

FADE IN

EXT. ARRAKAN PLAINS - DAY

An arid, sun-bleached landscape, shimmering from the heat.

Buzzards glide in a clear blue sky, floating in the shifting air currents. A single-engine, military airplane clatters below them headed for distant highlands.

EXT. ARRAKAN HIGHLANDS, CHECKPOINT - DAY

A lone sentry guards a makeshift roadblock - a pole nailed across an overgrown mountain road with a sign that reads STOP MILITARY CHECKPOINT.

Sentry glances at the airplane and promptly adjusts his watch.

To one side of the road flies a torn flag at half mast. An old military jeep stands next to a sandbagged machine gun nest and, behind it, some ragged tents.

Gaunt conscripts in tired uniforms, gather at the mess tent. They look up indifferently, when the single-engine airplane clatters overhead to the highlands.

Sound of distant gunfire. No one cares.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Arrakan, mother of calamity; great aunt to human suffering.

EXT. ARRAKAN HIGHLANDS, HIGHER UP - DAY

Bird's-eye view of haze-shrouded mountains. A bleak landscape of rocky ravines and scrub-covered cliffs. Smoke rises from a fortress clinging to the side of craggy mountain.

NARRATOR\_ (V.O.)

A land that spawns wars and famines, disasters of biblical proportions, and spews them onto the world with the wantonness of a possessed volcano.

EXT. LOOKOUT POINT - DAY

A rock outcrop overhangs the Great Rift Valley, commanding a spectacular view of the savanna and the winding, green belt of the Blue Nile valley.

An OLD MAN (80s), white, sits precariously close to the edge of the cliff, sitting as still as a basking iguana. He is lean and wiry, wearing sun-faded khakis - shirt and shorts - that reveal arms and legs tanned nearly black. His weathered face is thrust defiantly at the wind that agitates his snow-white beard and shoulder-length hair.

NARRATOR\_ (V.O.)

A persevering land, a generous land. A land that welcomes strangers with wide-open arms, promises bounteous treasures and boundless pleasures, and delivers a feast of unimaginable woes.

HERDS BOY\_ (O.S.)

Many Waters?

Old Man sits very still, appearing unaware of another presence.

HERDS BOY \_ (O.S.)

Old Man?

Old Man's eye twitches, betraying annoyance. He turns abruptly and glares at the boy standing behind him.

POV - A taciturn nomad lad with dark eyes and the hard features of Arrakans. Over one shoulder hangs a leather bag, while the other shoulder holds an AK-47 rifle almost as tall as he is.

HERDS BOY (CONT.)\_

She says you must stop dreaming now. She says you must go back to work now.

Old Man, ignoring him, returns to his brooding. The boy takes a small gourd from his shoulder bag, offers it to him.

HERDS BOY (CONT.)\_

Many Waters?

Old Man irritated, speaks without turning -

OLD MAN\_

What now?

HERDS BOY\_

She says you must take your medicine now.

Old Man accepts the gourd, swallows down the contents, grimaces and hands back the gourd. Then he returns to his brooding. Herds Boy hesitates before speaking again.

HERDS BOY (CONT.)\_

Many Waters?

The Old Man stirs, sighs deeply and nods at the boy. Rising, he pats the boy on the head.

POV - Another herd's boy stands in the shade of a thorn tree a few paces away, a rifle in the crook of his arm, his goats feeding on nearby rocks.

Old Man nods, starts to go, then freezes.

OLD MAN

Shakira!

POV - An old Arrakan Warrior (80s) barring his way, frail and unsteady and armed with AK 47. His facial features almost obscured by unruly hair and beard, he is mumbling incoherently as he struggles to cock the rifle.

OLD MAN (CONT.)\_

Shoot, impotent fool, shoot. You still don't have balls. Shoot.

Old Warrior fires. Bullets ricochet wildly, chipping a rock close to the Old Man. The gunshots echo from the mountain. The gun falls from Old Warrior's hands. Then silence.

Old Man shakes his head, pats Old Warrior on the shoulder comfortingly and walks past him limping from an old injury.

NARRATOR\_ (V.O.)

Shakira has been trying to kill me from the first day we met. Settling old scores with a gun is an old Arrakan tradition.

Herds Boy picks up Old Warrior's rifle, removes magazine and hands both back to Old Warrior. He addresses him in Arrakan -

HERDS BOY\_

Let it go, Old Jackal, let it rest.

He follows Old Man, while Old Warrior struggles to reload his rifle and the other Herds Boy looks on.

EXT. SHEBA'S CITADEL - DAY

An old fortress, its fortifications falling to ruin. A burned-out Russian tank guards the gate, its gun turret a children's plaything. To one side of the entrance is a cemetery with several dozen Orthodox crosses, gray with age.

