

CONVOY

by

Matt Holloway & Art Marcum

Paramount Pictures
di Bonaventura Pictures

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FADE IN ON:

A rusty BIG RIG WHEEL baking in the DESERT. The sand beneath the tire dissolves away as a CAMEL SPIDER digs to the surface. Albino body and legs. Big as your face.

As the camel spider leaves its hole we see that the tire is attached to the bullet-riddled carcass of an EIGHTEEN WHEELER -- a block of Swiss cheese with an engine. We're...

EXT. BONEYARD - KUWAIT - DAY

A graveyard of blown-up and shot-to-shit TRUCKS in the middle of the desert. Led Zep's "Ramble On" kicks in as the CAMEL SPIDER skitters across parched earth, onto...

A DUSTY HIGHWAY

Where a BIG RIG smashes the disgusting thing into oblivion.

A TWENTY TRUCK CONVOY

Rumbles down the road, wheels pounding asphalt. SEMIS followed by FUELERS. Each trailer says PROPERTY OF S&B. A U.S. ARMY HUMVEE escorts the civilian trucks.

EXT. FOUR CORNERS - DESERT - KUWAIT - DAY

An S&B VAN sits at the intersection of two desert roads that stretch from nowhere to nowhere. Waiting for something.

IN THE VAN

A dozen grizzly AMERICAN TRUCKERS. AC blows hard. BIG son of a bitch riding shotgun, wearing a CATERPILLAR hat, is IKE(30s). Born and raised in Detroit.

Greasy guy behind the wheel is GRONER(30s). His mangy bastard of a MUTT lies between the front seats.

GRONER

It's kind of like running pick ups and deliveries back home. Lotta scratching your balls 'til dispatch puts you out on the road. Only difference is the guns, the RPGs and the bombs.

(laughs)

Still. Not as bad as hauling live chickens. You ever haul live chickens? That shit is fucking embarrassing. Here they come.

The CONVOY thunders past. The truckers watch, admiring the clean and shiny rigs.

GRONER

(off convoy)

On their way to Baghdad. Safest spot is up front, driving one of the first two or three pigs. When the shooting starts, you're usually past it.

The last truck to pass has NO TRAILER.

GRONER

Last in line is your bobtail. You overcook your engine, lose your brakes or get your ass shot off, your bobtail has your back. You want a cowboy who's all the trucker he can be on that stick.

Groner drives in the direction the convoy came from.

IKE

Ever drive bobtail, slick?

GRONER

Got a month to go 'til I'm out of this shithole with my year-end bonus. Didn't make it this far trying to be a hero.

Groner eyes a looker in the rearview -- MICHELLE(30) -- a hard bit woman. DOGTAGS dangle from her neck.

GRONER

Where you from, honey?

MICHELLE

"Eat shit," Montana.

GRONER

Oooh...

(to Ike)

One of those.

Groner mouths "CARPET MUNCHER." Ike chuckles.

EXT. S&B HEADQUARTERS - KUWAIT - DAY

SUPER: STARS & BARS TRANSPORT, KUWAIT

A fully functional TRUCKING DEPOT in the middle of the desert. Several low-roofed office buildings. A virtual TENT CITY houses the truckers. A THERMOMETER reads 115 degrees.

In the SHOP mechanics pound bullet holes out of trucks -- more like a resurrection shop.

A razor-wire topped chain-link fence surrounds the whole compound. Armed guards man the gates. The stars and bars whip in the wind.

INT. DISPATCH CENTER - S&B HQ - DAY

An expansive room buzzing with activity. Dispatchers sit at stations chattering with convoys. A computerized MAP OF IRAQ shows convoy locations via GPS.

Supervisor NEIL ASPINWALL(40s) runs the circus. Tasseled loafers, sat phone clipped to his belt. Neil is a company man through and through. Dispatchers call out reports--

DISPATCHER 1

Tomlinson just pulled 652 into Baghdad. Said they got lit up pretty good going through Blood Alley. Got a couple drivers in bad shape.

DISPATCHER 2

659's scheduled for the same route this afternoon. They're requesting a deviation.

NEIL

No chance. That's an eight hour delay. You want to go sell that to the guys upstairs? What's the update on 640?

DISPATCHER 3

Banged up and coming in hot.

(beat)

We can't raise Frank.

Dispatchers shoot concerned looks around the room. Neil rolls his eyes, then tries to reassure them...

NEIL

Don't worry, people. Frank will pull through.

An ASSISTANT approaches Neil.

ASSISTANT
Newbies just came through the gate.

NEIL
Shit. I don't want them in the
yard when 640 rolls in.
(off assistant's look)
First impressions are everything.

EXT. TRUCK YARD - S&B HQ - MOMENTS LATER

The NEWBIES open van doors, step into a wall of oppressive
HEAT. NEIL greets the van, all smiles...

NEIL
Welcome! Neil Aspinwall, company
supervisor. Stars and Bars is
proud to have you on the team. Now
how about we get you all out of
this sun and into some lunch?

Hungry grumbles from the group.

GRONER
Time to whine 'em and dine 'em, eh
Neil?

Truckers grab their luggage. Neil leads them away, but
before they're out of the yard they HEAR IT...

A low RUMBLING. Through the fence we see a CLOUD OF DUST
getting closer. Neil grimaces as all eyes are drawn to the
opening GATES...

CONVOY 640 barrels in, hit HARD -- rigs POCK-MARKED and
CHARRED. Polar opposite of the first convoy we saw.

Michelle, Ike and the others realize they've signed up for
hell. Neil tries to put the best spin on it...

NEIL
Fifteen trucks accounted for. We
bring all of our horses back to the
barn.

GRONER
What about Frank?

A fat trucker who just got back with 640 ambles up. This is
PORTERHOUSE. From Memphis.

PORTERHOUSE

(to Groner)

Took heavy fire at the border.
Didn't look back the whole way in.

GRONER

Shit, Porterhouse, you don't think-

PORTERHOUSE

Ain't nobody done a year in that
rig he's driving and lived to talk
about it.

NEIL

(to guards)

Sun's going down! Close 'em up!

The guards start to close the gates. The mutt runs out.

GRONER

Hey! The hell's the matter with
you?!

Groner plants himself between the gates, making it impossible
to shut them all the way.

GRONER

(to Neil)

He's coming back. Frank always
makes it back.

The mutt has disappeared into the dust. Groner whistles.
Nada. The silence is deafening. Then...

HOOONK! A TRUCK with no trailer (bobtail) appears, the mutt
running alongside.

GRONER

Frank.

The guards get the gates open in time for the truck to roll
in. She's a WAR MACHINE: cracked windshield. Armor plating
has taken more shrapnel than a Sherman in WWII. Grill's a
piece of solid steel. "CLEO" is stenciled on the doors.

INSIDE CLEO'S CAB -- a filthy HAND detaches a TOY INDIAN from
the dash -- CHIEF CROW FEATHER.

Cleo's cab door opens. The driver steps out. Sweat running
through dust. Aviator shades. Meet FRANK DEEVERS.

FRANK

(to Cleo)

I hope they melt you down for scrap
you ugly bitch.

Frank approaches Neil who puts on a big grin for the newbies.

NEIL

This is Frank Deevers, best bobtail
driver we've got.

(to Frank)

Got a little hairy out there, but
nothing you couldn't handle, right
Frank?

Frank tosses Neil his keys.

FRANK

I'm five short, Neil. I'll never
set foot in her again.

Frank tips his hat to the shaken truckers, never breaking
stride. Groner and Mutt catch up...

GRONER

(off Cleo)

Shit, Frank, I thought for sure she
killed you. You broke the curse,
man!

Truckers pat him on the back. He's a regular hero around
these parts. But it all seems lost on him.

An IRAQI MECHANIC(30s) approaches Cleo -- this is IBRAHIM
ABDUL AZIZ, but people call him TAXI -- always wears a polo
shirt with a BAGHDAD CAB CO. logo. He inspects Cleo with the
care of a surgeon.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

CLOSE ON FRANK. Shaking as he pulls from a flask. Eyes
watering. We see he's...

IN THE BONEYARD

Staring at the wreckage of convoys past. Lost friends in
these metal coffins. Knows he's lucky to be making it out.

Frank unbuttons his shirt pocket, pulls out a SEALED LETTER.
Says: "SEND TO MIA DEEVERS." Frank opens the letter. We
catch the first line...

"Mia, Looks like I broke that promise. If you're reading this, I didn't make it..."

Frank tears up the letter. The pieces drift away.

INT. HALLWAY - S&B HQ - DAY

NEIL leads the NEWBIES through the bustling building. The truckers hold CONTRACTS.

NEIL

Let's get right down to it. The reason you're all here. Page seven of your contracts, section 2B.

The truckers turn to the important page.

NEIL

Each driver who works 330 days incountry receives their salary tax free. That amounts to a bonus of ninety thousand dollars.

(whoops and hollers)

Gets better. Actually works out to 325 days. We will not send you out on a convoy when you're five days short.

IKE

Shit, yeah.

MICHELLE

Hard to recruit if we get blown up a day before collecting that check.

The group quiets, the shot up convoy on their minds.

NEIL

Michelle, right? I want you to see something.

INT. MESS HALL

FOOD SERVERS display prime rib, mac and cheese, rolls and butter. A down home feast. Or a bribe. NEIL and the NEWBIES stand by PHOTOS OF TRUCKERS on the S&B WALL OF FAME.

NEIL

(off photo)

Stan Devine. Has three little girls. Bet they're out on their new boat on Lake Havasu right now.

(off another photo)

(MORE)

NEIL (cont'd)
 Evelyn here paid off all her credit
 card debt and, from what I'm told,
 invested in a whole new Evelyn.

Neil makes an "hourglass" motion down his body. Laughter.

NEIL
 (off photo)
 Wallace used his bonus to start his
 own company. Emailed me yesterday
 asking if I wanted to take a
 position working for him. And let
 me tell you something, I'm
 considering it.
 (laughter)
 All of these men and women came to
 Iraq. Now they're living the
 American dream.

Off the wall of fame we...

CUT TO:

The WALL OF PAIN: WANTED POSTERS of bandits, SCHEMATICS of
 IEDs. This wall shows shit the brass don't want you to see:

-- a MAP OF IRAQ with sections labelled "THE BARREL," "BLOOD
 ALLEY." Skulls and crossbones mark attack sites.

-- a WANTED POSTER: GRAINY PHOTO shows a heavy-set BEARDED
 MAN sneering. TEN MILLION DOLLARS for the capture of KUWAITI
 NATIONAL ABDEL MALLAS. WANTED FOR HI-JACKING AND MURDER.

-- another wanted poster, this one of NEIL, everyone's
 favorite supervisor -- Saddam mustache drawn in -- crossed
 out bounties at 20 mil and counting. We are...

INT. TENT CITY - S&B HQ - NIGHT

Cots are curtained off, two by two, into make-shift dorm
 areas. TRUCKERS drink beer, play cards, listen to music.

GRONER (O.S.)
 Come on you goddamn camel jockey!

GRONER yells at a CAMEL RACE on TV. TWO TEAMSTER BROTHERS
 watch with him. Older, bigger brother's handle is BATMAN.
 Younger one's is BATGIRL. He hates it.

ON TV: Groner's camel wins by a nose -- leading to the Groner
 victory dance.

GRONER

Told you that hump couldn't run a soft track, Batman.

BATMAN

Get outta here! It was fixed!

GRONER

Fixed? A camel race? Now pay up. You too, Batgirl.

The Brothers reluctantly fork over cash.

IKE, on his cot, studies a TRUCKING MANUAL. Odd. Flips through Hi-lited pages like he's prepping for a final.

OUTSIDE THE TENT

TRUCKERS barter with HAWKERS through the fence. We find MICHELLE with a SHADY HAWKER who opens an oily rag revealing PISTOLS. Hawker hands over two guns, holds back AMMO.

SHADY HAWKER

First money, then you get bullets.

MICHELLE

What makes you think I won't shoot you anyway?

She has a mean streak. Hawker doesn't understand; doesn't care when Michelle hands over money. She gets her bullets.

INT. MECHANIC'S SHOP - S&B HQ - NIGHT

TAXI takes off his shirt, folds it carefully, places it in a pile of BAGHDAD CAB CO. shirts.

He has a sliver of space in the back of the mechanic's shop for his cot and belongings. On the wall: a PHOTO of Taxi standing in front of a FLEET OF CABS.

Taxi lays out his sajjada (prayer mat), then begins wudu -- the ritual washing of hands, face and feet in the SINK that serves as his shower. Time for evening prayers.

INT. PHONE BANK - S&B HQ - NIGHT

Truckers phone home. FRANK dials a number.

EXT. ODESSA TEXAS - DAY - AS THE PHONE RINGS

We move over the city, finding Odessa High, the football stadium. Cookie cutter homes fade into run-down apartments.

INT. RUN-DOWN APARTMENT - PHONE STILL RINGING

Cramped. Peeling paint. But somebody tries to keep it nice. We see PICS: Frank with his WIFE and SON -- with his wife at the senior prom -- playing high school football. A magnet on the fridge says "LOVE A TRUCKER."

A boy -- FRANK JR.(6) -- runs through the door, grabs the phone, MOM coming in behind him with groceries. Mom is MIA DEEVERS, Frank's wife.

FRANK JR. (INTO PHONE)
Deevers residence. Frank speaking.

[INTERCUT WITH FRANK]

FRANK (INTO PHONE)
Now what did I tell you about
giving your name over the phone,
Frank?

FRANK JR. (INTO PHONE)
Dad!

Mia tries to take the phone. Frank Jr. ducks and runs...

FRANK JR. (INTO PHONE)
Are you taking care of Chief Crow
Feather?

INT. PHONE BANK

FRANK holds the Chief.

FRANK (INTO PHONE)
He's taking care of me, Frank.
It's all Indian country over here.

INT. FRANK JR.'S BEDROOM - ODESSA - DAY

The walls are covered in BUMPER STICKERS from every city in the U.S. -- presents from dad. A model big rig sits on a shelf. FRANK JR. hides in the closet. MIA finds him.

FRANK JR. (INTO PHONE)
Crow Feather has the most scalps.
Love you dad.

Frank Jr. puts the phone in Mia's outstretched hand.

MIA (INTO PHONE)
Frank?

INT. PHONE BANK

The sound of Mia's voice is like a tonic, taking Frank away from this compound, this desert. [INTERCUT WITH MIA]

FRANK

Hey, baby love.

They don't say anything, comfortable in silence. Then...

FRANK

My flight leaves out of Kuwait City in five days. We made it.

IN THE RUN-DOWN APARTMENT

Mia cries. Can't believe it.

FRANK

I want you to do something for me. Go to the chest.

Mia goes to an OLD CHEST that serves as the living room coffee table. It's covered in ketchup-smeared plates.

MIA

I have some cleaning up to do.

FRANK

Open it up.

Mia moves the plates, opens the chest. Finds dusty old junk.

FRANK

Take out the top tray.

Mia obeys. Finds a FOLDER. Inside, an AD: NEW HOMES! \$250,000! A picture of a modest three bedroom.

Frank has a folded copy of the ad in his hands too.

FRANK

Like the one you saw in that magazine. We'll be right down the street from Odessa High. Frank Jr.'s going to learn to throw a football.

MIA

Frank! Are you kidding me?!

FRANK

The agent has one lot left. He'll hold it 'til I get my check. So don't bother cleaning up, okay?

She can't believe her ears. This house is the reason he went to drive convoys in Iraq. Means the world to them.

MIA

(bursting)

Okay, your turn.

INT. PHONE BANK

Frank picks up a box. Says: "LAST CARE PACKAGE!" Frank cuts it open. Finds a six-pack of Lone Star Beer, "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" on DVD, cigars and a HOUSTON TEXANS ZIPPO.

MIA

Get it all out of your system before you come back.

Frank clings open the Zippo, smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. MECHANIC'S SHOP - S&B HQ - DAWN

The SHOP FOREMAN and TAXI work on CLEO. Hood's down, revealing her massive engine. Foreman holds a piece of Cleo's SHREDDED FAN BELT...

FOREMAN

You believe this? Shouldn't'a even been runnin'.

They close the hood.

FOREMAN

What do you think, Taxi? Will she hold together?

TAXI

What's the difference? Not our asses in the driver's seat.

(off Foreman's look -
reassuring)

She'll hold.

FOREMAN

Want to pull her into the yard?

TAXI
(surprised)
Sure.

OUTSIDE THE SHOP

NEIL, up at the crack, coffee in hand, walks a line of RIGS being loaded for convoy travel.

VROOM! CLEO hurtles across Neil's path, TAXI driving. He hits the brakes, sending Cleo into a 180, jams her into reverse and speeds for a NARROW SLOT between two trucks.

NEIL
She won't fit!

But Taxi glides Cleo into the spot without so much as a scrape. Neil is impressed. Taxi climbs out of the cab.

NEIL
(harsh)
Hey! You know the regs. You're a mechanic, not a driver.

Translation -- he's Arab.

TAXI
Sorry, boss.

FOREMAN
(yelling from shop)
Neil! Phone call!

Neil turns to Foreman. Taxi slips away.

NEIL
Who?

FOREMAN
Won't give their name! Want me to tell him where to get off?

NEIL
I'll take it in my office.

INT. NEIL'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

NEIL talks conspiratorially on the phone...

NEIL (INTO PHONE)
I gave you my mobile for a reason...you can't call it off!
(MORE)

NEIL (INTO PHONE) (cont'd)
I was short drivers but I've got it
covered now...

