

FALLEN RELICS

FADE IN:

EXT. ZIGGURAT - DAY

Within a black screen appears a smaller screen; we see a clipped, grainy scene like a distant memory.

At some 300 feet above ground level, we are at the highest point of an ancient ziggurat. We can see a great river and paved streets below, brightened by many colored friezes and reliefs. This central area is full of palaces and temples; a gold-sheathed winged statue of a god reflects the sunlight. Beyond and just visible on the left are the vivid blue tiles and towers of the city's gate.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A dark warehouse with overhead neon lights, a middle-aged man holds out his hands. His look of incomprehension turns rapidly to fear. The man speaks in Russian (English subtitles) -

MAN
(pleading)
No, please. He told me do it.

He is shot point blank in the head and collapses on the ground.

INT. CAR PARK - DAY

A metallic blue Ford Fiesta moves into a space in the Bloomsbury Square car park as the following text appears on-screen:

London, April 2008

A woman steps out of the car and heads for the exit; she wears dark sunglasses and her black hair is covered by a pillbox hat. An empty black backpack is slung on one shoulder.

EXT. BRITISH MUSEUM - DAY

Outside the British Museum, a wide banner stretches across the imposing portico with the sandy face of an ancient warrior and the title of the special exhibition:

The First Emperor:
China's Terracotta Army

Various clusters of people are gathered in the busy forecourt; the woman walks past a large group of tourists and another of schoolchildren to join the entrance queue.

INT. EXHIBITION HALL - DAY

Inside the main exhibition hall, the terracotta warriors stand in neat military formation, replicating how archeologists discovered them in the pits under the mausoleum of the first Qin Emperor.

Each warrior has a distinct face and the woman pauses by one and momentarily moves her shades down her nose to take a proper look at his features.

There is only one war chariot in the collection. She moves beyond the horses to stand next to a display cabinet with lights shining down on a single artifact: a palm-sized ziggurat attached to a stand.

A poster on the wall behind it has a photograph of the mound of earth, as the mausoleum now appears in the Shaanxi province of China, next to an artist's rendering of the large truncated pyramid as it would have appeared in 209 BC. We see the text -

Discovered inside this war chariot,
was this the architectural model of
the mausoleum?

She is briefly alone at the display. She looks around her to confirm that and abruptly reaches over to touch the ziggurat. She vanishes along with the artifact. The space where she'd been shimmers briefly.

INT. EXHIBITION HALL - DAY

Two schoolchildren come to stand by the display.

SCHOOLBOY 1
This one's empty.

He indicates the empty stand; as the rest of the school group arrives, the second boy says excitedly to their teacher -

SCHOOLBOY 2
Miss, this hasn't got anything!

SCHOOLBOY 1
I saw it first, Miss.

TEACHER
I expect it's just been moved back
into storage.

The group moves on; we linger on the empty display.

FADE TO WHITE

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Thirteen year-old Maira Brisden and her friend Pat sit on the ground with sketchbooks. Pat is busy drawing; Maira looks bored.

They're in a small backyard with a diseased bush whose leaves have mostly turned brown, a fake garden pond of stagnant water and a blowzy gnome without a nose - she glances at each in turn.

MAIRA
Maybe I'd be more into art if there
was something interesting to draw.

She reaches over to see what her friend is drawing; Pat instinctively pulls back before showing her a sketch of withering leaves on a branch.

PAT
The assignment is draw anything
from nature - so just draw anything
you see.

Each girl has a plate with a slice of carrot cake; Maira picks up her cake and takes a big bite. Pat is about to reach for hers when she spots two large black ants that have crawled onto her slice.

PAT
Eeew!

MAIRA
That's so cool! Look!

The ants pace round and round the slice as though confused.

MAIRA
Must be the biggest meal they've
ever seen. They don't know where to
start.

PAT
I'm not eating that.

Maira tilts the slice and gently knocks it so that the ants fall lightly to the ground. She breaks off two crumbs and drops them by each ant. With manageable portions, the ants pick up their crumbs in their mandibles and scurry to their antheap. Maira follows them and tells Pat -

MAIRA
Go ask my mum for another piece.

Pat gets up with her plate, leaving Maira on all fours.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A modest kitchen with a table where Maira's mum is seated, reading off a tablet. There's a TV on the wall and CNN news is on.

