

FROM THE THEATRE OF WAR TO THE
THEATRE OF MOVING PEOPLE

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by

Adam J. Musil, B.S.

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Adam John Musil

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There is a vocal minority in this country that believes they understand everything there is about the war in Iraq. This minority can often be neatly dissected into two politically motivated groups run mostly by old puffy white men. Few of these men have actually been in a war, but that does not stop them from telling the American people how a war should be run. These groups go on television and write books about why we should never leave Iraq or why we should immediately pull out. And while these people are pointing fingers at each other, half a world away real people are getting killed.

One day the United States will leave Iraq. For most Americans life will continue the same as it had before. The headlines will change. The old puffy white men will find something else to argue about. And so it goes. But for the men and women of the United States military and for the people of Iraq, the world will never be the same. This play is for them.

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CHAPTER I

A DISGRUNTLED WAR VETERAN'S GUIDE TO UNIVERSITY THEATRE PRODUCTION

The argument could be made that wars should not be fought unless absolutely necessary; however history has proven once a war has begun—regardless of the circumstances—it cannot be won without a great deal of death, destruction, and bloodshed. The United States military is finding this out first hand in Iraq¹. During the invasion of 2003, the military tore through Iraq and overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime in a matter of days and in doing so caused a great amount of death and destruction². During all of this (if you believe opinion polls), most Americans supported this military campaign. I believe many Americans supported the operation because they believed in two ideas: 1) it would be an easy victory and 2) all Arabs are the same and killing the ones in Iraq helped most of America feel better about the destruction of the World Trade Center a few years prior. Four years later, the war continues and after thousands of dead or injured soldiers and billions of dollars in

¹ A country in the Middle East created at the end of World War I by a group of wise old white men. The white men, thinking all brown men were the same, successfully grouped three religious sects of Arabs together even though they despised each other.

² After the initial invasion the military would set a curfew and any local Iraqi out past the designated time would be killed. One young soldier told me after curfew he was allowed to shoot at everything and anything on the street.

defense spending, most Americans are ready for the war to be over. While losing money and American lives is a terrible consequence of any military campaign, the loss of American life now is not any less tragic than it was in 2003 (or the loss of civilian life, which has only increased). However, today the perception of the war has changed: the American public no longer believes the soldiers are dying for a worthy cause.

In large part, the perception of the war changed due to the role of the mainstream American media. Now, the media is an easy scapegoat for much of the nation's ills, but in fact the window through which most Americans view the situation in Iraq is a five minute sound bite on cable television³. When the war first began, the sound bites delivered the smiling faces of the American soldier and in some cases portrayed the military personnel to be something they were not (such as Jessica Lynch whose story, she herself admitted, was less inspiring than advertised). The war was presented to the Americans as easy and uncomplicated; it was the New York Yankees against the Toledo Mud Hens—victory was a sure thing. Then, reality set in. The war turned from a happy jaunt across the poppy field into a long hard slog through the mud. Somewhere during all of this, public opinion turned against the occupation of Iraq and the vocal minority began polluting the airwaves splitting into two groups: pro-war and anti-war. Soon, the average American's window on Iraq became a kaleidoscope of war propaganda; the truth was all but snuffed out. Now, truth is itself an elusive term. After all, the truths one holds as self evident will vary based on that person's life experience. Therefore, an objective person must create his

³ Most cable outlets employ a technique dubbed, "drive-by journalism" wherein they simply report on events without any analysis as to what caused said event or why it happened.

own bedrock of truth, based not on a third party belief system, but on facts. This brings us full circle. It is the media where most Americans turn for these illusive factoids. This creates a sort of information paradox. Information paradox motivated me to write Welcome to the Sandbox.

* * *

Mark Twain once wrote, “Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities. Truth isn’t.”⁴ As a soldier who served in Iraq, I felt that I had the experience needed to write a piece of fiction that stuck to the possibilities of war. My goal was to write a piece that told a story but, more importantly, did not intentionally goad the audience’s opinion about the conflict in Iraq.

