

ASMODEUS

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". This is **SCHUSTER (90)**.

CLOSE UP: OLD MAN IN PLAID CAP, GRIM EXPRESSION, CHEWING GUM

SUPERIMPOSE:

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

The pigeon, aiming directly for the old man's head, let's one fly. A second later, poop lands with a satisfying splat; goo dripping from the cap.

Schuster doesn't even look up. Glowering, clutching his collar (**a tattoo of a snake eating a plant on his wrist**) he glares outward across the water 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.

Making sure they don't circle back, he ducks when another 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. The birds, cawing and flapping, screech in delight.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

You sorry sons of bitches!

Swans, at water's edge, look over. Schuster yells at them, too.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

WWHHAAT!?

Snapping a kerchief open, he glares.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Thought that was pretty funny, did you?

(wipes poop)

And maybe, *just* maybe, your thinking, I might want some of the old man, too? Yeah? Well, don't even think about it! Cuz if I gotta get wet? I'm gonna kick every one of your asses!

(points to each)

Yeah! Each of you!

Submerging, the swans pop up again, shaking feathers.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

(wiping)

Fucking birds! I mean *EVERY FUCKING TIME!*

Nearby 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. At once, the swans paddle toward them.

Schuster sighs. Free of birds, at last, he lets the warmth of the sun call to him, until finally closing his eyes.

FADE TO PAST:

EXT. WW2 - DACHAU CONCENTRATION CAMP - MORNING

JEWS, IMMIGRANTS and GYPSIES (various ages) stand in mud and rain. Shoes hang from their necks as one by one they present hands and feet to a cruel looking officer. This is **DECKERT (40)** -- rigid in form with pale blue eyes.

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

DECKERT

Scheisse! Will this rain never stop!?

Irritated, he waves a pitiful looking MAN through just as another OFFICER (25) steps up.

OFFICER

I would think you'd be used to the weather by now, Commander Deckert.

Deckert grunts, eyeing the trail of human flesh, 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 to her feet. Covered in muck, each carries a **sixth toe**. A warped, inward smile then...

DECKERT

Her!

A GUARD next to Deckert raises a rifle while two more 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 its covering removed. A moment later, the guard looks wide-eyed at Deckert.

Deckert pushes the man aside.

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

Grinning, Deckert picks up the babe to wrap in his coat. Its mother, on her knees, stretches arms.

GYPSY WOMAN (cont'd)

No! Please! God strike you down, you bastard! Give him back!

Deckert's grin is the last thing she sees before she, too, is dragged off.

EXT. MUNICH - WW2 GERMANY - SUNNY 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 rush out. Rapping smartly, he enters.

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 mid-room 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 bristles.

ALFRED

Well? Speak up!

DECKERT

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

Hitler clasps hands behind his back to contemplate the floor.

HITLER

And the babe?

Deckert stiffens.

DECKERT

Passed, Mein Fuhrer. Sadly.

Hitler lifts eyes to stare.

HITLER

I see. The mother, too?

Sweat drizzles Deckert's cheek.

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

Hitler's grin widens to that of a cobra.

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 looks to the generals then Hitler.

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

Alfred harrumphs, suspicious.

DECKERT (cont'd)
 I...I say this because, as we speak,
 the British are mounting a resistance
 there. In order to accomplish my
 mission, to ensure success, I'll need
 to move without hindrance.

Hitler ponders this then turns.

HITLER
 What are *your* thoughts, Alfred?

Alfred considers, then...

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

Wilhelm deliberates, pulling a stache.

WILHELM
 Hmm. I hear Schuster is well-versed
 in that area. Professor of
 Archaeology at the University of
 Berlin. He's in Turkey now, on a dig
 of some sort.

Hitler nods.

HITLER
Find him, Alfred. See to it.

Alfred snaps to attention...

ALFRED
At once, Mein Fuhrer!

...then strides to the door. Turning to Deckert, Hitler seems almost jovial.

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

Deckert scrambles to his feet. Clicking heels, he salutes.

DECKERT
Jawohl, Mein Fuhrer! Heil Hitler!

Hitler's wave dismisses him.

Relieved, Deckert departs just as Alfred steps in. Door closing behind him, both generals scowl.

ALFRED
I don't trust him!

WILHELM
Me, either!

Hands clasped, Hitler stares menacingly 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 Schuster's face, mostly anger, as **MICHAEL (30)**, (angelic with black hair and startling blue eyes), stares out over the pond.

Oozing sarcasm, Schuster can't help himself.

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

Michael, giving Schuster the up and down, frowns.

MICHAEL
And you're...*OLD*, Schuster.

SCHUSTER
Hmmpf! I was *OLD* twenty years ago!

MICHAEL
And, Eleanor?

SCHUSTER
Gone! A long time now!

Michael sighs, the sorrow genuine.

MICHAEL
I'm really sorry to hear that.

Schuster explodes.

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

Michael rolls eyes.

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

Reaching into his coat, he pulls 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!

Ignoring him, Michael continues.

MICHAEL
I mean, do you know how long its been since I had ice cream? Sixty two years, seven months and eleven days!
(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)
 (heaves sigh)
 My most favorite thing!

Schuster spits gum.

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

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

Schuster glares only to give in. Sighing, he turns to his friend.

SCHUSTER
 What kind?

MICHAEL
 Hmm? Oh. Raspberry.

Schuster crinkles his nose.

SCHUSTER
 Ugh! To each his own. 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
 Ha! I've *been* ready!

Schuster turns toward the water. Closing eyes, he quickly opens 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?
 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 can't help grinning.

MICHAEL
 Okay, *OLD MAN*. I'll do that.

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

Getting up, 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. A second later, he speaks into the device.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
 Mark. Life cycle complete. Schuster,
 Robert. 10 October, 2024. Ummm...
 (checks position of sun)
 ...10:35 am. Message relay...
 (grins)
 "Next time don't wait so long.
 Getting old sucks."

Ending transmission, he rounds the far corner of the pond. The little boy, adorable in a sailor outfit, waves to him and, surprised, Michael stops. Head cocked, 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 a pudgy finger at Michael and the father looks again. Nothing. Even though Michael is ten feet away.

Delighted, Michael grins at the boy only to look beyond.

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

Attention once more on the boy, Michael puts a finger to his lips then he, too, walks away.

BOY

Bye-bye-O!