ANCHORMAN
- and in New York, a Russian businessman and his wife were discovered murdered in their hotel room in what NYPD fear may be part of a wave of crimes in this country linked to the Russian mafia. Nick is on the scene for us with the story. Nick? -

Maira's mum looks up when Pat enters the kitchen from the back door.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Maira is kneeling by an antheap on the other side of the pond when Pat joins her with a fresh slice of cake.

MAIRA
(delighted)
How cute! It just waved its antennas at me.

Pat is about to step closer; Maira stops her.

MAIRA
Careful! Look, there's the other one.

While the first ant headed straight for home with its prize, they watch the second ant as it follows a zigzagging route.

MAIRA

Why is it doing that? There's nothing stopping it from going straight.

PAT

It's taking the scenic route. That's what my dad says whenever he gets lost.

Pat loses interest and returns to her sketchbook; Maira remains for a while by the antheap until the second ant finally makes it home.

MAIRA

(frowns)

A minute must be like an hour to an ant. Why would one ant take hours longer over the same route?

(pause)

Is the second one younger? Knows less? Or is the first one brighter?

She looks over at her friend.

MAIRA

Hey Pat, do you think ants are intelligent?

Pat shrugs as Maira gets up to enter the house.

PAT

Are you getting more cake?

MAIRA

No, I'm going to get an empty glass to capture some ants, a tape measure and my phone to use its stopwatch.

PAT

What for? What about the art assignment?

MAIRA

(nods)

Yeah, I'll need some paint, too. Just little drops of different colors on each abdomen so I can tell the ants apart.

Pat looks at her quizzically as she enters the house. We hear mother and daughter from outside -

MAIRA (V.O.)
Mum, where's our tape measure?

MAIRA'S MUM (V.O.)
In the garage. On the second shelf.

MAIRA (V.O.)
Thanks.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. FEDERAL SECURITY SERVICE BUILDING - DAY

We see a shot of the grey building in central Moscow. Above the main entrance in Russian (English subtitles):

Federal Security Service of the
Russian Federation

FADE INTO

INT. FSS OFFICE - DAY

We are in an open-plan office space with a dozen desks in the room. There's a TV on the wall at one end, the BBC World news is on. FSS agent Maksim Gusev holds the remote control; he carries a folder and a tablet under an arm.

ANCHORMAN
- and in Beijing, officials claim that London has not provided enough details about yesterday's strange robbery at the British Museum -

The news banner at the bottom of the screen reads: 'The Terracotta Head-Scratcher.'

ANCHORMAN
- More on this now with our reporter in Beijing, John Packer. John, could this spiral into a major diplomatic incident between China and the UK?

Maksim switches the channel to Russia-1 (in Russian, with English subtitles) -

NEWSWOMAN

The British Foreign Secretary has once again accused Russia of criminal activities without offering a shred of evidence. And once again the British press have lapped up the unsubstantiated claims. Our ambassador in London has formally -

He switches back to the BBC.

BBC REPORTER

- Now the police in London have shared all the footage with their Chinese counterparts, but this is an ongoing investigation into one of the most bizarre robberies the capital has ever seen -

Another agent waves at Maksim from the other end of the office.

FSS AGENT

They're ready for you, Maksim.

Maksim switches off the TV and steps away.

INT. FSS BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

Three senior officers sit at one end of a large oval table; Maksim stands and places an image of the ziggurat in front of them.

At the head of the table, the FSS director, Boris Voloshin frowns. The conversation is in Russian (English subtitles).

BORIS

What is that? Some sort of Mayan temple?

MAKSIM

This is the archeological object that the British claim we stole.

He places another picture on the table, an image of the metallic blue Ford Fiesta.

MAKSIM

This is from the CCTV footage in the carpark. The British believe that the perpetrator drove this car to the scene and then abandoned it.

BORIS

And are we now in the habit of taking the British at their word?

MAKSIM

All the initial intelligence has come from our bureau in Beijing. The British have been motivated to offer the Chinese their key findings. So what you see is reliable insofar as that's what the UK wants China to see, which we have intercepted.

He drops another photograph which shows a scan of the registration of the Hertz rental car; we see the name written in English, 'Andrey Sokolov', and the nationality, 'Russian'.

OFFICER 1

Andrey Sokolov?

MAKSIM

Yes, this is why the British are claiming to the Chinese that Russia was behind the robbery at the British Museum.

