WAR IN BURBANK

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TEASER

EXT. GRAND HOTEL PHILADELPHIA - DAY

A line of restless people extends down the sidewalk beside an unassuming hotel. They hold handmade signs boasting passionate statements like: “Save the magic”, “People > Profits.”

The line squeezes through the front doors to the hotel, spilling into the lobby, where a huge crowd waits impatiently to get into a tiny ballroom.

INT. BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

The cookie-cutter space is jam packed with an odd mix of businessmen, reporters, and teenagers in colorful T-shirts.

On stage there is a hastily assembled banner reading: “SAVE GILSEY.”

The crowd roars as a group of business people walk onto the stage. Leading them in is FRANK GILSEY(70s). He looks like your loveable grandpa, the guy who would take you out to a ball game. Frail with a small hunch, he is extremely powerful for such an unassuming man.

Frank quiets the crowd as he approaches a podium. He speaks nervously into the microphone:

FRANK GILSEY
Friends. Coworkers. Family. We’re here today united under one cause. This is *your* company, and we can’t let it be destroyed like this. You know as well as I do how corporate greed has defiled my father’s legacy and his good name. Turning his dreams, his life’s work, into a money grubbing monster. A beast that is being fed relentlessly by rotten management.

More of the crowds signs are highlighted as he speaks: One is a caricatured of a man stabbing a cartoon animal, another simply says “NO MORE SEAGER.”

FRANK GILSEY (CONT'D)
HE is the one responsible for the WRETCHED state of this company now. **HE** is the one we need to oust.

The crowd erupts in thunderous applause. Amongst them, a HOODED FIGURE stands with a flip phone held out.

INT. GRAND HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The speech carries over onto a hotel phone.

FRANK GILSEY (O.S.)
Tomorrow, you must vote to dethrone Gilsey's tyrant: CEO *Chris Seager!*

CHRIS SEAGER(40s) sits on his bed with the phone in his hand. A tall and lanky man, with a receding hairline and bags under his eyes. He looks like an out-of-shape basketball player that became a 9-5 businessman. Brash and opinionated with little to no bedside manner, his loud personality has clearly left him a broken man.

The crowd cheers over the phone. Chris throws it across the room, smashing it to bits.

Not even noticing the mess he has made, he flies up from the bed and exits to his balcony.

EXT. GRAND HOTEL ROOM BALCONY - DAY

Chris looks down upon the crowd in the streets below him. He stares in disgust until a beep breaks his focus.

He looks down at his watch. A friendly looking mascot, MILO THE MOUSE, points to the time, staring right back. Chris struggles to rip the watch off his wrist, only causing him to get more upset.

Finally tearing it off, he throws it off the balcony.

EXT. GRAND HOTEL PHILADELPHIA - DAY

The watch crashes onto the pavement, shattering into pieces. All that's left is a fragment of the Milo's innocent smile...

END TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. SKYLINE PICTURES - EDITING BAY - DAY

Chris Seager looks much younger, but only slightly less stressed.

SUPER: 1984 - 20 YEARS EARLIER...

He leans over a tiny EDITOR who is tapping away at a massive array of buttons and switches, cigarette in hand.

Chris is laser focused on the monitors in front of them. In the reflections of his eyes, images keep rewinding back and forth.

CHRIS SEAGER
The timing of that cut seems off...
What do you think?

The Editor takes a drag and exhales slowly.

EDITOR
We've changed it about fifty times already. I think it works.

Chris nods, though not really listening.

CHRIS SEAGER
It's got to be perfect though.
We're not leaving until it is.

EDITOR
You got it boss.

They continue to rewind, cut, fast-forward. The sounds of the dramatic soundtrack cutting in and out are heard until there's a knock at the door.

They turn to see WALTER FUCHS(35). He's a small man with a huge attitude and questionable morals.

FRANK GILSEY
You coming up to that meeting in 5?

CHRIS SEAGER
We'll finish this later...

The editor puts out his cigarette as Chris exits.

INT. SKYLINE PICTURES - LOBBY - DAY

Chris and Walter exit the editing bay, walks down a hallway, then enters a large atrium.

CHRIS SEAGER
Is Henry going to bother showing up today?

WALTER FUCHS
I doubt it.

They walks past cases full of golden awards, posters from movies, props, and other memorabilia. They get increasingly older, from the “modern” blockbusters of the early 80’s to the silent era, establishing Skyline as a powerhouse of filmmaking.

They approach a bank of elevators.

WALTER FUCHS (CONT'D)
I can’t believe we are still listening to that son of a bitch.

CHRIS SEAGER
Well, He *is* our boss...