Michael, smiling 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 hat against 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 meek expression. 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 ignores the hand, giving a curdled look.

DECKERT

You're late!

Turning, he leaves Schuster to catch up.

EXT. IRAQI DESERT - DAWN

Deckert's bi-plane flies through the air to circle ruins.

SUPERIMPOSE: RUINS OF ERIDU

Deckert lands and rolls to a stop. Removing 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 jolts awake.

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

Schuster, following, scrambles to catch up.

SCHUSTER
Hey! Wait!

Clumsy, he slides off the wing.

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

Deckert rolls eyes.

EXT. RUINS OF ERIDU - MORNING

Deckert (imposing) stands atop a crumbling, mud-brick wall staring at mile-wide ruins. Schuster (breathing heavy/clutching his side) is just caught up. Together, they survey the city.

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

CUT TO ANCIENT
PAST:

OVERLAY: THE RUINS OF ERIDU (SUDDENLY ALIVE) MELTS 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.

CUT TO:

INT/EXT. TEMPLE - DAY

One Annunaki goddess (beautiful 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 the temple only to glide past a fantastic 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 he and Schuster stand outside the temple.

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

SCHUSTER

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

Deckert grins, rolls 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 a foot or so down, he hits something. Scraping the sand away, he uncovers a stone tablet with an inscription on top.

Schuster leans over 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 -- meek expression gone. A second later, he lifts "All Life Flows" to swing. Only, he misses completely. Deckert, brushing the gem, is suddenly knocked ten feet back. Unconscious, he lies on the ground glowing with supernatural energy.

Schuster rolls 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 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 have it,
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 sand, sees the plane.
Meanwhile...

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!

Schuster cups an ear.

SCHUSTER
What!? Can't hear you!

Revving the engine, he grins, moving the plane forward. Aiming at Deckert, he watches him drop to the ground just as the plane lifts over him. Jumping up, Deckert shakes a fist.

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, Schuster and the bi-plane are gone.

FADE TO
PRESENT:

EXT. COMMAND CENTER - IRAQ - PRESENT DAY

An F-16 fighter jet soars over a U.S. flag hanging outside a building. Just below the flag is a sign. It reads, "**AL ASAD AIR BASE/USCENTCOM-IRAQ**".

INT./EXT. DECKERT'S OFFICE - DAY

A plaque on an office door reads: COL. W.G. DECKERT.

CUT TO
INTERIOR:

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 tags. He is **DREAMING...**

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

Deckert, dreaming, is brooding on a stone dais inside a luxurious chamber. Looking up, he sees a vague outline coming toward him. Torchlight reveals it's Ishtar.

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

ISHTAR

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

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

DECKERT

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:

Still dreaming, Deckert mumbles...

DECKERT

How!? How!? The bastard stole it!

CUT TO:

Caressing an eight-pointed star surrounding a crystal center, 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, cupping his erection, bolts upright from his sleep.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

A full moon in the dead of night 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 headdress and robes of an Arab, jumps out; compact shovel in hand. The PILOT, giving a salute, takes off again as Deckert heads toward the ruins.

INT./EXT. AMERICANA TAVERN/INN - KURDISTAN - NIGHT

A cobblestone street leads to an arched hidden doorway revealing a sign. It reads, "Americana Tavern and Inn - Private Club! Members Only!" in both Kurdish and English. Sultry music greets anyone entering. A burly guard, just inside, watches the door.

Moonlight shines through the upper window just as Schuster (32) with tan neck and muscular body walks in. Wearing a khaki, wide-brimmed fedora, he slings a jacket onto a hook then makes his way to the bar. As he does, a laughing, dark-haired woman with too much to drink weaves toward him threatening to collide. Throwing hands, arcing a derisive brow, he avoids contact with her at all costs. Offended, the woman wanders off only to get caught up somewhere else.

Relieved, avoiding contact with at least two other women, he seats himself at the bar. A BOY (8), hidden behind a large plant, looks up at him from the floor. Curled next to him is a scrawny dog.

A few seats down, a frail but beautiful BRITISH blonde, **MIRABEL (30)** sits with a cane by her side. Two men, **BRIAN (30)** and **FRANCIS (50)** are on either side. Lost in conversation over a Rugby game, the men do not notice Schuster, but Mirabel does and covertly scrutinizes as the **BARTENDER (40)** approaches.

MAN
Arak and water.

Grunting, the bartender turns.

MAN (cont'd)
And some of THAT.

Schuster tips his head toward a vat.

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

As Mirabel watches, Schuster lifts the Arak, splashes 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 child.

Taking it, the boy shares it with the dog until the bartender returns and sees what he's done.

BARTENDER
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 Schuster's fist slams the bar. Lifting eyes, he gives a dangerous look until, grumbling, the bartender walks away and everyone else goes back to what they were doing. All, except Mirabel. Pleased he championed the boy, she can't help but smile.

INTERCUT: AMERICANA TAVERN AND TEMPLE RUINS - NIGHT

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

Dropping to his knees, he unfolds the shovel.

CUT TO TAVERN:

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

SCHUSTER

Wow.

Lifting his glass, she blushes and turns away. More than a little intrigued, he reluctantly turns to the mirror only to spy Michael coming up behind.

Disgusted, he turns to see him within inches of Mirabel. She doesn't see him, though, and neither do her companions. He's not there, nor, is his reflection.

CUT TO TEMPLE:

Deckert, in a frenzy, is digging.

DECKERT

Where are you!? Where are you!?

Wiping sweat, he brings his shovel down only to hit something solid. Frozen at first, he then claws at the sand with his hands. A moment later, he uncovers the tablet, "From Where" and tugs at it.

CUT TO TAVERN:

Michael, inches from Mirabel, grins at Schuster.

MICHAEL

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

(sniffs her, gives
pitying look)

...she doesn't have long. I'd say...
umm...about two months. And you?
Well, you'll only hurt yourself.

SCHUSTER

She's got green eyes, bro! I mean,
like...EMERALD!! I mean...what can I
say?

Michael rolls eyes.

MICHAEL

Oh, my God! THAT again! I mean what
is it with you? Besides, its been so
long, you've probably forgotten how!

Seeing Schuster's resolve, though, he stops.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
 Okay. How about I highly advise
 against it? It's gonna hurt like
 hell! I mean...crippling, thundering
 agony, you know? And what about her?
 Did you think of that?

Schuster grins.

