

ASMODEUS

An ex-demon, cursed with immortality, is the keeper of sacred objects left by ancient gods. When one is stolen, he risks eternal damnation in the underworld to get it back.

FADE IN:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK/POND - LONDON - MORNING

A pigeon, aloft, glides a perfect, London sky. Banking a row of chestnut trees, it does a double-take at a surly old man sitting alone on a bench. The bitter expression along with a grim, cantilevered, masticating jaw screams, "don't even *think* about going near this guy" to anyone passing by.

CLOSE UP: OLD MAN IN PLAID CAP CHEWING GUM

SUPERIMPOSE:

("REDEMPTION -- THE
ACTION OF SAVING OR
BEING SAVED FROM
EVIL OR SIN.")

The pigeon, it seems, couldn't agree more and, descending, aims for the old man's head. A second later, poop lands with a satisfying splat; goo dripping from the edge of his cap.

Mission complete.

SCHUSTER (90), on the other hand, doesn't even look up. Glowering, clutching his collar closer (**a tattoo of a snake eating a plant on his wrist**) he glares as even more of the hateful creatures circle his feet -- one brass-balled mo-fry is actually pecking an ankle.

Kicking a spindly leg out, he hopes to inflict as much damage as possible...

SCHUSTER

Shoo! Go on!

...but completely misses.

Put out, the birds wander off.

Intent, making sure they don't circle back, he ducks when another, a Kestrel, swoops to an overhead branch. More and more join until the tree is chock-full, all cocking their heads and looking to wreak similar havoc.

Schuster looks up then, raising both fists, yells...

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

GRRRAAGH!

...only to have multitudes of excrement rain down on his head. Furious, he yells...

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 You sorry sons of bitches!

...as he covers his head.

Swans, at water's edge, look up in alarm. He can't help but yell at them, too.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
WWHHAAT!?

Snapping a kerchief open, he continues to glare. The swans, wary, stare back.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 Thought that was pretty funny, didn't you?
 (wipes poop)
 And maybe, *just* maybe, your thinking, I might want some of that, too? Yeah?
 (looks up menacingly)
 Well, don't even think about it! Cuz if I gotta get wet? I'm *REALLY* gonna kick some ass!
 (points to each)
 All of you!

The swans, though, are un-intimidated. And, as if to illustrate what they *really* think of the blustering old fart, submerge only to pop up again, shaking feathers.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 Fucking birds!

Commencing the wiping again, he heaves an indignant sigh.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 I mean *EVERY FUCKING TIME!*

Distant voices, however, divert his attention. A BOY (3) and his FATHER (30) approach the opposite shore. Splitting a loaf of bread, they break bits to throw in the water. Almost at once, the swans paddle toward them.

Schuster can't help being relieved. Free of birds at last, the warmth of the sun calling, he finally closes his eyes.

FADE TO PAST:

EXT. WW2 - DACHAU CONCENTRATION CAMP - MORNING

JEWS, IMMIGRANTS and GYPSIES (various ages) stand in the rain. Shoes hang from their necks as one by one they present hands and feet to a cruel-looking officer.

This is **DECKERT (40)**.

Droplets spatter his uniform and, annoyed, he flicks them off.

DECKERT
Scheisse! Will this rain never stop!?

Deckert waves the next MAN through just as another OFFICER (25) steps up.

OFFICER
You would think it would at least wash the stench away.

Deckert grunts until a dark haired, blue-eyed beauty is pushed forward -- a GYPSY WOMAN (20) with a BOY (8 mo) in her arms; its face and body covered with cloth. Presenting a hand, she switches the baby and presents the other.

Deckert's eyes slide down her body to her feet. Covered in muck, each carries a **sixth toe**.

DECKERT
Her!

The man next to Deckert raises a rifle while two GUARDS (20) yank her from line.

DECKERT (cont'd)
The babe, too.

The woman screams while those around her step back.

GYPSY WOMAN
No! Please! I beg you!

A guard butts her in the head and she and the baby fall. A second later, the child is wrestled from her arms and relieved of its covering. Stepping back, the guard turns to look wide-eyed at Deckert.

Deckert pushes the man aside.

The boy's hands and feet carry **six fingers and six toes**. Its eyes are the deepest blue. On its chest and back are intricate lines and symbols.

Grinning, he picks the child up. The woman, on her knees, stretches her arms.

GYPSY WOMAN (cont'd)
No! Please! God strike you down, you
bastard! Give him back!

A moment later she, too, is taken away.

EXT. MUNICH - WW2 GERMANY - MORNING

Deckert strides a boulevard only to stop outside a mansion draped in Nazi flags. Hitler's headquarters.

INT. BROWN HOUSE - MORNING

Strolling a hall guarded by S.S. MEN (20), he watches a door at the end open and a COURIER (16) rush out. Rapping on the door, he steps in.

INT. HITLER'S OFFICE - MORNING

HITLER (50) with two generals (ALFRED AND WILHELM) (50's) are studying a map. Turning, they eye Deckert.

Deckert halts and salutes. Hitler points to a chair.

HITLER
Sit.

Deckert sits -- all eyes on him.

HITLER (cont'd)
So, tell me, Deckert...did you locate
it?

DECKERT
Jawohl, Mein Fuhrer. I believe so.

Alfred arcs a brow.

ALFRED
Well? Speak up!

DECKERT
Southern Iraq. But, I will need to go
there to be sure.

Hitler, clasping hands behind his back, contemplates the floor.

HITLER

And the babe?

Deckert stiffens.

DECKERT

Passed, Mein Fuhrer. Sadly.

Hitler swipes a lock of hair from his eyes and stares.

HITLER

I see. The mother, too?

DECKERT

Jawohl, Mein Fuhrer. An unfortunate outbreak of...smallpox.

Hitler's smile, frozen in place, is nothing short of terrifying.

HITLER

Well now! How fortunate YOU managed to survive.

Deckert pales.

HITLER (cont'd)

Bring it to me, Deckert! No matter the sacrifice. A thousand men. Two. We *must* have it!

DECKERT

If..if you'll forgive me, Mein Fuhrer, just a single man will do. The less conspicuous, the better.

Hitler thinks on it then turns to the others.

HITLER

What are *your* thoughts, Alfred?

The general considers.

ALFRED

An archaeologist, I should think. Someone with credentials. Wilhelm?

Wilhelm ponders, pulling a stache.

WILHELM

Hmm. I hear Schuster is well-versed in that area.

(MORE)

WILHELM (cont'd)
 Professor of Archaeology at the
 University of Berlin. He's in Turkey
 now, on a dig of some sort.

Hitler nods.

HITLER
 Find him. See to it, Alfred.

ALFRED
 At once, Mein Fuhrer!

The general strides to the door as Hitler turns to Deckert.

HITLER
 See? All taken care of. But...do NOT
 fail me, Deckert. Do you understand?
 I can be *most* unforgiving.

Deckert jumps to his feet.

DECKERT
 Jawohl, Mein Fuhrer!

Clicking his heels, he salutes.

DECKERT (cont'd)
 Heil Hitler!

Hitler waives, dismissing him.

Turning smartly, Deckert departs just as Alfred steps back
 in the room.

Gone, the generals voice their opinion.

ALFRED
 I don't trust him!

WILHELM
 Me, either!

Both men turn to Hitler. He's staring intently at the door.

FADE TO
 PRESENT:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK/POND - LONDON - MORNING

Schuster's eyes fly open. A man in a full-length black coat
 has sidled next to him on the bench.

A sweep of emotions cross the old man's face, mostly anger, as **MICHAEL (30)**, (angelic with black hair and startling blue eyes), stares out over the water.

Schuster, bitter, fairly drips sarcasm.

SCHUSTER

Oh! Look who it is! It's Michael come at last! You're late!

Michael turns then frowns.

MICHAEL

And you're...*old*, Schuster.

SCHUSTER

Hmmpf! I was *old* twenty years ago!

MICHAEL

And, Eleanor?

Schuster glares.

SCHUSTER

Gone! A long time now!

Michael sighs, the sorrow genuine.

MICHAEL

I'm really sorry to hear that.

Schuster, jabbing a finger, doesn't hold back.

SCHUSTER

Look! What did I tell you about getting old and decrepit!? Hmm!?
Hmm!?

MICHAEL

Oh, come on! You know I don't control these things!

Reaching into his coat, he pulls first a silencer then a pistol and starts screwing them together. Both hands have **six digits**.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

I do as I'm told *when* I'm told, just like everybody else. And, do you hear me complain? No!

Schuster turns his back only to bark over his shoulder.

SCHUSTER
I don't want to hear it! We had a deal!

Michael ignores him.

MICHAEL
I mean, do you know how long its been since I had ice cream? Sixty two years, seven months and eleven days!
(sighs)
My most favorite thing.

Schuster rolls eyes.

SCHUSTER
My God! How *awful* for you! I mean... that couldn't *possibly* compare to wearing a diaper and getting liver spots!

Michael suppresses a grin.

MICHAEL
In fact, as soon as I'm done here, I plan on getting some.

Schuster sighs. Giving up, he turns to look at his friend.

SCHUSTER
What kind?

MICHAEL
Hmm? Oh. Raspberry.

The old man wrinkles his nose.

SCHUSTER
To each his own, I guess. I prefer cheesecake, myself. You know, the one with the little bits of chewy.

Michael stares as if wondering who in their right mind would like cheese cake.

MICHAEL
You're right. To each his own.

Raising the weapon, he puts it to Schuster's temple.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Ready?

Schuster can't help but grumble.

SCHUSTER
I've been ready!

Turning toward the water, he closes his eyes only to quickly open them again.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Wait!

Michael sighs, lowering the weapon.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Try the place on 53rd and Broadway.
Best ice cream you ever had.

MICHAEL
53rd...as in New York?

SCHUSTER
What? That's somehow out of your way?

Michael looks at him, amused.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
(sarcasm)
Oh, and dare I say it again!?

MICHAEL
What!?

Schuster glares out over the pond.

SCHUSTER
Tell them next time don't wait so long! Getting old sucks!

Michael is all-out grinning now.

MICHAEL
Okay, old man. I'll do that.

Pulling the trigger, he watches Schuster slump over. Reaching into his coat, he takes the old man's wallet, replaces it with a new one and covers the head with the hat.

Turning, he walks back the way he came. As he does, he pushes a button on a device strapped to his wrist. A wave of blue energy passes over his body only to dissipate.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Mark. Life cycle complete. Schuster,
Robert. 10 October, 2023. Ummm...
(checks position of sun)
(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)
...10:35 am. Message relay...Next
time don't wait so long. Getting old
sucks.

Ending transmission, he rounds the far corner of the pond.
The little boy waves to him and, stopping, he waves back.

The father, confused, turns to see who his son is waving at,
but sees nothing.

FATHER
Who are you waving at, sport?

The boy points at Michael and the father looks again.
Nothing. Even though Michael is just ten feet away.

Michael looks to the boy.

SHOT: VAGUE, BEHIND THE BOY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE POND,
SCHUSTER'S BODY SITS UPRIGHT. RISING, IT WALKS AWAY.

Smiling, Michael puts a finger to his lips then he, too,
turns.

BOY
Bye-bye-O!

Michael, looking over his shoulder, waves.

FADE TO PAST:

EXT. WW2 LANDING STRIP - ISTANBUL - NIGHT

Deckert waits impatiently by a 1940 two-seater bi-plane only
to see an awkward man in a baggy suit approach. He's
hurrying across the tarmac, head down, holding a hat against
the wind.

CLOSE UP: WRIST WITH PLANT/SNAKE TATTOO.

This is young **SCHUSTER (32)**.

Lifting his head, he exposes wire rim glasses, blue eyes and
a pleasant face. A second later, he sticks a hand out.

SCHUSTER
Ah! Hello! Schuster here. I must say
I'm delighted to meet you. What an
adventure, eh!?

Deckert, ignoring the hand, gives a curdled look.

DECKERT
You're late!

Turning abruptly, he leaves Schuster to catch up.

EXT. IRAQI DESERT - DAWN

Deckert's plane flies through the air only to circle over ruins.

SUPERIMPOSE: RUINS OF ERIDU

Deckert lands and rolls to a stop. Removing his goggles, he glares at the back of Schuster's head. Schuster in front, sits eyes closed, mouth open, unaware they even landed.

Taking his gloves off, he smacks Schuster on the head with them.

DECKERT
Wake up! We're here!

Schuster wakes then remembers.

Deckert, meanwhile, tosses his jacket only to replace it with field glasses and a compact shovel. Jumping down, he sets off for the ruins.

Flustered, Schuster calls after him.

SCHUSTER
Hey! Wait!

Clumsy, he slides off the wing to stumble after Deckert.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Do I need to remind you who I am,
Deckert? Or, was a direct order from
the Fuhrer not enough?

Deckert ignores him.

EXT. RUINS OF ERIDU - EARLY MORNING

Deckert stands on top of a crumbling, mud-brick wall staring at mile-wide ruins. Schuster is just caught up. Together, they survey the city.

SCHUSTER
Marvelous! Simply marvelous! One
can't help but imagine!

OVERLAY: RUINS OF ERIDU WITH MAGNIFICENT CITY OF THE PAST

A bustling marketplace of **PEOPLE, ANIMALS AND TRADERS** all hawking their wares. Two or three, interspersed throughout, are black haired, blue eyed **ANNUNAKI GODS** followed by **SERVANTS** in golden attire.

INT/EXT. TEMPLE - DAY

One, an Annunaki goddess with flowing black hair and piercing blue eyes stands at the entrance to a temple. This is **ISHTAR (25)**. Her hands and feet each have six digits. One hand holds a golden scepter made of two, intertwining snakes. At the head is a brilliant blue-green LIFESTONE radiating supernatural energy. Beside her, is her Divine Vizier, **NINSHUBAR (20)**.

Turning, she and Ninshubar enter only to glide past a fountain. At the base is a tablet with an inscription written in cuneiform.

SUPERIMPOSE: *"From Where All Life Flows"*

CUT TO PRESENT:

Deckert jumps to the sand. Ten minutes later they stand outside the remains of the temple.

Deckert searches for a map under his shirt. Unrolling it, he figures their position. Schuster rears at the sight of it. It's made of skin. *Human* skin.

SCHUSTER

Mein Got! Is that what I think it is!?

Deckert grins, folds the map then walks precisely ten paces forward. He tries handing the map to Schuster, but Schuster's unwilling to touch it.

DECKERT

Map or shovel, Schuster. Your choice.

Schuster two-fingers the map, earning him a disgusted look.

Taking the shovel, Deckert starts digging until two feet down, he hits something. Scraping the sand away, he uncovers a stone tablet with an inscription on top.

Schuster leans over his shoulder to decipher.

SCHUSTER

"From where all life flows"

Deckert grins, lifting the shovel...

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

No!

...only to split the stone. One half reads, "From Where" and the other half, "All Life Flows".

Yanking the pieces away, he is nearly blinded by the blue-green lifestone beneath. So entranced with its beauty, he doesn't notice Schuster slowly removing his glasses. A second later, he lifts "All Life Flows" above his head.

Just as Deckert reaches for the lifestone, Schuster swings. He misses, though, when Deckert's fingers brush the gem knocking him ten feet back. Unconscious, he lies on the ground glowing with supernatural energy.

Schuster rolls his eyes.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Oh, that's just great! Just great!

Lugging the stone over to Deckert, he drops to his knees.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Sorry, old man, but...

Bringing the stone down on Deckert's head, he punctuates his words with each blow.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

YOU. CANT. HAVE IT. YOU SORRY. PIECE.
OF SHIT!

Looking, he sees Deckert has stopped breathing.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Oh, don't look so surprised! Hitler
wasn't going to let you live, either.

Tossing the blood-covered stone to one side, he takes Deckert's shirt to wrap the lifestone completely. Careful not to let it touch his skin, he tucks it under his arm and sets off in a hurry.

EXT. DESERT - MORNING

Schuster, struggling across the sand, sees the plane.

INT. TEMPLE - MORNING

Deckert bolts upright. As he does, an eyeball falls out, tethered by long stringy flesh. Disgusted, he stuffs it back in only to find his face is reconstructing -- bone meshing with bone -- sinew and tissue repairing itself until, finally, the face is whole.

Rising, he staggers to the pit to see the lifestone gone.

DECKERT
You thieving son of a whore!

INTERCUT: DESERT - MORNING

Schuster lifts himself onto the wing. Half-way to the cockpit, he spies Deckert.

SCHUSTER
Why is nothing ever easy!?

Wedging himself into the pilots seat, he examines the gauges. Seconds later, the engine whines and the propeller turns. Peering up, he sees Deckert. He's yelling something.

CUT TO:

Deckert running.

DECKERT
You son of a bitch! I'm going to kill you!

CUT TO:

Schuster cups an ear.

SCHUSTER
What!? Can't hear you!

Revvng the engine, he moves the plane forward.

CUT TO:

Deckert looks up.

DECKERT
I will find you, you bast...

But Deckert's words are cut off when, dipping a wing, Schuster grins and shoots him the most ancient of insults.

