

Arabian Knights

By

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EXT. ARABIAN NIGHTS MOTEL [PLEASE INSERT  
\PRERENDERUNICODE{ÅÅ\$} INTO PREAMBLE] OUTSKIRTS OF ABU  
JEBA, ARABABIA [PLEASE INSERT \PRERENDERUNICODE{ÅÅ\$} INTO  
PREAMBLE] NIGHT

Atop a sleepy and unmistakably seedy establishment, a  
partially broken neon light with a short blinks on and off  
erratically: Arabian Nights Hotel, Arabian Nights Hotel,  
Arabian Nights Motel ...

INT. THE SAME HOTEL -- HALLWAY - NIGHT

Frayed and faded carpet lines the dingy ill-lit hallway. a  
bellhop from the subcontinent shuffles past, coughing and  
wiping his nose on the sleeve of his ill-fitting uniform.

A tinny, busted wall speaker emits a carpenter's song,  
"We've Only Just Begun."

                                CARPENTERS (V.O)  
                                ... we've only just beguuuunnn  
                                ... to       liiivve ...

JOHN WATES, a handsome but somewhat nervous American,  
makes his way down the ratty hallway, bag in hand, laptop  
satchel slung over his shoulder.

He comes to a room, compares the door number with the  
number on a key in his hand, begins to insert the key into  
the lock. As he puts pressure on the door, it falls into  
the room with a loud crash.

What a dump.

Loud laughter erupts from a few doors down.

A door bursts open and DR. AL-SNAFU, a rotund Arab man  
wearing an American Indian war bonnet and with a bathroom  
towel wrapped around his waist, clutches a bottle of Jack  
Daniels as he chases after a bare-breasted prostitute  
sporting a black Stetson, nylon stockings held up with  
garters, frilly panties and cowboy boots.

They come John's way. the prostitute giggles as she  
passes by and then disappears around a corner.

Al-Snafu stops drunkenly in front of John and begins to  
dance about in a circle, hooting and hollering in  
imitation of a TV Indian. His face is painted sloppily  
with bright red lipstick.

                                DR. AL-SNAFU  
                                Luh, luh, luh, luh ....

It seems he has a bit of a stutter.

(CONTINUED)

DR. AL-SNAFU (CONT'D)  
(exuberantly drunk)  
Me big chief!!!!

He dances around drunkenly a bit more. John steps back out of the way, tightens his grip on his bags.

JOHN  
Do you need some help?

DR. AL-SNAFU  
(laughing, out of control)  
Me make-em - luh - heap big  
warpath on Russian pussy! You  
mideast - luh, luh, luh - oil  
cowboy. You J.R. Ewing?

JOHN  
(frightened)  
No, actually ... I'm a

Al-Snafu pushes the whiskey bottle into John's hand.

DR. AL-SNAFU  
You drink, pale - luh, luh, luh -  
face!

The prostitute sticks her head around the corner, giggles, and Al-Snafu hustles off in pursuit, forgetting totally about John. Their laughter fades as they run further down the hallway. John looks in their direction, nervously steps over the door into his room. He lifts the door back into place.

INT. JOHN'S ROOM - CHEAP HOTEL - NIGHT

John tosses his bag on the bed, watches as a small cloud of dust rises from the sheets. He sets the whiskey bottle down, puts the chain lock on the door and wedges a chair against the knob to hold it in place.

He goes over to the sink in one corner of the spartan quarters, splashes water on his face and rubs his eyes. He grabs a ratty towel to dry off and watches the towel rack fall off and clatter on the floor. He dries his hands, drops the towel in the sink, goes to the window and peaks out the blinds.

The view is of a vacant desert landscape lit by the moon that stretches on into the night, seemingly forever. A meteor crosses the sky, then another. John studies the sky a moment, checks to make sure the window is locked, but the lock comes off in his hand. He looks at it, lets it fall on the floor.

(CONTINUED)

He sits on the bed, reaches for the whiskey bottle, stops, thinks about it a second, then reluctantly brings it to his lips, tilts it back.

He studies his reflection in the window, takes off his shoes and lays back on the bed, removes a wedding band from his ring finger, ponders it for a second, holding it up in the light, then lays it on the bedside table, closes his eyes.

EXT. THE ROYAL PALACE - ABU JEBA, ARABABIA - ABOUT THE SAME TIME AS PREVIOUS SCENE

KING AWAD is on the verge of nodding off while an unhappy supplicant in front of him gestures theatrically, drones on in Arabic about something or other.

At the king's side is ALI BEN ALI AL-GHUTRA, confidant and advisor, who loudly clears his throat, bringing the king back to consciousness.

KING AWAD  
(behind his hand)  
What is it this one wants, Ali?

ALI BEN ALI  
(shuffles through some papers)  
It's so late, I'm a little mixed up myself. Let's see ... was it a car or a house? Maybe it was surgery?

KING AWAD  
Whatever it is, give him two.

Ali Ben Ali motions for the supplicant to cease and desist, takes the man aside.

King Awad rises to leave, leaning heavily on a cane.

The Supplicant, now smiling broadly, tries to make a big production of bowing to and flattering the king, but two guards shuffle him out of the room.

ALI BEN ALI  
Uh ... there's still the other matter.

KING AWAD  
(wearily)  
What is this? A 24-hour bazaar?

ALI BEN ALI  
Prince Ahmed is outside.

King Awad rolls his eyes.

KIND AWAD

Ahmed.

ALI BEN ALI

He's been waiting for two hours.

King Awad sit heavily, nods to Ali Ben Ali.

KING AWAD

Ok ... let's get this over with.

EXT. ROYAL PALACE - MOMENTS LATER

A palace side door bursts open and a remarkably short Arab, PRINCE AHMED, exits angrily. He pushes back his fine silk robe, brings one hand up and bites a knuckle to keep from crying.

But, in fact, he does begin to cry, and as he wipes away a tear from one eye, he catches himself and bites his bottom lip with determination.

PRINCE AHMED

(to himself)

No. You no cry.

He pulls out a pocket mirror, studies his face.

PRINCE AHMED (CONT'D)

You ruin mascara.

He dabs at his eye again, smearing his makeup.

PRINCE AHMED

(vexed)

See?

A PALACE GUARD steps out of the shadows, smirks, gives the prince a half-hearted perfunctory salute. The guard snatches a two-way radio from his belt, barks an Arabic command into it, bringing a black stretch limo screeching around a corner and skidding to a halt in front of the prince

Ahmed walks over to the limo and the guard opens the door for him. The guard smacks him a bit on the ass with the door as he slams it shut.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Ahmed tumbles into the limo, flashes an angry glance at the guard, dabs at his mascara with a tissue, as his dark and beautiful wife, PRINCESS TEEKRA, lifts the black veil covering her face and leans forward toward him with a look of alarm.

(CONTINUED)

PRINCESS TEEKRA  
Ahmed, who has died?

Ahmed drops his guard, sobs loudly.

PRINCE AHMED  
It is worse than death.

PRINCESS TEEKRA  
What, Ahmed? What can be worse  
than death?

Ahmed composes himself with supreme effort, pauses for dramatic effect.

PRINCE AHMED  
He has condemned us to Shaheet!

The princess gasps, sits back in her seat, too stunned to speak.

EXT. LIMOSINE - CONTINUOUS

Tires squeal as the limo lurches from the curb.

EXT. RUNDOWN FOREIGN WORKERS COMPOUND - SHAHEET, ARABABIA  
- ABOUT THE SAME TIME AS PREVIOUS SCENE

A dim light illuminates a half-cocked sign on a sagging fence. In crudely painted letters, the sign says, "Leetle Bangladesh Blanned Komunity for Worker." Through the fence we see a ramshackle collection of tin shacks set higgledy-piggledy between some rocky hills.

A few people walk about the community, but all is mostly quiet. There are no street lights, no lights from any structure, except for a large concrete block building on the far side of the compound. Here we see a couple of street lights and the windows are lighted. Steam pours from a smokestack on the end of the building. A few men can be seen through the windows, walking about the building as if they are working.

The sky is clear and dark. Occasionally a shooting star lights the sky.

EXT. NEXT TO THE CONCRETE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

RUSS MCDARE, rugged 40-something American, badly shaven and sporting a dirty cowboy hat, walks out a door at the loading dock of the concrete block building. He is followed by two workers who load some boxes into an old Land Rover backed up next to the dock. The workers go back inside.

(CONTINUED)

RUSS

You boys keep it coming. I need  
10 for the delivery.

One of the workers looks back, gives Russ a thumbs up,  
disappears into the building.

Russ opens one of the boxes, takes out a pint bottle of  
what seems to be alcohol. He inspects it in the light  
for a moment, breaks the seal, smells of it, then turns  
it up, takes a big swig, smiles broadly.

RUSS

Eat your heart out, Jim Beam.

BIMAN, the plant foreman, a Bangladeshi man about 50,  
sticks his head out the door, bobs his head from side to  
side.

BIMAN

Hey, boss, you come to my house  
tonight, no? My wife make kalia.

RUSS

Sorry, Biman. Gotta pick up two  
new teachers at the airport early  
tomorrow. You always make me get  
drunk!

Biman feigns astonishment.

BIMAN

Biman make you drunk? Biman make  
sun come up in morning too. Biman  
make wind blow in evening. Biman  
very powerful man, no?

Russ grins. Indistinct yelling emanates from inside the  
building, some glass breaks. Biman turns in the doorway,  
gestures angrily, yells at someone in Bengali, goes back  
inside.

Russ shakes his head, walks out to the edge of the loading  
dock, looks up at the stars, turns the bottle up, takes  
another big swig just as a shooting star lights up the  
sky, then another, then another.

RUSS

(quietly)

Shit yeah.

He reaches for a pack of Redman chewing tobacco in his  
back pocket, stuffs a wad in his jaw.

He sees another falling star.



RUSS  
(quietly)  
Shit yeah.

INT. KING AWAD'S QUARTERS - PALACE IN ABU JEBA - ABOUT THE SAME TIME

King Awad, in his nightclothes, mixes a gin and tonic, heavy on the gin. Ali Ben Ali, still diligently in attendance, shuffles through some royal paperwork at a desk. Awad walks out onto the balcony.

EXT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

The king looks down at one of the palace guards, who snaps to attention, tosses off a salute. Awad shifts his attention to the sky, where a bright shooting star lights up the night.

Ali Ben Ali, drink in hand, steps out onto the balcony just as another meteor passes overhead.

KING AWAD  
It's a bad omen, Ali.

ALI BEN ALI  
Rubbish, Awad. It's the Leonid Meteor Shower. Happens every year.

KING AWAD  
(smiles)  
Did you see Ahmed's face when I told him I was appointing him Prince of Shaheet?

Ali Ben Ali chuckles softly.

ALI BEN ALI  
Not quite what he expected, was it? It was worth the extra wait just to see the horror in his eyes.

Awad sighs.

KIND AWAD  
It's a pity Teekra will have to accompany him though.

ALI BEN ALI  
(cautiously)  
Well ... she chose to marry him, Awad.

Awad nods.

(CONTINUED)

ALI BEN ALI (CONT'D)  
Awad ... What's past is past.

KIND AWAD  
(small smile)  
Sometimes, what's past is simply  
prologue, my friend.

ALI BEN ALI  
You think too much.

KIND AWAD  
Just like an old man, no?

They clink their glasses together.

KIND AWAD (CONT'D)  
Well, she can do us no harm ...  
especially in Shaheet.

ALI BEN ALI  
Only a woman.

KIND AWAD  
(quietly)  
Yes ... but so much like her  
mother.

They look up at the sky again. Another shooting star  
streaks past.

EXT. ABU JEBA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - ABOUT THE SAME TIME

Passengers disembark from a 747. TERRY BOLT, a skinny,  
extremely nervous American man with a facial tic and an  
enormous camera dangling from his neck, comes down the  
stairs of the plane, carry-on in hand.

INT. ABU JEBA AIRPORT TERMINAL - MOMENTS LATER

Bolt wanders vacantly inside, pulling his small bag behind  
him as he walks into the terminal. He is immediately  
accosted by an aggressive BAGGAGE PORTER from the Indian  
subcontinent.

BAGGAGE PORTER  
Hey, boss!

Bolt looks about in startled confusion.

BAGGAGE PORTER (CONT'D)  
Hey, boss! I am taking the  
baggages, sarh!

(CONTINUED)

BOLT  
(gripping his bag)  
I only have the one ... I, uh  
....

The porter snatches the bag away, throws it carelessly on a ridiculously large baggage cart and takes off, weaving pell-mell through the crowd in the terminal.

Bolt is too taken aback to react. A fat Arab man in traditional dress bends over his baggage a few feet away, farts loudly in Bolt's direction. Bolt starts, scurries away like a startled deer after the baggage porter.

EXT. AIRPORT, CURBSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

The porter tries to flag down a taxi as Bolt catches up to him.

BAGGAGE PORTER  
Hey, boss! I am bring the taxi  
for you. You want hotel?

Bolt doesn't respond immediately.

BAGGAGE PORTER (CONT'D)  
You want girl?

Shocked, Bolt begins to mumble and gesture in a confused way.

BAGGAGE PORTER (CONT'D)  
(impatient)  
You want boy?

BOLT  
(his tick flaring up)  
No, no, no! I - I - I - I suppose  
I need a hotel. Just a hotel,  
please. I ... I'm very tired. I  
have to go to Shaheet in the  
morning. I'm an art teacher.

The porter nods, uninterested.

Bolt's eyes become fixed on a sign just across the busy terminal. The sign has evidently been run over by one or more vehicles and part of the placard is missing.

All it says is "m: The Final Solution" and in smaller type: "For More Information, Contact ...." The rest of the message is broken off.

The roar of a jet engine all but drowns out every other noise as a plane lifts off a nearby runway, flies directly overhead.

(CONTINUED)

The porter watches the plane, just as a meteor blips across the sky above it. Then another, and another. Bolt is oblivious to all this, his eyes glued to the sign across the way.

BAGGAGE PORTER

Ooooh, very bad. People say  
meteor shower come before fall of  
king.

He shakes his head.

BAGGAGE PORTER (CONT'D)

Very bad.

A cab screeches to a halt in front of them. The driver jumps out, grabs Bolts bag, tosses it carelessly into the trunk, slams it, jumps back in the cab to wait.

BAGGAGE PORTER (CONT'D)

(holding out his hand)  
Twenty dollars, boss.

Oblivious to the porter's demand, Bolt nods at the sign across the way.

BOLT

You see that?

The porter glances over one shoulder at whatever in the hell Bolt is looking at.

Bolt brings his camera up, photographs the sign a few times. Click, whir, click, whir -

BOLT

The "final solution."

BAGGAGE PORTER

(uninterested, hand still  
out)  
Yes, yes, final solution. Give  
twenty dollars!

A goofy smile spreads across Bolt's face.

BOLT

Do you know how long I've been  
looking for the final solution?

The porter eyes him suspiciously.

BAGGAGE PORTER

You crazy man?

(CONTINUED)

BOLT  
(laughing)  
No, I'm an artist!

The fat Arab who farted in Bolt's face throws his stuff into the back seat of the waiting cab, jumps in behind it. The cab takes off.

BOLT  
Hey!

His nervous tic flares up. He turns to the porter.

BOLT  
My cab! My bag!

The porter stubbornly holds out his hand again.

PORTER  
Give 20 dollars.

EXT. ARABIAN NIGHTS MOTEL - THE NEXT MORNING

John flags down a cab.

INT. CAB - CONTINUOUS

John has hardly settled in the back seat when the DRIVER zips away from the curb, Steppenwolf blasting from his CD player.

STEPPENWOLF (V.O.)  
"Born to be Wiiiillld! Born to be  
Wiiiillld!"

JOHN  
(gasps)  
Airport!

He clutches his bags and computer case close to him.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Is there a seatbelt I could put  
on? Any prayer beads I could  
cling to?

The driver laughs, turns the music down just a bit, looks over his shoulder to talk to John, glancing back occasionally as he barrels down the street at expressway speed.

DRIVER  
No gat no seatbelt. You American?  
You go home to land of seatbelts  
now?

(CONTINUED)

He laughs (somewhat maniacally), shakes his head.

JOHN  
Could you slow down just a bit?

The driver ignores him.

DRIVER  
You go home now?

JOHN  
No, no. I'm going to a place  
called Shaheet!

He points frantically.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Redlight! Cars!

The driver screeches to a stop at the light, just inches from the vehicle in front of him. Unfazed, he grins wide at John.

DRIVER  
You go Shaheet, my friend?

John nods, grips his bags tighter, gasps. The driver begins to laugh.

JOHN  
What?

DRIVER  
Oh, my friend. You go Kingdom of  
Ahmed! You go Magic Kingdom!

He tosses John an English-language newspaper. The headline reads: "Ahmed Names Prince of Shaheet." Just below the headline there is a studio portrait of Ahmed in princely regalia, a hawk -- obviously fake -- perched on his arm. John studies the portrait.

JOHN  
He's wearing eye shadow!

The driver laughs, a bit unhinged, shakes his head, peels out at the light turns green again.

EXT. SHAHEET AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

In front of the terminal a silent monotonous desert landscape stretches to the horizon. Across the mostly empty gravel parking lot in front of the terminal, a wind devil whips a few dozen discarded plastic bags into a momentary frenzy, which quickly subsides. A shepherd wanders by leading a small flock of ragged goats.

(CONTINUED)

A door creaks loudly and John emerges from the terminal, pulling his suitcase behind him, his laptop strapped over his shoulder. Almost simultaneously, Bolt wanders out another door a few yards down, no bags, camera about his neck.

The stand a few yards apart looking at the bleak landscape before them. Bolt lifts his camera, snaps off a few shots of god only knows what.

JOHN  
(to himself)  
Oh god....

A battered Range Rover, its top removed, comes roaring into the terminal parking area. It circles the lot, slides to a stop in the gravel between Bolt and John.

It's Russ! He takes off his cowboy hat, sticks his head out the top of the Rover, gives Bolt and John a quick once over, then spits a huge wad of tobacco on the sidewalk between them.

RUSS  
Well, I guess you boys is the two  
miscreants.

John and bolt look at each other.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
You boys on probation, right?  
Working off your prison term or  
whatever?

John and Bolt stand in stupefied silence. Finally John starts to speak, but Russ cuts him off.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
Ain't nothin' to be ashamed of,  
son. Hell, all us is jailbirds  
here. Why else would anybody come  
to this stinking Shaheet-hole?

He grins through tobacco-stained teeth, slaps the side of the rover with his open palm.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
Well, come on girls! I'm your  
ride!

INT. RUSS' ROVER - MOMENTS LATER

The squalor and bleakness of Shaheet rolls by outside the windows. A camel noses about a stripped out car on the shoulder of the road. A man leans indolently in the doorway of a claptrap grocery store with cars parked in

(CONTINUED)

front at random angles. A stray dog limps past. Plastic bags and paper blow about in the desert like tumbleweeds. Garbage piles are strewn here and there between shantytowns punctuated by the occasional grand (and gaudy) edifice with a Mercedes or two parked out in front. People go about their business. Most of the men are dressed in white thobes with red-checked ghutras. The women are covered in black abaya with veils.

Russ glances at John in the passenger seat, then at Bolt in the back through the rear-view mirror. Bolt is taking photographs as they drive along. John strapped in with a shoulder harness, reaches over and locks his door.

RUSS  
(to John)  
Don't worry. We got air bags ...  
anti-lock brakes too.

JOHN  
Really?

RUSS  
(grins, shakes his head)  
Nah, we ain't even got no breaks.

John grips the arm rest on the door. Russ digs out a chew of Redman, offers it to John, who shakes his head.

JOHN  
I never chew before lunch.

Russ grins.

RUSS  
That's a good'n, boy.

He eyes John, trying to size him up.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
This your first time, son?

JOHN  
(looking about)  
In Arababia? Uh-huh.

RUSS  
(laughing)  
Yeah, I know it's your first time  
in Arababia. It's everybody's  
first time here. I mean, is it  
your first court-ordered  
community service assignment to a  
foreign country?

John nods.



JOHN

Yeah, it's my first time.

He glances back at Bolt.

RUSS

What about you, boy? You're awful quiet back there. What you got to say for yourself?

BOLT

(indignantly)

I'm an artist. They said I was guilty of pornography, but I'm not. I took nude pictures of children playing in my jacuzzi. They didn't understand the aesthetics of it. I'm an artist.

His nervous tic flares up.

BOLT (CONT'D)

I'm an artist ... an artist ....

He begins to mumble incoherently. John and Russ exchange a look.

RUSS

That right?

