

Cavalry

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Final Draft (February 2008)

Characters

War
Famine
Pestilence
Death
Claire Webster

In advance publicity, perhaps the horsemen could be referred to as Mark, Sean, Gary and Aleks.

Time

Tomorrow

Place

A changing room with tiled walls and lockers, with a large shower room behind, all attached to a stableyard, off the A535, between Holmes Chapel and Alderley Edge.

// in a line of dialogue indicates where the next speaker should come in, creating an overlap.

Some sentences lack concluding punctuation to indicate that the speaker does not finish the sentence, voluntarily or involuntarily.

1.

Claire it on?

Pestilence Well the light's on.

Claire Where?

Pestilence Just

Claire Oh, it's going!

Pestilence Looks like it.

Claire No wait a sec.

Pestilence Right.

Claire That's the battery light. I need to change the

2.

Pestilence goes in that way

Claire No, no, it

3.

Claire Okay...
Yep, I think we're all systems go.

Pestilence Right.

Claire Just say something into the mike.

Pestilence What sort of thing?

Claire Anything, it's just for level.

Pestilence Okay, testing, testing.

Claire Come back a bit.

Pestilence Hello. Hello.

Claire Just like you're talking normally.

Pestilence Okay, this is Gary, talking normally, um, I had eggs this morning, um, I was born a long way away. Um. (This sort of thing?)

Claire It's just for a level.

Pestilence I'm in a changing room. Er, there's lockers, over there, they're blue. Concrete walls. The other guys aren't here yet. I don't know what's going to happen today but -

Claire That's fine thanks, now I just need to listen to that back.

Pestilence Weird the way your mind goes bla

4.

Claire cos it's less echoey here cos of the

Pestilence Right, okay.

Claire I'll just move the cable out of the

Pestilence Have you done this before?

Claire Yeah no, I have I have, I know I must look a bit – I usually use a DAT but all the DATs were out so

Pestilence Am I alright here?

Claire Yeah you're fine.

Pestilence K.

Claire What's that on your... oh is it - ? I'm sorry

Pestilence I don't know what it is.

Claire A rash is it or

Pestilence Something. Can't shift it.

Claire There's something nasty going round I think. My editor was off for two weeks and she's never off.

Pestilence I've got some stuff but I don't take it. Maybe I should, I don't know.

Claire I hope it's not catching! I'm joking because I've had a jab actually.

Pestilence Right well

Claire The weather doesn't exactly help. Did you hear the storms last night? Biblical.

Pestilence Yeah, you're lucky you got here. It's chaos.

Claire I know but I was only local.
Chelford.
The A537 then the A535 and follow the signs from Badgerbank.

Pestilence Anyway, I don't know how much time I've got so...

Claire Okay, no absolutely.

Pestilence Great.

Claire Right. Okay. So, if you could just introduce yourself for the tape

Pestilence Okay, just name and

Claire Hold on, just let that ...

Pestilence What now?

Claire There's a plane or something.

Warplane approaches.

This microphone's quite sensitive, it'll pick that up. Have you got a signal by the way? I'm not getting anything, not even a bar.

Pestilence I haven't tried

Claire I'm on O2 and they're usually quite

Pestilence I don't know what I'm on

Warplane overhead.

Claire The signal might just come back, sometimes if it's cloudy it gets a bit, I don't why but it does.

Warplane passes.

Okay it's gone.
Okay, so. If you'd like to introduce yourself for the tape.

Pestilence Okay, I'm Gary.

Claire And how did you get into riding horses, Gary?

Pestilence My dad rode horses, his dad rode horses, and his dad and so on. It's in the blood.

Claire Oh okay because usually you know you think of little girls wanting to ride a a a pony or –

Pestilence It wasn't ponies.

Claire No, no, I didn't mean, sorry – okay: at what age did you realise, or your family realise, that you were, different, *special* on a on a on a horse?

Pestilence About ... seven.

Claire Seven, wow that *is* young.

Pestilence Is it?

Claire When did you first ride you know competitively?

Pestilence Competitively?

Claire I mean races, racing, were you young? I don't know what *is* young for a, did you actually race when you were seven?

Pestilence I'm not really that sort of rider.

Claire Okay. That's okay. And were you, did you, train – *can* you train? – for something like this or do you

Pestilence Today's not really about, it's not a skill thing, you know, even though you got to have it to to draw on, if you need to, you know, something happens, it's more of a ceremonial thing.

Claire I must admit I'm not completely 100% what it

Pestilence Well like I said it's ceremonial. I don't have the precise, if that's what you're looking for, // the details yet exactly.

Claire No, I was just, sorry, asking. Bear with me.

Going through notebook.

I only got the call 45 minutes ago. Jotted down some questions in the car but I couldn't get my editor back on the phone so if they're a bit – I'm sorry.

Pestilence Okay.

Claire So. Today.

Pestilence Oh yes.

Claire When does it all kick off?

Pestilence Don't worry. You won't miss it.

Claire It's definitely going ahead then?

Pestilence Sure.

Claire I just meant, with the crisis.

Pestilence I don't think that will affect us.

Claire It must be a great honour, I suppose.

Pestilence I guess it's saying, you're a good rider, you know how to handle a horse, even ones like these, you've made it to a certain level and so yeah it's an honour.

Claire What do your parents think? I bet they're proud.

Pestilence They're both dead actually.

Claire I'm sorry.

Pestilence No it's

Claire I didn't

Pestilence It's alright.

Claire We won't use that.

Pestilence It's fine honestly.

Claire I mean I'll be editing this anyway, I should have said that actually, sorry, right at the start, that I'll be editing this so if you find yourself, I don't know, what I mean is don't worry if you dry up or whatever, because I'll be chopping it about so

Pestilence It's okay.

Claire When did they die in fact because I actually lost my dad quite recently, actually, in the epidemic -

Pestilence I was twelve.

Claire Oh okay, so not that recently.

Pestilence It was quite a while ago.

