADIA

What is that?

MERC

Trouble. We need to go.

The Merc spots a cave up ahead.

MERC (CONT'D)

Look!

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Everyone enters the cave, safe from the harsh winds and smoke.

The Merc flips on the flashlight.

Everyone collapses on the floor out of exhaustion while the Merc goes deeper into the cave.

NADIA
We've been turned around, haven't we? We've reached the mountains.

MERC
Yeah, looks that way.

The Merc comes back, sits down, goes through the satchel.

MERC (CONT'D)
Damn it, no food.

He goes through the duffel bag.

NADIA
Anything?

The Merc pulls out a grenade.

He slips the grenade back, feels around in the bag, pulls out a zippo.

MERC
We have fire at least.

SALMA
(in arabic)
I'm hungry.

MERC
What did she say?

NADIA
She's hungry.

MERC
Yeah, me too.

He pulls out a buck knife from the duffel bag.

NADIA
What are you going to do with that?

He gets up and walks out of the cave.

AAFIYA
What is he doing?

NADIA
I'm not sure.

Aafiya coughs fiercely into his hand.

NADIA (CONT'D)

Are you okay? Let me get you some water.

She pours him some water into the canteen cap. He quickly drinks it down.

AAFIYA

My chest really hurts.

NADIA

Let me see.

She lifts up his shirt, there's some bruising on his chest.

Nadia gently presses on it, he winces in pain.

AAFIYA

Ow. That hurts.

The Merc comes back into the cave with a lizard shish kabobed on his knife.

MERC

I got dinner.

NADIA

Come here. Look at this.

MERC

What?

She shows him Aafiya's bruised chest.

NADIA

Do you think it's serious?

MERC

I don't know.

(to Aafiya)

You okay, buddy?

AAFIYA

Yeah, of course. I'm fine.

MERC

You ready to eat some lizard?

He shakes the dead lizard around on the blade.

Aafiya and Salma giggle.

AAFIYA

No, gross.

MERC

It tastes just like chicken.

EXT. BURNING OIL FIELDS - NIGHT

Diab and his men search the area. The harsh environment knocks a few soldiers on their knees.

The wind tosses sand and smoke at them like a hurricane.

Mahir helps a rebel get back on his feet.

MAHIR

We have to go back!

DIAB

No! No one leaves! He's out here!

MAHIR

He isn't going anywhere, Diab. The men can't breathe. I can't breathe.

DIAB

Then shut your fucking mouth, Mahir! I will find him with or without your help.

Diab continues the search alone.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

The Merc has made a campfire, roasting the lizard over the flames, still stuck on his knife.

He marinades the meat with the canteen full of alcohol, slightly drizzling it over.

MERC

Who wants first try?

He looks at everyone.

No takers.

MERC (CONT'D)

No one?

(beat)

Okay, I guess you all will just have to watch me eat.

The Merc takes the lizard off the fire and picks at it, pulling off a leg.

He takes a giant bite.

AAFIYA

Okay.

MERC

We have a taker.

The Merc pulls a leg off and hands it to him.

Slowly, Aafiya puts it to his mouth and takes a bite.

NADIA

What does it taste like?

He smiles.

AAFIYA

Chicken!

SALMA

(in arabic)

Me too!

MERC

I take it you want some too?

The Merc slices off a piece for her.

MERC (CONT'D)

(to Nadia)

Some tail?

She blushes and shakes her head yes.

MERC (CONT'D)

That's my girl.

EXT. BURNING OIL FIELDS - NIGHT

Mahir helps the men who have collapsed from inhaling too much smoke. He gathers them around.

He looks out at the distance, Diab is all alone, searching frenziedly for the Merc.

MAHIR

(in arabic)

Get the men back to the trucks.

The rebel soldiers turn back around, head for the trucks they came in, fighting the wind the whole way.

Mahir catches up to Diab.

MAHIR (CONT'D)
We're going back to the village.
We'll wait this out.

Diab turns around and punches Mahir in the jaw. Mahir gets knocked off his feet, lands in the sand.

DIAB
I told you not to get in my way!

Mahir holds his hurt jaw, wipes some blood from his lip.

MAHIR
The men won't follow you if you
keep acting this way.

Diab looks around. Nothing for miles but blackness.

MAHIR (CONT'D)
You'll never find him out here. Not
like this. We'll start looking
again at dawn. Let the men rest.

Beat.

DIAB
Fine.

Diab walks back to the trucks, leaving Mahir still on the ground.

Mahir spits some blood in the sand, gets up to follow Diab.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

The Merc has his pistol taken apart and is cleaning it. Nadia covers the sleeping kids up in sheets, officially putting them to bed.

NADIA
They're asleep.

MERC
At least they'll sleep with
something in their stomachs.

She takes a seat across from the Merc.

NADIA

I'm worried about Aafiya. He hasn't been well the last few days and now this...

Nadia looks unsettled. The Merc takes notice.

MERC

We all got pretty beat up in the crash. He'll be fine.

NADIA

They're all I've got now.

(beat)

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

MERC

No. Only child. If I did they'd just end up hating me anyways.

NADIA

What makes you say that?

MERC

My parents hated me. My teachers hated me. My friends hated me. Hell, my own fuckin' dog hated me. There's a monster that resides behind these beautiful eyes.

NADIA

I know. I've seen him. It's what saved my life, it's what has kept us safe.