Bolt's face goes totally blank, he trembles, shakes his head, then seems to come back to himself. He points his camera out the window - click, whir, click, whir ....

EXT. RUNDOWN FOREIGN TEACHERS' COMPOUND - MOMENTS LATER

The rover bounces into the compound.

Russ drops off Bolt in front of the door of one dilapidated structures, takes John to an equally decrepit home. They both get out of the Rover. John gives his new home a once over.

JOHN

(sarcastic)

Wow, they spare no expense, do they?

RUSS

(laughs)

You gonna fit in just fine here, boy.

He gives John a slap on the back.

(CONTINUED)

RUSS

Come on over to my place and I'll buy you a drink.

JOHN

What about a raincheck? It's been a long trip.

Russ nods.

RUSS

Well, *adios* then.

He jumps back into the Rover, fires it up.

RUSS (CONT'D)

*Hasta mañana, amigo!*

He drives away while John watches. He sees Russ drive down to a home at the end of the compound, turns back to his own humble abode. A few of the windows are broken, there's some Arabic graffiti on the door and the outside of the building. John walks up, turns the door handle and pushes, watches the door fall off its hinges onto the floor with a loud clattering bang.

EXT. SHAHEET COLLGE - DAY

A bus lurches to a stop in front of a central, overly grandiose marble edifice with marble pillars in front. It seems to be unfinished. Some rusting cranes stand next to the building as if construction were abandoned and no one bothered to remove them. Strings of 100-watt light bulbs are draped all over the building and the cranes. An equally pretentious unfinished mosque stands next to the school.

A few students in white thobes and checkered ghutras loll about the main building. A dog wanders out one of the open front doors and one of students kicks at it, misses, nearly falls on his ass while other students laugh and point.

Above the building, written in Arabic and English is a sign that reads, "Shaheet College." Underneath that: "In the Name of God, Be Merciful." About 15 "teachers," including Russ, John and Bolt, pile off the bus as one of the doors of the building begins to creak open.

The door grates, then sticks half open against the marble. Someone gives it a rough shove and the door hinges snap ... and crash! The door falls over, shattering glass all over the steps of the building.

Standing in the doorway is none other than Dr. Al-Snafu, the same guy John ran into a couple of nights ago at the fleabag hotel.

(CONTINUED)

AL SNAFU  
(redding with embarrassment)  
Luh, luh, luh ....

He snaps his fingers authoritatively at two workers from the Subcontinent idling about nearby trying not to snicker. They scurry over and grapple with the door, wresting it back into position.

RUSS  
(mimicking Curly Howard)  
Nack-nack-nack-nack!

John can't help but laugh. Bolt begins to take some pictures: click, whir, click, whir.

Al Snafu turns his attention to the teachers at the bottom of the staircase, clears his throat, tries to reclaim some air of dignity.

Most of the teacher, except for John and Russ, gaze up with vacuous eyes and gaping expressions, giving one the impression that they could possibly be drugged mental patients who have wandered off from an institution.

AL SNAFU  
And so, luh, luh, luh, so, good morning, gentlemen. Most of you have met me or already have known me for some, luh, luh, luh, time, but for those who haven't, I am Dr. Ishmael Al Snafu, professor of Native American studies and dean of Shaheet, luh, luh, luh, College.

He smiles a big, stiff smile just as John suddenly remembers him.

JOHN  
(grinning)  
It's big chief!

A bit shocked, Al Snafu peers with concern at John, trying to remember where they might have met. Russ reaches over and takes a newspaper John has tucked under his arm, begins to leaf through it.

AL SNAFU  
(trying to recover)  
Yes, I suppose you might, luh, luh, luh, say that I'm the "big chief" of this college. Heh-heh!

Fake smile. He clears his throat.

AL SNAFU (CONT'D)

Let me just take this moment to say what a thrill luh, luh, luh, it is to have such a fine collection of luh, luh, luh, professionals on board for the new semester.

Another tight, fake smile as he lets this compliment sink in, gazes out at the gawking expressions below him. One of the teachers is picking his nose. Another stares back with an insolent sneer, a cigarette dangling from his lips. Russ keeps on reading the newspaper.

AL SNAFU (CONT'D)

The fact that you are all on probation from the overcrowded American penal luh, luh, luh, system for assorted non-violent crimes is not important to me. What matters, luh, luh, luh, is that Shaheet College's relationship with the US Department of Justice remains vibrant. Everybody's a, luh, luh, luh, winner under this arrangement. We get affordable faculty and you get the invaluable opportunity at rehab-, luh, luh, luh, rehabilitation at one of Arababia's premier institutions!

Russ spots something of interest in his newspaper.

RUSS

(loud)

Well, lookee here, Doctor Al Snafu! Seems like they've named a new prince of *Sha--heet*.

He holds up the newspaper so Al Snafu can see.

RUSS (CONT'D)

(seriously)

Who do you reckon he pissed off?

Al Snafu reddens, a few of the teachers snicker.

RUSS (CONT'D)

I'd say you'd really have to be a royal-fuck-up to get shipped off to this place, don't you think, doctor?

Some of the teachers are laughing now. Others just continue to gape as if Russ were speaking Chinese.

(CONTINUED)

Al Snafu gives Russ the stink eye.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
 (drugged hippy voice)  
 Hey Ahmed, guess what? We're  
 shipping your ass off to Shaheet,  
 man.

A few more yuks from the teachers.

AL SNAFU  
 (coldly)  
 For those of you who have not had  
 the *pleasure* of meeting him, luh,  
 luh, luh, this is Russ McDare. We  
 are ... under *obligation*, shall  
 we say, to keep Mr. McDare on  
 through the end of this year.

RUSS  
 And no one appreciates it more  
 than me, doctor.

AL SNAFU  
 I'm keeping track of every  
 inappropriate remark you make,  
 Mr. luh, luh, luh McDare.

He produces an notepad, makes an entry while Russ and the  
 other watch.

AL SNAFU (CONT'D)  
 These will all be emailed to your  
 probation officer in luh, luh,  
 luh, Laredo, Texas.

Russ yawns loudly, scratches his underarm lazily.

AL SNAFU (CONT'D)  
 (to the others)  
 My office is in Room 701 on the  
 top floor. You, luh, luh, luh,  
 have your room assignments and  
 curriculum guides already. The  
 first bell rings everyday at 8  
 a.m. and school's, luh, luh, luh,  
 out at 1. Feel free to make an  
 appointment with my luh, luh,  
 luh, secretary should you need to  
 speak with me.

He glances down at Russ.

AL SNAFU (CONT'D)  
 And stay away from this Texan  
 unless you want luh, luh, luh,  
 trouble!

He starts to go inside, turns back to the teachers as if he forgot something.

AL SNAFU (CONT'D)

Oh, there is no smoking in the classrooms. This means students and luh, luh, luh teachers. Also, students are not allowed to climb in and out of the windows, especially on any floors higher than the third floor.

He starts to leave, turns back quickly, gives the teachers a serious look.

AL SNAFU (CONT'D)

These rules will luh, luh, luh, be rigidly enforced this year!

He disappears back into the building just as the workers from the Subcontinent finish Jerry rigging what's left of the door back into place, swing it shut -- BOOM!

RUSS

(to John)

Well, into the breach?

John, Russ and the others start up the staircase. John pauses, touches some of the big Christmas lights hanging from the building, looks about before entering.

INT. SHAHEET COLLEGE - MOMENTS LATER

Total pandemonium reigns in the corridors. All the students -- men in their 20s and early 30s -- are chattering like schoolboys randomly at one another in a great cacophony of happy noise and confusion. Portraits of King Awad and his grandfather, the country's first king -- Anod -- smile down benignly on the chaos. Russ and John wade through, into a central foyer, where STUDENT 1 darts past, dodging a sandal thrown by STUDENT 2, men in their early 30s who giggle as they pass.

STUDENT 3 sits on steps leading up to the second floor, cleans his toenails with a large knife.

STUDENT 4 lolls beside him, smoking a cigarette beneath a "NO SMOKING" sign.

From the balcony above, STUDENT 5 and STUDENT 6 hold STUDENT 7, who is screaming, upside down by his feet.

STUDENTS 8, 9, and 10 run past, playing grab-ass with each other.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN  
(nodding at the student  
hanging from the balcony)  
Shouldn't we do ... *something*?

Russ glances up.

RUSS  
Yeah. Let's get some coffee.

They make their way through the mayhem down a hallway toward a door marked, "SNEEK BAR," just as another student -- NAIF -- is pushed hurtling past Russ and then crashes into the opposite wall.

RUSS  
(casually)  
Hey, Naif.

Naif grins, touches his chest with his right hand, nods in greeting.

NAIF  
Goodnight, Mr. Russ.

Russ smiles in return, musses up Naif's hair, looks over at John.

RUSS  
(confidentially)  
One of our most promising  
scholars.

INT. SNACK BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Tables are covered with books, used paper cups and plates, half-eaten chunks of food covered with slowly crawling, lazy flies. Trash litters the sticky, yucky floor. A little-used mop stands in a bucket of dirty water in the center of the floor as if it were long ago forgotten there.

The SNACK BAR ATTENDANT -- a middle-aged man from the Subcontinent in a stained white uniform -- languidly shoves a plate toward one customer, takes a drag off his cigarette, points slowly to another student in the gaggle of customers crushing around the counter waiting to be served.

The attendant looks up at Russ as he walks around the counter.

SNACK BAR ATTENDANT  
(mumbles, cigarette in  
mouth)  
Good morning, Mr. Russ.

(CONTINUED)

RUSS

Hey, Sid.

Russ ambles toward the quieter end of the counter. He grabs a couple of Styrofoam cups, eyes John who waits on the other side, watching him.

RUSS (CONT'D)

Crap-puccino?

JOHN

(looking around at the  
chaos)

Better make it a doppio.

He shovels some instant coffee and sugar into the cups, turns on the tap and lets the water run until it's steaming, then fills the cups. He hands John's coffee across the counter.

RUSS

Ashanté.

They touch cups. John looks at the cup dubiously, drinks.

JOHN

(a bit nervously)

I've never taught school before.

Russ chuckles.

RUSS

Well ... this ain't exactly  
teaching, son.

JOHN

So I gathered. All these ...  
"teachers" ... here, are they *all*  
cons?

Russ nods.

RUSS

Everybody except the Big Chief.

He glances over at Bolt, who has wandered into the snack bar with his camera. He stops and takes a picture of the clutter.

A bunch of chattering students gather around him.

CHATTERING STUDENT 1

Hey, photo man!

CHATTERING STUDENT 2

Me, me! Take photo me!

(CONTINUED)



Bolt indulges them, a vacuous grin on his face - click, whir, click, whir ....

BOLT

I'm an artist. I'm going to teach  
you all about the beauty of art  
and the human body.

CHATTERING STUDENT 3

Me, me! Me be in art man class!

CHATTERING STUDENT 4 yanks his thobe up, bends over.

CHATTERING STUDENT 4

Me, me! Take picture me butt, art  
man! Take picture me beautiful  
butt!!!!

Russ and John turn away, continue their conversation.

JOHN

So ... why are you here?

RUSS

Me? Import-export shit. You?

JOHN

White collar stuff. What do you  
mean import-export shit?

RUSS

Eh, smuggling, untaxed  
cigarettes, beer, alcohol, a  
little weed too, but they never  
nailed me on that. You?

JOHN

I was at one of those high-flying  
dot.coms where they cooked the  
books. It crashed.

RUSS

You were the cook?

John nods.

JOHN

I was the cook. Got a little  
greedy. Didn't get out while the  
getting was good.

A beat. Russ eyes John for a moment.

RUSS

I could use a good cook.

John watches Russ carefully, sips his coffee.

STUDENT 11 jumps from one table to another, upending it and sending books, garbage and everything else skyward -- Crash! Bang! Boom! A food fight breaks out at the other end of the room. Splat! A tomato hits the wall over Russ' head. Russ is not perturbed by the commotion, but John seems a bit taken aback. Russ calmly pours his coffee down the drain. An electric bell rings signaling the beginning of class.

RUSS

Well, son, it's time to take the  
bullshit by the thorns.

John looks around the room doubtfully. The students grab-ass, laugh, push and jostle each other on their way to class. Russ gives John a nudge.

RUSS (CONT'D)

Hey, amigo, no hay mal que por  
bien no venga.

John looks at him quizzically. Russ puts his hand on John's shoulder.

RUSS (CONT'D)

There is no bad that comes  
without something good.

John nods, but doesn't quite seem to buy it.

INT. JOHN'S CLASSROOM - LATER THAT DAY

A course title has been scrawled across the blackboard:  
English 5940: Early Romantic Poetry: Wordsworth, Coleridge  
and the Lake Poets.

Below this, John writes, "Hello, Goodbye, Good Morning,  
etc."

His students ignore him, jabbering to one another in  
Arabic.

One of them, JAMIL, reaches over and grabs a textbook from  
KHALID, a fellow student. He casually tosses the book out  
the window beside him. A second passes. Plunk: it lands on  
the ground two stories below.

JAMIL

(smiling)

Go get you book, Shia.

Khalid jumps up, pushes Jamil, who pushes him back, and  
soon the two are on the ground, fists flailing, just as  
John spins about.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN  
Hey!Hey!Hey!

The rest of the students, laugh, shout, clap, point, etc.

John wades into the tussle, separates Jamil and Khalid, both of whom are about his size, and maybe only five years younger. It takes some doing to keep them apart, but John manages by hanging onto their collars and spreading his arms wide.

JOHN  
OK! OK! OK! That's enough!

Jamil and Khalid relax for a second, both of them seething and breathing hard, glaring at each other.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
What's the problem here?

He looks from one to the other.

JAMIL  
This dirty Shia, he jealous. His family no got money. He say my mother fuck donkey. He say things I no understand.

John looks at Khalid.

JOHN  
Did you say that?

Khalid shakes his head.

KHALID  
(perfect English)  
No, I said his father fucks donkeys.

The class titters. John fights back a smile.

JOHN  
(to Khalid)  
Why are you saying these unkind things to your classmate?

KHALID  
Because they're true. He's a total moron and he's typical. His family is connected to the oil dole and he aspires to nothing. He's a waste of semen.

John looks at Khalid, obviously impressed that he can express himself so well. Unconsciously, he releases his grip just long enough for Jamil to take a big, sloppy punch at Khalid, who ducks nimbly out of the way. The follow-through on the swing connects neatly with John's jaw: crack!

He goes reeling across the room, ending up on his ass near the chalkboard. The class falls silent, waiting. Khalid stands back out of the way.

Jamil stares dumbly at his fist, then his eyes meet John's which are filled with fire and fury. John pulls himself up off the floor, breathing hard, his fists balled.

Jamil, terror in his face, takes a step back, stumbles over a desk, trips over a book bag, careens off a wall, bounces up against an open window sill and teeters there for a second, his mouth open in silent scream as he grapples for balance, his hands grasping at the air.

He vanishes through the open window. A second passes. Plunk: He lands on the ground two stories below as John and all the class rush to the window to see what has happened.

Khalid turns to John.

KHALID

See? A total moron.

INT. AHMED'S PALACE, SHAHEET, BEDROOM SUITE - DAY

Prince Ahmed, wearing furry slippers, a pair of boxer shorts with Snoopy on them, and a frilly bathrobe, sits miserably on the silk sheets of his huge canopy waterbed, while his portly, graying American lover, RICCI BAOLONI, cardigan sweater and cotton briefs, plays softly at the white baby grand piano nearby.

On the walls of the room, a velvet portrait of Liberace hangs across from a reproduction of Warhol's Marilyn Monroe. Also on display, a colorful framed poster of a unicorn jumping over a rainbow and over the mantel, a dramatic oil portrait, a reproduction of Napoleon crossing the Alps on horseback, *Le Passage du Saint Bernard*. A framed degree from Yale University hangs conspicuously next to that.

A bearskin rug stares slack jawed and empty eyed from its place on the gleaming marble floor.

Ricci begins to sing, a bit over-the-top, eying Ahmed as he phrases each word.

(CONTINUED)

RICCI  
(singing)  
Why - do - birds - suddenly  
appear - every time - you are  
near -

Ahmed weeps softly. Ricci cuts his song short and comes quietly over to the bed.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
Ahmed ... habibi.

Ricci touches his shoulder, but Ahmed pulls away.

AHMED  
No.... Ahmed no be comforted.  
Ahmed is as Stalin when Hitler  
invade. All is lost. I sink dark  
debression.

RICCI  
(softly)  
Ah, but being the astute student  
of world history that you are,  
you know that Stalin prevailed in  
the end.

Ahmed is not listening. He breaks down in sobs on Ricci's shoulder.

AHMED  
Oh, why this habben, Reeki? Oh  
why boor Ahmed suffer this  
unspeakable shame? Ahmed Brince  
of Shaheet, Brince of Shaheet!  
Arrrggghhh!

He buries his face in Ricci's shoulder. Ricci begins to stroke his head.

RICCI  
(tenderly)  
You'll have your Stalingrad yet,  
habibi ....

He reaches over on the nightstand, lights a cigarette, hands it to Ahmed.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
What I'm wondering now is how we  
work through this pain and put my  
boy back on top where he belongs.  
You know what I'm thinking?

Ahmed looks up through tear-dimmed eyes, shakes his head.

RICCI  
I think this is a test.

AHMED  
A test?

RICCI  
Yes, dear heart, life is testing you.

Ahmed seems confused.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
Surrender to the ocean of life, habibi. Why do you leap at the high tide but flee from the low? Why do you smile at fortune but weep at life's little setbacks? The sun *will* come up tomorrow, Ahmed. Do you doubt the *magnificence* of your own destiny?

Ahmed nods.

AHMED  
(ashamed)  
Yes. Magnificent. Destiny. You right. I forget.

Ricci takes the cigarette from Ahmed's hand, watches Ahmed, takes a slow drag, lets it out.

RICCI  
(carefully)  
There's a ... man here in Shaheet ... an American.

Ahmed looks up.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
I've heard he has a profitable-but-oh-so-discreet operation going -- a liquor distillery. He's looking to expand, I hear.

AHMED  
Good! I want be drunk! I want be drunk all time in Shaheet!

Ricci shakes his head, continues patiently.

RICCI  
Drunk's not the discussion here. I tried some of the whiskey -- it's not bad. In fact, it's good ... good enough to form an cooperative arrangement --

(CONTINUED)

AHMED

What you mean, cooberatif  
arrange?

RICCI

I mean we should go into business  
together with --

AHMED

(interrupting)

What? You crazy? You want Ahmed  
sell whiskey in Arapapia? You  
want religious bolice panging on  
door tomorrow shouting berse from  
Holy Koran? You want Awad cut off  
Ahmed head?

Ricci shakes his head, holds up his hands to calm Ahmed.

RICCI

Habibi, nobody would know. We  
could use the jet, sell the hooch  
down in Abu Jeba where the market  
is bigger. We've got the  
connections to distribute it *and*  
to keep it quiet -- you know  
that. We'll make lots of friends  
in the right places, we'll have  
money to burn and we won't have  
to suck up to Awad anymore for  
cash.

He leans in close to Ahmed who is obviously warming up to  
the idea.

RICCI

We'd have the money to buy a  
mansion near that beach you like  
on the Côte d'Azure.

AHMED

(dreamily)

The peach has some nice poys,  
Reeki.

RICCI

(messaging Ahmed's  
shoulders)

You don't have to tell me that.

A beat.

RICCI (CONT'D)

Shaheet is such a small place for  
someone of your ... stature.

Ahmed shoots a sudden worried glance at Ricci.

(CONTINUED)

AHMED

Put this idea ... this idea bery  
dangerous, Reeki.

RICCI

No. Very Bold, very daring.

He glances up at, nods at Napoleon's portrait over the  
mantel.

RICCI

He would have done it.

Ahmed jumps up on the bed, his short stature notably  
emphasized by standing on something so high. He puts his  
hand on his bare chest in imitation of a Napoleonic  
stance.

AHMED

Yes, Naboleon!

Then, he looks worried again.

AHMED (CONT'D)

But Ahmed no want no Wateryloo!

RICCI

Relax, habibi. When it all goes  
sour--if anyone finds out--we  
just burn the American. Problem  
solved.

Ahmed begins to cry again, but this time it's tears of  
joy. He falls happily on Ricci's neck to embrace him.

AHMED

You!

RICCI

Me?

Ahmed kisses Ricci on the cheek.

AHMED

You--

RICCI

(smiling)  
What, habibi?

AHMED

(sobbing)  
You give me reason to live!



EXT. A MAIN STREET - SHAHEET - DAY

Terry Bolt walks hurriedly along a crowded sidewalk, his head bent, staring at the ground, muttering loudly. His camera and a huge lens hang from his neck by a shoulder strap.