The elevator arrives, they get in.

WALTER FUCHS
True, but that doesn’t give him an excuse to be such a tyrant. I don’t know who’s he’s fucked more times-

He stops.

WALTER FUCHS (CONT'D)
What floor?

CHRIS SEAGER
Twelve.

WALTER FUCHS
Me or you? I mean just a few weeks ago, he sent a memo down to TV and told me he wanted us to plug Coca-Cola in our prime-time crime drama.

CHRIS SEAGER
Didn’t you end up putting Pepsi in that show?

WALTER FUCHS
He *told me* Coke, but wrote Pepsi in the damn memo! Then he said it was *my fault,* and cut my bonus.

CHRIS SEAGER
This studio can be a shit show.

WALTER FUCHS
No thanks to you, *Vice President.*

Walter elbows Chris as they share a laugh. The elevator dings.

CHRIS SEAGER
This is us.

WALTER FUCHS
Wanna grab lunch later?

The elevator opens, they exit.

CHRIS SEAGER
How about The Edge, 12:30?

WALTER FUCHS
Sounds good.

CHRIS SEAGER
You'd better show up on time!

WALTER FUCHS
Am I ever late? I feel like you always say that but...

Their conversation fades as the elevator doors close.

INT. PETE GILSEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Sunlight floods into a wood paneled office. Animation cells of cartoon characters from the 40s line the walls. Stuffed animals and toys fill up the shelves. And a smiling Milo The Mouse is plastered everywhere else.

A door slowly opens and FRANK GILSEY(50s). He's a soft spoken and frail man who has been through a very turbulent life. He slowly scans the room, a flood of memories coming back.

He enters softly, approaching a large wooden desk. He runs his finger along the edge of it, stirring up clouds of dust.

He finally lands on a picture frame:

A young Frank sitting on the knee of PETE GILSEY. Pete Gilsey, Frank's father, is an American icon, a true patriot, and a groundbreaking visionary. They smile together at the front gate of the studio.

MARY SINCLAIR
Still a spitting image.

Frank sets down the picture wiping a tear away before it has the chance to escape his eye.

Behind him he sees MARY SINCLAIR(40s). She's a clever businesswoman who always speaks her mind, and has fought through a lot of prejudice to get to where she is now.

FRANK GILSEY
Mary? I haven't seen you in forever!

Frank sets the photo down and turns, collecting himself. They embrace.

FRANK GILSEY (CONT'D)
Last time I saw you, you were filling in animation cells in the building next door. What do you do now?

MARY SINCLAIR
I'm on the board now.

FRANK GILSEY
Congratulations! That's fantastic.

MARY SINCLAIR
It wasn't easy, but I earned it.

FRANK GILSEY
Thanks for letting me come back and see the place.

MARY SINCLAIR
How does it feel to be back?

FRANK GILSEY
You know, it feels... good.

EXT. GILSEY STUDIOS LOT - DAY

Frank and Mary take a stroll between quaint, tan colored buildings on the studio lot. A small army of quirky artists walk about the picturesque grounds.

FRANK GILSEY
It hasn't changed much, has it?

MARY SINCLAIR
It' still the studio your dad built.

Frank eyes a shaded patch of grass where a ghostly memory of his family appears.

Frank, Pete, his MOTHER, and SISTER all laugh as they enjoy a picnic.

He snaps out of his flashback.

FRANK GILSEY
What's this really about?

MARY SINCLAIR
What do you mean?

FRANK GILSEY
I know you didn't call me here just to catch up. I left this place for a reason all of those years ago.

Mary finds a bench. She sits down, Frank joining her, as she tries to find the words to say.

MARY SINCLAIR
The board is ignoring everything I say.

FRANK GILSEY
That hasn't either.

MARY SINCLAIR
But that's exactly why we need you to come back. They won't listen to me, but they might listen to a Gilsey.

FRANK GILSEY
I knew someone would try to pull me back into this mess...

Frank stands and begins to walk away. Mary fumbles to join him.

MARY SINCLAIR
You don't understand, Frank. This whole studio is on the verge of destruction.

FRANK GILSEY
You don’t have to get all doomsday on me, Mary. I read the news.

MARY SINCLAIR
Then are you okay with just sitting here while your father’s company goes up in flames?

Mary has a look of desperation on her face as Frank thinks...

MARY SINCLAIR (CONT'D)
Or are we going to do something about it?

CUT TO:

INT. THE EDGE STEAKHOUSE - DAY

Chris sits alone in a high end steakhouse. Filled with gaudy décor and overpriced art, this is the perfect place for the Hollywood elite to do business.

He checks his watch, then notices Walter waltz into the restaurant.