Claire Still. Twelve, that can't have been easy.

Pestilence I took my revenge.

Claire (*wrong-footed*) Did you?

Pestilence When's this gonna be on, by the way?

Claire I don't know, I think we're a bit late for *PM*. It should be on *The World Tonight*.

Pestilence There's going to be a *World Tonight*?

Claire Well you know, fingers crossed.

Pestilence K.

Door.

Famine Oi oi oi! GAZZER gazman!

Pestilence Alright Sean!

Famine Aye aye! Who's your lady friend?

Claire Hi. I'm Claire. I'm from the BBC.

Introductions

Famine Sean.

Pestilence She's doing interviews for // something.

Famine You got clearance have you?

Claire I expect so, it was a rush thing, my editor called me

Famine As long as they've cleared it.

Pestilence Did they give you a pass?

Claire No, as I say, I was just over at Chelford, I've not been back to the office

Famine (*to Famine*) You could call Aleks.

Pestilence She's saying there's no signal.

Claire I mean, if you think there's a problem, I could always nip back to the office. Take about forty minutes there and back.

Famine No it's fine. It's fine. Right. Just us is it?

Pestilence So far.

Famine Where's the food? I'm starving.

Pestilence There ain't none.

Famine Oh what?

Pestilence You should have eaten before you came.

Famine Coulda laid something on. Big day.

Pestilence Well they didn't.

Famine I'm starving.

Pestilence Not the end of the world.

Famine That's your opinion.

Pestilence Sit down.

Famine You bring something then?

Pestilence Yes I did and no you can't.

Famine Ah come on.

Pestilence Not a chance.

Famine One bite!

Pestilence No! Get your own.

Famine Could at least've got us a snack. Packet of Wotsits, not much to ask. You ain't got anything, love?

Claire I ate on the way actually, sorry.

Famine Oh right.

Claire Sorry.

Famine Not your fault.

Claire Oh wait a minute I've got a Kit Kat if that's –

Famine // Oh that'll do.

Pestilence Don't give it him –

Famine Just half, just half. Oh alright.

Pestilence You shoulda made him get his own.

Claire It's fine really. I thought I was hungrier than I was.

Famine I'll pay you for it, if His Majesty here will condescend to lend me 40p.

Pestilence No way.

Claire It's fine.

Famine Lifesaver.

Pestilence Scrounger.

Claire It's okay, really.

Pestilence What's it like out there?

Famine Nightmare.

Pestilence How are the roads?

Famine Closed.

Claire They were okay when I came up.

Famine Well they're not now. How are Mark and Aleks gonna get here?

Pestilence Aleks'll get the roads open. Aleks could open the gates of hell if he had to. Any news about the government?

Famine Hanging on in there. So what you here for, love?

Claire I'm here to interview, well I guess, you.

Famine Well, what are you waiting for? I am yours to command.

Claire Right. Oh. Okay. Right. Um.

Famine Take your time love.

Claire No, I'm okay. So. Did - ? When - ? Have you always loved horses?

Famine I wouldn't say 'love'. You respect a horse, you don't love it.

Claire Okay, well, have you always felt an affinity, if that's maybe a better word, an affinity with a horse, with horses?

Famine Um. Yeah. I guess.

Claire Could you elaborate on that?

Famine Not... really.

Claire Okay.

Famine Cos if you love a horse, it's like pissing down a well, you know what I mean? Cos a horse don't care about love. I mean, if it makes you happy, love your horse, yeah? Kiss before bedtime, why not? But it's never gonna love you back.

Claire Is that your experience too?

Pestilence Yeah.

Claire Is that a sad thing?

Pestilence What? That a horse doesn't love you?

Famine Only if you fancy your horse.

Claire I meant more

Famine And who wouldn't? Some of them are hung like a horse.

Pestilence Shut up.

Claire Well, no, I mean, sad in the sense that you have no emotional bond there with the, with the -

Famine You do have an emotional bond but it's not love is what I'm trying to say. It's respect and it's fear and it's submission and it's

also pain. Which I guess some people call love, and if you do, love, here's my number.

Pestilence Ignore him.

Famine Nah I'm just kidding around.

Claire No it's fine.

Famine You got another question?

Claire Yeah I did um where is it?

Turns page on pad.

Yes. How long have you known each other?

Pestilence Too long.

Famine He loves me really.

Pestilence Yeah right.

Famine I keep telling him, he can't have me, but he insists. Flowers, chocolates.

Pestilence Ha bloody ha.

Door.

Famine Markyboy!

Pestilence Where have you been?

War Don't start.

Pestilence I had to saddle up on my own.

War I'm not in the mood.

Famine Right little ray of sunshine he is.

War Manchester's under quarantine. Did nobody think that was worth me knowing? Two hours that diversion took me.

Pestilence You know about the epidemic.

War Cheeky little bastard on the roadblock. He actually laughed. I coulda killed him.

Pestilence Don't you read the papers?

War Life's too short. Who's this?

Famine Mark, this is Claire by the way.

War Oh right?

Claire I'm with the BBC.

War BBC? You're taking the piss.

Pestilence Aleks won't mind.

War You sure?

Claire My office thought it would be okay.

Famine It'll be fine.

War On your own head. I'm having a shower.
He goes.

Famine Such a worrier Marky is.

Claire No it's okay.

Pestilence He gets jumpy.

Famine Aleks doesn't trust the BBC. He says you're almost as bad as the UN.

Claire The UN?

Famine Take my advice. Don't get him started on the UN.

Claire Noted. So you three know each other?

Pestilence Oh yeah. We go way back.

Claire Where did you meet?
The two guys look at each other. An effort of memory.

Famine Where was it?

Pestilence Must have been. Crete? No wait.

Famine No, earlier than that, cos that's when you

Pestilence Yeah of course, cos I had the

Famine It was so long ago, I've completely, was it that training camp in Asia Minor?

Pestilence I wasn't at Asia Minor.