The original idea for Welcome to the Sandbox came to me after watching the David Lean film A Passage to India, a story of British Imperialism and problems the British occupation brought to India’s native people, specifically, a man named Dr. Aziz H. Ahmed. Ahmed was a local Indian man who served the Queen’s army in various ways and had a strong rapport with the British military men. At the end of the movie, Ahmed was falsely accused of raping an upstanding British woman. Though it was obvious Ahmed was innocent, his acquaintances were unwilling to defend their former friend in a court of law. Similar to the themes of Passage, I wanted to write a play about Iraq that highlighted the relationships between the occupying American military and the local Iraqis.

In Iraq I had met and interacted with many locals. On television, the people of Iraq are often pigeonholed as religious zealots or (when it comes to governing their

⁴ *Following the Equator*.

country) inept. However, most of the people in Iraq are simply trying to survive until the next day and the educated Iraqis are using their talents to flee the country; not rebuild it. Through my writing I wanted to educate the American people about the plight of the average Iraqi.

In the original draft, the play focused on the relationship of a young idealistic Army lieutenant named Manning and an Iraqi interpreter named Ali. One of the more profitable jobs for an Iraqi (albeit one of the most dangerous jobs) was as an interpreter. Using the model from Passage, the job of interpreter fit perfectly into the character model of Dr. Aziz. The story was told from the point of view of Lieutenant Manning. He was an outsider to the base, and over the course of the play, he was forced to come to terms with devastation caused in Iraq by the United States. Manning became appalled with the treatment of the native inhabitants of Iraq and lost faith in the war and the American occupation. I was not pleased with my original draft. I felt that the plot was overly cliché and predictable. I also wanted the play to be Manning's story, but unconsciously I had written a story that focused more on Ali.

I approached the second draft in a different manner. Instead of focusing on writing an entertaining story, I focused more on portraying the truths I had come to believe about Iraq. To accomplish this, I added additional characters to the play and dissected the story into small vignettes. The purpose of breaking down the story in this manner was to play up the notion of the audience as observers, not participants in

the story, creating a Brechtian alienation effect similar to Spaceship Earth at Epcot Center in Disney World⁵—you are learning something, but you are always cognizant of the small vessel lurching you around the track. In a sense I wanted the audience to view Iraq through my window.

The vignettes were held together by a narrative through line involving the construction of a hospital. As the play progressed, so did the completion of the hospital. This was in direct correlation with the mood and attitudes of the players in the performance. Ultimately the hospital was destroyed as were the hopes and realities of the characters. It was my intent that an audience member knowing nothing about Iraq would believe the hospital would be completed. Of course, as in reality, the building was destroyed and the military was forced to rebuild, symbolizing the fruitless attempts by the Americans to rebuild Iraq. The final scene of the play reiterates this point as Sergeant Jones speaks with Lieutenant Manning's replacement with the same words he used in the first act of the play. It creates a literal and figurative cycle symbolizing the problems in Iraq. I previously mentioned that my goal was not to influence the audience—I found this to be an impossible task. I wanted the story to have some type of narrative structure if for no other reason than to keep the audience engaged. Does every project in Iraq end in destruction? Of course not, but enough schools are destroyed to make the assumption that the long range goal of building schools and hospitals in order to help locals is a fruitless endeavor.

⁵ Spaceship Earth is a ride at Epcot Center that takes place inside the large ball that many have come to distinguish Epcot Center by. The attraction takes the audience “through time” as you enter a small vessel and are trucked around on a track all the while witnessing 1970’s robot technology crudely reenacting various time periods in the Earth’s history.

Also, the destruction of the hospital was a tangible event that made the play more credible.

So that Sandbox could be performed anywhere, I created a play with a small cast that required little need for costuming or set design⁶. With limited sets I decided to create an atmosphere that felt like Iraq through dialogue. I accomplished this by using dialogue that gave specific locations in Baghdad. For example, in the beginning of the play, Manning references the city Ottomiya, which was an Iraqi neighborhood that few audience members have ever heard about. It is a Sunni controlled neighborhood that was friendly to Americans. Therefore, it was logical for the Americans to work in Adhamya. I also wrote about actual locations that I had visited.