Neil looks at his ROLEX...

NEIL (INTO PHONE)
Today. You have my word.

Neil hangs up. ASSISTANT pops in.

ASSISTANT
We have a problem.

NEIL
Where?

ASSISTANT
Look out the window.

Outside, THREE NEWBIE TRUCKERS board the van.

ASSISTANT
Like you said, first impressions.

Neil looks like he could either explode or cry.

INT. MOVIE LOUNGE - MORNING

FRANK is passed out on the couch, empty Lone Star cans
scattered at his feet, cigar smoked to a nub. The TV loops
Sergio Leone. He wakes to find NEIL sitting way too close.

NEIL
First the good news. I've got your
plane ticket. Leaves tomorrow
night, nonstop back to the States.

Frank's waiting for the bad news.

NEIL
It's leaving from Baghdad.

FRANK
(menacing)
What did you just say?

NEIL
I'm out three drivers.

FRANK
Not my problem. I'm five days
short.

NEIL

That's a company courtesy. Nothing more.

Frank stands abruptly. Neil backs away...

NEIL

I know it's been tough.

FRANK

You don't know shit, Neil. You've never been outside these gates.

Neil is backed against the wall, sweating, Frank in his face.

NEIL

Fine. I don't know shit. But I know this. You don't make this run, you don't honor your contract. That means no bonus. Ninety grand, Frank. That's what it comes down to. One more run for ninety grand.
(then)
Walk away now and this whole year's been for nothing.

Takes all Frank's willpower not to strangle the motherfucker.

EXT. TRUCK YARD - S&B HQ - MORNING

The place is in full swing. A CONVOY is lined up. Truckers get into cabs, fire them up. Roll out. NEIL and TAXI walk the line...

NEIL

One run, four grand, then it's back to the shop.

Taxi nods as they enter...

A BRIEFING TENT

Where retired Army Captain DON DONALDSON(40s) holds court -- may have left the army but it didn't leave him.

GRONER, MICHELLE, IKE, PORTERHOUSE, BATMAN and BATGIRL are in on the briefing. TAXI sits in back -- an outsider.

DONALDSON

Morning, kiddos. I am your civilian convoy commander, Captain Don Donaldson, U.S. Army, retired.

We see the reason Donaldson's retired: his PROSTHETIC HAND AND FOREARM.

DONALDSON

Some of you have ridden together,
some of you are new. None of that
matters. As of this moment we're a
team. We move as one. We watch
each others backs. And we thank
God for it.

Groner makes like he's jerking off. Batman and Batgirl
chuckle. NEIL eyes an EMPTY chair (Frank's).

DONALDSON

Over the next forty-eight hours we
will be making a standard Thunder
Run to Baghdad. I am one of the
reasons you will make it there
alive. These gentlemen to my right
are the other reasons.

Three ARMY SOLDIERS, steely-eyed and young, stand next to
Donaldson -- SGT. OVERMEYER, PVT. SEAGRAMS and PVT. TRUJILLO.
Seagrams and Trujillo pass out SITUATION REPORTS -- cover
shows that grainy picture of the sneering ABDEL MALLAS.

SGT. OVERMEYER

We will be your military escort for
the duration. This morning's sit
rep should look familiar.

GRONER

(leafing through report)
Abdel Mallas...Abdel Mallas....
Guy must have jacked six figures
yesterday. Think he's hiring?

BATGIRL

That ain't very funny, Groner.

Nobody else thinks so either.

SGT. OVERMEYER

As civilians, it is strictly
forbidden for you to carry
firearms. We'll handle any
shooting.

DONALDSON

And if they're anything like me,
they'll have a goddamn hoot doing
it.

Donaldson holds up KEVLAR ARMOR.

DONALDSON

This is what we're hauling. Body armor, state of the art. Destined for the 4th Cav. You're not just driving trucks anymore, people. You're saving lives.

VOICE

Why not fly it in?

Everyone turns to FRANK.

DONALDSON

Thought I smelled a shitty attitude.

FRANK

The 4th's stationed at Baghdad Airport. Why ship through Kuwait?

NEIL

Clerical error.

GRONER

You're shitting me. So we're putting our asses on the line for someone else's screw up?

NEIL

You can always walk away. It's only money.

No one's walking away. Donaldson tosses Frank a set of keys.

DONALDSON

Welcome back to bobtail.

Frank tosses the keys right back.

FRANK

I'll drive one or two and coast into Baghdad for you, but that's it. I have a plane to catch and I'm not going to miss it batting cleanup. For any of you.

Surprises the truckers.

MICHELLE

(staring down Frank)

I'll do it. I'm not afraid.

DONALDSON

Let's get a few runs under your belt first, sweetheart. I'll take the tail.

Donaldson turns to a MAP OF IRAQ.

DONALDSON

We pick up three additional rigs at the port in Um Qasr. Our newbies - Michelle, Ike and Ibrahim - will drive those rigs.

BATMAN

Ibra-who?

(off Taxi)

You mean Taxi? He's not qualified to drive.

NEIL

He's had plenty of experience around the yard.

BATMAN

(firm)

He's not qualified.

BATGIRL

Yeah. The minute we get across the border he's on the horn to his buddies about where to rip us off.

TAXI

I'm not a thief.

BATMAN

Who's talking to you?

DONALDSON

Zip it. Taxi's driving. End of discussion.

The group disperses. Neil rushes up to Donaldson.

NEIL

Four rigs. We're picking up four rigs in Um Qasr. Didn't you get the new manifest?

DONALDSON

I got it. Add-on's not marked priority. We don't have the drivers.

NEIL

I'm driving.

(off Donaldson's look)

I drove a rig before biz school.

DONALDSON

Your funeral.

INT. PHONE BANK - S&B HQ - DAY

TRUCKERS talk to loved ones. FRANK picks up a receiver. About to dial Mia. Tell her. But he puts the phone back in its cradle. Can't make the call.

EXT. S&B HQ - DAY

Three SEMI TRAILERS and two FUEL TRAILERS in a line, TRUCKS parked in front, ready to be coupled. CLEO, all by her lonesome, behind the fuelers. An ARMY HUMVEE sits next to the trucks.

TRUCKERS stand by rigs with duffels and jugs of water. DONALDSON walks the line, tossing keys. IKE keeps step.

IKE

Question, sir, about R.O.E.'s.

DONALDSON

Rules of engagement? You fancy yourself a soldier, son?

IKE

Got two brothers in the 101st.

DONALDSON

What's that make you?

Shuts Ike up real quick.

DONALDSON

There's only one rule out there,
Private Ryan. Don't stop.

BATGIRL boards TRUCK 5 (Fueller) -- BATMAN in TRUCK 4 (Fueller) -- PORTERHOUSE, BIG COOLER in hand, boards TRUCK 3 (Semi).

Donaldson tosses keys to GRONER at Truck 2 (semi). Groner tosses the keys to Ike...

GRONER

All you, Private Ryan. I'm more
hung over than my old man on
Christmas.

Ike's new handle is already setting in. Ike stares at the keys in his hand -- for a big S.O.B., he seems nervous.

FRANK stands in front of TRUCK 1 (semi) with MICHELLE -- first in line. Donaldson tosses Frank keys.

DONALDSON

Ladies first.

Michelle wishes she was riding with anyone else.

EXT. S&B TRUCK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

The down and dirty of getting ready to roll...

FRANK greasing up his FIFTH WHEEL, prepping to couple--

FRANK and TRUCKERS in their cabs, eyeing mirrors -- inching back to TRAILERS--

KINGPINS sliding up into FIFTH WHEELS, the critical connection -- CLUNK -- CLUNK -- pins LOCK into fifth wheels--

TRUCKERS hook up RED AIR SUPPLY LINES to trailers -- crank up trailer LANDING LEGS--

INT. CLEO

DONALDSON attaches a KNOB to the steering wheel that makes it easier to drive with his prosthetic hand.

EXT. TRUCK YARD

Five rigs all hooked up, ready to roll. And Cleo.

NEIL, duffel in hand, approaches TAXI who stands alone -- no ride. Neil sees the BROTHERS staring down Taxi.

NEIL

Ride with Porterhouse.

Neil continues on, passing Frank who eyes him and his duffel.

NEIL

We've added on a fourth truck in Um Qasr. I'm pitching in.

FRANK

Three rookies and a suit. Thought this was a standard run.

Neil just keeps walking.

INT. CABS - SERIES OF SHOTS

BATGIRL tapes up ASHLEE SIMPSON -- BATMAN tapes up JESSICA SIMPSON -- GRONER sets down water for the MUTT--

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK attaches CROW FEATHER to the dash. His cab is equipped like everyone else's: QUALCOMM dashboard computer. CB radio. Smaller than shit SLEEPING SPACE behind the seats.

MICHELLE climbs in. Frank sees the GUNS in her duffel.

MICHELLE

You won't have to bat cleanup for me. I know how to hit.

Frank whips out a knife, cuts a slit in his seat. Hides a PISTOL and the KNIFE in the slit. Fuck the rules. He turns the ignition key. The engine roars.

EXT. TRUCK YARD

Like dominoes falling the engines turn over, one after the other, each trucker sliding in a tape or cuing an ipod -- calling his own tune...

...DONALDSON and "Margaritaville" -- PORTERHOUSE and Clint Black's "Killing Time" -- BATGIRL and the Beasties' "No sleep til Brooklyn" -- BATMAN prefers the Beasties' "Booming Granny" -- IKE hooks up 50 Cent's "Hate It or Love It"...

SGT. OVERMEYER fires up the Humvee. TRUJILLO mans the mounted .50 caliber machine gun.

DONALDSON (OVER CB)

Move 'em out!

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK slides in G'nR's "Nightrain."

EXT. TRUCK YARD

GUARDS open the gates. Frank's truck moves forward. Engines hum. Tires crunch gravel. Stacks belch smoke. The convoy comes to life. Some serious heavy metal. We're on the move.

DONALDSON (OVER CB)

Remember, dehydration's a killer. You get dry mouth, fatigue, piss that looks like honey, don't think. Drink.

(MORE)

DONALDSON (OVER CB) (cont'd)

(then)

Once we're in Iraq it's a straight shot up MSR Tampa. We'll bunk in at Cedar 2 for the night, so I hope you packed your jammies, children. Day two we take Baghdad. It is imperative that we shoot Blood Alley in daylight.

INT. IKE'S TRUCK

IKE raises an eye off "Blood Alley"...

GRONER

Last twenty miles into Baghdad. Most dangerous stretch of concrete in the world. You'll love it.

Groner leans back in his seat, puts his hat over his face.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - KUWAIT - DAY

The CONVOY rumbles past the BONEYARD.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

The ice has yet to be broken. Michelle cleans her guns. FRANK upshifts, gaining speed.

INT. PORTERHOUSE'S TRUCK

Same ice between PORTERHOUSE and TAXI, a particularly whiny Clint Black song wailing in Taxi's ears. A long beat.

PORTERHOUSE

You choose the next tape.
(off Taxi's look)
Fair's fair.

Taxi opens Porterhouse's tape box -- ALL country.

INT. IKE'S TRUCK

GRONER is dead asleep. Strangely, IKE talks himself through upshifting, telling his arms and legs what to do...

IKE

...depress clutch, shift into fourth, release clutch...
accelerate...

Smooth shift. Ike smiles. Mutt looks at him accusingly.

IKE
(to Mutt)
What?

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - KUWAIT - LATER

The HUMVEE rides alongside the convoy, TRUJILLO tanning himself with a reflector board. Sun, music, the open road. Driving in Kuwait is like a vacation.

WITH FRANK AND MICHELLE

Michelle sees a faded ODESSA HIGH FOOTBALL logo on Frank's duffel bag. Decides to break the ice.

MICHELLE
Let me guess. Quarterback?

FRANK
Guilty.

MICHELLE
So what, you made it all the way to the state championship and it's been a downhill ride ever since?

She laughs. Frank forces a chuckle.

WITH IKE AND GRONER

Ike holds up an INHALER...

IKE
...got cut from the Rangers.
Asthma. Driving this truck's my way of doing my part.

GRONER
Your part? Of what?

IKE
You know. Spreading freedom.

GRONER
Like peanut butter on Wonderbread?
You're a piece of work, Private Ryan.

IKE
How about you?

GRONER

I came here to save my life.

(off Ike's look)

An Armenian asshole sent a couple goons to my casa when I couldn't pay up after the Super Bowl. I owe that bastard 70K, plus the juice.

WITH PORTERHOUSE AND TAXI

PORTERHOUSE

(off Taxi's shirt)

Why'd you stop driving cabs?

TAXI

I didn't drive them, I owned them. Twenty cabs.

PORTERHOUSE

You must've been making a killing.

Taxi's pained look tells us he was.

TAXI

They were stolen in the looting after the war. With four thousand dollars I can buy a new cab.

PORTERHOUSE

One cab? After you had twenty? That's a raw deal.

TAXI

It's a start.

Taxi slides in a TAPE -- Shania's "Man I Feel Like a Woman" -- taps his feet. Porterhouse grimaces.

TAXI

Your music.

OUTSIDE

Our outbound CONVOY passes an INBOUND convoy. Air horns blast. Waves are exchanged. But our drivers notice bullet holes, scorched metal. Reminds them where they're going.

EXT. BORDER CHECKPOINT - KUWAIT/IRAQ BORDER - DAY

The CONVOY idles. Lines of IRAQIS in beat-up compacts wait, unhappy -- U.S. trucks have priority. SGT. OVERMEYER hands papers to an Army SPECIALIST.

SPECIALIST
Civilian convoy patrol. Talk about
cruel and unusual.

SGT. OVERMEYER
Tell me about it. Target's a mile
wide, no backup, and these whiners
are raking in enough dough to keep
me in MGD for the rest of my life.

SPECIALIST
Somebody up there hates you.

Laughter. Specialist waves the convoy through.

DONALDSON (OVER CB)
Welcome to the cradle of
civilization, kids. Put on your
head gear.

Truckers put on S&B-issued HELMETS as the convoy enters IRAQ.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - IRAQ - LATER

CONVOY just crossed the border but our truckers can see and
feel the difference. More menacing. Highway is rough, pock-
marked. BEGGARS run after the trucks. Trash blows.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

MICHELLE leafs through her SIT REP, flips to the picture of
ABDEL MALLAS.

MICHELLE
I don't get these people. If they
want us out so bad, let us do our
job and be on our way.

FRANK
That's the last thing Mallas wants.
We're making him rich.

MICHELLE
(off report)
S&B lost a driver up north
yesterday. You know him?

Frank nods, somber -- knew the guy. He changes the subject.

FRANK
Abdel Mallas owns these roads.
We're just trying to pass through.

EXT. THE BARREL - IRAQ - DAY

The CONVOY approaches TWO-STORY dilapidated TENEMENTS stacked close-in to the road.

DONALDSON (OVER CB)
Push those needles to seventy. No
red lights and no dead pedals 'til
we're through the Barrel.

INT. IKE'S TRUCK

IKE cautiously gains speed. Even the MUTT'S on edge, paws on the dash, looking for trouble.

GRONER
(off tenements)
Every window's a perch for some
trigger-happy bandit.

Tenement WINDOWS are dark, forbidding.

GRONER
It's called the Barrel. Know what
that makes us? The fish.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

MICHELLE loads her guns. FRANK rubs CROW FEATHER for luck.

MICHELLE
Friend of yours?

FRANK
He has the most scalps.

EXT. THE BARREL

The CONVOY hauls ass -- BATGIRL kisses his hand, presses it to ASHLEE -- BATMAN does the same with JESSICA.

INT. IKE'S TRUCK

CRACK! IMPACT on the windshield -- IKE SWERVES, the truck fishtailing all over the road--

GRONER
Ease off the gas, cowboy!

Ike obeys. Gets control. Calm reigns.

GRONER
Just a pot-shot.

Ike takes a hit off his inhaler, tension easing, then...

BAM! BAM! BAM! ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE. Like they've entered a HAILSTORM -- but this ain't hail--

INT. CABS - SERIES OF SHOTS

PORTERHOUSE and TAXI ducking bullets -- windows cracking -- MICHELLE hunkered down -- metal denting -- NEIL freaked--

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK'S head SNAPS SIDEWAYS, taking a bullet--

MICHELLE

FRANK!

Frank shakes it off. Whoa. Thought he was a brain-doner. He feels his temple. Just a little blood. Looks down -- a ROCK rests in his lap.

FRANK

Rocks.

Frank reaches for the CB...

INT. HUMVEE

OVERMEYER on the horn...

SGT. OVERMEYER (INTO CB)

I hear you, Frank.

(to Seagrams)

Blast 'em.

ATOP THE HUMVEE

We move past TRUJILLO and his gun to a SPEAKER. HEAVY METAL BLARES -- SLIPKNOT'S "I Am Hated." Scary shit.

EXT. THE BARREL

DOZENS OF KIDS run from hiding places on the rooftops, dropping rocks, hands over their ears.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

MICHELLE watches the scattering kids.

MICHELLE

They should shoot the little bastards.

FRANK
They're just kids.

Michelle doesn't give a fuck. Frank's eyes linger on her WEDDING RING, the DOG TAGS around her neck.

FRANK
When did he die?
(off Michelle's look)
Your husband.

MICHELLE
(beat)
August 18th, 2003.

CUT TO:

EXT. BANDIT COMPOUND - DESERT - DAY

A LOOKOUT, atop a guard tower, peers through binoculars at an approaching DUST CLOUD.

