**AIRBORNE** - STORY TREATMENT 2

**Title: Conflict in the Desert**

**LOGLINE:** The team of *Jacobe Reichman Airborne Design* has a huge opportunity in front of them. They have been invited to present to the Emir of Kuwait on a 747 Head of State Aircraft – but as they discover once in country, the palace’s liaison for the project has given them incorrect design direction. It threatens to destroy the opportunity altogether – and Jack Reichmann isn’t about to let that happen.

**KUWAIT CITY** -

Jack Reichmann pulls back the curtain in his hotel suite and looks down on the Islamic city, the surrounding desert and the Arabian Gulf beyond.

Ethan Ferris and Elena Gonzalez are seated in the restaurant downstairs as Jack walks up. The three order breakfast. Elena has her laptop open – reviewing the presentation they’ve prepared for the Emir on a newly acquired 747-8 Head of State aircraft. A lot is on the line. It’s a huge project, three years in duration and easily five years of cash flow for the firm.

But on a personal level, there’s much more at stake.

Reichman – always supremely confident, has one Achilles’s heel. It’s *Markus Peniman*, a London based designer who, like his own firm, is very well known – and almost always competes for the same top level projects. As the story goes (extremely well known by Jack’s staff), Penniman stole a set of concepts from Reichmann back in 2007 at a closed conference during the Farnborough Airshow and then used the designs to capture a huge project for a Russian client that both firms were competing for. In short, Reichmann loathed Penniman and everything he stood for. In fact at a Boeing reception for designers in Chicago, Reichmann cunningly seduced Penniman’s date – and slept with her. As it turns out, the date was Penniman’s assistant – but the gauntlet had been laid nonetheless.

Everyone, both inside the firm and elsewhere, knew of the long-standing feud. Sentiments however, mostly resided with Jack since Peniman had earned his rep as an unscrupulous slime-ball long before 2007.

Faisal Khaled, (assigned by the Palace to look after them, and project coordinator for the palace) walks up and joins the three. Khaled is charming to a fault but possesses an ego the size of Kuwait itself. He explains that the presentation would likely take place in the late afternoon at the Palace – and that they should be prepared to leave the hotel by 1:00 pm.

At 1:40, two Rovers roll up in front – where they load up for the drive to the Palace. Two representatives from Boeing are already in the second Rover. They have come along to support the presentation in a technical context. Arriving at the Palace entrance, the first of THREE security points are met – each with armed guards and retractable steel posts in the pavement. Passports are showed at the first two, and at the third entry point within the compound - passports are taken and kept until they leave.

Once in the Palace Compound, the group is driven to a large building and shown to a well-appointed lounge with seating groups, TV’s, desks, etc. It’s here the team waits to be called to the main palace where the Emir resides. Faisel begins briefing them on protocols, sequence, etc.

At 4:15 Faisel gets a call on his cell. It’s time to move and they all make their way back to the Rovers. A circuitous boulevard lined with grassy berms and date palms leads them to the main Palace – which rather surprisingly looks exactly like what they all expected. On entrance they are greeted with yet another security checkpoint where all their bags are un-packed and thoroughly checked. From there the team is escorted the distance of a football field on inlaid marble floors flanked by columns and frescoed ceilings – and gold-gilded everything. It was familiar to Reichmann and Ferris because Faisel had supplied many pictures of the hall (and various palace rooms) as design directives for the new aircraft’s interior.

“Ferris and Reichmann quietly remark to each other “we got this nailed!”

The team is shown to an inordinately large office with high ceilings and introduced to Hadeen Khaffi, the Emir’s undersecretary. Khaffi presides behind a huge carved wooden desk at the far end of the room and the walls are lined with armchairs and divans. Above the undersecretary’s desk is a huge portrait of the Emir in full royal regalia.