A moment later, he and the bi-plane are gone.

CUT TO PRESENT:

EXT. COMMAND CENTER - IRAQ - 2024

An F-16 fighter jet soars over a U.S. flag hanging outside a building. Just below the flag is a sign. It reads, "**Victory Base Complex, Baghdad/USCENTCOM-IRAQ**".

INT./EXT. DECKERT'S OFFICE - DAY

A plaque on an office door reads: Col. W.G. Deckert.

CUT TO:

A desk and sofa line opposite walls. A hook holds a perfectly pressed uniform. A garbage can outside a bathroom holds a used box of gray hair dye.

Deckert (un-aged but with gray hair now) is asleep on the sofa in skivvies, undershirt and dog tags. He is **dreaming...**

INTERCUT: INT. PALACE (NIGHT)/DECKERT'S OFFICE (DAY)

Deckert broods on a stone bench. Torches illuminate a luxurious chamber. Looking up, he sees a vague outline coming toward him. It's Ishtar.

Sensual, voluptuous, she moves with the insolence of a cat. Thick, dark hair runs untamed. Piercing blue eyes -- salacious. Holding her arms out, she calls to him.

ISHTAR

I must have you, my prince. Take me!
Do what you will!

CUT TO:

Deckert gets an erection and, without realizing it, cups a hand over his skivvies.

DECKERT

(mumbling)
Oh, God you're beautiful...SO
beautiful...

CUT TO:

Ishtar drops to her knees and crawls to a stop. Cupping her breasts, she looks up with abandon.

ISHTAR

Fulfill your every fantasy, my lord.
But first, you must find what is
stolen! Find it and there is nothing
you cannot want that I will not give!

CUT TO:

Distressed, Deckert mumbles in his sleep.

DECKERT

How!? How!? The bastard stole it!

CUT TO:

Caressing an eight-pointed star around her neck, Ishtar holds it out.

ISHTAR

Look closely, my prince!

As Deckert looks, Eridu and the hole he dug become clear.

ISHTAR (cont'd)

Find it, my love! It's there! Restore
my power and together we will rule
the world!

Crawling forward, she reaches between his legs.

CUT TO:

Deckert, still cupping his erection, bolts upright.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

A full moon then the *whomp-whomp* of a Black Hawk helicopter. Slowing, it lowers to hover two feet off the ground.

Seconds later a door slides open and Deckert, dressed in the robes of an Arab, jumps out -- a compact shovel in his hand. The chopper takes off as he pulls a keffiyeh (headdress) and puts it on. Turning, he heads toward Eridu.

INT. AMERICANA TAVERN/INN - IRAQ - NIGHT

A full moon shines through a window and down on a crowded bar just as a MAN in a khaki, wide-brimmed fedora walks in.

POV: THE ONLY THING VISIBLE IS HIS BACK. THE FACE IS HIDDEN BUT THE TAN NECK AND MUSCULAR BODY GIVE A CONFIDENT LOOK AS HE SEATS HIMSELF AT THE BAR.

Looking down, a BOY (8) tucked into a corner looks up at him. Next to him is a scrawny dog.

Just down from them, an English blonde, **MIRABEL (30)** with beautiful green eyes sits with a cane by her side. Two men, **BRIAN (30)** and **FRANCIS (50)** are on either side of her.

Lost in conversation over a Rugby game on television, the men do not notice Schuster, but Mirabel does and covertly scrutinizes him as the BARTENDER (40) approaches.

MAN

Arak and water.

The bartender turns.

MAN (cont'd)

And some of that.

The man tips his head toward a vat of stew.

The bartender grunts then turns away. A second later, he returns with Arak and water and a steaming bowl of stew; a small round of bread on top.

As Mirabel watches, the man lifts the Arak, splashes some water into it and watches it turn milky white. A second later, he shoots it down. As the bartender turns, he takes the bread and stew and hands it to the kid.

The boy takes it, sharing the bread with the dog until the bartender returns and sees what he's done.

BARTENDER

(In Dari)

Aye! What have you done!

(at kid)

Go on! Get out of here! Bothering my customers! Take that mutt with you!

Lifting a towel, he raises it until a fist slams down on the bar-- a **plant/snake tattoo on the wrist**.

It's **Schuster (32)**.

Lifting his eyes, he gives a dangerous look. The bartender, grumbling, walks away while everyone goes back to watching the game. All, except Mirabel. Pleased he championed the boy, she can't help but smile.

INTERCUT: TAVERN AND ISHTAR'S TEMPLE - NIGHT

Deckert stands outside the temple; the only light, the moon. A moment later, he steps across the threshold and digs a flashlight out. Ten steps forward he sees the hole he dug has been filled and the broken pieces gone.

Dropping to his knees, he unfolds the shovel.

CUT TO:

Schuster spies Mirabel only to do a double-take. Emerald green eyes hold him transfixed.

SCHUSTER

Wow.

Lifting a glass in salute, she blushes and turn away. More than a little intrigued, he reluctantly turns to the mirror only to spy another figure coming up behind. This one wears a full-length black coat.

Giving a disgusted look, he watches Michael get within inches of Mirabel only to eye her appreciatively. She doesn't see him, though, and neither do her companions. He's not there, nor, is his reflection.

CUT TO:

Deckert, in a frenzy, is digging.

DECKERT

Where are you!? Where are you!?

Wiping sweat off his brow, he brings his shovel down only to hit something solid.

He stops, frozen, then digs with his hands. A moment later, he uncovers the tablet reading, "From Where" and tugs at it.

CUT TO:

Michael looks from Mirabel to Schuster.

MICHAEL

Sorry, buddy. You know the rules. Besides...

(pitying look at
Mirabel)

...she doesn't have long. I'd say...
umm...about two months. And you?
Well, you'll only hurt yourself.
Besides, its been so long you've
probably forgotten how.

Schuster glares at Michael's grin.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
How about, I highly advise against
it? No?

Glum silence.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Okay. It's *your* funeral. I'll just
wait for you outside.
(laughs)
If you can still walk, that is.

Schuster watches him leave then, swallowing his drink, deposits a few dinar on the bar. Rising, he turns toward Mirabel.

SCHUSTER
Forgotten how!?! Pfft! Watch this!

Girding his loins, he steps toward Mirabel. Brian and Francis, backs turned, are watching the game.

As the crowd cheers, Schuster closes the distance. Nearing, green eyes boring into his, he gives his most handsome, to-die-for look.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Hi.

Mirabel blushes as agonizing pain hits Schuster so hard he grabs onto a chair. Trying not to be obvious, he desperately keeps from doubling over.

MIRABEL
Are you...*alright*?

Schuster grits teeth into a smile.

SCHUSTER
Yeah-yeah. Fine.
(gasp-twitch)
Listen, (groan), I know you're going
to think I'm crazy, but...
(groan)
...I've just got to know.

Mirabel gives a suspicious look.

MIRABEL
Know what?

Schuster clutches his side.

SCHUSTER

Your name?

(gasps)

What's your name?

Mirabel hesitates.

MIRABEL

It's Mirabel. Mirabel Lee. Heavens,
are you *ill*?

CUT TO:

Overjoyed, Deckert lifts the lifestone. As he does, a molecular change consumes his entire body. Aglow, he jerks the field glasses from around his neck, strips it of its cord and fashions the lifestone into a necklace. Reverent, he slips it over his head.

CUT TO:

Schuster, eye twitching, tries hard to look debonair.

SCHUSTER

No-no. Fine.

Stepping closer, he stifles an agonized squeal.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

So...Mirabel. Latin for wondrous
beauty.

(looks deep)

You have the most exquisite eyes!

Alarmed, Mirabel looks to escape.

MIRABEL

Uh...

Wrapping an unexpected arm about her, he pulls her close.

SCHUSTER

Just so you know?

(groans pitifully)

This is REALLY gonna hurt!

Mirabel tries pulling away.

MIRABEL

Oh, my! Just...Oh, God!

But, he doesn't hear and kisses her scrunched face with such passion, she slowly melds into him. As they embrace, a series of images flash through his mind.

MONTAGE:

*Mirabel -- a college dorm -- diligent over her books. Outside VOICES (partying) call to her, but she goes back to her studies.

*Mirabel -- in her lab. A poster behind her reads, "Man's greatest gift is the ability to help others."

*Mirabel and Brian, laughing, walking a hall. A moment later, she collapses.

*Mirabel in a hospital bed. Her father (Francis) by her side. Outside, Brian speaks to a DOCTOR.

DOCTOR
I'm afraid there's no cure. I'm
sorry.

BRIAN
I don't understand! She was fine!
(swipes a tear)
How long?

The doctor sighs.

DOCTOR
Three months...*maybe*.

Brian looks through the observation window. Francis is holding Mirabel's hand and speaking in low tones.

BRIAN
Does she know?

Mirabel breaks down as Francis gathers her in his arms.

DOCTOR
She does now.

*Mirabel -- beautiful face smiling -- looks lovingly into Schuster's eyes.

MONTAGE ENDS:

Brian finally turns.

BRIAN
So, who do you think will win,
Mirabel? England or...
(Brian gapes)
Argen..tin...a? Say, what's going on?

Nudging Francis, he turns to see his daughter kissing a total stranger. A moment later, he grins.

BRIAN (cont'd)
Should I...you know...intervene?

Francis shakes his head.

FRANCIS
No. Let her enjoy what time she has left. Unless, of course, she wants you to then...you know...feel free to kick his ass.

Brian considers.

BRIAN
You know I'm gay, right?

Francis stares.

BRIAN (cont'd)
I fight like a girl?

No response.

BRIAN (cont'd)
He's twice my size!

Francis, grinning, shrugs.

FRANCIS
Well, I'm old so....

Brian heaves a sigh.

BRIAN
Great.

It isn't until a rumbling is heard and the whole bar shakes that Schuster finishes the kiss.

BARTENDER
Earthquake! Everybody down!

The television flashes, "Breaking News" and "Rolling Earthquake hits Iraq" as car alarms goes off, the mirror shatters and pictures fall.

Everyone cringes as plaster rains down, some on Schuster's head. He doesn't notice, though. Arm still about her, lips puckered he stares transfixed until, shaking his head, he thrusts himself away with a horrified look.

SCHUSTER
 Wait! What just happened!?
 (suspicious)
 What did you do!?

Mirabel bulges her eyes

MIRABEL
 Me!?

SCHUSTER
 Yeah! You! Because no way was that
 supposed to happen!

Confused, she can only look at him.

MIRABEL
 What? The earthquake? Because...

SCHUSTER
 No!
 (waggles finger
 between them)
This!
 (gives disgusted
 look)
Feelings! Ugh! I mean, how do you
 people do it!

Jabbing a finger, he backs away.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 You stay away from me!

Brian's jaw drops. Mirabel snorts.

MIRABEL
 Hey, bud. You kissed me, remember?

Looking up and around, Schuster turns full circle. A second
 later, he stops, eye twitching.

MIRABEL (cont'd)
 I knew it! You're crazy aren't you?
 (to Brian)
 I always get the nuts!

Schuster whirls.

SCHUSTER
 You don't get it, do you!? You're
 supposed to fall for...
 (thumbs himself)
 Not, me for...
 (MORE)

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
(points to her)

Schuster bulges eyes.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
I gotta go!

Thoughts racing, he steps back.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Thanks. I *think*?

Jaw hanging, Mirabel watches him turn.

MIRABEL
Yeah. Sure.
(beat)
Hey wait!

Half-way to the door, he looks back.

SCHUSTER
Get as far away from here as you can
Mirabel. Your friends, too.

Mirabel lifts a finger.

MIRABEL
But...

Only, he doesn't hear. Instead, he grabs a jacket and exits;
the door swinging closed behind him.

Mirabel's shoulder's slump.

MIRABEL (cont'd)
...I only just got here!

Brian grins.

BRIAN
Well, he was a good looking chap!
But, what do you suppose all that
(mimics Schuster twitching) was
about?

Mirabel shakes her head and laughs. A second later, about to
cry, she buries her head in his shoulder.

MIRABEL
Oh, Bri! I'm going to miss out on so
much!

EXT. TAVERN - NIGHT

A cobblestone street.

Michael stands under a streetlight just as Schuster exits pulling a jacket on. Pale, clutching his side, he leans back-to-door.

SCHUSTER
What the fuck!

Looking up, he sees Michael smirking.

MICHAEL
Did it hurt?

Schuster groans.

SCHUSTER
Excruciating!

Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL
You'd think you'd know better.

Schuster exhales.

SCHUSTER
You'd think. She was worth it,
though. Brilliant mind...
(clutches side)
...pity about the rest.

MICHAEL
What made you do it?

Schuster, confused, looks to the door.

SCHUSTER
I honestly don't know.

Michael, disbelieving, arcs a brow.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Oh, come on! She's just a girl in a
bar, that's all. A bit of fun. It
doesn't *mean* anything.

MICHAEL
Maybe not to YOU! But, to *her*? Don't
forget who you are!

Schuster, pats his pockets.

SCHUSTER
Yeah-yeah, demon! As if I'm not
constantly reminded.

Michael frowns.

MICHAEL
You're not just *any* demon! You're...

Drawing forth cigarettes and lighter, Schuster grins.

SCHUSTER
Ha!

Michael throws up his hands.

MICHAEL
Great! As if you don't have enough
problems! You know that shit will
kill you, right?

Schuster lights one, exhales and grins.

SCHUSTER
I like to think of it as insurance!
It sure beats diapers and liver
spots! What!? Jealous it might get me
before you?

The corner of Michael's mouth twitches.

MICHAEL
Maybe.

Turning, they walk the street. A nearby clock tower shows
11:57.

SCHUSTER
So? Want to tell me what's *really*
going on? Wait. Let me guess.

Michael sighs.

MICHAEL
You'd guess right. Bastard found it.
I mean, not for nothing *old man*, but
what possessed you to put it back!?

Schuster, mumbling, looks off in the distance.

SCHUSTER
Who in hell would go back to a place
they already dug up!?

FLASHBACK: INT./EXT. TEMPLE - DAY

Schuster looks over his shoulder then pulls a metal box from under his shirt. The hole is just how he and Deckert left it.

Opening the box, careful not to touch the contents, he drops the stone back in the hole. Looking around, he spies "From Where" and puts it on top. "All Life Flows" lies ten feet away still stained with Deckert's blood. Before he can get to it, though, he hears voices.

CUT TO:

Two MEN (25 and 45), walking both sides of a camel, are arguing in Arabic. They are headed in his direction.

CUT TO:

Schuster scrambles to cover the hole, leaving no trace. Rising, he sneaks out leaving "All Life Flows" covered in Deckert's blood.

END FLASHBACK:

Schuster shakes his head.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Just FUCK!

MICHAEL

Well, the powers to be are pissed! As well they should be.

SCHUSTER

Well, maybe next time *they* oughtta do it! Oh, wait! That's right. They can't! I'm telling you, being the go-to boy for the Igigi is no picnic!

Michael ponders the clock tower. It ticks 11:57 to 11:58.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

What?

MICHAEL

I've never seen them like this, Schuster.

SCHUSTER

Seen them how?

Michael turns to look at him.

MICHAEL

Scared.

Stunned, Schuster draws back.

SCHUSTER

I didn't think the arrogant bastards
were afraid of anything.

Michael heaves a sigh.

MICHAEL

I didn't think so, either.

Each contemplates the other.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

So? What are you going to do?

Schuster exhales.

SCHUSTER

What I always do, I guess. Just...be
prepared.

MICHAEL

Aren't I always?

At this, Michael hesitates.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

You know...this isn't just mortal
greed you're dealing with, Schuster.
He's been endowed with supernatural
strength.

SCHUSTER

No! He's just a man with stolen
powers and I'll be damned if I'm not
going to steal them back!

INTERCUT: EXT. TAVERN/EXT. RUINS OF ERIDU

Deckert lifts his head to the moon. Formerly a wondrous
yellow, it's now an ugly red. Hands outstretched, raindrops
spatter his face.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

If Ishtar gets the lifestone AND the
scepter, she will destroy mankind...

Deckert wipes the wet then looks to glistening fingers.

MICHAEL (V.O.) (cont'd)
...wipe them from the face of the
earth...

Throwing arms to the rain, he laughs.

MICHAEL (V.O.) (cont'd)
...taking every living thing with
her!

CUT TO:

Michael stares.

MICHAEL
She wiped out an entire city with
just a point of her staff!

SCHUSTER
That's just it! She doesn't *have* her
staff! I hid it. And, without her
staff, *she* can't be resurrected.

Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL
And if she manages to find it?

SCHUSTER
Listen to me, Michael. I'm NOT going
to let that happen! And you can tell
those insufferable shitheads you work
for I said so!

Thunder rumbles and they look up.

MICHAEL
So? Where will you start?

Schuster exhales, flicking the cigarette.

SCHUSTER
Where it all began. Eridu.

Turning, he heads back the way he came.

MICHAEL
Hey!