MERC

Flattery. You know my weakness.

She shies away.

An awkward silence...

NADIA

Who was that you were talking to earlier?

MERC

When? On the radio? No one.

NADIA

Didn't sound like no one.

MERC
My old army buddy.

NADIA
I thought you said you didn't have
any friends.

MERC
He is trying to kill me, remember?

She smiles.

NADIA
How did you meet?

MERC
The Marine Corps.

NADIA
You were a Marine?

MERC
I'll always be a Marine.

He lifts up his shirt sleeve, shows her his army tattoos.

MERC (CONT'D)
1st Battalion.

He goes back to cleaning his gun.

MERC (CONT'D)
When we got discharged I went into
the soldier of fortune business.
Mahir on the other hand came here.
When things started going bad for
the revolution, he called me for
help.

NADIA
If he is your friend, why is he
after you?

MERC
He's just following orders.

NADIA
If they find us...
(beat)
What will they do to me?
(looks at the kids)
...to them.

MERC
Don't think about it.

He springs his gun shut, slaps in a clip and cocks it.

MERC (CONT'D)
I won't let anything happen to you
or those kids. I promise.

EXT. DESERT PLAIN - MORNING

The Merc and company hike the desert plain. The land is flat, nothing but cracked sandy earth. The sky is a crisp blue.

Nadia carries a still sleeping Salma in her arms.

Aafiya sluggishly marches along, coughing heavily. Nadia looks back at him.

NADIA
Are you okay?

AAFIYA
I'm fine.

NADIA
(to Merc)
Do you know where we're headed?

MERC
The filling station should be a few miles this way.

NADIA
Filling station?

MERC
It used to be a town. I can't remember the name of it.

NADIA
Nahr? We heard the rebels burnt it to the ground.

MERC
We did. But not before the government turned it into a place to fuel their tanks.

Aafiya coughs up some blood, tips over and falls face first into the sand.

Nadia looks back.

NADIA
Aafiya?

MERC
You trip, buddy?

NADIA
No, something is wrong. Aafiya!

Nadia sets Salma down and quickly runs over to Aafiya.

Salma starts crying.

The Merc drops his things and runs over.

MERC
What's going on?

Nadia shakes Aafiya to get him to wake up, but nothing works.

NADIA
I don't know! Help him!

MERC
Let me see.

The Merc pries his eyes open, gives him CPR, pumping on his chest.

NADIA
No! Wake up!

MERC
C'mon, kid!

Aafiya doesn't move.

He's dead.

The Merc stops giving CPR and punches the ground.

NADIA
Why did you stop?

MERC
He's gone.

Nadia slaps him hard across the face.

NADIA
No, he's not! Don't you say that!

MERC
I'm sorry, Nadia.

Nadia falls onto her little brother's corpse and starts to wail. She buries her face in Aafiya's still chest.

NADIA
No! He isn't dead!

The Merc stands there...

...Frozen...

...Staring down.

A terrible sadness overtakes him, but he chokes it back down.

LATER

The Merc wraps Aafiya up in a sheet. Nadia and Salma lean on each other, crying.

The Merc looks up, something glimmering in the far-off distance is heading their way fast.

MERC
Shit. You two head off alone.

NADIA
What? We can't just-

MERC
Just go!

Startled, Nadia takes Salma's little hand and the two walk away.

The Merc grabs a stick, wraps some ripped cloth around it. He stabs it into the ground, making a makeshift flag.

He reaches into the duffel bag and pulls out the grenade.

EXT. DESERT PLAIN - LATER

The Merc walks in silence. Salma still can't stop crying. Nadia keeps looking back, watching Aafiya's body get further and further away.

MERC
Don't look back.

NADIA
We can't just leave him there.

MERC
We don't have a choice, Nadia.

NADIA
You said you'd protect him.

MERC
There wasn't anything I could do.
He was sick. He died. We move on.

NADIA
You're heartless.

Salma balls her eyes out.

MERC
Can you shut her up?!

NADIA
She just lost her brother, she's
upset!

MERC
She's driving me insane.

NADIA
Go to hell.

MERC
Look around, Nadia. We're in hell!

EXT. DESERT PLAIN - LATER

Diab and his men stop a little ways up ahead.

Three of his men slowly walk over to Aafiya's body.

DIAB
(in arabic)
What is it?

REBEL 5
(in arabic)
It's a boy.

The soldiers turn the body over, releasing the striker lever
from the hand grenade hidden under the body.

It explodes, killing Diab's men.

Diab gets knocked off his feet.

Everyone readies for an attack.

DIAB
What's going on?!

MAHIR
It was a trap.

DIAB
We need reinforcements. Call it in.
He isn't getting away.

EXT. GHOST TOWN OF NAHR - DAY

They make it to the town of Nahr. The sand has reoccupied most of the buildings and streets.

Some bombed out tanks rest next to some long dead soldiers, buzzards pick at their bones.

MERC
We should check for food before the sun goes down.

Nadia gives him the silent treatment.

INT. DESTROYED HOUSE - DAY

The Merc checks inside a destroyed two story house. Half the walls and roof are missing.

Some family photos hang on what little of the walls that still remain.

KITCHEN

The Merc heads for the kitchen. He searches around in the cupboards, nothing but sand.

Nadia walks in through one of the wall openings.

NADIA
Anything?

MERC
Talking to me now?

There is nothing but disgust in her eyes for him now. She walks away, looks over the rest of the house.

