

FADE IN:

EXT. - UNIVERSITY CAMPUS- AFTERNOON

Overcast skies create a depressing feeling on the college campus. The bell tower rings once as the gnarled branches of ancient trees sway in the wind. Three men walk together through the bustling crowds of students. ARTHUR JERYMN, a graduate student in his mid-twenties, walks with his DALE CARTER, a fellow anthropologist, and LIEUTENANT JOSEPH REILLY of the Applewood Police Department. Arthur wears a black sports jacket over a grey vest. His hair blows around as the wind picks up.

ARTHUR

Get on with my work?

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Yes. You do your job and I'll do mine.

ARTHUR

This is my job. (BEAT) Look, my colleague is missing.

DALE

Maybe we should just leave

ARTHUR

No, Dale, Nijiel and I were on the verge of deciphering the script. It has nothing to do with foul play as the lovely lieutenant here wants to believe.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Look. (stops the men) There is no evidence, either way.

Escaping the wind, the three men walk up a stone stairway. An ancient stone building looms above them. Arthur pulls the door open and the other two men enter.

INT. - ARCHEOLOGICAL BUILDING- AFTERNOON

Lined with pew-like benches, the hallway gives off a sacred feeling. A stream of light flows in through a circular window, revealing the dusty haze that hangs in the air. The three men walk down the poorly lit corridor. Along the wall, an intricate frieze displays Evolution in all its grandeur: from beautifully carved animicules at one end to the great figure of Man at the other.

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LIEUTENANT REILLY

I have people looking into all of the airports, train stations, even boats. So far, no one fitting his description.

They walk in front of a door marked NIJIEL JEFFERIES. Arthur opens the door.

INT. - NIJIEL'S OFFICE- AFTERNOON

HELEN, Nijiel's secretary, wearing a circa nineteen seventies, taupe pantsuit, continues rummaging through the file cabinets behind her desk. She sings a rendition of a Bee Gees tune.

ARTHUR

Hello, Helen.

Helen jumps into the corner of the drawer and grabs her chest.

HELEN

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, you scared me.

ARTHUR

Sorry. (grins) How are you doing?

HELEN

Fine. Have you heard anything yet?

Arthur watches Lieutenant Reilly cut through the police line that hangs across the door. Dale follows the police officer into the office.

INT. - NIJIEL'S ROOM- AFTERNOON

The room gives off a cold feeling as if no one lived there for years. A thick layer of dust sits on top of a globe of the ancient world. A replica of the Rosetta Stone hangs on the wall. Various artifacts and relics lie all around. Helen and Arthur stand in the doorway.

HELEN

What are you looking for?

LIEUTENANT REILLY (V.O)

A set of keys.

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CONTINUED:

Arthur moves past Helen and walks over to Nijiel's desk. He shovels through a box containing books and papers. Helen moves a little further into the room.

HELEN

Well, if he didn't have them with him, they'd be in the top desk drawer. That is where he keeps all of his important materials. But you didn't hear that from me.

Helen returns to her desk. Dale looks over towards Arthur and smiles. Arthur opens the top drawer and comes face-to-face with Miss January nineteen seventy-four.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Find anything?

Arthur shakes his head. On the top of the desk, files, photos, but mostly, personal items from an expedition lie around.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

(cont'd)

Wasn't the most organized man. Are you sure there isn't another, secret place, Helen.

HELEN (V.O.)

I can't think of anywhere else.

Lieutenant Reilly's beeper goes off and he walks over to the door.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Don't worry about it, ma'am.
Thanks for your help.

Arthur closes the door, as Dale walks toward Lieutenant Reilly.

HELEN

Arthur, what should I do. I haven't missed a day since, well, before you were born. I..

ARTHUR

Well, it sounds like you are due for a vacation.

Helen smiles at Arthur.

INT. - ARCHEOLOGICAL BUILDING- AFTERNOON

The three men walk down the corridor to the exit.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

I want to see if the custodian has
a key. Maybe he

DALE

Highly doubt it.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Why?

ARTHUR

Because Nijiel had a thing about
changing the locks of any door that
contained the excavations. He said
it was too important for just
anyone to have a key.