Stopping in front of the tavern, Schuster looks back.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
There's a fine line between addiction
and suicide, my friend.
(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)
There's one in particular that would
say there *is* no line.
(smirks)
I believe you know her.

Schuster stares then, giving in, stomps his foot.

SCHUSTER
Oh, alright!

Grumbling, he digs for the cigarettes and with an angry flourish tosses it into a nearby bin. Swiping his hands, he holds them up.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Happy now!?

Michael grins then, pushing a button on his wrist, spreads two giant wings to shoot upward into the sky.

Turning away, Schuster stops. He can see Mirabel through the window. Alone, one hand under her chin, she's pondering what might have been.

Sighing, he looks at her with longing, until the clock, striking midnight, announces the rain. Pulling his collar, he looks one last time then slowly walks away.

EXT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

Deckert, lifestone about his neck, is perched atop a stone wall in the pouring rain. Half man, half something else, he ruffles feathers to stare -- eyes aglow, unblinking.

Slight movement and his head swivels. A blink with one set of eyelids switches his vision to infrared. Another to thermal optics. But...*nothing*.

Dropping to the ground, he enters the temple.

INT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

Deckert digs, flinging huge amounts of sand only to uncover a stone -- the first of ten steps leading downward to a polygonal wall. Spanning it, is a granite arch exhibiting three symbols: a crescent moon, a tree of life and an 8-pointed star.

Raising fist to wall, he stops when Schuster, in soaked jeans and cotton shirt steps in. Tucked into the back of his pants is a gold dagger.

Looking to the steps and the archway, he sighs.

SCHUSTER
I see she's been keeping you busy.

Deckert growls then, leaping the steps, guards the entrance.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MORNING

Mirabel, looks out at rain.

DAYDREAM: SCHUSTER, HANDSOME, LOOKING DOWN AT HER.

SCHUSTER
Mirabel...Latin for wondrous
beauty...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Can you believe it!?

SCREECH HALT:

Turning, she sees the hotel MANAGER (30) standing next to her. He's looking at the rain, too. A second later, he walks away. Gone, she slaps her forehead.

MIRABEL
What is *wrong* with you!?

Flushed, she turns to see Brian and her father traipsing the stairs. Each carry oversized bags.

FRANCIS
How long have you been waiting?

MIRABEL
Not long. You have everything?

BRIAN
Checked and double checked.

MIRABEL
Pop?

FRANCIS
Everything's in order. I put the
sterile stuff in there as well.

Mirabel sighs, looking out at the rain.

MIRABEL
Okay. Let's get this over with.

FRANCIS

Are you sure you want to do this?
There's no shame in waiting.

Mirabel shakes her head.

MIRABEL

No. The sooner we go, the better.
Besides, the permit is only good for
5 days.

Francis sighs.

FRANCIS

Okay. It's just...

Francis notices her hands. They're trembling.

FRANCIS (cont'd)

I'm worried about you, that's all.
You okay?

Mirabel gives, knowing he's just concerned.

MIRABEL

I'm fine, pop. Really. It's just this
damned rain...

FRANCIS

Well, it can't rain like this
forever, can it?

Brian shakes his head.

BRIAN

I'm afraid you don't get it, Mr. Lee.
This is Basra in August. The hottest,
driest place in all Iraq.

Stooping, he picks up a bag.

BRIAN (cont'd)

It shouldn't be raining here *at all*.

EXT. HOTEL - MORNING

Mirabel and Francis cluster under a canopy while Brian runs to a Jeep, lifts the hatch and throws the bags in. Just inside are camping gear and cans of gas. Climbing next to Mirabel, Francis jumps in the back.

INT. JEEP - MORNING

Mopping the wet away, he looks at Mirabel. She's setting her satellite phone on the dash. The screen displays a map.

BRIAN
You have the permit?

MIRABEL
Yup.

BRIAN
Coordinates set?

Mirabel eyes the phone.

MIRABEL
Yup.

BRIAN
Okay, then. Here we go.

Turning the key, the Jeep roars to life and they set off. A moment later, he looks over at her.

MIRABEL
What?

BRIAN
You okay?

Mirabel, head against the headrest, closes her eyes.

MIRABEL
I wish people would quit asking me that.

Cocking an eye, she looks at him.

MIRABEL (cont'd)
I *have* to find it, okay? No matter what it takes. Besides, that marker didn't just manifest itself. I've checked and rechecked. It isn't supposed to exist. It's...

BRIAN
It's what? Not of this world?

Mirabel heaves a sigh.

MIRABEL
I was *going* to say, it's too important.

Brian steals a glance at Francis. Both give concerned looks.

BRIAN

Look. I'm sorry, okay? It's just I don't want you to...

MIRABEL

What? Lose it?

BRIAN

Okay. Yeah. Now that you bring it up. Look, I can understand keeping to yourself. *But*, when you stop eating, stop sleeping, we find you wandering in the dead of night, well...we tend to get *really* worried.

FLASHBACK: INT./EXT. MIRABEL'S FLAT - NIGHT

Mirabel tosses and turns in her sleep. Ishtar is weaving in and out of her dreams.

Trance-like, she paces to the front door and stares out at NOT the park beyond, but rather a vision of Eridu. Seconds later, a downpour, and she steps out into the "ruins".

END FLASHBACK:

BRIAN (cont'd)

This last put you in hospital and in your condition you can't afford another misadventure. You might...

MIRABEL

What? *Die!*?

A bitter laugh escapes her.

MIRABEL (cont'd)

Yeah. Well...

Awkward silence. Mirabel, weepy, peers out the window.

MIRABEL (cont'd)

Look! It stopped raining!

(wipes tears)

See? Things are looking up!

When Brian doesn't say anything, just switches off the wipers, she gives a reassuring look.

MIRABEL (cont'd)

Look. Don't worry, okay!? I'm never going back to that place.

BRIAN

Which place? Maudsley or that place in your head?

MIRABEL

Both.

Her father leans forward and squeezes her shoulder. In response, she places her hand over his.

FRANCIS

So, tell me about Eridu.

Brian glances over his shoulder.

BRIAN

Oh, my! Where to start! Okay. Eridu is one of the oldest cities in Iraq. About 9,000 years old. It's where the flood myth was first recorded. So, you can just imagine its history. AND before you say anything, the flood was real. There's evidence all over suggesting it really happened....

FEMALE:GPS (V.O.)

Turn left here then West for 4 miles.

Turning the wheel, Brian veers off into the desert.

MIRABEL

Eridu is where modern man was supposedly "created" after the waters receded and earth returned to normal.

BRIAN

In fact, the temple we're going to held an aquifer in which its said life began anew. It's where the stone Mirabel holds so close to her heart was found.

MIRABEL

Supposedly found. We're not sure.

FRANCIS

Oh, yes! The stone! You never did say how you came about it.

BRIAN
Mirabel didn't tell you!?

Brian looks aghast. Mirabel only shrugs.

MIRABEL
I had other things on my mind...

Brian frowns.

BRIAN
Okay then. *I'll* tell you. About three weeks ago this trader offers to sell the stone to the British Museum. Says his grandfather found it inside the temple back in the 40's. Kept it all these years until his son became sick with cancer. Guess he needed the money, poor guy...

FLASHBACK: INT. TENT - DAY

An Arab MAN (30) and his sickly SON (8) offer a photograph to a British MAN (50). The stone tablet still has Deckert's blood on it along with the inscription.

The British man, not really expecting anything, looks up in surprise.

BRITISH MAN
How much to take it off your hands?

BRIAN (V.O.)
...and Mirabel, being who *she* is, is one of the first to examine it.

INT. BRITISH MUSEUM - DAY

Mirabel, the stone on a table, leans over with gloved hands. Swabbing the stone, she puts what she collects in vials.

CUT TO:

Brian enters to see her sitting by a genetic analyzing machine.

BRIAN
Linguistics wants to know if you're done with the stone yet? They're about ready to gnaw their arm off. How are you? Still feeling unwell?

Mirabel looks up from her paperwork.

MIRABEL

I'm done. You can take it. And
yeah...I'm feeling a little better.
Oh, and tell Harry I said, Happy
Birthday.

Brian moves to the table and dons gloves.

BRIAN

Oh, hell no. Evil bastard's really in
a mood. I plan on avoiding him the
rest of the day!

Both grin until a ding sounds. The analyzer opens a report
on her computer. Curious, they read it then slowly look at
the stone.

END FLASHBACK:

Mirabel stares out at the desert.

MIRABEL

Human hybrid. Origin unknown.

Brian frowns.

BRIAN

Now, you know full well that sample
wasn't exactly pristine when we got
it. It could have been contaminated
by just about anything. Which is why
...

MIRABEL & BRIAN (UNISON)

...we must keep it to ourselves until
sure!

MIRABEL

Except, the computer would have shown
if the sample had been contaminated.

FRANCIS

Okay. I know I'm just along for the
ride, but can someone please explain?

Brian sighs.

BRIAN

What she's saying is...every single
human can be traced back to a
specific origin. Homo-Erectus.
Denisovan, etcetera.

(MORE)

BRIAN (cont'd)
THIS showed whoever this was is only
half human. The other half?
Completely unknown. In short, if any
of this is true...

MIRABEL
Which it is!

BRIAN
...Mirabel has discovered a
completely new species.

MIRABEL
And, as if that wasn't enough, the
cell makeup was, well...something
I've never seen before. It's...

BRIAN
Oh, please God! Don't say it!

Mirabel giggles.

MIRABEL
...NOT of this world!

Francis leans forward in surprise.

FRANCIS
What do you mean!?

Mirabel and Brian look at each other.

MIRABEL
Well, we weren't going to tell a
soul, but...oh Brian! Do you want to
tell him, or, should I?

BRIAN
Ugh! You tell him.

Mirabel grins.

MIRABEL
Those cells? They aren't dead yet!

Francis draws back.

FRANCIS
What!? What do you mean!?

Mirabel hesitates.

MIRABEL

I mean, they look dead and should be dead, but they aren't! The closest I can come to describing them is that they're...well...*hibernating*.

Shocked, Francis sits back.

FRANCIS

How extraordinary!

Mirabel turns to the window and grins.

MIRABEL

My thoughts exactly!

INT. TEMPLE - LATE AFTERNOON

PAN FROM: ISHTAR'S TOMB TO MIRABEL, BRIAN AND FRANCIS'S BACKSIDE.

All three are leaning over Schuster, sprawled out on the ground. There's a dagger sticking out of his side. The rest of him is barely recognizable.

BRIAN

Well, so much for never seeing *him* again.

FRANCIS

Who?

BRIAN

The guy from last night. Mr. Twitchy. The one that kissed Mirabel.

Mirabel stiffens.

MIRABEL

You're crazy. That's NOT him.

Brian frowns.

BRIAN

What are you talking about? Sure, it is! See that slight curve of the jaw there? That's definitely him.

Mirabel and Francis tilt their heads.

MIRABEL

You sure?

FRANCIS

You know, I think you're right!

Brian leans in, arcing a brow.

BRIAN

Looks like he got his ass kicked.

Schuster suddenly spits blood.

BRIAN (cont'd)

Whoa!

FRANCIS

My God! He's alive!

Mirabel grins. Catching herself, she rolls eyes, instead.

MIRABEL

How about instead of blathering on,
we help!? Brian, fetch the first aid
kit. Dad, help me get his head.

Dropping, she cradles Schuster's head in her lap. As she
does, he opens one caked, bloodshot eye to look up.

MIRABEL (cont'd)

Hi.

Recognizing her, he jerk-twitches then grins; a front tooth
missing.

MIRABEL (cont'd)

Oh, my! Now...now, don't you worry
about that! That can be fixed!

Schuster's head rolls to the side.

MIRABEL (cont'd)

No-no! Don't go back to sleep! Oh,
God! Where in hell is Brian!?

Francis straightens to see Brian barrelling toward them.

FRANCIS

Here he comes!

Breathless, Brian drops to his knees. Flipping a First Aid
kit, he finds an ammonia capsule, snaps it and holds it
under Schuster's nose. Schuster sits bolt upright.

BRIAN

Hello! Are you sure you should be
sitting up like that!?

(MORE)

BRIAN (cont'd)
 (eyes dagger)
 I mean...maybe you should lie down.
 You don't look so hot.

Schuster groans then lisps a reply.

SCHUSTER
 I'm fwine.

Brian eyes the dagger.

BRIAN
 Uh...you don't *look* fine.

Schuster lolls an eye in his direction.

SCHUSTER
 I'm fwine. Thith thit happenth all
 the thime.

FRANCIS
 Good lord! *Really!*?

MONTAGE:

* 79 AD POMPEII -- A ROMAN "SCHUSTER" (50) with a tattoo on his wrist shades his eyes. Shoulders sagging, he sees Mt. Vesuvius explode, the pyroclastic cloud coming straight for him.

ROMAN MAN
 Futues!
 (Fuck!)

* 869 AD JAPAN - A JAPANESE "SCHUSTER" (40) with a tattoo on his wrist sits on a shoreline mending a net. Shoulders sagging, he sees a horde of sword-swinging mongols bearing down on him.

FISHERMAN
 Kuso!
 (Fuck!)

* 1880 WILD WEST -- BANK ROBBER "SCHUSTER" (30), is smack dab in the middle of a robbery. Reaching for his gun (tattoo on wrist) he is shot in the head. His last words are...

SCHUSTER
Fuck!

Michael, roosting on a balcony, shakes his head.

END FLASHBACK:

Schuster spits out a tooth.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Realwy.

Reaching, they see him grimace. Holding a finger up, he yanks the blade, drops it then holds his arms out.

FRANCIS

Good Lord! I mean...oh, okay...here you go!

Brian leans down, picks up the dagger only to pop up again.

BRIAN

Oh, my God! Do you even know what was sticking out of your side!

Schuster pats his body for damage.

SCHUSTER

Let me gueth. Dagger? Athyrian? About 3,100 yearth old?

BRIAN

How did you...?

Schuster gives an irritated look only to snatch the knife.

SCHUSTER

Thankth.

Slipping it into his waist, woozy, he looks at Mirabel.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

I'm gonna go now. Do me a favor and...and keep that one (points) away from me...

MIRABEL

I beg your pardon!?

SCHUSTER

...I hurt enough already.

Schuster shuffles into a turn.

MIRABEL

Well, so much for gratitude!

Mirabel stands.

MIRABEL (cont'd)
 Wait! That's all the explanation we
 get!?

Ignoring her, Schuster staggers toward the entrance.
 Francis, realizing the futility of it, shakes his head.

FRANCIS
 Where are you going, son?

Schuster halts.

SCHUSTER
 What did you jutht call me!?

Francis gives a quizzical look.

FRANCIS
 You mean...son?

SCHUSTER
 Yeah. Hmmph! No one's ever called me
 that before.

A grin plasters his face.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 Cool!

Eyes rolling, he promptly passes out.

INTERCUT: INT/EXT. TENT - NIGHT

A table outside the tent holds a map with a lantern. A portable stove provides warmth. Chairs hold Mirabel, Brian and Francis. All three sip tea and munch sandwiches as Mirabel stares off into the distance.

FLASHBACK: MIRABEL IS MELDING INTO SCHUSTER, KISSING HIM.

FRANCIS (O.S.)
 I don't get it. How can someone
 recover from that?

END FLASHBACK:

Mirabel's head snaps up. Flushed, she sees Brian peering over at Francis.

BRIAN
 I want to know about that dagger! Did
 you see it?
 (MORE)

BRIAN (cont'd)
It IS Assyrian! 3,100 years old...900
BC...in the time of Solomon for God's
sake! AND, it's in perfect condition!
What are your thoughts, Mirabel?

Mirabel arcs a brow.

MIRABEL
Me? I'd say, what about that chamber!
I can't be the only one that noticed.

BRIAN
Of course not! I mean, who could have
dug that up do you suppose? Him?
Because there's no one else here.

FRANCIS
That you know of. *Somebody* did that
to him. Either way, one of us should
keep watch.

BRIAN
Good idea.

MIRABEL
In the meantime, maybe the pic's dad
took of the entrance are clue to who
might be in there...(grins).

BRIAN
Yeah. About that...

MIRABEL
What?

Brian looks about then lowers his voice.

BRIAN
That dagger...those symbols...this
place?

MIRABEL/FRANCIS
What!?

The corner of Brian's mouth twitches.

BRIAN
Ever hear of a goddess named Ishtar?

Mirabel and Francis sit silent, waiting for him to continue.

BRIAN (cont'd)
 Ishtar was one of the most powerful
 goddesses known throughout
 Mesopotamia...

CUT TO PAST:

INT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

Ishtar stands with Ninshubar at the fountain. Turning, she is followed by a retinue of man-slaves and advisors.

BRIAN (V.O.)
 ...every bit the representative of
 sex, love and war. Make no mistake,
 though, she was no mother goddess.
 Far from it. She was a voracious
 sexual predator...

INT. PALACE - NIGHT

Torchlight reveals **GILGAMESH (30)** on a throne. Looking up, he sees Ishtar coming out of the mist. Throwing herself at Gilgamesh's feet, she creeps forward on all fours.