Lookout yells to GUARDS manning a GATE below him. [BRACKETED DIALOGUE IS ARABIC SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH]

LOOKOUT
[Open the gates!]

The guards open up, revealing the dust cloud. THREE BIG RIGS appear, flanked by half a dozen FAST, ARMORED CARS -- BMWs, Camaros, Hondas. The motley convoy roars...

INSIDE THE COMPOUND

Several warehouses and a dusty lot. Scattered rigs chopped for parts. Dozens of ARMORED CARS and MOTORCYCLES.

The guards shut the gates as the trucks come to a stop: two REFRIGERATED SEMIS and a regular SEMI.

GUN-TOTING MEN approach the bullet-scarred trucks. DRIVERS get out of cabs, armed. This is a BANDIT version of S&B.

Their LEADER appears from a warehouse -- heavy-set, bushy mustache. Could be ABDEL MALLAS without the beard. We'll call him THE BUTCHER.

The Butcher follows DRIVER #1 who opens a refrigerated trailer -- filled with FROZEN STEAKS.

THE BUTCHER
[Contact the original buyers.
Double the price.
(MORE)]

THE BUTCHER (cont'd)
They're hungry, they'll pay. Take
a few crates off. We'll eat well
tonight.]

The Butcher follows Driver #1 to the last semi. Inside:
boxes of CELL PHONES, still in their original packaging.

THE BUTCHER
[Good. We need phones.]

DRIVER #1
[I have something even better.]

Driver #1 opens the semi's cab, pulls out a gagged, bleeding
PAKISTANI TRUCKER. Driver #1 thinks he's delivering the
golden goose. The Butcher takes off Pakistani's gag...

PAKISTANI
(scared shitless)
My company will pay! Please! Any
price!

The Butcher SHOOTS Pakistani dead.

THE BUTCHER
[We're not in the hostage
business.]

CUT TO:

EXT. PORT OF UM QASR - DAY

A run-down trucking depot on the edge of the Persian Gulf.
Mine sweepers visible in the harbor. This ain't Miami. The
CONVOY is parked.

A DISPATCHER and NEIL talk by three additional S&B rigs.

DISPATCHER
Three. I got three additional
trucks. There is no fourth truck.

NEIL
I've got a schedule to keep, you've
got a job to keep. Find it.

GRONER, IKE, DONALDSON and the BROTHERS eat RIBS out of
Porterhouse's cooler. PORTERHOUSE scribbles in a notebook.

DONALDSON
(off ribs)
Hotter than camel shit on a tin
roof.

GRONER

Whoo-wee!

PORTERHOUSE

Edna calls them "Atomic Hogs."

IKE

(taking a bite)

Who's Edna?

PORTERHOUSE

The old lady and me are openin' a
rib joint when I get back to
Memphis. She sends a new batch
every month, vacuum packed.

Ike's mouth catches fire. He waves his hand over his tongue.
Porterhouse, giddy, makes a note of it. Sees TAXI eating his
own food -- seasoned BEEF in pita.

PORTERHOUSE

(off ribs)

Help yourself.

GRONER

How long you been here, man? They
don't dig on Porky Pig.

BATGIRL

Missing out.

Taxi gives a piece of his sandwich to Porterhouse. He smells
it, unsure -- then eats, savoring the taste.

TAXI

Cumin.

Porterhouse makes a note of it.

Down the way, FRANK inspects his rig. MICHELLE gets out of
the cab with her duffel.

MICHELLE

Thanks for the memories.

FRANK

Yeah.

Michelle spots a YOUNG IRAQI MAN staring at her from across
the fence.

MICHELLE

What are you looking at?

Guy just keeps staring. Michelle pulls her GUN on him. Iraqi Man RUNS, scared. Michelle pretends to pop him. Turns back to Frank who frowns.

MICHELLE

My husband volunteered to help these people. You know how they repaid him? They shot him at point blank. People just stood there and watched. Then they burned his body and hung what was left of him from a light post.

A beat.

FRANK

We have a drop to make. You're a danger to us if you're looking for payback instead of doing your job.

MICHELLE

You've been scraping guys off the road for a year now. Don't you want some payback?

FRANK

No. There's only one thing I want.

MICHELLE

You'll make it to Baghdad all right. And you'll still be worth shit when you get there.

Frank just goes back to his inspection. Michelle walks off.

A PIECE OF SHIT RIG enters the port, an IRAQI DRIVER at the wheel. No S&B stencil on the trailer. NEIL approaches.

NEIL

You're late.

IRAQI DRIVER

You're lucky I'm here at all. People would kill to get their hands on this truck.

NEIL climbs into the piece of shit rig.

MICHELLE, GRONER, the MUTT and TAXI board the S&B rigs.

INT. NEIL'S TRUCK

NEIL turns the key over and over. Doesn't start. DONALDSON appears at the window.

DONALDSON

Clutch down, then turn.

Neil depresses the clutch, turns. Vroom! Donaldson laughs.

EXT. PORT OF UM QASR - DAY

The CONVOY rolls out. GRONER, NEIL, TAXI and MICHELLE fall in behind Batgirl's fueller. Cleo brings up the rear.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The CONVOY hums along, swelled to eleven trucks now. A monolith moving down the road. BATGIRL rides close to BATMAN'S bumper, revving his engine...

BATGIRL (INTO CB)

Pick up the pace, lard ass.

BATMAN downshifts, forcing BATGIRL to hit his brakes, fucking with him. DONALDSON sees it...

DONALDSON (INTO CB)

Batman, Batgirl, cut it out.
That's some flammable shit you're hauling.

IKE (INTO CB)

Why do they call you Batgirl,
Batgirl?

BATGIRL (INTO CB)

You don't call me jack shit,
Private Ryan.

GRONER (INTO CB)

Rumor is Batman's got a twelve inch
bat. That pretty much makes his
brother a pussy.

BATMAN grins. BATGIRL curses.

IKE (INTO CB)

They call you Groner 'cause you
bitch 24/7?

GRONER (INTO CB)
What are you talking about? That's
my name. Steve Groner.

Laughter in the cabs. Then...

BRAKE LIGHTS on the Humvee. A string of brake lights and
squealing tires as the convoy STOPS...

SGT. OVERMEYER (OVER CB)
Suspicious object in the road.
Possible IED. We're going to have
to check this thing out.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

The convoy is stopped -- shitty spot to be stuck. Piles of
TRASH and SCRAP dot the landscape. Plenty of places to hide.

SEAGRAMS holds oncoming traffic. TRUJILLO, stuffed into a
bulky SAPPER SUIT (for bomb defusing), slowly approaches the
suspicious object -- a PLASTIC BAG. Could explode any time.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK glances at his WATCH, then glimpses something DARTING
behind a scrap heap -- or maybe it was nothing.

INT. CLEO

DONALDSON scans horizons, wary, same as Frank.

DONALDSON (INTO CB)
We're sitting ducks out here,
Overmeyer. How much longer?

SGT. OVERMEYER (OVER CB)
As long as it takes. You know the
drill, sir.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK switches channels on the CB...

FRANK (INTO CB)
Hey Frenchie, you making time?

No answer.

EXT. MSR TAMPA - DAY

We move along ANOTHER CONVOY of S&B semis. At the end of the line we find an ugly-ass BOBTAIL TRUCK -- "CAMILLA" stenciled on her doors, Sex Pistols blaring.

INT. CAMILLA

The BRITISH driver -- FRENCHIE(30s) -- rocks out -- can't hear FRANK over the CB...

FRANK (OVER CB)
Frenchie! Turn down the goddamn music!

Heard him that time -- Frenchie turns down the volume.

FRENCHIE (INTO CB)
Christ, Frank, that you? I heard you flew the coop.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK on the horn with FRENCHIE [INTERCUT].

FRANK
On my way to the airport. How's it look on your end?

FRENCHIE
Had a couple rocks tossed at us. Kids having fun.

Frank chuckles.

FRENCHIE
We're cruising now. You shouldn't have any trouble.

FRANK'S eyes dart from scorched cars to metal heaps -- THERE -- that avalanching trash pile -- did someone take cover?

FRANK
Check in on you later.

FRENCHIE
Happy trails, Frank.

Frank's hand moves to the GUN inside his seat.

EXT. HIGHWAY

DONALDSON, fed up, gets out of his cab; storms toward the front of the convoy, keeping an eye out for snipers. BATGIRL climbs out of his truck...

DONALDSON

Get back in your cab. You want to get shot?

BATGIRL

Gotta piss, boss.

Donaldson tosses Batgirl a CAN from the road. Batgirl gets back in the cab -- Donaldson makes it to OVERMEYER at the Humvee -- FRANK watches from his cab.

DONALDSON

We've been here over an hour, girls. Why isn't this road cleared?

SGT. OVERMEYER

Go back to your rig, Don.

DONALDSON

I'll go back to my rig when you pansies stop dickin' around and get the job done.

SGT. OVERMEYER

Now, Don.

(off Don's false hand)

Before I kick your washed-up, gimp ass.

That hits Donaldson below the belt. Before the fireworks, Trujillo comes back to the Humvee...

TRUJILLO

Could be an IED, could be a goat sandwich. I need some more equipment.

Fuck this. Donaldson heads out to the suspicious object.

SGT. OVERMEYER

Hey!

But Overmeyer DOES NOT follow.

Donaldson stands over the plastic bag. Doesn't scare him.

Frank watches from his cab, concerned...

FRANK
(off Donaldson)
What the hell are you doing?

Frank SLIDES DOWN in his seat--

Overmeyer and Trujillo take cover behind the Humvee--

Donaldson OPENS the bag. Reaches inside. This is when Donaldson would blow up if it was a bomb. Suddenly...

Donaldson pulls out a COKE and a SANDWICH. He marches back, taking a bite of the sandwich...

DONALDSON
(off sandwich)
Lamb. Can we go now, Sergeant?

Donaldson keeps on. BATGIRL dumps the can of PISS out his window. Splashes Donaldson's boots. What a day.

CUT TO:

EXT. MSR TAMPA - DAY

Free at last, the CONVOY rumbles along...

FRANK (INTO CB)
Don. Checked in with 663. Looks like smooth sailing.

DONALDSON (INTO CB)
You stay nice and cozy out front, Frank. I'll worry about what's ahead.

But the TRUCKERS are relieved to get the report.

The convoy enters a NARROW STRIP lined with tenements, mud-brick shacks and corrugated iron lean-to's--

GRONER (OVER CB)
Hey, Frank. Ain't that that house you're savin' up for?

A HOVEL flies past. Frank cracks a grin.

BATMAN cues up Sinatra's "NEW YORK, NEW YORK" -- puts his CB up to the speaker, broadcasting to the convoy.

BATGIRL
(singing)
Start spreading the news...

TAXI
(singing)
I'm leaving today...

THE WHOLE CONVOY sings Sinatra...

FRANK turns up the volume on the CB. Almost feels like we're back home, cruising the I-70...

The HUMVEE pulls next to Frank. Frank and Trujillo exchange nods -- solidarity...

KABOOM! The whole fucking Humvee flies INTO THE SKY (hit an IED)--

The blast pushes Frank's truck onto its NINE RIGHT WHEELS --

Frank turns the wheel clockwise -- cab moves right, trailer moves left -- THUD! -- trailer comes down, settling the rig, but the evasive maneuver propels Frank OFF the road--

The Humvee lands in a battered heap, on fire--

IKE swerves, just missing the Humvee, other trucks following--

FRANK, dazed, tries to re-start his engine as the convoy passes him by. And now...

Dozens of AK BARRELS appear in windows -- looks like a shooting gallery -- CH-CH-CH-CH! AKs blast away--

The convoy is officially under attack--

Bullets tear into trucks and trailers--

DONALDSON (OVER CB)
MOVE! MOVE! MOVE!

Franks's windows shatter, his windshield cracks -- taking heavy fire and the goddamn engine won't turn over--

The fuelers pass. Then GRONER. NEIL. TAXI. MICHELLE.

SCREECH! Donaldson stops Cleo, runs to the blazing Humvee -- the soldiers are goners.

DONALDSON
Goddamn it!

Donaldson hops back into Cleo. Pulls up to Frank...

DONALDSON

Leave her!

FRANK

Go on ahead!

AHEAD ON THE ROAD

PING! PING! PING! HOLES appear along Batgirl's FUELER -- gas leaks out of the holes like a sprinkler truck--

BEHIND THE CONVOY

DONALDSON screams at Frank...

DONALDSON

SHE'S DEAD, FRANK! HOP IN!

FRANK

(off Cleo)

I'M NOT GETTING IN THAT TRUCK!

A long, tense, bullet-rattling beat -- VROOM! Frank's truck comes to life. He pulls out in front of Donaldson.

AHEAD ON THE ROAD

Trucks SLIDE across leaking fuel -- a skating rink in the middle of the desert--

BATGIRL is getting the shit pounded out of him, and if we thought it couldn't get any worse--

POP! One of Batgirl's tires EXPLODES -- the rim hits the street, SPARKS FLYING. If the stream of sparks hits the leaking fuel, Batgirl goes up like a Roman Candle...

GRONER, NEIL, TAXI and MICHELLE stack up behind Batgirl's slowing, swerving, leaking fueler...

GRONER (INTO CB)

Get out of the way, Batgirl!

BATGIRL (INTO CB)

No friggin' way! I stop I'm dead!

GRONER (INTO CB)

You want us all to die?!

NEIL (INTO CB)

Pull over! That's an order!

BATGIRL (INTO CB)
Screw you, Neil!

DONALDSON jumps into the exchange, level-headed...

DONALDSON (INTO CB)
Batgirl, no one's going to leave
you behind. You copy?

Batgirl copies all right. Tears stream down his face as
bullets pierce his truck--

BATMAN (way ahead of Batgirl) takes up his CB, knows what he
has to do...

BATMAN (INTO CB)
You've got to get that pig off the
road, Bro.

Takes all of Batgirl's courage to PULL OFF THE ROAD -- the
convoy passes him by--

Batgirl tries to get the door open -- won't budge -- smoke
billows in from the hood. Batgirl scurries into the back--

On the REAR of Batgirl's cab an ESCAPE HATCH opens (all the
trucks have them) -- Batgirl squirms out, runs--

A MOLOTOV COCKTAIL flies from a window -- SMASH! -- the fuel
on the road catches FIRE--

Batgirl hunkers behind a rusted-out Datsun, surrounded by
fire. The flames creep toward the leaking fueler--

AHEAD ON THE ROAD

IKE, in the lead truck, spots BURNING CARS blocking the road
ahead, GUNMEN using them for cover, firing head on--

IKE
(to himself)
Don't stop...don't stop...don't
stop...

Ike VEERS ONTO ANOTHER ROAD, hopping the curb--

The rest of the convoy follows Ike like lemmings--

BACK WITH FRANK

Coming up on the fire, the fueler, Batgirl trapped...

FRANK (INTO CB)
No time to stop, Don. That
fueler's going to blow.

DONALDSON (INTO CB)
I don't leave my men behind!

Frank slams down the CB. Goddamnit. A beat. Frank makes a
decision -- sets CRUISE CONTROL -- accelerator stays down--

Frank OPENS THE DOOR, steps onto the running board, staying
ducked behind the door, bullets pinging off it--

Donaldson sees Frank standing OUTSIDE the cab--

DONALDSON
Jesus Christ, Frank...

Batgirl, encircled by fire, has no reason to hope. Then...

Frank appears like a mirage through the flames. He leans
down, his arm out--

Batgirl runs, jumps and CLASPS Frank's arm, the momentum
nearly pulling Batgirl's shoulder out of its socket--

KABOOM! The fueler blows apart--

Frank SWERVES -- straightens her out, trying to hold onto
Batgirl at the same time--

Batgirl gets onto the running board. Climbs inside the cab.
Frank follows--

DONALDSON zips by the fire in CLEO.

INT. MICHELLE'S TRUCK

MICHELLE hears Donaldson...

DONALDSON (OVER CB)
Nice grab, Frank.

Michelle didn't see it, but knows Frank did something brave.
Maybe he's not a total piece of shit.

INT. CLEO

DONALDSON on the horn...

DONALDSON (INTO CB)
Frank...

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

Frank takes up the CB. Considers responding. Puts the CB back down without saying a word.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAY

Convoy's down to nine. Battered, but safe. IKE in the lead. FRANK second to last. CLEO bringing up the rear.

DONALDSON (INTO CB)

Needles up, kiddos. We get some distance, find a safe place to pull over.

BATMAN (INTO CB)

Safe? What? Til' Taxi sells us out again?

TAXI (INTO CB)

Fuck yourself, Batman.

MICHELLE (INTO CB)

Road was clear for 663.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

BATGIRL takes up the CB. FRANK grabs Batgirl's wrist...

FRANK

Let it go.

BATGIRL

They tried to kill me!

FRANK

Taxi took the same fire we did.

Batgirl, pissed, puts the CB down.

INT. IKE'S TRUCK

IKE takes a pull from his INHALER. Nothing but open road ahead. He gives her a little more gas. Then...

IKE

Aw hell no...

An IRAQI GIRL(10) sits smack-dab in the middle of the road. Ike SLAMS the brakes with both feet as we go...

WHIZZING THROUGH IKE'S AIR BRAKE SYSTEM

From the COMPRESSOR through the RESERVOIRS, the circuits -- sharp turn at the PROTECTION VALVE -- finally exploding into the BRAKE CHAMBER where we...