SCHUSTER
 She's got green eyes!

Michael throws hands.

MICHAEL
 You're a complete and utter ass, you
 know that?

Schuster doesn't care.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
 Okay! Okay! It's *YOUR* funeral.
 (angry)
 Tell you what. I'll just wait for you
 outside...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, hitching a belt.

SCHUSTER
 Forgotten!? Me!? Ha!

Brian and Francis, backs turned, stand watching the game. As
 the crowd cheers, Schuster closes in on Mirabel.

JUMP CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: SCHUSTER LEERING.

SCHUSTER
 Hi!

Mirabel (weirded out) sits back.

MIRABEL
 H..Hi.

Schuster grips the back of a chair as the first wave of pain
 hits him. Gasping, he keeps from doubling over.

MIRABEL (cont'd)
Are you...*alright*?

Gritting teeth, he pretends.

SCHUSTER
Yeah-yeah.
(eye twitching)
Listen, I know you're going to think
I'm crazy, but...
(low moan)
...I've just got to know.

Mirabel tilts her head.

MIRABEL
What?

Schuster clutches his side; pain radiating all over.

SCHUSTER
Your name?
(gasps)
What's your name?

Mirabel hesitates.

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

CUT TO RUINS:

Overjoyed, Deckert lifts the lifestone from its sandy grave. As he does, the same supernatural energy as before consumes him. 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 TAVERN:

Schuster tries to appear normal.

SCHUSTER
No-no. I'm fine. Really. So...

Managing a agonized squeal, his steps closer.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
...Mirabel. Latin for wondrous
beauty...

Leaning in, in agony, he adds...

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
You have the most exquisite eyes!

At this, he doubles over.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Scheisse that hurts!

Horrified, Mirabel looks to escape.

MIRABEL
Ummm...

Determined, he leans in further still.

SCHUSTER
Look. I know this might be
alarming...me coming onto you like
this and all, but you should know I
don't do this, like...EVER. Well,
hardly ever. So...here goes!

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

MIRABEL
Uh... WHAT. ARE. YOU. DOING!!?

Schuster grins crazily.

SCHUSTER
Just so you know? This is *REALLY*
gonna hurt!

MIRABEL
Oh, my God!

Schuster doesn't hear, though, and kisses her scrunched face with such passion, she slowly melds into him -- his right leg shaking like a dog. As they kiss, a series of images flash through his brain.

MONTAGE:

*Mirabel -- flashing scenes from baby to college.

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

As they watch, Mirabel breaks down, Francis gathering her in his arms.

DOCTOR
(sad)
Pretty sure, she does now.

*Mirabel, beatific/angelic, smiling. A second later, she looks up.

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!?
(looks down at
Schuster's leg)
What the...? Okay. That's NOT right.

Nudging Francis, he turns to see his daughter kissing a stranger. A moment later, Brian and Francis grin.

BRIAN (cont'd)
 Ahem! 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 Schuster's big, muscular form -- death grip
 on the chair -- leg shagging.

BRIAN
 Um...You know I'm gay, right?

Francis is unconcerned.

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

Francis stares.

BRIAN (cont'd)
 He's twice my size! And, I'm not so
 sure he's not crazy. I mean, do you
 see the leg? I mean, who does that?

Francis shrugs.

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

Brian's shoulders slump.

BRIAN
Great.
 (at leg)
 What. in. the. hell?

It isn't until a rumbling is heard and the whole bar shakes
 that Schuster and Mirabel finish. Arm about her still, he
 stares deep into her eyes.

BARTENDER
 Earthquake! Everybody down!

The television flashes, "Breaking News" and "Rolling
 Earthquakes hit Iraq". In the distance, a car alarm goes
 off, plaster falls, but Schuster doesn't notice. A second
 later, as searing pain returns, he thrusts her away to
 clutch his side.

SCHUSTER
Whooooie that hurt!!!

Turning full circle, trying to shake it off, he stops.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Wait! WHAT just happened!?
(suspicious)
Say...what did you do!!?

Mirabel steps back.

MIRABEL
ME!?

SCHUSTER
Yeah! You! 'Cuz no way *THAT* was
supposed to happen!

Mirabel's head cocks.

MIRABEL
What are you talking about? The
earthquake? Because...

SCHUSTER
No! *THIS!*
(waggles finger
between them)
Feelings? Ugh! I mean, how do you
people do it!?

Stepping back, he appears shocked.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Say...you just...you just stay away
from me!

Brian's jaw drops. Mirabel bristles.

MIRABEL
Listen, bud. You kissed ME, remember?

Schuster turns full circle as if it's some sort of joke. A
second later, he levels on her, eye twitching.

MIRABEL (cont'd)
You're crazy aren't you?
(heaves sigh)
Why do I always get the nuts!

Schuster snorts.

SCHUSTER
You don't get it, do you!?

MIRABEL
Get *WHAT!*?

SCHUSTER
I mean...even I don't get it!
(big breath)
Okay. Here's how it works, alright?
YOU'RE supposed to fall for...
(thumbs himself)
Not me for...
(points to her)
Oh, never mind!
(beat)
I gotta go! Listen...umm...DON'T tell
anyone about this, okay?

MIRABEL
Oh! TRUST me!

Not sure what to do, he flounders.

SCHUSTER
Oh, and thanks for the kiss. I mean
that, yeah?

Angry he turns away.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
I THINK!

Jaw hanging, Mirabel watches him leave.

MIRABEL
Sure. I mean...what the hell!?
(beat)
Hey! Wait!

Clutching his side, he looks back.

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

Mirabel frowns.

MIRABEL
But...

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

Mirabel slumps in her chair.

MIRABEL (cont'd)
 ...I don't even know your name!

Grinning, Brian puts an arm around her.

BRIAN
 Well, he was a good looking chap!
 Weird. Odd even.
 (laughs)
 I mean...*that leg!*

MIRABEL
 I'm sorry...what?

BRIAN
 But, you know...all in all, really
 good looking.
 (grins dreamily)
 I'd have kissed him!

Mirabel bursts into a laugh. A second later, though, she buries her head in his shoulder.

MIRABEL
 Oh, Bri! I'm going to miss out on so
 much! This whole dying business just
 sucks, you know!?
 (wipes tears)
 Oh, Christ! I promised myself I
 wouldn't do this!

Brian gathers her in his arms.