BOLT

... though I walk through the  
valley of the shadow of death --  
ohhm -- ohhm -- hare Krishna,  
Krishna, Krishna. Hare,  
hare --I'm a little teapot,  
short and stout. Here is my  
handle and here is my spout.

He giggles, rolls his eyes, then stops suddenly, takes on a serious demeanor, whips up his camera and clicks off a few photos of who knows what -- click, whir, click, whir, click .... He strides on finally and comes to a photo-processing shop on a corner.

He ducks inside just as WORKMAN 1 and WORKMAN 2 from the Subcontinent shuffle up carrying a signpost with a sign, the face of which is turned away, out of sight.

WORKMAN 1

(points)  
He say put it here.

WORKMAN 2

(bobbing his head from side  
to side)  
No, yah!

He points across the busy street.

WORKMAN 2 (CONT'D)

He say other side, yah. Next to  
bus stop, no.

The first workman yawns, scratches his ass. The second workman yawns, scratches *his* ass. They both look around.

WORKMAN 1

(insistently)  
He say here!

WORKMAN 2

(plaintively)  
No, yah!

INT. PHOTO PROCESSING SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Bolt stands at the front of a line of customers, sifting through some photos. A couple of other customers -- an enormous bearded BEDOUIN in traditional dress, a ceremonial sword at his side, and a MAN IN A TURBAN wait impatiently.

An INDIAN CLERK smiles vacantly at Bolt from behind the counter, trying to dispatch him as quickly and as effortlessly as possible.

BOLT  
These are not my photos.

His face begins to twitch slightly. The clerk glances at the photos.

INDIAN CLERK  
Oh, yes sarh. You photos.

Other customers come into the shop, get in line.

BOLT  
Then ... who is this?

He shows the clerk a photo of a fat, smiling Arab man in traditional dress sitting beside a fire with a white Nissan truck behind him, somewhere in the desert. The man is smoking a hooka.

INDIAN CLERK  
(shrugs)  
Maybe you father?

Bolt face twitches some more.

BOLT  
My fath-- You think *this* is my father?

INDIAN CLERK  
(smiling pleasantly)  
Maybe you mother?

BOLT  
What?

INDIAN CLERK  
(motions to the next customer)  
Next, please.

The bedouin gives Bolt a little shove on the back.

(CONTINUED)

BEDOUIN  
(American accent)  
Hey, you think you own this  
place?

Now the man in the turban pipes up.

TURBAN MAN  
Yes, yes. You go now!

Other customers pipe in. Bolt looks nervously about, beats a hasty retreat from the photo shop.

The Indian clerk bobs his head from side to side, tuts a bit.

INDIAN CLERK  
Very pushy man!

EXT. A MAIN STREET - SHAHEET - CONTINUOUS

The two workmen are finishing their discussion about the sign.

WORKMAN 1  
OK, OK, we put it here! You bring  
shovel?

Workman 2 shakes his head.

WORKMAN 2  
You bring cement?

Workman 1 shakes his head. They stare at one another for a moment, scratch their heads, their butts, yawn. They begin to look around. Workman 2 looks up at the sky.

WORKMAN 2  
Noon prayer in 5 minutes. Then  
tea time.

WORKMAN 1  
(brightening)  
Then nap. We come back after  
evening prayer.

He starts to pick up the sign.

WORKMAN 2  
No, yah. Sign heavy. Leave here,  
yah.

WORKMAN 1  
Here on street?

The second nods at the wall of the photo-ship building. The first shrugs, helps lean the big metal sign against the side of the photo shop.

Then they head up the street, just as Bolt scurries from the shop, muttering loudly to himself, face twitching.

BOLT

My Mother? Hah! -- Full of Grace,  
pray for us sinners now and --  
Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna --  
There was a little girl who had a  
little curl right in the middle  
of her forehead--

He cackles, jumps back suddenly, dodging a crack on the sidewalk, points at the sidewalk.

BOLT (CONT'D)

Hah! Step on a crack, break your  
mummy's back!

He bumps into the signpost, sending it toppling, slamming him to the ground and slashing a gash on his face as it falls: Boom! Bolt ends up face down on the sidewalk, the sign on top of him.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - A MINUTE OR TWO LATER

A bloodied Bolt wakes up, looks about him, dazed. He turns over on his back.

A bevy of chattering Arabs and workers from the Subcontinent stare down into his face.

He pushes himself up sits, shakes his head groggily and looks about, reads the placard -- next to him -- that knocked him cold: "Islam is the Final Solution: For More Information, Contact Shaheet Islamic Center 325567."

A silly grin spreads across his bloodied face and he begins to mumble.

BOLT

Yes, yes ... the ... final  
solution!

He searches about him, finds his camera, brings it up and photographs the sign -- click, whir, click, whir ....

INT. SHAHEET ISLAMIC CENTER - LATER THAT DAY

CLERIC 1 & 2 skeptically study Bolt, who is accompanied by Dr. Al Snafu. They speak to one another in Arabic and Cleric 2 shakes his head doubtfully.

CLERIC 1  
You do not think your ... *sudden*  
desire to become a Moslem is a  
bit ... *premature*, Mr. Bolt?

Bolt shakes his head, grins stupidly.

CLERIC 1 (CONT'D)  
I mean, you clearly know next to  
nothing about Islam and yet ....

He looks at Cleric 2 for help.

CLERIC 2  
Mr. Bolt, apostasy is not taken  
lightly in Islam. This is not  
Walmart. You cannot return what  
you have accepted. You do  
understand that, don't you?

Bolt rattles his head up and down, still grinning  
stupidly.

BOLT  
I want to become a Moslem,  
brothers. I want to become a  
Moslem today.

The Clerics look at one another, shake their heads again.

CLERIC 1  
(to Al Snafu)  
So, Al Snafu, you say he has  
received a sign?

AL SNAFU  
(nodding vigorously)  
Yes, brothers. In more luh, luh,  
luh, ways than one!

INT. TEACHERS' BUS - DAY

MAJEED, the bus driver, listens to his I-POD, occasionally loudly sings a verse of whatever Arabic song he happens to be listening to at the moment. He swings his prayer beads lazily back and forth while he steers the bus with his knees and smokes a cigarette. He is dressed in thobe and ghutra, wears midnight frames.

(CONTINUED)

Terry Bolt, now dressed to the hilt in traditional garb, sits on one side of the bus, furiously studying a copy of the Koran and mumbling to himself. Occasionally he stops, points his camera out the window at something, fires off a few shots.

A handful of other teachers are sprawled here and there. One lays face-up on a bench seat asleep, snoring loudly.

Just across the aisle, John and Russ sit on seats facing one another, leaning forward and talking. Russ lifts his foot, pushes the snoring teacher, who starts with a snort, opens his eyes, rolls over on one side and falls asleep again immediately.

Russ turns back to John.

RUSS

Like I was saying, I need  
somebody to run the books. You've  
got a background in accounting --

He stands, spits tobacco juice out the window, reaches for a binder, starts leafing through it, hands it to John.

RUSS (CONT'D)

Look at this. It's getting way  
complicated now. We're making 500  
liters a week -- double last  
month -- and still we can't keep  
up with demand. We'll quadruple  
production with this new  
expansion my guys are finishing  
up, and I already got  
distributors lined up, waiting  
for the hooch to roll off the  
line. People are thirsty here,  
son.

John shakes his head in disbelief.

JOHN

Look, I can't help but say that  
I'm impressed, but don't you  
realize this is a police state?  
Don't they execute people here  
for this kind of shit?

Russ closes the binder, waves his hand dismissively.

RUSS

(grins)  
Hell, only if you get caught.

John is too aghast to say anything.

RUSS (CONT'D)

Just the risk of doing business,  
son.

JOHN

You are insane.

He looks out the window, catches a glimpse of an unsmiling policeman with a machine gun cradled in his arms.

Russ taps him on the knee.

RUSS

You don't get it, do you son?

JOHN

What?

RUSS

*It, son.*

John shrugs his shoulders.

RUSS (CONT'D)

You ever jump out of an airplane?

JOHN

No. Can't say that I have.

RUSS

Son, I used to be a paratrooper. Hundred and First Airborne. You know, the first time you go to jump, your balls shrivel up so bad you think they're going to come out your nose. Lots of guys piss on themselves - No shit. Big tough guys standing there with piss running down their legs. Happens every fucking time.

He laughs. A beat. He watches John.

RUSS (CONT'D)

But I tell you something, son. You get up there at the door and all that goddamn wind is blowing on you and you can't hear shit for all the noise and you know you gotta jump 'cause your lieutenant is standing right there beside you to kick your ass out anyway if you don't, and you're standing there looking out at the abyss and you're goddamn sure you're gonna die and then  
....

(CONTINUED)

Russ looks out the window. In spite of himself, John has become intensely interested in the story.

JOHN  
And then what?

He looks back at John.

RUSS  
And then, it's fucking awesome. Unbelievable. You're falling through the blue, blue sky, and it's such a rush, son, you don't even care anymore if your parachute opens or not.

He leans in close to John.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
And that's what *it* is son. That's what *it* is. That's what you call being alive.

John is still skeptical, but obviously warming up to the idea.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
Hey, cowboy, it's a short-term deal. In and out. We got good cover. The regional police commander is one of my distributors. The Bangladeshis who run the stills are hard-working and ... eh ... mostly honest.

He grins.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
If we can just keep cranking out the hooch for six months -- just cut it off at six months, just make the pledge right now, right off the bat, six months and out... you're looking at a vacation that'll last, son.

He leans in closer.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
Just look at the numbers, college boy. You won't have to cook no books no more. I need a partner, partner, and half of what we make is yours ... if you'll just climb on board.



JOHN  
(obviously torn)  
Look, I've got a two-year,  
court-ordered vacation in  
beautiful Shaheet and then I'm  
going home. Thanks, but no  
thanks.

He looks out the window. A beat. Russ taps him on the  
knee.

RUSS  
(kindly)  
Going home to what, son?

John doesn't have an answer.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
How did your wife die?

JOHN  
How did you know?

Russ shrugs.

RUSS  
It's written all over your face.

A beat. John clears his throat.

JOHN  
(hesitantly)  
How do you ... protect the  
proceeds?

RUSS  
(grins)  
Well, some of the money's under  
my mattress and the rest I buried  
in a big jar in back of my  
apartment. You gotta a better  
idea?

JOHN  
(grins)  
You're kidding, I hope.

RUSS  
Yeah. It's in the bank downtown.  
What'll we do with it.

JOHN  
Simple. We make it disappear.  
There's no currency restrictions  
here, so we can just wire it to  
an offshore account. I know a guy  
in Vanuatu who sets up fake

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JOHN (cont'd)  
corporations. We can funnel the money there and it's as good as clean after that. We can access it with an ATM card whenever we need it. I can get us a dozen ATM cards in a dozen different names, a dozen different bank accounts. No one will ever be able to trace the money back to us.

John picks up the binder, begins to study it.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
How much cash are we talking about anyway?

INT. TEACHER'S BUS - ABOUT 10 MINUTES LATER

Majeed swings his prayer beads, smokes, drives.

Bolt stares out the window, a silly grin plastered on his face.

Russ cracks open a fresh pack of Redman.

John taps out something on his laptop.

JOHN  
(to Russ)  
Twenty-six weeks at \$50k per week, divided by two --

He looks at Russ in surprise.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Why ... that's \$650,000 a piece.

He thinks about it for a minute.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
(absently)  
... of course, you have to deduct for taxes and social security  
....

Russ chortles, guffaws, nearly swallows his chaw. He slaps John the back, smiling.

RUSS  
Spoken like a true accountant.  
Son, you gotta quit thinking like that!

John gives Russ a sheepish grin.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

Guess I wasn't think--

Suddenly, Majeed lays on the horn as a motorcycle cuts him off. He veers left, then right, then left again, losing control as he cuts over the median into oncoming traffic. A Nissan pickup lurches out of the way, A Lexus runs off the road into the desert, a truck load of goats skids past, the goats bleating and baaing in terror. Suddenly a big stretch limo is hurtling in their direction.

At the last second, Majeed jerks the wheel violently to the right, just barely misses the limo.

EXT. SHAHEET HIGHWAY - DAY

The bus teeters on two wheels on its right side, slows, then plops onto its side in a cloud of dust: Boom!

The limo skids an angle, the driver over-corrects and the car slams into a date tree in the median: CRASH!

INT. TEACHER'S BUS - CONTINUOUS

All the teachers seem to be stunned, but otherwise OK. Bolt, his face wedged against the side of the bus, screams.

BOLT

Aggggggggh!

Majeed sits on a window of the bus, a cigarette dangling from his lips, his midnight frames cocked at an odd angle, a stunned expression on his face.

John pushes one of the teachers off his face, sits up, looks around to see Russ sitting near an open bus window.

JOHN

You OK?

RUSS

(grins)

Whoa!

He clears his throat.

RUSS (CONT'D)

I think I swallowed my Redman.

INT. STRETCH LIMO - CONTINUOUS

Ahmed, a trickle of blood running from one nostril, cries like a little girl.

Beside him, Princess Teekra painfully pulls herself from the floorboard. Her abaya is torn across the shoulder. Her veil dangles from her face.

Up front, the driver-side airbag deflates, releasing the unhurt DRIVER from its hold.

DRIVER  
(to his passengers)  
I OK. You OK?

Teekra nods, but seems a bit dazed.

AHMED  
(holding his nose)  
Aggggggggggh!

INT. TEACHERS' BUS - CONTINUOUS

Bolt has gone from screaming to moaning. Majeed tries to stand unsteadily, picks up his I-POD lying on the roof of the bus. The teachers begin to stir, look about.

Bolt begins to search frantically about for his Koran.

JOHN  
(holding it up)  
You looking for this?

Bolt snatches it away, retreats into a corner of the bus, face twitching wildly.

BOLT  
(hisses)  
Infidel.

JOHN  
Hey, no problem, you're welcome  
... Psycho.

John finds his laptop, puts it in the satchel and drapes it over his shoulder as Russ pulls himself up through a window for a look outside. Then he lowers himself back down.

RUSS  
(to John)  
C'mon, son, we better go help  
those people out there.

EXT. SHAHEET HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

John wiggles out a window, jumps down from the bus. He puts his laptop on the ground near a date tree. Russ waits for him and together they trot to the limo, which is lying half turned on its side at the base of a tree, the front collapsed.

Russ opens the driver's door. The driver climbs out.

DRIVER

No problem, no problem. I OK.

He helps the driver out.

Simultaneously, John opens the passenger door, where he is greeted by the bloodied, hysterical face of Ahmed.

AHMED

Aggggh! Blease save me! Blease save me!

JOHN

Whoa!

He extends a hand, pulls Ahmed from the car with the help of Russ, who guides the prince to safety.

RUSS

Easy does it there, easy does it.

He studies Ahmed.

RUSS (CONT'D)

Say ... aren't you the new prince of Shaheet?

Ahmed wails hysterically.

AHMED

(dispondent)

I Ahmed, Brince of Shaheet --  
Brince of Shaheet -- Brince of  
Shaheet ....

He weeps on Russ' shoulder. Russ helps him to sit next to a nearby date tree. He looks at him askance as he bawls, unsure what to do. Finally, he begins to pat Ahmed awkwardly on the shoulder like a child.

RUSS

(soothingly)

There, there, now ... it'll be  
all right ....

He hands Ahmed his handkerchief.

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

John sticks his head inside the limo, finds himself abruptly face to face with Teekra, who has pulled away her tattered veil.

Definitely a *coup de foudre*, or at least intense lust, passes between them. Both are too surprised to say anything, unable to do much more than just stare into each other eyes. John swallows hard.

EXT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

The front part of the limo bursts into flames.

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

John and Teekra are still frozen there face to face, transfixed. They stay this way for a long moment while the front of the car blazes.

Finally Teekra clears her throat.

TEEKRA

The ... uh ... car's on fire.

JOHN

Ummm....

They look at each other some more.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(dreamily)

Maybe ... we should get out?

Teekra nods, tries to move.

TEEKRA

My foot is stuck.

She pulls her foot, but is unable to free it.

Something explodes at the front of the car and a big crack appears in the window.

JOHN

(serious)

I'd better get you out of here.

TEEKRA

Yes, I think you'd better.

He reaches inside, begins feeling his way down her leg to her foot.

EXT. SHAHEET HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Russ sees the explosion at the front of the car, starts over to help John, but Ahmed clings to his leg with both arms, stopping him.

AHMED

Nooooo! Nooooo! Ahmed scraared!  
Blease, no leave me!

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

Smoke is filling the limo and the front of the car is now blazing. John, coughs, yanks frantically at the Princess' leg, which is wedged between the cushion and the door.

One more pull and her foot slips out of her shoe and she is free. The jolt throws him off balance and onto Teekra, his head cushioned softly between her firm, ripe breasts. Her abaya -- and dress -- are now practically up around her waist.

She looks down at him, smiles.

The fire crackles.

JOHN

My god, it's hot in here.

TEEKRA

Yes, it is.

Teekra takes his face in her hands and gives him a passionate kiss.

They look into each others eyes.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

And now ... we'd better get the  
fuck out of here.

John nods, pulls her from the car by her hand and they flee the limo.

EXT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

The limo explodes as John and Teekra run hand-in-hand to Russ and Ahmed by the date tree.

EXT. NEAR THE DATE TREE - CONTINUOUS

John and Teekra stand hand in hand, watching the limo burn nearby while Russ attends to Ahmed, who is oblivious to John and Teekra and still hysterical.

Teekra removes her hand gently from John's grasp. They look into each others eyes and she smiles, turns to deal with Ahmed.

John turns back, watches the limo burn.

EXT. SHAHEET HIGHWAY - AN HOUR LATER

A couple of dozen policemen swarm the site, babbling in Arabic into walkie-talkies, strutting about, posturing. No one seems to be in charge or actually doing anything constructive.

The limo is now a smoldering ruin. A fire truck stands nearby. Firemen put away some hoses.

About 20 or so workers from the Subcontinent struggle with the overturned bus, trying to push it back up onto its wheels. One last hard push and BOOM! They succeed.

Bolt stands to one side, ignoring the laboring men, taking seemingly random shots of something on the other side of the highway that only he can see: click, whir, click, whir.

Ahmed, sporting a ridiculously large bandage on his nose, sits in the back of a police car with Teekra. He gestures dramatically to a police officer who takes notes and seems totally confused as he listens to the prince. Ahmed gingerly touches his nose, begins to cry afresh.

Teekra's attention is elsewhere. She watches John as he and Russ finish giving their statement to a POLICE OFFICER. The officer waves them away and the two head to the bus. On the way, John turns, looks back at Teekra. He starts to wave, thinks better of it, turns back and gets on the bus. Bolt and the other teachers follow suit.

Except for being a bit battered, the bus seems fine. Majeed starts the bus and it pulls away, crosses the median and is soon far away.

Teekra watches it leave, gets out of the car suddenly, approaches the police officer with whom John and Russ were speaking.

The police officer stiffens nervously as Teekra approaches. She gives him an imperious look, waits. He nods with respect and obvious fear.

(CONTINUED)



POLICE OFFICER  
Your highness?

TEEKRA  
(coldly)  
Those men with whom you were  
speaking, did you take their  
statements?

POLICE OFFICER  
Yes, of course, your highness.

She holds out her hand.

TEEKRA  
Give me your reports.

Surprised, he hesitates, hands her the reports  
reluctantly.

POLICE OFFICER  
May I ... ask why, your highness?

Teekra takes the reports, turns, begins to walk away.

TEEKRA  
(without looking back)  
No, you may not.

INT. JOHN'S HOME - AFTERNOON

Furnishings are basic: A sheet covers the living room  
window. There's a simple desk with a chair, a small TV, a  
kitchen area with a small frig and a stove.

John lies on a single bed, holding his wedding band in one  
hand, studying it. There's a knock on the door and he gets  
up, puts his ring back on.

It's Russ.

RUSS  
Ready for the tour of the Russ  
McDare Distillery?

JOHN  
Sure, just let me get my shoes.  
C'mon in.

Russ walks in, shuts the door.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Wanna beer?

(CONTINUED)

RUSS  
Where'd you get beer?

JOHN  
Non-alcoholic.

Russ laughs.

John pulls on his shoes while Russ ambles over to the frig, pulls out, opens a non-alcoholic beer. He ambles back, watches John fiddling with his wedding ring.

RUSS  
So ... how did your wife die?

John looks up. A beat.

JOHN  
Plane crash.

Russ seems taken aback, doesn't immediately respond.