Force the PUSH ROD to lock the S-CAM into ROLLERS -- the BRAKE SHOE jams against the BRAKE LINING and...

OUTSIDE IKE'S TRUCK

The tires LOCK UP, squealing and smoking as--

INSIDE IKE'S CAB

The air pressure guage drops to ZERO -- the TPV knob (looks like a STOP SIGN) pops OUT -- Ike used all his air--

IKE

Shit!

Total brake FAILURE. Ike CRANKS the wheel--

OUT ON THE HIGHWAY

Ike's semi goes into a CLASSIC JACKKNIFE--

The trailer swings across both lanes, moving right OVER the GIRL who sits still as stone. And now...

It's like the parting of the RED SEA as the trucks maneuver AROUND the Girl, brakes screeching--

Wind whips the Girl's clothes as trucks WHOOSH past--

THUNK! IKE'S RIG embeds itself in a DUNE--

THUNK! NEIL gets stuck too, and...

Thank God for FRANK who expertly pumps his brakes, downshifts and stops mere INCHES from the Girl's face.

FRANK

(to truck)

Whoa, darlin'.

EXT. STALLED CONVOY - MOMENTS LATER

Two trucks in the sand -- Ike and Neil. The rest are at various angles across the road, like a spilled Erector set.

In front of Frank's rig, the TRUCKERS gawk at the IRAQI GIRL who wears an American rock t-shirt -- "*The Killers*." Despite the brush with death, her face betrays no emotion.

There's a strange OBJECT in front of her. DONALDSON plays it nice and calm, unsure of what he's dealing with...

DONALDSON
(off object)
What do you got there, sweetheart?

FRANK eyes the object -- wires, a piece of a CELL PHONE.

FRANK
It's a bomb.

The truckers take a few steps back.

FRANK
(to Taxi)
Ask her what she's doing here.

Taxi questions her in Arabic. The Girl remains catatonic.

IKE
I think the little babydoll saved
my ass.

MICHELLE
I say we take her out before she
blows us all to hell.

Suddenly the Girl STANDS -- everyone FLINCHES -- but the Girl steps OVER the bomb to the object of her desire -- the MUTT.

GRONER
(to Michelle)
Shit, Montana, I'm glad you're not
my mother.

DONALDSON
Listen up. When that sun drops,
the convoy alert bumps up to red
'til morning. Batman, Batgirl, use
Cleo to pull these rigs out of the
sand. We leave the IED where it
is.

EXT. STALLED CONVOY - DUSK

Frank's trucked is backed away from the IED. The BROTHERS winch rigs out of the sand, straining CLEO.

DONALDSON has a map punched up on his Qualcomm Computer (detaches from cab). NEIL talks on his sat phone.

BEHIND FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK stares down the road, GUN in hand. MICHELLE appears.

MICHELLE

You're thinking what I'm thinking.

(off Girl)

She didn't save us. She stopped us so the others could catch up.

FRANK

Could be.

Michelle pulls her PISTOLS. Joins the watch.

WITH DONALDSON AND NEIL -- Donaldson's sweating, his stomach unsettled.

NEIL

(on his sat phone)

...you have got to be kidding me!

(clicks off)

Army can't spare another escort.

DONALDSON

(off computer)

We've got a clear route back to MSR Tampa ten clicks up. Should be home in time for Leno.

NEIL

(incredulous)

Home? We go on to Cedar 2, bunk in, finish the run tomorrow.

DONALDSON

Two hours in the dark without an escort? I don't think so.

(clutches stomach)

Ugh. Shouldn't have eaten that sandwich.

WITH GRONER AND IKE as they watch Cleo pull Ike's truck out--

GRONER

You lost your brakes? On a flat?

IKE

Girl was right in front of me.

GRONER

I'm smelling the stink of bullshit
on you, Private Ryan. You mail
away to Mexico for your CDL?
(off Ike's look)
You don't even know how to drive?!

IKE

I read a book.

GRONER

You're gonna get us all killed!

Ike looks around, hoping no one heard.

GRONER

Okay, okay. Don't soil your
drawers. I'll keep a lid on it.
(then)
For a hundred bucks a day.

A beat. Ike reaches for his wallet.

BEHIND FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK cocks his gun. MICHELLE sees why...

An ARMORED OPEL and a HARLEY DAVIDSON idle at the top of a
rise fifty yards away -- BANDITS.

WITH DONALDSON AND NEIL -- Neil studies his computer screen.

NEIL

Boom Boom Palace. Uday's old
place. Only an hour up the road.
Thundering Third's based there.

DONALDSON

Border's closer. We're heading
back.

From down the road...

FRANK

(firm)
Don.

Donaldson heads to Frank and Michelle. Neil follows.
Donaldson sees Frank and Michelle's GUNS.

DONALDSON

The hell do you think you're doing
with those?

FRANK
(ignoring - off bandits)
Just pulled up.

DONALDSON
A couple of chicken shit
opportunists. They can't take us
and they know it.

Frank's CB SQUAWKS...

BATMAN (OVER CB)
Unstuck and ready to fuck!

DONALDSON
(to group)
Mount up, kiddos! We're going back
to Kuwait!

NEIL
Oh no we're not. I'm in charge
here.

DONALDSON
(ignoring Neil)
Give me the gun, Frank.

A tense beat. Frank v. Donaldson. Then...

Donaldson's CHEST EXPLODES, a bullet THROWING him back--

Half a second later we hear the SHOT -- came from HARLEY
BANDIT'S smoking AK-47--

BANG! BANG! Frank and Michelle UNLOAD. The bandits squeal
off, disappearing over the rise--

Frank turns to Donaldson who lies dying in front of Frank's
truck. Before Frank can help, Donaldson's ARM slides off his
chest, connecting with...

The IED. BOOM! Donaldson blows into a million pieces--

Frank and Michelle are thrown to the ground--

Neil is blown into the air--

Total chaos -- TRUCKERS rush over to the CRATER where
Donaldson once was. Frank helps Michelle up--

NEIL lies motionless, unnoticed--

BATGIRL
(off crater)
Jesus! I mean...Jesus!
(yelling at road)
Animals! Guy had a wife! Kids!

Frank sees Neil. The truckers surround his body -- eye each other for a brief second, half-glad he might be dead, then...

Neil COUGHS. Alive. Frank helps him up. Neil sees the Donaldson crater. Realizes he can run things now.

NEIL
We're going to Boom Boom Palace.

BATMAN
Are you cracked?! We're dropping
like flies out here!

NEIL
With some luck we'll pick up a new
escort. Batgirl, you've got
bobtail.

PORTERHOUSE
No way, Neil. We're going back.
Like Donaldson said.

BATGIRL
Yeah. You can't make us do shit.

NEIL
You're right. This isn't the
military. You're all free to go
back.
(dead on at Frank)
When you get there, you'll find
your contracts terminated.

The bottom line. All eyes turn to Frank, wondering what his play is.

Frank goes to his trailer and hauls out a crate. Inside: that state-of-the-art BODY ARMOR. Frank puts on a set.

FRANK
(to group)
It's a bitch either way we go.

If the truckers thought Frank was going to save them, they thought wrong. Groner grabs armor. The rest of the truckers take a set.

NEIL
That's coming out of your
paychecks.

But Neil takes armor too.

CUT TO:

NEIL, TAXI and the GIRL by Neil's truck. Taxi says something to the girl in Arabic. She replies.

TAXI
She's scared. Doesn't know where
to go.

NEIL
If you care so much, put her in
your truck.

TAXI
She won't ride with me. I'm Shia.
She says her father would be angry.

NEIL
Then she's not our problem.

Neil gets in his truck. Taxi hesitates. Then walks away.

FRANK, in his cab, sees the girl all alone. He opens his passenger door. An offering. The girl climbs into the cab.

As Frank pulls away, an IRAQI BOY(10) wearing a RED SOX hat pops up from behind a scrap heap. He watches Frank's rig disappear down the road.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Convoy headlights cut through the darkness. TRUCKERS stay alert. BATGIRL, wary, rides bobtail in Cleo.

WITH FRANK AND THE GIRL

FRANK
So which is it? You trying to help
us or kill us?

She doesn't understand.

FRANK
They'll know what to do with you at
the palace. Somewhere someone's
missing you.

WITH NEIL

On his sat phone...

NEIL (ON PHONE)
...we're on schedule. I give you
the keys, you give me the
cash...no, no, no. Dollars, not
dinars - I have enough toilet
paper.

Neil clicks off. As his truck moves down the road we...

CUT TO:

INT. THE BUTCHER'S WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Dozens of BANDITS at work tables take CELL PHONES out of boxes, disassemble them and attach the parts to EXPLOSIVES. This is a factory. They're making ROAD-SIDE BOMBS (IEDs).

We hear violent SCREAMING -- the Butcher, in his office, yelling loud enough to be heard through the door.

INSIDE THE BUTCHER'S OFFICE

The BUTCHER, on the phone, regains his composure.

THE BUTCHER (INTO PHONE)
[Are you absolutely sure?...And you
know the truck?...]
(smoldering)
[No one sleeps until we find it.]

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BUTCHER'S WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

BANDITS flow from the warehouse, rev up ARMORED VEHICLES -- Beemers, Hondas, Vettes, Ducatis, Harleys, pick-up trucks with mounted machine guns. Exhaust billows.

Guns and ammo are dumped in back seats. Like a stampede, the cars flood through the gates, into the night.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The herd of bandit HEADLIGHTS moving down the road. Clumps of headlights BREAK OFF from the group, heading in different directions, scouring the countryside.

CUT TO:

Neil's PIECE OF SHIT RIG. We're...

EXT. GATE - BOOM BOOM PALACE - NIGHT

The convoy is parked outside a gate guarded by IRAQI MILITIA.
NEIL gets out of his cab, surprised to see FRANK.

FRANK
What's in the truck?

NEIL
Body armor. Same as the rest.

FRANK
(probing)
Not an S&B rig.

Neil eyes the unmarked trailer.

NEIL
Didn't have time to stencil it.

Frank follows Neil to the gate. Neighborhood BEGGARS are
gruffly turned away by a TOUGH MILITIAMAN. Neil approaches.

NEIL
You speak English?

No reaction from Tough Militiaman.

NEIL
(pantomiming)
Park trucks. Eat food. Sleep.

FRANK
Should be GIs on this gate. Maybe
the army already handed this place
back to the natives.

Neil hands a COMPANY CARD to Tough Militiaman.

NEIL
My company will pay. *Mucho dinero,*
mi amigo.

FRANK
Didn't know we were in Tijuana.

NEIL
You have a better idea?

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

FRANK pulls a CARTON OF MARLBOROS from a secret stash. The GIRL eyes him. Frank tosses her a Kit Kat from the stash.

EXT. GATES - BOOM BOOM PALACE

TOUGH MILITIAMAN, Marlboro carton in hand, cracks the gate. FRANK walks through. NEIL moves to follow, but Tough Militiaman shuts the gate in his face.

NEIL

Hey!

Militiaman barks in Arabic -- he's only letting Frank in.

FRANK

I'll see who's calling the shots.

EXT. BOOM BOOM PALACE - NIGHT

TOUGH MILITIAMAN walks FRANK to the palace -- bullet-pocked and gauche. We hear ARABIC TECHNO inside.

They mount the steps to massive doors. Frank notices a guy passed out against the wall, his head at a GROTESQUE angle -- could be more than passed out. They walk...

INSIDE THE PALACE

FRANK takes it in. If Liberace owned an oil field he'd build something like this -- massive foyer, endless marble stairs, indoor fountains (dry). Bullet holes scar the whole place.

MILITIAMEN, SHEIKS, EX-PATS and JOURNALISTS hang out, drinking strong coffee, smoking hookahs. A few drink a MILKY LIQUID out of shot glasses. No idea when the party started or when it'll end.

TOUGH MILITIAMAN leads Frank through the party, up a BOMBED-OUT STAIRCASE.

EXT. GATES - BOOM BOOM PALACE - NIGHT

MICHELLE steps onto Taxi's running board, eating sunflower seeds.

MICHELLE

(offering seeds)

Hungry?

TAXI, wary, doesn't move to take them.

MICHELLE

I don't bite.

Taxi takes some seeds. We move OFF the cab, around the front of the truck to see BATMAN and BATGIRL sneaking along either side of Taxi's trailer, up to no good.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - BOOM BOOM PALACE - NIGHT

TOUGH MILITIAMAN leads FRANK into the sprawling room. A YOUNG, HANDSOME SHEIK hangs with his inner circle of GUARDS. Militiaman talks to Sheik. He turns to Frank, curious.

FRANK

My convoy was attacked down the road. We need shelter for the night.

SHEIK

You people lived in this palace for a year. Never did the village right outside your gates get electricity, water. Now I give them these things, and you come asking for favors?

FRANK

We can pay.

SHEIK

Do I look like I need money?

Sheik takes up a KNIFE, casually tosses it up and down.

FRANK

I didn't mean to insult you.

SHEIK

GI's are not welcome here.

FRANK

We're not soldiers.

That knife goes up and down, spinning, menacing. Frank doesn't have much time. Through a SIDE DOOR he spots a hand separating piles of POWDER in a low-lit room.

FRANK

(off side door)

We're just moving a product. Same as you.

Sheik eyes the open door, nods to somebody inside. The door closes slowly.

SHEIK

You meant to insult me that time.

(impressed)

That took balls.

Sheik lets the spinning knife stick into a table.

EXT. GATE - BOOM BOOM PALACE - NIGHT

TAXI in his truck. MICHELLE on the running board sharing sunflower seeds. Not what we expected from her. Then...

Michelle sees BATGIRL crouched by the cab, but she's NOT surprised. Michelle steps OFF the cab--

BATGIRL rushes up, opens Taxi's door -- TAXI scrambles across the cab, but BATMAN opens the other door, DRAGS Taxi out--

Batman pins Taxi's arms behind his back--

TAXI

Let me go!

Batman tightens his grip -- bigger than Taxi. He's in some serious trouble here. Batgirl and Michelle approach--

BATMAN

Search him.

Batgirl searches Taxi's pockets. Finds a WALLET stuffed with papers. Goes through them.

TAXI

Give that back!

The noise draws GRONER, PORTERHOUSE, IKE and NEIL over...

NEIL

What's going on?

BATMAN

He sold us out. We're getting proof.

GRONER

You're mugging him!

IKE

Let him go, Batman.

BATMAN
Stay out of it.

Porterhouse is about to throw his considerable weight at Batman, but Michelle pulls her gun...

MICHELLE
You heard him.

BATGIRL
Here! I knew it!

Batgirl has found a PR photo of SADDAM in Taxi's wallet.

BATGIRL
Guy's a what do you call it...

NEIL
(taking photo)
Baathist.
(then)
What is this, Taxi? You call in
the ambush?

Taxi stammers, eyes going wide, Batman applying pressure...

FRANK
Let him go.

Frank has his gun on Batman. Michelle trains hers on Frank.

FRANK
She might drop me, but not before I
drop you, Batman.

A beat. Batman lets Taxi go.

NEIL
(handing over photo)
He's a loyalist, Frank. See for
yourself.
(to Taxi)
I thought you said you're Shia.

TAXI
(stammering)
I am. I had a business. A good
one. I paid the right people and
they left me alone. Life was not
so bad under Saddam. Not for me.
If I paid the right people.
(then)
I want a chance to be happy.
(MORE)

TAXI (cont'd)
Just like you. My loyalty is to my work.

(off photo)
I keep it for insurance. For when you all leave. In case he comes back...

Frank hands the photo to Taxi.

FRANK
You don't have to explain yourself.

The group stays silent. Michelle stows her gun.

FRANK
We can pull onto the compound. Some sheik's taken over the joint. Thinks he's Mother Theresa, but he's really using the place to run drugs. Lot of itchy trigger fingers. I say we stay in the trucks, get some sleep.

GRONER
They have food in there? I could eat the ass out of a dead rhino.

Rumbles from the group. Stronger than Frank's advice.

INT. BOOM BOOM PALACE - NIGHT

IKE and GRONER carry plates piled with kebabs and flat bread through the SHADY CROWD -- BANG! -- Groner FLINCHES -- Militiamen shooting off rounds outside.

GRONER
We supposed to join the party or duck for cover?

They make it to the GROUP -- MICHELLE, NEIL, BATMAN, BATGIRL and PORTERHOUSE huddled in a corner, trying to be inconspicuous. They attack the food, famished.

IKE
Man, that was some heavy shit out there today. That typical?

BATMAN
No such thing as a typical run.

NEIL
But it was bad, all thing's considered. Wasn't it?

PORTERHOUSE
Worst beating I ever took.

BATGIRL
(spooked)
Did you see Donaldson? There was
nothing left...

GRONER
Piñata city.

BATGIRL
Everything's a friggin' joke to
you.

GRONER
Donaldson was an asshole.

BATMAN
(grabbing Groner)
Shut up, weasel.

GRONER
Get the hell out of my face you
freakin' mook!

NEIL
Hey! Cut that shit out. We don't
want to get kicked out to the road.

MICHELLE
And we're safer in here?

PORTERHOUSE
(stuffing his face)
Ever see moths fly to a porch
light? That's how it is out there.
Mallas sees you coming a hundred
miles away, you never see a goddamn
thing. Til' they're swarming all
over you.

Batman lets Groner go.

GRONER
Relax, man.

Groner sees a MILKY SHOT on a table, drinks. Strong stuff.

GRONER
It's a party.

Groner walks off.