BRIAN (V.O.)
 ...so much so, even the legendary
 Gilgamesh, a tyrant and womanizer in
 his own right, didn't want her.

Gilgamesh rises. Pointing, he demands she leave. Scorned, she hisses and retreats.

BRIAN (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Enraged, she implores the gods to
 send the husband of her sister,
 Ereshkigal, "Queen of the Dead", to
 destroy him...

INT/EXT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

ERESHKIGAL (30), crowned in gold, sits brooding upon a black granite throne. Wispy, black threads drape a seductive body. Wings extend outward in magnificent fashion. In one hand is a scepter, a double headed dragon, the lifestone it holds crimson red.

BRIAN (V.O.)
 When that failed, thinking she was
 betrayed, Ishtar sought vengeance
 upon her sister.

Ishtar, accompanied by Ninshubar, walks a stone path; clad in a magnificent array of silk, crown, jewels and gold. Hell hounds appear only to keep pace. At the end is a granite opening flanked by hideous, carved demons. Above, a three headed vulture, chained to a rock.

This is **RIPPER**.

Growling, he flutters his wings. Just inside, garbled, pitiable cries leave Ninshubar uneasy.

BRIAN (V.O.) (cont'd)
Ishtar, no fool, was immensely powerful and carried with her always a lifestone...

FRANCIS (V.O.)
Lifestone?

BRIAN (V.O.)
A creation stone. Not of this earth. One of many brought to this planet by the gods. The stone allowed her to turn whatever she wanted into anything she desired...

CUT TO:

Mirabel's head snaps up.

MIRABEL
Wait! Manipulate DNA?

Brian grins.

BRIAN
Among other things. What she was NOT, was fool enough to let Ereshkigal get hold of it.

CUT TO:

Ishtar detaches the lifestone from her staff and hands it to Ninshubar.

ISHTAR
Hide it. Tell no one.

Ninshubar wraps the stone then, bowing, backs away.

INT. TEMPLE/FOUNTAIN - NIGHT

Ninshubar drops to her knees. Making sure she is alone, she digs a hole and buries the lifestone.

INTERCUT: UNDERWORLD AND CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Leaving her scepter, Ishtar steps through the portal. Scuttling, skin-sagging, two-headed creatures track her as she picks her way down a slope. Demented screamers rip flesh from bone. Harpies screech overhead.

BRIAN (V.O.)

But, Ereshkigal was no fool, either. So, to ensure her sister came unarmed, she forbade Ishtar enter any of the seven gates unless she gave of herself first.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

* FIRST GATE: A deformed demon snatches her crown.

* SECOND GATE: A snake creature snatches her earrings.

* THIRD GATE: A spider demon snatches her necklaces.

* FOURTH GATE: A lizard demon rips the breastplate from her chest.

* FIFTH GATE: A gremlin removes the birthstones at her waist with sticky fingered zeal.

* SIXTH GATE: A demon with face and mouth where its stomach should be takes anklets and bracelets to shove her past.

* SEVENTH GATE: **ASMODEUS (30)**, devilishly handsome, looks up from a hellish, abstract throne of metal shards and human bone. Skin a burnt sage, he carries horns, a serpent's tail, cloven feet, the legs of a satyr and a dong the size of a mule. Before him are a line of sinners in shackles.

Looking up, he sees Ishtar shoved forward and grins. Thrusting minions aside, he stands swishing a tail, demanding the last of her garments.

Just past the gate Ereshkigal watches.

CUT TO:

Mirabel's jaw drops.

MIRABEL

So, wait. THAT'S who you think is in there!? Ishtar?

Brian grins.

BRIAN

Did you see the tree of life? The eight pointed star? All I can say is...if it *is* her...

MEANDER TO
TENT:

BRIAN (O.S.)

...it'll be the first real proof of her existence ever to be found.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Schuster, worse for wear, lies bandaged with a blanket across his lower half. A lantern reveals a wash-board stomach rising and falling.

A slight breeze and Michael drops in from out of nowhere. Eyeing Schuster's wounds he spreads his wings over the body. As he does, a glow emanates, until he retracts them.

Leaning in, he whispers...

MICHAEL

Get up. There's work to do.

Smiling fondly, he shoots upward and is gone.

Schuster's eyes flutter open. Wounds heal and the swelling in his face, eyes and lips disappear. Seconds later, the face is restored. Alarmed, as if remembering, he checks his teeth are all there then sighs with relief.

Pushing the blanket, he pulls on jeans and removes the bandage from his side. That, too, is healed. His shirt hangs by the cot and he puts it on.

Just outside, Mirabel sips her drink and Schuster can't help but stare. She laughs -- making her all the more beautiful.

CUT TO:

Brian gets to his feet, waving them toward the map.

BRIAN O.S.

Here! Look! I'll prove it to you!

As all three study the map, Schuster escapes unnoticed.

INT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

Schuster stands staring at the archway.

FLASHBACK:

Deckert's talons dig in as he readies to spring. Lips stretched, he growls...

DECKERT
Asmodeussssss!

Schuster rolls his eyes, mindless of the rain.

SCHUSTER
Oh, come on! No one calls me *that* anymore. But then, you wouldn't know that would you?
(nods toward tomb)
But, SHE would.

Deckert hisses.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Hey. And don't feel bad about the new suit, yeah? She does that to people. See, once you touched her lifestone, it changed your molecular makeup. Made you more...*pliable*. Now, she can restructure your cells any way she wants for as *LONG* as she wants.

Looking to the polygonal wall, he calls out.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Isn't that so, Ishtar? What's next? A bald-headed monkey-pig!? A cyclops, perhaps!?

Turning to Deckert...

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Anyway...she owns you now. So? What did that little Manx promise, eh?

Deckert rises.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Tell you what. Whatever it is, she's *LYING!* She has no intention of giving you anything.
(MORE)

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 I mean, the best you can hope for now
 is she turns you into...oh, I don't
 know...a border collie or something.

Deckert pulls lips to growl.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 Whoa! No need for all that! Just give
 me the lifestone, and we're even.

Leaping to the top of a wall, Deckert advances.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 Okay. Okay. I see we got off on the
 wrong foot. Trust me, I don't want
 her. I mean the hell she put me
 through!
 (rolls eyes)
 You have NO idea!

As Deckert drops, Schuster reaches for the dagger.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 Now...hold on!

Unleashing, Deckert slams Schuster to the ground. In turn,
 Schuster thumbs Deckert in an eyeball only to stab him in
 the side.

Pulling the dagger out, Deckert looks at it in disbelief
 then leaps onto Schuster's back as he tries crawling away.

DECKERT
 Aargh!!! Where is it!?

SCHUSTER
 I don't know what you're talking
 about!

Deckert leans in to growl.

DECKERT
 The scepter! Where is it!?

Lifting Schuster's head, he pounds the ground with it.
 Coming back, Schuster's missing a tooth.

SCHUSTER
 I'M NOT...(oompf) TELLING
 YOU...(oompf!) STHIT!

Grinning like a crazy person, he elbows Deckert in the face.

END FLASHBACK:

Schuster steps downward to Ishtar's tomb.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Mirabel, flare gun in hand, stares at the empty cot. Beside it, are Schuster's bandages.

MIRABEL
Well...*shit*.

EXT. TENT - NIGHT

Brian and Francis are in sleeping bags as Mirabel exits toward the temple.

EXT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

Limping, she reaches the entrance, peeks inside and enters.

INT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

A torch illuminates the archway; stoves about the threshold. Peering inside, she whispers...

MIRABEL
Hey! You in there!?

Unsure, she makes her way down.

INT. ISHTAR'S TOMB - NIGHT

Entering, her jaw drops. In the middle is a massive quartz sarcophagus. It glows eerily. On the face, etched in gold, is an 8-pointed star. Below, an indentation in the shape of Ishtar's scepter. Bordering are gold moons -- one for each day of the cycle.

Mirabel gasps. Schuster is standing beside the sarcophagus; hand hovering over the energy. His back to her, he appears lost in thought until, turning, he faces her. He is as she first met him; the wounds gone, the handsome face restored. Alarmed, she points the gun at him.

MIRABEL
You! How is this possible!?

Schuster shakes his head.

SCHUSTER
Don't be afraid, okay? I can explain.

Fumbling, she collects herself.

MIRABEL
Explain then! *Whoever* you are!

Schuster looks at the gun.

SCHUSTER
The name's Schuster and...
(looks around)
...I'd rather not explain here.

Mirabel arcs a brow.

MIRABEL
Here's fine!

Raising hands, he looks at the sarcophagus then her.

SCHUSTER
You don't understand. What lies
inside is *not* dead. Merely sleeping.
And, for *your* sake, I don't want you
near her!

MIRABEL
Why's it glowing like that?

Schuster runs his hand over the energy.

SCHUSTER
The sarcophagus is crystal quartz;
the energy, piezoelectric...a
reaction allowing for the
luminescence.

Mirabel frowns. Schuster smiles.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
The ability to create light under
immense pressure.

MIRABEL
I see...

INT. ISHTAR'S SARCOPHAGUS

Ishtar, beautiful face gaunt, almost alien, lies eyes
closed.

INT. ISHTAR'S TOMB - NIGHT

Schuster's hand hovers over the sarcophagus.

SCHUSTER

Do you?

Unsure, she looks to the sarcophagus then him.

MIRABEL

Wait. How do you know its a *her*?

Schuster sighs.

SCHUSTER

Because, I helped put her there.

INT. ISHTAR'S SARCOPHAGUS - NIGHT

Ishtar's eyes fly open.

INT. ISHTAR'S TOMB - NIGHT

Schuster holds Mirabel's gaze.

SCHUSTER

I imagine a girl like you, a scientist no less, would want the truth no matter how implausible?

Mirabel doesn't say anything.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

I'll take that as a yes.

(beat)

Okay. You asked for it. I, *moi*, was a prince of the Underworld once. They called me...

Mirabel rolls her eyes.

MIRABEL

Really!? You're going to hand me a bunch of crap!?

SCHUSTER

Hey! I asked! If you don't want to hear, just say so! I'll go about my merry...you go yours!

Throwing hands, she glares.

MIRABEL

I knew it! You're completely bonkers!
What do American's say? Oh, yes!
Cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs!

Schuster arcs a brow.

SCHUSTER

Well, how else do you explain my
miraculous transformation? Hmm?

Considering, Mirabel can't help but sigh.

MIRABEL

Fine! But, this better be good!

The corner of Schuster's mouth twitches.

SCHUSTER

Oh. It *is*.

(beat)

As I was saying, *I* was a prince of
the Underworld once. They called
me...

Schuster flourishes a bow.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Asmodeus.

FADE TO:

INTERCUT: UNDERWORLD (PAST) AND TOMB (PRESENT)

* SEVENTH GATE: Asmodeus looks up from his throne.

SCHUSTER (V.O.)

Trust me when I tell you there was no
lustful desire I did not fulfill...

Asmodeus eyes his paradise. Crawling horrors, having twisted
sex with one another, scream blood curdling cries. Pulling
hair, they expose themselves in obscene fashion.

SCHUSTER (V.O.) (cont'd)

...no adulterous act I did not
commit, no craven desire I did not
minister to...

A terrified, half-naked woman is shoved before him. His eyes
dancing across her body, he commands she fall before him.

SCHUSTER (V.O.) (cont'd)
 ...no vile, vengeful act I was not
 capable of.

Rising, he picks up a whip spiked with razors.

CUT TO:

Mirabel stares.

SCHUSTER
 That is...until SHE brought about my
 downfall.

Schuster nods toward Ishtar's sarcophagus.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 And never has a more vengeful harlot
 existed!

CUT TO PAST:

Ishtar stands naked; the body exquisite.

Slaves hiss, eyeing Asmodeus, as he runs his hands over her
 body. Then, thrusting himself on top of her, rapes her in
 full view of the others. Ereshkigal watches, predatory-like,
 as Asmodeus leaves her on the floor.

Rising, quivering in anger, Ishtar lifts her chin.

ISHTAR
 There will come a day, Asmodeus, when
 I will exact revenge!

Asmodeus grins then, sweeping his tail, allows the naked
 Ishtar to enter. As she does, Ereshkigal rises to meet her.

CUT TO PRESENT:

Schuster cannot look at Mirabel.

SCHUSTER
 You have to understand, I was
different then.

Riveted, *she* can only stare.

MIRABEL
 You *raped* her!?

SCHUSTER
 I was conceived of a succubus and a
 night crawler! I...I was NOT human!

MIRABEL

And yet, somehow, I'm supposed to believe you're human now!?

Schuster looks up. Eyes hopeful, they wander her face.

SCHUSTER

I would like you to believe that, yes.

Mirabel studies him; the expression wary.

MIRABEL

So, then what?

Schuster runs a hand through his hair.

SCHUSTER

It wasn't long after, she got her revenge...

INTERCUT: EXT. SEASIDE (DAY)/INT. TOMB (NIGHT)

Asmodeus (in demon form) stands on the beach; horns glinting in the sun - long tail swishing.

A WOMAN (20) splayed out on a mooring rock is in front of him. She reaches, wanton, throwing her head back. Above her, embedded in the rock is an iron ring and a short chain in which to tie a boat.

Lustful, eyes closed, Asmodeus licks a forked tongue only to open his eyes and see the woman gone. In her stead, is Ishtar, scepter in hand.

Horrified, he draws back.

ASMODEUS

You! But, how can this be!?
Ereshkigal killed you! I watched her do it!

Ishtar smirks.

ISHTAR

And yet I live.

Circling, she admires his form.

ISHTAR (cont'd)

Did I not tell you, Prince, that one day there would be a price?

Reaching, she cups his crotch.

ISHTAR (cont'd)
That I would demand something in
return for what you took!?

Asmodeus pales.

ASMODEUS
It was your sister, goddess! She bade
me do it! To humiliate you! I beg
you, let me live!

Ishtar looks to the sea. A longboat is out on the water;
Gilgamesh at its helm. He heads outward toward his destiny.
Anger at the very sight of him makes her whirl.

ISHTAR
Oh, you *shall* live, Prince.

Pounding her staff, she plants a finger on his forehead.
Clouds roil as he is transformed into a snake. He tries
wriggling away, but she steps on his tail.

ISHTAR (cont'd)
Not so fast!

Leaning down, she picks him up and carries him to the rock.
Wrapping his tail with the chain, she ties it tight.

ISHTAR (cont'd)
I bind you, Asmodeus. I bind you to
this rock for however long the birds
pecking at your flesh let you live!

ASMODEUS
No!

ISHTAR
Never again shall you seduce! Never
again shall you take without asking!

Seagulls land only to inch closer. One pecks as he tries
squirming away. When he can't, he strikes, misses and it
takes to the air.

She laughs when, a moment later, a crab followed by another
scuttles ashore, snapping pincers.

ISHTAR (cont'd)
How does it feel, Asmodeus? How does
it feel to be held down? Preyed upon?
Unable to get away?

Smug, she turns only to look back.

ISHTAR (cont'd)
 Let your cries of anguish carry a message, for I will never step foot in the Underworld again. Tell my sister that from now on if she wishes to kill me, she'll have to come to MY world to do it! *If* she dares!

Turning, she leaves more crabs to crawl ashore. More birds to swoop and peck.

SCHUSTER (V.O.)
 Left to die, starving, I ate whatever I could. Snail droppings, bird excrement...then one day I saw a ship. It was that bastard, Gilgamesh!

Sails torn, barely afloat, Gilgamesh beaches the craft only to fling himself ashore. Collapsing by the rock, he passes out. Hanging around his neck is a delicious-looking plant.

Half-dead, Asmodeus slithers over Gilgamesh's shoulder and eats it.

CUT TO:

Schuster, pacing, stops to look at her.

SCHUSTER
 I was so desperate...so hungry...I ate without thinking!

Schuster gives a derisive laugh.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 And voila! Just like that, I'm immortal! I ate the Plant of Immortality not realizing!

He stops, shaking his head.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 I can't tell you how long I lay there, chained to that rock with birds pecking and pecking and pecking at me! I would die, be reborn, die, be reborn and they just kept pecking and pecking and pecking!
 (aaargh!)
 I fucking HATE birds!

MIRABEL

And Ishtar?

Schuster heaves a sigh.

SCHUSTER

Ishtar returned only to be stripped of her power for trying to usurp her sister's throne.

INTERCUT: EXT. ERIDU (DAY)/ INT. ISHTAR'S TOMB (NIGHT)

Ishtar, furious, stands atop a distant hill looking down on Eridu. Clouds darken the sky, lightning flashes. Below, gods and peasants look up in fear.

Sweeping the gates, wind whipping all around, she approaches Ninshubar. As she does, Ninshubar gets to her knees.

ISHTAR

The lifestone! Give it to me!

Ninshubar looks up; eyes pleading.

SCHUSTER (V.O.)

Ishtar had gone mad down there and Ninshubar knew it. She must have known what would happen if she refused. But, she was commanded by Enki, the most powerful of all, not to relinquish it.

ISHTAR

You dare!