The Merc kicks one of the cabinets out of anger, punches the wall.

MERC (CONT'D)
Damn it, kid.

He drops to the floor and buries his head between his hands.

MERC (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

Nadia silently watches him mourn.

INT. DESTROYED HOUSE 2ND FLOOR - NIGHT

By the window, the Merc has set up camp. A fire burns in an iron skillet. Salma sleeps beside Nadia who is still up, looking a little shell shocked.

The Merc walks upstairs holding two cans of food.

MERC
I managed to find something to eat.
Here.

He hands Nadia a can.

NADIA
Thanks. What is it?

He takes a seat on the floor next to her.

MERC
I was hoping you could tell me.

She manages to sneak out a smile.

MERC (CONT'D)
She finally out?

NADIA
She cried herself to sleep.

MERC
Maybe we should wake her, get some
food in her belly.

NADIA
No, let her sleep.

MERC
I'm sorry for snapping at you
earlier. I just didn't know what-

NADIA

It's okay. I know it wasn't your fault he...

(beat)

Anyway, I'm sorry.

They eat their cans of mystery product. Nadia puts hers down and looks up at the Merc.

MERC

Not hungry?

She reaches in and kisses him on the lips.

MERC (CONT'D)

Hey, what was that? You're just a kid.

NADIA

I'm not a kid. I'm 15. That makes me old enough to marry.

She kisses him again, he winces.

MERC

Not where I'm from.

NADIA

You don't like it?

MERC

It isn't that.

NADIA

I see how you look at me. You're always flirting-

MERC

You're right. I've been surrounded by soldiers for too long. I'm not really sure how to act appropriately around you.

NADIA

I like the way you look at me. How you flirt with me and smile when you say my name-

MERC

Nadia.

NADIA

--I sound like a child. I'm sorry.

Tears run down her cheeks. The Merc wraps his arm around her, wipes her tears.

NADIA (CONT'D)
You just think I'm a kid. A scared kid.

MERC
No. Not even close. I think maybe you might be the bravest person I've ever met in my life.

She smirks, shakes her head.

NADIA
No I'm not. I'm terrified. I think I'm frightened all the time. So much I don't think I can even move sometimes. I go on because of them. They're all I have. I can't lose Salma too.

The Merc brings her head to his chest.

MERC
You won't.

INT. DESTROYED HOUSE 2ND FLOOR - MORNING

Salma is awake, looking out of one of the shattered windows.

SALMA
Nadia.

Salma walks over to Nadia who is sleeping soundly in the Merc's arms. Both clothed.

SALMA (CONT'D)
Wake up.

Salma shakes Nadia awake.

NADIA
What's wrong?

SALMA
People are here.

Nadia sits up, looks out the window.

EXT. GHOST TOWN OF NAHR - MORNING

Diab and his men drive into town. They scatter in search of the Merc.

DIAB
Everyone spread out. I want him
found. I know he's here.

INT. DESTROYED HOUSE 2ND FLOOR - MORNING

Nadia ducks behind the wall, shakes the Merc awake.

NADIA
Get up.

The Merc wakes up, looks around.

MERC
What?

NADIA
People are here.

MERC
Get down.

The Merc grabs his rifle and looks down the scope.

RIFLE SCOPE

Another truck full of heavily armed men pulls up. Mahir points directions for the men to take. The rebel soldiers jump out of the truck and fan out. The town is completely surrounded.

The Merc brings his rifle down.

NADIA
How many are out there?

MERC
I count about 14.

NADIA
What do we do?

He hands Nadia his rifle.

MERC
Listen, I need you. Understand?

NADIA

Yes.

MERC

I need you to snipe from here.

The Merc grabs the Kalashnikov AK-47.

NADIA

I don't think I-

MERC

Yes you can.

NADIA

--What about you?

MERC

I'm going to flank them from the left. You start shooting once you hear shooting, okay?

NADIA

Okay.

MERC

Salma, I know you're frightened, but I need you to be silent. Stand behind your big sister, okay? She'll keep you safe.

She nods her head, she understands.

MERC (CONT'D)

There are extra magazines by your feet. Use them.

NADIA

Okay. Be safe.

MERC

If you see me get hit or taken, take Salma and head that way.

He points off to the sunrise.

MERC (CONT'D)

You'll see a mountain pass a few miles ahead. Take that path and you'll find your destination.

EXT. GHOST TOWN OF NAHR - MORNING

The rebels search all the damaged homes.

DIAB

Come on out, Merc! You can hide
like a rat, but I will find you!

The Merc crouch-runs from one hiding place to another. He creeps along, keeping his eyes on Diab.

The Merc looks up at Nadia, sees the rifle barrel sticking out of the window, ready to fire.

INT. DESTROYED HOUSE 2ND FLOOR - MORNING

Nadia exhales, does the breathing technique the Merc taught her.

Her finger hovers over the trigger.

DIAB (O.C.)

We got word last night, mercenary.
My father has taken the capital.

Nadia tries to get a beat on Diab, but he's just out of her line of fire.

DIAB (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Because of you, you have deprived
me and my men from relishing in
this glorious day.

She switches targets.

EXT. GHOST TOWN OF NAHR - MORNING

The Merc runs over to a decommissioned tank.

DIAB

You will repay us with your blood.

He sets his sights, squeezes the trigger. A rebel soldier takes it in the head.