A platoon of teenage soldiers parades with AK-47s in the main square, while children and goats run about in the sun. Old people, sitting in the shade with their rifles by their sides, hail the Old Man as he passes them. He responds in Arrakan and walks on.

NARRATOR\_ (V.O.)

This is Arrakan, my Arrakan, a harsh and ruthless land. A land as woeful as it is beautiful.

Children run to take his hand and walk with him to the main house at the end of the compound.

NARRATOR \_ (V.O.)

In Arrakan, they never let you forget you are old; you are old but not useless. Old age is the umbilical cord with which the future is anchored to the past. The living affirmation that, no matter what, life is possible.

An elderly Arrakan woman, tall and elegant, carrying herself with imposing majesty, steps out of the house to meet him. The children let go and scurry away.

NARRATOR \_

This is She! She who must be loved. She who must be obeyed. She who must be feared. Rider Haggard must have met her too, searching for King Solomon's mines, in that other life no one believes in until they are about to die.

CLOSE ON OLD WOMAN (70s), her dark eyes radiating a quiet authority, hard Arrakan features framed by wild gray curls down to her shoulders. She wears a flowing, silk flock and gold, silver and amber jewelry. She smile affectionately at the Old Man, speaks to him in Arrakan.

OLD WOMAN\_

Are you hungry?

Old Man shakes his head.

OLD WOMAN (CONT.)

You must go back to work then. You have many truths to tell before you can die.

Old Man laughs, kisses her and pinches her bottom as she leads him up the steps into the house. An AK-47 rifle leans on the doorframe.

Herds Boy settles down on the steps, his rifle in his lap, and watches Old Warrior arrive back, raging and waving his rifle in the air.

INT. SHEBA'S CITADEL, STUDY - DAY

A big study, with high ceilings and large windows. On the walls hang old photographs of Arrakan warriors posing with their guns, horses and mules. On one wall hang assorted artifacts, ancient maps and hand-woven carpets. Another wall displays guns, antique and modern.

At the center of the room sits a desk, holding an inkwell, a horn of writing quills, a ream of paper, an AK-47, several magazines and a framed photograph.

Old Man sits at the desk. Old Woman throws a shawl over his shoulders.

NARRATOR\_ (V.O.)

When I first met her, she promised to shoot me dead herself, if it became necessary.

He picks up the photograph.

CLOSE-UP OF PHOTOGRAPH, showing a smiling white man, (20s) sandwiched between a fearsome, bearded warrior wearing ammo belts crossed over his chest and a haughty, Arrakan woman of awesome physique and beauty. The woman also armed with an AK-47.

NARRATOR\_ (V.O.)

She was the visionary, the liberator, the sword of justice and sworn foe to anyone who would oppress her people. Her declared reason for living was to deliver her people from the shackles of neocolonial bondage, from the pseudo-socialist generals who had hijacked the revolution and slaughtered the dreams and the aspirations of her people.

Old Man returns photograph on the desk, picks up a gold coin from the desk.

CLOSE-UP OF COIN, with image of Queen of Sheba and ancient inscriptions.

NARRATOR (CONT.)\_

Everyone wanted to shoot me dead, in those days, for reasons that had something to do with the fact that I was after their gold and considered everything else, especially their tragic revolution, an extravagant waste of time and resources. But they spared me, each for his own reasons, and I eventually gave everyone a good reason to seriously want me dead.

He picks up a quill and dips it in ink. The he pauses, thoughtfully staring at the gun-lined wall, before starting to write.

NARRATOR (CONT.)\_

Before I was a man of wisdom, I was a man of violence, a vile creature, or so She told me, a selfish man who could not believe in any cause other than his own; a man incapable of love; a gun runner.

(smiles at Old Woman)

But I wasn't the only one who believed in the might of the gun.

Old Woman smiles back and exits.

EXT. ARRAKAN HIGHLANDS - DAY

A narrow mountain road winds down a rocky gorge. On one side, the mountain rises into the clouds, while the other side drops vertical to a black river at the bottom the gorge. A heavily-loaded truck leans on the mountainside, its windshield shattered and the fenders bent from impact.

Two armed bandits carry the dead driver across the road and toss him down the ravine. A dozen more mill around the truck ignoring the dazed white man sitting on the ground with his head in his hands.

A bandoleered giant, last seen in the framed photograph on the Old Man's desk, swaggers up to the dazed white man, spits tobacco juice from the corner of his mouth and peruses his passport.

BANDIT CHIEF\_

So you are American? Musician even! Can you sing? Sing something for me, Mister ... Jack Rivers?

