

EXT. KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN - ESTABLISHING - 2009 - DAY

An unpaved road curves into the distance. Mountain peaks reach up into the sky across a brambly desert. A farm field covers the land on one side of the road- poppies, growing up like cornstalks. This is the opiate capital of the world.

We SLOWLY SINK down lower and lower, until the gravel of the road looms as large as the mountains. There, inches away from us, is a mound of dirt and a small coil of wire.

A cloud of dust appears in the distance.

U.S. ARMY CONVOY

Chugging up the road. Six trucks- big, growling Humvees, carefully spaced from each other, move in a rigid line.

INT./EXT. LEAD HUMVEE - CONTINUOUS

Where war-weary SOLDIERS ride in silence. Their thousand-yard stares watch an empty, lonely landscape. Helmeted heads loll in unison as the truck rolls over the uneven highway.

EXT. THE ROAD - COIL OF WIRE - CONTINUOUS

Still looms large to us as the trucks draw closer. Oblivious, they don't even slow down. The first truck rolls over the bomb- it passes unscathed. Then the next. And the next...

Nothing happens.

INT./EXT. LEAD HUMVEE - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers inside remain unmoved. Completely unaware of the danger that passed beneath-

EXT. THE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

BANG! The lead humvee disappears in a violent blast of dust. It skids to a stop a flaming wreck. Windows shattered. Axles broken. Tires vaporized. Another bomb.

The other trucks slam on the brakes. The burning carcass of the humvee blocks their path. Their ENGINES REV, and each swings into a practiced K-turn.

The trucks reform their line facing the other way, and roll out, back toward-

THE COIL OF WIRE

Waits patiently for the first truck to drive over and-

KABOOM! It too is ripped apart by a giant explosion. The powerful, percussive blast makes everything shake.

The cloud of dust thrown up by the bomb drifts over the scene as the other humvees come to a stop again. With a burning truck skeleton at each end of the line, they're trapped.

A CRACK OF GUNSHOTS from the poppy field. BULLETS PING off the heavy armor of the humvees. Somewhere in the field, a VOICE SHOUTS:

TALIBAN FIGHTER (O.S.)
Allahu-akbar! Allahu-akbar!

The ambush intensifies. FIGURES in the poppies open up with MACHINE GUN and SMALL ARMS FIRE.

The door to the middle humvee swings open, and a soldier jumps out, barking orders as he readies his M-16. He is a LIEUTENANT, 31, a seasoned, capable professional. We'll call him LT.

LT
Let's go! Everybody out!

The soldiers jump out of their trucks on the far side of the road. Using the humvees as cover, they RETURN FIRE on the poppy field. Some aim over the hoods of the trucks, others around the rear hatches, a few even fire from between the wheels. The bullets tear at the poppy crops.

LT ducks down behind one of the trucks, and shouts into a handset hanging off the back of a RADIOMAN.

LT
This is second platoon reporting
enemy contact! Two IEDs and small
arms at coordinates-

One of the SOLDIERS gags as a spurt of red erupts from his neck. He drops his rifle and collapses, gurgling on his own blood. His buddy, HERNANDEZ, screams over the din:

HERNANDEZ
Medic! Mediic!!!

LT hangs up the radio and joins the fray, firing over the hood of his truck. The enemy shooting DIES DOWN.

LT

Cease fire! Cease fire!

The shooting STOPS. LT trots down the line, surveying the damage. The first and last humvees are beyond repair, and anyone who was in them is a charred skeleton. He grimaces.

Hernandez gazes off into the distance.

HERNANDEZ

Hey, LT! They're heading for the village!

LT looks down the road- three TALIBAN FIGHTERS clutching Kalashnikovs are sprinting away as fast as they can. LT turns to Hernandez.

LT

Good eyes, Hernandez- Keener- Anguiano! You're with me! Let's go!

LT and Hernandez jog down the road with two other SOLDIERS.

EXT. EDGE OF VILLAGE - CROSSROADS - DAY

A rough intersection where our road meets another one from the other side of a small village. The two roads converge into a broad main street that runs between two rows of small buildings made from mud and wood.

The soldiers spot a MAN walking toward them, leading a BROWN GELDING and a cart piled with sheep's wool. He wears a long, flowing shirt and loose-fitting trousers.

The Man sees them, and tries to turn the other way, but LT and his men surround him. He looks at least 50, but it's hard to tell. A bushy, gray beard covers his thick, weathered face. His eyes flick around to each of the soldiers and their guns. LT smiles.

LT

Hi. Hello. Uh-salem alaykoom.

The Man nods slowly. He gives the traditional response.

MAN

Salaam. Astalah mashai.

LT

Do you speak English?

The Man looks at LT's rifle and hesitates. Shakes his head. LT points at the wreckage of the convoy down the road.

LT

My men- we were attacked. A bomb.
Big bomb. Three Taliban ran this
way. Did you see them?

The Man tries to back away, but the horse won't budge. He
shakes his head again. He stammers.

MAN

No- no English. No English.

BARAZ (O.S.)

Excuse me, Boss!

Another man is jogging toward them from the town center. He
wears a dirty, ill-fitting police uniform with a bright,
shiny badge on a dark vest. He is clean shaven except for a
thick, carefully groomed mustache. He is BARAZ, he's 44, but
like everyone else, looks much older.

Baraz jogs up to LT and grabs his hand.

BARAZ

Baraz, Chief of Police. I saw the
whole thing. Came as fast as I
could. What seems to be the
trouble, Boss?

LT sizes up this newcomer and turns back to the other Man.

LT

My men and I were just attacked-
can you ask him if he saw anyone
come through here?

Baraz looks at the Man and chuckles.

BARAZ

Mahmoud? Boss, he is a Tajik. He
doesn't see anything. Don't waste
your time- they're getting away!

LT

Could you ask him anyway? They came
right through here.

BARAZ

(Asks in FLUENT PASHTO)

MAHMOUD

(Answers, shakes his head)

BARAZ

(in English)

There you are, Boss. Mahmoud didn't see anything. Just like a Tajik. What you need is a Pashtun. Ask any Pashtun- anyone else in the village. They will tell you where your Taliban went.

He turns to Mahmoud again.

BARAZ

Go on, Tajik! Shoo! C'mon, Boss. I know just where to start.

INT. VILLAGE - CHAIKHANA - DAY

As Baraz bursts through the door of the teahouse, followed by LT and his men. A low, crowded room, where BEARDED MEN sit around tables murmuring amongst themselves. Baraz barks IN PASHTO at the grizzled owner, YUSUF, carrying a tea tray.

BARAZ

(with subtitles)

All right Yusuf, where are you hiding them!

YUSUF

(also in subtitled Pashto)

Baraz! What have I told you about men with guns being in the Chaikhana?

BARAZ

Guns? What guns? I don't have a gun!

He shrugs, surrounded by the heavily armed American soldiers. Yusuf rolls his eyes and offers the tray to LT.

YUSUF

Ah-salaam aleikum. Chin chai? Tor chai?

LT

No, thank you. Baraz, ask him if he saw anyone come through here.

BARAZ

(to Yusuf)

Some men blew up their trucks outside. He wants to know if anyone came in here.

YUSUF

No, of course not. I don't like men
with guns in my shop- it's bad for
business.

Some of the customers are already starting to leave. Yusuf
hurries to corral them. LT and the soldiers exit.

EXT. MAIN STREET - OUTSIDE CHAIKHANA - CONTINUOUS

They march out of the shop, quickly followed by Baraz.

BARAZ

Boss! Wait! Where are you going?