The other rebel soldiers scatter.

Nadia picks two off as they flee.

Diab and two others hide behind their truck. A bullet strikes the windshield.

DIAB (CONT'D)

Shit! There is more than one person
out here shooting at us. Find them!

The rebel soldiers blindly return fire.

Their bullets bounce off the heavy armor of the tank.

Nadia has managed to kill at least 3 already.

The Merc opens fire, shoots up the truck Diab is hiding
behind.

A grenade is tossed by the Merc's feet. He quickly grabs it
and tosses it back at the soldiers who threw it.

A small fueling station explodes, two rebels dead. The gas
line at the pumping station ignites, sending flames screaming
into the sky.

The SOUND OF HEAVY FIRING-

The Merc looks over, sees a 50 cal machine gun BLASTING the
house Nadia is in.

Sprinting to cover, finding a position on their weak side, a
better angle to take out that HEAVY GUNNER.

A few rebel soldiers take potshots at him.

He moves on, dashing from cover to cover, triangulating fire,
shredding the rebels, blowing them off their feet.

SPORADIC FIRE-

A dozen muzzle flashes coming from everywhere.

Nadia isn't looking anymore, she's just sticking the gun out
and shooting, hitting dirt.

The building looks like it's about to completely cave in.

INT. DESTROYED HOUSE 2ND FLOOR - MORNING

Bullets whiz by, shattering through the wood and brick walls.
Nadia has Salma under her, shielding her from harm.

Nadia keeps firing until the magazine runs dry.

She pulls the rifle back in and reloads.

NADIA

It's okay. It's okay.

The top half of the ceiling tumbles over, some of the wood flooring gives way.

EXT. GHOST TOWN OF NAHR - MORNING

Bullets smash to the ground around the Merc.

He returns fire.

Two rebels block his path to the Heavy Gunner. The Merc hides behind a toppled oil drum.

MERC

C'mon, Nadia. Get out of there.

Nadia fires blindly out the window, somehow she manages to shoot one of the rebels blocking the Merc's path.

The Merc smiles and makes a run for it. He takes out the other rebel and sets his sights on the Heavy Gunner behind the 50 cal, shell casings gathering by his feet.

The Merc jumps up on to the truck and shoves his knife through the back of the Heavy Gunner's neck.

The heavy gunfire stops.

The rebel soldiers all open fire on the truck.

The Merc is stuck, using the Heavy Gunner's armored body as a shield.

INT. DESTROYED HOUSE 2ND FLOOR - MORNING

Nadia shakes some debris off of her and readies the rifle.

RIFLE SCOPE

The Merc is pinned down. The rebels circle the truck, filling it with holes. Nadia squeezes the trigger, a rebel's head explodes. She finds another target, another rebel is laid to rest.

EXT. GHOST TOWN OF NAHR - MORNING

Diab hides behind his truck. He signals for his men to join the fight.

DIAB

Find me a gun with a scope on it,
damn it!

Bodies fall around the truck the Merc is in. He pops his head up, sees an opening. He bails out of the flatbed and heads for better cover.

The Merc slams in a fresh magazine and looks for Diab.

He spots him.

Diab is armed with a rifle with a scope and has set his sights on Nadia.

MERC
Nadia! Get down!

She peeks up, looks at him.

A shot is fired-

A burst of blood, Nadia falls out of view.

MERC (CONT'D)
No!

The Merc runs for the house, firing as he runs from cover.

INT. DESTROYED HOUSE 2ND FLOOR - MORNING

The Merc runs upstairs. Immediately, he sees Nadia on the floor, bleeding out. She's been shot in the side of the neck.

He runs over, wraps his hand around her throat to try and stop the bleeding.

MERC
It's okay, I got you.

Her blood flecked face stares up at him, unable to talk. He removes his hand.

MERC (CONT'D)
C'mon, we're getting out of here.

NADIA
No. Take Salma. You go.

She spits up blood. Salma stands in the corner unable to process what is happening.

MERC
I can't leave you.

NADIA
You go. You save her.

Diab and his men flank the house.

NADIA (CONT'D)
Promise me.

MERC
I promise.

He hands her his pistol.

MERC (CONT'D)
You shoot anyone you see in the
head. Got it?

She manages to smile one last time.

The Merc gets up and grabs Salma. She pitches a fit, reaches out for Nadia.

SALMA
No! Nadia!

The stairs crumble to the ground.

MERC
Fuck!

He sets Salma down and carefully walks over to the broken staircase.

A rebel soldier pops out firing. The Merc jumps down the staircase, topples the soldier, breaks his neck and takes his rifle.

MERC (CONT'D)
Salma. Come here. I got you.

Salma walks over, tears in her eyes.

MERC (CONT'D)
It's okay. Jump.

She's too afraid.

MERC (CONT'D)
I'll catch you. Please, we don't
have much time.

The Merc shoots any rebel soldier who dares to enter the demolished house.

Salma gets to the edge of the broken staircase, looks down.

MERC (CONT'D)

I got you, kid.

She looks over at Nadia.

Nadia tries her best to hold the blood in, but it's flowing out rapidly.

NADIA

Please, habibty. You need to go.

Salma takes a literal leap of faith, the Merc easily catches her.

INT. DESTROYED HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The Merc holds Salma close to him as he guns down advancing rebel soldiers.

