

HALF-LIFE

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EXT. BEIT HANOUN - GAZA - DAY

Establish the dusty border village of 40,000 hard-scrabble souls.

Groups of grim ARMED MEN gather on the northern outskirts, nearest the Israel border, begin preparing batteries of rocket-launchers. Behind the batteries are masses of Arab infantry awaiting orders. Spread out behind them are a hundred camouflaged main battle tanks.

EXT. ISRAELI MILITARY POST - EREZ - DAY

Less than a kilometer north of the border, sand-bagged gun emplacements protect a 6-gun Israeli 155mm artillery battery circling a command bunker.

INT. COMMAND BUNKER - DAY

A field phone rings. A bearded CORPORAL answers, hands the phone to a martinet MAJOR.

CORPORAL

Satellite surveillance to speak to you, sir.

MAJOR

(into phone)

Major Chertok.

(beat)

How many? That many?! What sort of weapons besides rockets? Where in hell did they get tanks?

(frowning)

Surely HQ is authorizing a preemptive strike.

Major Chertok works an unlit cigarette from side to side beneath his mustache, not liking what he hears.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Damn protocol. At least activate our anti-missile forces and get some aircraft airborne. And I hope

to hell we're mobilizing our own
land forces.

The major listens, astonished.

MAJOR

What do you mean, they've jammed
everything? We've lost all command
and control? God help us.

EXT. BEIT HANOUN - GAZA - DAY

Now a blinding barrage of short-range rockets rends the
sky, streaking toward southern Israel.

EXT. ISRAELI MILITARY POST - DAY

The rockets rain down.

INT. COMMAND BUNKER - DAY

Jammed against a wall of sandbags, the corporal and the
major hold their hands over their ears as the barrage
continues unabated.

MAJOR

Screw this. I'm not waiting for
orders. Notify the guns. Let the
bastards have it.

The corporal salutes, waits for a break and ducks out the
door.

EXT. ISRAELI MILITARY POST - DAY

The Israeli artillerymen return fire. All six 155mm
howitzers erupt. The incoming barrage intensifies. Three
guns are quickly put out of action. The surviving crews
bravely load and shoot.

INT. COMMAND BUNKER - DAY

Above the POUNDING, on the phone:

MAJOR

This is Chertok. We're getting
pulverized here.

(beat)

Yes, of course I'm shooting.

(beat)

Sir? Hello, hello? Damn. I've lost them.

Now a gaunt LIEUTENANT, blood-streaked, climbs through the wreckage at the bunker entrance.

LIEUTENANT

... The whole sky's lit up from here to the coast... it's an all-out attack, sir. Their troops are on the move all along the border. We've got to deter them or we've had it.

MAJOR

(cold)

There's one thing that will deter them... One well-placed nuclear-tipped artillery shell.

LIEUTENANT

With all due respect, sir, are you insane? If we're going to inaugurate World War Three, we at least need orders from Tel Aviv.

The major works his unlit cigarette back and forth, thinking, his eyes narrowing.

MAJOR

Tel Aviv's off the air. We'll be off the air soon. We've no choice.

Rockets continue to explode. Wooden beams overhead loosen and fall. The lieutenant lights a bent cigarette with bloody fingers, holds the match out to the Major, who shakes his head.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

When out of comm, we're required to act independently, correct?

(icy)

Have you got your key?

The lieutenant pats his breast pocket. The major opens a pouch worn around his neck, produces his own key, an innocuous sliver of brass. For the first time in months, Major Chertok lights a cigarette.