Famine Yeah you were. We had the the you know desert race and you

Pestilence I wasn't there

Famine You burned the back of your

Pestilence That was the Patagonian thing

Famine You sure?

Pestilence Positive

Famine It wasn't Rome was it?

Pestilence Might have been actually.

Famine Yeah it was, Rome, no I remember

Pestilence Yeah we had that thing and you remember you

Famine Yeah

Pestilence and you carried on drinking like nothing had

Famine I'm a class act.

Claire So you first met in Rome?

Pestilence Yeah.

Claire I love Rome. It's so beautiful.

Famine Suppose.

Pestilence It's different when you're working.

Claire What were you doing?

Pestilence Trials.

Claire For what?

Pestilence Horse trials.

Claire Oh I see, like a gymkhana.

Pestilence Riding the horses out, testing their strength, getting to the edge of their their endurance. Cos we've, okay, some horses, okay, some horses can't cope in the heat, that's no use where we're going. Others go down in the cold. We have to know that these rides will be there right through to The End.

Claire Okay so maybe not like a gymkhana.

Famine And we rode them through the burning summer and we rode them in the frozen winter. And we rode them without water or food and we jabbed prickspurs into their sides until the blood gathered at their bellies. And we rode them on stone and we rode them on earth and we rode them through wind and water and we rode them and rode them and we rode them in darkness and we rode them through pain, and we rode them through mud and madness and flesh, and we rode them and we rode them and we rode them by night and we rode them in tears and we rode them and rode them and two hundred horses died under each of us before we found the mounts that would serve.

Pause.

Claire Riiiiight.

Pause.

It sounds a bit, I mean I'm not really an expert, well I'm not at all an expert, but it sounds to my mind a bit cruel.

Famine Does it?

Claire Well, a bit.

Famine Maybe. I don't know any more.

The following very chaotic, overlapping.

Death What the hell's going on?

Famine Aleks. Alright?

Death Who is she?

Claire Hi, I'm Claire, I'm from the BBC

Death I'm not talking to you. What is going on?

Pestilence She's just doing an interview, man.

Death Not any more she's not. Turn it off.

Claire I'm just doing

Death You let her just waltz in here?

Famine Look, Aleks, she's just

Death Did you check her papers?

Claire Honestly, I'm just a journalist, I'm

Death I said: turn it off.

Claire Don't touch me

Death Now.

Famine Honestly, love, you better do as

5.

In the background, Claire: 'let go of me' (ad lib)

Famine ot her fault, we should have waited // for you and

Death Too right you should have waited. Why isn't it playing?

Pestilence It's recording.

Death Well turn it off.

Famine Look we keep the tape, we don't have to kil

6.

Pestilence is in the shower. War is sharpening a sword in the background.

Death Recording.
So, Claire, how did you know we were here?

Claire (*trying to be calm*) My editor called me on my mobile just said go to this address.

Death And how did *he* know?

Claire She, she didn't say, she just

Death And you came here alone?

Claire Yes, I promise you, she just said to come here and interview there were some jockeys or something, meeting in the

Death She said what?

Claire Well something like that.

War Do we look like jockeys?

Claire Well.
No.
I suppose you're a bit
Tall

War Unbelievable. 'Jockeys'.

Death Yes, alright Mark.

Claire What's he doing actually?

Death Don't mind him. Why did they send you?

Claire I was nearby.

Death Nearby?

Claire I'm local radio really but no one else was available.

Death You're from local radio.

Claire I'm new, actually. I covered the garden festival in March, that's probably the biggest thing I've done so far. Well until you.

Death Did you hear that, Mark? You're bigger than a garden festival. You're coming up in the world.

War Well whoop de whoop.

Claire Yeah, I know, I mean it probably sounds a bit, I don't know, but actually I had to do a lot of reading up and on the day it was pretty hectic, rushing about and interviewing the finalists.

Death Sounds very exciting.

The shower stops.

- Claire** Okay well you can be sarcastic if you want or maybe you could just tell me what's going on without trying to make me feel
- Death** Alright alright, don't get your knickers in a twist. Why was no one else available?
- Claire** I think they're all in London you know, because of the crisis and stuff.
- Death** No, I don't know, tell me.
- Claire** Well, the storms and the flooding and the epidemic. Parliament's in emergency session.
- Death** Interesting. Any tremors?
- Claire** Okay so see you do know.
- Death** Just guessing.
- Claire** How can you not know?
- Death** I've been travelling, Claire. I've been travelling a long time.
War is still sharpening his sword. Awkward silence.
- Death** Tell me about you, Claire.
- Claire** Me?
- Death** Yes. While the boys get ready.
- Claire** There's nothing to tell really.
- Death** Age?
- Claire** I'm, I'm 28.
- Death** You look younger.
- Claire** Right, thank you.
- Death** I'm hearing a Scottish accent.
- Claire** Oh, you can - yes well, I've lived down south since I was, must be fifteen years now. Most people can't
- Death** Husband? Boyfriend? ... Girlfriend?

Claire Um, fiancé. Roger, he's my fiancé.

Death Oh lovely. When's the big day?

Claire Um, August, we're having a

Death Summer wedding. Oh that will be nice.

Claire Yes, summer wedding.

Death You live together?

Claire Yes -

Death In what they used to call but no longer call sin?

Claire We live together yes.

Death Same bed?

Claire I – that's not really –

Death No?

Claire I don't think that's

Death It's just a question.

Claire Well if you don't mind I'd // rather not ans

Death Likes to ask the questions, not so keen on answering them.
War laughs in the background.

Claire It's not that, it's just if you don't mind I'd

Death I don't mind at all.
Silence.

Claire Maybe the roads have reopened. I ought to be getting back.

Death Tell you what I'll have a look. In the meantime, I'll leave you in Mark's very capable hands. You can interview him. He's got a good story.

Claire No honestly, I'd rather just –
Death leaves. Awkward silence.

Claire Um, maybe you could tell me about your horse.

War What do you want to know?

Claire And what, what breed is is your horse?