The majority of the play took place at the Ministry of Defense⁷, a military outpost that housed both Iraqi army and American military. To give the setting its own personality without much of a set, I set scenes in the areas of the building that I believed were the most distinguishable. For example, the balcony setting was a place where soldiers would go to get away from the daily grind and take in some fresh air. Here one could find soldiers smoking cigars and rambling on about daily events. In the play, I used the balcony for only such events. I believe that it gave the audience a reference point as to the setting without having to mention it.

The other settings in the play were also based on areas I visited in Baghdad. In Iraq, there were numerous projects underway to rebuild hospitals, schools and water

⁶ While I would love to credit this approach to a Grotowski-like attitude towards theatre and the power of the actor, the reality is I just wanted the play to be produced cheaply by someone interested in performing it. Of course, I *was* trying to create a theatre of understanding in a way, but I digress.

⁷ The building received its title because it was Saddam Hussein's ministry of defense building. Americans called it the MOD for short.

treatment sites⁸, all of which were funded primarily by the United States but built by the local communities. I felt I would be remiss if I wrote a play about Iraq and did not mention these projects⁹.

* * *

The characters of the play were designed from a mish-mash of my ideas, thoughts, and caricatures of flesh and blood servicemen with whom I had come in contact. My intent was for each character to serve as a varying viewpoint on Iraq. I wrote Sandbox to be an ensemble piece with no true protagonist. However, Ali is the one character that could be described as the protagonist.

I gave Ali the job of interpreter because in Iraq most units rely on an interpreter to speak with local Sheiks and clerics. These interpreters were educated at University. As an interpreter Ali could plausibly spend most of the play with the American soldiers¹⁰. The character of Ali was based on a man I met in Iraq named Ali. This may not be the most creative choice in terms of naming a fictional character; however, Iraqis are named based on their religious sect and I also knew that the real Ali would never see the play. I first met Ali when I was working as a gate guard.¹¹ As a member of the Sunni minority, he was educated under the Saddam Hussein regime;

⁸ In Iraq I spent most of my time producing Army news stories for military television and cable stations. On one such story, I covered the opening of a water station. In that news story I wrote that the water station allowed everyone to have clean running water. The reality was different; I used the play to tell the complete version of what happened that day.

⁹ The local community was not one that held a high regard for quality craftsmanship. Often walls leaned and the electricity was not properly connected. It was also common to see Iraqis, literally, sleeping on the job. This work ethic is not a new occurrence; T.E. Lawrence found instances similar to this during his travels in the Middle East during the First World War.

¹⁰ Interpreters in Iraq have access to military personnel in ways that an average citizen does not. The more trusted interpreters live on the base and eat and sleep with the military. Most of these interpreters are brought in from America; whereas the local interpreters work on the post, but live at home.

¹¹ On gate guard a soldier split his or her time standing behind a gun turret looking out into the city or sitting on a bench searching civilians entering the base. In any case it was an excruciating affair. Talking with Ali and other locals was the only thing that made the job tolerable.

however, once Saddam was deposed, Ali found himself out of work and unable to leave the country.

Using the real Ali as a foundation, I wrote the character as a composite of opinions and ideas I had heard from various Iraqi men. For example, in one scene Ali rants about not being able to get a higher paying job. This dialogue was taken from a conversation I had with a well-educated Iraqi male who made his living checking identification cards. This man was being supervised by men and women less educated than himself, but because of the war he was unable to gain any type of social status. It was important for me to write the character in this way because not only does it characterize the problem many Iraqi males face, it also hints at the larger problem of creating foreign fighters. Currently, Iraq is full of unemployed twenty-something's with no place to put their energies or aggression. This creates a frustrated and angry young man; a perfect recruit for a future suicide bomber.

Not only were the women in Iraq forced to confront the problems of their male counterparts, they were also treated as second class citizens. Because of the strict religious tenets followed by most Iraqis, a woman's role was reduced to that of baby-producer and caregiver. This may bring to mind images of the 1950s and Donna Reed, but many Iraqi women could only hope to be treated like an American housewife. The majority of these women were kept at home and when in public were required to cover the majority of their bodies. These restraints were applied to married and single women. Single women were looked down upon for being promiscuous because sex should be reserved for making children. Of course (like many American youths in the Bible belt) the young Iraqis got around this rule by

having alternate forms of intercourse¹². This was the type of environment Assil, the female lead in the play, was forced to deal with on a daily basis.