White Man shakes his head, still dazed, and spits blood.

NARRATOR\_ (V.O.)

The real name was Jack Adams. But I'd borrowed the identity of a rock star, reckoning the name of a world-famous man would have more mileage than that of a down and out wise guy. The fact that the real Jack Rivers was a black man, and I couldn't sing to save my own life, made no difference at all to anyone in this gun-mad country. Now here I was with a truckload of stuff a warlord would sell his mother for, and here was this mad bandit reeking of gum-Arabica, and could read besides, and ... I didn't suppose he'd ever heard of Jack Rivers.

ANGLE ON BANDIT CHIEF indicating his rifle -

BANDIT CHIEF\_

I am musician too; I play AK-47.

He laughs heartily, helps the white man to his feet, pats him on the shoulder and spits at his feet.

BANDIT CHIEF (CONT.0\_

No one come this way but bandits. Where you go?

JACK ADAMS\_

To Kalam.

Bandit Chief hands him his passport, then looks up sharply when military aircraft appears in the sky above them. His men express their concern. He ignores them, turns to the white man.

BANDIT CHIEF\_

Kalam?

He spits tobacco juice, all the time regarding Jack with bemusement.

BANDIT CHIEF (CONT.)\_

There is no such place.

Jack reaches in the truck for a map, spreads it for him to see. Bandit Chief glances at the map, nods and spits.

BANDIT CHIEF (CONT.)\_

See this bridge here; it is not there any more; my men *blowed* up that bridge. And this road here? It is also not there. My men *blowed* it up to kill soldiers.

(spits)

My men do not *blowed* up Kalam, but Kalam is no more.

JACK ADAMS\_

How about ...?

CLOSE ON MAP, Jack's finger searching frantically, stabbing at a town circled in red.

JACK ADAMS (CONT.)\_

Harrar?

BANDIT CHIEF\_

Harrar? I tell you about Harrah.

(spits)

First the Khamsin. Khamsin is terrible, you know. All food dies, rivers die, wells die, springs die, all dry up. You see, ...

(spits)

no rain, no water, but dust. Cows die, donkeys die, sheep die, and goats and people too die. Whole desert smell of dead things in Harrar. Then airplane come down from Assab and ... *Kaboom-boom!* They *blowed* up everything to hell.

(spits)

What you carry?

JACK ADAMS\_

Guns.

BANDIT CHIEF\_

Guns?

JACK ADAMS\_

Uha.

BANDIT CHIEF\_

Why the hell you carry guns? Are you soldier?

JACK ADAMS\_

Trader.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
Trader for guns?

JACK ADAMS\_  
Uha.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
In Arrakan?

JACK ADAMS\_  
This is Arrakan, isn't it?

Bandit Chief laughs, translates to his bandits and they too have a good laugh.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
Who the hell tell you bring guns to Arrakan? Give key.

JACK ADAMS\_  
First things first. How do you pay?

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
You want money? Bonaya, you hear that? The American wants money.

Again he translates to his lieutenants and they have a good laugh at Jack.

JACK ADAMS\_  
Actually I'd prefer gold. But dollars will do just fine.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
Are you crazy? I'm bandit; give key. Ok?

JACK ADAMS\_  
No gold, no key. Ok? No guns. Ok?

Bandit Chief looks from his outstretched hand to Jack, unslings his rifle.

JACK ADAMS (CONT.)\_  
I brought food too.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
Food? Why you no say so? My men very hungry. Give key.

JACK ADAMS\_  
Give gold.

Bandit Chief swears, shoves his rifle under Jack's nose.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
Gold? You are a crazy American, it is true. See this? What you call this, huh? I tell you, stupid. Is called Kalashnikov AK-47. Russian for I get whatever the hell I want. Give key!

His men chatter with excitement, point at the aircraft droning overhead.

POV - Reconnaissance plane suddenly peels off and vanishes over the ridge. SOUND of a jet approaching.

Bandit Chief glances at the sky. Suddenly animated, he barks orders at his men and turns to Jack.

BANDIT CHIEF \_  
I kill you later. Go.

He shoves Jack behind the wheel and scrambles in the passenger seat.

BANDIT CHIEF (CONT.)\_  
Go, go, go!

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Jack Adams crosses his arms and stays put. Bandit Chief swings his rifle butt at him. Jack ducks and Rifle smashes driver's window. Jack turns the ignition, kicks truck into gear and takes off.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Truck lurches forward, bandits scrambling to board it as it careens down the road.

ANGLE ON Jet, diving for the truck with guns firing.

INT. TRUCK, TRAVELING - DAY

The jet's noise fills the cabin, as the mountainside erupts from multiple shell-hits showering truck with debris.