EXT. BOOM BOOM PALACE - NIGHT

FRANK holds the sleeping GIRL in his arms. TAXI speaks to two MILITIAMEN in ARABIC.

TAXI
(to Frank)
They say you can leave her here.

Frank eyes the rough-looking militiamen.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK finishes sealing a LETTER. Writes "Send To Mia Deevers..." on the envelope. In case the worst should happen. Buttons it in his pocket.

He turns to the rear of the cab -- the GIRL sleeps under her blanket. Didn't hand her over. Frank settles in. Shuts his eyes. But the PARTY MUSIC is louder now. He sits up.

INT. BOOM BOOM PALACE

Party has kicked up a notch. The music pounding, hypnotic.

TAXI hangs with IKE and PORTERHOUSE who eye MILKY SHOTS (Taxi does not have a shot)...

TAXI
(off shots)
Arak. Made from dates. They call
it the milk of lions.

Ike and Porterhouse drink, grimace.

In the FOYER -- FRANK takes in the scene -- BANG! BANG! -- MILITIAMEN fire more rounds -- inside.

VOICE
This place is fucked up.

An AMERICAN wearing a full-length ROBE stands next to Frank. Chiseled, sincere, dressed like a Sheik. This is LT. CURRY(30s).

FRANK
You said it.

Curry sips from a shot glass. Savors it.

CURRY
Haven't had a drink in six months.

Curry lifts his robe, revealing DESERT CAMO PANTS.

FRANK

Living dangerously, aren't you.

CURRY

Looking for a hand. Got separated from my unit in an ambush. Truck's shot to shit. Fried the comm-link. To top it all off we ran out of gas.

Curry offers a smoke, Frank declines.

CURRY

Me neither. Use 'em to barter.

Frank cracks a small grin -- guy's a kindred spirit.

CURRY

Name's Curry.

FRANK

Frank.

They shake hands.

LATER

GRONER, drunk, in a POKER GAME with the SHEIK. Huge pot. Groner turns over ACES.

GRONER

Read 'em and weep, Ali Baba.

Groner rakes it in. SHEIK is getting his clock cleaned and Groner isn't making it easy.

ATOP THE HALF-BOMBED STAIRCASE

FRANK, CURRY and NEIL...

FRANK

(to Neil)

His Stryker's stashed out in the desert. He's got two men guarding it. Come sun up they'll be spotted.

CURRY

If we could just get some of that fuel you're hauling we'll be on our way to Baghdad.

NEIL
What's in it for us?

FRANK
He needs gas, we need an escort.

EXT. BOOM BOOM PALACE - LATER

PORTERHOUSE cannonballs into the pool with partiers --
SPLASH! FRANK shakes his head at Porterhouse's antics.

MICHELLE, TAXI, the BROTHERS and IKE sleep on lounge chairs.
Suddenly...

GRONER is carried outside by MILITIA, writhing and kicking,
SHEIK following. NEIL following Sheik. Frank falls in step--

FRANK
(to Sheik)
What's he owe?

SHEIK
Five thousand.

GRONER
I told him I'll have it in a month!

Groner is thrown to the dirt, next to TWO OTHER BODIES...

GRONER
Jesus! What kind of place you
runnin' here? Hand me a genie lamp
and I'll wish you the five lousy
dimes!

FRANK
If you're going to say something,
say something that helps.

Frank leans into Neil, whispers.

NEIL
It's my anniversary present for
God's sake.

Sheik barks the order to shoot Groner.

NEIL
Wait!

Neil takes off his ROLEX, tosses it to Sheik. Sheik takes a
good hard look, gestures to his men to let Groner go.

SHEIK

I want you out. All of you.

EXT. TWO LANE ROAD - NIGHT

The CONVOY moves along in the dark, headlights a beacon.

BATMAN (INTO CB)

You are one stupid asshole, Groner.

GRONER (INTO CB)

They're the assholes. They never heard of a marker?

NEIL (INTO CB)

News isn't all bad, people. We've got ourselves a new escort. Lieutenant Curry of the 182nd Corps Support Group and two of his men.

PORTERHOUSE

(to himself)

If we make it there.

The bleary-eyed TRUCKERS keep their eyes peeled, nervous--

FRANK looks into the night -- ready for anything--

BATGIRL, driving bobtail in Cleo, eyes his mirrors. Nothing behind him, then...

HEADLIGHTS. A beat. Then MORE HEADLIGHTS -- a SWARM of them, coming up quick on the convoy in the left lane...

ZOOM! Fast cars fly by Cleo and the convoy, EMINEM blaring on stereos--

BARE ASSES hang out a couple windows -- TEENS fucking with the convoy, drag racing through the night. Red tail lights disappear in front of the trucks. Everyone sighs relief.

EXT. DRY RIVERBED - DAWN

Sun's just rising, bringing welcome daylight -- and the heat. FRANK and the TRUCKERS surround an ARMY STRYKER camouflaged under brush next to a TRICKLE that used to be a river.

The Stryker is part truck, part tank. Eight big wheels, metal caging to protect against RPGs. Cherry on top is a 40mm grenade launcher.

Curry's MEN stand by, MP5s hanging casually. Short one is PIT BULL. Tall one is DOBERMAN (D-MAN).

BATMAN fuels up the Stryker. IKE and TAXI check her out, impressed. Run fingers through dozens of bullet scars. CURRY, confident but unassuming, briefs.

CURRY

(off Stryker)

19 tons of hell-raising fury.
Makes a Humvee look like the VW I
drove back in Salt Lake.

IKE

(off bullet scars)

Looks like you took a pretty good
pounding.

CURRY

You've all been through a lot too,
so I guess we're a good fit. We're
going to get you to Baghdad. Don't
want the fighting men and women of
the 4th Cav without that battle
armor a minute longer than need be.

Curry smiles at Michelle. She smiles back -- her kind of
guy. GRONER sees the look, gives Batman the "In-Out" sign
with his fingers.

CURRY

Who's my bobtail?

BATGIRL

Over here.

Curry, surprised, assumed Frank was bobtail.

CURRY

(to Batgirl)

Keep one eye ahead, one behind.
You spot anything, and I mean
anything, let me know.

The group disperses. As Frank and Groner pass...

CURRY

(to Frank)

Figured you for my anchor.

FRANK

Not on this run.

GRONER

Frank shouldn't even be here.
Bastards sent him out five short.

(MORE)

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Frank shouldn't even be here.
Bastards sent him out five short.

(MORE)

GRONER (cont'd)

He's got a ride home when we drop
in Baghdad.

CURRY

Must be getting one of the last
flights.

(off Frank's look)

They're closing the airport.
Security review. Gave everyone
twenty-four hours to get out.

News to Frank.

FRANK

When's the last flight?

CURRY

1900 tonight. Wouldn't want you to
miss it.

(biting)

You'd be stuck here with the rest
of us.

Frank has slipped down a couple notches in Curry's book.
Curry turns to the Stryker, flashing an anger we hadn't seen.

CURRY

Hey!

IKE is about to open a hatch on the Stryker.

CURRY

Get away from there.

IKE

Yes, sir.

Curry turns back to Frank who eyes the Stryker.

CURRY

Clock's ticking.

Frank goes to his truck. Curry sets FUEL CANS down for
Batman to fill.

CURRY

When you're through.

NEIL

Can't let you do that.

(off Curry's look)

I give you extra fuel, you and your
men can take off at any time.

CURRY
(beat)
It's your fuel, Mr. Aspinwall..

Pit Bull and D-Man want to knock Neil on his ass. Curry keeps them at bay with a look.

INT. MICHELLE'S TRUCK

CURRY opens the passenger door.

CURRY
Mind if I ride with you?

MICHELLE doesn't mind. He hops in.

EXT. DRY RIVERBED

The convoy pulls out. PORTERHOUSE takes the lead. FRANK jumps in behind him. Off NEIL'S TRUCK we...

CUT TO:

EXT. IRAQI POLICE CHECKPOINT - DAY

A small mudbrick shack on the roadside. Sandbags and a retractable arm block the road.

INSIDE THE SHACK

A SEATED GUARD (his back to us) faces THE BUTCHER and a BANDIT who go through stacks of PAPERWORK.

We come around on SEATED GUARD to find a BULLET WOUND through his forehead. The Butcher's gun is on the table.

THE BUTCHER
(off paperwork)
[Here. This is the truck. It came through with a convoy two hours ago.]

Bandit opens his cell phone -- time to get out the word.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The convoy moves. GRONER plays the Doors' "Roadhouse Blues." D-MAN and PIT BULL roam in the Stryker.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

The GIRL drinks a Coke.

FRANK

I couldn't leave you there. We'll find something.

The Girl finds one of Frank's hats, puts it on -- too big for her head. She laughs. Frank pulls the hat off -- doesn't want to be sucked in.

FRANK

I've got a little one of my own back home. I can't be responsible for you.

OUT ON THE HIGHWAY

BATGIRL looks in Cleo's mirror, sees a GLINT -- it's a CAR, trailing far behind.

BATGIRL (INTO CB)

Hey Lieutenant, I think we got ourselves a tail.

CURRY (INTO CB)

What is it?

INT. MICHELLE'S TRUCK

BATGIRL (OVER CB)

Some kinda foreign job. Been behind us for ten miles.

Curry sees the SPECK in his mirror. Frowns. The STRYKER pulls even. Curry NODS to D-MAN.

EXT. HIGHWAY

The STRYKER drops down the line, past nervous truckers, all the way behind Cleo, D-Man climbing on top--

D-MAN loads the grenade launcher -- takes careful aim on the car five hundred yards back -- FIRES -- the grenade arcs through the air and...

BOOM! The car mushrooms into a FIREBALL--

TRUCKERS see the explosion in mirrors, stoked -- NEIL wipes away sweat.

WITH FRANK AND THE GIRL

FRANK
(off explosion)
I guess it's shoot first, ask
questions later.

INT. MICHELLE'S TRUCK

Curry takes up the computer, looks at alternate routes.

CURRY (INTO CB)
Mr. Aspinwall, I think we should
shake things up a bit here. Take
an alternate route north. Check it
out on your Qualcomm.

INT. NEIL'S TRUCK

NEIL checks out the route.

NEIL (INTO CB)
Keep 'em guessing. Just what I was
thinking.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK studies his computer.

FRANK (INTO CB)
You're taking us well off the main
supply routes, Lieutenant. Not the
best roads.

INT. MICHELLE'S TRUCK

CURRY puts the CB down.

MICHELLE
You going to answer him?

CURRY
He's worried about making his
flight. Let him.

Michelle's cool with that.

EXT. HIGHWAY

The CONVOY exits onto a NEW road.

BEHIND the convoy we find the smoking wreckage of an ARMORED
BMW -- one of the cars from the Butcher's yard.

An INJURED BANDIT lies on the road -- thrown from the vehicle by the grenade. His bloody hand MOVES, pulling a cell phone from a pocket. Injured Bandit opens the cell phone.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - LATER

The convoy is pulled over. GRONER, TAXI and D-MAN toss a football. PORTERHOUSE sits, eating.

BATMAN gasses the Stryker, NEIL, MICHELLE and CURRY watching.

CURRY

We're losing time, Mr. Aspinwall.
How about filling her all the way?

NEIL

We do this my way or we don't do it
at all.

Curry rolls his eyes at Michelle -- Neil's a shithead.

FRANK, away from the group, climbs into NEIL'S CAB. Takes the SAT PHONE out of its cradle. Dials.

INT. RUN-DOWN APARTMENT - ODESSA - NIGHT

The phone rings and rings, answering machine picking up, then...MIA grabs the phone...

MIA

Hello? I'm here...hello?

INT. NEIL'S TRUCK

FRANK on the phone with MIA [INTERCUT]. He rifles through paperwork for some clue about the cargo Neil's carrying.

FRANK

What's this I hear about strange
men coming and going at all hours
of the night?

MIA

Where are you? I called a few
hours ago and they said you went
out on a run.

Guilt tears at him. So does his desire to put her at ease.

FRANK

Local errand, baby love. Nothing to worry about.

Frank finds a small KEY in the glove box, hops...

OUT OF NEIL'S TRUCK

Walks around to the back of the trailer, phone at his ear, careful that Neil doesn't see him...

MIA

You're telling the truth? You're safe?

FRANK

Safe as can be. Just wanted to say I love you.

MIA

You don't sound right.

FRANK

I'm on a satellite phone in the middle of the desert.

Frank puts the key in the PADLOCK -- it WON'T turn. Shit.

MIA

Since when did they start letting you make calls from the road?

FRANK

(beat)

I'm not on the road, honey. I told you.

MIA

Almost caught you.

FRANK

Almost.

A beat.

FRANK

I'll see you soon.

MIA

I love you.

Frank clicks off, POCKETS the sat phone. Then he eyes GREASE oozing from inside Neil's trailer.

A FOOTBALL skitters by on the road. Frank picks up the ball before GRONER reaches it.

GRONER

Frank. What are you doing back here?

FRANK

(off grease on trailer)
Check it out.

GRONER

What is it?

FRANK

It's not body armor.

Frank rubs the grease between his fingers, smells it.

FRANK

What gets a supervisor behind the wheel?

GRONER

You think Neil's got something going on the side?

TAXI

(yelling)
Come on, Frank! Throw it!

Frank throws a BOMB -- the football flies way over Taxi's head and slams NEIL in the back. Ouch. Groner laughs.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - LATER

The convoy moves, the TRUCKERS feeling good. Just might make it. FRANK slides in a little Alice 'n Chains -- "Rooster."

INT. MICHELLE'S TRUCK

CURRY checks out MICHELLE. She eyes him. A beat. Definitely something cooking. They turn away.

INT. PORTERHOUSE'S TRUCK

PORTERHOUSE, the lead man, sees something down the road.

OUT ON THE HIGHWAY

JUNKED PICK-UP TRUCKS and CARS stacked two deep completely block the road. Could be an ambush waiting to happen.

PORTERHOUSE (INTO CB)
Lieutenant, we've got a major
league problem coming up.

Porterhouse begins to SLOW DOWN, the others following suit...

CURRY (INTO CB)
D-Man, Pit Bull, get up there and
check it out.

OUT ON THE HIGHWAY

The STRYKER zooms to the head of the pack -- D-MAN on the
grenade launcher.

As the Stryker approaches the kill zone D-Man fires--

BOOM! BOOM! -- grenades pound the trucks and cars -- flaming
metal splashes into the sand--

The Stryker PUNCHES THROUGH remaining debris, PORTERHOUSE and
the trucks following -- AIR HORNS blast. These army guys
fucking rock.

The Stryker falls back, leaving Porterhouse in the lead--

Porterhouse wears a curious look -- the highway ENDS ahead of
him, stretching into hard-packed DIRT -- the truck rumbles as
it leaves highway. As he reaches for his CB...

Porterhouse's rig EXPLODES from underneath, hurled into the
air like a bucking bronco by MULTIPLE bursts. Lands on fire--

FRANK, shocked, slams his brakes--

The CONVOY screeches to a messy, smoky stop--

FRANK hops out, ready to run to Porterhouse -- CURRY is out
and running at Frank--

CURRY
STOP!

Frank holds up. GRONER and IKE stop next to him --
Porterhouse is right in front of them -- BURNING TO DEATH.

IKE
We gotta get him outta there!

Curry kneels on the hard-packed dirt, uses his hands to
uncover THREE PRONGS protruding from the ground.

CURRY

Pressure prongs. Step on one and the main charge flies up - about one meter - then BOOM.

(off open desert)

It's a minefield.

GRONER

(off Porterhouse)

He's right there, toasting like a freakin' marshmallow! Come on!

Ike holds Groner back. No way Porterhouse is still alive in the burning rig. Everyone is stunned. Frank boils.

FRANK

That's why you don't leave the main road!

CURRY

You don't question my decisions!

MICHELLE

(disgusted - to Frank)

Still looking to catch that plane.

PIT BULL

Shit. We have company.

A half mile down the road TWO ARMORED BMWs shimmer in the sun, lined up across the highway, blocking it. Convoy's fucked either way.

Frank eyes the DEMOLISHED ROADBLOCK back on the road -- busted up pick-ups and cars. Frank turns to Curry, urgent--

FRANK

This kind of mine have a delay element?

CURRY

Yeah. Why?

FRANK

How long?!

CURRY

Once you hit it you have about two and a half seconds before she blows.

EXT. DEMOLISHED ROADBLOCK

FRANK and the TRUCKERS push on a CAR lying on its side -- it comes down on its wheels with a thud.

The car is an AUDI 5000(circa 1984). Taxi does a quick inspection under the hood.

The Stryker is angled across the road, CURRY and D-MAN on top, aiming the grenade launcher at the armored cars, which just sit in the same position, idling, creepy.

FRANK
(off Audi)
Well?

TAXI
Everything's here. We'll see.

TWO MORE CARS join the others down the road.

CURRY
See faster.

CUT TO:

TAXI under the Audi's hood. BATMAN gasses her up. FRANK, in the driver's seat, is ready to hot-wire the car.

TAXI
Now.

Frank connects wires -- nothing. Taxi works quickly.

TAXI
Now.

Frank connects again -- nothing.

BATGIRL
Let me under there.

TAXI
NOW.

Frank connects wires -- VROOM! -- then she sputters out.

TAXI
Could be the fuel line.

Taxi looks under the car. FUEL leaks out -- Taxi hops in back, unscrews a plate that gives a view into the transmission hump. The SEVERED fuel hose leaks.

Down the road -- another CAR and a HARLEY arrive -- the bandit who killed Donaldson. Shit.