BRIAN
 You're right, my girl. You're right.
 It does suck! But we have each other,
 right?

Francis joins them, wrapping an arm.

BRIAN (cont'd)
 And we're gonna do this together...

Brian looks to Francis.

BRIAN (cont'd)
Right?

Sniffling, gathering resolve, Mirabel nods.

EXT. TAVERN - NIGHT

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

SCHUSTER
(to himself)
What the fuck!

Looking up, he sees Michael.

MICHAEL
Did it hurt?

Schuster groans, pushing off.

SCHUSTER
Excruciating!

Michael approaches, shaking his head.

MICHAEL
GOOD! Although, you'd think you'd
know better!

Schuster staggers to just in front of him.

SCHUSTER
You'd think! Ah...but she was worth
it. I saw everything. Brilliant
mind...
(clutches side)
...pity about the rest.

MICHAEL
What made you do it?

Schuster looks to the door.

SCHUSTER
I...honestly don't know!

Michael scowls.

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 arcs a brow.

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

Drawing forth cigarettes and lighter, Schuster grins.

SCHUSTER
Ha!

Michael throws hands.

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

Schuster lights one, inhales and grins.

SCHUSTER
I like to think of it as insurance!
It sure beats diapers and liver
spots!
(exhales)
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 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, covert, 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 hurries out leaving "All Life Flows" still stained with 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!*
 (grumbling)
 I'm telling you, being the go-to boy for the Igigi is no picnic!

Michael ponders the clock tower. It ticks 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.

Schuster draws back.

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

Michael sighs.

MICHAEL
I didn't think so, either.

Each contemplates the other.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
So? What are you going to do?

Schuster exhales smoke.

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

Michael grins.

MICHAEL
Aren't I always?

Hesitating, he adds...

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, a drop of rain spatters 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
 I think they heard you.
 (beat)
 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. 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 bin. Swiping his hands, he holds them up.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Happy now!?

Michael grins then, pushing a button on his wrist, enveloped in blue energy, he spreads two giant wings to shoot upward.

Turning, Schuster stops. He can see Mirabel through the window -- alone, one hand under her chin, pondering what might have been. A moment later, the clock, striking midnight, announces the rain. Pulling his collar closer, he takes one last look then slowly walks away.

EXT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

Deckert, lifestone about his neck, is perched atop a stone wall in the pouring rain. He's now half man, half something else. Ruffling feathers, he stares, 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 on all fours, he enters the temple.

INT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

The Deckert thing 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 with circular end. 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 IN THE BAR.

SCHUSTER (V.O.)
Mirabel...Latin for wondrous
beauty...

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

SCREECH HALT:

Turning, she sees the Inn's MANAGER standing next to her. He's looking at the rain, too. A second later, he gives a polite nod and 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 smiles.

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 to 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.

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.

CUT TO:

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.

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 Sumerian 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 shrugs.

BRIAN (cont'd)
 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 this
 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, 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.
 (MORE)

BRIAN (cont'd)
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 to don gloves.

BRIAN
Oh, hell no. Evil bastard's really in
a mood. I plan on avoiding him the
whole 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. 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 anyone, 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

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 grins.

MIRABEL

My thoughts exactly!

INT. TEMPLE - LATE AFTERNOON

PAN INSIDE ISHTAR'S TEMPLE 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 then catches herself.

MIRABEL

Ahem! 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. 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...

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) (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) (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" (32), 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 MONTAGE:

Schuster spits out a back tooth.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Realwy.

Reaching, they see him grimace. Yanking the blade, he 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.

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 to 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!?

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

FRANCIS
 Where are you going, son?

Schuster abruptly halts, tilting his head.

SCHUSTER
 What did you jutht call me!?

Francis gives a quizzical look.

FRANCIS
 You mean...son?

SCHUSTER
 Yeah. Hmmp! 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 opposite the tent holds a MAP with a lantern. A
 portable stove provides warmth. Chairs hold Mirabel, Brian
 and Francis around a fire. All three sip tea and munch
 sandwiches as Mirabel stares off in the distance.

FLASHBACK: MIRABEL IS MELDING INTO SCHUSTER, KISSING HIM AT
 THE BAR.

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

END FLASHBACK:

Flushed, Mirabel turns to see Brian peering 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 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 wait.

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 embodiment 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...

CUT TO:

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 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 before the fountain. Making sure she is alone, she digs a hole and buries the stone.

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 long line of sinners in shackles.

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

Just past the gate Ereshkigal watches.

END MONTAGE:

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. The most monumental discovery ever made.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

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

A moment later, a slight breeze, and Michael drops in from above. 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 be done.

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.

Sighing with relief, he pushes the blanket off to pull on pants and remove the bandage from his side. That wound, too, is healed. His shirt hangs by the cot and he puts it on.

Parting the tent, he can just see Mirabel sipping her drink. Laughing, she appears all the more beautiful in his eyes.

EXT. TENT - NIGHT

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 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 structure your cells any way she wants for as *LONG* as she wants.

Looking to the entrance to the tomb, 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, stretching talons.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
 Tell you what. Whatever it is, she's LYING! She has no intention of giving you anything. 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 nearby 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, shaking the memory of it, 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, cane in hand, she reaches the entrance, peeks inside and enters.

INT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

A torch illuminates the archway; stones lie 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.

MIRABEL
You! How...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 within.

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 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!

Hands on hips, 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 sighs.

MIRABEL

Fine! But, this better be good!

The corner of Schuster's mouth twitches.

SCHUSTER

Oh. It *is*. *It's a doozy*.
Ahem. 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...

Hideous, he 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 at the Seventh Gate, naked; the body
 exquisite.

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

Rising, quivering in anger, Ishtar's chin lifts.

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.

Mirabel can only stare.

MIRABEL
You took 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 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, arching her 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 flicks 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. Collapsed 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)

Oh, yes. The legends are true! 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.

(MORE)

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

FLASHBACK:

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

END FLASHBACK:

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 by the Gods to interfere in human affairs, reasoned that since I could not die I would make the perfect watchdog. The tattoo? A reminder of who I was.

Michael hands Asmodeus Ishtar's scepter.

CUT TO:

INT. ISHTAR'S TOMB - NIGHT

Schuster looks deep into her eyes.

SCHUSTER
Or...who I *thought* I was. I...I don't know anymore.

Mirabel blushes.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Anyway, tasked with keeping it safe, I hid the scepter in the one place I knew *SHE* would never find it.