KITCHEN

The Merc makes it to the kitchen, a rebel soldier gets the drop on him. The Merc quickly turns his back, taking a bullet in the shoulder.

Wincing, the Merc whips back around, blasts the rebel away.

Mahir stands behind him, pointing his gun.

MAHIR

Don't move.

The Merc slowly turns around in pain.

Mahir sees the terrified girl in his arms.

MERC

Mahir. Please.

Mahir lowers his weapon.

The Merc takes this chance to run off.

Diab stumbles into the kitchen just missing him.

DIAB

Where is he?!

MAHIR

I don't know. But someone is upstairs.

They head to the stairs.

INT. DESTROYED HOUSE 2ND FLOOR - MORNING

Nadia manages to still hold on. She cocks the gun the Merc gave her. She tries her best to raise it, but it's too heavy for the state she's in.

The sounds of footsteps.

A rebel is lifted up to see who is up here.

Nadia points her gun, shoots the soldier in the head.

The rebel soldiers below shoot at the ceiling, bullets pierce the wooden floor.

DIAB (O.C.)
Stop firing!

The shooting dies down.

DIAB (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Is that you up there, Merc?

Nadia cocks the gun and fires it again, hitting the wall.

DIAB (O.C.) (CONT'D)
I'm coming up.

Diab climbs up to the second floor.

Nadia tries cocking the gun again.

DIAB (CONT'D)
Who are you? Where is the mercenary?

Nadia ignores him, focuses on aiming the gun at him.

DIAB (CONT'D)
He isn't here, is he? Where is he going?

He steps on Nadia's wrist, making her drop the gun.

DIAB (CONT'D)
Who the hell are you?

He kneels down beside her, looks at her wound.

DIAB (CONT'D)
You're dying. Tell me where he is.
Tell me where he's going.

She coughs up some blood.

Diab pulls out the map the Merc left behind, shows it to her.

He points to a place circled on the map.

DIAB (CONT'D)
He's headed here, isn't he? Why?

A tear runs down Nadia's face.

Diab puts the map away.

DIAB (CONT'D)
That's okay. You've told me enough.

He grabs the gun the Merc left her and shoots Nadia in the chest with it, killing her instantly.

EXT. GHOST TOWN OF NAHR - MORNING

Diab wipes his hands clean of blood with a rag. The rebel soldiers help move the dead bodies.

Mahir runs over.

MAHIR
Well?

DIAB
He's headed for the mountains.

MAHIR
He won't survive up there.

DIAB
No, he won't. But just in case he does, I'm sending a few men.

MAHIR
What? Why?

DIAB
I need to be sure.

Diab discards the stained rag, pulls out the map and shows it to Mahir.

DIAB (CONT'D)

There's a village circled on this map, know it?

MAHIR

Adjiki, it's a small farming village.

DIAB

If he makes it down off the mountains, he'll be headed there.

EXT. RESABA MOUNTAINS - DAY

The Merc carries Salma in his arms. The terrain has changed from sand to jagged rocks.

The wind blows with fury, battering everything.

Salma can't stop crying and shivering, her tears frozen to her face.

The Merc talks to her like she understands him, which she doesn't.

MERC

I know you're scared. You feel like the only thing you can do now is cry. But you need to be strong. I will get you home. I promise.

He tries his best to keep moving, blood leaking down his arm.

LATER

It's started to snow and the wind hasn't let up for a second.

The Merc does everything he can to keep going, keep him and this little girl alive.

LATER

The Merc and Salma collect some of the snow into their palms and eat it.

The Merc finds a bush with some berries on it. He pinches one and licks it.

MERC

How do we know if these are okay to eat?

Salma just looks at him.

He shows her some animal tracks in the dirt by the bushes.

MERC (CONT'D)

I'll show you. Look at these.
They're animal tracks. If the
animals can eat them, so can we.

He hands her one.

She pops it in her mouth and smiles.

DUSK

The sun is dropping fast.

The Merc perseveres.

The harsh environment gets worse by the second.

Starving, moving, freezing.

Salma is walking by herself, collecting snow in her palms,
eating it with the berries the Merc collected for her.

The Merc has his pockets stuffed with berries. He eats them
like a snack.

MERC

How are the berries?

Salma doesn't understand a word he says.

He nonchalantly checks on his bullet wound. The cold has
frozen the blood to his skin and clothes.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

The Merc sets up camp on the mountain. He's made a small fire
with his zippo and has wrapped as many pieces of cloth around
himself and Salma as he possibly can.

Salma sits opposite him, finishing off the berries.

SALMA

(in arabic)
I'm cold.

His teeth chatter in his head.

SALMA (CONT'D)
(in arabic)
Food. I'm hungry.
(english)
Lizard.

The Merc smiles.

MERC
Lizard? You wanna eat lizard?

She nods yes.

SALMA
(in arabic)
Hungry.

MERC
I don't think there are any lizards
up here, honey. Dragons maybe.

Salma crawls over and gets warm next to the Merc. In pain, he wraps his arms around her, trying his best to keep her warm.

MERC (CONT'D)
Sorry, kid. I guess I just don't
have much to give you right now.

DAWN

The Merc and Salma hike the rough terrain. The snow is melting in the rising sun.

The Merc stops in place-

He bends down, spots some blood splattered on the rocks that isn't his.

MERC
Stay by me, kid.

They cautiously walk up the hill to find a dead rebel soldier.

The Merc pulls out his knife and runs over, stabbing the corpse just to be sure.