EXT. - DESERT MARKETPLACE- AFTERNOON

The afternoon sun radiates onto the roofed bazaars of the desert marketplace. A weathered-faced man wanders through the labyrinths of the narrow alleys. Maelstroms of traffic with strange cries, cracking whips, rattling carts, jingling money, and braying donkeys, create a congested atmosphere. A brown haze of sand and dust hangs in the air. Suddenly, everyone falls to his or her knees. Even a water-carrier places his buckets on the sand and kneels. The man looks around and grabs a small book from his pocket. Only the wind breaks the silence, as three shadowy figures, wearing black cloaks, approach the man. The lead FIGURE yells at the man.

FIGURE

Mata sawfa tukhalis? [When will
you learn?]

The man stares at the three figures and returns his book to his pocket.

MAN

Ayezeh? [What do you want?]

The figure steps forward through the bowing denizens. He kicks over one of the water buckets of the water-carrier.

FIGURE

Sharmute! Tahat. [Fool! Kneel
down.]

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The man turns and walks away. The figure grab a small boy, who kneels next to him.

FIGURE(cont'd)
La, zibaska. Kidha. [Look
outsider, like this.]

In mid-step, the man stops and turns. He looks at all of the humble people.

NIJIEL
Kul khara. [Eat shit.]

The lead figure grins at the man. The man's knees crack as he gets to the ground.

EXT. - MCLEARY'S PUB- EVENING

The dim lighting of the pub forces itself into the atmosphere of its inhabitants. Couples enjoy a few drinks while best friends catch up on weeks past. The bartender stands there with a smile, as a young woman and her friends take shots. Arthur and Dale sit in the darkest corner of the bar and leaf through a huge pile of journals and papers, containing detailed maps and pictures of middle-eastern civilizations. Arthur looks at the empty bottle and holds up his two fingers. Seeing the signal for two more beers, a blonde WAITRESS walks over from the bar. She places two Sam Addams on the table.

WAITRESS
Anything else, honey?

Arthur looks at the bottles and smiles.

ARTHUR
No, thanks.

The waitress returns the smile and walks away. Arthur takes a swig from his Sam Addams.

ARTHUR (cont'd)
Well let's see. We have

DALE
Nothing. We've been looking at these things for an hour now. Nothing here tells us why Nijiel is missing. (BEAT) We're wasting our time. Just let the police handle this.

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Arthur leans back in his chair and grabs his beer. He looks around the bar and takes a gulp.

INT. - ARTHUR'S HOUSE- LATE EVENING

The small house energizes when Arthur turns on the lights. Flipping through his mail, Arthur walks towards his kitchen. The light on the answering machine blinks once. He presses the playback button and walks over and leans on his counter. He opens a bag of pretzels and munches on a few.

MESSAGE ONE

Arthur, this is Lieutenant Reilly. I finally got a hold of that custodian. He said the night-time guy found a set of keys. It might be what we're looking for. I'm going over there now to talk with him. It's not my style, but I figured you'd be interested.

EXT. - THE PULZER BUILDING - NIGHTTIME

The Pulzer Building, a forgotten structure to most of the students of the college, houses most of the past excavations. Arthur walks up to the back-door and enters.

INT. - THE PULZER BUILDING - NIGHTTIME

The dim lights throw a weird facade of shadows on the walls. Arthur walks to the lower level. Rounding the corner, he hears two people talking in the distance.

INT. - ROOM 3C, THE PULZER BUILDING - NIGHTTIME

LIEUTENANT REILLY

And you say you just found the door opened.

CUSTODIAN

And the keys lying on the desk there.

Arthur knocks on the door.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Come in, but don't touch a damn thing. This is hot.

A giant monolith defies all laws of gravity as it stands in the middle of the room. Ladders rest all around the huge slab of basalt. Arthur grabs the back of his neck.

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CONTINUED:

ARTHUR

It is breathtaking, every time I see it.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Anyway, Mr. Harvey

CUSTODIAN

Call me Rich.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Rich, here said he was doing his rounds three nights ago.

CUSTODIAN

Yeah, I saw the lights on inside, so I walked in. No one was here, so I turned them off. That is when I found the keys lying on that desk.