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 is bitter.

SCHUSTER
Because even gods have their limits.

INT. ISHTAR'S SARCOPHAGUS - NIGHT

Furious, Ishtar narrows her eyes.

CUT TO:

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 to fumble boots.

FRANCIS
What makes you think that?

Brian yells over his shoulder as he takes off.

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

INT. ISHTAR'S TOMB - NIGHT

Mirabel pales as Schuster draws near.

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 demon?

Mirabel gasps as he runs a finger (without touching her)
down her cheek. The mere proximity of him makes her flush.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Because, demons don't show mercy.
They don't sacrifice themselves and
they damned sure don't kiss women in
bars.

He's intoxicating.

MIRABEL
And yet, you kissed me!

Gritting his teeth, he pushes the muzzle toward the floor if only to step closer. His eyes glimmer.

SCHUSTER
Yes. I did. Worse? I wanted to keep kissing you after I got what I wanted.

Lips close to hers...

MIRABEL
And...and what was it you wanted?

Schuster flat-out smolders, a centimeter from her lips.

SCHUSTER
Everything.

At this, Mirabel gasps. But not at Schuster. Rather, Deckert, slinking down the stairs.

Cocking his head, Schuster draws back.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
What?

Mute, she points. Schuster grimaces.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Let me guess. An owl-like creature with long talons and a hideous face?

Mirabel nods.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
(sigh)
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, he'll be a lot shorter, I swear!

CUT TO:

Inside the sarcophagus, her eyes roll. They're furious.

CUT TO:

Schuster looks to Mirabel.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Go! While you still can!

At this, horns sprout from Deckert's head. Lowering them, he butts Schuster right in the face. Falling back, knocking his head, Schuster loses the dagger.

In an instant, shouldering Brian aside, 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)
 (agonized)
 Aw, not you! Not you, Mirabel!

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

Slipping to his knees in front of the sarcophagus, Schuster glares.

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!

Shoving Schuster aside, he grabs Mirabel.

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.

ISHTAR
 Where is the scepter, Asmodeus?

Schuster, holding his arms out, turns full circle.

SCHUSTER

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

ISHTAR

Really?

Mirabel, as if being drawn and quartered, screams as she's pulled taut.

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

FRANCIS

Let her go! *Please!*

Mirabel, 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

THIS from the most powerful of all
Ereshkigal's demons. How many have
suffered at *YOUR* hands, Asmodeus? How
many women has the infamous "Demon of
Lust" destroyed to satisfy his sick,
sadistic needs?

Schuster takes a knee.

SCHUSTER

Look at me! I'm begging you. 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! I am NOT that creature anymore. I'm...I'm *human!*

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 may appear! Tell me Asmodeus, does she know its your essence that she cannot stop thinking of you? Did you not kiss her, deliberately breaching her soul, as he would have done? And, armed with that knowledge, seduce her, just as *he* would have done? All with no thought, no care, as to how she might suffer, love unrequited, at the bitter end...

(beat)

...just as *HE* would have done?

Horrified, Schuster looks to Mirabel.

SCHUSTER

That was before I...before I *felt*... Oh, God, Mirabel! I didn't mean to hurt you!

Ishtar laughs.

ISHTAR

OF COURSE, he didn't mean to hurt you! It was *only a bit of fun*, right Asmodeus? *Just a girl in a bar?*

Horrified, his own words haunting him, his eyes seek Mirabel's. Pride overriding humiliation, she lifts her chin.

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 then, running past Francis 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 you *knew* her end was near! Oh,
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, anguished, looks over at him.

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! Or, she *will* suffer. I
promise you!

Disappearing up the steps, the entrance crashes down behind them.

Silence, then Deckert bolts upright amidst the debris. 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.
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
(stoic/miserable)
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, finally,
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 giving a half crazed laugh.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
I wouldn't even know where to begin!
(MORE)

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

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, 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. 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

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 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.
(MORE)

AZIM (cont'd)
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, Schuster 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 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 come back for her.

Michael turns angry.

MICHAEL

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

Schuster hangs his head.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Damn it! I warned you to leave her
alone! How many times do I have to
remind you! You're demon! The Demon
of Lust! Once, all you need do was
look at a woman and she could not
bear to live without you! Now look
what you've done!

Michael snaps his head up.

SCHUSTER

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

MICHAEL

What do you mean!? That's NOT
possible!

Schuster shakes his head, wind whipping hair.

SCHUSTER

I know! I didn't think so, either!
But, something happened inside that
tavern, Michael. When I kissed her...
I don't know...something inside just
snapped. I *wanted* her. *Needed* her! I
can't describe it! It's...

(crazed laugh)

...fucking awful! I mean, is this
what happens to mortal men!? Cuz, I
haven't been right, since!

Michael's speechless. Schuster's miserable.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

If I could give a piece of myself to
save her, I would!

Eyes pleading, he looks to his friend.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Would a demon do that, Michael!?
Would they!?

Michael, as if seeing him for the first time, stares.

MICHAEL

You know, I *actually* believe you
would. The gods will never allow it,
though.

Schuster nods.

SCHUSTER

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

Michael studies him then claps a hand on his shoulder.

MICHAEL

Until you get back.

Schuster nods.

SCHUSTER

Thank you!

The corner of Michael's mouth twitches; a mischievous look
in his eye.

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

Schuster looks up.

SCHUSTER
What?

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

Schuster draws back.

SCHUSTER
You don't...?

Michael laughs, shaking his head.

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

Schuster squats over the vortex to look down...

SCHUSTER
Son of a bitch!

...then leaps.

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

Torchlight reveals Francis sitting on a stool outside the collapsed entrance to the 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 eyes, she sees Deckert squatting 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, watching from the shadows, smiles.

CUT TO:

FRANCIS (cont'd)
 So, you see, I'm counting on that obstinate streak of yours...
 (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, ahead, is just rounding a corner. Hiding, he waits for Schuster to pass.

CUT TO:

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

VULTURE
 Asmodeussss! ASMODEUSS! Asmodeus!

Schuster looks up.

SCHUSTER
Hello, Ripper.

CUT TO:

Ereshkigal, scepter in hand, broods upon her throne.

WHISPERS
Asmodeus! Asmodeus has returned!