OFFICER 1

(to Boris)

We weren't, right?

Boris shakes his head impatiently.

MAKSIM

Andrey Sokolov -

OFFICER 2

(interrupts)

Pure propaganda. Andrey Sokolov never left Russia.

MAKSIM

(repeats)

Andrey Sokolov is the prime suspect in the assassination of Alexey Nikitin in London two years ago.

OFFICER 2

Alleged assassination. *Alleged* suspect.

BORIS

So who did the museum job? And why are the perpetrators incriminating Russia?

MAKSIM

We don't know. But we know the driver of the car wasn't a man.

He places a grainy picture of the woman in dark sunglasses and pillbox hat. The next image is zoomed in on the black backpack that is slung on her shoulder; the handle at the top seems unusually thick and appears to be made of a harder plastic.

MAKSIM

The British police believe this could have been the handle of a saw concealed as part of the bag. It would not have been picked up by the museum security if the blade itself was made of diamond encrusted polymers.

The next two pictures are placed in rapid succession: shots showing the fine covering of iron dust at the bottom of the display case, and a close-up of the edge of one of the supports that had held the ziggurat in place.

MAKSIM

This would explain some of the forensic evidence at the scene.

BORIS

But how was it done?

OFFICER 1

It would take time to saw through - someone must have seen something.

MAKSIM

(troubled)

That is the real mystery. This is the actual footage of the event.

He projects a video footage on the tablet onto a large screen. Lasting barely 20 seconds and taken from an oblique angle, we see the display with the ziggurat. The same woman arrives, stands still momentarily, looks around and then reaches over to touch the object before they both vanish.

OFFICER 1

That's just not possible. This film has been doctored.

MAKSIM

No, the film's time stamps have not been altered. This is the exact footage that the British shared with the Chinese.

OFFICER 1

It makes no sense.

OFFICER 2

So what do we do?

BORIS

We find who is responsible, who is blaming us for this.

OFFICER 2

And to the British?

BORIS

We deny all knowledge, of course.

OFFICER 2

As we always do.
(chuckles)
And it'll be the truth.

Maksim brings up the grainy image of the woman again to examine her.

FADE TO WHITE

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Maira's marked art assignment is on the kitchen table.

WE ZOOM IN

INT. GRANT THE ANTSTEIN - DAY

We see the title of her work -

Grant the Antstein

Three ants have been drawn next to an anthheap, each with a speck of color on their middles - red, blue and green - and we read their respective names -

Rant, Blant, Grant

A line has been drawn from the anthheap to a point on the paper marked with an X, with the distance written above in

feet and inches. Next to that is a graph of the time taken against the distance with the ants' average performances as straight lines in their respective colors. Then a simple ratio and assumption in a child's handwriting:

Intelligence, I = Comprehension, C/
Time taken to comprehend, T

Assumption: All the ants knew they had crumbs in their mouths and knew they had to return home, so comprehension is constant.

Three further ratios in the appropriate colors to the right of the graph in Maira's handwriting:

$I(\text{green})/I(\text{red}) = T(\text{red})/T(\text{green})$
 $I(\text{green})/I(\text{blue}) = T(\text{blue})/T(\text{green})$
 $I(\text{red})/I(\text{blue}) = T(\text{blue})/T(\text{red})$

Below that, the result:

The green ant was 1.5 times faster than the red, and 2.25 times faster than the blue.

The teacher's assessment and grade is in red at the bottom of the page -

This is NOT art!
E-

ZOOM OUT

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Maira places an old analog watch on the table, records the time in a notebook, confirms the time in her phone and then moves to the freezer to retrieve another analog watch, which she places next to the first. She smiles as she jots down the result.

Her mum enters the kitchen.

MAIRA'S MUM

Maira, can you stop changing the freezer setting?

MAIRA

(excited)

But look, mum, time is slower in a cold temperature. And it's proportional. See?

(indicates her notes)
The watch ticks four times slower
in setting 4 than in setting 1, and
setting 2 is halfway. Isn't that
cool?

Maira's mum looks over at the art assignment.

MAIRA'S MUM
We need to talk about your art.

MAIRA
But this is amazing, mum, don't you
see? Science is just the greatest
art.

MAIRA'S MUM
Well your teacher doesn't agree
with you.

She picks up the assignment sheet; Maira shrugs -

MAIRA
Not my fault she's blind as a mole.