The character Assil was based on a person of the same name who was part of a small minority of women in Iraq who outwardly challenged the societal conventions of an Iraqi woman. Assil was not afraid to speak out in public, challenge men, or wear colorful clothing many Arab men might perceive as provocative. When the Americans arrived, many of these same women used the occupation as a way to better their own social standing and did so with great personal risk.

While writing, I struggled more with the character of Assil than any other character in the play. In Iraq, the decision for an Iraqi woman to cling to an American male is a bold one that could lead to death. However, to an American audience, her actions could be perceived as weak. Originally, my solution to this problem was to write in a few extra scenes that overtly presented Assil as what an American would perceive as a strong woman. However, I eventually removed the scenes because it took away from my intent of simply presenting the Iraqis as I had known them. I had no idea what someone like Assil may have said in private, so I removed the dialogue, with the hope that the audience would be able to understand the situation on its own¹³.

Unlike her real life counterpart, the character in the play was known by the name of Nancy. Many Iraqi women that worked for the Americans gave themselves American names. Some did this because they wanted to be accepted by the Americans and others did it because they were ashamed of their upbringing.

¹² As one Iraqi male told me, “we have sex everywhere but in the area used to make children.”

¹³ The comments of the character were mixed. Two said that she was a “strong character” while another said she was uninteresting and predictable.

The real Assil died shortly after I returned from Iraq; she was gunned down in the same fashion as her fictional counterpart.

The current perception by many Americans of the American service member is laughable at best. It is bad enough for one to serve in a war zone for a year, but it is worse to come home and be constantly patronized for your service. I cannot remember the number of times I have been called a *hero* and told *thank you for keeping us safe*. Then, you have the stickers on the cars. For some reason, the stickers are big now. I have not studied this phenomenon in any great detail, but it appears that most people with “Support the Troops” stickers also have a Jesus fish stuck to the back of their car. The people against war have stickers on their cars berating the current president and the war. These people also have a fish on their car, but the fish usually has the word DARWIN inside of it. These disgruntled pro and anti war factions have definitive opinions on the war (at least they seem to want to paste their viewpoint on their car) and each group uses the American service member to express that view. To the pro-war crowd, the soldiers are heroes. To the anti-war crowd, the soldiers are innocent people forced to fight for George W. Bush. With this play, it was important for me to write military characters that I felt were a true representation of a soldier.

The elder statesman of my soldier threesome was Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse. Stackhouse was a man who enjoyed nothing more than serving in the military and viewed his position more as an adventure than as a job; he wanted simply to be perceived as a leader of men. For Stackhouse there was no time to

become bogged down by paperwork and brown-nosing, which is why he enjoyed serving as the officer in charge of the ministry of defense¹⁴.

At this ministry, Stackhouse's main duty was to monitor the dealings between the Iraqis and the Americans. He enjoyed this type of work because he was able to come and go as he pleased. Stackhouse answered to no one; the Iraqis answered to him. Stackhouse was not intended to drive the storyline; rather, his purpose was to provide the audience with an understanding of command structure and to lighten the mood of the play. I accomplished the latter by placing Stackhouse in absurd situations such as riding a bicycle on stage¹⁵. Stackhouse was the character that taught the audience about the idiosyncrasies of the military command structure. For example, though Stackhouse was in charge, it was the Sergeant Jones who actually handled most of the day to day operations on the base. A lay audience member may have heard the word *colonel* and believed that Stackhouse was out running around with the men and making all of the decisions when in reality, he was the supervisor of the operation.

If Ali was the sun around which the universe of the play revolved, Lieutenant Manning was the careening asteroid inadvertently disrupting the balance of that universe. Manning entered the play as fresh faced and eager to work with his fellow soldiers. I believed that after being inundated with images of Iraq, a third party would more easily sympathize with the frustrations of Sergeant Jones because he, and to a

¹⁴ During my time overseas many soldiers liked nothing more than to work at the ministry of defense. There soldiers were not constrained to the political correctness at the larger bases which were full of high ranking officers.