Arthur walks towards the fake-mahogany desk and examines it. Cigarette ashes lay on the wood.

ARTHUR

Hold it. Nijiel didn't smoke. What is this?

CUSTODIAN

Oh, that was me. I usually smoke while I'm working. They say we aren't supposed to, but hell, what they don't know, won't hurt them.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Okay, let's get out. I want to keep it clean in here for dusting.

Arthur turns to walk out and sees an object out the corner of his eye. Lieutenant Reilly writes down the rest of Rich's information. Arthur bends down and picks it up. He places the small, leather-bound journal in his pocket. He walks out behind the other two, without them noticing the book.

EXT. - DESERT MARKETPLACE- AFTERNOON

The sun blasts the desert sands of the marketplace. The man rubs his forehead as he waits for his drink at an outside cantina. He watches an old woman, on her Arabesque balcony, shake her rugs out. Crouching nearby, a whining, blind beggar holds a small burlap bag and jingles it. A waiter shuffles over with a steaming, limestone cup on a tray. The man hands him a small, coin-like object.

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CONTINUED:

MAN

Shukran. [Thank you.]

The waiter nods his head. The man takes a sip of his drink and pulls a journal from his coat pocket. Suddenly, the three shadowy figures return through the crowds of traders and merchants. Two of the figures walk behind the man. He sits still and sips his drink. The third figure stands on the opposite side of the table.

FIGURE

Estana zibaska...[See outsider...]

The figure throws a severed tongue on the table. The blood still flows from the flesh. The figure laughs demonically. The man tries moving but the two figures behind him put their hands on his shoulders. The figure stoops down and points his finger in the man's face.

FIGURE (cont'd)

...ariyad boukra! [lessons are learned!]

The figure makes his point and walks away. The other two figures release the man's shoulders and they all fade through the crowd. The man leans back in his chair and stares at the severed tongue. He swats the muscle in to the street, where two dogs fight for it. He sighs in disbelief.

INT. - ARTHUR'S OFFICE- MID-MORNING

The small cubicle constricts from the huge piles of miscellaneous papers. A cup of coffee steams from a black mug. An unopened New York Times lies on Arthur's desk. Arthur reads more of the journal, he found in the room containing the monolith. Dale busts through the door and sits down in front of the desk.

DALE

I heard you found the keys.

Arthur looks up and over the pile of books on his desk.

ARTHUR

Yes. (BEAT)

Arthur returns to the journal. Dale steps forward and looks over the desk.

DALE

Whatcha got there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Arthur hands the journal over to Dale. Dale stares at the book and looks up at Arthur.

DALE (cont'd)
Nijiel's personal diary.

Dale pages through it.

DALE (cont'd)
Where did you

Dale hands it over to Arthur.

ARTHUR
In the room. (BEAT) Reilly doesn't know about it yet. Besides, there is nothing in here about big debts or information that someone might kill Nijiel. Just daily logs starting from the first day of the excavation.

Dale sits back in his chair and strokes his chin.

ARTHUR (cont'd)
Look at the last two entries.

Arthur hands it back to Dale.

ARTHUR (cont'd)
Nijiel talks about some huge discovery involving the carvings. Then he talks about testing his theory.

DALE
What? Have any idea what he is referring to?

Arthur opens his desk drawer and places some of his papers inside.

ARTHUR
I'm sorry. Oh. No, I don't. He never discussed it with me. I'm as confused as you.

Arthur's phone rings and startles the two men. He pushes a pile of books away and picks it up. Dale pages through the journal some more.

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CONTINUED: (2)

DALE

Look. The last date was three
night ago.

ARTHUR

Hello.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Arthur, this is Lieutenant Reilly.
Lab tests didn't find much at the
room, but it is a fact that Nijiel
was there the night he disappeared.

ARTHUR

Really. I found something that
might interest you.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

What? A receipt for a plane ticket
to Italy.

ARTHUR

No, no. I found Nijiel's personal
diary.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Where?

ARTHUR

At the room last night, when you...

LIEUTENANT REILLY

What the hell do you mean the room?
(BEAT) Do you know that removing
evidence from a possible scene of a
crime is

ARTHUR

Look, I didn't think it was
important.