RUSS  
(stumbling)  
Man ... that ... that's rough.

He sets the beer down on the small table, is at a loss for words for once.

JOHN  
(looks at the floor)  
She was on a business trip in the Midwest. Small commuter plane. Went down in a storm trying to land. Pilot couldn't see the runway, hit some powerlines coming in. He was flying too low.

A beat.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
FBI dropped by to arrest me the day after the funeral.

An awkward silence follows.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
(looks back up at Russ)  
Let's go see this facility of yours.

INT. RUSS' OLD RANGE ROVER - 30 MINUTES LATER

The Rover bounces along a vague desert trace, Russ at wheel, John in the passenger seat.

As they top a rise, they're suddenly overlooking a ramshackle collection of maybe 100 tin shacks clustered in the desert between a pocket of towering rock mountains.

They stop and take it in for a minute.

RUSS

There you go ... Little Bangladesh.

JOHN

My god.

Russ eases the Rover toward the community.

JOHN (CONT'D)

How in the hell did this get here?

RUSS

This is a planned community for foreign laborers from the Subcontinent, son. You should see the brochures for the place -- tree-shaded houses, paved streets, sidewalks, green grass in the yards ... hell, one guy showed me a brochure they gave him that showed a family sitting next to a swimming pool.

Russ laughs, shakes his head. They pass an appalling collection of shacks placed randomly throughout the compound. Here and there a mound of garbage rots in the bright sunshine, while feral cats paw through the refuse.

They drive slowly through the compound and Russ waves at several people along the way.

A Bangladeshi man emerges from an outhouse, picking his way around pools of raw sewage. He waves at Russ, smiles happily.

Russ points at a group of women queued up for water at a faucet next to the outhouse.

RUSS

That's the only fresh water source for the whole compound.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

For the whole place?

RUSS

Yep. Except for the pipes I paid to have run in at our facility.

He drives on, points out a freshly dug trench.

RUSS

We're laying a pipe here for water. When we're finished, it'll give them about 20 freshwater spigots around the village. We're also setting up some proper latrines on the edge of Little Bangladesh.

John nods.

JOHN

You mean, you're paying for them?

RUSS

Yep, I guess that's what I mean.

JOHN

A cowboy with a heart of gold, huh?

Russ smirks.

RUSS

Well ... least I could do for them, son. They're good people.

He looks John in the eyes briefly.

RUSS (CONT'D)

Could have just as easily been you or me living here, son. Just fate ... that's all.

At the edge of the community, they pull up to a long, low concrete-block building roofed with corrugated steel. Steam pours from a couple of crude smokestacks on one end. They get out of the vehicle.

John looks about nervously.

JOHN

What about the cops?

RUSS

I told you, son, the regional police commander is one of my distributors. By the way, this is

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RUSS (cont'd)  
a lamp oil production plant, if  
any anyone asks.

Russ nods at the back of the building.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
I've got a crew coming out  
tomorrow to tear the ass-end out  
of the building. We're going to  
put in three newer, bigger  
stills. In a week, we'll be able  
to double production.

John shakes his head in disbelief. Russ reaches over into  
a cardboard box on the dock and takes out a pint bottle of  
liquor. He opens the top, smells it, winks, passes it to  
John.

JOHN  
(nervously)  
This is the most insane thing  
that I have ever done in my life.

John takes a shot passes it back to Russ.

RUSS  
Take a walk on the wild side,  
son. Trust me.

He grins, takes a big shot of whiskey.

EXT. LITTLE BANGLADESH - DUSK

Night is settling over the shantytown as the taillights of  
the Rover -- it's chassis loaded down with hooch  
-- recede into the distance, bouncing along a two-lane  
track in the desert.

EXT. TWO TRACK ROAD - NIGHT

In a rocky ravine along the isolated road, a shiny new  
Mercedes-Benz SUV sits straddling the two-track lane,  
blocking it, its parking lights on.

A couple of beefy thugs - ABDULLAH and AKBAR - stand  
sentry beside the vehicle, sporting sunglasses with  
midnight frames and wearing expensive suits.

Ricci, nattily dressed in a nifty outfit, perhaps from a  
recent J. Crew Catalog, emerges from the driver's seat of  
the vehicle, scans the horizon, waits.

Emanating from the car as he opens the door is a  
Carpenter's song, "Sing a Song/"

(CONTINUED)

CARPENTERS (V.O)  
(singing)  
- sing of good things, not bad,  
sing of happy, not sad -

He closes the door.

A pair of headlights tops a nearby rise. It's Russ' Rover.

INT. LAND CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Russ slows up as his headlights play across the roadblock in front of him.

John glances over at him.

RUSS  
Well, well ... that took even  
less time than I thought it  
would.

JOHN  
(concerned)  
Who is it?

RUSS  
(winks)  
Who do you think, son?

John shakes his head. Russ grins.

He drives on, getting closer and closer - damn it, looks as if he is going to ram into them.

Abdullah and Akbar step move out of the way. Ricci's eyes grow wide with alarm, but he freezes with fear in front of the Mercedes. At the last second, Russ slams on the brakes, brings the old Rover to a stop just inches from Ricci's kneecaps.

Ricci swallows hard, glares at Russ, fights to regain his composure, brushes the dust off his trousers.

Abdullah and Akbar take up positions on opposite sides of the Rover. They draw pistols from shoulder harnesses, point them toward Russ and John.

INT. LAND CRUSIER - CONTINUOUS

John looks worried, but Russ is grinning, seemingly enjoying himself.

Out of the windshield, Ricci waits for his thugs to settle into place, then starts slowly toward Russ' side of the Rover.

(CONTINUED)

Russ gives John a friendly pat on the shoulder.

RUSS

You let me handle this, son. You look like you're about to shit on yourself.

JOHN

(nervously)

Like what are you going to say? Look, we're here at the edge of the Nafud desert with a load of moonshine in the back, facing what looks like a summary execution.

RUSS

Son, if you go on thinking like that, you'll die a thousand times before you finally die. Oh, they're swell enough guys. See the nice suits?

Ricci arrives at Russ's door.

RICCI

(dry)

That was some cute driving.

RUSS

(nods)

Thanks.

He waits. Ricci peers in at John, glances at the moonshine in the backseat.

RICCI

Out for a little drive, gentlemen? Strange, don't you think, two Americans driving alone in the An-Nafud on such a dark and lonely night.

RUSS

(shrugs)

What's so strange about it, Ricci Baoloni?

Ricci smiles.

RICCI

So, you know my name, Mr. McDare? And this must be Mr. Wates.

He looks at John, who smiles nervously. Ricci nods toward the moonshine.

(CONTINUED)

RICCI (CONT'D)  
Of course, this is what I came  
here to talk about.

Russ glances over his shoulder.

RUSS  
What the spare tire?

Ricci sighs.

RICCI  
No, Mr. McDare. Your "lamp oil."

Ricci makes little quotation marks in the air with this  
fingers.

RUSS  
You like lamp oil?

RICCI  
Oh, yes indeed. Especially on the  
rocks.

Russ leans out the window, looks up at Ricci.

RUSS  
Well, how 'bout this then? How  
'bout I give you a couple of  
quarts ... and you get on out of  
our way, go up there on those  
rocks over yonder and set your  
big fat ass on fire?

Russ grins, Ricci frowns, nods to Abdullah standing next  
to Russ. Abdullah cocks his pistol, puts the barrel  
against Russ' head.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
-- or not, I guess.

John chimes in nervously.

JOHN  
Hey, uh, look, Mister, I don't  
know who you are, but we don't  
want any trouble. He, uh, Russ  
here ... he talks like that to  
everybody....

Ricci smiles at John.

RICCI  
Such a polite young man. We could  
all learn from him.

He turns to Russ.



RICCI (CONT'D)

This is what we need, Mr. McDare.  
A more cooperative, pleasant  
attitude.

Russ nods in agreement, smiles at Ricci.

RUSS

Fuck you ... please.

INT. RICCI'S MERCEDES SUV - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ricci drives, Akbar beside him in the passenger seat. Squeezed into the back are John and Russ, their hands tied. Abdullah sits beside them with his pistol drawn. Ricci glances into the rear view mirror at his captives.

RICCI

A little music, gentlemen?

RUSS

Sure. You want me to play my  
banjo?

Ricci ignores the remark, tuns on his CD player and then begins to sing softly along with the Carpenters (V.O.).

RICCI

-- such a feelin's coming over  
me. There is wonder in most  
everything I see --

Russ shakes his head, glances over at Abdullah, who is cleaning his ear with the barrel of his pistol.

Abdullah grins at Russ.

RUSS

(kindly)  
Watch it, boy ... you'll waste a  
bullet if you're not careful.

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - RECEPTION AREA - 30 MINUTES LATER

Tacky and tasteless are the themes here. Heavy orange curtains are draped across windows. Gaudy green armchairs with gilded wooden armrests shaped into lions' paws line the walls.

A pretentious chandelier of cut glass hangs heavily from the ceiling. Ostentations persian carpets line the floors. Portraits of King Awad and King Anod smile down on the tawdry trappings.

(CONTINUED)

Despite the garishness and obvious expense of the surroundings, everything seems a bit dusty and rundown. Awad's picture is skewed and yellowed. The Persian carpets are somewhat worn and frayed. The chandelier has a few spiderwebs in it.

Menservants, retainers, and Ahmed's lazy relatives lounge about slovenly here and there. One or two of them indolently flip prayer beads back and forth. Others smoke cigarettes or sip tea. A television tuned to Hindi-MTV blares from one corner. The screen shows a scantily clad Indian girl in traditional, but rather skimpy, garb gyrating and singing.

The door opens and Akbar and Abdullah push Russ and John inside, leave. No one looks at them. They stand for a moment, taking in the tasteless atmosphere.

JOHN

Wow, this is like Graceland.

He crinkles his nose.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Smells like somebody had fava beans for lunch.

Russ eyes all the layabouts.

RICCI

Yeah, this is definitely a fava bean crowd, I'd say.

Ricci enters, sporting a fresh change of wardrobe (the guy's really a clothes horse): This time it's a palace casual, a brilliant blue thobe trimmed with gold thread. He spots Hassan, one of the layabouts, sitting with a cigarette dropping from his lips, a bare foot resting on a coffee table pitted with cigarette burns.

RICCI

Hassan! Foot off the table!

Hassan sneers, slowly moves his foot.

Ricci composes himself, turns to Russ and John.

RICCI (CONT'D)

(calm and reasonable)

Guys, let's start all over again. Let bygones be bygones, as they say.

RUSS

(cheerily)

Sure, fat boy. Let's be friends. No hard feelings.

(CONTINUED)

Ricci bristles, tries to stay cool. Out of the corner of his eye, he spies Hassan slowly putting his foot back on the table.

RICCI  
(angrily)  
Hassan! Foot off the table!

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - DINING HALL - A FEW MINUTES LATER

A water fountain shaped like a pineapple drools and wheezes a spittle of water as if it is clogged up, while a couple of ducks paddle languidly in a filthy basin below.

Nearby, stands a life-size copy of Rodin's "The Thinker," covered in dust. Someone has leaned a mop up against the side of the statue to dry.

Inside the dining hall, Prince Ahmed sits at the head of a ludicrously long and mostly empty mahogany table, Ricci on his right. Russ and John sit across from Ricci.

The table is decked with an overly ornate spread, flanked with tacky golden goblets and Liberace-esque candelabras. The dinnerware is gilded. Several boxes of Kleenex, serving as dinner napkins, are spread about the table.

Ahmed raises his glass of wine, smiles graciously.

AHMED  
Our Amirikan freends, we do the  
toast.

Ricci snatches up his goblet. Russ grins, nods, keeps eating, pays no attention to Ahmed's toast. John hesitates, then takes up his glass.

AHMED (CONT'D)  
Long live the freendsheeb and  
understanding our beeples!

Ahmed, John, Ricci drink. Russ keeps on eating.

AHMED (CONT'D)  
I like that you are poth  
peezenessmens and intellectuals.  
Staleen, I remember, was bery  
good freend with Armand Hammer.  
Heetler was also freend of  
intellectuals and peezenessmen.

Russ raises his glass.

RUSS  
(sarcastic)  
Hey, *sieg heil* to that, cowboy!

(CONTINUED)

Ahmed notices that Ricci is giving him a pained look.

AHMED

What? What I say? This Heetler  
was great man. Role model all  
beeples under obbressions.

A long, embarrassing silence falls over the room as Russ and John exchange a look. Finally, Ricci clears his throat.

RICCI

(confidentially, to Russ and  
John)

Uh, Prince Ahmed ... is ... very  
worldly, you know. He earned his  
Ph.D. in Modern European History  
at Yale. And he lived in the  
states for a number of years as a  
visiting scholar.

Russ winks at John.

RICCI

Visiting scholar, you say?

AHMED

Yes, yes, Ahmed was bisiting  
squalor at University Nevada Las  
Vegas!

Russ raises his glass.

RUSS

Well, viva Las Vegas!

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE AHMED'S PALACE - CONTINUOUS

A black stretch limo pulls up at the side entrance. Out steps a woman in black, covered in an elegant silk abaya and veil. Two guards snap to attention. One holds the door for her as she disappears inside the building.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Ricci has the floor. He raises his glass and nods to Ahmed first, then to Russ and John.

RICCI

We've arranged a little  
sabbatical for you two.

(CONTINUED)

John looks confused. Russ grins.

RUSS  
(Texas drawl)  
Well, it'n that nice?

CUT TO:

INT. DARK PALACE CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Small light fixtures spill pools of illumination into the corridor every few feet or so. Otherwise the hallway is dark, the walls indistinct and shadowy. The woman in black makes her way swiftly through the passage, her shrouded face intermittently falling from light into shadow and back into the light again. We hear the click of her heels echoing against the tile.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

RICCI  
(to Russ and John)  
It's really quite simple: We provide protection -- and the aircraft -- you provide the product and manage distribution.

CUT TO:

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - PRIVATE CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

The woman in black slips off her shoes, steps behind a screen for a second, then emerges as ... Princess Teekra in a skimpy lace bra and matching panties, black silk stockings and garters. She bends to adjust a garter on one of her stockings, then wraps herself in a robe, slips on a pair of shoes with stiletto heels, reaches for a remote and clicks open a big wall panel, which slides aside to reveal a bank of monitors, all showing different views of different parts of the palace.

She zeros in on the dining room, clicks some buttons and instantly only the dining room is showing on all the monitors. The men are continuing their conversation, audible via the monitors.

AHMED (ON MONITOR)  
(proudly, to Russ and John)  
So what you think brince Ahmed leettle bizness blan?

CUT BACK TO:

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Russ, John, Ricci and Ahmed continue.

RUSS  
(while eating)  
Small potatoes.

Ahmed looks hurt, offended, sits up straight.

AHMED  
Who you call small botatoes?

Russ continues as if Ahmed hadn't spoken.

RUSS  
(to Ahmed)  
There's no real money in  
moonshine, cowboy. It's high risk  
and short term and the return on  
the investment is minimal.

John looks quizzically at Russ -- What the hell is he up to? Russ presses on, grinning, eating, enjoying himself.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
You got a 747, don't ya? Hell,  
let's use it. Let's give folks  
what they really want. We'll  
import bonded. The real McCoy.  
Gentleman Jack, Crown Royal,  
Johnny Walker. I know a  
wholesaler in Jedadna who can  
supply us at rock bottom prices.  
We can fly our moonshine to  
Jedadna, sell in the local market  
and fly back with the real stuff  
to sell here -- simple.

John sees the vision, Ricci smells the money. Ahmed remains unconvinced.

AHMED  
(shakes head in disbelief)  
*That ... you blan?*

RUSS  
(winks)  
That's the short of it.

Ahmed flusters, points his finger at Russ.

AHMED  
I tell you *short* of it ... you  
*crazy*, Texas man. You want  
smuggle whiskey into Arapapia?  
Into *Arapapia*? Ahmed think you  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

AHMED (cont'd)  
walk in desert too long without  
you hat, cowpoy! You want Awad  
to chop off you deek? My deek?

Ricci holds up his hand.

RICCI  
Hold on a minute, Ahmed habibi.  
Let's think this through.

CUT TO:

INT. TEEKRA'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Teekra continues to watch the proceedings on the monitors.  
There's a tap at the door and she hits the mute button.  
She turns as her greying, distinguished servant, MOHAMMED,  
opens the door.

He glances at the screen and they exchange a  
conspiratorial look.

TEEKRA  
Everyone except he blond  
American.

Mohammed nods, turns, leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Ahmed, Ricci, Russ and John continue. Mohammed enters  
pushing a tea cart. He silently pours some tea for  
everyone into tiny crystal cups.

Ricci picks up his cup of tea, takes a swallow. Ahmed does  
the same, so do Russ and John. Everybody makes a little  
what-the-hell-is-this-shit sort of face, except John. They  
all keep on drinking the tea.

RICCI  
Look Ahmed, we've got diplomatic  
carte blanc on the plane. No one  
can search it, not in Arababia or  
anywhere else. We've got the  
connections in Abu Jeba to keep  
things quiet and, certainly, we  
can distribute name-brand spirits  
... no problemo.

Ahmed yawns shakes his head, unconvinced but faltering.  
Ricci yawns.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN  
(to Ahmed)  
Nothing gambled, nothing gained.

Ahmed looks back at him, bemused, but kind of sleepy too. He yawns again, smiles kindly.

AHMED  
Such a prave young poy. No gample, no gain. That sound inteelectual. Ubleefting. Naboleon say that?

Russ touches him on the arm. Ahmed looks at him.

RUSS  
Time to shit or get off the crapper ... Napoleon said that too.

Russ fights off a yawn.

JOHN  
Carpe diem!

Ahmed smiles dreamily.

AHMED  
Yes ... carpet diem.

He shudders, takes a cushion from his seat, hugs it close and lays his head on the table.

AHMED (CONT'D)  
Carpet diem ... sleaze the day. Put I very tired. I sleaze day tomorrow.

RICCI  
(tries to speak while yawning cavernously)  
It's getting late for sure, but Ahmed, there hasn't been a decent bottle of wine uncorked in this country since Awad clamped down after the war. People are tired of Awad ... and the religious police. They want ... change.

His head droops suddenly. He starts, shakes himself temporarily awake.

RICCI  
This is our chance to make friends, habibi. We can become powerful ... we ... can rule....

He yawns cavernously again.



JOHN  
Now you're talking!

RUSS  
(while yawning)  
You'd be a bitching royal couple!

JOHN  
There's room at the top for two!

Ahmed is so moved at the thought that his lower lip begins to quiver and a teardrop trickles down his cheek. He wipes it away, holds his hand out to Ricci.

AHMED  
You!

RICCI  
Habibi!

They fall into a clumsy, sleepy embrace. Within seconds, both are snoring as John and Russ look on.

Russ yawns mightily, stretches, stands, tries to focus on his watch. He staggers a bit, takes a pillow from a chair, goes over, sits on the floor.

RUSS  
Damn, son, what do they put in  
the wine in this restaurant?

He looks at John.

RUSS  
Tell that guy with the tea he  
ain't getting no tip from me.  
Damn!

Russ lays down on the floor, puts the pillow under his head, closes his eyes, is asleep in seconds. John looks about at his sleeping-beauty business partners, shakes his head, laughs.

The dining hall door opens and Mohammed walks in with Abdullah and Akbar.

MOHAMMED  
(nods at John)  
That one.

INT. TEEKRA'S CHAMBER - PALACE - MOMENTS LATER

Teekra turns towards the door as it opens. She sees John standing wedged between the beefy frames of Abdullah and Akbar. They give John a shove, he lurches into the room and they shut the door.

(CONTINUED)

She stands in her loose silk robe, hand on hip, coolly regarding him. He looks back uncertainly. She pours herself a bourbon.

TEEKRA

You know ... I'm seldom wrong  
about people.

JOHN

(nervous)  
Is that right?

She drinks, nods.

TEEKRA

(confidently)  
Yes, that's right.

She sets down her drink. Walks a little closer to him.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

On the outside ... you're hurt,  
confused, a bit shy ...  
ambitious, but not *quite* sure of  
yourself.

She walks slowly past him, runs her hand over his shoulders, inspecting him. John turns his head, watches her as she slides around him. She stops directly in front of him again, puts her hands on his chest, pats him softly.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

But inside ... *inside here* it's a  
different story.

She smiles, walks away, picks up her drink, turns back to him, takes a sip, swallows.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

*Inside* ... there is *fire*, John  
Wates.

She lights a cigarette, offers him one. He shakes his head. She smiles at him, puffs her cigarette. A beat.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

You saved my life.

JOHN

That's ... probably overstating  
it.