He grabs the soldier's gear, grabs some extra machine gun magazine clips, notices the water canteen, quickly drinking it down. He stops and looks over at Salma dying of thirst.

He hands her the canteen.

MERC (CONT'D)
It's okay. He won't miss it.

She takes it and drinks until she drowns.

MERC (CONT'D)
What happened to this guy?

He pushes him over. The rebel soldier's body has giant claw marks down his face and body.

MERC (CONT'D)
Shit.

The Merc stands up and the two continue their march forward.

EXT. GRIZZLY BEAR KILL AREA - LATER

The roar of a grizzly.

The Merc ducks.

A GIANT GRIZZLY BEAR stands guard over three other dead rebels. The bear has been shot repeatedly, but still hangs on.

MERC
Look at the size of this mother.

Salma hides.

MERC (CONT'D)
It's okay, she's about done for, kid. We need those soldiers' supplies though.

He hands Salma his AK-47.

MERC (CONT'D)
Here. I got a feeling mama grizzly has seen enough of these to know they're no good for her.

The Merc slowly walks down over to the bear's kill area.

Blood is splashed everywhere, the rebels have been torn apart.

The bear sluggishly follows the Merc's every move.

MERC (CONT'D)
Easy, mama.

The grizzly bear gets on its hind legs, towering over its domain.

The bear rears towards him, releasing a guttural growl.

MERC (CONT'D)

I hear ya.

The Merc searches one of the corpses, finds his canteen. He very slowly moves around to another corpse, grabs his gear.

The bear won't let him touch anymore of its prizes. The Merc quickly backs off, running back to Salma.

MERC (CONT'D)

Did you see that? Pretty great, right?

She hands him back the rifle, he hands her the canteens of water.

EXT. RESABA MOUNTAINS - DAY

The Merc and Salma walk down the mountain.

MERC

I think me and you should join a circus. What do you say?

He looks over at her.

She doesn't understand.

MERC (CONT'D)

I could train the bears and you could be my pretty assistant.

He pats her on the head.

DUSK

The sun is going down again and the wild life is coming out to hunt.

A shot is fired behind them.

The Merc quickly grabs Salma and runs down a hill. He stops and crouches down.

Tears and worry form in Salma's eyes.

MERC

Don't worry. Remember what I said.
Be silent. Close your eyes. Stay
hidden.

The Merc grabs his rifle and runs towards the person that
shot at them.

The Merc crouches behind a boulder.

MERC (CONT'D)

Who's out there?!

A rebel soldier pops out and fires at him, hitting the
boulder.

The Merc returns fire.

MERC (CONT'D)

We don't have to do this! You can
turn around and pretend we never
saw each other.

The soldier sprays the area with bullets.

REBEL 6 (O.C.)

(in arabic)

I'm going to kill you!

MERC

I'll take that as a go fuck
yourself.

The Merc finds new cover, flanks the soldier.

The rebel has been mauled by the bear. Pieces of flesh hang
from his face.

The Merc sneaks up behind him and shoots him in the back.

The rebel lies there, bleeding out. The Merc walks over to
him and kicks his rifle away.

REBEL 6

(in arabic)

I will see you in hell, kafir.

MERC

You look like shit. Let me help you
with that.

The Merc raises his gun, shoves the barrel in the rebel's
mouth.

SALMA (O.C.)

No!

The Merc quickly looks over.

Salma stands there now with mercy and tears in her eyes.

MERC

It isn't safe. Go hide.

SALMA

No. No kill.

MERC

He tried to kill me, Salma. He tried to kill you. He might have been the one that killed your sister.

SALMA

Stop it!

Rattled by the outburst, the Merc pulls the barrel out of the rebel's mouth.

SALMA (CONT'D)

No more killing!

Tears run down her red puffy cheeks.

MERC

Okay. Yeah. You win.

He takes Salma's tiny hand and they walk away.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

The sun is down, the sky is clear, but the wind is sharp.

The Merc treats his bullet wound, doing his best to stop the bleeding.

Salma has her back to him, forced to look away.

The Merc smiles.

MERC

Okay. All done.

Salma turns around, sees the Merc going through the soldiers' supplies.

MERC (CONT'D)
Let's see what we have here.

He pulls out some MRE's.

MERC (CONT'D)
Jackpot, kid.

LATER

The Merc and Salma eat MRE's "Meal, Ready-to-Eat". Salma taps her feet on the ground out of joy she's finally eating something other than berries and snow.

MERC
Know any campfire songs?

Salma just looks at him as she enjoys her meal.

The Merc sits down his meal and goes through the rest of the supplies.

He pulls out a pocket knife.

MERC (CONT'D)
What do you think?

He compares it to the giant buck knife he found. The size is ridiculously different. It even gets a laugh out of Salma.

MERC (CONT'D)
You like that, huh? Let's see what else we have.

A box of matches.

He puts them back and pulls out a pack of cigarettes.

MERC (CONT'D)
Here we go. Now we're talkin'.

He takes one out and quickly lights it.

Salma gets up and walks over to him.

MERC (CONT'D)
What's up?

She takes the cigarette out of his mouth and tosses it away.

MERC (CONT'D)
What the hell?

SALMA
(in arabic)
Mommy says to daddy all the time.
Smoking is bad for you.

She shakes a disapproving finger at him.

MERC
You don't want me smoking?

He can't help but laugh to himself.