Chris flags him down and he approaches.

CHRIS SEAGER
You’re late.

WALTER FUCHS
It’s been two minutes, no need to bust my ass.

They both pick up their menus as someone else enters the restaurant.

CHRIS SEAGER
Oh shit, it’s Henry.

Without hesitation, Walter flips around to see HENRY DILLINGER (60s) enter through the front door. He’s a large man with a bad combover and an even worse bedside manner.

WALTER FUCHS
It’s fine. Maybe he won’t see us-

Before he can finish his breath, Henry spots them and lights up.

HENRY DILLINGER
Chris! Walter!

Henry moves across the restaurant.

HENRY DILLINGER (CONT'D)
Mind if I join you?

He doesn’t even wait for a response as he steals a seat between them. He notices Walter.

HENRY DILLINGER (CONT'D)
Sorry I couldn’t make it to the meeting earlier.

A WAITER approaches and begins filling up their glasses with water. They all order without even looking at a menu.

HENRY DILLINGER (CONT'D)
I’ll have the ribeye. Medium-well. Sub the vegetables for the fries, and uh, how about a milkshake. Can you do that?

WALTER FUCHS
I’ll have the Crab and Lobster. But make sure the catch is fresh, last time it was a bit sour. Oh and a side soup of the day. Just make sure to bring extra crackers but saltines *NOT* club. Water is fine to drink. I know there’s droughts or whatever but if it’s not spring water I’ll riot.

CHRIS SEAGER
Caesar Salad.

Henry looks to Chris with a raised eyebrow.

CHRIS SEAGER (CONT'D)
Please.

The waiter leaves the table.

HENRY DILLINGER
Well, since you’re both here, I think it’s about time that I break the news.

CHRIS SEAGER
What news?

Chris takes a large sip of water.

HENRY DILLINGER
I've got an offer to be CEO at Vixen Studios.

Chris chokes. He looks to Walter: what did he just say?

CHRIS SEAGER
We've been at their throats for years and you're just jumping ship?

HENRY DILLINGER
Skyline never stood a chance against them. Plus, you should see the stock options they offered me!

Both men are shocked.

WALTER FUCHS
What do you mean Skyline never stood a chance? We were only a couple of million away from beating their box office last year.

HENRY DILLINGER
Last year was an outlier.

Chris is quietly thinking through a million scenarios.

HENRY DILLINGER (CONT'D)
I mean come on, my options are limited. Vixen is by far the biggest kid on the block. Skyline, Freeway Pictures, even Gilsey, they're all gonna get eaten up eventually.

WALTER FUCHS
What's gonna happen to your spot then?

HENRY DILLINGER
I've already been talking to the board about a new chairman. We're looking into every suitable replacement right now.

Chris and Walter sit in silence. Henry notices.

HENRY DILLINGER (CONT'D)
Hey, if you wanna bid for my job, go right ahead.

Walter and Chris look to each other: Who's it going to be?

EXT. SEAGER HOUSEHOLD - EVENING

A decent sized Spanish home, with a new Mercedes in the driveway, sits behind a well manicured lawn. The glow of a fire illuminates one of the windows.

INT. SEAGER HOUSEHOLD - OFFICE - EVENING

A shot of whiskey is poured in a glass.

Chris' cozy office is revealed. Decorated wall-to-wall with every award, celerity photo, and prop he has collected over his young but bountiful career.

He approaches a stone fireplace, kindling the last few glowing embers. He then leans on the mantle, and sips his drink.

A huge painted portrait of Chris' father towers above him. Under it is a plaque reading: CHRIS SEAGER, SR.

Chris stares up, feeling smaller and smaller until-

A KNOCK.

Chris turns to see his wife, BARBARA SEAGER(40). A hardworking mother who is unbelievably patient, and kind to everyone she meets.

BARBARA SEAGER
Honey, the TV is acting up again, could you come take a-

She spots the whiskey in his hand. She enters slowly, shutting the door behind her.

BARBARA SEAGER (CONT'D)
What's going on?

Chris takes a moment as she moves over.

CHRIS SEAGER
Henry... He's leaving Skyline.

BARBARA SEAGER
Finally! The meteorite has come to destroy the dinosaurs.

Chris chuckles as he sits the glass down.

BARBARA SEAGER (CONT'D)
So... Are you gonna take his job?

CHRIS SEAGER
Probably, I am high up on the list.

BARBARA SEAGER
Well, you don’t seem too excited about it.

CHRIS SEAGER
Oh no, I am... I am...

Barbara doesn’t buy it.

BARBARA SEAGER
What’s really going on, Chris?