Khaffi shakes everyone’s hands, passes a card to each and nods to one of his staff. Tea and snacks are brought a moment later. He asks the team to be seated, saying the Emir will be present shortly. There are several other men sitting in chairs close to the undersecretary. Every few minutes someone enters the room and obtains his signature on a set of papers. Dressed in traditional Islamic garb, Khaffi keeps a cigarette lit for the entire span of the visit. Each time he needs a new one, he pulls it from an ornate silver box while one of the men to his left rises, fetches an ornate lighter from the desk, and lights it for him.

At the opposite end of the room (near where the team is seated), on the wall, is a 70-inch TV where an Arabic Cooking show is on - no audio. Back to back episodes continue for the entire time as the team waits. The undersecretary and his staffers remained glued to the monitor – and eventually Reichmann, Ferris and Elena are also transfixed to the monitor, out of boredom.

Nearly two hours pass when a rubiesque lady with headscarf and veil enters and greets them warmly. She informs the team that the Emir and his entourage will be arriving in 15 minutes – and asks them to gather their things and come with her. As she is making the request, Elena notices the name Marcus Pinniman written in the notebook the lady was carrying. She bumps Ethan just in time for him to notice as well. Reichmann had not seen the name.

As they walk, Ethan whispers to Elena but is interrupted. “Don’t you even think about it!”

The team is led down a short hall to a huge round room with ornate ceilings, an enormous round conference table in the center, the Kuwait State Seal on the far wall above the Emir’s chair. Lining the outer walls are guests chairs - where the rest of the team is asked to be seated. As the presenter, Reichmann is requested to stand near the table at a lectern from which to present. Reichmann is quickly briefed again on how to address the Emir and to look him in the eye when *speaking* to him.

Soon the undersecretary enters the room along with Faisel, seating themselves next to the Boeing guys and Ethan. A moment later, a lady (attractive, late 40s) enters and smiles warmly at Reichmann, offering her hand before seating herself next to the Emir’s chair. The team later learns she is one of his three wives.

As she and several men are seated, the Emir enters and takes his chair at the far side of the table, his entourage flanking him.

Faisel stands and makes the introductions, lights are lowered, and Reichmann is asked to begin the presentation. Elena is tasked with operating the laptop - advancing through the PowerPoint on Reichmann’s cue. He begins with intro level narrative. The audience is quiet - emotionless.

The presentation had been prepared around TWO rooms only – the Majlis (a large traditional meeting room with chairs on all sides) and the Emir’s bedroom (to be situated in the nose of the aircraft). As the presentation arrives at the first rendering - *the Majlis*, Reichmann surveys his audience – hoping to get a read on the Emir and his wife. They remain emotionless. No comments, no questions, nothing! The wife motions for Reichmann to move on. Elena advances to a second slide of the Majlis showing details of the room – and is again motioned to advance without comment.

Responding to the quickened pace, Elena skips over a few slides, advancing to the Bedroom – Reichmann abbreviating his narrative. As he speaks, he again catches the wife’s eye - the precise moment where the presentation takes a decided turn. She rolls her eyes in what clearly was a message; one that couldn’t be mistaken. She turns her head, no longer looking at Reichmann – abruptly replacing the warm demeanor she had displayed only moments before. Reichmann wasn’t sure if anyone else had seen the gesture – but to him, it may as well have been a note saying “your presentation sucks”. It was clear alright…*Airborne* had missed the mark! He glances at Elena, She wrinkles her brow at him – indicating she had probably seen it too. She quickly advances through the closing slides, Reichmann thanking them for the opportunity….blah blah blah, upon which the whole team is ushered out and back to the undersecretary’s office.

From there, it’s back in the Rovers – no one saying a word - and then back to the building where they had been before. It’s dark by now and Faisel is nowhere to be found. The entire team is dumbstruck. Reichmann, Ferris and Elena are huddled at one end of the room feverishly speculating about what just happened. The direction they were given had been extremely clear and well supported by photographs. What the hell had gone wrong?

At 7 p.m., Faisal appears with his usual ‘shadow’ assistant and announces, “Come - we will now take you back to the hotel.”