She returns to look at her notes.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. FSS OFFICE - DAY

Maksim is at his desk and looks at his computer monitor. We
see an image of a ziggurat sandwiched between that of a Greek
bronze figurine and a cuneiform tablet. Next to the ziggurat,
we see a price tag -

US\$7 million - paid in bitcoins (฿)

Maksim picks up his phone and waves over an office clerk. He
speaks in Russian (English subtitles) -

MAKSIM
(into the phone)
Get me the chief.
(to the clerk)
Get me a file from the open
investigation section - British
Museum, 2008.

He writes some notes as he waits to be connected through. We
hear his side of the conversation -

MAKSIM

Hello, yes, we have a new lead on that investigation on the British Museum robbery. Yes, sir. One of our agents with the Islamists in Syria reports that a ziggurat is being sold on the dark web. They have a buyer. Yes, I'll get on the first flight to Syria.

INT. DIRT ROAD IN THE SUBURBS OF ALEPPO - DAY

Scene of devastation, jagged remains of buildings and bombed-out cars; the following text appears on-screen:

Aleppo, Syria, January 2020

A woman steps out of an SUV. She wears shades and a black chiffon turban that covers her blond hair except for a fringe at the front. She stands in the scarred remains of what was once a bustling street in Aleppo.

A black car and two pick-up trucks appear from the other end of the long street, speeding towards her and causing a cloud of dust to spray behind. The converted trucks have the distinctive flags of the ISIL terrorist group at the front and heavy machine guns have been rigged at the back so that when the group pull up by the woman, the militiamen manning those guns swing them from side to side, looking warily for any sign of trouble.

A man dressed in an expensive suit steps out of the car and smiles as he walks towards her. They speak in English (hers is fluent; his has an Arab accent).

MAN

Welcome to Aleppo.

WOMAN

So this is the land of milk and honey. I don't think Abraham would approve.

MAN

Abraham?

WOMAN

Aleppo comes from Abraham's Semitic word for milk. How time changes things.

MAN

God-willing it will once more rise
like the phoenix to be a land fit
for all our prophets. With the
grace of God and -
(smirks)
- your financial assistance.

WOMAN

Where is it?

The man raises a hand and gestures with an index. Two militiamen in keffiyehs emerge from the car; one carries a small chest. They come to stand next to the man.

WOMAN

I want to see it.

The man nods; the militiaman opens the chest and tilts it towards her. We see a pure white, angular object: a miniature ziggurat like the one stolen in London.

WOMAN

I want to touch it.

The man nods; the chest is brought forward so she can feel the surface of the artifact.

MAN

But you don't take it out.

The woman withdraws her hand abruptly and the militiaman aims his gun at her when her hand enters a pocket. She extracts a satellite phone and he relaxes.

She talks briefly in Russian (English subtitles) -

WOMAN

Yes, it's good. Transfer now. Is it done? OK.

She turns to the man.

WOMAN

852 bitcoins now sent to you, as agreed. At today's exchange, it was \$32 over seven million.
(smiles)
Keep the change.

The man takes out his phone and steps away momentarily.

WOMAN
(to the militiaman with the chest)
Where was it found?

The militiaman does not understand; he shrugs.

The man returns and pockets his phone; he nods to his group as she repeats the question to him -

WOMAN
Was it found in Palmyra?

MAN
No, the crusader castle of the Kurds.

WOMAN
(she smiles, delighted)
Of course. For once the Islamic State uses the word crusader accurately. The great Templar castle of Krak des Chevaliers.

MAN
Everything is good, and so -
(he bows stiffly)
Peace be with you.

He turns to walk back to the car with one of the militiamen, while the other hands her the chest before joining them.

INT. INSIDE THE SUV - DAY

The chest is open on the passenger seat; she is about to extract the artifact when she hears gunfire.

She looks up; soldiers in Syrian and Russian military uniforms have surrounded the area and shoot at the ISIL fighters. One of the militiamen on a pickup truck fires back; the other on the second truck receives a bullet in the head and collapses.

A helicopter gunship appears over the skeletal buildings and the woman sees Russian commandos in a sideview mirror. She swears in Russian (English subtitle) -

WOMAN
Fuck.

She rushes to reach for the object and says something inaudible. The ziggurat shines a brighter white and the space shimmers briefly.