MERC (CONT'D)
Okay. I hear ya. Go back and eat
the rest of your food before it
gets cold.

She sits back down and eats.

MERC (CONT'D)
We should be able to reach your
grandmother's village tomorrow.
You'll finally get to go home.

She just stares at him, eating her MRE.

EXT. RESABA MOUNTAINS - MORNING

The Merc keeps an eye on the surrounding landscape. Just a little ways ahead, there's a clear path to civilization.

MERC
Alright, kid. We made it.

He picks up Salma and the two journey down the hill, to a small settlement in the distance.

MERC (CONT'D)
Is that it, you think?

She nods yes.

MERC (CONT'D)
Okay, let's go find out.

EXT. ADJIKI VILLAGE - MORNING

Mist from the mountains moves over the village. People are out working their fields.

War hasn't reached this part of land yet. Everything is calm and peaceful.

Everyone stares at the Merc as he walks into town, holding a child.

MERC
Which way, kid?

Salma points up the road to a house all alone up on a hill.

EXT. ROAD TO GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The Merc walks up the hill on a dirt road. A small house sits all alone, surrounded by trees.

The Merc puts Salma down and takes a rest on the grassy hill.

MERC
I wanna give you somethin'.

He reaches into one of his pockets and pulls out Nadia and Aafiya's gold crosses.

MERC (CONT'D)
Here.

She hesitantly takes them from his palm. A single tear runs down her cheek.

Salma tugs on his army vest.

SALMA
(in arabic)
Come on.

MERC
That's okay, kid. You go on ahead.
I'll just rest here.

Salma looks over at the house, then back at the Merc. She gives him a giant hug.

SALMA
Thank you.

MERC
You're welcome. Now go.

Salma wipes away some tears and runs off to her Grandmother's house.

The Merc stays to look at the beautiful scenery. Nothing but hills and trees for miles.

THE SOUND OF MILITARY TRUCKS-

The Merc stands up, sees a couple of militant trucks headed his way.

A shot is fired from the house.

MERC (CONT'D)
Salma? Salma!

The Merc runs as fast as he can up the hill to Grandmother's house. He finds Mahir standing by the entrance with a smoking gun in his hand.

MERC (CONT'D)
What did you do?! What the fuck did you do, Mahir?!

A bag is shoved over the Merc's head and is hit in the face with the butt of a rifle.

He falls to the ground hard.

Diab walks over with a smile.

DIAB
Get him to the truck.

EXT. BACK OF TOYOTA PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

The Merc sits silently, his anger building up. Diab gives us his most shittiest of shit eating grins.

They drive the truck up a long hill to where that giant white cross resides.

DIAB
Father wants to kill you personally. You should feel honored.

The truck comes to a halt. It's surrounded by rebel soldiers celebrating the liberation of the capital.

The other two rebels in the flatbed get him down off the truck. Instantly, he's swarmed, beaten and punched by angry soldiers.

Mahir breaks it up, coming between them.

MAHIR
Get back!

MERC
Why did you do it, Mahir?

MAHIR
She's fine.

MERC
What?

MAHIR
The little girl. She's alive.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - MORNING

Mahir waits inside the house with his gun ready. The GRANDMOTHER is on the bed, frightened but not harmed.

Salma walks into the house, sees Mahir pointing a gun at her.

Mahir puts his finger over his lips.

MAHIR
(in arabic)
It's okay. Go see your Grandmother.

Salma runs over to her Grandmother. She scoops her up into her loving arms.

Mahir fires a shot into the floor.

MERC (O.C.)
Salma? Salma!

BACK TO PRESENT

EXT. CAPITAL SQUARE - DAY

MERC
Thank you.

MAHIR
Don't thank me just yet.

Mahir sneaks a grenade into the Merc's vest.

MAHIR (CONT'D)
My men are ready.

Mahir shoves the Merc to the feet of GENERAL JUBAYR. He's Middle Eastern, 60s, wears a ridiculous military outfit covered in self-appointed medals.

GENERAL JUBAYR

So this is him? He's just a boy.

Diab walks over and gets the Merc on his knees. The rebel soldiers circle around them.

MERC

Nice to finally meet you, General.

GENERAL JUBAYR

The honor is all mine. So you killed my son?

MERC

Yeah.

General Jubayr pulls out the knife used to kill his son.

GENERAL JUBAYR

With this knife?

MERC

It had a bit more of his blood on it, but yeah, I think that's the one.

Diab punches the Merc in the face, props him back up.

DIAB

Watch your damn tongue, Merc.

MERC

Sorry to offend the genocidal murdering psychopaths.

Diab delivers another punch to the face.

GENERAL JUBAYR

Is that why you turned on us? You don't agree with how we treat this scum?

MERC

Scum? These people were innocent.

GENERAL JUBAYR

None of them are innocent. They hide behind a corrupt government that sells away our oil, our land, even our own religion and for what? If they want to worship a god that doesn't answer their cries, I'm going to make damn sure he at least hears them clearly.

MERC

Fuck you.

GENERAL JUBAYR

Think of this as a purification.
I'm cleansing this land.

MERC

You're sick. Delusional. A monster
just like your dead fuckin' son.

GENERAL JUBAYR

Nothing you say now matters.
They're just the cheap words of a
man who has been defeated.

MERC

Defeated? As long as I'm still
breathing, I win.