With the speed of a Daytona pit crew:

--TAXI duct tapes the Audi's fuel line.

--BATGIRL and IKE attach CHAINS to the Audi's back bumper.

--BATMAN and MICHELLE duct tape BODY ARMOR to the windshields and windows, leaving a small hole to see through.

CUT TO:

The TRUCKERS surround the Audi, FRANK in the driver's seat, sweating to death. He starts her up.

Atop the Stryker -- CURRY and D-MAN keep the launcher aimed at the armored cars -- the cars slowly APPROACH--

Curry FIRES -- the grenade arcs up and BOOM! -- blows in front of the cars--

Cool as Christine, the cars calmly BACK out of range, continue to rev their engines, rearing to pounce--

The Audi SPUTTERS. Taxi looks underneath -- fuel still leaks from the taped line.

TAXI

It needs pressure. Someone has to hold the line.

A ride through a minefield -- no one jumps at the opportunity.

TAXI

(to Neil)

Double or nothing. Eight grand.

Neil looks to the minefield--

NEIL

Your funeral.

Taxi climbs into the back of the Audi, pinches the fuel line together -- no more sputtering.

Down the road -- an armored '67 CHRYSLER CHARGER joins the cars. The driver steps out revealing THE BUTCHER.

Atop the Stryker -- Curry and D-Man eye the Butcher.

CURRY
He found us.

Seems the Butcher isn't after our convoy -- he's after Curry.

CURRY
(to truckers)
BACK TO YOUR RIGS!

The truckers run for it -- Groner leans in Frank's window.

GRONER
Thanks, Frank.

FRANK
If I thought you could do it, it'd
be your ass in this oven.
(then)
Take last position and open your
barn doors. You got me?

GRONER
(panicked)
Last position?! I didn't make it
this far trying to...

Groner trails off, Frank's look telling him to shut up.

GRONER
I got you.

Groner runs off. Frank looks back to TAXI.

FRANK
Hold on tight. We drop below sixty
we're finished.

The Audi takes off, chains spread out behind her like a metal
wedding gown train, scraping asphalt, sparks flying--

Frank speeds down what's left of the highway -- 70mph -- 75 --
85 -- 90 miles an hour -- the highway ends and...

Frank's in the MINEFIELD, tires hit prongs -- CLICK CLICK--

MINES pop into the air -- BOOM! -- detonate behind the Audi--

Shrapnel hits the car, body armor absorbing most of it, Frank
keeping the needle up at ninety -- Taxi somehow manages to
hold the fuel line together--

The CHAINS on the Audi's bumper hit prongs -- mines pop up,
exploding -- rocking the car (the chains make a WIDER path).

BACK WITH THE CONVOY

D-MAN and PIT BULL hop into Frank and Taxi's trucks--

NEIL leads the convoy into the minefield, on the path Frank's clearing -- veer off the narrow path and you're dead--

CURRY heads into the minefield in the Stryker--

GRONER waves Batgirl ahead in CLEO -- in Groner's cab the MUTT'S busy licking his own ass--

GRONER

That's right. Time to kiss our asses goodbye.

Groner brings up the rear, his trailer doors WIDE OPEN, CRATES EXPOSED--

HARLEY BANDIT leads the ARMORED CARS into the minefield behind Groner, the BUTCHER trailing in the Charger--

A long straight line of trucks followed by the line of cars, moving as one through desert -- amazing discipline--

Trucks BUMP and SHUDDER as they cross CRATERS left by mines--

CRATES tumble out of Groner's trailer, leaving PILES of crates and body armor armor on the path--

HARLEY BANDIT weaves between piles--

The two bandit cars behind the Harley hit the piles -- swerve INTO the minefield -- EXPLODE into balls of fire--

AHEAD OF THE CONVOY

FRANK'S a speeding bullet -- CLICK CLICK CLICK -- BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! -- mines pop and explode--

STEAM billows from Frank's hood -- losing speed -- 80 -- 75--

BACK WITH THE CONVOY

The trucks rumble along, TIRES close to hitting prongs -- no room for error--

D-MAN drives Frank's rig -- the GIRL hides under her blanket behind him, staying out of sight--

HARLEY BANDIT and the armored cars inch closer to GRONER--

Groner veers for a crater, hits it -- more crates fall out of Groner's trailer--

AHEAD OF THE CONVOY

FRANK sees HIGHWAY straight ahead, almost there, hits a BUMP--

WHAM! -- TAXI hits the roof, LOSES HOLD of the fuel line -- the engine sputters -- Taxi desperately tries to grab the line and pinch it back together, fuel all over him--

Frank sees the speedometer dropping BELOW 60--

FRANK
(resigned)
Here we go.

KABOOM! -- Frank and Taxi disappear in a burst of flames--

BACK WITH THE CONVOY

Harley Bandit SWERVES around crates, looks back -- the bandit cars make it around the crates -- Harley Bandit looks ahead again -- there's a pile of body armor right in front of him--

The Harley RAMPS OFF the pile, into the sky--

Harley Bandit separates himself from the bike in mid-air, trying to get away, like a moto-cross stunt--

Bandit and bike land hard, sliding across PRONGS -- mines pop up and EXPLODE -- the explosions ROCK the next two bandit cars -- the cars SPIN INTO the minefield--

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! -- CHAIN REACTION -- the BUTCHER and two remaining bandits skid out, blocked by flaming debris--

GRONER flips off the Butcher.

FURTHER AHEAD

The CONVOY makes it back onto HIGHWAY where the AUDI sits in a smoking heap, tires no more than chipped rims.

GRONER opens the driver door -- FRANK sits there, soot-faced, coughing. But okay. IKE pulls him out -- into an uncomfortable bear hug. The BROTHERS clap him on the back.

IKE
Thought you got smoked.

MICHELLE and CURRY watch from a distance.

Batman and Batgirl pull TAXI out, knock fists. All on the same team.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

Everyone back in their rigs, moving, SOMBER. The GIRL hands FRANK water from the stash. He drinks, grateful.

GRONER (INTO CB)
I'm gonna miss those ribs.

IKE (INTO CB)
Somebody should call his wife.
Edna, isn't it?

BATGIRL (INTO CB)
He gave me a letter. In case
anything happened.

A beat.

BATMAN (INTO CB)
Read it to us.

BATGIRL (INTO CB)
No way. It's between him and the
old lady.

BATMAN (INTO CB)
We don't know who's going to make
it out of here. The one who does
has to tell Edna.

IKE (INTO CB)
He ain't wrong. Read the letter.

FRANK (INTO CB)
Leave it alone, Batgirl.

But Batgirl already has the letter open -- it's filled with
BLANK pages.

BATGIRL (INTO CB)
There's nothing here. It's blank.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

A beat. Then FRANK takes up his CB...

FRANK (INTO CB)
Porterhouse's mother sends him
those ribs. Edna...she's just a
girl he made up.
(MORE)

FRANK (INTO CB) (cont'd)
He wanted to feel like he had
something to go home to. Like the
rest of us.

EXT. HIGHWAY

The truckers continue on, missing Porterhouse even more.

CUT TO:

EXT. MINEFIELD - DAY

Two BANDITS pull body armor and crates off the path, clearing the way. The BUTCHER inches the Charger along behind them, impatient and fucking pissed.

CUT TO:

EXT. DUNE HIGHWAY - DAY

The convoy moves. Hard cracked earth has given way to loose sand billowed into high dunes. And the wind is kicking up.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK on the horn...

FRANK (INTO CB)
Hey, Groner...

INT. MICHELLE'S TRUCK

FRANK (OVER CB)
Got an itch needs scratching.

CURRY'S ears prick up.

WITH GRONER

He TURNS KNOBS on his CB, moving to an UNUSED CHANNEL...

GRONER (INTO CB)
Oooh. Our own private channel. I
like a fast dinner - no Arby's,
though - and sex on the first date.

WITH CURRY

He flips through CB channels, getting static, pieces of random conversations as he searches for Frank and Groner.

WITH FRANK - [INTERCUT WITH GRONER]

FRANK

You ever see Curry or his boys call into their CO?

GRONER

No. Why? You smelling something?

FRANK

You're separated from your unit with a busted comm link, first chance you get you contact command.

GRONER

Shit, I don't know. Maybe they used Neil's phone.

FRANK

Then we pick up a tail, Curry gets jumpy. Deviates the whole convoy, gets Porterhouse killed.

GRONER

Think you might be the one who's jumpy, Frank? First Neil's on the shit list, now it's Curry? Make up your mind, man.

WITH CURRY

He continues through channels, finally lands on FRANK...

FRANK (OVER CB)

You got your piece?

WITH GRONER

He pulls down his visor, revealing a PISTOL.

GRONER (INTO CB)

Never leave home without it.

WITH FRANK

FRANK (INTO CB)

Keep it on you.

INT. MICHELLE'S TRUCK

CURRY and MICHELLE share a look -- heard the exchange.

EXT. DUNE HIGHWAY - LATER

Ground and sky are becoming one. GALE FORCE winds slam Ike--

IKE (INTO CB)
I'm gettin' knocked around like
Tyson out here.

GRONER (INTO CB)
Relax, Ryan.

A blast of wind punches Groner's rig.

GRONER
Holy shit!

EXT. DUNE HIGHWAY - SAND STORM

The CONVOY is STOPPED, sand piling against wheels, road covered. Technically it's day, but the SAND saturating the air has made it damn close to NIGHT. The trucks might as well be a million miles apart.

NEIL (INTO CB)
Don't get too comfortable. We've
still got trouble behind us. Soon
as this eases up we head out.

CURRY (INTO CB)
In the meantime, stay in your cabs.
Unless you want your skin
sandblasted off.

INT. GRONER'S TRUCK

GRONER
(to Mutt)
Doesn't mean you can piss in here.

Mutt GROWLS as the door swings open, wind roaring. A FIGURE wrapped from head to toe stands menacingly over Groner.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

CLOSE ON Frank's WATCH: 11am. Flight's in nine hours.

The GIRL scampers behind the seats as Frank's passenger door opens, wind blowing. The BUNDLED FIGURE in the doorway pulls down his bandana revealing PIT BULL.

PIT BULL
Surrender your firearms and LT
forgets about any infractions.

FRANK

Not armed.

Pit Bull reaches right into the SLIT cut in Frank's seat, pulls out the GUN.

FRANK

(under his breath)

Bitch.

Michelle sold him out. Pit Bull leaves. We notice...

The Girl is no longer in back. The escape hatch is OPEN.

INT. STRYKER

D-MAN and PIT BULL hand Frank and Groner's pistols to CURRY.

PIT BULL

I say we take the fuel we need and ditch these fools.

CURRY

We take off, they'll call it in.
We'll have the whole army on our ass.

D-MAN

(off gun)

So we make sure they don't call it in.

Curry thinks long and hard about that.

EXT. DUNE HIGHWAY - LATER

We can barely make out the rigs in the blistering sandstorm.

INT. CLEO

The BROTHERS wait out the storm together, telling a road tale on the CB. [INTERCUT WITH TRUCKERS]

BATMAN

...so me and Batgirl are pulling a flatrack into Shakytown when this Carrera pulls up, hottest piece of trim I've ever seen riding shotgun. Her fat slob of a husband's driving, but still she's giving me the eye...

BATGIRL

Both of us.

BATMAN

She couldn't see you.

BATGIRL

She knew I was there!

WITH MICHELLE

Listening to the CB banter...

GRONER (OVER CB)

Get on with it.

Michelle smiles. A burst of wind, and CURRY enters the cab.

MICHELLE

I was starting to miss you.

CURRY

Me too.

She inches closer to him. He slides closer too, stops, pulls his PISTOL out of his belt, puts it on the dash. Don't know if he wants to fuck her or kill her. He TURNS OFF the CB.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

FRANK on Neil's SAT PHONE, struggling to get a connection...

FRANK

Come on...

Finally...it RINGS.

INT. DISPATCH CENTER - S&B HQ - DAY

A DISPATCHER answers the PHONE...

DISPATCHER

Hello...hello?...

FRANK (FILTERED)

...hey...Frank...

DISPATCHER

Jesus, that you Frank? Your GPS is out, we were starting to fear the worst.

FRANK (FILTERED)
 Sandstorm...don't know how long I
 can...favor...anything you can find
 on Lieutenant Curry, 182nd Corps
 ...copy?... that's Curry...

DISPATCHER
 I copy. Hold the line.

WITH FRANK

He waits, the BROTHERS' banter still going over the CB...

BATMAN (OVER CB)
 So this slice gives me the sign to
 pull off at the next stop. Which I
 do.

BATGIRL (OVER CB)
We do.

BATMAN (OVER CB)
 You think they think you got out?!

Frank flinches when the door OPENS -- the GIRL, bundled in
 her blanket. She hands Frank his GUN back. Good girl.

WITH THE BROTHERS

Telling their tale...

BATMAN (INTO CB)
 Next thing I know, this chick's
 facing the wall, hand blower
 blowing right in her face, me
 behind her, giving her the bat
 while Batgirl's outside asking the
 ball and chain to show him the flat
 six he's got in that fine piece of
 German engineering...

OUT THE WINDOW...a FIGURE dashes past in a blur. Creepy.
 The Brothers don't notice.

WITH FRANK

PHONE at his ear, impatient. Then...DISPATCHER'S VOICE on
 the other end -- barely intelligible...

DISPATCHER (FILTERED)
 ...urry. A few days ago. His unit
 in Al Qadisiyah pro...

FRANK
Say again.

DISPATCHER (FILTERED)
KIA...

FRANK
Who was KIA?

DISPATCHER (FILTERED)
...Curry...dead...

The line goes to complete STATIC.

BATMAN (OVER CB)
So I'm just about to unload a fresh
batch of baby batter when the door
flies open. And guess who it is...

BATGIRL (OVER CB)
(freaked)
What the hell was that?!

The CB goes silent.

GRONER (OVER CB)
You're killing me, who was it?
Batgirl or the ball and chain?

Frank takes up the CB, worried...

FRANK (INTO CB)
Batman?...Batman, come back...
Batgirl?

STATIC in reply -- sounds like the storm -- then SILENCE.

FRANK (INTO CB)
I'm going out there.

Frank bundles up, covered except for an EYESLIT exposing his
shades. He grabs his gun, steps...

INTO THE SANDSTORM

Gets rocked by wind. Can only see a few feet ahead. Mars
would be more hospitable--

IKE, bundled, jumps down into the storm--

TAXI, covered, gets out of his cab--

GRONER opens his door, but when the wind and sand hit him, he closes it. Stays in the cab.

FRANK, TAXI and IKE meet in front of CLEO. Frank gestures for Taxi and Ike to take the passenger side--

TAXI and IKE approach the passenger door, wary -- door's cracked an inch--

FRANK sees the driver door is cracked too. He climbs onto Cleo's running board -- like mounting Everest in this wind--

IKE reaches for the passenger door handle -- TAXI, close, watches as Ike pulls open the door and...

BATMAN falls out of the truck, landing on Taxi -- Taxi writhes on the ground under Batman--

Ike pulls Batman off. Steps back startled when he sees--

Batman is DEAD, throat CUT from ear to ear--

FRANK, on the driver's side, pulls open the door revealing...

NOTHING. Seat's empty. Frank hops down. Suddenly...

Frank HITS THE SAND FACE FIRST -- squirms onto his back, defensive and...nothing's there. What the fuck?

Frank spots a LUMP -- must have tripped over it -- he crawls to it. Nearly jumps out of his skin--

It's BATGIRL -- throat slashed -- sand blasting away flesh.

INT. CLEO

FRANK climbs in, TAXI and IKE already inside.

TAXI

They were murdered.

IKE

What the hell's going on here, man?

FRANK

Curry's an imposter. The real Lieutenant Curry is dead.

IKE

That's crazy! Playing soldier?
For what?

FRANK

We're about to find out.

(into CB)

Lock your doors, people. Don't open them for anybody.

WITH NEIL

Scared out of his mind. He locks the doors, peeks outside -- THREE FIGURES pass by his truck like shadows.

NEIL (INTO CB)

Oh God, Frank. There's three of them!

EXT. SANDSTORM

FRANK leads TAXI and IKE through the blinding maelstrom, the trucks looming shadows. They make it in sight of...

THE STRYKER

WHAM! Frank's tackled by a WRAPPED MAN. Frank drops his gun--

TAXI is blind-sided by WRAPPED MAN 2 -- IKE takes a blow to the head from WRAPPED MAN 3--

FRANK and WRAPPED MAN roll, Frank ending on top, hands around the man's throat, squeezing--

FRANK

I called you in! I know you're not soldiers!

IKE slams WRAPPED MAN 3 against the Stryker -- BAM! -- and that's when something strange happens...

...the cab doors open, PIT BULL and D-MAN rushing out -- Frank thought they were fighting Curry and his men--

FRANK pulls away Wrapped Man's face cover revealing the BUTCHER. He bucks, sending Frank flying, climbs on top of Frank, puts a knife to his throat--

WRAPPED MAN 3 pulls a PIECE. IKE deflects the gun -- BANG! -- PIT BULL, hit by the bullet, falls to the ground, dead--

WRAPPED MAN 2 beats Taxi senseless, pulls out his gun -- D-MAN tackles Wrapped Man 2. They wrestle around, rolling over Wrapped Man' 2's GUN--

WRAPPED MAN 3 bashes IKE'S head against the Stryker, then jumps up on top of the vehicle--

FRANK rolls, taking the BUTCHER'S knife. Gets on top, forcing the blade toward the Butcher's chest--

THE BUTCHER slides Frank's SLEEVE up, exposing Frank's arm. Sand TEARS into flesh. Frank screams--

INT. GRONER'S TRUCK

The MUTT stares Groner down.