¹⁵ That particular scene was based on a Captain I knew who had his exercise bike shipped to Iraq. Every night he would dress up in his cycling outfit and peddle away. He ended up participating in a triathlon competition that appeared on NBC. I shot his segment; however it was bumped from the show and replaced with a story about a paraplegic athlete. I think it eventually aired on the NBC morning show. Either way, I received a t-shirt out of the deal.

lesser extent Stackhouse, was exhausted with the war in the same way most Americans were. Manning was the foil to this. He was young, chipper and believed he could make a difference. Unlike the more seasoned soldiers around him, Manning had never seen the situation in Iraq first-hand. On a deeper level, Manning was driven by a belief system based on religious faith and an unnerving patriotism based. This patriotic belief system creates an imperialistic attitude of *I am better than you* to other nations and their people. Manning's feelings came from an unconscious belief that the *good* was preordained to conquer the *evil* (the western world being the good). The tragic irony of this belief is that the fundamentalist Muslims of the Middle East hold the same belief.

Manning's character allowed me to fill his mouth full of clichéd dialogue and rhetoric I heard from various sources. For example, after I returned home, I heard a retired military Colonel say, "If we don't stop the terrorists in Iraq, we could all end up wearing burkas!" When I heard this statement I was still writing the script, I immediately made room for this line of dialogue. In fact, most of Manning's speeches and diatribes were taken from actual conversations. In many ways, the character of Manning was the most realistic in the play.

The final major player of the performance was Sergeant First Class Jones¹⁶. Jones was Ali's closest confidant on the post and is the character, I believed, most audience members could relate to. Sergeant Jones represented the average working military man in Iraq. Unlike Manning, Jones did not care about the occupation in Iraq. As a veteran he was exhausted from deployments and wanted nothing more than

¹⁶ Sergeant Jones was picked by audience members as their favorite character in the play.

to go home. As a result, he had become jaded about helping the Iraqis and was biding his time to leave.

Though he was outranked by everyone else in the play, Sergeant Jones was the wheel that turned the military machine at the Ministry of Defense. He was Stackhouse's go-to-guy and also had the best relationship with the Iraqis. The character that brought Jones the most friction in the play was Manning. This made for an interesting situation because Manning outranked Jones, but had no experience. Jones coped with his internal problems by making jokes and undermining Manning's authority. To the audience member, it may have appeared odd (it did to some of the actors) that Jones had so much clout at the base while also being on the bottom of the totem pole; however, historically speaking, the army sergeant was the individual that had the most experience within the unit—not the officer. An army officer was basically a manager who reported to a higher authority regarding the progress a unit was making. And while officers frequently left units for promotions, the Sergeant stayed to rear the next crop of young soldiers. This often made the sergeant more knowledgeable than his higher-ranking counterparts.

Though Sergeant Jones was of a lower rank than Lieutenant Manning and Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse, the two officers could not succeed without Jones. Therefore, Jones had free reign to act and say things that other soldiers could not.

Because of this, he served as the comic relief of the story; whether it is chiding the young Lieutenant or joking with the Colonel, Jones never misses an opportunity to make light of a war he found impossible for the Americans to win¹⁷.

* * *

I found writing Welcome to the Sandbox to be a relatively easy and painless process¹⁸. However, I was not as confident with the production aspect. Welcome to the Sandbox was the first play I had actually written knowing that, unless the play was awful or embarrassing to the university, it would be performed. I had no idea what to expect. The process began on shaky ground as the original person who volunteered to direct the play pulled out at the last minute due to a scheduling conflict. A few other people passed on the play for various reasons and with a week before rehearsals were scheduled to begin, the play had no director. Then the day before the official casting was supposed to take place, graduate student Debbie Swann agreed to direct the play.