Pounding her staff, she points. Within seconds Ninshubar is reduced to a liquefied mess.

SCHUSTER (V.O.)

Ishtar and her scepter alone were powerful. Only a fool would say otherwise. But, the lifestone? Well, the lifestone made her near invincible. It was bonded to her. Which meant they didn't have long before she found it.

Furious, she looks on as, one by one, **GODS** (various ages - male and female) land in a circle; each with their own scepter. Last to arrive, a bearded, muscular **ENKI (40)**.

Michael watches from a distance as the God's level their scepters.

Ishtar draws up, sweeping her staff in a circle -- a tornado exploding outward that blows people, animals even Gods away.

SCHUSTER (V.O.) (cont'd)
 She leveled the entire city. The only
 one left standing was Enki.

Enki draws himself up only to deliver a blow so powerful it nearly destroys her. Suspended mid-air, held in place by the power of Enki's stone, the gods regroup around her.

SCHUSTER (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Her fate was decided right then. BUT,
 they didn't dare kill her.

CUT TO:

MIRABEL
 Why not?

SCHUSTER
 Because, without the lifestone,
 mankind would cease to exist. It
 brings forth the rains, feeds the
 crops. She really *is* the cycle of
 life. *That's* why Enki bartered with
 Ereshkigal for her freedom.

MIRABEL
 I don't understand. Didn't you say
 Ereshkigal killed her?

Schuster gives a derisive laugh.

SCHUSTER
 Yes. She did. But the number one rule
 in the underworld is...if you want to
 be restored to the natural world,
 someone must be sacrificed in your
 stead. In Ishtar's case, her not so
 mournful husband took her place.

CUT TO:

Ishtar smirks as her HUSBAND (30), intertwined in the limbs of naked women, is suddenly dragged away by demons.

CUT TO:

Michael watches as, struggling, Ishtar is lowered into the sarcophagus and the lid set. Enki places her scepter in the groove and, at once, moon locks clamp the lid in place.

Removing it, he hands Michael the scepter.

INTERCUT: ISHTAR'S TOMB/SEASIDE (DAY)

Mirabel looks up.

MIRABEL

And you?

SCHUSTER

Me? I was where she left me. If it weren't for the Igigi...better known to you as Watchers...I'd still be tied to that rock.

CUT TO:

Michael lands holding Ishtar's scepter only to look down on the bedraggled snake.

MICHAEL

I have a proposition for you, Asmodeus. If you'll listen.

The snake lifts its head.

MIRABEL (V.O.)

But, why give the scepter to you?

SCHUSTER (V.O.)

Because power such as that could never be allowed back in her hands.

Michael wraps his wings over Asmodeus. When he lifts them Asmodeus is in human form -- muscular, flowing hair, with **piercing blue eyes**.

Michael nods and Asmodeus looks down. A **tattoo with a snake eating a plant** is on his wrist.

SCHUSTER (V.O.) (cont'd)

The Igigi, forbidden to interfere in human affairs, reasoned that since I could not die I would make the perfect watchdog.

Michael hands Asmodeus Ishtar's scepter.

SCHUSTER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Tasked with keeping it safe, I hid the scepter in the one place she would never find it.

CUT TO:

Mirabel cocks her head.

MIRABEL
And the Lifestone?

SCHUSTER
As long as it remains here, life will
continue.

MIRABEL
But, why leave her behind? Why didn't
the gods take her with them?

Schuster's laugh cuts to the bone.

SCHUSTER
Because even gods have their limits.

INT. ISHTAR'S SARCOPHAGUS - NIGHT

Ishtar, furious--unable to move, narrows her eyes.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Breathless, Brian shakes Francis until he wakes.

FRANCIS
What!? What's going on!?

BRIAN
It's Mirabel! She's gone! So is the
guy!

FRANCIS
Who?

Flustered, Brian blurts...

BRIAN
You know...Mr. Twitchy! I think
they're in the tomb.

Throwing blankets, Francis jumps up to fumble boots.

FRANCIS
What makes you think that?

Brian yells over his shoulder.

BRIAN
Because its the only place I haven't
looked! Come on!

INT. ISHTAR'S TOMB - NIGHT

Mirabel pales, unsure, as Schuster closes the distance.

MIRABEL

How do I know I can I trust you? How do I know you're not...who you were before?

SCHUSTER

Before, as in a demon?

Mirabel gasps as he runs a finger (without touching her) down her cheek, along her neck then down her chest. The mere proximity of him makes her skin flush. His eyes glimmer.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Because, demons don't show mercy. They don't sacrifice themselves and they damn sure don't kiss women in bars!

He's so close he's intoxicating. Mirabel stammers.

MIRABEL

And yet, you kissed me!

Gritting his teeth, he pushes the muzzle toward the floor.

SCHUSTER

Yes. I *did*.

Lips close to hers, he wants to kiss, but can't. Pained, he draws back only to see her turn her head. Gasping, she sees Deckert slink the stairs.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

What?

Lifting a finger, she points. Schuster doesn't even turn.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Let me guess. An owl-like creature with long talons and a hideous face?

Mirabel nods and his shoulder's slump.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

That's what I thought.

Resigned, he steps in front to protect her, but Deckert takes him down, raking him with his claws.

Mirabel aims the gun, but both are tumbling, punching and biting to the point she can't get a shot. Jumping out of the way, she sees Brian and her father rush the opening.

Wide-eyed, Brian yanks Mirabel toward the steps. She pulls away, though, still trying to aim.

BRIAN
Come on!

MIRABEL
No!

BRIAN
Come on!

MIRABEL
NO! I won't leave him!

Clutching Deckert by the throat, Schuster screams...

SCHUSTER
Get her out of here!

Tossing Schuster off, each grapple for the dagger until Schuster pins Deckert; blade to throat.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
(to Ishtar)
Stop! Or, I'll cut his head off, I swear!

CUT TO:

Ishtar's eyes roll in his direction. They're furious.

CUT TO:

Schuster looks to Brian and Mirabel.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Go! While you still can!

Horns sprout from Deckert's head. Lowering them, he butts Schuster. Falling, knocking his head, Schuster loses the dagger.

Shouldering Brian, Deckert grabs Mirabel. Picking her up, he slams her on top of the sarcophagus.

CUT TO:

Ishtar's eyes glow with delight.

CUT TO:

Climbing on top, Deckert rips the lifestone from its tether, bares her chest then presses it into her flesh.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

NO!

At once, the molecular change takes place and Mirabel succumbs.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Aw, not you! Not you, Mirabel!

Rising, Schuster picks up the gun and shoots Deckert in the head. A hole burns straight through as he slides off.

Slipping to his knees, Schuster glares at the sarcophagus.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

You crazy, psychotic...!

Mirabel's scream brings him back. Clawing, trying to rip the lifestone from her chest, she twists and turns. A second later, she rises, suspended, by an unseen force.

Schuster jumps to his feet. Brian and Francis are in shock.

FRANCIS

What's happening!? What's going on!?

Brian moves to help, but Schuster grabs him.

SCHUSTER

No! Don't touch her!

BRIAN

Are you crazy!? Get out of my way!

Brian shoves Schuster aside to touch Mirabel's skin.

SCHUSTER

Stop! Or, she'll have you, too!

Too late, Brian is flung hard against a wall. Unconscious, he glows just as Deckert once did.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

No!

Furious, Schuster looks up as Ishtar's disembodied laugh booms throughout the chamber.

ISHTAR

Where is the scepter, Asmodeus?

Schuster turns full circle.

SCHUSTER

It's where even I can't get it,
Ishtar!

ISHTAR

Really?

Mirabel, as if being drawn and quartered, is pulled taut.

Francis looks around, unsure who he's even talking to.

FRANCIS

Let her go! *Please!*

Mirabel, the cords in her neck straining, gargles.

SCHUSTER

Okay! Stop! Stop!

Brian wakes, rising to his feet. Limp arms, a dull stare, all indicate he is now at Ishtar's bidding.

ISHTAR

Every minute...of every hour...for
all eternity, Asmodeus!

Frustration turns to anger.

SCHUSTER

Aargh! Your sister would be so proud!

Ishtar laughs.

ISHTAR

How many have suffered at *your* hands,
Asmodeus? How many women has the
Demon of Lust destroyed all to
satisfy his sick, sadistic needs?

Schuster takes a knee.

SCHUSTER

Look at me! I'm begging. Don't take
your hatred of me out on her. Let her
go!

Mirabel's head twists; the neck creaking.

MIRABEL/ISHTAR

Why, Asmodeus! How unlike you! Don't tell me you actually care for this thing?

Schuster shakes his head.

SCHUSTER

I'm different now! Human! I am *not* what I used to be!

Contemptuous, her laugh booms.

ISHTAR

Oh, Asmodeus! You're EXACTLY as you used to be! That suit you wear...that skin...it means nothing! You reek of demon no matter how you appear! As for this pathetic creature, does she know it's your essence, who you are that she can't stop thinking of you?

Shame-faced, he looks at Mirabel.

SCHUSTER

I never meant to hurt you! Please! I'm so very sorry!

Ishtar laughs.

ISHTAR

Of course, he didn't mean to hurt you! It was *only a bit of fun*, right Asmodeus?

Horrified, his own words haunting him, his eyes seek Mirabel's.

MIRABEL

Don't give her a damned thing!

In an instant, she is pulled taut again and she screams.

Brian, monkey-like, jumps up and down with delight then, running to the entrance, disappears.

ISHTAR

Bring it to me, Asmodeus, and I promise to let her live.

Schuster's laugh is bitter.

SCHUSTER

As what? Some cruel abomination?

Ishtar scoffs.

ISHTAR

THIS from the man that gave her hope when all the while you *knew* her end was near! No, Asmodeus. I think it is not *I* that is cruel. It is *YOU*.

Francis can bear it no longer.

FRANCIS

What are you waiting for!? Give her what she wants!

Schuster looks over; the look pitiful.

SCHUSTER

You don't understand. I *can't*! I...

He stops short when the whole tomb shakes and a chunk falls from the ceiling. Ishtar laughs as Schuster dives toward the steps pulling Francis with him.

ISHTAR (O.S.)

Three moons, Asmodeus! That's all the time you have!

Halfway up the steps, it crashes down behind them.

Silence, dust settling then Deckert bolts upright. The hole in his head healing itself.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Francis runs behind Schuster.

FRANCIS

What is going on!? What was all that!?

Schuster doesn't answer. Catching up, Francis grabs his arm.

FRANCIS (cont'd)

Hey! I'm talking to you!

CUT TO:

Brian, keeping in the shadows, creeps up to listen.

CUT TO:

Schuster looks at the hand only to yank his arm away. Undeterred, Francis picks up a sledgehammer, blocking him.

SCHUSTER

Get out of my way!

FRANCIS

Not until you tell me what's going on! Why is my daughter hanging like that!? What is happening!?

When Schuster doesn't answer, he lifts the sledgehammer. He's surprised, though, when Schuster doesn't stop him.

SCHUSTER

You know what? Just do it! I don't care!

Schuster looks to the sky.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Do you hear!? I'm NOT playing your game anymore! I want out! I want...

His face goes through a tumult of emotions until his shoulders drop.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

...I don't know what I want.

Francis lowers the hammer.

FRANCIS

What is *wrong* with you!?

SCHUSTER

Wrong with me!? Wrong with *me*!?

Schuster throws his head back giving a half crazed laugh.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

I wouldn't even know where to begin! You want to know about Mirabel? Huh? Okay! I'll tell you!

(points)

She's in that tomb held captive by the most vengeful goddess in all the universe. If she's released, she, in all likelihood, will kill every last thing on earth. Do you understand?

Francis shakes his head.

FRANCIS

I don't care! I just want my daughter back!

Schuster's look is incredulous.

SCHUSTER

Let me get this straight. You'd sacrifice everyone...all life on this planet...for your *daughter*?

FRANCIS

Yes! And if we don't do something soon, she's going to die down there!

Schuster grabs his shoulders.

SCHUSTER

That's just it, she won't! The bitch isn't that merciful! Now, leave me alone, okay? I gotta think!

Turning away, he starts looking around.

FRANCIS

What are you looking for?

SCHUSTER

Keys!

FRANCIS

You're leaving!?

SCHUSTER

Yup!

FRANCIS

You can't leave!

Schuster turns to face him.

SCHUSTER

You don't get it, do you? It's not that I don't want to help. I *CAN'T*.

FRANCIS

Just tell me why! *Why* can't you!?

SCHUSTER

Aargh! Because I have a duty! Because I've hidden what she wants in the one place I don't want to go! Like ever!

FRANCIS

And where's *that*!?

Schuster gives a half-crazed laugh.

SCHUSTER
THAT is a one-way ticket. You go in,
 you don't come out!

CUT TO:

Brian, excited, looks to the tomb.

ISHTAR (V.O.)
 Go!

CUT TO:

A second later Schuster hears the Jeep start. Hurrying, they see Brian peeling away.

SCHUSTER
 Oh! That's just great! Just great!

FRANCIS
 Where's he going!?

SCHUSTER
 If I had to guess? The City of
 Screams!

FRANCIS
 What!?

Schuster stops only to look back.

SCHUSTER
 Gholghola! Look! Do NOT leave, okay!?
 Maybe there's still a chance to get
 out of this mess!

Turning, he heads into the desert.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 I just gotta get there first!

EXT. CITY OF SCREAMS (GHOLGHOLA) - DAY

Schuster (arms folded-covered in grime-NOT happy) is situated at the very rear of a dilapidated bus. Lettering on the outside reads, "Azim's Tours" as it bumps down a road.

An ELDERLY COUPLE in their seventies are chatting up the driver, AZIM (40) as OTHERS listen.

AZIM

(Afghani accent)

Ah, there she is! Our last stop!
Gholghola! The City of Screams! They
call it that because when Genghis
Khan ransacked the city, he killed
everyone inside. Men, women,
children. *Everyone.*

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh, my! Did you hear that, Henry?

HENRY (70), half dozing, is suddenly jarred awake.

AZIM

It is said, at night, you can hear
the dead wailing, begging for
mercy -- their screams carried by the
wind. So! Be warned! Do not be
anywhere near lest you be dragged
into the underworld and lost forever!

Excited murmurs pass through the group. Schuster rolls his
eyes. A moment later, the bus stops to let everyone out.

AZIM (cont'd)

Watch your step! Watch your step
everyone! And remember, we're running
late due to Mr. Zellensky's "little
accident"...

CUT TO:

An ELDERLY MAN (80) with a cane and a fresh bandage on his
forehead is turning circles, fussed over by two women.

CUT TO:

AZIM (cont'd)

...so when you hear the horn, its
time to get back on the bus. No
exceptions! The bus will not wait for
you!

ELDERLY WOMAN

Did you hear that, Henry?

HENRY

For God's sake, Charlotte! Yes! I
heard!

Almost immediately, Schuster spots Brian's Jeep.

Leaving the others, he makes for an ancient well. Peering into the depths, he sees Brian glaring up at him.

Schuster thrums his fingers then draws back. Looking to the sun, he hears a horn toot. Climbing a wall, he can see a clearly agitated Azim checking his watch and waving people aboard. A few minutes later, Azim practically peels out leaving the site empty.

Schuster shades his eyes to look up at a crumbling tower; the middle of which has a slit for an opening. The setting sun will shine through at any minute.

Climbing down, he situates himself at the edge of the well. Snaking a hand under his shirt, he draws out a crisp, ripe apple only to tuck it back for safe keeping.

Impatient, he watches the sun slowly sink.

SCHUSTER

Come on! Come on!

Schuster looks down. Brian is raising himself to a standing position only to press arms and feet against the interior.

A second later the last of the sun's rays, in perfect alignment, break through the slit and onto the well. Just as it does, the bottom of the well fragments to form a vortex of horrifying screams and foul odor. Schuster draws a sleeve across his nostrils to keep from gagging.

Glancing down, he sees Brian let go.

Ready to jump as well, he feels a hand on his shoulder. It's Michael; voice rising above the wind.

MICHAEL

If you do this, my friend, I cannot follow!

Schuster claps a hand over his.

SCHUSTER

I know. Watch over her will you?
Mirabel?

Shaking his head, he looks up at his friend.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

I've seen gladiator's with less
courage.

Michael grins.

MICHAEL
Cities laid waste for women less
beautiful?

Schuster flushes.

SCHUSTER
Something like that.
(turns serious)
But, no. More. Now, because of me,
she's at Ishtar's mercy...all in the
hope one day I'll be back for her.

MICHAEL
But, that's just it, Schuster! You
might not! Her agony is just that
much more acute because of you!

Michael glares.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Damn it! I warned you to leave her
alone! How many times do I have to
remind you! You're demon!

Michael's head snaps up.

SCHUSTER
That's just it, Michael! I don't
think I am! At least...not any more!

MICHAEL
What do you mean!? That's not
possible!

Schuster shakes his head.

SCHUSTER
I know! I didn't think so, either!
But, something happened inside that
tavern, Michael. It's like, when I
kissed her...I don't know...something
changed! Something inside just
snapped. I *wanted* her, *needed* her! I
can't describe it! It's...
(crazed laugh)
...fucking awful! I mean, how do men
do it!? Cuz, I have to tell you, I
haven't been right, since!