With a nod, 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 him 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 echoes 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 bows lets him pass.
- * THIRD GATE: The spider demon bows lets him pass.
- * FOURTH GATE: The lizard demon bows lets him pass.
- * FIFTH GATE: The gremlin tries pinching the apple. Smacking its hand, Schuster wags a finger at it. Grinning, it bows, letting him pass.
- * SIXTH GATE: The mouth demon bows 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 screeching...

MINIONS

Asmodeus! Asmodeus has returned!

Just beyond, Schuster sees Ereshkigal, regal, waiting. He tries walking toward her, but Canis blocks his path.

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; 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 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 grins.

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 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 inside the tomb.

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 with delight.

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

FLASHBACK:

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

* Schuster kisses Mirabel in the bar.

* 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 downward.

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!
 (leans close/grins)
 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 bottom. Ishtar screams as the lifestone pierces her heart; spilling goo.

Mirabel, suddenly released, the lifestone inside her fading, slumps to the ground. Crumpled in 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 screaming into their lair.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. TOMB - NIGHT

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

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:

Ethereal, 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*.

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 cut off when, grinning,
she draws herself up in a whirlwind 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 -- beaks snapping in anticipation if
only to peck and feed.

Schuster, struggling against his binds, screams.

FADE TO:

SUPERIMPOSE: TWO WEEKS LATER

INT. MIRABEL'S FLAT - DAY

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

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

A tear slips Mirabel's cheek.

MIRABEL
What have we done!?

Pain strikes and, gasping, she doubles over only to hear a key. Straightening, she heroically hides the pain as Francis enters.

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 to 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. Grabbing the remote, he switches it off.

FRANCIS

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

Mirabel nods, wiping eyes.

MIRABEL

Thanks for always being there for me, you know?

Francis scoffs. Walking to the kitchen, he grabs 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 a seat.

FRANCIS (cont'd)

I'm not blind, you know. Is it...is it true what Ishtar said? Do you...do you think of him always? Does his essence consume you?

Mirabel can't look at him.

FRANCIS (cont'd)

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

Mirabel's lip trembles. Francis grabs some brandy.

FRANCIS (cont'd)

Tell you what...lets finish this little bit. What do you say?

Bringing forth two glasses he measures two, small but equal shares to empty the bottle. When still she doesn't speak, he looks over.

FRANCIS (cont'd)

Talk to me?

Lifting eyes, she sighs.

MIRABEL

Your right, Pop! You're right! He *is* all I think about!
(MORE)

MIRABEL (cont'd)
 Not doctors, not medication, not
 cures...just *him!* I have no
 verifiable life left in me, and all I
 want is to see him again! Ishtar was
 right!
 (weeps)
 He *is* demon!

Francis shakes his head.

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

Mirabel grabs tissue to blow.

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's true, how come he
 never came back!?

Francis, takes her hand, gently folding it into his.

FRANCIS
 Maybe...just 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.
 I just can't do this anymore." 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 "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 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 blinks.

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's finding it hard to focus.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

The lifestone? You carry it within.

Her brows knit together as he points to her chest.

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...

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, grabbing some tissue, he dabs 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, chin barely above 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 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.
 (beat)
 Oh, and cats.

Mirabel fixes him with 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.

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.

(beat)
 The powers to be needn't have worried, though. In the thousands of years I've known him, I've never known him to care for anyone...

(cocks head)
 ...except you.

Mirabel's lower lip quivers.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
 Oh, 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.

Closing her eyes, she remembers.

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

A second later, they fly open again.

MIRABEL
 No.

MICHAEL
 No?

She struggles to stay awake.

MIRABEL
 No. Die. H..halp.

Michael looks down; 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
from the bedroom across the hall.

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

His eyes drop to the wine glass then to her again.

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.

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, 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 to laugh.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

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

Reaching, she runs fingers through his hair. Drawing the hand away, some of the scalp comes with it.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Yu-uck!

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?

Lifting the flap to his pants, she casually checks his nethers.

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, she shrieks with laughter. Done, she draws near, no longer amused.

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, 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 cup.

DREAM:

* ISHTAR'S TOMB:

Mirabel and Schuster are talking.

SCHUSTER

...if you want to be restored to the natural world, someone must be sacrificed in your stead.

(MORE)

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
In Ishtar's case, her not so mournful
husband took her place...

END DREAM:

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?

Exhausted, Mirabel shakes her head.

MIRABEL
Sorry, Pop. Bad dream.

Reaching for the cup, she looks into the water.

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

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.

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, crumpled on the ground, sits up. As she does, pain hits her midsection, doubling her over.

MIRABEL
Please! Not yet! Not yet!

Looking over, she sees Francis passed out. Struggling, she crawls over only to collapse at his side.

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

Looking up, she sees Michael leaning 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 struggles to rise.

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 answer.

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?

Lifting her chin, she looks up at him.

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.

At this, sun shines through the slit and onto the well. Stench hits and she covers her mouth and nose.

With great difficulty, she climbs a stone block to stand at the edge of the well.

MIRABEL (cont'd)
(voice above the wind)
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.

Wind whipping, she smiles.

MIRABEL
No! Schuster won't let her!

Letting go, she steps off the edge and is gone.

INT./EXT. UNDERWORLD - NIGHT

Mirabel wakes only to cry out. Her body, twisted in pain, lies atop a plateau. Managing to get up, she quickly draws back. A hellhound is looking right at her.

Growling, it watches her stagger to a path only to stop. A stone-age creature is crossing in front of her.

Looking at her, it hisses. Harpies swoop, raking her hair, and she yelps.

Rounding a corner, she stops once more. She is at the entrance to the Underworld. Ripper's heads glare down at her. Crying out at the site of him, 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 straightens.

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 clutches her side.

MIRABEL

I've...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 her 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 -- half his face gone.

SCHUSTER

Noooo!

Ereshkigal throws her head to laugh.

ERESHKIGAL

YES!

At once, Schuster is transported, body restored, to just outside the entrance. He has just a moment to look at Mirabel before she disappears.

Trying to follow, he beats at the opening.

SCHUSTER

Let me in! Ereshkigal!

Hoping to barrel through, he drops to the ground, instead. 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 at Mirabel passed out on the floor.

ERESHKIGAL
I'm counting on it.

EXT. CITY OF SCREAMS (GHOLGHOLA) - DAY

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 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 up 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 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 a full hand.

KID
(accent)
American.

Schuster eyes the savvy little trader then...