GRONER

What?

Mutt whines.

GRONER

You go out there if that's what you want.

OUT IN THE STORM

FRANK and THE BUTCHER -- the knife almost piercing the Butcher's skin -- sand tearing Frank's flesh, stalemate--

WRAPPED MAN 3 works a LOCKED HATCH on top of the Stryker -- WHAM! -- he's knocked on his ass by IKE -- they roll OFF the Stryker -- Ike's weight BREAKS Wrapped Man 3's neck--

D-MAN and WRAPPED MAN 2 wrestle for Wrapped Man 2's GUN--

FRANK is forced to drop the knife and cover his shredded arm. The BUTCHER decks him -- Frank goes sprawling into the sand--

The BUTCHER scrambles up the Stryker, works the LOCKED HATCH--

FRANK finds his pistol, FIRES at the Butcher--

The Butcher jumps off the Stryker, disappears into the swirling storm--

WRAPPED MAN 2 points his gun at D-MAN. In a blinding move, D-Man takes the gun and blows Wrapped Man 2's brains out--

Frank trains his gun on D-Man--

FRANK

Drop it!

D-Man hesitates, then drops the gun. Frank grabs it.

FRANK

Hands up!

D-Man obeys. Ike helps Taxi up. They gather round Frank.

FRANK
(off Stryker)
They were after something inside
the truck!
(to D-Man)
Well?! What are you hiding?!

D-Man doesn't answer.

INT. MICHELLE'S TRUCK

MICHELLE and CURRY, sitting close.

CURRY
...the heat's different in Cuba.
More bearable. Probably the breeze
coming in off the Caribbean.
(then)
I didn't want to leave, but some
folks didn't like the way we were
running things down there.

Curry laughs.

MICHELLE
What?

CURRY
I've told you my whole life story
and you've barely said a word.

MICHELLE
(coy)
You might have to use some of those
interrogation techniques of yours.

Curry takes her hand in his. Pretty. Slender.

CURRY
It's not about what you threaten to
do. It's about what the subject
thinks you're willing to do.

Curry bends Michelle's wrist expertly. A sharp pain shoots
up her arm -- seems to exhilarate her.

CURRY
If you think this is as far as I'll
go, you'll clam up.
(MORE)

CURRY (cont'd)
But if you think I'll break
it...well, you'll do just about
anything I want you to do.

The implication hangs between them -- both ready to take the
next step. Suddenly...

The driver door opens, FRANK climbing in, GUN pointed at
Curry. Curry drops Michelle's hand--

FRANK
What's in the truck?

CURRY
Put down the gun, Frank.

MICHELLE
What are you doing, Frank?!

FRANK
He's not who he says he is.
Lieutenant Curry was killed in
action.

MICHELLE
(to Curry)
Is that true?

CURRY
Whatever Frank says is true. He
has the gun, he has the power.

FRANK
I want answers.

CURRY
Of course.
(to Michelle)
Just do as he says. We'll make it
through this.

FRANK
Don't try to twist this.

CURRY
You pull that trigger, there's no
turning back.

Frank wavers. May have had Michelle, but Curry's changing
that...

MICHELLE
Frank. Be reasonable.

FRANK

Be reasonable? Five people are dead outside and you're in here steaming up the windows.

CURRY

You're not a killer, Frank. You're just a little washed up. A little tired. Being tired will make you do things you don't want to do.

(then)

Don't blow this one, Quarterback.

Quarterback? Frank looks accusingly at Michelle--

The opening Curry needs. His hand whips at the gun, so fast you can't even see it--

CLUNK -- the gun hits the floor of the cab -- Curry JABS Frank -- Frank's nose explodes, blood in his face--

Curry scrambles for the gun underneath the floor pedals--

Frank puts a BOOT against Curry's wrist -- Curry grabs Frank's neck, squeezes -- they're immobilized--

Michelle grabs the gun -- Curry lets go of Frank's neck--

CURRY

(off gun)

Give it here!

Michelle is unsure, giving Frank a split second to GRAB THE GUN BACK--

BANG! Frank fires right past Curry's ear, shattering the window, wind and sand blowing in--

Curry backs off. If Frank wasn't ready to kill before, he is now. And Curry knows it.

FRANK

There are some hard core dudes after you, Lieutenant. So I'm asking for the last time. Who are you?

A beat.

CURRY

An independent contractor, Frank. Same as you.

EXT. DUNE HIGHWAY - POST-SANDSTORM

The TRUCKERS surround the Stryker, GUNS in hand -- they've taken control of Curry's weapons. It's HOT -- everyone sweating. CURRY climbs onto the Stryker, moves to a hatch.

CURRY

Me and my boys work freelance. We run private security details for oil execs, politicians...

GRONER

Don't try turning a pig into the prom queen. You're mercenaries.

CURRY

(ignoring)

We came across the Stryker on the road. It had been ambushed. Lieutenant Curry and his men were already dead so we buried them.

FRANK

Convenient.

CURRY

We took the Stryker for protection.

NEIL

Protection from who?

Curry opens the hatch. A LARGE BUNDLE is pushed out by D-MAN. Curry kicks the bundle OFF the Stryker -- it SQUIRMS VIOLENTLY. The truckers jump. Curry unwraps the bundle...

CURRY

This bastard has some devoted fans. Figured they'd want him back.

The sheets come off revealing a heavy-set BEARDED MAN. Hands tied, beat-up, gagged. Cold, dead eyes. Looks familiar. Frank knows exactly who this motherfucker is.

FRANK

Abdel Mallas.

It is Mallas, from the WANTED POSTER -- still sporting a sneer through the gag (the BUTCHER is his 2nd in command). The truckers are incredulous.

GRONER

Holy shit.

TAXI
(spitting at Mallas)
Yel'an koss omak!

CURRY
Caught a tip he got flushed out in
a raid. Found him in a well.

Something changes in Frank -- repressed rage surfacing. He
steps in close -- raises his gun to Mallas' forehead, presses
the barrel into skin--

One look in Frank's eyes and Mallas knows he'll do it--

NEIL
Whoa whoa whoa...what are you
doing?

FRANK
Gets real simple from here on out.

NEIL
If we hand him over in Baghdad
alive, we get ten million dollars.

Curry curses.

FRANK
He's killed friends of mine. I'm
not going to profit on their backs.

NEIL
Eight way split. Somebody should
get the money.

FRANK
Not a good enough reason.

Frank takes the hammer back -- Mallas flinches like a caught
animal, sweat pouring off him, dropping into dust--

GRONER
It's a lot of scratch, Frank.

Unfucking believable...

FRANK
You're a month off your bonus. One
month from getting your life back.

GRONER
I've gotta roll the dice, man.

IKE
Come on, Frank. Take it easy.

MICHELLE
It's not your call.

Tide's turning...

FRANK
What happened to payback?

MICHELLE
Ten million bucks is a lot of
payback.

Neil, emboldened, raises his gun at Frank.

NEIL
You had your chance to lead this
circus another way.

Frank can see Neil's serious -- not such a pussy when money's
on the line -- but Frank could care less at this point...

...he turns back to Mallas -- fuck it, take him out. Frank's
finger dances on the trigger and...

Frank lowers the gun.

FRANK
Make it to the end of a year here
and you know one thing. Money's
not going to do you any good if
you're not around to spend it.

A beat.

FRANK
Who's coming with me?

The truckers avoid Frank's eyes -- they're not budging.
Frank walks away, disgusted.

GRONER
What's it come to seven ways?

EXT. DUNE HIGHWAY - LATER

Three crude markers mark GRAVES where Batman, Batgirl and Pit
Bull are buried. The rigs are dug out, ready to go. CURRY,
D-MAN and the TRUCKERS (minus Frank) surround the Stryker.

NEIL

Private Ryan, you take the fueler.
I want one of my own sitting on the
gas.

(to Curry)

You're in Ryan's rig.

CURRY

I'm riding with Mallas.

NEIL

Right. And you ditch us first
chance you get. Pull a load or the
deal's off.

FRANK and the GIRL pass by. Frank lifts her up into CLEO.

GRONER

(to himself)

Cleo? You gotta be shitting me.

Neil follows Frank around to Cleo's driver side.

NEIL

Just what in the hell do you think
you're doing?

FRANK

Cleo's the fastest.

NEIL

You have a drop to make.

FRANK

I'm getting as far ahead of you as
I can.

NEIL

I'll make sure you go home as broke
as when you got here.

FRANK

No you won't.

Neil is stunned silent. Frank climbs up into Cleo.

FRANK

You'll keep your mouth shut. Or I
tell the guys upstairs what you're
hauling in that trailer of yours.

Neil eyes his truck. Frank has him by the balls.

NEIL

All right. I'll sign off on your bonus.

FRANK

You won't do that either. You'll be dead.

Neil loses some color at that.

INT. CLEO

Frank puts CROW FEATHER back on his faded dashboard spot -- puts the key in the ignition.

FRANK

(to Cleo)

Easy now. Just one more run.

Frank turns the key. Cleo rumbles angrily to life.

FRANK

I don't like it any better than you.

Frank puts Cleo in gear, rolls out. The GIRL gives him a wary glance.

EXT. DUNE HIGHWAY

CLEO breaks away from the pack as the CONVOY pulls out, NEIL leading, MICHELLE driving last position.

EXT. MSR TAMPA - LATER

FRANK on the open road, making good time in Cleo.

INT. CLEO

Loud in the cab, wind blowing through broken windows. The GIRL is buckled up, hair blowing. FRANK upshifts.

CUT TO:

EXT. MSR TAMPA - MILES BACK

The CONVOY rumbles along. MICHELLE spots a DUST CLOUD behind them on the horizon.

MILES DOWN THE ROAD

We find ARMORED CARS -- a gathering army. THE BUTCHER joins the group in his Charger.

CUT TO:

INT. CLEO

FRANK passes a SIGN: "BAGHDAD: 112km."

Out the window Frank sees the burned-out CARCASS of a rig -- cab scorched black, trailer walls ripped open. We can still read "S&B" on the side.

A VULTURE lands, joining others on the hood of the burned-out S&B truck, fighting over something inside the cab. Frank can't take his eyes off it. He grabs the CB.

FRANK (INTO CB)

You still out there, Frenchie?

A beat. Then a familiar British voice...

FRENCHIE (OVER CB)

Frankie, baby, you better buckle up. Alley's hot.

FRANK (INTO CB)

How hot?

FRENCHIE (OVER CB)

Lost two lorries. Got the drivers right here with me, stinking up my cab. But everyone's coming in safe.

(then)

Good luck, Frank.

Frenchie's words eat at Frank -- left his people behind and it's a hard road ahead. Frank meets eyes with CROW FEATHER who's look seems to scold.

CUT TO:

EXT. MSR TAMPA - MILES BACK

The CONVOY chugs along, the TRUCKERS tense.

Behind them, the Butcher's army APPEARS. Thirty armored cars. A dozen crotch rockets.

MICHELLE loads pistols as she drives--

The MUTT nudges a box of ammo to GRONER--

IKE takes a hit off his inhaler--

CUT TO:

EXT. MSR TAMPA - MILES AHEAD

CLEO is back on the road, cruising -- FRANK determined. The GIRL wears Frank's kevlar vest like a blanket, and his HELMET -- way too big.

CUT TO:

EXT. MSR TAMPA - MILES BACK

The BUTCHER and his BANDITS encroach on the convoy--

MOTORCYCLES break away -- Uzis out -- the first assault -- CH-CH-CH! -- they spray Michelle's trailer--

Michelle yanks her wheel -- the trailer jerks hard, RAMMING the bikers off the road--

The maneuver BENDS Michelle's KINGPIN -- her trailer starts to BOUNCE AROUND, wanting to come loose--

The whole bandit army puts pedals to metal -- full on attack -- Michelle sees it in her mirror--

MICHELLE (INTO CB)

This is gonna be bad.

Nothing the truckers can do now except pray--

NEIL, leading the CONVOY, sees a SPECK on the road ahead, barrelling down the middle of the highway. Neil frowns as the speck grows LARGER...

NEIL

What in the hell is this?

It's CLEO. Coming head-on at the convoy--

FRANK (INTO CB)

Clear out or you're getting hit.

SERIES OF SHOTS: GRONER relieved -- MICHELLE -- Even CURRY.

NEIL breaks right, the rest of the trucks breaking left and right behind him, OPENING A PATH--

CLEO flies past, a blur -- the trucks whoosh by her, inches separating them from collision--

An ARMED PICK-UP edges up on Michelle's bouncing trailer, smelling blood, but Michelle suddenly breaks LEFT revealing--

CLEO -- 33,000 pounds of steel hurtling at the bandit army -- SMASH! -- Cleo rams through the pick-up -- SMASH! -- two more cars are toast--

Cleo's a wedge splitting a board -- motorcycles and drivers pancake against her grill like flies on a windshield -- Bandits swerve off the road--

SMASH! -- Cleo CLIPS the BUTCHER -- his Charger whips around three times--

Frank hits the brakes, spins into a 180 using DONALDSON'S KNOB, his free hand a safety bar across the GIRL'S chest -- she wants to do it again--

Frank puts Cleo in gear, heads after the convoy--

The bandit army is in disarray -- armored cars are stuck in sand, trying to get free. Won't take them long--

The BUTCHER burns rubber, chasing Frank--

Cleo comes up behind MICHELLE and her wounded rig, trailer bouncing around -- Frank is officially driving BOBTAIL--

The BUTCHER and BANDITS catch up -- Frank ZIG-ZAGS Cleo, keeping the bandits BEHIND THE CONVOY--

FRANK (INTO CB)
You have to lose that trailer,
Montana. You read?

WITH MICHELLE

Bouncing around in her cab--

MICHELLE (INTO CB)
I read you, Frank.

FRANK (OVER CB)
Hit those brakes, then punch it.

Michelle SLAMS the brakes with both feet -- WHAM! -- the loose trailer rams the cab -- Michelle punches the gas and...

...Michelle's kingpin SNAPS, SEPARATING the trailer from the cab -- the LOOSE TRAILER hurtles along asphalt--

FRANK whips Cleo AROUND the massive trailer just before...

The trailer SPINS and HITS two bandit cars like an enormous baseball bat connecting with a change-up--

The cars fly off the road, the rest of the cars SWERVING, brakes squealing--

The BUTCHER rips through the trailer, comes out the other side, runs off road in a cloud of sand and busted crates--

Frank, Michelle and the convoy gain distance on the bandits.

FRANK (INTO CB)
Can't hold them off forever.
We've got to make a stand.

GRONER (INTO CB)
Hell of a time to break the only rule, Frank.

FRANK (INTO CB)
We'll have a shot. Neil's going to see to that.

NEIL (INTO CB)
I don't know what you're talking about, Frank.... Frank?

Frank just shakes his head, punches Cleo AHEAD of the convoy--

FRANK (INTO CB)
Follow me.

Frank cranks his wheel, off-roading it -- NEIL follows -- then IKE -- CURRY -- GRONER -- the STRYKER -- MICHELLE--

The truckers drive in a HUGE CIRCLE on hard-packed dirt, dust enveloping everything, and as they rumble to a stop...

FRANK (INTO CB)
No air between pigs!

The truckers BUMP each other, completing an UNBROKEN CIRCLE of big rigs -- a modern day wagon train -- the INSIDE offers protection -- a wall of trucks.

The truckers jump out of cabs, into the protective circle -- FRANK runs for Neil's truck, grabs the padlock on the trailer. NEIL grabs Frank...

NEIL

Don't touch that! So help me,
Frank, I'll fire your ass so quick
your-

Frank shoots off the padlock, opens the trailer revealing
crates of AK-47s and tons of AMMO -- a weapons cache --
Neil's little secret.

GRONER

Holy Toledo, Neil! Didn't think
you had it in you.

Frank pulls out crates, Curry passes out guns.

FRANK

Probably armed these assholes
coming at us.

NEIL

No! This was my first deal.
Salary wasn't cutting it - you
understand - I've got a steep
mortgage - two kids in private
school...

FRANK

(tosses Neil a gun)
Want to see them again?

OUT ON THE HIGHWAY

The BUTCHER spots the circle of trucks on the desert floor --
he drives off road, leading the charge at the trucks, an
attacking Apache war party.

INSIDE THE CIRCLE

The TRUCKERS, oozing sweat in Kevlar, lie on their bellies
behind tires for protection, rifles pointed outside the
circle. Crates of guns lie near the truckers -- easy access.

FRANK slides into another set of armor -- lies down with his
rifle -- MICHELLE lies next to him -- he meets her gaze --
trust there, for once--

Atop the STRYKER -- Curry fires GRENADES--

WITH THE BUTCHER

He sees GRENADES arcing, dropping right for him. He SWERVES
-- BOOM! -- two motorcycles are blown sky high by the blast,
the cars break around the crater...