She puffs out a perfect smoke ring through full lips, which are accentuated by a glistening coat of ebony lipstick. She smoke wafts sensually between them in the dim light.

TEEKRA

Still, I feel indebted ... *deeply*  
indebted.

She shifts her weight from one heel to another, causing her robe to slip off her shoulders. She does nothing to pull it back up, just gazes at John with a smoldering look.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

Surely ...

She shifts again, this time letting the robe fall, uncovering full breasts, long, curvaceous legs and a narrow waste.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

... surely, there must be  
*something* you want.

John takes a step closer, hesitates.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

(sultry voice)

C'mon John ... show me that fire.

INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT - THE NEXT DAY

John makes some instant coffee. He picks up his wedding band off the counter, regards it for a moment, slips it on.

There's a knock on the door.

He goes over and opens it. It's Khalid.

JOHN

Well, this is a surprise. C'mon  
in.

Khalid comes in, stands in the living room area, looking about, unsure how to begin.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What's up?

KHALID

Al Snafu said you took a  
sabbatical. Said you were doing a  
research project.

JOHN

(chuckles)

Big Chief said that?

(CONTINUED)

KHALID

Yep.

He hesitates.

KHALID (CONT'D)

The Middle East is a place of many languages, John.

JOHN

So I hear.

KHALID

I speak many languages, John. Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Hebrew, Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Farsi, even some Pashto and Balochi ....

JOHN

(grins)

So, basically, you're asking to help me with my "research project."

He makes little quotation marks in the air with his fingers. Khalid nods.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You want a job with a convicted felon who's smuggling liquor illegally into Arababia?

Khalid nods.

KHALID

Yes, I do.

John takes a deep breath, regards Khalid for a moment.

JOHN

If we got caught, they will kill us. You do understand that, don't you.

KHALID

I need this John. You don't understand how it is here. I'm a shia in a sunni country. My parents are poor. I'm smart, I'm talented, but I'm shit here. I have no legitimate options.

John looks away.

(CONTINUED)

KHALID

Besides ... I like you. I want to help you.

John looks Khalid in the eyes. A beat. He grins.

JOHN

OK, kid, you're in.

INT. AHMED'S 747 - DAY

Russ and John sit across the aisle from each other. Khalid sits behind them. Boxes upon boxes of moonshine line the aisle behind them and the hooch is also stacked in the seats. Russ reaches back, takes a bottle from one of the boxes, opens it and pours himself a drink. He sits back in his chair, smiling and as relaxed as can be, sips from his drink.

John, on the other hand, is looking a bit pale. He clutches the seat armrests and stares straight ahead. Little beads of sweat have popped out on his forehead. Russ looks over at him, grins.

RUSS

Relax, son ... it's just a little plane ride.

John smiles nervously, says nothing.

The cockpit door opens and the PILOT enters, gesturing angrily at and apparently arguing with his co-pilot, who remains at the controls. John cranes his neck to see what the hell is going on. Russ ignores it all, keeps sipping from his drink.

The pilot shuts the door, turns to his passengers, puts on a smiling face, runs his fingers through his hair and composes himself. He speaks a few sentences in Arabic to Russ and John.

Khalid translates.

KHALID

He welcomes you aboard for the hour-long flight to Jedana and says he is at your service.

RUSS

(raises his glass)  
Thankyouverymuch!

Khalid then translates simultaneously for the pilot, who speaks at length.

KHALID

He says that rebels with the Party of Righteous Islam have recently deployed anti-aircraft missiles and flak guns along the approach to Jedana. Naturally, any Arababia royal aircraft would be a target. If there is any indication that we are coming under fire, he may have to take evasive action.

The pilot stops talking, smiles kindly, adds a remark.

KHALID (CONT'D)

He asks you to buckle your seatbelts.

The pilot nods in parting, disappears back into the cabin. Khalid looks at John, who looks at Russ, who shrugs. Khalid sits back down, begins thumbing through a magazine.

John buckles his seatbelt, tightly. Russ chuckles, sips his drink, shakes his head.

EXT. JEDANA AIRPORT - AN HOUR LATER

Ahmed's 747 makes a routine landing.

INT. TERMINAL BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Ominous military presence in the terminal, frowning soldiers, armed to the teeth, are standing about everywhere.

Russ, John and Khalid file past a CUSTOMS OFFICIAL, each of them showing an Arababia passport.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL

(Sceptically)

Diplomatic passports?

RUSS

Diplomatic mission, pardner.

The customs official raises an eyebrow.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL

(to Russ)

So, you are Arababian?

RUSS

Born and brung up there.

The customs official looks at Russ askance, shakes his head, begins to stamp the passports.

EXT. JEDANA AIRPORT - MOMENTS LATER

If there was a pronounced military presence inside, outside it's 10 times worse.

Soldiers man machine guns on sandbagged bunkers on approach roads. Others stand at strategic points with automatic weapons at the ready. Armoured personnel carriers and tanks sit off to the side of the approach roads. Nearby, there's a cluster of anti-aircraft guns.

Despite the ominous feel of the place, taxis stand at the ready in long lines waiting for passengers, travelers exit and enter the terminal in large numbers ... it's travel as usual for most people.

One or two taxi drivers move in for the kill when they see Russ, John and Khalid exit the terminal.

However, they quickly back off respectfully, when, out of the shadows, appears HAMO, a jolly, tall, angular Armenian man with a three-day growth of beard. With him is his driver, DAVID.

HAMO  
(smiling broadly)  
Russ McDare! It's true! You're  
still alive!

They embrace warmly.

RUSS  
Hamo, you old bastard!

Russ glances around at the military trappings.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
Boy, Jedana's changed a lot,  
hasn't it? More peaceful and laid  
back than it used to be.

HAMO  
(excited)  
Yes, yes, the new mayor has  
really cracked down on random  
violence. Car bombings are down  
45 percent and they rarely kidnap  
Westerners anymore.

RUSS  
Really?

HAMO  
(chatty)  
Yes, yes ... this year has been  
proclaimed the Year of Tourism in  
Jedana!

(CONTINUED)

John gulps, looks about nervously. Russ nods at John and Khalid.

RUSS

This is John, my partner and this is Khalid. I guess you could say he's our intern.

(to John and Khalid)

Whatever you want in Jedana ... Hamo's the man.

HAMO

You flatter me. How are you, gentlemen?

JOHN

(uncertain)

Fine.

KHALID

Very good, thanks.

Hamo nods to David.

DAVID

(nods)

Gentlemen.

They all shake hands. David and Hamo picks up their bags, walk over to a shiny new Mercedes limo. David pops the trunk with a key fob.

HAMO (CONT'D)

(excited)

I just got a new car today? Isn't it cool?

INT. HAMO'S MERCEDES - MOMENTS LATER

Hamo pours drinks for everyone as his driver cruises the narrow, crowded streets of Jedana.

HAMO

(raises his glass)

To peace and prosperity.

They all drink. Suddenly the limo lurches to a stop as another car cuts it off. Within seconds, Hamo and David produce Uzis from secret panels in the car, hunker down for a fight, but they relax somewhat when a person exits the vehicle in front with his hands in the air, walks slowly and cautiously toward their vehicle.

It's Teekra's Mohammed!

(CONTINUED)



RUSS  
(grins)  
Well, well, well ... it's tea  
time!

He winks at John. Mohammed comes around to John's side of the limo, pecks on the window. John pushes the button that slides the window open.

MOHAMMED  
(nods respectfully to Hamo)  
A thousand pardons, Mr.  
Baghdassarian.  
(he turns to John)  
She ask for you to come, Mr.  
John.

John glances awkwardly about the limo, his big secret suddenly exposed ... though apparently, it's not such a big secret after all.

RUSS  
(kindly)  
You go ahead, son. Me and Khalid  
can handle things on this end.

John thinks about it. Mohammed opens the door for him and he gets out.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
Just remember, Romeo, we leave  
tomorrow night on the redeye to  
Shaheet. Don't be late.

EXT. MOONLIT BEACH - SOMEWHERE OUTSIDE JEDANA - NIGHT

A villa sits in the moonlight a hundred yards inland and up a hill from the surf, which rhythmically pounds the white sand.

INT. VILLA - BEDROOM - NIGHT

John rhythmically pounds Teekra, who has her legs wrapped around him. The moonlight streams in through a window, we hear the crashing waves outside.

INT. VILLA - BEDROOM - MORNING

John wakes up, finds himself alone in bed, birdsong wafting through the window, a breeze rustles the curtains.

(CONTINUED)

He pulls on his pants, goes to the window, checks out the view. A fountain gurgles quietly in the middle of a shaded courtyard where orange trees blossom and flowers bloom. Beyond this, a low stone wall and beyond that, the bluff drops dramatically to the blue sea.

John breathes deeply.

INT. VILLA - LIVING ROOM

John wanders in, dressed now. He strolls about, examining the room, which is full of art objects that suggest a quiet sophistication. Here a Japanese woodblock print, there a sandstone sculpture or an oil painting, everything tasteful, orderly and serene.

He stops to study a photograph of a Teekra as a teen-ager with an older woman. He touches the photo, then jumps with a start as Mohammed clears his throat behind him. He turns to face Mohammed.

MOHAMMED

(smiling kindly)

I'm sorry, Mr. John. I hope I didn't startle you.

JOHN

That's OK.

MOHAMMED

(nodding at the photo)

Princess Teekra and her mother.

JOHN

Where is her mother now?

MOHAMMED

Dead these many years now. Her mother was her best friend, her confidant. She was devastated when she passed on. It happened very suddenly, you know. The princess ... was not prepared.

He lets that information sink in, studies John's face.

MOHAMMED

Princess Teekra is all alone now.

EXT. VILLA - GARDEN - DAY

John and Teekra sit across the breakfast table from each other as Mohammed pours coffee before quietly retiring.

She rubs her foot on his leg under the table, seems to be considering what to say.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

What?

TEEKRA

Why do you still wear your  
wedding ring, John?

John stammers. She can see that she has made him feel  
uncomfortable. She takes his hand.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry ... it's just that--

JOHN

-- so, you know everything about  
me then?

TEEKRA

I asked around ... yes. Someone  
in my position has to be careful.

A beat.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

Believe it or not, I've never  
done anything like this before  
... it just felt right with you.

A beat. He takes a deep breath.

JOHN

(looking at the table)

I never knew I loved her ...  
until she died. I didn't even  
know what love meant. All I  
thought about was the money, and  
I was making a fortune --  
stealing a fortune, working 16  
hours a day or more ... stealing  
money. After they arrested me, I  
suddenly had lots of time to look  
at things. I didn't like what I  
saw.

She squeezes his hand.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(looks up at her)

But you can't go back, can you?

She shakes her head. He drinks his coffee. Teekra takes  
his free hand, kisses it.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And you ... why are you married  
to a gay man?

Teekra smiles.

(CONTINUED)

TEEKRA

Ouch!

JOHN

You did know he's gay, didn't you?

She laughs.

TEEKRA

(in disbelief)

John!

She shakes her head.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

OK, let's put it all out on the table. It's a political marriage, John. Good for him, good for me. I do what I want, he does what he wants. We have to make our peace with this world we live in. That's the way things are here.

She leans in close to him.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

(confidentially)

Someday ... someday soon, Ahmed is going to be king.

John chortles. She slaps him on the arm.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

It's true! And you're helping him.

She sits back in her chair, crosses her arms.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

And what about Russ? Does he have things well in hand?

JOHN

I think so.

EXT. JEDANA - WAREHOUSE ON THE EDGE OF THE CITY - ABOUT THE SAME TIME

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Russ, Hamo, Khalid and David dive for cover as a blast of machine gun fire tears up the pavement near Hamo's new Mercedes.

(CONTINUED)

A guard on top of the warehouse shouts, reloads his weapon to fire again. A half dozen other armed guards scurry from the warehouse as Hamo begins shouting frantically in Arabic to them from behind his limousine.

The ranks part for the MAIN GUARD, a muscular swarthy man with a bandanna on his head, dressed in military fatigues and covered in tattoos. He smiles sheepishly through broken teeth as Hamo cautiously appears from behind the limo.

MAIN GUARD  
(scratches his scalp)  
Sorry, boss. I am forget new car.

Russ, Khalid and David cautiously stand.

Russ smiles at Khalid, who is still shaking from the experience.

RUSS  
That's what you call *security*,  
son.

INT. WAREHOUSE - ABOUT AN HOUR LATER

All is bustle and activity. Cases of liquor are stacked to the ceiling along rows that recede into the distance. Hamo sits at a corner desk in front of an oscillating fan that rustles papers, a calendar on the wall, etc., as it swings back and forth. Russ and Khalid sit opposite him.

Nearby, forklifts whiz past laden with boxes marked Crown Royal, Jack Daniels, Absolut, Stolli, Beefeater, etc. Workers pull cases from shelves, rearrange stacks of boxes and load crates onto forklifts.

Far across the warehouse, a Crew moves shipments from a loading dock onto waiting trucks. Khalid sits with a laptop, typing stuff into a spread sheet.

KHALID  
Twenty-two hundred cases per  
flight at \$36 per case,  
wholesale. Minus the allowance  
for moonshine that we sell here  
pushes the price per bottle down  
to ... less than three dollars  
US. We'll sell each bottle in  
Arababia for 60 bucks, *minimum*.

He looks up from his computer.

KHALID  
Fuck!

Russ laughs, gives Khalid a friendly slap on the back.

(CONTINUED)

Hamo holds out his hand, casually snags a bottle of single-malt scotch as a forklift whizzes by. He offers it to Russ, who grins, spits out his wad of chewing tobacco in a trashcan.

RUSS  
Don't mind if I do.

He takes the bottle, opens it as Hamo produces three glasses. Russ pours a generous shot into each glass and passes them about. Bottoms up!

Russ smiles at Hamo, who smiles at Khalid, who smiles at Russ.

RUSS  
Prohibition just ended in the  
Magic Kingdom, boys!

They chink glasses as the opening drum licks to the ZZ TOP Song, "Tube Snake Boogie," kick in. They continue to drink as the song plays.

ZZ TOP (V.O.)  
I got a girl she lives cross  
town, she's the one that really  
gets down. When she boogie, she  
do the tube snake boogie. Well  
now boogie little baby, boogie  
woogie all night long

INT. VILLA - BEDROOM - ABOUT THE SAME TIME

ZZ TOP continues to play in the background. A breeze rustles the curtains as Teekra and John make love.

ZZ TOP (V.O.)  
I got a girl she lives on the  
block, she kinda funky with her  
pink and black socks. She likes  
to boogie, she do the tube snake  
boogie. Well now boogie woogie  
baby, boogie woogie all night  
long.

INT. SHAHEET PALACE - AHMED'S BEDROOM - ABOUT THE SAME  
TIME

The music fades as the portrait of Napoleon over the mantel looks down on Ahmed and Ricci grunting and straining under the covers.

AHMED  
Carpet diem! Carpet -  
diiiiiii-eeeeem!

(CONTINUED)

RICCI  
Arrrrrrrrrrrgggggghhhhhh!

The music rises again as the camera pulls in tighter on Napoleon's visage.

ZZ TOP (V.O.)  
I got a girl, she lives on the  
hill. She won't do it but her  
sister will, when she boogie, she  
do the tube snake boogie. Well  
now boogie little baby, boogie  
woogie all night long. Blow your  
top, blow your top, blow your  
top.

Music and scene fade.

EXT. SHAHEET - DAY

An annoying nasal voice gives the call to noon prayer just as Terry Bolt - decked out in traditional garb - approaches a mosque, snapping pictures as he goes - click, whir, click, whir ....

CLERIC 3, leaving the mosque, spies him, begins waving his hands frantically and shouting angrily in Arabic to Bolt. The Cleric snatches Bolt's camera, opens the back, unspools the film and throws it on the ground. He switches from Arabic to English.

CLERIC 3  
No you stupid photos!

BOLT  
But-but-but-but ....

The man cocks his arm, hurls Bolt's camera in a mighty arc. It crashes back to earth - thunk, shatter, tinkle - just as a passing truck runs over it, smashing it like a bug - crunch!

INT. PHOTO SHOP - SHAHEET - DAY

Bolt tentatively looks through a big pile of cameras the Indian Clerk from the previous scene has strewn on the counter in front of him.

Again, a small line of customers has formed behind him.

INDIAN CLERK  
Please you hurry, sarh. Other  
customers, she is waiting.

He bobs his head a bit from side to side for emphasis.

(CONTINUED)

BOLT

But - I don't know much about  
these models. And some seem ...  
well, rather used.

He picks up a dented and scarred 35mm.

The Indian Clerk picks up a small camera.

INDIAN CLERK

(helpfully)

Simple, light and versatile?

He picks up another camera with a ridiculously enormous  
telephoto lens.

INDIAN CLERK (CONT'D)

Big and brawny?

Bolt's eyes get big with excitement.

INT. AHMED'S 747 - NIGHT

Russ, John and Khalid are in flight. Lined up in the cabin  
are stacks of boxes of commercial booze. The flight is a  
little bumpy and the bottles jingle as they pass through  
turbulence.

Khalid reads a magazine, while Russ chews a chaw and  
daydreams, a pleasant smile on his face, a glass of  
bourbon in his hand. John, ashen and terrified, clutches  
his armrests.

The pilot's voice crackles over the PA system. Khalid  
listens, translates.

KHALID

He says he thinks he saw some  
tracer bullets whiz by outside,  
so he is going to change course  
and fly down to Abu Jeba along  
the sea coast.

Khalid looks at Russ. Russ nods, goes back to his drink  
and his daydreams. Khalid shrugs, starts reading his  
magazine again. John turns a whiter shade of pale, finds  
the emergency flotation device under his seat and puts it  
on the seat next to him, rebuckles, tightens his seatbelt.

EXT. PRIVATE AIRPORT - ABU JEBA - NIGHT

The 747 touches down without incident.



EXT. PRIVATE AIRPORT - ABU JEBA - NIGHT

Workers from the subcontinent scurry in and out of the cabin and cargo hold of the jet, carrying boxes of liquor. They load the contraband onto waiting trucks.

John counts the loot as it comes down, logging it onto his computer. Russ, Ricci, Khalid stand nearby.

RICCI

These workers belong to Prince Omar. He's a big wheel in Arababia. He's agreed to help with distribution.

John looks up.

JOHN

What do you mean, they *belong* to Prince Omar?

Ricci ignores him. Russ pipes up.

RUSS

What do we need him for?

RICCI

(grins)

Influence. We involve the right players, we get influence. In Arababia, money's only important in terms of whose ass you're wiping with it.

RUSS

(shakes his head)

Damn, boy ... that's poetic.

EXT. A HIGHWAY NEAR ABU JEBA - NIGHT

A convoy of trucks roars down the highway. We hear the opening licks of the ZZ TOP song, "La Grange."

ZZ TOP (V.O.)

Rumours spreadin' 'round in that  
Texas town 'bout that shack  
outside La Grange ....

INT. LEAD TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

"La Grange" continues to play in the background.

Ricci sits beside his driver, glances back at the long row of trucks following the lead truck, smiles.

EXT. EXPRESSWAY - MOMENTS LATER

"La Grange" continues to play.

The trucks rumble on through the suburban outskirts of Abu Jeba, heading toward the faraway city with it's plethora of irrigated date palms, ostentatious skyline, it's tacky, marble festooned buildings.

Western franchises are everywhere: McDonalds, a Walmart Supercenter with a mosque next to it, a Safeway, a Burger King and on and on it goes. Beyond the strip malls and burger joints, a vast and barren desert stretches into the night.

They cut off the main highway onto a side road in the desert. As the trucks top a rise on the mostly deserted road, a military checkpoint comes into view.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

"La Grange" fades out.

Russ drives with Khalid and John beside him. They peer out at the approaching checkpoint and Russ begins to slow down like the other trucks. Russ grabs a two-way radio mic, speaks into it.

RUSS

Hey, fat boy, don't think I like  
your choice of roads here. What  
in the hell's this?

INT. LEAD TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Ricci picks up his mic.

RICCI

(somewhat nervous)  
You stay put. Let me handle this.

He opens his door, steps down.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Russ drops his mic on the floor.

RUSS

Stay put my ass!

He jumps out of the truck.

Khalid and John look at each other and follow him out the other door.

EXT. CONVOY - CONTINUOUS

A half-dozen armed soldiers walk the length of the convoy their flashlights cutting sharp beams through the darkness. Ricci smiles and waves to them, just as Russ, John and Khalid run up.

RICCI  
 (angry, aside)  
 I thought I told you to stay in  
 the truck!

He turns to the soldiers. Big fake smile.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
 (cheery)  
 Good evening, gentlemen!