War He's a Destrier.

Claire And how are you spelling that?

War I don't know. Next question.

Claire Destrier. Sounds like Destroyer.

War Next question.

Claire And what's his name?

War Silver.

Claire Okay.

War No, that's the Lone Ranger's horse.

Claire The who?

War He doesn't have a name.

Claire Really? That's interesting.

War I've been across the desert on a horse with no name.

Claire Okay. When did you go across a desert?

War No I'm still joking. He's called Sabre. Next question.

Claire ...
What are you doing?

War What does it look like I'm doing?

Claire Okay, *why* are you doing that?

War You have to do it every day. Oil and leather and a stone. If you don't, the blade gets dull.

Claire Is it a – family – heirloom – sort of thing?

War No. It's mine.

Claire It looks old.

War It's 800 years old.

Claire It should be in a museum or something.

War Nah. This is the future. Feel that.

Claire I'd rather not.

War Feel how sharp it is.

Claire I believe you.

War Just touch it.

Claire I said I believe you.

War Doesn't matter whether you go or don't.

Claire And what do you do you use it for?

War Depends.

Claire Right. Okay.

War 'Right. Okay.'

Claire Okay. What does it depend on?

War What mood I'm in.

Claire You know you don't frighten me.

War Only frightened people say that.

Claire Where did you get it?

War Dad gave it to me when I was fourteen.

Claire Funny present for a boy.

War He had it made specially.

Claire Well how can it be 800 years old then?

War I'm older than I look.

Claire I don't appreciate these mindgames, actually.

War Open your eyes. That which was closed shall now be open. That which was open shall now be closed.

Claire I know carrying knives is against the law. I'm sure a sword like that must be –

War Not if it's for military use.

Claire Are you a soldier?

War I am a knight.

Claire (*laughs*) Come on.

War I am a knight. I serve my master with loyalty and honour, mercy and dread. I pledge my sword in fealty to my master's cause.

Claire Right and who is your master?

War War.

Claire Your master is - ?

War My master is war. Watch this.

Claire Okay.

War The blade is so sharp that all I have to do is rest the sword on my arm and

Claire WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

War (*ecstasy*) And draw it across...

Slicing flesh. Singing blade.

Claire You're bleeding, what the hell are you - ?

War (*in ecstatic pain*) You get used to this smell, this taste. You cut your finger, you suck the wound clean, taste like iron, like sweet warm iron. Now think of that times a thousand, Claire.

Claire You've cut yourself -

War Not just a battle. A slaughter, a real slaughter. Blood everywhere, a spray of blood hanging in the air, as you move forward and on. Coating your nostrils. It's the thing that shocks you most about war. Not the killing, but the smell. That iron kick that doesn't stop.

Claire You're losing blood fast what are you -

War It takes a special man, a perfect man, to walk happily in blood.

Death re-enters.

Death It's all kicking off out there - oh Mark, not yet!

Claire I'm sorry, I couldn't stop him, he just -

Death Why can you never wait?

War I'm sorry, boss.

Death goes to his locker, gets out medical kit.

Death Okay, alright, take yourself in there. Wash that off and bandage yourself up. You know the drill.

Chucks him the kit.

War Yes Boss. Sorry Boss.

War goes through the bathrooms.

Death He'll be alright. It's a thing he does.

Claire Oh come *on*.

Death He likes the smell. Did he tell you?

Claire He did, he did say something about that -

Death I swear to you, Claire, sometimes it's like working with children.

Claire Is it?

Death You wouldn't believe it. They get hungry, I have to feed them. They cry, I have to comfort them. They get lost, I have to find them. They'd be helpless without me.

Claire He cut himself really deep. He should go to hospital.

Death He'll be fine.

Claire He won't be! He must have cut half an inch deep! He needs stitches!

Death Claire, he'll be fine.

Claire He can't ride now –

Death (*firmly, nastily*) Claire. You don't know what you're talking about.
Silence.

Claire You said it's all kicking off outside. What's happening?

Death Chaos.

Claire How do you mean?

Death Like nothing I've ever seen. And I have ridden through cities on fire.

Claire I should call Roger.

Death The network's down.

Claire Which network?

Death All of them. Emergency use only.

Claire Can they do that?

Death They have.

Claire What do you mean chaos?

Death The sky is burning.

Claire How do you mean burning?

Death The clouds are boiling.

Claire I never know whether you're serious or not.

Death Yet oddly the sea is frozen.

Claire Okay you can drop the -

Death Like unto crystal.
Famine and Pestilence are out of the shower.

Pestilence Oi grow up.
Famine flicks Pestilence repeatedly with a wet towel. Cannoning around the room.

Famine Gotcha! Gotcha!

Pestilence Piss off!

Death Boys, boys.

Famine You are at my mercy!

Pestilence How old are you?

Famine A thousand lifetimes.

Pestilence Exactly. Grow up.

Death Cover up, gentlemen, there's a lady present.

Pestilence Oh my God.

Famine I've got nothing to be ashamed of. Not like Mr Twiglet.

Pestilence Shut up.

Famine No, *you* shut up.

Death Didn't I tell you? They're children, Claire.

Claire I – it's okay – I'm actually quite unshockable.

Death Really?

Claire Well, you know –

Death Nothing you haven't seen before, I dare say.

Claire Right, well.

Death Okay you two. Chop chop. Make yourselves decent and then get the uniforms.

Famine Wicked, where are they?

Death Outside. Back of the 4x4.
They open their lockers and dress quickly.

Claire What sort of uniforms are they?

Death Well, I say uniforms. Armour, I suppose.

Claire Armour?

Death Yes, of a kind.

Pause.

Claire You know, Mark said, Mark said –

Death What's he said now?

Claire I think he was winding me up.

Death He does have a wicked streak.

Claire He says he's a knight.

Death Ah.

Claire He's a... funny guy.

Death He is quite funny yes.

Claire I mean funny kind of not in a nice way.

Death Well, you're not the first.