SCHUSTER
Done!

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

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Pay up!

Francis rolls eyes if 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 speed 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 to climb the top of the well.

FRANCIS
Are you sure about this, son?

Schuster 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, 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!
Or, I'll sic her on you, I swear!

Flapping and screeching, the heads carry on.

RIPPER

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

At once, the barrier 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.

Schuster grins. Eleanor takes it in stride.

Passing through the six gates, each demon scrambling for cover, they finally 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 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?

Ereshkigal cocks her head.

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?

FLASHBACK:

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. Turning, she flees the chamber holding an injured hand.

END FLASHBACK:

Ereshkigal, sullen, remains silent.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

Ho! Ho! You did! Didn't you!?

Nose up, she turns her head.

ERESHKIGAL

What do mortal's say? Oh, yes. It's just a matter of time.

(sly grin)

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 circumstances...

Hateful eyes slide to Eleanor.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

...I'm not in a generous mood. That *thing* you carry on your shoulder...

...well, best hope nothing happens to it.

SCHUSTER

Who? Eleanor? Eleanor can take care of herself. Isn't that right, baby girl?

Eleanor hisses making Ereshkigal 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

A challenge requested cannot be refused. *That* is Underworld law.

Rising, Ereshkigal points to Canis.

ERESHKIGAL

Know this before you accept, Canis. This is no mere fight to the death.

(MORE)

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
The loser spends eternity in
everlasting torment. What say you!?

Canis throws his head.

CANIS
Challenge accepted! I will tear him
limb from limb and dine on the
entrails.
(laughs)
We will ALL feast good tonight!

Demons cheer. 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.
Demons 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 razors.

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
until, surprised, she sees a kitten saunter in. Cocking its
head, it peers over at her.

MIRABEL
(weak smile)
Best get out of here, little one.
There be monster's about.

Eleanor draws close to put a tiny paw out. Looking long and hard, she turns tail only to look back.

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 misses a club aimed at his head.

Scrambling to his feet, Schuster runs, kicks off a wall and with both feet knocks Canis to the ground; sending the club flying.

Demons cheer uproariously.

Picking up the spear, Schuster drives it toward Canis's chest, but Canis grabs it, keeping it from penetrating. Twisting the shaft, the spear is torn from Schuster's grasp to go spiraling.

Rising, he and Schuster grapple over it until, gaining the advantage, Canis slams Schuster to the ground. Falling on top, he pummels Schuster relentlessly.

Mirabel covers her mouth at the beating.

Flipping over, Schuster tries crawling away only to be grabbed by the foot and lifted. Canis, twirling him three times, throws him discus-like into a wall.

The crowd, thirsting for blood, screams for more.

Schuster staggers to his feet. A second later, he is thrust high in the air and into the crowd. Demons, bowled over, scramble.

Sitting up, Schuster finally sees Eleanor. Behind, in the shadows, is Mirabel. Taking all he's going to, he looks to Canis. He's barrelling toward him, full steam.

SCHUSTER
Sorry, buddy.

Grunting, he gets to his feet.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

It's time.

Canis isn't listening, though. Hurling himself head first into Schuster, he launches him thirty feet. As Schuster braces for impact, Canis doggedly follows. Getting on hands and knees, he commences throttling Schuster, until Schuster boxes his ears. Staggering back, Canis howls in agony.

Seizing the opportunity, Schuster leaps to his feet only to stagger-run to his throne. There, amidst all the metal and bone, he pulls Ishtar's scepter from within. Holding it like a spear, he points it at Canis.

Ereshkigal, instantly recognizing it, jumps to her feet.

ERESHKIGAL

Hold!

Canis freezes. The crowd ceases cheering. Ereshkigal steps from her throne.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Is THAT what I think it is!?

Caught red-handed, Schuster gives her a look.

SCHUSTER

Yes.

ERESHKIGAL

Here...this whole time...under my very nose!?

At this, he loses a grin.

SCHUSTER

Yes.

Eleanor steps forward. Mirabel follows. Ereshkigal 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 hands.

ERESHKIGAL
Oh, but *I* mean it!

Schuster rolls eyes.

SCHUSTER
Yeah. Yeah.

Drawing back, he takes aim, only to abruptly stop and point
at Mirabel.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Sorry about this. I truly am.

Wide-eyed, Ereshkigal realizes too late.

ERESHKIGAL
NO!

Piercing Mirabel's chest, the scepter connects with stone.
Bursting with blue-green radiance, she staggers backward
then forward, only to fall to her knees in shock.

Ereshkigal, wasting no time, rushes forward.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
You DARE!

Schuster laughs.

Mirabel, unbelieving, pulls the scepter from her chest;
lifestone coming with it. At once, the sickly look is gone.
Rising, she looks at it in amazement.

Ereshkigal glares.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
Give it to me, girl! Or, so help me
you'll wish you had!

Schuster goes to Mirabel. He tries consoling her, but she steps away.

MIRABEL

Why!?

All he can do is look at her.

MIRABEL (cont'd)

Why!?

Schuster holds out his hands.

SCHUSTER

Because you deserve to live, Mirabel.
And, now you will.

Stepping back, he points 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 eyes.

ERESHKIGAL

You forgot one thing, idiot!

Schuster smirks.

SCHUSTER

Oh, 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, chanting, circle.

DEMONS

The Law! The law! The law! The law!

Frightened, Mirabel looks 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! *That is Underworld law.*

MIRABEL

And, if I refuse?

Ereshkigal grins.

ERESHKIGAL

Then you may NEVER leave! You and your father will remain here, in ever lasting torment.

(grins)

Kapisch?

Laughing, she turns away.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

As for you, Asmodeus. I'll let the birds deal with you! Seize him!

Demons seize him by the arms.

As Ereshkigal turns to face Mirabel, drums begin to beat again. Taking her scepter, she sets it to the side then shrugs off her royal mantle.

SCHUSTER

Mirabel!

Numb, Mirabel turns.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

You're stronger than you think!

Demons pummel Schuster, silencing him, just as Ereshkigal steps forward.

Horrorified, Mirabel shrinks away. Turning, she sees Schuster; one clawed foot holding him down.

MIRABEL
I...I can't do this!

Straining, he raises his head, but not before Ereshkigal comes up behind Mirabel to back-hand her; loosing Ishtar's scepter from her hand. Seconds later, Mirabel lies crumpled.