I spoke with Debbie briefly on the phone before we met for the casting call and dispensed pleasantries. She commented on how she was looking forward to working on the play and I told her I was looking forward to her working on the play. Of course, in reality, I think both of us were just happy to be working on something. I was a tad late for the casting call, a practice that would continue for much of the

¹⁷ At the intermission of the Sunday performance I was confronted by a young man who, judging from his haircut and tough guy saunter was either in the military or had served in the military. He felt that a sergeant would never outwardly make fun of a lieutenant (which is wrong because I have seen it) and expressed that I should not have been portraying the military in such a negative manner. I told him I did not think the military was portrayed in any way that was not realistic. He agreed it was realistic in tone, but felt that, "things like that should not be shown to the public." He left at intermission.

¹⁸ I wrote the first draft over the course of three nights. I then went back and refined the play, which took longer. I find writing dialogue to be relatively easy. I just think of a topic and have a conversation with myself.

rehearsals, and when I arrived the actors were already on stage and jumping up and down and making strange noises to prepare for their scenes. It was mid-January and I was wearing a light jacket. When I left Austin for San Marcos there was definitely a chill in the air that merited wearing a light coat; however, once I arrived in San Marcos it was rather warm. Yet, I liked my coat and wore it anyway which caused me to mildly perspire and arrive at the audition a little damper than I would have hoped. This dampness raised my anxiety level which was already high because of the unknown situation into which I was about to step. Perhaps it was my deer in headlight look, or my nervous sweating, but Debbie noticed me soon after I entered the room and introduced herself. There was a sharper edge to my new director than what I had heard on the phone and as she buzzed around the room she seemed to intimidate the actors around her. I quickly learned that Debbie was not anymore impersonal than most people; she simply wanted to get more work done than many of her peers.

Because of our schedules, we were not able to sit down and talk about what each of us was expecting in terms of casting. In hindsight, I believe this would have made the audition process a little more successful. Our actor pool to draw from was quite limited. With no real standout, I wanted to cast actors with skin that looked a little more lived in. Debbie wanted to cast actors she knew and felt comfortable working with. The only point of contention, though a moderate one at the time, was the casting of Sergeant Jones. Most of the actors were thin and wiry and looked all of twenty-three years old (which they were), which was about twenty years younger than what I had in mind for the character. The actor she had chosen was a friend of hers and she felt confident he would be a good fit for the part. The actor I wanted was

a little older and had more tough-guy presence on stage. In the end, we went with her choice because she felt more comfortable with him.

The one cast member Debbie had a problem with was Steve Zinkgraff who was already chosen to play Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse before the casting call. She was perturbed that she was unable to be involved in the casting. I was shocked by this because it was not as if there was a plethora of fifty-year old retired military men vying for the opportunity to perform in a college production. After a few weeks Debbie warmed to Steve, or at least warmed to the idea of him being in the play.

Overall, I thought the cast chosen was able to represent the characters in the play. My greatest apprehension going into the production process of the play was finding actors who could play Iraqis. At the casting call, I was just hoping to get people with a skin tone similar to that of an Arab. Luckily, this was never a problem. After the casting call I had full confidence that Micah Lyons and English Hinojosa could represent local Iraqis realistically.

* * *

The rehearsal sessions began the week following the casting. On the first rehearsal session the actors went through the entire play, reading the script aloud. Halfway into the play, one of the actors decided to turn down his role in the play. His character had a small walk-on part and he did not feel that committing himself to the performance was worth reading only a few lines. I was not bothered by this as much as the rest of the cast was. Apparently turning down a part after accepting it is a no-no in the theatre world. Some of the students wanted to blackball this actor so he would

never work again¹⁹. According to them, this was not the first time this actor had shown a poor attitude about performing and he did not play well with others. Later that night, it was decided we would offer the part to John Iverson who also was serving as the script dramaturg on the production.

The night of the first reading I introduced myself to the cast and explained to them my motivations for writing the script and what I wanted in terms of production. We also explained to the actors there would most likely be revisions throughout the process, as Sandbox was a new script. The actors agreed to be flexible, and were throughout the performance. John Hood followed me with a rousing Vince Lombardi-esque speech about working on new productions and the importance of the play. Everyone involved seemed excited about the project.