Michael is speechless -- Schuster miserable.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
If I could give a piece of myself to
save her, I would!

Eyes pleading, he looks at his friend.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Would a demon do that, Michael!?
Would they!?

Michael stares, pitying.

MICHAEL
You know, I *actually* believe you
would. Sadly, the gods would never
allow it.

Schuster nods.

SCHUSTER
I know. But, have I not suffered
enough...*paid enough*...that the gods
would deny me this one thing!? Watch
over her, Michael! *Please!*

Michael studies him for a *long* moment then...

MICHAEL
Until you get back.

Schuster hangs his head.

SCHUSTER
Thank you!

The corner of Michael's mouth twitches.

MICHAEL
You know, if I didn't know better...

Schuster looks up.

SCHUSTER
What?

Michael looks mischievous.

MICHAEL
If I didn't know better, I'd say the
Gods were playing some sort of trick!

Schuster draws back, stunned.

SCHUSTER
You don't think...*seriously*?

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL
No! But, I wouldn't put it past them.

Schuster looks into the vortex, shaking his head.

SCHUSTER
Son of a bitch!

INTERCUT: ISHTAR'S TOMB/ISHTAR'S TEMPLE (NIGHT)

Torchlight reveals Francis sitting on a stool outside Ishtar's tomb. At his feet are sledgehammer and chisel where he's managed a small opening in which to view Mirabel. Weary, he leans his head against the stone.

FRANCIS
You still there, my girl? Because I
am.

CUT TO:

Mirabel hangs taut, too weak to respond. Lifting her eyes, she sees Deckert squatted in a corner, sucking an incisor.

CUT TO:

Francis's voice trembles.

FRANCIS (cont'd)
I'll bet you don't remember, but when you were eight, I forbade you leave the table until you ate all your beans. Yes, I did. And do you know you sat there for over an hour with the most mulish look I've ever seen? Because, that's what you do. You never give up.

CUT TO:

Michael, hidden in the shadows, smiles.

CUT TO:

FRANCIS (cont'd)
So, you see, I'm counting on that obstinate streak of yours...
(MORE)

FRANCIS (cont'd)
 (lower lip quivers)
 ...because I am NOT leaving here
 without you!

INT./EXT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Schuster walks the stone path to the underworld only to come across a crow sitting on a sign above two arrows. One points toward "HELL". The other, "HELL".

Schuster smirks, eyeing the crow.

SCHUSTER
 She always did have a sense of humor.

The crow cocks its head...

CROW
 Wanna bet?

...only to fly off.

Turning left, Hell hounds pick up his scent. Harpies swoop. Brian, on all fours, is rounding a corner.

CUT TO:

Hiding, he waits for Schuster to pass.

CUT TO:

Schuster approaches the entrance to the Underworld. As he does, red swirling mists and garbled cries call out. Just above, the vulture's heads present themselves.

VULTURE
 Asmodeusss! ASMODEUSS! Asmodeus!

Schuster looks up.

SCHUSTER
 Hello, Ripper.

CUT TO:

Ereshkigal, scepter in hand, broods upon her throne.

WHISPERS
 Asmodeus! Asmodeus has returned!

Nodding, she sends winged minions flying.

CUT TO:

Schuster steps through the opening.

INT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Torches illuminate slime covered walls. Half buried within are twisted faces warning Schuster to go back. Disembodied arms tug and pull trying to keep him from going further.

Freeing himself, Schuster checks the apple is undamaged only to tuck it back. Feeling hot air on his neck, he looks over at a shaggy horned creature twice his size.

Further down, fluttering wings make him look up. Fires burning amidst craggy rocks give just enough light to see. Ereshkigal's spies are settled atop, watching.

Rabid rabbits gnash their teeth. Ghouls and troll-like creatures move to investigate. But, Ereshkigal's demons screech until, slinking away, they scurry off.

Schuster grins.

SCHUSTER

Ereshkigal.

Ereshkigal's disembodied voice whispers back.

ERESHKIGAL (O.S.)

Asmodeus.

Moving forward, he passes over a clear glass-like surface. Beneath, a beautiful woman is drowning. Desperate, she tries breaking through the barrier only to be dragged to murkier depths. Her attackers, fish men with needle-like teeth glare upwards as he passes.

Succubi, shape-shifters, banshees, minotaurs, carnivorous corpse-eating worms, man-scorpions, hell-hounds even a snake-woman stand riveted. Awed, each whisper his name as he goes by.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

* FIRST GATE: The deformed demon bows, letting him pass.

* SECOND GATE: The snake creature lets him pass.

* THIRD GATE: The spider demon lets him pass.

* FOURTH GATE: The lizard demon lets him pass.

* FIFTH GATE: The gremlin tries pinching the apple. Smacking its hand, Schuster wags a finger at it.

* SIXTH GATE: The mouth demon lets him pass.

END MONTAGE:

Schuster enters the seventh gate only to look over at his old throne. A demon with a human body and a dog-like head sits upon it. Before him, in chains, are naked dead. This is **CANIS**. Whip in hand, he looks on Schuster with hateful eyes.

Ereshkigal's minions fly by announcing to any and all.

MINIONS

Asmodeus! Asmodeus has returned!

Just beyond, Schuster sees Ereshkigal waiting. He tries walking toward her, but Canis blocks the way.

Schuster looks him up and down.

SCHUSTER

Oh, I guarantee you don't want any of this.

ERESHKIGAL

Let him pass, Canis!

Schuster grins. Canis backs away.

INT. ERESHKIGAL'S THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

As Schuster drops to his knees, demons gather round.

Ereshkigal takes her throne; her voice echoing throughout.

ERESHKIGAL

It is good to see you again,
Asmodeus. You have been gone a long
time. Have you missed me?

Schuster reaches under his shirt and brings out the apple. Pushing it toward her, he lowers his eyes.

SCHUSTER

So much so, I brought you a gift,
highness.

At sight of the apple, Ereshkigal squeals.

ERESHKIGAL

Do you see? Do you see what a true
prince brings his queen!?

Her eyes, accusing, scan the crowd. Satisfied her minions are suitably shamed, she turns once more to Schuster. Motioning for him to rise, she admires his form.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
Oh, how I have missed you! Things
have not been the same without you.

The slight, aimed at Canis, inspires a disgruntled snort.

Ereshkigal holds out her hand. The apple appears, levitating over the palm. She does not let it touch her, though. A snake demon slithers in, a glass dome upon its head. With utmost care, as if handling a prized possession, she lowers the apple into the enclosure. Secure, she turns to Schuster.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
You know, if I didn't know better,
I'd say you were angling for your old
throne.

Giving a sideways glance at Canis, she smiles.

Canis puffs and glares. Schuster turns to Ereshkigal.

SCHUSTER
Forgive me, glorious one, but if not
for your sister, I would never have
lost my throne.

Ereshkigal's smile freezes.

ERESHKIGAL
My sister!? What has *she* to do with
this?

SCHUSTER
Why, it was SHE who bound me in the
mortal world, highness, to prevent me
from returning.

Furious, Ereshkigal rises, smoke billowing all around. Creatures large and small scramble for cover. Schuster lowers his head.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
She...she bade me give you a message
should I ever see you again. Tell my
sister, she said, that from now on if
she wishes to kill me, she'll have to
come to MY world to do it! *If* she
dares!

Ereshkigal peers down her nose, smiling an unholy smile.

ERESHKIGAL

Did she now!?

A second later, in the midst of hell-fire and smoke, Ereshkigal is gone.

Canis, sensing opportunity, steps off his throne cracking his whip. Lower demons peer back and forth, tension rising.

Schuster, unperturbed, examines his nails.

SCHUSTER

Um...not for nothing big guy, but you know the rules...

Giving Canis a sideways look, he adds...

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

...AND the penalty for breaking them.

Canis stops dead then, stomping his foot, howls in frustration.

Lower demons snicker, one in particular, until Canis throws a spear, pinning it to the wall. The rest, no longer amused, back away.

INT./EXT. ISHTAR'S TOMB - NIGHT

Francis sits, sound asleep, unaware the hairs on his forearms are rising.

Michael, sensing something, steps out of the shadows.

CUT TO:

A foreboding breeze and the hair on the back of Mirabel's neck rises. A moment later, Ereshkigal materializes.

Deckert jumps up if only to protect his mistress, but a touch of Ereshkigal's finger leaves him disintegrated; a pile of ash where he stands.

Moving to Ishtar's sarcophagus, she runs a hand over it.

ERESHKIGAL

Hello, sister!

Spying Mirabel, she circles.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

And what have we here?

Ereshkigal lifts Mirabel's arm. Drawing her nose up and over the skin, she looks up in surprised delight.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 Death! Death and...
 (inhales deeply....)

FLASHBACK:

* Schuster gives stew to the boy and his dog. Mirabel smiles.

* Schuster kisses Mirabel.

* Schuster steps in front to protect her from Deckert.

* Deckert presses the lifestone into her flesh.

SCHUSTER
 NO!

* Schuster shoots Deckert.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 Not you, Mirabel! Not you!

END FLASHBACK:

Ereshkigal wrinkles her nose.

ERESHKIGAL
 Ugh!

Dropping the arm, she glares at the floor.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 I'll deal with you later!
 (grins)
 But, for now...business first!

Stepping to the sarcophagus, she walks her fingers over the energy.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 And, sister? I believe you know what that is! After all, was it not you who said if I wanted you dead I would have to come here to do it? Hmm? Well, here I am! I say we get on with it!

Ishtar's voice booms.

ISHTAR

You dare! The gods...!

ERESHKIGAL

The gods!? The gods!? It was the gods
put you here was it not!? They will
not come to your rescue! They have
forsaken you!

Ereshkigal raises her arms. Gathering energy, she draws the atmosphere to her. Torches grow brighter, wind and sand swirl, lightning flashes.

CUT TO:

Jolted awake, Francis peers through the peephole, gaping at the spectacle.

CUT TO:

Energized, Ereshkigal brings forth her scepter.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Goodbye, sister!

Drawing up then thrusting downward, her lifestone burns through the stone quartz, through Ishtar then out the other side. Ishtar screams as the lifestone pierces her heart; spilling blackened goo onto the floor.

Mirabel, suddenly released, slumps to the ground. Crumpled into a heap, she sobs pitifully.

CUT TO:

INT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Brian, half way through the labyrinth is suddenly transformed. No longer Ishtar's abomination, he returns to human form.

Nearby, naked female succubi lift their noses. Seconds later, he is surrounded by oversexed, demonic women.

Brian's shoulders sag.

BRIAN

Oh, God! This really *IS* hell!

A second later, they drag him into their lair.

CUT TO:

INT. TOMB - NIGHT

Eyes aglow, Ereshkigal withdraws the scepter. Curious, one eye closed, she peers through the hole into the sarcophagus. Seeing the final, anguished look on her sister's face, she throws her head back and laughs.

ERESHKIGAL

Oh, how I have waited to see *that*!

Done, she turns to give Mirabel a predatory look.

CUT TO:

Francis, alarmed, is about to call out only to feel a sudden gust at his back. It's Michael. He has passed through Francis, through the stone and into the tomb.

CUT TO:

Corporeal, Michael arrives just in time to see Ereshkigal reach for Mirabel.

MICHAEL

You know the rules Ereshkigal! She's not dead!

Ereshkigal, caught red-handed, gives a "you caught me" look.

ERESHKIGAL

You mean, *yet*. Not dead, *yet*.

Turning, pitiless, she watches Mirabel crawl away.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Oh, would you look at that! Oh, come on Michael! It's a pity to leave that behind!

When Michael doesn't say anything, just glares, she heaves a sigh.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Oh, well! Soon enough!

Michael, about to say something, is suddenly cut off when, grinning, she draws herself up to leave the way she came.

CUT TO:

Francis bangs on the stone only to have it crumble. Surprised, he steps through to the other side. As Michael watches unseen, he rocks Mirabel in his arms.

FRANCIS
Hold on, my girl! Hold on! We're
going to get you out of here!

INT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Ereshkigal arrives the way she came only to glare at Schuster.

ERESHKIGAL
You *lied* to me, Asmodeus!

Canis snickers as Ereshkigal draws forth her powers.

SCHUSTER
No! I can explain!

Seconds later the whole chamber erupts--every monster in it.

JUMP CUT TO:

Schuster, chained to a rock inside a chamber, watches in horror as a demonic seagull approaches. A moment later, another then another lands, beaks snapping in anticipation. Drawing closer, they begin to peck and feed.

Schuster, struggling against his binds, screams.

SUPERIMPOSE: TWO WEEKS LATER

INT. MIRABEL'S FLAT - DAY

Mirabel, exhausted, enters the front door and heads straight for a kitchen island. Resting her cane, she plops onto a stool only to stare at a television.

CLOSE UP: A SERIES OF PICTURES SHOWING DROUGHT CONDITIONS AROUND THE WORLD, CROP FAILURES AND STARVING CHILDREN. "PLANET-WIDE DROUGHT CONDITIONS GO UNABATED!" FLASHES ACROSS THE SCREEN.

A tear slips down her cheek as she shakes her head.

MIRABEL
What have we done!

Pain strikes and, gasping, she doubles over only to hear a key in the lock. Straightening, hiding the pain, she watches Francis enter.

Reaching under his jacket he pulls a bottle of pills to put in an upper cabinet along with other medications. Kissing her on the forehead, he pulls up a stool.

FRANCIS
Hey there. Any luck?

She shakes her head.

MIRABEL
I've tried and tried. I've looked for every possible solution, but the cells...they just don't respond.

Francis reaches for her hand.

MIRABEL (cont'd)
I don't know what to do. If I could just activate them...beat them out of hibernation maybe I could buy more time, but...

Mirabel looks at the TV. The image of a fed-up newscaster with a microphone comes on. Below, "RIOTS TAKE THEIR TOLL".

MIRABEL
It's as if Ishtar's powers died along with her.

A tear rolls down her cheek. Francis eyes the TV then her.

FRANCIS
Listen, I don't want you going out anymore, okay? It's getting ugly out there.

Mirabel nods then wipes her eyes.

MIRABEL
Thanks for always being there for me, you know?

Francis scoffs only to walk into the kitchen and grab sleeping pills from the cabinet. Eyeing the bottle, she watches him set one in front of her.

FRANCIS
You know what you need? YOU need a good nights sleep! It'll take your mind off your worries and, more important, off *him*.

Mirabel arcs a brow as he takes the seat across from her.

FRANCIS (cont'd)
I'm not blind, you know. Is it...is
it true what Ishtar said?

Mirabel cannot look at him.

FRANCIS (cont'd)
God, Mirabel! If it IS...
(anger brews)
Well, its bloody cruel!

Mirabel's lip trembles. Unable to bear it, Francis grabs
what's left of some brandy.

FRANCIS (cont'd)
Tell you what...lets finish this.
What do you say?

Bringing forth two glasses he measures two, small but equal
shares. When still she doesn't speak, he looks up.

FRANCIS (cont'd)
Talk to me?

Lifting her eyes, she sighs.

MIRABEL
Your right, Pop! You're right! He *is*
all I think about! Not doctors, not
medication, not cures...just *him!* I
have no verifiable life in me, and
God help me all I want is to see him
again! Ishtar was right!
(weeps)
He is demon!

Silence, then Francis shakes his head.

FRANCIS
It's as if it's some sort of bad
joke, isn't it?
(long beat)
But, I'll tell you this...I'm not
sure I believe her, either.

Mirabel grabs a tissue and blows her nose.

MIRABEL
What do you mean?

FRANCIS
I mean, *think* about it. Would
anything short of human have begged
her to let you live?

Mirabel looks up.

MIRABEL
Well, if that were true, how come he
never came back!?

Francis takes her hand, gently folding it into his.

FRANCIS
Maybe, he *couldn't*.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Francis reads in bed; door to the hall open. Across the hall is the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mirabel lies steeped in hot water. Beside her, on a table is an empty bottle of sleeping pills next to a glass of wine. A note reads, "I love you always and forever, Pop. Forgive me." She is unaware Michael watches.

Pulling up a chair, he looks long and hard then, waving a hand over her face, rouses her from the overdose. He smiles as she slowly opens her eyes.

MICHAEL
Hello.

Mirabel doesn't say anything, just stares.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
I'm Michael.

Licking her lips, she tries sounding out "who...?".

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Oh. You don't know me. But, I know
you.
(frowns)
Do you know what you've done,
Mirabel?

Mirabel gives a barely perceptible nod.

MIRABEL
You...angel?

Michael smiles.

MICHAEL
Not the kind you're thinking, I'm
afraid. Still, I mean you no harm.

Mirabel stares.

MIRABEL
Wh..why?

MICHAEL
Why? As in...why am I here?

Mirabel nods.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Well...you're past the point of no
return. As such, I'd like to get
something from you when you pass. I'm
afraid I must insist.