INSIDE THE CIRCLE

The truckers unload, a metal cacophony of machine gun fire--

OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE

Motorcycle drivers fly off bikes -- car engines explode--

BANDITS return fire, peppering trucks--

IN THE BELLY OF THE STRYKER

Dark. MALLAS stays down, bullets denting METAL around him--

INSIDE THE CIRCLE

Truckers throw down empty weapons, take up new ones--

Trailers are torn apart by bandit fire, tires blown--

CLEO loses her windshield -- the GIRL, inside, hunkers under kevlar, MUTT barking out the window -- her protector--

ATOP THE STRYKER

CURRY eyes the truckers -- they're all firing away, distracted -- Curry hops off the Stryker, climbs in the driver's seat--

INSIDE THE STRYKER

CURRY fires her up -- ready to roll out with the prize--

INSIDE THE CIRCLE

MICHELLE sees CURRY in the Stryker...

MICHELLE

(to Frank)

He's taking Mallas!

FRANK

No he's not.

INSIDE THE STRYKER

CURRY turns around -- MALLAS IS GONE -- the belly of the Stryker is EMPTY.

CURRY

You piece of shit!

Enraged, Curry climbs up and out a hatch--

ATOP THE STRYKER

Curry takes aim with his pistol--

CURRY

Where is he, Frank?!

The BUTCHER sees an easy target: Curry exposed on the Stryker
-- BANG! -- Curry drops off the Stryker.

OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE

A BANDIT fires an RPG at NEIL'S TRUCK--

INSIDE THE CIRCLE

FRANK sees the RPG -- IKE and GRONER are sitting ducks...

FRANK

MOVE!

Ike grabs Groner, tackles him to the ground as Neil's truck goes up in a GIGANTIC explosion, shrapnel flying--

The circle is BREACHED -- clear path for the bandits--

FRANK, NEIL, TAXI, D-MAN and MICHELLE take up positions by the opening where Neil's truck was--

MUTT jumps out of Cleo, runs to Groner who lies unconscious, licks him. Groner opens his eyes.

GRONER

All right, all right. Get off me.

Groner sits up. IKE'S lying next to him, a grin on his face.

GRONER

Don't think this changes anything.
You still owe me today's hundo.

Ike's bleeding -- took shrapnel. Groner freaks -- starts chest compressions--

GRONER

Stay with me! Stay with me, Ryan!

Ike opens his eyes -- grunting through the compressions...

IKE

All right. Get off me.

GRONER
 You're okay, man! You're okay!
 Thank you, God!

Ike sits up -- CH-CH-CH! -- gunfire -- Ike SLUMPS. Dead.

GRONER
 No...no, man...NO!

Ike is gone. Bullets hit dirt near Groner. MUTT tries to pull him to safety. Groner resists, then moves, anguished--

Frank and the truckers, at the circle opening, aim their guns. They know the end is near as--

The armored cars come at the breached circle full force--

The truckers fire, a last stand...3...2...1...

BLAM! Two armored cars are BLOWN SIDEWAYS into balls of fire
-- no fucking clue why--

BLAM! -- another car goes up in flames -- BLAM! BLAM! -- motorcycle drivers fly into the sky for no clear reason...

The cars BREAK AROUND the trucks, in a new direction, AWAY from Frank and the truckers--

MICHELLE
 What's going on out there?

Frank eases out to get a look, sees a line of BANDITS on a ridge, firing RPGs at the Butcher's army...

FRANK
 Ten million dollars in the desert.
 Word must have gotten around.

The truckers watch as the COMPETING BANDIT FACTION races across the desert in armored cars, engaging the Butcher's men, cutting them to pieces--

The BUTCHER, livid, stays focused on getting Mallas back. He drives right at the opening in the circle--

FRANK sees the Butcher coming, raises his rifle--

The Butcher sees Frank, his nemesis -- the Butcher FIRES--

Bullets WHIZ by Frank -- THUD -- a bullet throws him back, but he stays standing, kevlar protecting him--

Frank takes careful aim and BANG! -- one shot--

The Butcher slumps over the wheel -- still coming at the circle -- Frank and the truckers DIVE out of the way--

In a sickening crunch of metal the Charger wedges itself UNDER a trailer, the top half of the car cut off -- the BUTCHER severed inside. Dead.

OUT ON THE DESERT FLOOR

The NEW BANDITS leave the Butcher's army in heaps of burning, smoking metal. It's all over.

WITH FRANK

Grabbing another gun...

FRANK

They'll come for him.

Sure enough, the NEW BANDIT CARS approach--

The TRUCKERS are ready to engage, like Custer near the bitter end and all of a sudden...

...the Bandits STOP at a safe distance. Coming no closer...

GRONER

(yelling)

Well come on you freakin' armadilloes! Get it over with!

A long, gut-wrenching beat. Then--

THE GIRL appears at Frank's side--

INSIDE A BANDIT CAR -- the IRAQI BOY with the RED SOX CAP, riding in the back seat, smiles and points at the Girl--

The Girl grabs Frank's hand, squeezes it, then runs across the desert floor--

A MAN gets out of a car -- catches the Girl in his arms -- raises her up high -- the Girl's FATHER--

MICHELLE

They came for the girl. She...

TAXI

She saved our asses.

The Girl's FATHER nods thanks to Frank -- Frank nods back. Father puts the Girl in his car and the group takes off. Frank watches her go.

MOMENTS LATER

FRANK opens Groner's trailer -- MALLAS lies there, tied up, sweating (Frank hid him here). Frank pulls Mallas out, marches him through the circle--

D-MAN checks CURRY'S pulse, nods "no" to FRANK.

Frank looks at the trucks -- Stryker's tires are FLAT -- the other rigs blown to shit -- only ONE is still functional -- CLEO. Frank looks at his watch. One hour 'til takeoff.

EXT. CLEO - DAY

Frank prods MALLAS into Cleo's passenger side. MUTT jumps in with Mallas. Frank walks to the REAR of the cab where...

MICHELLE, GRONER, TAXI, NEIL and D-MAN climb aboard Cleo's tandem axle wheelbase -- like riding a ROAD BARGE -- not much room, but AIR SUPPLY LINES (red plastic cords) dangle from the back of the cab -- something to hold onto.

GRONER

(off Cleo)

She got Batman and Batgirl. Now we're giving her a chance to kill us all.

(to Frank)

Try not to piss her off.

CUT TO:

SMOKE billows from Cleo's exhaust pipes. FRANK puts her in gear, drives onto the highway. The TRUCKERS, exposed on the back, hold on. One bad bump and they're toast.

INT. CLEO

FRANK and MALLAS. Mallas still seems to sneer through his gag. Frank rips it off.

FRANK

You have something to say, say it.

Mallas won't talk.

FRANK

Nothing. That's because you fight for nothing. You're a parasite.

MALLAS

And what are you?

FRANK
I make an honest living.

MALLAS
Out of the ruins of my country.

FRANK
You slipped across the border from
Kuwait. If you're Iraqi then so am
I.

Mallas can't argue that.

MALLAS
You changed your mind. I guess ten
million is too much to refuse.

FRANK
I didn't come back for you.

CUT TO:

EXT. STRYKER - DAY

We move along the FLATTENED TIRES of the assault vehicle when suddenly...the tires start to INFLATE -- all of them at once, a beast coming to life. At the steering wheel we find...

CURRY. Alive. Using the Stryker's central tire inflation system. He cranks the key -- VROOM!

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DUSK

Sun starts to go down. The TRUCKERS hold on tight to CLEO--

INSIDE THE CAB

FRANK and MALLAS. They pass a ROAD SIGN covered in RED Arabic graffiti. A SUBTITLE translates the graffiti: BLOOD ALLEY.

MALLAS
(nervous)
You should take another road.

FRANK
There's no other road in. But you
know that. It's your favorite
place to hit us.
(then)
Enjoy the ride.

Mallas gulps.

EXT. BLOOD ALLEY - DUSK

The road is lined with BOMBED-OUT rigs, Hummers, cars and pick-ups -- blackened doors swing in the breeze -- an AUTO GRAVEYARD stretching for miles.

CRATERS pock-mark the road, left by IEDs -- TRASH abounds -- bags, boxes. Any one of them could be a bomb rigged to blow.

FRANK swerves Cleo around a BOX concealing an IED--

ON BACK OF CLEO

NEIL stumbles backwards -- D-MAN lunges, grabs Neil's hand -- Neil hangs over the road, D-Man straining to pull him up...

HONK! A horn blares behind them -- CURRY barreling at them in the STRYKER--

D-Man and Curry meet eyes, then D-Man LETS GO of Neil's hand--

Neil hits asphalt -- THUNK THUNK -- Curry drives over him--

GRONER

What the fuck, man?!

D-Man hits the deck, hands over his head--

Curry FIRES at the truckers, bullets pinging all around--

MICHELLE, TAXI and GRONER duck, barely holding on--

FRANK sees the Stryker in his mirror--

FRANK

Goddamn it.

Curry brings the Stryker alongside Cleo -- D-MAN leaps onto the metal caging surrounding the Stryker, climbs up top--

Frank sees D-Man prepping to fire GRENADES, meaning certain death to the truckers exposed on back--

Frank rams the Stryker at full force, nearly throwing the TRUCKERS off--

The Stryker veers off road, slamming through car carcasses, D-Man almost falling off -- the vehicle gets stuck in sand--

Frank brings Cleo to a STOP on the side of the road--

FRANK
EVERYBODY OFF!

WITH THE STRYKER

CURRY
(to D-Man)
WE WANT HIM ALIVE!

D-Man aims the grenade launcher, looking to wound Cleo--

FRANK
RUN AND HIDE!

GRONER, MICHELLE and TAXI jump off Cleo, run for it -- the
MUTT jumps out the passenger window, runs clear--

D-Man fires -- the grenade whistles through the air--

Frank hits the gas, Cleo lurches forward -- BOOM! -- the
grenade impacts behind Cleo -- her ass-end flies up, Frank
and Mallas tilting toward the street and...

THUD -- Cleo lands hard on her wheels -- Frank speeds away--

Curry gets the Stryker out, falls in behind Cleo--

Michelle, Groner and Taxi hunker down behind a burned-out
Datsun 240Z as Cleo and the Stryker disappear down the road--

GRONER
(off Datsun)
Got freaky for the first time in a
car like this.

AHEAD ON BLOOD ALLEY

FRANK pushes Cleo to the limit, engine whining--

CURRY keeps his distance, giving D-Man an easy shot -- D-Man
fires -- the grenade flies OVER Cleo -- BOOM!--

A CRATER opens in front of Frank -- he spins the wheel,
disappearing in smoke -- comes out the other side, safe--

D-Man lines up again -- Frank can't dodge forever, so...

Frank DOWNSHIFTS, falling back NEXT TO the Stryker--

D-Man has NO ANGLE now that Frank is in close--

D-MAN
PUSH HIM OFF!

Curry rams Frank -- D-Man almost has a shot -- Frank comes back at the Stryker hard -- SMASH! -- D-Man falls off the side, grabs onto caging--

Curry, unable to see D-Man hanging off, swerves at Frank--

D-MAN

Don't!

CRUNCH -- D-Man is sandwiched between Cleo and the Stryker -- he hits the ground, dead--

Frank comes back at the Stryker -- SMASH! -- heavy metal boxing match on the road--

The Stryker rams Cleo again and again -- she's coming apart inside and out--

Cleo hits back -- her engine RATTLES. Frank doesn't see...

MALLAS scraping his wrist bindings against SHRAPNEL sticking through the door, trying to get free--

Frank cranks his wheel toward the Stryker -- Curry cranks his wheel toward Cleo -- SLAM!

The two vehicles hit each other HARD, but they don't come apart -- they're STUCK TOGETHER by impact--

The trucks come OVER A RISE revealing...

...a JUMBO DUMP TRUCK, recently blown up, sitting in the middle of Blood Alley half a mile ahead--

Either Cleo or the Stryker will hit the dump truck, it's just a question of who--

Frank pulls on his wheel, trying to drag the Stryker in line with the dump truck -- Curry pulls back -- tug of war--

The distance closes, the dump truck looming large -- thing's bigger than Cleo and the Stryker put together--

Frank YANKS Cleo's wheel, pulling the Stryker to the middle of the road in the last seconds before impact and--

Mallas, free of his bonds, LUNGES at Frank -- Frank's forced to LET GO of the wheel--

Curry yanks the steering wheel with all his strength and...

Cleo smashes headlong into the dump truck--

Mallas launches out the windshield like a torpedo--

Cleo crumples like a tin can--

The Stryker rips free of Cleo, passes the dump truck unhurt--

Mallas slams into the dump truck's grill, lies dead on Cleo's hood--

Curry screeches the Stryker to a stop--

But what the hell happened to Frank?

INT. CLEO

CLOSE ON FRANK sucking in short, labored breathes--

He's pinned to his seat by Cleo's STEERING WHEEL -- Cleo saved him -- would have flown out like Mallas--

But Frank doesn't have the strength to push the wheel off -- it's a VICE, crushing him -- maybe Cleo does want him dead--

OUTSIDE

CURRY, gun in hand, walks up the side of the jumbo dump truck -- sees MALLAS dead on Cleo's buckled hood -- Curry's ready to tear Frank apart--

Oil and gas bleed out of Cleo, onto the road -- Curry marches through it, on a mission.

INT. CLEO

FRANK'S hands fumble at his seat -- they find the SLIT he cut into it long ago, but his fingers can barely reach inside--

OUTSIDE

CURRY double checks his clip, slams it home, steps on Cleo's running board to find--

FRANK wheezing, the wheel crushing him -- Curry points the gun at Frank's face -- Frank stares into it--

CURRY
(off Mallas)
I can still get something for him.

In a flash Frank's hand comes up with a KNIFE -- he STABS Curry in the arm (the knife came from the slit in the seat)--

Curry, knife stuck in his forearm, screams, falling backwards onto the oil-soaked street -- the gun clatters to the ground--

Curry pulls the knife out, about to blow a gasket now. He grabs the gun, steps back onto the running board to find...

FRANK IS GONE.

Curry rushes around the cab -- the ESCAPE HATCH is open--

WHAM! -- Frank broadsides Curry with a CAR BUMPER -- Curry's gun skitters underneath Cleo--

Curry spins out of the path of the next blow -- CLANG! -- sparks fly as the bumper hits Cleo--

Curry, the more experienced fighter, takes Frank by the throat, squeezes his windpipe -- Frank's face goes purple--

Frank -- raw rage -- nails Curry in the gut -- Curry crumples to the ground, rolls UNDER Cleo--

BANG! -- a bullet tears into Frank's leg, topples him--

Frank finds himself two feet away from Curry and his leveled gun -- BANG! -- point blank to Frank's chest--

The force of the bullet sends Frank sliding away on the oil-slicked road, slamming him into a blown up car at roadside--

Curry emerges from under Cleo -- gun in hand--

Frank stirs -- bullet hit his armor -- broke some ribs--

CURRY

Hear that, Frank? Sounds like a plane taking off.

Sure enough, Frank sees a PLANE rising into the sky from Baghdad Airport in the distance -- so goddamn close--

Curry raises his gun to fire -- Frank rips the blown-up car's door off its weakened hinges, gets it up in time to -- PING! PING! PING! -- absorb Curry's bullets--

CLICK -- empty chamber -- Frank's on his feet charging at Curry like a lineman behind the car door--

THUD -- Frank and Curry collide, hit the ground -- a wrestling match in oil and gas--

They tear at each other like animals -- Frank beats on Curry relentlessly, gets on top, rears back for one more blow, UNLOADS and...

Curry grabs Frank's wrist, twists -- we hear something POP -- Frank screams out -- Curry brings Frank's arm around his back, sitting up at the same time and with his free hand...

Curry takes Frank by the back of the head and stuffs his face into a POTHOLE filled with gas and oil -- holds Frank there--

Air bubbles surface in the oil -- Frank shudders violently -- the bubbles come slower now, slower, until they don't come at all -- Frank lies motionless. A long beat.

Curry stumbles to his feet. Heads to Cleo where Mallas' million dollar CORPSE lies splayed on the hood. Curry slings Mallas over his shoulders. Victory. Then...

CLING -- the sound of METAL ON METAL -- Curry sees...

FRANK holding his LIT Texans Zippo (the one Mia sent him)--

FRANK
Nobody told you.
(off Cleo)
That lady's cursed.

Frank tosses the lit Zippo -- it skids past Curry -- lands under Cleo -- Frank rolls to safety--

BOOM! -- Cleo EXPLODES into flames, taking CURRY and MALLAS with her -- her last victims.

Frank pulls himself up, watches Cleo burn -- only cowboy who ever survived her. Only one who ever will.

Frank looks north -- a PLANE takes off from the airport.

CUT TO:

A ROAD SIGN -- Baghdad Airport 20km. We drop off the sign, finding...

FRANK. Limping down the road on his busted leg. Covered in blood and oil. Heading AWAY from the airport and departing planes, toward the friends he left behind. He's...

EXT. BLOOD ALLEY - SUNSET

The sun fireballs into the horizon behind FRANK. Darkness coming. In the distance Frank sees...

HEADLIGHTS coming from a mile away -- a pick-up truck--

A MAN stands in the bed, banging on the cab roof, urging the driver on--

The truck accelerates, swerving around craters, driving erratically -- a last vestige of the Butcher's army--

Frank tenses -- reaches for his gun -- not there--

It's too much to take. Frank stands there, ready to accept his fate once and for all as--

The truck comes to a stop, an OLD MAN at the wheel. GRONER stands in the bed next to MICHELLE and TAXI. The MUTT jumps out, dutifully sits by Frank, wagging his tail--

GRONER

What do you say, Frank? Twenty minutes to takeoff.

Frank looks at his watch. Groner's right. Frank climbs aboard, bones aching. The pick-up takes off down the road.

He just might make it.

FADE TO BLACK.