Reichmann and Ferris both stand immediately with perplexed looks. Everyone begins to move but Reichmann holds:

“Hang on, nobody’s going anywhere until you tell us what just went on in there.”

Faisal is taken aback - as if no one would ever dare talk to him in such a manner. He immediately asks everyone in the room besides himself and Reichmann to wait in the outer lobby. As the door shuts, Faisel tells Reichmann, ”You and your team are guests of His Majesty and I am an extension of the family within that context and…”

Reichmann interrupts: “Lets cut the bullshit Faisel. This whole notion that you have the ear of the Emir is not true at all, is it? The entire directive you gave us was WRONG. I listened to you go on three weeks ago in Dallas about what they wanted and despite us all asking for a written requirement, you just kept insisting gold this and the gold that… blah blah blah.”

“Jack! We will receive a formal briefing on the Emir’s reaction from the undersecretary’s office tomorrow. In the meantime, I’ll thank you not to go pointing fingers.”

“Are you kidding me!? I just got all the *briefing* I need in Mrs. Emir’s face. They *hated it*, all of it! And I’m more than sure you’re already keenly aware of that. So fuck the briefing, I want you to tell me why my staff just worked night and day, made a trip halfway around the world, sat in a hotel for a week – and then handed the Emir Chocolate when he wanted Raspberry!”

The two men stand toe to toe. Faisel is visibly pissed and completely taken aback at this American Designer reading him the riot act *on his own turf*. He continues to insist that Reichmann is out of order and threatens that he is far from the only designer at their disposal – that if he doesn’t calm down, he and the entire crew will be escorted out and deported immediately.

Reichmann rolls his eyes: “Whatever! Let me ask you something Faisal, do you know the name Ahmed Fahed?” Faisel clearly hasn’t a clue. “He’s a close friend of mine” Reichmann continues, He attended school with the Emir at Georgetown and still maintains a close relationship with him.”

(*Was it true? Not exactly all of it but probably enough to serve his interest he thought)*

“I’m just wondering, Faisal…wondering if the Emir would like to know who’s really responsible for wasting his time, whose overconfident, under informed directives have now thrown PDR back by 60 days.”

He leans into Faisel and whispers, ”I don’t care what you have to do – but if you wanna maintain your lofty position, I suggest you get me something REAL, because if I go down, trust me, *you’re going with me!”*

He flings the door open (heart pounding out of his chest) and, as he’s leaving adds, “We’re not leaving until this is fixed!”

The entire next day is spent nervously sitting around the hotel waiting to either be forcibly removed by armed escorts to the airport OR receive a conciliatory call from Faisel. In the meantime Reichmann, Ferris, Elena and the Boeing guys are anxiously holed up at the local Starbuck’s within a huge, overly-opulent mall connected to the hotel. The main level is littered with Bentleys and Lamborghinis representing local dealers and every high end luxury retailer on the planet lining the mall.

Ethan is arguing with Elena over the Worldcup which is playing on a monitor above the counter – an argument he will loose but a tactic he hopes will result in her sleeping with him. Reichmann is getting a flirtatious smile from the sales woman assigned to the Aston Martin Vanquish across the way. She’s stunning - and though he returns her gaze - he’s far too pre-occupied to engage her.

At 4:17 Reichmann’s phone goes. It’s Faisel asking him to meet him in front of the hotel in 15 minutes. Reichmann stands, slaps Ethan’s hand and says: “Game on kids, If I’m not back in an hour, call the embassy and tell that girl over there I love her.”

Reichmann enters the white Bentley coupe in front of the hotel. Faisel hands him a jump drive and says, “This was handed to me by the Emir’s wife this morning. Other than the layout and technical specs, the “design” is under her control. I have dinner with some people. You have 36 hours, and this time your audience will be her alone – the decision is entirely hers to make.”

Reichmann thanks him and opens the door.