Claire Why does he have that sword?

Death I suppose, Claire, because he's a knight.

Claire Okay, is this like a tournament thing? The armour, the, like battle re-enactments. Sealed Knot type of thing. Jousting or something.

The guys laugh in the background.

Death No. Nothing like that.

Claire Why the secrecy?
 Are you actually soldiers?

Death We're the cavalry.

The guys are ready.

Pestilence You got the key, Aleks?

Death It's open.

They leave in some excitement.

Claire Look, I'm sorry about the 'jockey' comment earlier.

Death It's quite alright, Claire.

Claire I just got a phone call, be at these stables, interview these guys.

Death You weren't to know, Claire.

Claire Okay, I'm just saying.

Pause.

Claire Are you going to tell me what this is about?

Death You're a clever girl. You can work it out.

Claire You don't need to patronise me.

Death I don't need to do anything Claire.

Claire Well you're soldiers. I know that much.

Death We are an elite army. We are cavalrymen.

Claire But it's just you guys?

Death Just us.

Claire I didn't, I'm sorry if this sounds ignorant, but I didn't know they still used horses for fighting.

Death Horse is the oldest technology of war. It is the Alpha and the Omega.

Claire Well sure but it's not exactly a very, well, *practical* way of fighting a war.

Death Military history an major interest of yours is it, Claire?

Claire No, I'm just saying a horse can't be a match for say an armoured tank or, I don't know, a bullet-proof, you see these things on -

Death No technology has ever improved on the horse.

Claire But surely you're vulnerable simply to -

Death A tank is a machine with men inside it. A horse and its rider are one thing.

Claire Yes but you're not answering my question –

Death No, you're right. I'm not.

Claire Okay, thank you.

Death Do you want to see them? The horses?

Claire Oh. Well. Um. Yes, okay.

Death Follow me.

Claire Can I record in there?

Death As you wish.

Claire Okay, I'll just turn it off for n

7.

Stables. Straw underfoot. Wooden partitions. We don't clearly hear the horses yet.

Claire plug the mike in. Okay, I'm good. Sorry, you were saying.

Death Do you know horses, Claire?

Claire *(amused)* What, as friends?
No, no I don't. I mean, I was in a pony club when I was a wee girl, in fact I won a rosette and there's a picture of me wearing it and I'm

Death Prepare yourself. These horses are different.

Claire Uh huh. Okay. Different how?

Death You'll see. Come and stand here.

Claire approaches. Four horses. Chains that we eventually realise are securing them to their cell. Occasionally whinnying, stamping their hoofs, the jangle of bridles and reins, the slower, deeper clank of armour plates. The hot horse breath in the air. This should sound very slightly larger than life, unreal.

Claire Okay, this is them?
Oh

Death These are our horses.

Claire I didn't think they'd – look like that.

Death You see. This isn't a pony club. There are no rosettes. These are beasts of war.

Claire Forgive me, I really don't think I've seen a horse up close for years: are they always so tall?

Death No, these are unusual.

Claire That must be, what, nine, ten feet high.

Death Imagine us, Claire, on your horizon, what a sight.

Claire And they're so thin. I mean they're huge but they're so thin.

Death They are old and lean and perfect.

Claire And look at this one's coat, it's so –
Strong reaction from the horse. Claire jumps back in shock.

Death Don't touch them.

Claire I wasn't going to

Death Don't even approach them

Claire I'm not going to

Death Good. Don't.

Claire Why are they so nervous?

Death They're not nervous.

Claire Well, jumpy then. Why are they so

Death They're mad, Claire. We had to drive these horses mad.
Pause. Horses snorting, tossing manes.

Claire And I'm supposed to take from that what?

Death Horses have coexisted with us for thousands of years. They're domesticated, they've been broken. To make a horse an instrument of war with men, you must un-break him.

Claire You really turned these horses mad?

Death They obey nothing but their riders and they are filled with hate for us. He can smell you.

Claire That's horrible though.

Beat.

Death Yes it is.

Claire Which one's which?

Death The black one is Gary's. Then Sean's. That's Mark's and this one here is mine.

Claire (*unenthusiastically*) Oh, he's... nice.

Death (*Faint laugh*)

Claire Why is he so pale?

Death He hasn't seen sunlight since he was born. I ride him at night.

Claire Can, sorry this is such a stupid question, but can horses see at night?

Death No it's a good question, Claire. No, they can't, not well. But he can't see at night *or* day. My horse is blind.

Claire (*not sure whether this is a joke*) You've got a blind horse?
...
Can't be much use, I mean –

Death He goes where I tell him to go. He is very obedient.

Claire (*laughs*) Well he'd have to be.

Death They're all blind. I rode this horse for a year down Roman roads, across heathland and scrub, through marble courtyards, down streams, up mountains. You learn to make your bodies one. I was satisfied that this should be my horse. We responded to each other as two parts of a single thing.

Claire Right, yes, this is what you were saying back in the

Death But it seems this was not enough. I also needed obedience. And so, one night, I was sent into the stableyard with a chisel and a hammer and instructions to blind him.

Claire Ugh! No! Really?

Death Of course, what I never knew was whether this act was intended to secure the horse's obedience, or mine.

Claire Who told you to blind your horses? That's criminal, in fact literally, criminal, it must be, there must be some law, something about animal cruelty.

Death I entered the stable, I stroked his coat, and held my lips and cheek to his side to feel his heart, his heat, his breath, then I tapped the hammer to the chisel and took away his sight.

Claire That's inhuman. That's disgusting.

Death It was, nonetheless, effective.

The horse rears up. Claire, again, flinches back, panicked. A chain yanks taut. Straining against the chains and ropes.

Don't worry. He's secured. He can't do anything.
Blind and mad and full of hate.
Easy. Easy now.

Claire They're so bony. And all that armour.

Death They have only one more ride.

Claire And then what?

Death ...

Claire And then what?

Death (*haunted*) I don't know.

Claire Why don't you know?