GENERAL JUBAYR

Then tell me why I shouldn't slice
you apart?

MERC

You want me to beg? Fuck you.

GENERAL JUBAYR

You don't even want to defend your
pitiful life?

MERC

Is this a trial?

GENERAL JUBAYR

The closest one you'll ever get.
How many people have you killed in
the name of money?

(beat)

A lot I assume. Yet you look down
on me?

MERC

How many of those medals have you
actually earned, General?

Diab pulls out his knife and presses it against the Merc's
jugular.

DIAB

You will not speak to General
Jubayr that way.

MERC

Fuck you, Diab, you're just as big
of a pussy as him. Free my hands
and I'll show you what a real
fuckin' soldier looks like.

Diab tosses him over on the ground, cuts the ropes, freeing
the Merc's hands.

DIAB

Father, the knife.

GENERAL JUBAYR

What are you doing, Diab?

DIAB

Giving the men a show. His trial is
over. Now it's time for sentencing.
I choose death.

The rebels cheer.

Diab tosses his blade beside the Merc. He grabs the knife
used to kill his brother away from his father.

GENERAL JUBAYR

Alright. Everyone! Enjoy the show!

The Merc smiles and grabs the knife, slowly standing up.

The two meet, circle each other.

Diab feints the knife toward the Merc.

The Merc jabs with the knife, misses.

Diab jabs, SLASHES the Merc deep down the arm.

The Merc winces, jabs again.

Diab parries the jab and SLASHES the Merc deep across the
cheek.

The Merc staggers, holding his bleeding face.

Diab smiles, taking great enjoyment out of seeing the Merc
bleed.

They circle each other again, FEINTING jabs at each other.

The rebels cheer Diab on.

Diab jabs again. This time the Merc parries the jab, and
SLASHES Diab, the crowd reacts poorly.

The Merc and Mahir exchange glances. Mahir nods his head. He's ready to make his move.

The Merc jabs, grabs Diab by the neck, cuts his wrist. Blood shoots out on to the sand.

The Merc wrestles him to the ground.

Diab tosses sand in the Merc's eyes, blinding him.

MERC

Fuck!

Diab stabs him from behind in the shoulder and side.

The Merc drops his knife in agony, trying his best to pull the knife out of his side.

GENERAL JUBAYR

Very nice, son. End him.

Diab stands up, hovers over the Merc smirking.

DIAB

Let's end this.

MERC

Sure.

The Merc gets to his feet, staggers over to the General, spins around, plunges the knife deep into the General's belly.

DIAB

Father!

The Merc quickly grabs the grenade tucked into his vest, pulls the pin and tosses it to Diab.

Diab catches it, the Merc delivers a hard punch and kicks him into the crowd. Him and the rebel soldiers around him EXPLODE, scattering pink mist and body parts everywhere.

The rebels quickly set their gun sights on the Merc.

He swiftly lunges at the General, pulls out the knife in his gut, and presses it against his jugular.

MERC

Get the fuck back!

(to Mahir)

Tell them to get the fuck back!

Mahir and his men spring into action, they shoot any soldier even thinking about pulling the trigger.

MAHIR

No translation required, sadiqi.
They get the picture.

Mahir and his men circle the Merc and his hostage. They keep moving forward.

MERC

This is one fucked up plan.

A wall of soldiers quickly move backwards out of the way.

MAHIR

Plan? I thought we were just making this up as we went along.

They smile to one another.

GENERAL JUBAYR

What are you doing, Mahir?!

MAHIR

General. Go fuck yourself.

GENERAL JUBAYR

I will have your heads! I will have all your fucking heads!

The rebel soldiers keep their guns trained on them, not daring to fire.

MERC

So how we getting out of here?

MAHIR

This way.

Mahir and the others move toward a giant military truck.

The soldiers keep giving ground, until Merc and company reach the truck.

Everyone is getting froggy. Nobody dares to move on them yet, but the rebels keep their weapons ready.

MERC

You know how to drive this fuckin' thing?

MAHIR

Sure. More or less.

MERC

You're not filling me with
confidence here.

Mahir jumps into the truck, starts it.

Mahir's men get the Merc and General safely inside the truck.

All hell breaks loose. The rebel soldiers open fire on
Mahir's men.

They quickly drive away, piling through a bunch of rebel
soldiers on their way out.

INT. MILITARY TRUCK - DAY

Mahir drives, the General sits in the middle holding his
bleeding gut.

The Merc looks over.

MERC

What do we do with him?

MAHIR

I hear the government is handing
out a pretty big reward for his
head.

GENERAL JUBAYR

You traitorous bastard!

MERC

Shut the fuck up.

The Merc punches him in the face, knocking him out.

EXT. RESABA MOUNTAINS - DAY

The Merc looks through a pair of binoculars.

BINOCULARS

We see Salma safe and sound playing outside with an old dog.
Her Grandmother walks out and calls for her to come inside.
Salma quickly runs back into the house.

MAHIR

Are you sure you don't want to go
down there? You could let her know
you're alive at least.

MERC

No. This is fine. Let's get out of here.

They walk back to the military truck parked behind them.

EXT. GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Salma runs out of the house to play some more with the old dog.

She looks out at the mountains and smiles.

GRANDMOTHER (O.C.)

Salma, time to eat.

SALMA

Okay, grandma. I'm coming.

Salma runs back to the house.

She's wearing her sister and brother's gold crosses around her neck.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END