As Reichmann exits, Faisel leans across and says, “I guess we both keep our jobs, Reichmann. I’ll give you this: you’ve got some big balls. I’ve seen people beheaded for less. I’ll call you.”

Back in LA, Lexy and Simon are looking at the e-mail from Reichmann.

*“ 36 hours!… ..that’s impossible”* says Lexy.

“It might be impossible but we’re gonna do it anyway. I have no interest in being around here if Reichmann comes back without this one. We can sleep when we’re dead. I need you to keep everybody off of me, OK? No calls, nothing. And coffee, we need lots of coffee!”

“You got it soldier!”

Back in Kuwait, Reichmann and Ferris are at the hotel bar.

“So what’s the deal… did fuckwad offer any apology?”

“Yeah, he even started crying. Of course he didn’t. Ya think that arrogant fuck gives a shit if his stupidity cost us anything? The only reason we’re not all on a Turkish prison boat right now is that he thinks his own ass is on the line.”

“Well how’s your foot?”

“My foot??”

“Yeah, I mean ya put it pretty far up ole Faisel’s ass there!”

The two laugh.

Reichmann tells Ferris….

“Go ask Elena to go up to the front desk and ask if Marcus Penniman is still here”

“What??”

“I can smell him! He’s either *been* here or he’s *coming*”.

“Jack there’s a dozen western hotels here!”

“its just a hunch”

A few minutes later, Elena returns. “Penniman was here alright, ten days ago.”

Pause

“OK that’s good, right?” says Ferris.

Elena speaks: “its gotta be good! I mean If we were allowed to present under Faisal’s ill informed design directive – then Penniman was too. And it couldn’t have gone much better for them, right?

“Exactly…and the NEW directive… only came after you called him out yesterday” says Ferris.

Reichman nods his head – still in thought. “the only question is, is Penniman still in the game AND is Faisal intending on now giving the correct directive to him as well?”

“Not a chance.” says Ferris. As long as he thinks you have the ability to throw him under the bus, he’s going to leave well enough alone. What could he possibly gain by opening it up?”

“Well it would sure be a good opportunity to bitch slap me in return, wouldn’t it? – says Reichmann.

“Yea but we’re HERE”, says Elena – “and we have another audience with them in 36 hours”. And Faisal, he needs this *over* before there’s even more egg on his face.

“Maybe you’re right” says Reichmann, “It’s our only play...we nail this and its done - game over, the prize is ours!

30 hours later, Reichmann, Ferris and Elena are back in the undersecretary’s office watching the Arabic Cooking Channel again.

The three are seen going in to the conference room.

After some time, they emerge with emotionless faces, entering the Rovers for the drive back to the hotel.

We next see the three exiting a Rover – but discover it’s their own vehicle having just pulled up at the office back in LA.

As they enter, Lexy, Simon, the intern and other staffers are assembled and waiting. Yelps! Lexy chops the cork off a bottle of champagne – cheers, laughter, celebration.

Later, around dusk, Reichmann and Ferris are on the veranda overlooking LA, their bad-ass offices visible through the windows behind them. Each sporting a glass of McCallum and a cigar.

Ferris speaks: “Ya know Reichmann, for a man of diminished moral character, you occasionally manage to surprise me.”

“Yeah, how’s that, Ferris?”

“Well you *blackmail* a high-ranking Kuwaiti National on his own soil - with a name that you probably *made up –* and somehow wind up with rainbows comin’ out of *your* ass! How exactly did you manage that anyway?”

“You know Regan once said, ‘*If ya can’t make ‘em see the light…ya make ‘em FEEL the heat”*

The two clink their glasses and smile.

“Are you speaking of Faisal or Penniman?”

“Is there a difference?”

In trailing conversation…..

“The 74-8 is one monster of an airplane airplane”

“Yep”.

“Does that scare you at all?”

“It isn’t the airplane that has me worried.”

“Yea – what then?”

“Our friend Faisel,…..he lost a battle this week – but he isn’t the sort to forget it”.

**END**

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