

# At Hell's Gate

Draft 10

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EXT. DESERT - DAY

The sun burns like a foretaste of hell. Below, a blighted wasteland.

SUPER: ANBAR DESERT, IRAQ - 2006

We hear GRUNTING coming from a HUMVEE where a sweating soldier works. This is MANNY (20's). He's screwing with the whip antenna. His hand slips.

MANNY

Dammit!

JESS, late twenties and caked in grime, pauses from her shoveling.

MANNY (cont'd)

Antenna's busted.

Jess shakes her head and extricates herself from the dune, she's shoveling.

MANNY (cont'd)

Why are we even out here?

Another head pops up from the dune: PFC HORNER (30's).

HORNER

He's got a point, Jess. I look into the night sky and ask, what does it mean? What are we even *here* for?

JESS

(without heat)

You? You are here to shovel. That's your job.

HORNER

Whatever.

Horner HITS something.

HORNER (cont'd)

Hey-- Boss?

Jess sighs and drains the water. Manny follows.

Jess scrapes expeditiously with her shovel and reveals a worn CARGO CRATE. The three look at each other, surprised.

SAME - LATER

MANNY

(into radio)

Base, this is Guardian Alpha. Base,  
this is Guardian Alpha? Do you copy?

Jess and Horner are looking at a set of LAMINATED CARDS, each with an Arabic term, a photo, and an English description: قاذفات -- RPG | رشاش -- AK-47 | اون -- MORTARS, etc.

Jess stares at the crate's barely uncovered label. It could be any of the cards.

JESS

Manny?

MANNY

Yeah. Shit radio's got no range.

JESS

Forty clicks to base. What, three hours there and back? We leave, some insurgent grabs it and it'll be RPG's, our luck.

HORNER

Could just be a Hajji crapper.

MANNY

Hajjis shit in holes.

HORNER

All of 'em? Damn. My son's two and he's civilized enough to shit on a throne.

JESS

Learned everything he knew from you, right?

HORNER

Yes'm. How's about we just...

Horner vigorously sweeps sand from the crate.

Jess blanches. Manny dives behind the humvee.

JESS

Shit-- Horner, stop!

But Horner doesn't. After a moment, he's uncovered the face of the crate.

HORNER

Don't need no EOD for a little dusting, do we?

MANNY

You're a goddamn lunatic, you know that?

Jess flips a few more laminated cards until she comes to one in particular. She looks down at it, brow furrowed, then looks back up, in sudden shock.

Horner's still dusting off his hands.

JESS

Horner, what's on your hand?

He looks to his hand. It's smeared with a dark stain.

The bottom of the crate's leaking BLACK ICHOR.

OFF Horner's face,

CUT TO:

EXT. FORWARD BASE EAGLE - DAY

Manny watches Horner's convulsing body as it's wheeled inside a medical tent. He turns to watch Jess angrily push past a door guard and into the sweltering black of

THE COMMAND TENT

JESS

What the hell was that!?

Her Commanding Officer looks up from a MAP as she storms inside. An aide tries to stop her, but she shoves him aside.

AIDE

Lieutenant McCleary--

JESS

(to Officer)

You sent a Humvee of me and two other guardsmen to recon a goddamn WMD?

AIDE  
 You will stop right there,  
 Lieutenant--

Jess notices the map he was glancing at. Dozens of PUSHPIPS scatter across the desert features.

JESS  
 --What are these?

COMMANDING OFFICER  
 We have orders to eval all sites  
 within this AO.

JESS  
 Did you *know* what we were  
 investigating?

The Aide looks to the Officer.

JESS (cont'd)  
 We didn't even have MOPP gear, *sir*.  
 You CANNOT send guardsmen out there  
 without even the most *basic*--

AIDE  
 They're on order. We're just  
 investigating--

JESS  
 Bullshit!

AIDE  
 You are way out of line--

JESS  
 I'm outta line? This *mission* is out  
 of line!

The Officer silences the aide. He holds up a hand to Jess.

COMMANDING OFFICER  
 Your comments are noted, Lieutenant.  
 I suggest you cool off. You're  
 dismissed.

Jess, with an effort, masters herself. The Aide stares venom at her.

Jess turns to leave. She blinks muzzily.

The commander turns back to the map.

COMMANDING OFFICER (cont'd)  
Send out Bravo immediately to  
investigate site thirty.

What's that on Jess' hand? Is it... a dark stain?

AIDE  
They don't have hazmat suits.

COMMANDING OFFICER  
No one does.

Her stained fist CURLS. A DEEP BASS RUMBLE permeates the scene.

She turns on the Officer, raising her FIST--

ABOUT TO STRIKE--

The rumble INCREASES, pitching UP TO--

EXT. JESS' CAMPSITE - DAY

--The IMMENSE POUNDING of a freight train.

Jess stumbles from her tent to watch it scream by.

Jess stares after it in the too-bright morning. Suddenly, she pukes.