He tries to show them some papers, but they brush past him roughly. They begin checking the undercarriages of the trucks with mirrors on long poles. Other soldiers open the canvas tarps at the back of Ricci's truck. One jumps inside, begin shouting almost immediately in Arabic. He emerges with a bottle of Jack, holds it up for all to see.

The soldiers unsling their weapons, pull back the bolts to cock them. One of the drivers jumps out with his hands in the air, lays down on the ground. A soldier, obviously the leader, chatters angrily in Arabic, points his weapon at Ricci, Russ, John and Khalid, indicates with a downward motion that they should get down on their stomachs on the highway.

Ricci holds out his papers frantically, babbles. The soldier snatches the documents, crams them in his back pocket, grabs Ricci by the shoulder and forces him onto one knee.

RICCI  
 I am an American citizen!

Another soldier kicks him in the ass, pushes him down on his stomach.

Russ has had enough of this shit. Just as a YOUNG SOLDIER sticks his weapon in Russ' stomach, Russ deftly steps aside, grabs the barrel of the gun, gives the soldier a firm knee in the groin, snatches away the weapon, as the soldier collapses in a heap on the highway.

YOUNG SOLDIER  
 Arrrrrgggghhhh!

Russ turns the gun on the soldier guarding John. That soldier freaks, drops his weapon, holds up his hands. John snatches up the weapon, puts the soldier in a headlock simultaneously and points the gun at his head. Russ

(CONTINUED)

swivels his gun so that it's pointing at the two soldiers guarding Ricci and Khalid.

The two soldiers chatter fearfully and threateningly in Arabic, point their guns at Russ and John.

RUSS  
(a bit unhinged)  
I'll kill everyone of you  
cocksuckers!

The soldier in the back of Ricci's truck jumps down, cocks his weapon simultaneously, but his hand slips and he discharges the weapon into the pavement.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Everyone dives for cover and soon bullets are flying in every direction, especially into the lead truck, which sparks, smokes, then catches fire.

Russ looks back over his shoulder at the truck, which quickly begins to blaze. The soldiers who stopped them are running for their lives, throwing away their weapons as they flee. He sees Ricci running among the soldiers, his eyes filled with terror.

Russ grabs John by the arm, Khalid by the collar.

RUSS (CONT'D)  
Get the fuck out of here! Run,  
damn it! Run!

They make for the edge of the highway embankment, diving into the darkness just as the lead truck explodes with a thunderous roar, the flaming chassis and cab of the ruined vehicle twisting and turning like a toy as it sails heavenward.

As the roar of the explosion subsides, Russ finds John and Khalid at the bottom of the embankment, panting, shaken, scraped, bruised, covered in dust ... but all right. John looks at Russ, Russ looks at Khalid, who looks at John. Suddenly, John rolls over onto his back, begins laughing. Russ chuckles and even Khalid braves a smile.

RUSS  
Think we can write that off on  
our taxes, college boy?

EXT. CONVOY - DAWN

Russ, John and Khalid stand next to one of the trucks, talking, waiting. None of the other trucks were damaged. Off to the side of the road, a fire truck hoses off the wreckage of the lead truck, which smolders. Soldiers sweep

(CONTINUED)

up broken glass on the road.

A sheepish CAPTAIN, holding his cap in his hands, walks up with RICCI, strutting and imperious.

CAPTAIN

Again, Mr. Ricci, we are most  
sorry for this ... inconvenience.  
How could my men know that you  
were transporting badly needed  
... er, *medical supplies*.

RICCI

(without looking back)  
Make sure it doesn't happen  
again. We plan to use this route  
for future deliveries.

The captain gulps, smiles, beats a hasty retreat. Ricci turns to Russ.

RICCI

*That's* why we need people like  
Prince Omar onboard with us.

EXT. LITTLE BANGLADESH - LOADING DOCK - EVENING

"La Grange" begins playing again in the background, softly at first, then gaining in intensity.

The operation is in full swing now. Russ happily barks orders to workers, who load crates of moonshine on a waiting truck. John sits nearby, logging it all on with his laptop. Khalid gives him a running count as he types.

EXT. SHAHEET AIRPORT - NIGHT

"La Grange" continues to play. Russ directs traffic as John and Khalid log the moonshine crates as they trundle up the conveyer belt into the belly of the plane.

INT. AHMED'S 747 - NIGHT

"La Grange" continues to play. The plane bounces and shakes through some bad turbulence as Russ snores while holding a drink in one hand. Khalid studies a spread sheet in the seat behind Russ and John sits gripping the seat armrests, beads of sweat on his forehead.

EXT. JEDANA AIRPORT - NIGHT

"La Grange" continues. Hamo stands on the tarmac directing workers as a pair of conveyor belts hum along, emptying the airplane of moonshine while loading it with name brand booze on the other side. He smiles broadly at John and Russ, who smile at one another, do a quick high-five.

"La Grange" fades out.

EXT. TEEKRA'S VILLA - A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER

John and Teekra make love on the beach in the moonlight as the surf pounds over them.

EXT. TEEKRA'S VILLA - A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER

John and Teekra, clothed now, lie intertwined on a chaise lounge on a deck that overlooks the coastline.

TEEKRA

So, how long can you keep it up?

John looks at her askance. She gives him a little punch on the arm.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

I *meant* the liquor smuggling operation.

JOHN

Well ... not forever.

TEEKRA

We don't need forever. Ahmed has already made lots of friends. There was deep dissatisfaction with Awad. All people needed was a leader to rally around.

She rubs her foot up and down his bare leg.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

Soon we'll be able to make our move for the throne.

JOHN

(moody)

Our move?

She looks at him.

TEEKRA

What?

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

I kind of get the feeling that  
I'm going to be marginalized in  
the not too distance future.

TEEKRA

*Marginalized?* What kind of talk  
is that?

She touches him on the cheek, turns his face to her.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)

(carefully)

There's a lot of things you don't  
know, John.

JOHN

Then fill me in.

She shakes her head.

TEEKRA

I can't, baby.

She sighs.

TEEKRA

Look, John, everybody has debts  
to pay ... and to settle. Let it  
go for right now, OK? Just trust  
me. Can you do that?

John smiles, nods.

EXT. SHAHEET BAZAAR - DAY

Bolt wanders vacantly through the souk, a day pack on his  
back, his new camera with the humongous lens around his  
neck. He snaps off a few random shots - click, whir,  
click, whir - then zeros in on a mangy cur pissing on a  
utility pole - click, whir, click, whir....

He exits the souk just as a Nissan truck pulls up with a  
bed full of young Arab men chattering happily and laughing  
in the back.

YOUNG ARAB 1, YOUNG ARAB 2, YOUNG ARAB 3 recognize Bolt,  
smile broadly.

YOUNG ARAB 1

Brother Bolt! Come with us to  
desert!

YOUNG ARAB 2

(holds up a hooka)  
Smoke with us!

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG ARAB 3  
(holds out his hand)  
Let's go!

EXT. DESERT - MOMENTS LATER

Bolt is in the back of the pickup as it bounces along in the desert. His new friends chatter in Arabic as Bolt smiles stupidly, nods occasionally.

One of the young men fires up the hooka, takes a deep drag and lets out the smoke in a tremendous cloud. Bolt watches, fascinated.

YOUNG ARAB 1  
You try, brother Bolt?

Bolt rattles his head in assent, grins, takes the hose emanating from the hooka, closes his eyes, puts the mouthpiece between his lips and takes a huge drag. It takes a second but the effects aren't good.

His face turns red, then blue, then green. His eyes begin to water. He looks up at his new friends and projectile vomits like an erupting geyser on them all.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUOUS

The young Arabs toss Bolt unceremoniously from the back of the speeding Nissan truck without slowing down. He tumbles and flips in the dirt before stopping near a fence.

YOUNG ARAB 2  
(shaking his fist)  
American pig!

YOUNG ARAB 3  
Filthy infidel!

They toss Bolt's camera and bag out of the truck as they drive away.

Bolt stands, no serious injuries, brushes himself off, retrieves his camera and bag, looks around. He snaps off a few photos of the retreating pickup, turns.

Somewhere, the roar of a jet plane grows louder and louder. Bolt looks up at the top of a hill just as Ahmed's 747 appears over the hilltop, roars past overhead on its way to landing just a few hundred yards away. Bolt brings his camera up, quickly fires off a few shots: click, whir, click, whir.... He's so close, he can see the pilot in the cockpit as the plane passes.



EXT. DESERT - MINUTES LATER

Bolt pushes along the fence row, snapping pictures as he walks of rocks, an acacia tree covered with windblown plastic bags, his shoe, a pile of garbage rotting in the sun, a dead sheep rotting in the sun.

He comes to a sign, beside which is a large hole in the fence. He glances at the sign, upon which is written in English and Arabic in large, bold capital letters, "Military Airfield: Restricted Area. Trespassers Will Be Shot on Sight." He slips through the hole in the fence, snapping pictures as he walks.

EXT. DESERT - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Bolt wanders mindlessly past another sign in Arabic and English: "Mine Field: Danger!!!" embellished with a skull and crossbones. He ignores it, carries on across a wide, open space and finally comes upon a soldier snoring in his jeep next to a large caliber machine gun. Bolt fires off a few shots of the soldier sleeping, stumbles on.

EXT. SHAHEET AIRPORT AIRSTRIP - MOMENTS LATER

Bolt tops a small hill 100 yards away, looks down on the airstrip and the 747 parked directly below him. Russ, John and Khalid supervise the offloading of the brand-name booze, while workers load moonshine in the cargo hold of the plane.

Bolt begins to snap random pictures of everything: Russ, John and Khalid, the workers, crates of liquor being offloaded and loaded, the plane's ID numbers, etc. He gets a shot of Russ opening a bottle of Crown Royal, bringing it to his lips. He reloads with fresh film and fires off a few more shots of the plane: click, whir, click, whir.

Somewhere a goat bleats pathetically, turning Bolt's head. He becomes excited and chases off after the animal. Ah, fresh material. Bolt runs after the startled, fleeing goat, firing frames as he goes - click, whir, click, whir .... The goat prances back across the area marked as a mine field and Bolt follows, oblivious to any danger.

EXT. SHAHEET AIRPORT AIRSTRIP - MOMENTS LATER

Russ offers the bottle of Crown Royal to John just as they all hear a tremendous explosion on the other side of the hill 100 yards away. Everyone freezes, turns slowly toward the source of the noise.

(CONTINUED)

KHALID

(shrugs)

Probably just a wild camel. They get into the mine field around the airport sometimes.

John takes the bottle from Russ.

JOHN

Bummer....

EXT. MINE FIELD - SECONDS LATER

Bolt, covered in dust and fresh goat gore, sits on his ass in the mine field. He seems dazed, stunned, his hair and clothes disheveled. His face twitches. Slowly, he brings his camera up, fires off a few shots.

INT. AHMED'S 747 - DAY

The plane is on its Jedana run again, loaded to the gills with moonshine. John and Russ pass the Crown Royal bottle, which is now almost empty. Both seem to be fairly tipsy. As John drinks, Russ tosses a nerf football that bounces off of John's head. John picks it up and soon they are sailing the football back and forth along the length of the cabin.

Khalid exits the toilet just in time to catch the football before Russ.

RUSS

Interception!

Soon all three are laughing like little kids as they continue to play.

BOOM! The airplane hits a sharp bump and some of the cargo shifts. Everyone stops playing. BOOM! The plane hits another seemingly intense bump. A few crates topple and John and Khalid end up on the floor, Russ tumbles behind some boxes.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The plane hits some more intense bumps in rapid succession.

KHALID

They're shooting at us!

KER-BOOM!

There's a loud explosion on the port side that causes the plane to rattle, one engine taking on a HIGH-PITCHED STRAIN.

(CONTINUED)

The cockpit door burst open and the pilot sticks his head out, shouts something in Arabic to Khalid, ducks back inside. Khalid turns white with fear.

KHALID

He says to put on our parachutes!  
We may have to jump!

John sits down heavily like an old man in a chair. Russ shrugs, takes out his Redman, pulls out a chaw, sticks it in his jaw and calmly begins to chew. He walks forward in the cabin to Khalid, who has opened an overhead compartment and is frantically pulling everything out inside.

KHALID

(to Russ)  
There's only two parachutes!

Russ smiles, yanks Khalid around so that his back is to him, puts one of the parachutes on him, yanks him around to face him, begins to strap it into place.

RUSS

Two's all we need, young man!

EXT. DESERT 15,000 FEET BELOW - SANDBAGGED BUNKER -  
CONTINUOUS

A MILITANT in quasi-military garb, desert-camouflage fatigues with tennis shoes, sunglasses and a ghutra around his neck, squints through the sights on a huge anti-aircraft gun. A COMPATRIOT stands nearby, wringing his hands.

COMPATRIOT

(whining)  
They are getting away!

The militant grins, gives his friend a look and calmly reaches up and depresses a button on the weapon. KA-BOOOOOM! The concussion is deafening as the shell fires. They shield their eyes and look heavenward. Way up among the wispy clouds, a smattering of puffs shows previous explosions.

They see the shell explode near the tail of the plane and part of the tail section falls off. The plane begins to dive at a 45 degree angle.

INT. AHMED'S 747 - CONTINUOUS

Khalid has his parachute on. Russ pulls John out of his seat to help him put his parachute on. KA-B000000M! The shell fired by the militants explodes near the tail section, the plane shudders violently and cases of liquor tumble in every direction. The aircraft pitches forward into a dive, and Russ, John and Khalid tumble ass over elbows toward the front of the plane.

Russ stands, grabs John by the collar, yanks him to his feet, begins to help him put on the remaining parachute.

The cockpit door bursts open and the pilot and co-pilot emerge, wearing parachutes, tugging mightily against the gathering g-forces, heading for the door.

KHALID  
(to the pilot)  
Parachute!

He points at Russ. The pilot give him a fuck-that-shit look, waves him off and keeps moving for the emergency exit. Khalid grabs him by the arm, points at Russ, but the pilot ignores him, throws the door release and the hatch explodes off, sails away into space, creating a huge vacuum that sucks the two pilots -- and Khalid-- from the airplane.

The roar inside the plane is deafening now. Russ finishes strapping John into the parachute. Pushes him toward the door.

JOHN  
N0000000000000!

Russ chews his chaw, all the time in the world.

RUSS  
(calmly)  
Now don't tell me you're skeerd  
of heights, son?

JOHN  
I won't go without you!

Russ grins. They reach the emergency exit. John looks behind him at the approaching ground, still a few thousand feet below. He turns with a terrified look back at Russ, still calm as can be.

RUSS  
(deep Texas drawl)  
How's your balls, son?

John manages a smile.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

Shriveled up. I think I just  
pissed --

Russ gives him a sudden shove and John tumbles out the door, free of the airplane, which continues downward away from him. He falls through the quiet stillness of the blue sky watching the receding plane for a few seconds, then pulls the ripcord of his parachute.

EXT. SKY - MOMENTS LATER

John drifts silently through the sky beneath a big white parachute. He sees another parachute far below but can't make out who it is.

He turns his attention back to the 747 just as it strikes the earth and explodes in a tremendous fireball. After a couple of seconds the sound of the explosion reaches him.

EXT. CRASH SITE - ABOUT 20 MINUTES LATER

John stands a safe distance from the wreckage, shielding his eyes from the heat and watching the plane crackle and burn. A shattered airplane wheel lies nearby, aircraft parts are everywhere, as are broken bottles of moonshine and flaming boxes. John walks about the wreckage.

He spies Khalid lying on his back in some scrubby bushes near the flaming wreckage, runs to him. He's alive, but his ankle is badly broken, a sharp edge of bone protrudes from the joint. Khalid moans in agony as John comes up. The flames from the burning wreckage are licking closer to the brush in which Khalid is lying.

KHALID

The pilots, the chutes didn't  
open ... I ....

John shushes him. Some shrubs near Khalid burst into flames.

JOHN

We gotta get you out of here.

He hoists Khalid up in his arms, carries him away. Khalid screams in agony.

He carries him to a safer location about a hundred yards away. As he walks, he looks about the desolate countryside. Not much to see. No roads, no houses, nothing. He sets Khalid down on a sandy patch of ground, begins to bind his leg as Khalid drifts in and out of consciousness, moans.

John looks about the barren wasteland, waits for whatever is coming next.

EXT. CRASH SITE - ABOUT 30 MINUTES LATER

John sits beside Khalid, who is unconscious, moaning. From a distance, there is a sound of approaching trucks. John clambers up onto a boulder, looks around, spots a pair of military jeeps and an old truck speeding their way.

He jumps back down, goes back to Khalid.

The sound of the engines grows closer. Someone fires a machine gun into the air - RAT-A-TAT-TAT - and then two more militants follow suit in rapid succession. Somewhere, someone shouts in Arabic.

John looks over his shoulder in the direction of the firing, takes off his wedding ring slowly, studies it sadly for a moment, digs out a small hole in the ground with his hand, buries it, puts a rock on top.

After another few seconds, a man in military fatigues and toting an AK-47 walks over the small hill and finds John and Khalid together. He looks at Khalid, looks at John, grins, then whacks John on the side of the head with a sharp, upward thrust of his AK-47.

John collapses on his side, grabs his head where the man hit him, sees that it is bleeding. He loses consciousness as he hears the man barking military commands behind him.

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Light fixtures provide illumination every several feet or so. Ricci and Ahmed walk side by side, their faces intermittently falling from light into shadow and back again. Abdullah and Akbar pace them, several steps back.

RICCI

My people tell me Prince Omar is impressed with your independent stand against Awad. His connections in the business community make him very important to us, Ahmed. And he likes to drink.

AHMED

Yes, yes, he pig customer Ahmed's. He like drink expensive wine.

(CONTINUED)

RICCI  
(irritated)  
That's not the point, Ahmed. We need to make an impression on him. He can help put you on the throne.

Ahmed makes a dismissive gesture.

AHMED  
No problem. Ahmed make pig impression. You see.

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Ahmed is at the head of the table. Ricci and PRINCE OMAR, a dapper, slender man about Ahmed's age, sit across from each other on each side. Abdullah and Akbar lurk in the shadows, along with a few of Omar's body guards.

Omar tastes his wine, smiles, holds it up to the light and studies it.

OMAR  
Ah ... flavorful, a silkly texture that lingers ... aromas of black currant and mint.

He looks at Ahmed.

OMAR (CONT'D)  
A Chateau Lafite Rothschild Pauillac?

AHMED  
(smiling)  
Yes, yes, you right! Chateau The Feet Rothschild!

Omar laughs, his eyes twinkle

OMAR  
Oh, Ahmed, you are so witty!

He drinks some more of the wine, obviously savoring it.

OMAR (CONT'D)  
So seldom one finds a good wine in Arababia.

RICCI  
We aim to change that ... your highness.

Omar looks askance at Ricci, trying to size him up.

(CONTINUED)

OMAR

Yes, change can be a good thing. But it can also be violent ... disruptive ... distasteful. And you are ... ?

RICCI

Ricci Baoloni. Chief of staff for Prince Ahmed.

Ahmed pipes up.

AHMED

Yes, Ricci, he one and only chief my staff.

Omar smiles, eyes twinkle.

OMAR

You have ... a big staff, Ahmed?

Ahmed opens his arms expansively.

AHMED

Ahmed, got huge staff.

Omar dabs his lips with his dinner napkin, blushes.

OMAR

Oh, my goodness me!

Ahmed smiles, leans across the table, pours more wine for Omar, a gesture that obviously makes Ricci feel a bit uncomfortable. Omar holds up his glass, studies it in the light, smiles, sets it down and looks at Ricci.

OMAR (CONT'D)

Yes, change can be a good thing ... sometimes the best of things.

Ricci doesn't quite know what to make of Omar's double entendre.

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - TEEKRA'S CHAMBER - MORNING

Teekra is sleeping. There's an urgent knock on the door. She wakes up, throws on her robe, opens the door. Mohammed comes in, his face troubled.

MOHAMMED

Something has happened, Princess.



INT. AHMED'S PALACE - TEEKRA'S CHAMBER - A LITTLE LATER

Teekra is speaking in Arabic - URGENTLY - into a mobile phone as she paces back and forth. Mohammed is poised nearby, watching her. Abdullah and Akbar lurk in the doorway.

Teekra turns to Mohammed.

TEEKRA  
The plane is ready.

She turns to Abdullah and Akbar.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)  
You will go with him to Jedana.

She turns back to Mohammed.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)  
If they are alive ... the Party of Righteous Islam has them. A car will be waiting at the airport.

The three men look at each other, hesitate just a moment.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)  
Go now!

