

# “The Lion of Babylon”

by Steven Croft

*April, 2003*

Is lonely as a shadow on the moon,  
a silent Marine fireteam approaching  
in twilight, through palm groves opening  
to sunbaked desert ground.

The lead Marine stares at the lion  
crouching over a carved man,  
symbol of power guarding windswept  
ruins and half-rebuilt faux city.

For three millennia invaders have made  
this approach: Assyrians, Persians, Ottomans,  
now it's a teenager in desert camo, sandpaper  
brush of wind on his face, rifle ready to raise.

He has never heard of the land of Ur,  
knows Hammurabi only as a metal band,  
but in this moment he sees the signs  
the world is older than it is tonight—

Tonight, where their unit waits for daylight  
to move on Saddam's palace rising above them  
in the distance. 80 clicks north in Baghdad,  
buildings vanish to smoke and rubble,

Those bombs faraway thunder in a place  
that rarely has rain. Its stars that were once  
omens begin appearing as they walk back  
to find some sleep on the ground by dusty vehicles

Or stand guard. In night-vision binos, as if there  
were no war tomorrow, they watch camels kneel  
in soft quiet under palm trees along the Euphrates.

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