Silence.

Death Let's go back.

Walking.

Claire I mean do they get (*lowers voice*) shot, like after a race or

Death I said: I don't know.

Claire Okay and Mark's horse, that's an unusual colour.

Death Claire, would you give me a moment?

Claire Oh. Okay, sure.

Death turns his back on her. It's just possible that he's close to crying.

I'll just wait here.

Pause.

Death *(very quiet)* Thank you.

Pause.

Claire Actually, to preserve the battery I should

8.

Back in the locker room.

Claire can just leave it running it should be fine.

Death Okay.

Claire Thank you for showing me the horses.

Death It's quite alright.

Claire This is going to make for a really strong piece I think. I mean it's supposed just to be a segment but I might put a proposal in for a documentary slot you know. I don't have any clearance forms with me but

Death You won't need them.

Claire That's great but actually for peace of mind, not me but the legal people get a bit antsy if you don't get everything you know signed on the dotted line.

Death Right, okay.

Claire It's a classic bit of BBC red tape.

Death Would you please, if you don't mind, stop talking about the form?

Claire Oh, right. Sorry.

Death Thank you.

Silence. Claire decides to push her luck.

Claire You seemed upset in there.

Death Did I.

Claire Yes actually.

Death So now you have your angle.

Claire What were you upset about. Was it – what you had to do? To your horse?

Death Are you interviewing me, Claire?

Claire Okay, yes. Yes I am.

Death And why do you think I want to answer your questions?

Claire Because I'm here and I'm asking and I'm ready to listen to what you have to say.

Death Are you.

Claire Yes.

Death Ready for what I have to say?

Claire I think so.

Death I don't think so.

Claire Try me.

Death Why do you think I want to tell you anything?

Claire Don't think of it as telling me. Think of it as telling the tape.

Death *(single laugh)*

Claire Because you know, you could probably get some help. I'm sure we could arrange something, counselling or

Death I don't need help, thank you.

Claire But will you talk to me?

Death Ask your questions.

Claire becomes very focused, gets her notebook, sits down.

Claire Would you introduce yourself for the microphone.

Death (*amused*) Hello, microphone, I'm Aleks.

Claire And how old are you Aleks, if you don't mind me asking.

Death You wouldn't believe me.

Claire No, fine. And when did you first get into horses, riding horses?

Death I can't remember a time when I wasn't riding.

Claire How long have you been a soldier?

Death I have ridden all my days, Claire. Through the endless night of the world. I have ridden my horse through the blood of the Persian and the Ashvakayana. I have ridden the plains of Asia Minor and the deserts of Babylon.

Claire You'll have to explain what that means.

Death Two thousand years ago, I commanded the fourth battalion of Alexander of Macedon's companion cavalry.

Claire ...
I'm not sure how you want me to respond to that.

Death I don't care how you respond.

Claire It's very hard to to to interview someone if you if they just make stuff up.

Death Sometimes I wish – (*he stops himself*)

Claire (*softly*) What do you wish?

Death (*Single laugh*)

Claire What do you wish, Aleks?

Silence.

Death Sometimes I wish I *were* making this up.

Claire I want to understand, Aleks.

Pause.

Death I had ridden the siege boards across the ravelins over six deep of the Assakenian dead. I ride my horse straight up the battlement walls. Seeing that, they know all is lost. And there is a moon. I'm about to give the signal, but there's a sound. Like drums. I'm up on a moonlit battlement, and there's this sound, like two massive metal hearts in the air.

Claire A thunderstorm?

Death A helicopter. It plucked me from the field of war.

Claire You're saying, two thousand years ago, you were airlifted off a battlefield by helicopter?

Death We were called up.

Claire All of you?

Death It falls to few to be chosen. But we were chosen. Of course, at the beginning I wept. I disbelieved. As you do.

Claire Well, it does sound –

Death But we have power over fire. We can overcome the saints.

Claire Okay, you've lost me again.

Death We were made powerful. Taken from our places and brought together to ride.

Claire Where did you ride?

Death We rode through the burning streets of ancient Rome. We scorched the Patagonian steppe. We sought out our horses and we trained through all of time for this day.

Claire What's this day?

Death The End Of Days.

Famine and Pestilence appear, dragging four large canvas bags that contain their armour.

Pestilence Uniforms, boss!

Famine Get yer luvvly uniforms 'ere!

Pestilence Shut up.

Famine Four for a pound!

Pestilence Don't you ever stop talking?

Famine Gift of the gab innit?

Death Thanks, lads.

Pestilence Where's Marky?

Famine Marky boy!

War (*off*) What?

Famine Got something for ya!

War enters.

War What is it?

Famine Uniforms! Uniforms! Get your luvvly uniforms 'ere!

War Sweet.

Famine Four for a pound!

Pestilence You've done the 'four for a pound' joke.

Famine He ain't heard it!

War Which one's mine?

Famine Gentleman at the back? Certainly sir. Got a lovely one here just for you.

War Just give it here.

Claire Hey. Your arm.

War Eh?

Claire What's happened to the cut?

War What? Oh it's better now.

Claire But it was only five minutes ago.

War Yeah that's all cleared up.

Claire Let me see that.

She goes and examines his arm.

Death His deadly wound is healed.

Pestilence He didn't do it again did he?

Famine Jesus, mate, you're blood-mad!

Sound of a helicopter approaching.

Death Quiet!

Famine What is it?

Death Listen.

Claire It's a helicopter.

Pestilence Is it one of ours or one of theirs? (*Laughs*)

Claire It's not black –

Death Get away from the windows!

Claire It's coming this way.

Death Now!

He grabs her and pulls her back into the room just as machine gun fire strafes the outside of the building, shattering the windows, a couple of bullets ricocheting into the room. Claire screaming, general commotion. It passes.

Death Are you alright, Claire?

Claire (*slowly calms down*) Yes. Thank you...

War (*shouting at the disappearing helicopter*) Bastards!

Claire Who was that?