Bandit Chief laughs his head off and urges Jack to drive faster, as dust obscures the road.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
Faster! Son of whore almost kill us. Faster, faster!

Jack wrestles with the wheel, glances in the rear-view mirror.

POV - Bandits hanging desperately on the truck. One tries to stop his hat blowing in the wind and blows away with it.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

The jet completes strafing run, veers from the pass and rises.

INT. TRUCK, TRAVELING - DAY

Jack shifts gears, slows down. Bandit Chief, suddenly alarmed.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
No stop. Why you stop? Go, go, go!

SOUND of jet returning. Jack accelerates and Bandit Chief covers his ears with his hands roaring with laughter.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Jet swings down, guns blazing. Truck careens away, leaping and rocking, and dodging craters. Shrapnel and debris rain down. Bandits falling right and left of the truck.

INT. TRUCK, TRAVELING - DAY

Bandit Chief clings to the dashboard. Jack battles the wheel. Glancing in the mirror, he hits the brakes.

JACK ADAMS\_  
We've lost your men.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
No stop! Go! Go, I say. Go, go, go!

Jack's stomps on the accelerator. Truck leaps forward.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Truck leaps forward, as the road erupts from missile hits, and charges through a rain of debris. Dodging exploding craters, it finally slips into the safety of the pass. Jet vanishes over the ridge.

INT. TRUCK, TRAVELING - DAY

Bandit Chief, ecstatic, slaps Jack's back and laughs madly.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
We beat them! We beat the son of whore!

JACK ADAMS\_  
We beat them?

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
No planes fly here. Too danger for them.

Jack applies emergency brakes.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

Truck skids to a dusty stop. Both doors fly open and Jack and Bandit Chief jump out. Surviving bandits hop down from the truck, hugging and congratulating one another.

Jack, warding off attempts to hug him, inspects his truck. The truck's body battered, bleeding out rice, flour and sugar.

A hundred yards back, Bonaya picks himself up, dusts himself and limps to the truck. Bandit Chief engages him in a shouted exchange, turns to Jack.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
Others dead. You drive quick-quick, like crazy devil;  
all fall down dead.

Jack walks to the edge of the ravine and looks down.

POV - A sluggish river at the bottom of a rugged ravine.

Bandit Chief walks up, spits in the ravine, claps Jack on the shoulder.

BANDIT CHIEF (CONT.)\_  
Not to worry, American, I don't blame you. Five  
men? *Baab!* I lose more men in one day. Don't feel  
bad. My men they don't mind to die for me.

Jack lights a cigarette, contemplates the mountains towering over them and shakes his head.

BANDIT CHIEF (CONT.)\_  
I think so too; this is a terrible place to die. Come, we  
must be gone from here.

EXT. SAVANNA BUSH - DAY

Truck drives along a barely visible trail.

BANDIT CHIEF (O.S.)

It is good we meet, American. Hey, you want to go Kalam? I take you Kalam.

JACK ADAMS (O.S.)

Kalam doesn't exist, remember?

BANDIT CHIEF (O.S.)

I take you there, still. I take you Bahadar too. You drive like crazy devil, I take you Jirom too. I take you anywhere you want. Hey, keep lorry on road. Many mine in this country.

INT. TRUCK, TRAVELING - DAY

Truck drives along an overgrown trail.

BANDIT CHIEF

I take you Bahadar. Best girls in Arrakan.

JACK ADAMS\_

I don't want girls.

BANDIT CHIEF\_

You like boys?

JACK ADAMS\_

Gold, I want gold.

BANDIT CHIEF\_

Gold? You want gold?

JACK ADAMS\_

Only reason I'm in this Godforsaken country.

Bandit Chief smiles cunningly.

BANDIT CHIEF\_

Gold? Only gold, huh? You want only gold?

Jack, steering with one hand, reaches in his pocket and takes out a gold coin. The Bandits smile instantly vanishes.

BANDIT CHIEF \_

Where you get this?

JACK ADAMS\_

Never mind, where are the rest? I'll give you the whole damned truck for them.

Bandit Chief, regards him with curiosity, shakes his head.

BANDIT CHIEF\_

More? I don't know more. Sheba gold hard to get.

JACK ADAMS\_  
But not impossible?

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
Not to me. But you must kill many people to get this gold.

JACK ADAMS\_  
Bring them on.

Bandit Chief, taking him seriously, grabs Jack's hand and pumps it enthusiastically.

BANDIT CHIEF  
Good man, good man.

EXT. SAVANNA BUSH - DAY

Truck veers off the trail, crashes through some bushes.

INT. TRUCK, TRAVELING - DAY

Jack pulls back his hand, steers truck back on the trail and wipes nervous sweat from his brow.