LIEUTENANT REILLY

Everything is important. Bring it
over to the station. Now!

INT. - APPLEWOOD POLICE STATION - LATE MORNING

Arthur and Dale stand at the front desk of the police
station. Dale watches a man being interrogated by an over-
weight cop. Arthur walks over to another OFFICER.

OFFICER

Who ya here to see?

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ARTHUR
Lieutenant Reilly.

The officer walks into a doorway and shouts down a small hallway.

OFFICER
Yo, Reilly. Someone hear to see ya.

The officer walks back with a huge smile on his face.

OFFICER (cont'd)
He'll be right with ya.

Arthur sits down at a row of chairs. He places the book on his lap. He notices a small paper sticking out of the back of the book. He removes it. The paper contains a detailed sketch of the monolith.

LIEUTENANT REILLY (V.O.)
Arthur, come here.

Arthur walks over and hands him Nijiel's journal. Dale comes up from behind and stands with Arthur.

LIEUTENANT REILLY
(cont'd)
Do you know that you might have messed up all of the fingerprints on this. (BEAT) Look I know want to find him. But I told you before. Leave this to the professionals, Sherlock.

DALE
Don't you think you should put that right into a, I don't know, plastic bag?

Dale smiles at Lieutenant Reilly. Arthur hides back a smile and walks away.

LIEUTENANT REILLY
Yeah. And don't forget Watson, here.

EXT. - DESERT MARKETPLACE - AFTERNOON

The man walks through a kaleidoscope of polychrome robes, veils, turbans, and tarbooshes. In the distance, the three black robed figures weave through the peddlers like ghosts.

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The man sees them and enters a small stand that sells incense beads, rugs, and silks. The owner of the shop sits near the back and pays no attention to his pseudo-customer. The figures come close to the tent, but only glimpse in. The man turns his back and looks through the multi-colored silks. As the figures disappear in the distance, the man sighs and looks back at the old man in the back. He sits there with a knife and cleans under his fingernails.

INT. - ARTHUR'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Arthur walks through his kitchen with a duffel bag. He enters his livingroom and walks over towards his bookshelf and grabs every book that deals with the middle eastern world. He shovels them into his bag.

EXT. - ARTHUR'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Running out of his house, Arthur jumps into Dale's 2000 Lumina. He throws his duffel bag full of books into the backseat.

DALE

Back to your office?

ARTHUR

No. Let's go to the Pulzer Building.

DALE

How about we call off and get drunk.

EXT. - DESERT MARKETPLACE - AFTERNOON

The man lingers among the desert people. Multiple denizens offer him rugs, metal lamps, and women. The man lowers his determined face and walks on. He passes by a soothsayer, who yells out to the small crowd that slowly surrounds him.

EXT. - PULZER BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Arthur and Dale walk up to the looming building. Arthur carries his duffel bag.

DALE

Arthur, what are we doing? I really think you have lost it.

Arthur looks at Dale and smiles. He enters the building.

INT. - PULZER BUILDING - AFTERNOON

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With no one in sight, the two men head for the basement doors. They descend the small stairway. The men begin shivering as they walk down the long corridor. Dale blows his breath out and a small white cloud lingers into the air.

DALE (cont'd)
Why is it so damn cold?

The door marked "3-C" stands in front of the men. Arthur grabs the handle and jingles it.

DALE (cont'd)
Now what? You don't have a key.

Arthur reaches into the bag and pulls out a crowbar.

ARTHUR
We use this.

Arthur jams the crowbar in the hinge of the door and pushes on it. He struggles for footing and the crowbar slips out of his grip. Dale reaches down and picks it up.

DALE
Trying to draw attention? Here
shove it here and we both

Cracking wood echoes down the hallway as the metal hinges rip from the wall.

INT. - ROOM 3C- EVENING

Dale grabs his arms as he enters the room. Arthur walks towards the familiar stone slab. A wooden ladder rests against the wall. He can see his own breath still lingering in the air.

ARTHUR
I found this before Lieutenant
Reilly took the journal from me.

He opens up the paper from Nijiel's journal and hands it to Dale.

ARTHUR (cont'd)
Remember the last entries. The
theory.