Mirabel stares; eyes going in and out of focus.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
The lifestone? You carry it within.

Mirabel's brows knit together.

MIRABEL
Iss dea.. Worl's dea..

MICHAEL
Still, as long as there's hope, I
cannot let it fall into the wrong
hands. When you pass, because of what
you've done, you will belong body and
soul to Ereshkigal. She, too,
waits...and with great anticipation,
I might add.

Mirabel blinks, letting it sink in.

MIRABEL
Shi..t.

Michael studies his hands.

MICHAEL
I'm here, because I cannot allow her
to gain control. Balance must be
maintained and right now, the world
is in a tailspin.

Drool spills from Mirabel's mouth and Michael, grabbing some
tissue, dabs at it.

MIRABEL

Taa..ke. Nn..ow.

Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL

I cannot. As long as you are alive,
you can't be touched. Not by me. Not
by anyone. Even Ereshkigal. There are
rules.

Mirabel's head rolls, her chin barely above the water.

MIRABEL

Whe...?

MICHAEL

It must be done at the precise moment
of your death, before you reach the
underworld, or, all is lost. Schuster
understood the importance of this.
It's why he sacrificed himself trying
to stop your friend and...save you.

Anguished, she emits a small cry.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

You see, Schuster knew uniting the
lifestone with the scepter would give
the bearer unimaginable power.
Combine Ishtar's with Ereshkigal's
and no one, not even the Gods will be
able to stop her. She will,
literally, create hell on earth.

(beat)

Ever watch a zombie movie?

Mirabel pales.

SCHUSTER

Yeah. Like *that*.

Pursing her lips, she breathes...

MIRABEL

You. G..go.

Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL

My kind can never allow themselves to
be corrupted. Not for any reason.
Only mortals have the luxury of that
kind of exchange.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)
(beat)
Oh, and cats.

Mirabel's eyes fix him in a stare.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Yeah. Cats. Messengers of the gods?
(laughs)
The underworld hates *them* almost as
much as Schuster hates birds.

FLASHBACK:

A white cat with a clear vial about its neck, saunters tail up through the labyrinth. As it does, hideous monsters scream in terror and run from it.

END FLASHBACK

Michael grins.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Ever wonder why Schuster acts all...
(twitches) around you?

Mirabel blinks.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
It's pain. Agonizing pain. As
penance, you see? Because of what
he's done. It's why he's not allowed
to be with anyone...touch anyone...
especially a woman.

Michael thinks about it and smiles.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
The powers to be needn't have
worried, though. In all this time
I've never see Schuster care for
anyone...except you.

Mirabel's lower lip quivers.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
And a feline named Eleanor. Oh, how
he *loved* that cat! You know, I think
now I see the connection.
(beat)
See, at first I thought he loved the
cat because cats don't like birds and
Schuster hates birds. But, that's not
it at all.

Michael leans in to look at her.

SCHUSTER
The truth is...you both have the
exact same emerald colored eyes.

Mirabel blinks a tear. Closing her eyes, she remembers.

SCHUSTER (V.O.)
You have the most exquisite eyes!

Mirabel's eyes fly open.

MIRABEL
No.

MICHAEL
No?

She struggles to stay awake.

MIRABEL
No. Die. H..halp.

Michael looks down; the expression sorrowful.

MICHAEL
I'm sorry, Mirabel. I'm not allowed.
You've set the course...it cannot be
undone.

Michael hesitates then looks at the door separating the two
of them from the bedroom across the hall.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Not by me, anyway.

His eyes drop deliberately to the glass on the table then
her.

Understanding flashes. Summoning what little strength she
has, she manages to flop an arm over the tub hoping to tip
it. Missing, she begins to weep.

Frowning, Michael leans closer.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Where's that stubborn streak of
yours?

At this, mustering all she has, she tries again. Connecting,
the glass topples over smashing onto the floor.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Francis, hearing the glass, throws his book to the side and jumps up.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

As Michael watches unseen, Francis rushes in to pull Mirabel from the tub.

INT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Ereshkigal snorts in disgust. Getting up, she storms from the chamber.

CUT TO:

Schuster, screaming, is covered in birds; all jostling as they peck at his flesh. That is, until they suddenly take off when Ereshkigal enters.

Feigning concern, she pouts over his body.

ERESHKIGAL

Oh! My! They certainly are hungry today, aren't they!? And...oh, look! They got one of your eyes!

Leaning over, she tries stuffing the eye back in but, like uncooked egg, it falls through her fingers. She shrugs, shaking the hand.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Oh, well. I tried!

Schuster whimpers as she throws her head back to laugh.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Oh, come on! Don't be such a baby!

Reaching, she runs her fingers through his hair. Drawing the hand away, some of the scalp comes with it and she wipes it on his pants.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Yuck!

Schuster, sucking air through various openings gives an agonized look. His heart, beating inside his ribcage, can clearly be seen.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 You know, every day I come here and
 every day you deny me. Why is that?
 Hmm?

Ereshkigal lifts the flap to his pants, checks his nether's
 and laughs.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 Well, *that's* seen better days, hasn't
 it? Tell you what...we'll just leave
 that right there.

Dropping the pants, she gives his crotch a pat.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 Where were we? Oh, yes. Is it because
 you don't like me anymore? Is that
 it?

Schuster looks over with his one good eye. Half his lips are
 gone leaving the teeth visible.

SCHUSTER
 F...uck. Y..you.

Ereshkigal draws back, pretending to be grieved.

ERESHKIGAL
 Why, Asmodeus! I'm hurt. I truly am!

Throwing her head back, she shrieks with laughter. Done, she
 draws near, no longer smiling.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 Where's the scepter, Asmodeus? WHERE
 IS IT!?

When Schuster doesn't answer, she heaves a sigh.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 Well...perhaps tomorrow you'll feel
 more like talking.

Rising, she turns. As she does, birds swoop in to start
 feeding again.

Schuster screams and keeps on screaming as Ereshkigal walks
 away. On the way out, she spots a demonic rat only to stop.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 Well? What are you waiting for!?

Gnashing its teeth, the rat runs for Schuster.

Turning, she sees not only has it jumped into the fray but has taken a chunk out of his foot. Her eyes glisten just watching it feed.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Atta boy!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Mirabel lies in a hospital bed. Next to her, on a table, are flowers. Above her is a list of do's and dont's for visitors at the MAUDSLEY PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL in South London. Tossing and turning, she dreams in her sleep.

Francis, in the adjoining bathroom, is filling a paper cup.

FLASHBACK:

* ISHTAR'S TOMB:

SCHUSTER

...if you want to be restored to the natural world, someone must be sacrificed in your stead. In Ishtar's case, her not so mournful husband took her place...

END FLASHBACK:

Mirabel's eyes fly open and, not realizing, she calls out.

MIRABEL

Take me! Take me instead!

Francis steps into the room, placing the cup on the table.

FRANCIS

What did you say?

Mirabel, exhausted, shakes her head.

MIRABEL

Sorry, Pop. Bad dream.

Reaching for the cup, she looks down into the water.

FRANCIS

Better drink all you can. There's a moratorium on water starting tomorrow.

(MORE)

FRANCIS (cont'd)
(sigh)

Mirabel frowns. But, not at the ban on water. The water inside the cup is vibrating. So are the flowers.

MIRABEL
Do you see this?

Francis turns to look at her.

FRANCIS
See what?

Just as the words leave his mouth, though, he feels it. Spinning, he looks around the room. Everything is vibrating, getting more and more intense as each moment passes.

Mirabel starts to get up, but can't. A second later, a tingling starts, followed by a pulling sensation until, suddenly, she is yanked halfway through the mattress.

Francis, trying to help, grabs her hands.

MIRABEL
What's going on!?

FRANCIS
I don't know!

Her face, a mask of fear and confusion, is the last thing Francis sees before both are sucked to the other side.

EXT. CITY OF SCREAMS (GHOLGHOLA) - DAY

Mirabel, on the ground, sits up. As she does, pain hits her midsection and, clutching her stomach, she doubles over.

MIRABEL
Please! Not yet! Not yet!

Looking over, she sees Francis passed out. Struggling, she crawls over only to collapse next to him.

MICHAEL (O.S.)
He'll be alright. Just give him some time.

Mirabel struggles to rise. Michael leans, arms crossed against the well.

MIRABEL
You! How...? What is this place?

Michael sighs pushing himself off.

MICHAEL
Boy, you don't give up, do you?

MIRABEL
Not as long as I'm alive!

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL
Well, that's the spirit!

Mirabel shakes her head.

MIRABEL
No! That's what *you* said! Not as long
as I'm alive! So, back off!

Michael looks to Francis.

MICHAEL
Your father doesn't know, does he?
That you intend to exchange your life
for Schuster? That IS why you're
here, isn't it? That's why SHE
brought you here?

Mirabel doesn't say anything.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Then, know this. You will not be
saved. Your body and soul will belong
to her and, trust me, she is NOT
kind. Why, Mirabel? Why would you do
this?

Breaking down, Mirabel lifts her chin.

MIRABEL
Because, beyond the dying carcass you
see before you, its the only thing I
have left to give! And if giving it
means there's a chance to save the
world, I'm willing to do that.

Sun shines through the slit and onto the well. Stench hits
as she covers her mouth and nose. Looking down, she sees the
vortex swirling.

Climbing to the edge, she looks over at him.

MIRABEL (cont'd)
 Don't you see? Maybe I can undo
 what's been done.

Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL
 Schuster was right. You DO have
 courage. Unfortunately, that won't
 save you from Ereshkigal. She'll
 still take it from you.

Mirabel looks over; a small, confident smile on her lips.

MIRABEL
 No. Schuster won't let her.

Letting go, she steps off and is gone.

INT./EXT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Mirabel wakes only to cry out. Her body, twisted, lies atop
 a flat plateau leading to a path. Getting up, she draws back
 in fright. A hellhound is looking right at her.

Growling, it sees her stagger to the path only to stop
 abruptly. A stone-age creature is crossing in front of her.
 Looking at her, it hisses. Harpies rake her hair and she
 yelps.

Turning a corner, she stops. She is at the entrance to the
 underworld. Ripper's heads glare down at her. Crying out,
 she steps back.

RIPPER
 It's alive! Alive! Alive!

Mirabel stands frozen in fear.

RIPPER (cont'd)
 Speak, mortal! What brings you here?

Gathering courage, she looks up.

MIRABEL
 I...I have a proposition!

Ripper cocks a head. The others glare.

RIPPER
 A proposition!? I need no
 proposition!

Mirabel shakes her head.

MIRABEL
It's not for you! It's for
Ereshkigal!

Ripper's heads draw back.

RIPPER
Ereshkigal! Queen! Evil most high!

Closing his eyes, he reaches out with his mind.

CUT TO:

Ereshkigal, looking down on Asmodeus, lifts her head.

CUT TO:

Ripper opens his eyes.

RIPPER (cont'd)
Speak! You will be heard!

Mirabel winces then straightens best she can.

MIRABEL
I've come to offer myself in place of
another. That's the rule, isn't it?

Ripper nods.

RIPPER
You speak truth, mortal. Pray, who is
it you seek to release?

Mirabel lifts a chin.

MIRABEL
Asmodeus!

CUT TO:

Ereshkigal looks down on Schuster and grins.

ERESHKIGAL
What say you, Asmodeus? Your little
girlfriend proposes an exchange. Her
for, well..you. Personally? I don't
get it.

Schuster, shakes his head.

SCHUSTER

Noooo!

Ereshkigal throws her head back and laughs.

ERESHKIGAL

Done!

At once, Schuster is transported, body restored, to just outside the underworld.

CUT TO:

Mirabel immediately disappears.

CUT TO:

Schuster beats on the impenetrable opening.

SCHUSTER

Let me in! Ereshkigal!

Schuster, hoping to barrel through, drops, nursing a shoulder. Rising, he points at Ripper.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Tell that bitch I'll be back!

Whirling, he marches up the path.

CUT TO:

Ereshkigal looks down at Mirabel passed out on the floor.

ERESHKIGAL

I'm counting on it.

EXT. CITY OF SCREAMS (GHOLGHOLA) - DAWN

Vortex open, Schuster is cast out only to land face first. Lifting his head, he sees Francis staring at him.

Scrambling to their feet, each eyes the other.

SCHUSTER

Got a car?

Before Francis can reply, Azim's familiar horn toots in the distance. Schuster rolls his eyes.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Come on!

EXT. AFGHANI MARKETPLACE - DAY

A taxi drives like crazy down a narrow street until Schuster spots a BOY (10) with a box and a sign written in Dari.

SCHUSTER

STOP!

The taxi slams to a halt. A moment later Francis follows Schuster down the street.

FRANCIS

What's going on? Why did we stop?

Schuster doesn't answer.

FRANCIS (cont'd)

What are you doing!?

Schuster stops in front of the kid. Pulling back the lid, he peeks inside the box. Four kittens look back at him. Spying one in particular, he reaches in and lifts it from the box.

FRANCIS (cont'd)

A cat!? THIS is what this is all about!? Unbelievable!

Schuster peers into the kitten's eyes. They are a gorgeous emerald green. It purrs adorably and he grins.

SCHUSTER

Hello, Eleanor.

Peering down at the kid, he rubs his fingers.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

How much?

The boy ponders then holds up five fingers.

KID

(Afghani accent)
American.

Schuster eyes the savvy trader then...

SCHUSTER

Alright!

The boy grins. Turning to Francis he nods toward the kid.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Pay up!

Francis rolls his eyes only to dig in a pocket.

Delighted, Schuster strokes Eleanor then tucks her under his shirt. Looking up, he sees Francis glaring at him.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Let me tell you a little something
about cats...

Turning, they weave through the crowd; Eleanor's head sticking out of his shirt.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
I've seen monsters so hideous they
turn your hair white just looking at
them...

Schuster whistles for a taxi.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Hey yo!

Satisfied he got the drivers attention, he turns to Francis.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Some disembowel you where you stand;
dip you in your own blood...

The taxi, whizzing through the crowd, slams to a halt in front of them.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
But, no one, not even Ereshkigal,
fucks with a cat!

Climbing into the taxi, the two drive away.

EXT. CITY OF SCREAMS (GHOLGHOLA) - DAY

Francis and Schuster are at the well.

Schuster, chin in hand, is watching Eleanor eat from a plate; a bowl of water next to it. Finished, she licks a paw, swipes an ear and looks up adoringly.

SCHUSTER
All done?

Schuster picks her up, cuddling and stroking her only to look up at the sun. It is just edging the tower.

Raising Eleanor to eye level, he can't help but ask.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Ready?

Eleanor butts her head against his.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

I'll take that as a yes.

As Francis watches, Schuster situates Eleanor on his shoulder only to climb on top of the well.

FRANCIS

Are you sure about this, son?

Schuster, never tiring of the endearment, grins.

SCHUSTER

Yeah, Pop. I'm sure.

A moment later, vortex open, Schuster and Eleanor drop.

EXT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Schuster wakes on the plateau only to see Eleanor, head cocked, looking down at him.

Patting her on the head, he gets to his feet. Eleanor on his shoulder, he heads for the trail.

CUT TO:

Ripper, sleeping, opens his eyes to see Eleanor in his face. Schuster has her in his hand right in front of him.

ELEANOR

Mew.

Horrified, all three heads draw back.

SCHUSTER

Open the door, Ripper! Open it now!

Flapping and screeching, the three heads carry on.

RIPPER

As you wish! Doom upon you! Curse you, Asmodeus!

At once, the barrier to the underworld is lifted.

SCHUSTER

Hmpf! That's what I thought!

INT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Schuster enters, Eleanor on his shoulder. As he does, all manner of demonic creatures cry out. Harpies, back-draft and fly off. Hairless, demented rats, hiss, only to run away.

Schuster grins. Eleanor takes it in stride.

Passing through the six gates, each demon scrambling for cover, they reach the seventh.

CUT TO:

Canis rises as Schuster and Eleanor enter. Enraged, he comes at Schuster only to stop. Eleanor, arching her back, is hissing. Cowering, he draws back.

Just beyond, Ereshkigal stands waiting.

CUT TO:

Ereshkigal eyes Eleanor warily. Narrowing her eyes, she gives Schuster a disgusted look.

ERESHKIGAL

I might have known you'd pull something like this.

Schuster feigns innocence.

SCHUSTER

What?

Turning her back, inwardly furious, she resumes her throne.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Where is she, Ereshkigal?

Mocking him, she smiles.

ERESHKIGAL

What?

SCHUSTER

Now, you know full well that was against the rules. She's not dead!

Ereshkigal grins.

ERESHKIGAL

Free will. Free will overrides *all* the rules.

SCHUSTER
She's not dead, Ereshkigal!

Ereshkigal shrugs.

ERESHKIGAL
She will be soon.

Schuster considers only to give a sideways look.

SCHUSTER
Bet you burned your fingers, though,
didn't you?

JUMP CUT TO:

Mirabel, curled in a fetal position, is alone. Opening her eyes, she sees Ereshkigal coming at her, claws distended. Jerking her into the air, she tries extracting the lifestone, but the hand turns bright red and she screams.