As demons cheer, Eleanor runs to the scepter to guard it. Demons hiss, but advance no further.

Picking Mirabel up, Ereshkigal throws her again, this time hitting a wall. As stone crumbles all around, demons shriek and applaud.

SCHUSTER
Get up, Mirabel! Get up!

Mirabel pounds her fist.

MIRABEL
I'm...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*!

Ereshkigal approaches and, grabbing her by the back of the neck slams her face first into the floor. Embedded three inches in stone, Mirabel moans.

Lifting her head, she sees Ereshkigal twirling; arms raised in victory as demons holler. A second later, she holds an arm out, her scepter flying to her, lifestone hell-fire red.

A chorus fills the chamber.

DEMONS
Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!

Ereshkigal aims her scepter. A wave of scarlet 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 her, outlining her body. Twisting and turning, her flesh begins to peel. She screams as, unrelenting, Ereshkigal steps closer.

ERESHKIGAL
Stupid fool!

She looks from Mirabel to Schuster to Mirabel, again.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 You know what absolutely astounds me?
 Hmm?

Mirabel twists and turns.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 How mortal women like you *always*
 sacrifice yourselves for creatures
 like *him*. As if, trying to prove
 they're not weak...rather worthy or
 somehow noble.

A moment passes as she contemplates, only to finally
 withdraw the energy. Mirabel, seeping from her smoldering,
 cracked skin, looks up in torment.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 Shall I let you in on a little secret
 Mirabel?

Mirabel hangs her head.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 Women only *think* they are weak. When
 in reality, they are the most
 powerful of all creatures. For it is
 they that shape man's destiny and
 with it all creation.

Ereshkigal looks to Schuster only to circle.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 It's their gentleness, you see...
 their nature.
 (beat)
 It is THIS very truth that keeps men
 from destroying them, though he is
 loathe to understand why.

Lifting Schuster's chin with her scepter, she peers down at
 him.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)
 Demons like Asmodeus on the other
 hand, have no such affliction...

Schuster shakes it off to look her in the eye.

SCHUSTER
 Don't listen, Mirabel! Just because
 love is forbidden me, doesn't mean
 I'm incapable! Not anymore!

Humbled, he looks to Mirabel.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)

SHE taught me that. Ishtar was right. It was cruel what I did. The demon in me thought only of itself! But you know what? The joke was on me! Your kiss...OUR kiss...changed everything!

Ereshkigal laughs.

ERESHKIGAL

And there it is, exactly! The forbidden knowledge that has eluded man since the beginning of time. Do you know what it is? No?

She's now inches from his face.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Asmodeus lives in ALL men. Each born with loathsome, evil, conniving, violent traits. All of which Asmodeus embodies. BUT, each man also has the ability to conquer those traits and THAT is what separates the demon from REAL men.

Turning, she faces Mirabel.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

You wondered, did you not, if he was truly human? If you could give your heart to someone such as him? Well... THAT is how you know.

A tear streaks Mirabel's face. Ereshkigal grins.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Which makes this all the more deliciously cruel, don't you think? For you see, he really does love you. Not that you, or, he will be around long enough to know.

At this, she points her scepter.

ERESHKIGAL (cont'd)

Ready for more!? Or, are you too... weak?

SCHUSTER

Don't you dare yield, Mirabel! Come on! Get up!

Mirabel peers over, too decrepit 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!

A fist drives Schuster downward as Mirabel looks to the scepter. Then, raising a scorched arm, wills it to move closer.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
That's it, Mirabel! That's it!

To Mirabel's amazement, the scepter does move, an inch then two, then suddenly snug in hand. Lifestone glowing, power surges through her, the power of Ishtar, and she is suddenly whole again. Furious, she rises, narrowing her eyes.

Ereshkigal, unsure, steps back then, squaring off, each releases a torrent from their scepters. Such is Mirabel's fury, though, that Ereshkigal is slowly pushed back. One last burst of energy and she is slammed into her throne, wings igniting. Dropping her jaw, she screams, trying to rise, but Mirabel won't let her.

Demons screech, pulling hair, in one gigantic free-for-all as Ereshkigal suddenly succumbs.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Mirabel stop! Stop! You don't know what you're doing!

But Mirabel doesn't stop. Seconds later, nothing remains of Ereshkigal but ash -- her scepter spent, falls.

Schuster, dropping to his knees, covers his face.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
NO!

Mirabel collapses, as well. Placing Ishtar's scepter in front of her, she's horrified at what she's done. A second later, she looks to Schuster. It's then she notices demons glaring -- baring teeth as they draw near.

SCHUSTER (cont'd)
Oh, Mirabel! Mirabel!

Canis leans to pick up Ereshkigal's scepter. Casting demons aside, he stands in front of her, fists clenched.

Mirabel, rises, unsure. Then suddenly, without warning, Canis drops to one knee. Holding Ereshkigal's scepter, 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 crown appears. Behind, a golden throne takes the place of the old one.

At this, the entire assembly kneels -- all bow heads.

MIRABEL

I...I don't understand! What's happening!?

Schuster splays 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. 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 tries hard to make her understand.

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, she sits the throne, 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.

She looks to the assembly, then him, eyes filling with tears.

MIRABEL

And you? Will I ever see you again?

Schuster hesitates only to conjure a mischievous smile.

At this, every demon cheers.

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, shaking his head. Two anxious looking tourists are not far off.

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 to Michael.

A few yards away, Francis can be seen at a table. A chessboard in front of him, he contemplates his move.

MICHAEL

So? How did he take it?

Schuster peers 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.
His daughter is safe. That, at least,
gives him peace.
(beat)
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 then grins.

SCHUSTER
Don't be a stranger?

Michael claps his shoulder.

MICHAEL
Never.

Taking a lick from the raspberry, Michael does a double take. The boy he had seen at the pond two months earlier is seated at a table. His father, unaware, is nose-deep in a book. Delighted, the boy waves. Grinning, he 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 until a brood of pigeons crowds his feet. He's about to shoo them when, suddenly, they all fly off. Looking up, he sees Eleanor come into view; vial about her neck. Jumping up, she bumps heads and gives him a rub.

SCHUSTER
Hello, beautiful! What have you got?

Francis watches 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 flat-footed demon carrying fruit. Francis, Schuster and Eleanor are just behind.

Eyes fixed on Schuster, she descends only to stop. 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.