BANDIT CHIEF\_  
I am called Shakira Gebre-Merrian. You kill me they give you much money in Assab. But is not possible to kill the jackal.  
(laughs merrily)  
Now I take you Jirom. You know Jirom, no? My mother live in Jirom. Drive like crazy devil now. Go! Go! Go! But stay on road, ok?

JACK ADAMS\_  
Road? What road?

Reaching into glove compartment, he extracts a pair of steel-rimmed sunglasses and puts them on.

EXT. DESERT COUNTRY - DAY

Truck speeds past sun-bleached camel bones pursued by a cloud of dust.

SHAKIRA GEBRE-MERRIAN\_ (O.S.)  
Stay on road, ok? My men lay mine everywhere. I take you many place, but stay on road, ok? Have you been Jijiga? Best girls in Arrakan. I must take you Jijiga. Drive quick-quick, crazy devil, we go many place.

INT. TRUCK, TRAVELING - - DAY

Shakira very excited, claps Jack on the shoulder.

SHAKIRA GEBRE-MERRIAN\_  
Hey, I like you, American.

He claps Jack on the shoulder again, harder.

JACK ADAMS\_  
Hey, watch it!

EXT. DESERT COUNTRY- DAY

Truck swerves off the trail and back, going at top speed.

INT. TRUCK, TRAVELING- DAY

Shakira wipes sweat off his brow laughing. Then -

EXT. DESERT COUNTRY - DAY

A land mine goes off under the truck. Truck vanishes in a cloud of dust.

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Total silence. Then someone stirs, coughs. Sound of shifting scrap metal, followed by groans and moans.

SHAKIRA GEBRE-MERRIAN\_ (O.S.)  
By God, Bonaya? Are you alive?

LT. BONAYA\_ (O.S.)  
Aye.

SHAKIRA GEBRE-MERRIAN\_ (O.S.)  
American? American? Are you dead yet?

Jack Adams coughs, spits dust.

JACK ADAMS\_ (O.S.)  
Sheeeit!

FADE IN

EXT. ARRAKAN HIGHLANDS, CHECKPOINT - DAY

Sentry paces the barrier, stops to watch reconnaissance plane swoop down the mountainside, pass directly overhead and fly down to the plains. He turns, stops abruptly and readies his rifle.

POV - A lone figure, shimmering ghostly in the mirage, stumbles down the trail towards the barrier.

Sentry raises his voice, calls out in Arrakan.

BARRIER SENTRY  
Someone comes! Someone comes!

Armed soldiers emerge from a tent and run to the barrier. CAPTAIN YEMENU, young and overzealous, draws his service pistol. Shielding his eyes with one hand, he squints at the approaching figure.

CAPTAIN YEMENU\_  
It's him; it's the American. Go bring him to me.

Two soldiers start off. The Captain holsters his gun and returns to his tent.

INT. OFFICE TENT - DAY

The Captain picks up his hat and cane and walks out.

EXT. OFFICE TENT - DAY

Captain Yemenu exits tent just as Jack Adams arrives, haggard hair in a tangle, lips cracked, his clothes torn and dusty.

JACK ADAMS\_  
You were wrong, Captain. That's not no-man's-land  
over there. That, is bandit land.

Captain Yemenu, fighting the urge to strike him, rips Jack's glasses off his face and grinds them under his boot.

CAPTAIN YEMENU\_  
Search him.

Jack offers no resistance as the conscripts turn his pockets inside out. They come up with a solitary gold coin. The captain snatches it from them.

CAPTAIN YEMENU (CONT.)\_  
Where is the lorry, Mister Rivers?

Jack points back up the trail.

CAPTAIN YEMENU (CONT.)\_  
Corporal Bekele! The jeep.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Military jeep rocks and rattles from the highlands to the plains. Jack sandwiched between grim-faced soldiers. Captain Yemenu turns in his front seat to growl at Jack -

CAPTAIN YEMENU\_  
Bandits kill everyone, Mister Rivers. They kill men,  
women and children. They even kill goats. How  
come they don't kill you, Mister Rivers?

JACK ADAMS\_  
They like my driving. They liked it so much they  
apologized for laying the mine that blew up my truck.  
In fact, they offered to steal me a better lorry next  
time.

Captain Yemenu snorts, scowling at Jack.

CAPTAIN YEMENU\_  
I should have shot you last time, Mister Rivers.

INT. GENERAL DINKA'S OFFICE - DAY

Heavy furniture, sun faded, green curtains and threadbare carpets. The walls covered with military charts, maps and photographs. Soft rock music issuing from a radio on the desk.