They start to leave, but Teekra takes Mohammed by the arm as he is going out the door. He faces her.

TEEKRA (CONT'D)  
You will let me know immediately if he is alive.

MOHAMMED  
(nods)  
Yes, your highness.

He leaves.

Teekra shuts the door, runs her fingers through her hair. Tears well up in her eyes and she turns away, holds her hand to her face.

INT. RICCI'S MERCEDES SUV - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ricci cruises down a highway in Shaheet, feeling mellow, singing along with the Carpenters (V.O.) on his CD player.

RICCI  
Every sha-la-la-la and every  
whoa-whoa-whoa still shines ....  
Every shing-a-ling-a-ling since  
it started to ring so fine ....

(CONTINUED)

His phone rings. He suavely slaps his Nokia to his ear.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
(smooth voice)  
Yello?

A look of concern grows on his face. He switches off the Carpenters. We hear Ahmed's indistinct voice emanating from the phone. He is apparently wailing, screaming and crying simultaneously.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
(agitated)  
What?

Ricci shifts nervously in his seat as he listens to Ahmed's hysterics.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
(firmly)  
No, you are not going to flee the country! You stay right where you are. I'll be there in five minutes.

He ends the call, puts the phone between his legs. Ricci looks around, makes an immediate U-turn. SCREECH! A car in the other lane slams on the brakes, swerves to miss him. Unperturbed, Ricci cuts across the highway median and peels out, slinging sand and gravel, speeds back in the other direction.

He slows, cranes his neck as another SUV zips past in the lane in which he was just traveling. He sees Mohammed in the back with Abdullah at the wheel and Akbar on the front passenger side of the vehicle.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
(angry)  
Fuck! Goddamn you, Teekra! Just fucking great!

He cranes his neck to see where they are going, just as his cell phone rings again. He speeds back up as he answers the phone.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
(irritated)  
What?

He listens, clucks his tongue, rolls his eyes.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
(exasperated)  
Now?

He shakes his head in frustration, sighs, takes a deep breath.

(CONTINUED)

RICCI (CONT'D)  
(singing)  
Why - do - birds - suddenly  
appear - every time - you are  
near ....

EXT. AN OLD MILITARY TRUCK - DESERT - ABOUT THE SAME TIME

John and Khalid sit next to one another on the bed of the truck, their hands tied behind him. Khalid winces with pain as the truck bounces along to god knows where. They are accompanied by three militants with AK-47s.

MILITANT 1 dons Russ' scorched cowboy hat, which he obviously found at the site. He smiles at John through broken, rotten teeth drinks some moonshine from a bottle that survived the crash.

MILITANT 1  
Tank you! Good mornink!

The other militants laugh.

JOHN  
(to the soldier)  
Hey, that's not your hat!

The soldier shakes his head, points at his ear to show he doesn't understand. The other soldiers laugh. Soldier 1 drinks some more moonshine.

John makes an awkward attempt to stand.

JOHN  
I said that's not your hat!

The three soldiers react quickly, make quick time of beating and kicking John back to the bed of the truck. The soldier wearing the hat spits some moonshine on John, says something in Arabic and the other soldiers laugh.

KHALID  
He says be still, you son of a  
Jewish whore.

JOHN  
Tell him that's not his hat.

KHALID  
You tell him.

John starts to stand again.

KHALID  
OK, OK, I'll tell him.

John sits back down. Khalid speaks in Arabic to the soldier. The soldier smirks, takes the hat off and looks at it, flips it over to John, makes another smart ass comment in Arabic as the other soldiers laugh.

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - PRIVATE CHAMBER - 30 MINUTES LATER

Ahmed weeps, despondent, pacing the room nervously in a bathrobe and fuzzy slippers. Ricci burst in, breathless and flushed. Ahmed runs to him, falls on his shoulder, weeping.

AHMED

Oh, why we do this foolish thing,  
Reeki? All our days in sun over  
now! Awad ram red-hot boker up  
Ahmed ass! Oh, Reeki!

Ahmed babbles. Ricci composes himself, takes Ahmed firmly by the shoulders and looks him directly in the eyes.

RICCI

(soothingly)

Ahmed, habibi. What I'm hearing  
now is a lot of negativity and  
despair. That's not the big guy I  
love. All is not lost, habibi.  
This is just the brief storm  
before the glorious sunshine.

A beat.

RICCI (CONT'D)

What would he think of you?

He nods toward the portrait of Napoleon on Ahmed's wall. Ahmed looks away, ashamed of himself, but still weeping.

AHMED

But what we do now, Reeki? What  
we *do*?

Ricci hugs Ahmed, pats his back soothingly.

RICCI

We just have to get our hands a  
little dirty now, habibi. Then  
everything will be all right. You  
can do that, can't you?

He looks Ahmed in the eyes. Ahmed nods bravely.

RICCI (CONT'D)

That's my big guy!

EXT. LITTLE BANGLADESH - NIGHT

Several armed men in military fatigues herd the RAG-TAG RESIDENTS refugee style from the shanty town, moving men, women and children up a dark road to god only knows where. Many of the refugees are weeping. Some carry whatever they could salvage.

Ricci and Ahmed watch the exodus, standing in the back of Ricci's SUV, which has had the top removed. Ricci is sipping a martini. Ahmed wrings his hands.

AHMED

But why for we do this, Reeki?  
Why we torment boor villagers?

Ricci sneers.

RICCI

Scorched earth, habibi. Be strong  
... like Stalin!

Ricci tosses his martini away, jumps down from the vehicle, hoists a flame thrower, turns to a COMMANDING OFFICER.

RICCI (CONT'D)

Is the village cleared? Is that  
everyone?

The commanding officer shrugs, but Ricci simply ignores him, fires up the flame thrower and turns it on one of the flimsy buildings of the shanty town. WHOOSH! He walks a bit further and blasts another home. WHOOSH! Then another. WHOOSH! A man who had been forgotten runs pell-mell for his life from one of the buildings just before Ricci torches it. Soon the entire pitiful settlement is blazing.

Fire climbs into the night sky, illuminating the shanty town as it burns. Ahmed stands in the SUV watching everything burn, quivering with fear, tears streaming down his cheeks, his face a mask of terror in the flickering light. Ricci laughs maniacally among the flaming buildings, the flamethrower in his hand.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - SOMEWHERE NEAR JEDANA - DAY

John and Khalid sit on stools next to a small table, hands still tied behind their backs. Khalid is sweating profusely, his broken ankle crudely bound and obviously causing him pain. An INTERROGATOR paces back and forth in front of them in the dark room, illuminated by a dim naked bulb in a socket hanging from a wire from the ceiling. Two guards with machine guns stand in the shadows against the walls.

(CONTINUED)

INTERROGATOR  
(smiling, casual)  
Nobody ever wants to talk.

He paces back and forth, unhurried, unworried.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)  
It's always like that.

He paces some more, stops in front of John, takes his chin between the index finger and thumb of his right hand.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)  
(smiles)  
In the end ... you'll tell me everything.

He pushes John's face away, paces some more.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)  
It's always like that.

He stops in front of Khalid, but focuses his attention on John.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)  
Well, gentlemen ... diplomatic passports, a royal Arababian jet carrying illegal contraband -- from the Holy Land, no less. This is an international incident. Who could be behind it?

He motions to one of the soldiers, who comes over, puts Khalid in a head lock. The interrogator puts his foot on Khalid's broken ankle, his attention fixed on John.

KHALID  
Arrrrghhh! Oh God!

The interrogator takes his foot away, his attention still focused on John. He shakes his head.

INTERROGATOR  
No? Nothing?

John turns his head away.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)  
(calmly)  
You're in over your head, Mr. Wates.

He takes out his pistol slowly, puts the barrel against Khalid's temple, pushes the hair out of Khalid's eyes. John turns back, clearly nervous about what might happen.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

Leave him alone, you fuck!

The interrogator smiles, his attention fixed on Khalid.

INTERROGATOR

Honestly, Mr. Wates, this one ...  
he is nothing to me. He an  
Arababian ... worse yet, he's a  
Shia. He's nobody ... and he's  
certainly not the boss.

He cocks the pistol, turns his attention to John. Khalid  
is panting in fear.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)

What's he worth to you, Mr.  
Wates?

John begins to mumble, stutter nervously.

KHALID

No, John! They'll kill us anyway!  
Don't!

INTERROGATOR

(looking at Khalid)

Such a brave young boy ....

BANG! Suddenly the metal door burst open, slams against  
the wall. Hamo strides in, Mohammed in tow. He glances  
around at the soldiers, who give him a nod of respect,  
back away, and then at the interrogating officer, who  
hastily starts uncocks his weapon, starts to put his gun  
away.

Hamo holds his hand out.

HAMO

(disdainfully)

Give me that gun. Give it to me  
before you hurt someone, you  
dumbass.

That knocks the wind out of the interrogator's sails. He  
reddens with embarrassment, sheepishly hands over the  
pistol.

INT. HAMO'S MERCEDES - JEDANA - DAY

David, the driver, navigates a pothole-pocked street. Hamo  
sits up front, his eyes misting over. He holds Russ'  
scorched cowboy hat in his lap. Mohammed and John are in  
the back seat.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

I'm sure he'd want you to have it.

HAMO

You don't know how much this means to me, John. Me and Russ go way back. He was the best smuggler I ever met. Hell, he was the best man I ever knew. Honest to a fault and a true friend. He was there for me when the militias were trying to muscle me out of business. I'll never forget that. I was there for him when his wife died.

JOHN

When his wife died?

Hamo looks back at John.

HAMO

He never told you?

John shakes his head.

HAMO

Her name was Ann. They were quite the pair. Broke his heart when it happened. They met when they were both in the army, you know. She was a paratrooper too.

A beat.

JOHN

What happened to her?

Hamo studies John.

HAMO

Airplane crash, John. Same as happened to your wife. Commercial flight went down in bad weather. Just dumb luck.

John, looks down at his hands, has to think about this for a while.

JOHN

He was absolutely fearless, wasn't he?

HAMO

No, John. I think he was beyond fear and courage. I think he saw

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



HAMO (cont'd)  
life through a different set of  
eyes.

John obviously doesn't understand what he means.

HAMO (CONT'D)  
He had a heart the size of Texas,  
John. Why do you think he asked  
you to run the books for him?

John shrugs.

JOHN  
He said he needed help ....

Hamo smiles.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
What?

HAMO  
John, don't take this the wrong  
way, OK?

Hamo studies John's face.

HAMO  
First of all, Russ didn't need  
any penny-ante liquor smuggling  
operation. He had a ton of money  
already. Believe me ... he had a  
ton of money.

He hesitates.

JOHN  
And?

HAMO  
Secondly, he didn't need you to  
help him with his books, John. He  
had an MBA. Harvard Business  
School.

JOHN  
Harvard Business School?

Hamo shows him his class ring, Harvard, Class of 1975.

HAMO  
That's where we first met, John.

Hamo waits for all that to sink in.

JOHN

Then why was he in Shaheet?

HAMO

He went because I asked him to go.

John seems more and more confused.

HAMO (CONT'D)

I asked him to look out for my sister. She doesn't even know herself.

John doesn't get it.

HAMO (CONT'D)

Teekra's my sister, John. At least, she's my half-sister, but we grew up together like brother and sister.

John looks at Mohammed, who nods in agreement.

HAMO

How do you think I found you so quickly? You think I'm that damn good?

He grins.

INT. PHOTO PROCESSING SHOP - DAY

Bolt wanders into the photo shop with Al Snafu. The clerks looks up, bobs his head from side to side, smiles.

INDIAN CLERK

Ah, you photos are ready sarh.

He slaps a large pack of photos on the counter. Bolt opens them, begins to thumb through. Al Snafu looks over his shoulder. He shows Al Snafu some skewed and mostly out-of-focus shots he took of him at the college.

AL SNAFU

(about half interested)

Yes, yes, very nice.

Al Snafu takes the photos, flips through the ones of the angry, vomit-covered youths just before they chunked Bolt from their pickup.

AL SNAFU

My, you certainly have a luh, luh, luh ... eye for human emotion.

(CONTINUED)

He sorts through some more shots: a dead sheep, an out-of-focus photo of Bolt's shoe, a soldier asleep in his jeep ... then he comes across the photos of John, Russ and Khalid unloading/loading Ahmed's airplane with booze. His eyes narrow as he flips through these photos. He looks through them a second time.

AL SNAFU (CONT'D)

My goodness, brother Bolt ... do you luh, luh, luh, know what these are?

Bolt shakes his head.

AL SNAFU (CONT'D)

(smiles)

We must see that these get into the right hands, brother.

INT. AWAD'S PALACE - KING'S QUARTERS - DAY

The king stand in front of a television watching the news in his jammies, a gin and tonic in one hand, the remote in the other. His mouth is agape in horrified astonishment. A CNN report plays on the TV:

CUT TO:

Cable news report: A NEWS ANCHOR sits in front of a photo of a wrecked plane with the caption: Arababian Moonshine?

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)

One American has died and another may have been taken captive by a militant faction south of Jedana this morning after the militants shot down a plane en route from Arababia. Sources say the aircraft was part of an illegal liquor distribution ring allegedly operated by the Arababian royal family.

Awad chokes on his gin.

AWAD

Jesus H. Christ, Ali! It's on CNN now!

Ali ben Ali, who was in the next room, runs in with a cellphone against his ear, speaking loudly in Arabic. He ends the call and joins the king at the TV.

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)

Alcohol is illegal under Arababia's strict Islamic laws

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV) (cont'd)  
and the incident has already  
provoked riots in some parts of  
the country.

Awad runs to the window, dumps out his drink.

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)(CONT'D)  
Photos distributed by the  
Associated Press today show two  
unknown Americans apparently  
supervising the shipment of  
contraband aboard a Royal  
Arabian aircraft in Shaheet, a  
remote provincial capital in the  
north of Arababia.

CNN shows some of Bolt's photos. Ali and Awad look at one  
another.

ALI AND AWAD  
(in unison)  
Ahmed!

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - PRIVATE CHAMBER - DAY

Ahmed is sprawled across the bed, SOBBING and clutching a  
teddy bear. Ricci comes in and Ahmed jumps up, speeds to  
his embrace. They hold each other close, while Ahmed  
whimpers.

RICCI  
(smiling)  
Hush, hush, sweet prince. We have  
just a little more dirty work to  
do and all will be fine.

AHMED  
Blease, Reeeki! No more purn  
homes of boor villagers! Ahmed  
cry self to sleep last night!

Ricci shushes Ahmed, picks up a cellphone, speed-dials a  
number.

RICCI  
Let me take care of this, habibi.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET IN JEDANA - SECONDS LATER

Abdullah and Akbar stand like wooden Indians in Raybans on the sidewalk in front of a shop. Abdullah's phone RINGS.

Abdullah listens impassively.

ABDULLAH

Right.

He ends the call, looks over at Akbar.

ABDULLAH

First the American, then the dirty Shia.

Akbar nods.

EXT. AHMED'S PALACE - FRONT GATE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

A poorly-shaven GUARD in a sloppy uniform leans indolently against the gate with his machine gun cradled in his arms. A cigarette dangles from his lips. ANOTHER GUARD sits in a small shack nearby with his head on a desk, SNORING.

The first guard sees a column of vehicles approaching in the distance. He stubs out his cigarette, straightens up, squints at the convoy, sees something that alarms him.

He SHOUTS, his sleeping comrade jumps up, straightens his uniform and the pair snap to attention just as the convoy arrives, its fluttering Arababian flags indicating a royal motorcade.

Ali Ben Ali stands up through the sunroof of an armor-plated silver Mercedes limo at the lead of the column as dozens of soldiers jump out of jeeps and APCs with weapons drawn.

ALI BEN ALI

(to an officer)

Arrest these clowns and get control of this gate!

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - BATHROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ricci and Ahmed share a Jacuzzi, their heads sticking up out of a mountain of foam. Ricci smokes a cigar while THE CARPENTERS sing "On Top of the World" quietly in the background. Ahmed monkeys around with a plastic toy boat. Ricci snuggles up to him.

RICCI

Now our work is done, habibi.  
They can pin nothing on us.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RICCI (cont'd)  
Nothing can be traced to our  
door.

He soaps Ahmed's neck and back.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
Let your pain go. Feel your  
tension melt away, dear heart.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Gunfire erupts from the next room. Ricci farts loudly as he and Ahmed jump to their feet, bare-assed and dripping water, just as a group of soldiers kick in the door.

Ahmed squeaks, jumps into Ricci's arms, nearly knocking him over. Ricci GRUNTS under Ahmed's weight and struggles to gain his footing in the slippery tub.

Ali Ben Ali walks in, holding his hands over his ears and glaring at one of the soldiers.

ALI BEN ALI  
Why in god's name did you do  
that?

SOLDIER  
(sheepishly)  
Sorry, finger slipped.

He sneers at Ahmed and Ricci, standing in the tub scared shitless and noticeably naked. Ahmed whimpers and Ricci blushes.

ALI BEN ALI  
(to a soldier)  
Give them a towel! And turn off  
that crappy music!

EXT. OUTSIDE JEDANA AIRPORT - DAY

Abdullah peers over his sunglasses at Hamo's Mercedes pulling up to the curb. He glances at Akbar, who nods. The pair begin walking toward the Mercedes.

INT. HAMO'S MERCEDES - AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Hamo's driver David brings the car to a slow stop near the Departure Terminal. Hamo is beside him. John and Mohammed are still in back.

Hamo points at a car in front of his, shakes his head in disgust.

(CONTINUED)

HAMO

Look at that, will you? Double parked and no one does anything about it!

John touches Hamo on the arm to get his attention.

JOHN

Khalid will be OK?

HAMO

He'll be fine! He's in the best hospital in the Middle East. We'll send him back your way just as soon as he's ready to travel.

JOHN

He might be happier staying here with you.

Hamo thinks about it.

HAMO

Not a bad idea. He's a bright kid.

He glances back toward the front, notes Abdullah and Akbar heading his way. Hold up one finger to John.

HAMO (CONT'D)

Just a sec, John. Little business to attend to here.

John looks confused, then sees Abdullah and Akbar heading their way. They draw two enormous pistols from holsters inside their coats as they approach. Mohammed gasps, points at them. Hamo seems unperturbed.

HAMO (CONT'D)

Yeah ... Khalid's got a bright future. Unlike some people I know.

He reaches up, takes a joystick device from the dash of the car, presses a button. A flap on the hood opens - POP! -- and a machine gun on a platform surfaces almost instantly.

Hamo mans the joystick, swiveling the gun on the hood this way and that. He squeezes the trigger.

The gun fires: RAT-A-TAT-TAT-TAT RAT-A-TAT-TAT-TAT  
RAT-A-TAT-TAT.

EXT. OUTSIDE JEDANA AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Abdullah and Akbar quiver violently as they absorb the bullets, reeling backwards like big rubber dolls, guns limp in their hands. Their bodies collapse through a big, SHATTERING plate-glass window. CRASH. BANG. BOOM.

After a moment, a POLICEMAN walks over casually, glances down at the two bodies.

INT. HAMO'S MERCEDES - AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Hamo flips the switch on the joystick, the machine gun on the hood disappears - POOF! -back into its housing. John just sits there with his mouth open. Mohammed blinks.

HAMO  
(casually)  
Come on, I'll walk you to your  
gate. Hurry up, you're going to  
be late.

INT. A COMMERCIAL AIRLINER - 30 MINUTES LATER

John sits comfortably relaxed next to Mohammed, an inflight magazine open on his lap.

JOHN  
You know, I don't know what the  
future may hold for me, but I'm  
actually looking forward to  
getting back to Shaheet.

Mohammed smiles kindly.

MOHAMMED  
The Princess will be glad to see  
you.

John smiles.

EXT. SHAHEET AIRPORT - DAY

A jetliner TOUCHES DOWN on the runway.

EXT. SHAHEET AIRPORT - A FEW MINUTES LATER

A group of security personnel hustle John roughly into a waiting van, slam and lock the door. Mohammed follows them, protesting loudly but to no avail. The security personnel get in the van and drive off.



INT. AHMED'S PALACE - A STUDY -- DAY

Ricci, Ahmed and Ali Ben Ali sit Inquisition-like behind a long desk as the door opens and a GUARD shoves a manacled John into the room, chains RATTLING. The guard forces him to sit in a chair facing the other three, takes up position behind him. Ricci stands dramatically and points an accusatory finger at John.

RICCI

This is the infidel mastermind!

JOHN

Good to see you too, buddy. It's been a rough trip.

INT. TEEKRA'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

A startled and outraged Teekra watches Ricci grill John on her bank of closed-circuit TV monitors.