War I *bet* that was the UN.

Famine Oh here we go.

Pestilence Take it easy, lad.

Claire But they were shooting at us.

Death They were.

Claire Why? Why would anyone want to shoot at us?

Death Not everyone likes it when the cavalry arrives.

Claire But why? Why did they do that?

Death It's obviously time. Get these bags open.

Claire What's going on here?

Pestilence You got a knife, boss?

Death Here.

Pestilence (*Catches it*) Ta.

The bags are ripped open. Metal and bone spills out onto the concrete floor. The sounds are sharp and brutal. Knives scraping across stone. Nails on a blackboard. Hooks and barbs and jagged edges. A horrible teeth-aching sound. In the background, the guys are laying out and putting on their armour. This should happen through the rest of the scene.

War Sweet!

Death Claire? Is something the matter?

Claire Your armour.

Death What about it?

Claire It's, I've never seen anything, it's so ...

Famine It's made of metal and leather and bone.

Claire Why?

War Cos it looks cool.

Laughter.

Claire Why does yours have those - ?

Death Don't touch them!

Claire What?

Death They're very sharp.

Claire What are they?

Death It's parts of a rib cage with razor blades soldered along the bone.

Claire Don't be stupid.

Famine Look at mine. I got human teeth sewn into the sleeves.

Claire You guys are sick.

Famine Look.

Claire That's disgusting. That's not real.

Famine That's nothing. Look at Mark's helmet. The visor's made of human fingers.

War Infidels!

Famine He's mad he is, I swear!

Pestilence We're thinking of marketing it as a new type of armour.

Claire Really?

Pestilence Calling it 'armourgeddon'. Armour. Geddon.

Famine Leave the funnies to me, Gazer.

Claire What kind of soldiers are you?

Death We're the cavalry.

Claire Aren't you here to help with the crisis?

Death In a way, Claire, we *are* the crisis.

Pause. Decision.

Claire Were you all called up?

Pestilence Yeah!

Claire Aleks told me his story. What's yours?

Pestilence My call up?

Claire Yes.

They look to Death.

Death Go ahead.

Pestilence I'm a general in the Parthian army. We're putting the Syrian to flight. Black helicopter appears above the trees. You wouldn't believe the sound, the power. The ground is pounding beneath our feet. We're all firing arrows at it. We don't know what it is.

Famine I was commander of the Mongol cavalry into Armenia on our campaign to take the Caspian. The helicopter bursts from a cloud. It whips the sea water into a storm. I thought it was the wrath of God come down upon us.

Claire And you're a knight, I suppose.

War I joined the Third Crusade. One night we're encamped. Then all the tents are open and a light is shining down on us, like a great sun. That same steel thunder in the sky. I am caught in its beam and a rope ladder is lowered to me. I thought, do I climb this ladder?

Death We had a choice, you see, Claire.

War I thought this might be a trick. Some knavery of the Sultan. But also it seemed to me that perhaps this came from Our Lord.

Famine I thought: what have I got to lose?

Pestilence I never let fear enter my life. I thought: why start now? And I climbed the ladder.

Claire You know, you're actually quite convincing.

Silence.

Death Okay, clear up in here.

Famine Why bother?

Death Because you're a cavalryman, soldier.

They guys start clearing up. This conversation very intimate.

Claire So who, who was it?

Death What?

Claire In the helicopter, who was it? Who called you?

Death I don't know.

Claire Who are you working for?

Death I used to think I knew. But now I'm not sure.

Claire So what did it mean?

Death It was my road to Damascus, Claire.

Claire What are you going to do?

War We're going to ride.

Claire Yes but what is this ride?

Death Haven't you felt it, Claire?

Claire Felt what?

Death Felt it coming.

Claire I don't know what you mean.

Death Haven't you wished the world were swept away? Replaced with something new? Doesn't it all feel tired to you Claire?

Claire Not really.

Death Wars unending. Every week a new disease. The air filled with lies.

Claire No, I don't feel that at all.

Death Open your eyes, Claire.

Claire No, because in fact, I feel very strongly that things can be better.

Death Yes. Sweep it all away.

Claire No, I don't think like that.

Death Disappointment and debt and dishonour.

Claire You can't just wish the world away.

Death You don't have to wish. Come and see.

Claire What?

Death Come and see.
He opens a window. Claire gasps.

Claire What's causing that?

Death Beautiful isn't it?

Claire Well –

Death The heavens are dying.

Claire It looks like –

Death You know it is, Claire. You are seeing what was and is and shall be. The raging madness in the heart of the universe. Eternal chaos. Accept it.

Claire Right. I want to go.

Death There is nowhere to go.

Claire I don't care. I'd just rather be with my family or Roger or –

Death Open your eyes, Claire. You know what's happening.

Claire I know you're mad, that's what I –

Death Governments in crisis. The cities of the nations fall. The seas turning against us.

Claire I am not playing along with this.

Death Babylon that great city with its hanging gardens and its gates and temples is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils. Not my words, Claire.

Claire Okay. I'm telling you now. Let me go. Let me go now or you are in very serious trouble.

Death No. No we're not.

Claire This is imprisonment. And kidnapping. This weather thing, these freak conditions, it's all going to blow over, it's not, I don't know what you, I don't care. Let me go now and I won't name you, I won't mention this to anyone –

Death Claire, please. You have very little time left. Don't waste it.

Claire You're – you're going to kill me?

Death No. But the world will end and you with it.

Claire The world's not going to end.
Movement.

Famine We're ready, boss.

Claire Is that your armour? Is that what it's going to look like?

Death Gentlemen! It's almost time.
The guys come to a stop.
The oath in blood. Armour up and gather round me.

Famine Sir?

Death What is it, Sean?

Famine The girl, I mean should we

Death Yes.
You're right.
Claire, you shouldn't see this.
Mark, take her next door.

War Yes, boss.

Claire What's going on?

Death Claire, this isn't for your eyes.

Claire I want to see.

War Alright love. Off we go.