GENERAL ASFAW DINKA (50s), dapper and potbellied, rises from behind his desk, as Jack Adams is ushered in.

GENERAL DINKA\_

Sit down, Mister Rivers.

Jack drops wearily into a chair, looks about.

POV - A tall Air Force Officer, in dark glasses and paratroop badges, stands by the window, hands behind his back, staring at the shimmering runways.

GENERAL DINKA

General Asfaw Dinka, West Point. I like your western music. It is very hard to get here, but my daughter will bring me when she comes home on holiday. I'm considered a moderate because I send my children to school in America and offer amnesty to rebels in exchange for peace. But, don't get me wrong, Mister Rivers, I am a general first, and a man of war.

(turns off radio)

I can be just as ruthless as the warlords.

(leans over desk)

You promised the food would not fall into bandits' hands. That was our understanding. And you brought me back nothing. No intelligence. Nothing. I gave you very special permit, to go to the highlands, yet you brought me nothing.

JACK ADAMS\_

But I did prove my point, general. There is no reason people should die from hunger while food rots in your harbor.

AIR FORCE OFFICER\_

That is not your concern, Mister ...

GENERAL DINKA\_

Rivers, Jack Rivers.

POV - Air Force Officer, staring out of the window, rising and falling on the balls of his feet, twiddling his thumbs behind his back.

AIR FORCE OFFICER\_

Tell him, General.

GENERAL DINKA\_

Colonel Tesfaye Gus, Chief of Military Intelligence.

Colonel continues staring out the window. General Dinka drops Jack's gold coin on the desk.

GENERAL DINKA\_

What is this?

JACK ADAMS\_

What it looks like.

General Dinka eyes him curiously. Colonel Gus stops rocking on his heels.

AIR FORCE OFFICER\_

Associating with rebels can be very dangerous, Mister Rivers.

JACK ADAMS\_

I don't associate.

AIR FORCE OFFICER\_

Where is the rest of the gold, Mister Rivers?

JACK ADAMS\_

You know that better than I, Colonel.

The General glances at the Colonel.

AIR FORCE OFFICER\_

What do you know about Hela, Mister Rivers?  
Exactly.

JACK ADAMS\_

Exactly? Nothing. I told you I didn't get to Hela.  
Maybe next time ...

GENERAL DINKA\_

There will be no next time.

AIR FORCE OFFICER

You must not return to Arrakan, Mister Rivers.

He stops rocking on his heels, turns.

AIR FORCE OFFICER\_

I advise you to stay away from our politics, Mister Rivers. Walk out of Arrakan now, while you still can. Go back to America and stay there. Promise you'll do that, Mister Rivers.

JACK ADAMS

Someone owes me for my truck and I intend to go back and collect.

AIR FORCE OFFICER

By someone you mean Shakira?

JACK ADAMS

You really are intelligence.

AIR FORCE OFFICER

Bandits don't pay, Mister Rivers.

GENERAL DINKA

You'd do well to go back to America.

JACK ADAMS\_

I'll go home. I'll go tell the world how you cower here and food rots in your ports because no one has the balls to truck it through bandit territory. Then I'll come back to Arrakan. That I can promise.

GENERAL DINKA\_

You will not leave Arrakan alive next time, Mister Rivers. I can promise that.

AIR FORCE OFFICER

You seem to have forgotten where you are, Mister Rivers. Gold has a history of doing that to perfectly good people. You'd do well to remember that.

GENERAL DINKA

Where did you get Queen Sheba's gold, Mister Rivers?

EXT. JESUIT MONASTERY, N.Y. - DAY

A red car pulls up in front of an imposing gray building.

CAPTION: NEW YORK - Months Earlier.

Jack Adams steps out, looks up at the imposing building. He takes a last pull at his cigarette, drops it.

NARRATOR\_ (V.O.)

Uncle Mario jumped back in my life at a crazy time of life. Business was down, the pressure was up, and Frank, yes, that Frank, wanted my legs broken for ... lets just say it wasn't the best time to be bonding with a forgotten kin.

He walks up the steps, rings the bell and waits.

The door screeches open. BROTHER GREGORY (60s), a round monk in a brown frock, steps out.

BROTHER GREGORY\_

Brother Mario is expecting you. He is very ill so ...

INT. JESUIT MONASTERY, CORRIDOR - DAY

Jack follows the old monk down a gray corridor with doors on either side.

BROTHER GREGORY\_

In the old days, this was a place where young men came to learned to serve God and humanity. But nobody serves anymore. We are all gods and masters now. Stealing and killing, drugs and alcohol, money, money. Money is their only god. The new world order, ha-ha-ha. Only sick priests come here now, to recover or die.