The week after rehearsals started, I left town for a work trip and returned to discover one that the lead actor was forced to resign his part because of grades. I told him I was sorry about his academic problems (which I was), but inside I was cheering ecstatically because I did not feel that actor fit the part. My thinking was with him out of the picture Debbie was out of friends to cast and I could influence the casting process more. However, standing in the foyer of the theatre building discussing the possibilities of who we could cast an acquaintance of Debbie's walked up and volunteered for the role. We both immediately agreed, her because of time needed to rehearse and me because he was taller and looked stronger than the other actor.

With the entire cast now in place, Debbie began running different scenes throughout the week; after each scene she would ask me what I thought. For the first

¹⁹ A few days later I was told all other directors and actors were warned to stay away from this actor. I found this quite amusing that someone would be shunned because of his performance in my play.

week I was elated someone was even rehearsing my play, so I believed everything was perfect. After running through the scenes a few times problems started to arise; the biggest being: overdramatic pauses and dialogue. At various points throughout the play it was as if I had been transformed into Danielle Steele as much of the dialogue was over the top and melodramatic. I quickly deleted these scenes. My other concern was the actors' inability to understand their characters in the context of the world of the play. In hindsight, I should have explained this to the cast before the rehearsals began. The actors were not finding a lot of the humor in the play. They seemed to think: "war, I must be serious and somber". The result was a boring product with actors droning on about current events. Before we began production, Debbie, John Iverson and I did our best to inform the actors of the conflicts in the Middle-East with the hopes of helping them better understand their characters. To a point, I think this was accomplished, but it also caused the actors to take their roles too seriously. That first month, Debbie and I had to constantly remind the actors that they could relax and allow themselves to be funny.

As the actors worked to learn their lines and become comfortable with each other, I worked with John Iverson to think of ways to help the cast better understand how a soldier moved and spoke. I also wanted them to gain a greater understanding of the war in Iraq and what led America to invade the country. John and I decided to show the actors press clippings of current events and have a discussion about what it was like to live in Iraq. Debbie cleared a rehearsal day and we conducted a discussion session. At the session, John shared stories of the war he had read in the paper and brought newspaper clippings. He also spoke about what the military was like when he

was in it. I followed and spoke briefly about Iraq. I also gave the actors web addresses where they could find some of the Army news stories I had written and recorded. I felt this was important for them because much of the play is a reaction to the stories I had written in Iraq. The scene at the water site was an example of this. Regardless of how much I shared with them about the water site, nothing was as effective as showing the actors moving images of the event.

After the discussion, the acting started to reach a higher level. I could tell the actors were more involved and better understood their characters. As the actors became sharper in their deliveries, errors in the script became more apparent. There were some scenes that needed to be trimmed and some dialogue needed to be changed. Although Debbie, the actors and I usually agreed on the choices being made, there were a few instances of disagreement.

My intention was always for Assil to die in the play. I realized having the innocent die in a war play was cliché; however, the real Assil did die in the same manner she did in the play²⁰.

Writing a death scene for Assil was a struggle; I did not want to write a staged death scene for fear that it would not look realistic, but at the same time I wanted the audience to feel the impact of Assil's untimely demise. I decided to write a scene in which Assil died offstage, but returned to Sergeant Jones in the form of a vision. Whether this vision was a ghost, or Sergeant Jones' imagination, was a question I

²⁰ A few months after the play I ran into a man who, now a national guard pilot, was a civilian contractor in Iraq a year before I arrived there. We had worked at the same base and he knew the "real" Assil. It was obvious he was quite fond of her and he believed that she was a good role model for other Iraqis. Once I told him that she died he was visibly upset. I wished that everyone in the play could have seen that moment and understand how important Assil was to a lot of people.

never answered. I thought it best to let the director decide how he wanted to handle the scene.