Furious, she shoves Mirabel to the ground then, turning, flees the chamber holding an injured hand.

JUMP CUT TO:

Ereshkigal, sullen, doesn't say anything.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Ho! Ho! You did! Didn't you!?

Turning her nose up, she looks in another direction.

ERESHKIGAL
What do mortal's say? Oh, yes. It's
just a matter of time.
(sly)
Not that time matters here.

Turning, she faces him again.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
Don't tell me you wish to barter for
her like some Turkish trader?
Because, given the present
circumstances...

Hateful eyes slide to Eleanor.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
I'm not in a generous mood. That
thing you carry on your shoulder...
(MORE)

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
(vicious smile)
...well, best hope nothing happens to
it.

SCHUSTER
Who? Eleanor? Eleanor can take care
of herself. Isn't that right?

Eleanor hisses at Ereshkigal making her sit back.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
And, you're wrong about Mirabel. What
I really want...

Schuster steps to the gate to point.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
...is to kill *him*.

Canis rises. Ereshkigal grins.

ERESHKIGAL
YOU want your old throne back!?

Schuster turns to look at her.

SCHUSTER
Once requested it cannot be refused.
That is Underworld law.

Rising, Ereshkigal points.

ERESHKIGAL
Know this before you accept, Canis.
This is no mere fight to the death.
The loser spends eternity in
everlasting torment.

Ereshkigal looks down her nose.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
What say you!?

Canis throws his head back.

CANIS
Challenge accepted! I will tear him
limb from limb and dine on the
entrails.
(laughs)
We will ALL feast good tonight!

Demons cheer uproariously. Schuster smirks.

SCHUSTER

You can try!

Drums beat as Schuster lifts Eleanor from his shoulder and whispers in her ear.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

You know what to do.

Eleanor nuzzles his face then slips from his hands. Following Schuster, she sits to the side in order to watch the spectacle. Other demons, terrified, scramble as far from her as they can.

Ridding himself of his shirt, Schuster looks around. Spotting the demon Canis pinned earlier, he pulls the spear, letting the body slide to the floor.

Canis snorts, beating his chest. A moment later, he advances, swinging a club spiked with metal shards.

Amidst the cheering crowd, as Schuster dodges the blow, Eleanor slips away.

CUT TO:

Mirabel, hopeless, lifts her head to see a two-headed demon run by. Seconds later, another then another; all anxious to get where they're going. Far off, deep within the labrynth, she can hear cheering and carrying on.

Grimacing, clutching her stomach, she lays her head down again until, surprised, she sees a kitten saunter in. Cocking its head, it peers over at her.

Managing a weak smile, she whispers...

MIRABEL

Best get out of here, little one.
There be monster's about.

Eleanor draws close only to put a tiny paw on her hand. Looking long and hard, she turns tail only to look back. When Mirabel doesn't respond, she does it again.

MIRABEL (cont'd)

You want me to follow?

Eleanor mews.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Yeah. Cats. Messengers of the gods?

Mirabel draws breath then, using the last of her strength, gets to her feet.

CUT TO:

Eleanor stops, letting Mirabel catch up. Hidden in shadow, they watch Canis body slam Schuster nearly breaking his back. Rolling, he narrowly misses the club aimed at his head.

Scrambling to his feet, Schuster runs, kicks off a wall and with both feet knocks Canis to the ground; the club flying from his hand.

Demons cheer.

Picking up the spear, Schuster drives it toward Canis's chest, but Canis grabs it, keeping it from penetrating. Twisting, the spear is torn from his grasp to go spiraling.

Rising, he and Schuster grapple until, gaining the advantage, Canis slams Schuster to the ground again. Falling on top, he pummels Schuster with his fists.

Mirabel covers her mouth at the horrendous beating.

Flipping over, Schuster tries crawling away only to be grabbed by the foot and lifted. Canis, twirling him three times, throws him like a discus head first into a wall.

The crowd, thirsting for blood, screams for more.

Schuster shakes his head then staggers to his feet. A second later, he is thrust high in the air and thrown into the crowd. Demons, bowled over, scramble. Sitting up, he clears his head only to see Eleanor. Behind, in the shadows, is Mirabel. Taking all he's going to, he looks over at Canis.

SCHUSTER

Sorry, buddy.

Grunting, he gets to his feet.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

It's time.

Canis isn't listening, though, and hurls himself head first into Schuster's chest. Launched thirty feet, Schuster can only cover his head. Wasting no time, Canis gets on hands and knees to throttle him.

No choice left, Schuster boxes Canis's ears. Staggering backward, Canis howls, blood dripping from his ears.

Scrambling to his feet, Schuster stagger-runs to his old throne and, amidst all the metal shards, pulls out Ishtar's scepter. Holding it like a spear, he points at Canis.

Ereshkigal, seeing the scepter, rises.

ERESHKIGAL

Hold!

Canis freezes. The crowd ceases cheering. Ereshkigal steps from her throne.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Is THAT what I think it is!?

Schuster gives a guilty look.

SCHUSTER

Yes.

ERESHKIGAL

Here...this whole time...under my very nose!?

Schuster can't help but grin.

SCHUSTER

Yes.

Eleanor steps forward. Mirabel follows. Ereshkigal, seeing them, narrows her eyes.

ERESHKIGAL

Ah. Your timing is perfect.

Turning, she addresses Schuster.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Give it to me, Asmodeus and I will return her to the mortal world where she can die warm in her bed; her father holding her hand.

Schuster shakes his head.

SCHUSTER

Just like your sister! Promise one thing...do another.

Ereshkigal clasps her hands together.

ERESHKIGAL

Oh, but *I* mean it!

Schuster rolls his eyes.

SCHUSTER

Yeah. Yeah.

Drawing back, he takes aim only to turn, abruptly, and point at Mirabel.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Sorry about this. I truly am.

Ereshkigal, realizing what Schuster intends, screams...

ERESHKIGAL

NO!

Too late, the scepter flies through the air, pierces Mirabel's chest and connects with the lifestone.

Mirabel, her chest bursting with blue-green radiance, staggers back. Falling to her knees, she looks up in shock.

Screeching, Ereshkigal rushes forward.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

You DARE!

Schuster laughs.

Mirabel, in shock, pulls the scepter from her chest; the lifestone with it. At once, the sickly look is gone. Rising, she looks in amazement at the scepter.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Give it to me, girl! Or, so help me
you'll wish you had!

Schuster goes to Mirabel. He tries to console her, but she steps away.

MIRABEL

Why!?

Hurt, all he can do is look at her.

MIRABEL (cont'd)

Why!?

Placating, he holds his hands out.

SCHUSTER

Because you deserve to live, Mirabel.
And, now you will.

Stepping back, he points his finger at Ereshkigal.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
And you, you miserable hag. You can't touch her. The lifestone she carries belongs in the mortal world and that's exactly where it's going!

Ereshkigal narrows her eyes.

ERESHKIGAL
You forgot one thing, idiot!

Schuster turns to look at her.

SCHUSTER
Yeah? What!?

Ereshkigal grins.

ERESHKIGAL
Underworld Law!

Schuster pales as excited whispers chant...

DEMONS
The law! The law! The law! The law!

Ereshkigal sweeps toward Mirabel.

ERESHKIGAL
Winner take all. Including your father in two years, eleven months and seven days!

Demons anxiously crowd around.

DEMONS
The Law! The law! The law! The law!

Frightened, Mirabel turns to Schuster.

MIRABEL
I don't understand! What does she mean!?

Schuster hangs his head.

SCHUSTER
She means if you want your freedom... and your father's freedom...you'll have to fight for it!

MIRABEL

And, if I refuse?

Ereshkigal grins.

ERESHKIGAL

Then you may NEVER leave! The two of you will remain here, forever, never to see the light of day. Oh, and while I mayn't touch you as long as you live, your father I CAN touch. Kapisch?

Laughing, she turns away.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

As for you, Asmodeus. I'll let the birds deal with you!

(beat)

Seize him!

At once, demons seize Schuster by the arms.

As Ereshkigal turns to face Mirabel, drums begin to beat. Taking her scepter, she sets it to the side then shrugs off her royal mantle.

SCHUSTER

Mirabel!

Numb, Mirabel turns to face him.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

You're stronger than you think!

Demons pummel Schuster to the ground silencing him as Ereshkigal steps forward. Only, it's not Ereshkigal. Her features are alien-like; teeth sharpened to a razor's edge.

Horrified, Mirabel shrinks from the sight. Turning, she sees Schuster; one clawed foot holding him down.

MIRABEL

I...I can't do this!

Straining, he raises his head, but before he can answer, Ereshkigal comes up behind and back-hands her; loosing Ishtar's scepter from her hand. Stunned, she lies crumpled as demons cheer all around.

At once, Eleanor runs to the scepter, guarding it. Demons hiss and spit, but advance no further.

Leaning over, Ereshkigal picks Mirabel up and throws her. Hitting a wall, the stone crumbles beneath her. Demons shriek as she slides to the ground.

SCHUSTER

Get up, Mirabel! Get up!

Frustrated, Mirabel pounds her fist.

MIRABEL

I'm not like you! I *can't*!

To her amazement, the ground splits beneath her hand. Dropping her jaw, she looks at Schuster. He stares back.

SCHUSTER

You *can*!

Impatient, Ereshkigal approaches and, grabbing her by the back of the neck slams her face down into the floor. Embedded three inches in stone, she can only moan.

Slowly, lifting her head, she sees Ereshkigal twirling; arms raised in victory as demons screech and holler. A moment later, her scepter flies to her, glowing hell-fire red.

A chorus fills the chamber.

DEMONS

Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!

Inspired, Ereshkigal aims her scepter. A wave of energy leaps from it slamming Mirabel against a wall. The beam is so intense, it slices through any and all demons within range. Stone melts around Mirabel, outlining her body. Twisting and turning, her flesh begins to peel.

Mirabel screams as Ereshkigal steps closer.

ERESHKIGAL

Stupid fool!

Smirking, she looks from Schuster to Mirabel.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

You know what absolutely astounds me? Hmm? How women like you *always* sacrifice yourselves for someone like *him*. A creature wholly incapable of loving you back and yet, it never fails! You just do! I mean...from my perspective its pretty satisfying, but oh, how typical! How mortal! How foolish!

Schuster shakes his head.

SCHUSTER
Don't listen to her Mirabel!

Ereshkigal laughs.

ERESHKIGAL
Let him up. I want him to see this.

Schuster rises.

SCHUSTER
Just because love is forbidden me,
Ereshkigal, doesn't mean I'm
incapable! Not anymore!

Humbled, he looks over at Mirabel.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
SHE taught me that!
(to Mirabel)
Ishtar was right. It was cruel what I
did. The demon in me thought only of
myself! But you know what?
(humble)
The joke was on me! Your kiss...OUR
kiss...changed everything!

At this, sadness washes over him.

I know that you could probably never
love someone like me...*forgive*
someone like me, but...

Schuster looks up, eyes pleading.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
I love you, Mirabel.

At his words, Mirabel cries out. Ereshkigal rolls her eyes.

ERESHKIGAL
Oh, come on! You don't actually
believe that, do you?

Mirabel looks at Schuster. Her eyes say she wants to.

Disgusted, Ereshkigal withdraws the scepter leaving what's
left of her on the floor.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
Do you yield!?

SCHUSTER
Get up Mirabel! Get up!

Mirabel peers over, too weak to respond.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Use the power the Gods gave you!

His eyes roll to the scepter at Eleanor's feet.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
*Call to it, Mirabel! Make it come to
you!*

A huge fist drives Schuster to his knees as Mirabel looks to the scepter. Holding a tremulous arm, she closes her eyes, willing it to her.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
That's it, Mirabel! That's it!

To her amazement, the scepter is suddenly snug in her hand, the lifestone glowing blue-green. Power surges through her -- the power of Ishtar -- and she is transformed into Mirabel again. Furious, she narrows her eyes. Whirling, scepter pointed, she releases a torrent of energy slamming Ereshkigal into her throne and melting it. Her wings, igniting, burn.

Ereshkigal drops her jaw to scream. Trying to rise, Mirabel won't let her.

Demons leap and pummel. Screeching, they pull their hair, clawing at one another in a gigantic, maniacal free-for-all.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Mirabel stop! Stop! You don't know
what you're doing!

Seconds later, nothing remains of Ereshkigal but ash; her scepter, spent, falls to the floor.

Schuster drops to his knees and covers his face.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
NO!

Mirabel drops to her knees, as well. Placing Ishtar's scepter in front of her she stares, horrified, at what she's done. A second later, she looks over at Schuster.

Schuster's face is a tortured mask. It's then she notices demons glaring; baring their teeth. Frenzied, they claw and bite as they draw near.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Oh, Mirabel!

Canis leans down and picks up Ereshkigal's scepter. Casting demons aside, he stands in front of her, fists clenched.

Mirabel rises, unsure.

Suddenly, without warning, Canis drops to one knee. Holding Ereshkigal's scepter in front of him, he lowers his head.

CANIS

Majesty!

Shocked, she watches him place it in her hands. At once, it ignites fiery red, wings sprout from Mirabel's back and a magnificent gown along with a crown appears. Behind, a golden throne takes the place of the old one.

At this, the entire assembly of demons kneel. All bow their heads.

MIRABEL

I...I don't understand! What's happening!?

Schuster splays his hands, trying to be as gentle as he can.

SCHUSTER

Ereshkigal. You killed her. Now, you are both queen of the underworld *and* the world above.

Schuster shakes his head.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

You're a goddess now. You hold the power to destroy all mankind...*or, give it life.*

Mirabel's eyes fill with tears.

MIRABEL

No! I don't want this! I don't want it at all!

Schuster's look is near inconsolable.

SCHUSTER

Had she yielded, you and your father would have been free. Instead, you killed her. Now, there's no going back. THAT is underworld law.

Mirabel shakes her head.

MIRABEL

No!

Schuster hangs his head.

SCHUSTER

Yes. Hell needs a master, Mirabel.
Without one, every demon here will
find their way out. And when they do,
they will destroy everything you hold
dear.

Stunned, Mirabel sits back; wings folding around her.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

*But, if you give Ishtar's scepter to
me, I will ensure the lifestone is
never found. Mankind will live on
because of you.*

Mirabel looks up; the look pitiful.

MIRABEL

And you?

(beat)

Will I ever see you again?

Schuster hesitates then looks up with a devilish smile.

Demons cheer.

EXT. CITY OF SCREAMS (GHOLGHOLA) - DAY

Brian wakes with shredded clothing, a nipple ring and a dog collar only to see Azim squinting down at him. Two anxious looking tourists wearing sunscreen are not far off.

Azim sighs.

AZIM

Allah is surely punishing me!

SUPERIMPOSE: ONE MONTH LATER

EXT. CENTRAL PARK/ICE CREAM STAND - LONDON - MORNING

A MAN (40), inside an ice cream stand, hands Schuster three cones: one raspberry, two cheese cake. Turning, Schuster hands the raspberry one to Michael who takes a bite.

A few yards away, Francis can be seen at a table. A chessboard in front of him, he contemplates his next move.

MICHAEL
So? How did he take it?

Schuster peers over at Francis.

SCHUSTER
About as well as can be expected.

MICHAEL
Which is?

Schuster gives him a look.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
That well, huh?

Schuster shrugs.

SCHUSTER
He didn't really have much choice.

Turning, he looks at his friend.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Hey and, uh, thanks for putting in a good word with...you know.
(points up)

Michael shrugs.

MICHAEL
It was the least they could do, considering all you did for them! I *still* think it wasn't enough.

Schuster nods, giving it some thought. A second later, he looks at his friend.

SCHUSTER
Don't be a stranger?

Michael claps his shoulder and smiles.

MICHAEL
Never.

Taking a lick of his ice cream, Michael turns only to do a double take. The little boy he had seen at the pond two months earlier is seated at a table watching him. His father, unaware, has his nose in a book.

Adorable, the boy waves, delighted to see him again.
Grinning, Michael waves back.

Schuster watches him go then turns to Francis. Seating himself at the table he hands him a cone.

SCHUSTER

Here you go, Pop.

FRANCIS

Thanks, son.

Schuster smiles then frowns when a brood of pigeons crowds around. He's about to shoo them off when, suddenly, they all fly off. Relieved, he looks up to see Eleanor come into view; a clear vial about her neck.

Jumping up, she bumps heads with Schuster and gives him a rub.

SCHUSTER

Hello, beautiful! What have you got?

Francis watches expectantly as Schuster extracts the message. Reading it, he looks up.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Mirabel wants to know if you want to come to dinner? If you do, can you bring some fresh fruit to come with?

Francis grins.

INT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Mirabel, magnificent on her throne, looks up to see a demon carrying a basket of fruit. Francis, Schuster and Eleanor are not far behind.

Eyes fixed on Schuster, she descends only to stop in front of him. Holding her hands out, she takes his. Together, each ring finger wears a matching hell-fire band.

As demons go wild, Schuster takes her in his arms and kisses her.

(THE END)