He ushers Jack into a dark, cell at the end of the corridor. He draws the curtain, revealing a poorly furnished room.

INT. BROTHER MARIO'S CELL - DAY

A bare light bulb sheds a feeble light on a narrow bed, a chair and a small table. On the table lies a Bible with gold lettering, a water jug, a half-full glass of water, a reading lamp and a pair of gold-rimmed, reading glasses.

On the bed lies a pale, old monk, his eyes closed, his hollow cheeks moving in and out with his breathing, fingers clutching a rosary with black beads and ivory cross.

BROTHER GREGORY\_

He'll wake up in a moment.

He picks up the jug and exits, leaving the door open. Jack looks about uncomfortably, steps up to the window.

POV - Grey headstones, sprouting over a small cemetery.

Jack's phone rings. He takes it out, flips it open.

JACK ADAMS\_

Jack Adams. I told you never to call me again.

He steps closer to the window, lowers his voice.

JACK ADAMS \_

No, you listen. It's over; can you get that into your head? You are no longer my problem. Yeah, that's right, you go right ahead and do whatever you need to do; see if I care. You'll what? Get in line.

He snaps the phone shut, turns to find Brother Mario staring at him, a wan smile on his face.

JACK ADAMS \_

We thought you died, Uncle Mario.

Brother Mario laughs, in good humor.

BROTHER MARIO\_

You know, it always amazed me how your father could laugh at adversity. Mother used to say to me Mario, why don't you be like your brother? Nothing bothers him. He laughs at death.

JACK ADAMS\_

Death got the last laugh on him

BROTHER MARIO\_

Doesn't it always? What do you do now, Jack?

JACK ADAMS\_

Same as always, Uncle Mario.

BROTHER MARIO\_

Gambling? Pimping? Stealing cars?

Jack smiles patiently. His phone rings.

JACK ADAMS\_

I'm not a kid any more, Uncle Mario.

(into the phone)

Jack Adams.

Stepping back to the window, he lowers his voice.

JACK ADAMS \_

Yeah, Eddie? What have you got for me? Did you talk to Tony? Don't worry about Frank. Have you got sixty thousand dollars? I said don't worry about it. No, Eddie, you don't want to do that. You'll only get hurt.

He snaps the phone shut, agitated, turns to find Brother Mario staring at him.

JACK ADAMS \_

Business.

BROTHER MARIO\_

What business?

NARRATOR\_ (V.O.)

I'd come expecting to hear that a dying relative had left me a fortune. What a waste of time this was!

JACK ADAMS\_

Right now? Import-export.

BROTHER MARIO\_

Smuggling? Can you hear your father turn in his grave?

Jack Adams puts his hand to his ear, listens.

JACK ADAMS\_

As always, not a good word. I'm a businessman.

BROTHER MARIO\_

Good business?

JACK ADAMS\_

I do fine.

BROTHER MARIO\_

Just fine? Would you like to do better than just fine?

Jack regards with piqued interest.

BROTHER MARIO\_

Go to Arrakan, Jack. Do someone good for a change. The country's destroyed by war while the warlords battle for territorial control. In Kalam, bullets are worth their weight in gold. That's right, Jack, weight in gold.

JACK ADAMS\_

Real gold?

BROTHER MARIO\_

Arrakan is famous for its gold. In ancient times, Arrakans warred with spearheads made of gold. They say a fortune is buried under the monastery at Sheba's Citadel. Hand me my robe.

Jack hands him his robe from a peg behind the door. He tries to rip the hem. Jack hands him a pocketknife. He cuts the hem, extracts a single gold coin, hands it to Jack.

CLOSE-UP OF COIN, showing ancient inscriptions and the image of the Queen of Sheba.

JACK ADAMS  
How much is this worth?

BROTHER MARIO  
By itself, priceless. If they are as many as is rumored,  
...

Jack tosses coin in the air, catches it and, out of habit, flips it on the back of his hand.

CLOSE UP ON COIN - Heads.

JACK ADAMS  
Arrakan, huh?

Phone rings. Jack flips it open, returns to the window.

JACK ADAMS\_  
Yeah? Who's this, Sam?  
(lowers voice)  
I told Frank I'd have his money soon. Soon! Since when is that your problem, Sam? Breaking my legs will not get him a dime. Two, three months. Two weeks? What the hell can I do in two weeks? Run to Mexico? You've been watching too much AMW, Sam.

He snaps the phone shut, angrily.

BROTHER MARIO\_  
No one will find you in Arrakan.

EXT. NEW YORK - NIGHT

A rain soaked night. A black limousine cruises down a street.

Caption: New York, Two Days Later.