Chris thinks for a moment. He looks up to his father’s portrait.

CHRIS SEAGER
I’m scared I’ll screw it up. I want to make a name for myself, leave a good legacy for our kids. What if it’s too much?

BARBARA SEAGER
You’ve worked your ass off your whole life for this. You will be perfect, I know it.

They exchange a gentle kiss.

BARBARA SEAGER (CONT'D)
As long as you don’t do anything crazy...

CHRIS SEAGER
I’ll try my best not to.

They laugh together as the last few embers of the fire die, sending the room into darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. GILSEY STUDIOS - BOARDROOM - DAY

Dust is illuminated in a shaft of light to the hum of a slide projector.

MARY SINCLAIR (O.S.)
Corporate Raiding. It’s what happens when an investor with a little too much cash finds a company with an undervalued stock.
(MORE)

MARY SINCLAIR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
They buy up a bunch of shares, and then put themselves in charge.

Mary stands at the front of a tiny board room. Around the table sit 10 MEMBERS OF THE BOARD. At the head of the table is JOHN WILSON(38), He looks like a football player, but he's actually the CEO. He is lost.

Beside him sits ROBERT CLEARWATER (40), Chairman of the Board. He leads a new generation of management who only care about short term profits.

In the corner, behind everyone, Frank sits with his arms crossed.

MARY SINCLAIR (CONT'D)
It's happened before, and it could happen again.

ROBERT CLEARWATER
We're not children, Mary. What's this all about?

Mary taps her foot impatiently as she switches the slide.

MARY SINCLAIR
Paul Steinberger.

An image of PAUL STEINBERGER(50) pops up on the screen. He's a plump man with an evil grin and a very dark approach to wall street.

MARY SINCLAIR (CONT'D)
Over the past few weeks, he's been buying up chunks of our stock.

BOARD MEMBER
So? The share price is going up.

MARY SINCLAIR
This man has been known to attempt corporate takeovers via stock before.

BOARD MEMBER 2
He also just buys a lot of stocks. He doesn't want to take over ever company he has money in. Why do you think he would go after us?

A few more comments come in as John stands.

JOHN WILSON
Are you trying to say that this Steinberger guy is gonna try and take over *Gilsey? Buy us out?* Can he do that?

Robert steps in.

ROBERT CLEARWATER
He is not going to buy us out. We just launched a new distribution label, a tv channel, and the theme parks are printing money. My guess is that this guy just wants in on our success. And I say, he can help us get it!

The board agrees unanimously.

MARY SINCLAIR
Please, listen to me. He's done this to a dozen other companies. If we keep issuing more shares, he could buy them up and-

ROBERT CLEARWATER
We had to issue those shares to keep the studio open.

JOHN WILSON
And we aren't like those other companies.

MARY SINCLAIR
What if he keeps buying? What's your plan then?

John walks up to Mary and shuts off her projector. He leans in so the rest of the room can't hear him.

JOHN WILSON
My plan is to do what the board tells me, keep everyone happy, and hope this all just goes away. I am in way over my head, and the last thing I need is for someone like you to go and get everyone all upset.

Baffled, Mary tears the slides out of the projector.

MARY SINCLAIR
Don't say I didn't warn you.

She turns and storms out of the room. Frank sneaks out behind her.

John reassumes his seat.

JOHN WILSON
Sorry about that!

INT. GILSEY STUDIOS - HALLWAY

Mary blasts out of the meeting room and storms down the hallway, Frank tries to catch up behind her.

FRANK GILSEY
Mary!

She turns abruptly and enters her office.

INT. MARY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The door flies open and she throws her slides directly into the trash can.

She sits down at her desk and powers on her computer.

MARY SINCLAIR
Goddamn useless piece of shit.

She hits it in frustration as Frank enters, still catching his breath.

FRANK GILSEY
Mary... I... I had no idea that-

MARY SINCLAIR
That we're screwed? Yep. Do you see why I called you now?

The computer boots up and she begins furiously typing. Frank approaches Mary and puts his hand on her. She flinches.

FRANK GILSEY
I'm ready to help. We have to do something about this.

MARY SINCLAIR
Finally... Lucky for us, I have a plan.

She reveals a small device from her jacket.

FRANK GILSEY
What is that?

Mary clicks a button and plays back John’s voice:

JOHN WILSON (O.S.)
My plan is to do what the board tells me, keep everyone happy, and hope this all just goes away. I am in way over my head, and the last thing I need is for someone like you to go and get everyone all upset.

MARY SINCLAIR
If the board can’t realize that John in incapable of running this company, we’ll just have to convince everyone else.

END OF ACT ONE