RICCI (ON THE MONITOR)

(sarcastically)

So, you are in the lamp oil business, are you? Along with your friends in Jedana, I suppose.

Ricci watches Ali Ben Ali out of the corner of his eye to see what affect his words are having on him.

JOHN (ON THE MONITOR)

Yeah. Along with you.

(nodding at Ahmed)

And with Fuzzy Slippers over there.

Ricci reddens with embarrassment.

RICCI (ON THE MONITOR)

How dare you insult the Prince of Shaheet!

Ahmed groans, puts his head down on the table.

AHMED (ON MONITOR)

(muttering, barely audible)

I Brince of Shaheet ... Brince of Shaheet ....

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Ali Ben Ali has had enough. He holds up his hand to silence Ricci.

ALI BEN ALI  
Enough with the bullshit!

RICCI  
(flustered)  
But I --

ALI BEN ALI  
Shut up, fool. Shut up and sit  
down.

Ricci does as he is told. Ali Ben Ali holds up his right hand his index finger and thumb spaced about an inch apart.

ALI BEN ALI (CONT'D)  
(to Ricci)  
You're about this close to  
getting that fat head of yours  
lopped off.

Ricci gulps. Ali Ben Ali turns to Ahmed, who is clearly on the verge of tears again.

ALI BEN ALI (CONT'D)  
And as for you, Fuzzy Slippers,  
if we weren't already in deep  
enough shit diplomatically, I'd  
have them take you out right now  
and shoot you.

Ahmed whimpers. Ali Ben Ali ignores him, turns back to Ricci.

ALI BEN ALI (CONT'D)  
(thinking)  
But you're right .... We do need  
a scapegoat.

He ponders for a moment.

ALI BEN ALI (CONT'D)  
Perhaps even two.

He looks at Ricci, who turns ashen with fright.

ALI BEN ALI (CONT'D)  
Not you, idiot. Two American  
heads won't placate the rabble.

He stands, addresses the guard.

(CONTINUED)

ALI BEN ALI (CONT'D)  
He is to be transported  
immediately to Abu Jeba. Make  
sure nothing happens to him.

INT. AN INTERROGATION ROOM IN ABU JEBA - DAY

A guard hustles John into the room in chains. He has a few bruises on his face. It's clear he's been worked over a bit. A single bulb dangles from a wire above. Waiting in the room is JED BAKER, a mousy American bureaucrat wearing glasses and toting a leather briefcase. He smiles blandly. The guard leaves.

Jed holds out his hand. John doesn't take it. Looks like it like it's a turd on a stick. John sits, waits.

Jed is disconcerted but tries to soldier on.

JED BAKER  
(taking a seat opposite  
John)  
Well ... John. It's a ...  
pleasure meeting you.

He fishes in his pocket, finds his card, lays it on the table. John doesn't look at it.

JED BAKER (CONT'D)  
I'm Jed Baker with the US  
embassy. I'm here to see that  
your rights are protected --  
though, quite frankly, you don't  
really have any.

He shakes his head.

JED BAKER (CONT'D)  
You're in some deeeeeep poo-poo,  
Mr, Wates. I'm afraid about the  
only chance you have is to play  
ball with them. Otherwise ....

He gives a wink, makes a chopping motion against his neck with the side of his hand.

JED BAKER (CONT'D)  
... chop, chop!

Jed looks at John to see what effect his words are having. John stares back for a moment, snickers.

JOHN  
(sarcastically)  
... chop, chop!

He imitates Baker's hand gesture.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN (CONT'D)

That's pretty fucking weird.

He leans in closer to Baker, who moves back, a bit intimidated.

JOHN

Ok, Mister ....

(he looks at his card)

... Baker, just what in the fuck do you want?

Jed reddens, composes himself, sits back in his chair.

JED BAKER

Can we be totally honest?

JOHN

I can ... I don't know about you.

Jed smiles, leans forward, rests his arms on his briefcase.

JED BAKER

OK, Mr. Wates, here's the scoop. You're shit to us. you got yourself into this mess and what happens to you is your own damn fault. However, Arababia sits on top of 50 percent of the world's known oil reserves ... and that's not shit to us. You've thrown this nation into crisis and we want to see things resolved as quietly and as peacefully as possible. Capiche?

John stares back in response. Jed leans back in his seat again.

JED BAKER

I've spoken with Judge Al Nafa, also known around here as the "Sword of Justice." He's not only a jurist, he's a leading cleric -- therefore, he's a big cog in the power structure in Arababia. He's a showboat, likes to send a message whenever he can. Right now, Awad desperately wants to placate the clerics .... I'm sure you understand why.

JOHN

So, what do they want?

(CONTINUED)

JED BAKER

They want the girl, Mr. Wates.  
You know who I'm talking about.

He lets that information sink in.

JED BAKER (CONT'D)

Give them Princess Teekra and I  
can guarantee you that you'll  
only get a prison term. In a  
couple of years, we can quietly  
get you out of the country.

JOHN

They'll kill her.

JED BAKER

(shrugs)

Not your country, Mr. Wates.

He stands up.

JED BAKER (CONT'D)

You can call me if you wish. I've  
arranged it with the guards.

He starts to leave, turns to face John.

JED BAKER (CONT'D)

You won't even be a blip on the  
evening news back in the States,  
Mr. Wates. But, whatever you  
decide, I will see that your  
remains are repatriated.

He winks.

JOHN

(sarcastic)

Gee, thanks, buddy.

Jed ignores the remark, leaves, shuts the door behind him.

INT. JAIL CELL - DAWN

A call to prayer filters into the cell from outside the  
jail. John sits upright on a dirty old mattress on the  
floor, his back leaned against a wall.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

(CONTINUED)

Court officials file into the room. JUDGE AL-NAFA, aka the Sword of Justice, enters from his chambers, a copy of the Koran tucked under his arm and a ceremonial sword strapped to his waist. On the wall behind the bench, portraits of King Awad and King Anod smile down benevolently.

Two guards bring John in, chains clanking, and sit him down behind the defendant's table. Jed Baker watches from a few rows back, a briefcase on his lap.

INT. HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CLERIC 4 leads Teekra into the room. She is frightened but stoic. The cleric points to a chair in front of a television monitor that shows the courtroom, John situated in the middle of the picture.

CLERIC 4

(sneering)

As you know, because you are a woman you cannot enter the courtroom. Watch from here.

TEEKRA

And why have you called me to watch?

CLERIC 4

(more sneering)

Because you have also been implicated, woman. You are a co-defendant and will be put to death for your crimes the same as this infidel.

He pauses to see what effect the news will have on her, but Teekra displays no emotion, does not avert her eyes from his gaze.

CLERIC 4 (CONT'D)

Sit, shameless woman ... and pray for mercy.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Terry Bolt is on the witness stand. One of his photos of the 747 has been blown up poster-size and is on an easel beside him. The prosecutor waves a pointer at it.

PROSECUTOR

Nice composition, Mr. Bolt.

Bolt smiles, faces begins to twitch.

(CONTINUED)

PROSECUTOR (CONT'D)

I like the way you use the clouds  
to produce a feeling of  
perspective.

BOLT

(face twitching)

Well, I *am* an artist, you know.

PROSECUTOR

Yes, of course --

BOLT

(face twitching)

I am *not* a pornographer --

PROSECUTOR

(cuts him off)

--er, well, thank you, Mr. Bolt.

INT. COURTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Now it's Al Snafu's turn in the witness box.

PROSECUTOR

And so, this ... infidel simply  
disappeared from the university?  
Forsook his sacred duties as a  
teacher.

Al Snafu nods sadly.

AL SNAFU

Yes, I must ... luh, luh, luh say  
I had a bad feeling about Mr.  
Wates when I first met him in the  
Arabian Nights Hotel in Abu Jeba  
before he began teaching.

PROSECUTOR

(shocked)

You met Mr. Wates in the infamous  
Arabian Nights Hotel ... the one  
that was just closed for being a  
bordello owned by the Russian  
mafia?

The prosecutor casts a disapproving glance at John.

AL SNAFU

(reddened, embarrassed)

Uh luh, luh, luh, luh ... no, I  
meant the Arabian Flight Hotel  
... near the luh, luh, luh  
airport!

John laughs.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN  
Well, you were flying high,  
that's for sure.

Judge Al Nafa slams his fist on the table.

JUDGE AL NAFA  
Silence, infidel!

INT. HOLDING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Teekra watches the monitor, which frames Ricci, who is on the witness stand now.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

The prosecutor aims his pointer again at the easel, but this time it's holding a big, grainy portrait of Teekra. John glances over his shoulder at Jed Baker, who studiously avoids eye contact, drums the fingers of one hand on his briefcase.

Ricci nods emphatically.

RICCI  
Yes. That is the Jezebel who  
brought this shame on the good  
name of Prince Ahmed.

INT. HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Teekra watches Ricci on the monitor as he testifies against her. She smirks, shakes her head.

TEERKA  
(calmly)  
I'll get you if it's the last  
thing I do, you fat son of a  
bitch.

INT. COURTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

John stands in chains in the courtroom. Judge Al Nafa whispers behind his hand to a court employee, smiles, then turns his attention to John. He addresses John from a prepared text the employee handed to him, his voice dripping with venom.

JUDGE AL NAFA  
Infidel. You have come into our  
country and violated our sacred  
traditions, bringing the vile  
curse of alcohol into the holy

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



JUDGE AL NAFA (cont'd)  
land of the prophet, peace be  
upon him.

A couple of courtroom officials murmur in agreement. The judge nods at the prosecutor.

JUDGE AL NAFA (CONT'D)  
The prosecutor advises this  
court, however, that there may be  
a call for leniency in your case.  
Should you testify against your -  
(he nods at the photo of  
Teekra)  
--your co-defendant, your life  
may be spared.

He lets that sink in, sits back, crosses his arms, looks John in the eyes.

JUDGE AL NAFA (CONT'D)  
So tell me, infidel, do you know  
this woman?

The court holds its collective breath.

INT. HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Teekra holds hers too, watches the monitors.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

The judge waits. The prosecutor peers over at John. Jed Baker looks at the floor

JOHN  
(shrugs)  
I've never seen that woman before  
in my life.

INT. TEEKRA'S CHAMBERS - AHMED'S PALACE - NIGHT

Teekra paces back and forth, nervously smoking a cigarette. The door bursts open and Mohammed comes in, breathless.

TEEKRA  
You found where they are holding  
him?

Mohammed smiles. Teekra runs to him, embraces him.

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - DINING HALL - NIGHT

Happy days are here again. Ahmed and Ricci feast at one end of the table, drinking champagne and laughing. Teekra sits at the opposite side of the table, smiling a fake smile.

Mohammed lingers at the serving cart in the shadows.

RICCI  
Another bottle!

At a serving trolley nearby, Mohammed pops a cork, winks at the princess, who nods slightly. Ahmed and Ricci giggle drunkenly as Mohammed walks over, starts pouring.

AHMED  
Hey. Where Abdullah? Where Akpar?

RICCI  
Who cares? They probably got better jobs somewhere else. Loyal royal help is soooo hard to find!

AHMED  
You right. Balace thugs dime a dozen!

He and Ricci giggle again, their faces almost touching as they drink deeply.

AHMED  
Ahmed so happy pee alive!

He drains his glass and beams at Ricci. Then his eyes roll up into his head and - splat! - he falls forward, face in his dinner plate.

Ricci smirks, turns his attention to Teekra.

RICCI  
(drunkenly)  
Little queer never could hold his liquor.

He leers at her as if waiting for her to say something. Teekra drinks from a goblet of water, watches him.

RICCI (CONT'D)  
(wags his finger at her)  
I'm not stupid. I know what you did.

Teekra tenses, waits.

(CONTINUED)

RICCI

He was screwing you, wasn't he?  
Throwing the old weenie to you?

Teekra smiles.

TEEKRA

Can't get anything past you, can  
we, you master of palace  
intrigue?

RICCI

(chuckles)

Well ... sorry, Your Slut-ness.  
They'll be another dick someday.  
No hard feelings, eh?

She raises her glass to him. He does likewise, kills his  
champagne.

RICCI (CONT'D)

(slurring)

Politics makes for strange --

Suddenly, Ricci's eyes cross, he gets a stupid grin on his  
face and - BOOM! - he falls sideways out of his chair.  
Teekra stands, walks casually over and looks down at Ricci  
on the floor.

TEERKA

-- bedfellows. Goodbye, Ricci  
Baoloni.

She pushes him with her foot, steps over him.

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

John lies on his mattress, staring at the ceiling.

A key turns in the lock of the cell door and a GUARD  
looks in. John keeps staring at the ceiling.

GUARD

I was asked to speak with you  
because I know English. In the  
morning, you will be fed if you  
wish to eat. They will cut your  
hair and then, if you wish, they  
will give you some drugs that  
will make everything seem very  
slow and confused. You will not  
understand what is happening  
after that.

The guard waits to see if John has anything to say.

(CONTINUED)

GUARD (CONT'D)

If I were you, I would take  
the drugs.

The guard leaves, bolts the door. John keeps staring at the ceiling. After a moment, he smiles.

INT. PRISON CELL - ABOUT DAWN

A key rattles in the lock and the door opens. John stands up, takes a deep breath, waits.

Two men wearing black hoods enter the room. One motions for him to follow. John does so without a word. As he passes out the door, he sees two other hooded men with a fifth hooded, bound man between them. He seems to be heavily drugged and can hardly stand.

They push the fifth man into the room, lock the door behind them. John turns to one of the men.

JOHN

This is some hotel you've got  
here. Just dying to get in,  
aren't they?

The man grunts in reply. They shuffle John quickly down a dark corridor and turn down another dark corridor and then another, and pass down some stairs. John is utterly confused.

JOHN

They gonna do this in the  
basement?

They walk down some more stairs, head toward a door marked "Exit."

EXT. OUTSIDE THE PRISON - DAWN

The door John saw bursts open and the hooded men hustle him outside into dawn. John looks about, astonished, but doesn't have much time to think about it. The men hustle John into a waiting van and slam the door shut behind him. The van drives away as soon as John is inside.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

John sits on his knees in the dark van, lurches forward as the driver speeds away. He reaches out his hands to steady himself and someone takes his arm.

He looks up in the dim light to see Teekra's Mohammed smiling down at him.

EXT. DESERT AIRSTRIP - SUNRISE

Mohammed and John stand at the end of the airstrip while a small commuter aircraft taxis slowly in their direction.

MOHAMMED

Perhaps you wonder why she wants to put Ahmed on the throne, Mr. John?

JOHN

He's her father, isn't he? I mean, Awad's her father.

MOHAMMED

My goodness, your death sentence has made you quite perceptive.

John laughs.

JOHN

Then why does she want to bring him down?

MOHAMMED

For the oldest reason in the world, Mr. John. Revenge. He destroyed her mother. Used her and her political connections to get the throne ... and then he dumped her. He divorced her and disowned Teekra, spread rumors about Teekra's mother being unfaithful to him .... All of it total bullshit, of course.

John nods.

The plane arrives. The pilot reaches across and opens the door, looks at them, waiting.

JOHN

So, where does this leave me?

MOHAMMED

On a plane leaving Arababia at sunrise ... with your head still attached to your shoulders. Not a bad deal, I don't think.

John nods again.

JOHN

I feel good about it.

They shake hands. John gets into the waiting plane, shuts the door. The plane immediately begins to taxi away, picking up speed and then lifting off into the blue sky.

EXT. PUBLIC SQUARE - ABU JEBA - AN HOUR LATER

The sun is up and a rowdy crowd is gathered around a raised dais in a central square of the city. A hooded executioner stands on the dais, impassively sharpening a tremendous scimitar with a whetstone.

A convoy of military trucks pulls up and soldiers jump out, pushing people aside to clear a pathway to the platform. Some soldiers pull Ricci Baoloni, his head freshly shaved and his hands bound behind him, from one of the trucks.

Ricci tops the steps of the platform, looks back fearfully at the jeering, taunting crowd below. He turns to find a HOODED CLERIC facing him, his hands behind his back.

HOODED CLERIC

(sternly)

And so, John Wates, do you have a last request?

RICCI

(weeping, desperate)

I told you, I'm not John Wates!

The cleric moves in close to Ricci.

CLERIC

(whispers)

Eh ... one American is as good as any.

Ricci looks fearfully at the cleric.

The cleric slowly removes his hood to reveal that he is in fact -- Mohammed! Ricci gasps. Mohammed smiles at Ricci.

MOHAMMED

(whispers)

Princess Teekra sends her regards, Ricci Baoloni.

Mohammed takes a step back from Ricci, turns to the crowd.

MOHAMMED (CONT'D)

You lie, infidel!

The crowd hoots and jeers. One or two men shake their fists. A third throws his hat in the air in excitement.

RICCI

(weeping)

Could you at least ... could you at least play some music for me? Something by the Carpenters?

Mohammed turns to the crowd.

(CONTINUED)

MOHAMMED  
(sternly)

No!

The crowd hoots and jeers some more. A guard steps up, puts a hood over Ricci's head, leads him to the waiting executioner.

INT. AHMED'S PALACE - TEEKRA'S CHAMBER - DAY

Teekra watches CNN, where NEWS ANCHOR 2 is jabbering, a big picture of Awad prominently displayed over her shoulder.

NEWS ANCHOR 2 (ON TV)  
King Awad of Arababia has abdicated and gone into exile tonight under mounting internal and international pressure over the state liquor-smuggling scandal that rocked the country and over the execution of American John Wates, a move that seriously damaged bilateral US-Arababian relations following the huge, spontaneous protests that paralysed the US after Wates' execution in Arababia last week. Awad has reportedly been offered temporary asylum in the Democratic Peoples' Republic of the Lower Congo.

Teekra hits the mute button, smiles.

INT. AN APARTMENT IN THE US - CONTINUOUS

John, standing in his boxers with a beer in one hand and a remote in the other, watches the same newscast. He grins broadly, takes a sip from his beer.

INT. AWAD'S OLD PALACE - THRONE ROOM - ABU JEBA - DAY

Bolt is taking pictures of someone off camera, a celebration of sorts going on around him, PARTY-GOERS milling about here and there.

VOICE (O.C.)  
Thank you bery much, Mr. Polt.

Bolt nods respectfully, moves demurely to one side and we see Ahmed rising from the throne that Awad once occupied. Prince Omar offers his hand to help him descend, sidles over to Ahmed and takes his arm.

(CONTINUED)

FLASH! Bolt steps back into the scene to capture the moment. Then - FLASH! - he takes another. And - FLASH! FLASH! - a couple more.

OMAR  
Your photographer really enjoys  
his work.

AHMED  
(nodding, smiling  
graciously)  
Yes, he have bery good eye.

A CALL TO PRAYER filters through the hall from somewhere outside and the crowd instantly dissipates. Bolt squeezes off one more frame - FLASH! - before joining the exodus.

Ahmed and Omar, suddenly, are alone together. Omar takes the new king by the arm, leads him out onto the balcony.

EXT. BALCONY - PALACE - DAY

Omar and Ahmed look out on a beautiful garden below with date palms, orange trees, tropical flowers and a manicured lawn stretching on for hundreds of yards.

OMAR  
A strange turn of fate that  
brought us here, no?

AHMED  
(puffs out his chest)  
Destiny.

Omar takes Ahmed's hand in his own, caresses it gently. Ahmed, disarmed, trembles and blushes.

OMAR  
No, Ahmed, habibi ... I mean that  
brings us here ... together ...  
alone.

He watches Ahmed carefully.

OMAR (CONT'D)  
It's sad that your most loyal of  
servants could not be here to  
see  
this day. Do you still miss him?

Ahmed's eyes mist over.

AHMED  
Yes, I owe everthing Reeki.

He wipes away a tear.

(CONTINUED)



AHMED (CONT'D)

He chief my staff. Bery, bery  
special chief my staff.

Omar puts his arm around AHMED. He too is crying now. They look into one another's eyes.

OMAR

Maybe ... maybe I could be the  
new  
chief of your staff?

Somewhere a Carpenters song begins to play:

CARPENTERS (V.O)

Why do birds suddenly appear,  
every time you are near? Just  
like me, they long to be, close  
to you.

EXT. TEEKRA'S VILA BY THE SEA - DAY

Carpenters voice over continues.

Teekra and John sit around the breakfast table as Mohammed pours tea, demurely exits. Teekra stands, puts her hand on her belly. She's pregnant! John comes over, gives her a hug, then puts his ear against her belly to listen to the baby.

CARPENTERS (V.O)

Ah, aahh, aahh ... close to you!  
Ah, aahh, aahh ... close to you!

FADE TO BLACK

THE END

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