Claire Hey, hey –

War You heard the man.
*Rattle, disturbance. Claire being manhandled. The recorder falls.
Tape clicks off.*

9.

Bathroom next to the changing room. We hear the horsemen's ritual from the next room, distant and muffled. Clare is whispering nervously very very close into the microphone.

Claire *(whispered, panicked)* This is Clare Webster, reporting for the BBC. I'm in a stableyard off the A535. I'm being held prisoner by an armed gang. I've not been hurt but I think they're mad and they're probably dangerous. At least one of them is has a sword. Around ten minutes ago, the whole complex came under attack from what looked like a military helicopter. If I hold the microphone to the door you can hear part of a ritual which I have been prevented from seeing.

We hear part of the ritual. Ten seconds or so. The rest should overlap the speech before and after.

Death Brothers of The Horse. Brothers of The End.

Unsheathing of swords.

We join metal to earth.

The men slowly scrape their swords across the concrete floor. It makes a horrible sound.

Master of war. Present your flesh to The Brothers of The End.

War steps forward.

We baptise our swords in the blood of war.

They draw their swords across his body. He shudders with pain.

Claire There have been signs of activity from the men but I am not sure what they're planning. They seem to have created some uniforms and a basic armour for themselves. They may be mercenaries of some kind. Wait I think they've stopped.

Death Claire!

Claire's breathing very hard now.

Death You can come back in now Claire.

Claire Th – thank you.

She returns to the larger space. The horsemen are now fully dressed. We hear the metallic scrape of their armour, the clank of metal and bone, the jingle of hooks and spurs. Claire very scared now.

War Look at her. She's still got that bloody microphone.

Death Let her. No one's going to hear it.

Claire You're cut again.

War I am the blood of the blood oath.

Claire You all look... twisted, sick -

Death Do you know us now?

Claire Know you?

Death Accept us, Claire?

Claire This is insane. You are insane.

War Come on, let's go.

Famine Yeah, I wanna get out there.

Death Accept us. You know who we are. You've known for a while now.

Claire No, I refuse to –

Death Have a little faith.

Claire No, no, I am not –

Death Don't deny me a third time, Claire.

Claire You can't make me

Pestilence Look, Aleks, if you're gonna kill her, just kill her

Death Accept us. It will make things so much easier for you.

Claire Why will it make it easier for me?

Death To die denying the world is the cruellest death of all.

Claire Are you - ?
No, I can't. I won't.

Death You know us. You have always known us. We are the four horsemen whose coming was foretold.

War I am War.

Pestilence I am Pestilence.

Famine I am Famine.

Death I am Death.

Claire You can't be.

Pestilence This is The End that was, and is not, and yet is.

Death The sky is opening. The mountains are topped with fire. The trees are burning, they have been burning a long time. The End is come and all shall speak its name.

Outside, the skies are boiling.

Claire Aleks, please.

Death Kindred, nations, multitudes, who is like unto The End? Who can make war unto death?

War I rode to crush the blasphemous Turk. I now ride to bring this world to its End.

Famine I subdued the Caspian and cast long shadows on the East. I now ride to bring this world to its end.

Pestilence The world was turf beneath the Parthian hoof. I now ride to bring this world to its end.

Death I was the hammer of Alexander's army. I now ride to bring the world to its End.

Claire But look, this has to be, you can't, the world can't end just because -

Death Everything comes to its end. The world is no different. We are the eschaton. We are the telos and the terminus.

Claire So you're saying, this is everything.

Famine Claire, there are some things you can't resist. Sometimes you just have to give in.

Claire So this is the, is this the Day of Judgment?

Pestilence There is no Judgment. There is no city of God. No return. No rapture. This is just The End.

Claire But doesn't The Bible say –

War You shouldn't believe everything you read.

Death This has long been prepared for, Claire.

Claire What happens if you don't go? What happens if you stay here? You don't have to ride. Why bring everything down? Because things, don't laugh at me but things are better, and no things aren't perfect, things aren't even good, probably, but we haven't seen the best of us yet, and if we just have a chance to make this world better and, look, this doesn't have to happen, you can't just end it.

Death Can't I?
Am I not fire?

Outside, the horizon explodes.

(darkly) Am I not flame?

We hear a helicopter distantly approaching.

Ah. The beast is risen.

Claire What's that sound?

Death Goodbye Claire.
Gentlemen?

On their way out.

Famine & Pestilence War! Huh!

Pestilence Good God now!

Famine & Pestilence What is he good for?

Pestilence Absolutely

Famine & Pestilence Nothing!

Pestilence Say it again!

War Shut it!

*They leave.
The helicopter draws near.
Storm clouds break. Hail.
Fire surrounds us. Winds whirl
Claire fumbles with the field recorder.
She's holding the microphone but she is shaking, and so now is
the room.*

Claire This is Claire Webster reporting for the BBC. The helicopter is back. The guys have left. There are storms overhead and hailstones and fires. I think this is the end of the world, I think this is it.

*The earth begins to shake.
A voice from the helicopter, unreally amplified through a
megaphone.*

Megaphone Drop your weapons. Lie on the floor with your hands behind your head. I repeat, lie on the floor with your hands behind your head.

Death *(very distant)* Cavalry. Mount up!

Megaphone Get down on the floor or we open fire. This is your final warning.

Death *(very distant)* Present weapons!
We ride!

*Horses hooves begin beating the earth. The sound grows louder
and louder. We hear the horsemen urging the horses on, whips
beating at their backs. Spurs and armour. The earth being
ploughed up, the animals snorting, the equine armour crashing
and jangling.*

The helicopter opens fire.

The earth trembles, the skies boil.

Claire *(hysterical)* This is Claire Webster reporting for the BBC. The horsemen are riding. The horsemen are riding. The skies are boiling. The earth is opening. The horizon is on fire. I may be the last person on the last day. If anyone hears me, if there is to be another life here, we ended like this, without judgment, just an end, no

Tape ends abruptly.