NARRATOR  
I returned to New York full of ideas and lots of energy.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

Headlights reflecting eerily on the wet pavement, limo turns onto a side street, pulls up by an old apartment building.

Five men alight, two of them armed with baseball bats. Four of them enter the building, leaving the fifth by the car.

INT. NEW YORK APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jack and Gail in bed, engaged in serious lovemaking.

NARRATOR\_ (V.O.)  
I was taking care of urgent business when...

Bedroom door crashes open to admit baseball thug, boot first, and the rest of the gang. Jack reaches for a handgun. SAM STONE, a big thug with a bag attitude, takes the gun from him and tosses it across the room.

FRANK FUSO, a godfather figure in a black coat and hat, clicks his tongue at Jack.

FRANK FUSO  
Where's my money, Jack?

He motions at his men. One of them bundles Gail into the bathroom and locks her inside. Then they set upon Jack with kicks and baseball bats.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

Limo driver glances up at the apartment window, drops his cigarette butt on the growing pile at his feet and lights another.

INT. NEW YORK APARTMENT - NIGHT

The room in disarray, Jack bound naked to a chair.

FRANK (SHORT FUSE) FUSO (60s), studying Jack's Sheba gold coin while Sam Stone and JOE BINDER guard Jack with their baseball bats.

FRANK FUSO  
What the fuck's this, Jack?

JACK ADAMS  
What it looks like.

FRANK FUSO  
How do I know it's real?

JACK ADAMS  
Why would I make up such a crazy story, Frank?

FRANK FUSO  
To stop Sam breaking your legs again?

JACK ADAMS  
My passport's in the drawer.

FRANK FUSO  
Sam?

Sam opens drawer, finds passport.

SAM STONE  
(reads it)  
The People's Republic of Arr ... Arrakan?

JACK ADAMS  
The man can read, give him a cigar.

Sam hurls passport at him, hefts his bat.

FRANK FUSO  
Easy, Sam.

He continues tossing the gold coin up and down, thoughtfully.

FRANK FUSO\_

Jack, my boy, any fool in the world knows you don't fuck with Frank Fusio. So, tell me again about this Sheba woman.

JACK ADAMS\_

Sheba was not just King Solomon's love interest. Way back in biblical days ...

FRANK FUSO

In short, Jack.

JACK ADAMS\_

Queen Sheba's gold is as real as Pizza Hut deep-pan pizza. The proof is in your hand. But there's a problem. The people who have it don't want guns or money. They want food, ounce for ounce.

SAM STONE\_

Bullshit.

Jack glances at him, shakes his head in despair.

FRANK FUSO\_

Jack, you owe me more than your life's worth. How do you propose to pay for the food?

JACK ADAMS\_

Who said anything about buying it? The ports are bursting with food. American ships, Japanese, French, Canadian ships ... the whole world has sent food aid to Arrakan. All we do is ...

SAM STONE\_

Steal it?

FRANK FUSO

Shut it, Sam! Sit down.

JACK ADAMS\_

We don't steal nothing. The World Food Program's desperate for contractors to move the stuff where it's needed. We take it from here to there, then get paid, first by the agency in dollars, then by the rebels in gold.

FRANK FUSO

Rebels?

JACK ADAMS\_

They have assured me payment in gold. Tons of gold. The government is so far away in the capital that the rebels run the highlands.

SAM STONE\_

How come they are starving, when they got so much gold?

JACK ADAMS\_  
(to Frank)  
Do I have to say everything twice for your gorillas?

Frank glances at the bathroom door, where Gail is banging and yelling.

FRANK FUSO\_  
You are too smart to fuck with me, Jack. I respect that. Cut him loose, Sam.

Sam releases Jack and Joe unlocks bathroom door.

JACK ADAMS\_  
Hey, what about some capital?

Frank stops, hand on the door.

FRANK FUSO\_  
You want more money from me? Jack? From me?

JACK ADAMS\_  
I need to hire people.

FRANK FUSO  
Take Sam.

JACK ADAMS  
I need people who can read as well as shoot guns.

Frank tosses him the gold coin.

FRANK FUSO\_  
Remember, half the gold is mine. Don't come back without it, or the girlfriend is history.

JACK ADAMS\_  
The girl goes with me.

FRANK FUSO\_  
I was wrong about you, Jack, you do take me for a fool. Sam, you go with him. Joe, watch Sam's back, do what Sam says, ok? Don't come back without Jack or the gold.

He exits, leaving Jack and Sam eyeing each other. Joe looks on confused.

SAM STONE\_  
Where's the catch, Jack?

JACK ADAMS  
The catch? No catch. To get to the gold we must drive eight hundred miles through bandit territory. No road, no water, nothing. No catch.