Arthur brings over one of the ladders and sets it up near the left side of the monolith.

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DALE

You think it has something to do
with the stone.

Arthur ascends the wooden structure and stares at the symbol
of the sun.

ARTHUR

Seems he was able to decipher the
writing. Actually I think he knew
for awhile.

DALE

So he learns the meaning and just
vanishes. I don't get

Arthur puts his fingers into the grooves of the sun. The
small symbol rotates and a gear-like, grinding sound comes
from within the stone slab. Arthur stops for a moment. He
resumes with the next symbol.

EXT. - DESERT MARKETPLACE- AFTERNOON

The crowd of traders and merchants diminishes as the man
arrives near the outskirts of the marketplace. He stares off
into the endless desert. Nothing appears for miles. He
pulls a small silk rag from his back pocket and rubs his
forehead. A loud cracking noise erupts from the center of
the "city".

INT. - ROOM 3C- EVENING

Arthur arrives at the last symbol. With hesitation, Arthur
spins it. The stone starts shaking and cracks of light shine
through. Arthur covers his eyes. The whole room fills with
blinding light. As fast as the room fills with the light, it
returns to normal. Dale stands near the doorway. He slowly
walks towards the monolith. The ladder falls backwards and
the sound echoes down the hallway.

DALE

Arthur?

EXT. - DESERT MARKETPLACE- AFTERNOON

The man walks at a quickened pace. Everyone in the
marketplace wanders in his general direction. A huge crowd
of people form a circle. In the middle, a young man
struggles to his feet.

MAN

Arthur?

(CONTINUED)

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The man breaks through and reaches the center.

MAN (cont'd)
Arthur, my boy.

ARTHUR
Nijiel?!

Arthur blinks uncontrollably in the bright sunlight.

ARTHUR (cont'd)
Nijiel...Nijiel, Jesus Christ, what
just happened?

Nijiel grabs Arthur and brushes him off. Nijiel pats
Arthur's leg and young man screams.

NIJIEL
Oh my.

ARTHUR
Shit. (BEAT) Where are we?

Nijiel assists Arthur through the crowd.

NIJIEL
I don't know. The design is
similar to the peasant sections in
Shaqra. But believe me, that is
about it. (Beat) We need to take a
look at that leg.

Nijiel walks Arthur over to the cantina. A small boy, with a
ceramic cup, sits at the entrance. Nijiel places Arthur at
one of the tables. Nijiel motions for the boy. Arthur leans
back in his chair and opens his mouth in silent pain. Nijiel
walks back over to Arthur. He rips Arthur's pant leg.
Arthur's ankle is a deep shade of blue.

NIJIEL (cont'd)
We're going to need to set this.

Arthur places his hand on Nijiel's shoulder.

ARTHUR
Why haven't you told me about this?
Do you realize everyone thinks you
are dead?

NIJIEL
Well they might as well think that,
because I'm not going back.

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CONTINUED: (2)

Nijiel lowers his head and starts preparing Arthur's leg for a splint. Arthur rests his head in his hand.

NIJIEL (cont'd)

And neither are you.

Arthur turns his head and looks down at Nijiel.

ARTHUR

What the hell do you mean?

NIJIEL

Like I said, it's different here. Believe me, I've been trying to get back.

ARTHUR

I still have the...shit I must of dropped it.

NIJIEL

Doesn't matter.

ARTHUR

Why?

Nijiel stands up. The small boy runs over and hands Nijiel a small, crude crutch. Nijiel hands him three, small coins. Nijiel sticks the crutch under Arthur's arm helps him to his foot.

NIJIEL

Believe me, Arthur. I tried.

The two men walk out of the cantina and into the crowded street. Nijiel points up in the sky.

NIJIEL (cont'd)

See. Things are very much different here.

In the deep, unchanging blue sky, a monolith, that resembles the one they found weeks before, floats above the crowded marketplace.

ARTHUR

I don't

Suddenly, everyone in the marketplace falls on their knees. They bow to the giant monolith. The three shadowy figures materialize under the floating doorway. Nijiel pulls Arthur down to the ground.

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CONTINUED: (3)

NIJIEL

It is better this way. (BEAT)
Welcome to hell my boy.

FADE OUT