We began running the scene, but Debbie and John Hood felt that the scene was missing something. Debbie also found it odd to place something so unrealistic in a linear play. It was my thought that the audience would be able to follow the death sequence without confusion; I also wanted to break up the monotony of a linear story. Different ideas were discussed as to how to change the scene. Debbie and John offered the idea of having Nancy die on stage. I was completely against this, afraid that the scene would look very fake and cheap. Also, Debbie wanted her to have a “beautiful death.” I argued, at least in my play, there is nothing beautiful about death²¹. Eventually, we agreed on adding some dialogue to the scene to make it more obvious to the viewer that Assil was dead. I also repositioned the scenes. Prior to Assil appearing on stage, Ali yelled out that Nancy had been killed. Then when Assil enters the stage in the following scene, it leaves the audience wondering if Assil was indeed dead. I remedied this problem by moving Act II, Scene 5, ahead of Assil’s return to the stage. Scene 6 originally involved Ali, Stackhouse and Jones lamenting over Assil’s death; I moved this scene forward and removed Ali and revised the discussion so that Assil’s death is only alluded to. This happens when Stackhouse states, “...then maybe innocent women wouldn’t get shot to hell for no reason.” My intent was to keep the audience interested and allow them to discover in the following scene that Assil had died. In the end, everyone agreed on the changes. Once it was decided the scene with Assil was staying, Debbie worked on the blocking to create a

²¹ When I had been an undergraduate I too liked stories where death was presented as beautiful. However, after seeing countless numbers of dead bodies my perception changed.

way for Assil to enter the stage and leave while giving the impression of a vision or spirit²².

The scene that brought up the most discussion and disagreement was Act I, Scene 5 titled: “Defending the Gap.” The premise of the scene required that Manning illustrate to Ali the positives of invading Iraq. Manning did this by introducing Ali to something called the Gap theory—an actual theory that capitalist nations have a duty to put money and manpower into rebuilding some of the more impoverished nations in the world.

I first heard of the gap theory from a crusty neo-conservative man at a Best Western Hotel in North Dakota. I was attending a public affairs conference for the army, where the presenter talked for nearly an hour about the need for globalization and the need to decrease the size of the gap. I could not help but wonder what a local from a country inside the “gap” would think of this; I decided to analyze this in my play.

The problems started when the actor playing Manning was unable to understand the gap theory. I explained to him that the way I wrote it, he was not going to be able to understand it because Manning himself did not truly understand it. The comedic effect of this appeared to be lost on the actor--he was more concerned with Manning’s diatribe making sense. “But it’s not supposed to make sense!” I railed. After a week of going back and forth on whether or not to change the scene I went back to the script and rewrote the scene. I wrote something that was funny, but also easy for an audience to understand. The scene never was as comical as I wanted

²² In the talkbacks after the production the majority of the audience nodded when asked if they understood that Assil was dead during her last scene. Only one woman was moderately confused.

it to be. What I wanted was a crazy rant *a la* Dr. Strangelove and what I received was a flat scene that had a couple throw-away jokes.

I learned that as a writer, I need to take all of the questions and concerns from the director and actors seriously. My own biases came into play during the gap scene. I believed their confusion came from their inability to get the joke. In reality, there was not much of a joke to get.

It was three weeks before opening night and Debbie and I noticed the actors were again struggling to move and act like military soldiers; to be fair it was not their fault that twenty year olds were not acting like a grizzled forty year old war veterans. Steve and I designed a “boot camp” to get the actors thinking as much like soldiers as possible.

Steve, a sixty plus year old former naval officer, was in better shape than anyone else in the cast; therefore, he was in charge of exercises. I knew the most about military combat maneuvering so I taught some basic combat drills. Steve and I both dressed up in military garb and met the actors behind the theatre building. The actors playing the male roles were the participants in the event. Immediately, Steve and I began to yell at them as a Drill Sergeant would. It was supposed to be intimidating to them, but I’m sure they were not afraid of me. Once the exercises were done, I put the three actors through an exercise simulating firing a rifle while assaulting a building. I told the actor playing Manning to act like the officer and actor playing Jones to act like a Sergeant so the two could better understand the relationship between their two characters.

The three did an excellent job of going along with the boot camp idea. I am sure it was not easy to agree to let someone berate them for an hour (even when you know it is part of an act). After the exercise, I felt the actors understood the life of a military man better, but there was still something missing from their performance. This became another good learning point for me. If I took nothing else from this production, it was a new found respect for acting. I learned that acting was more than just looking the part. It was also about convincing the audience that you are the character you are playing. I finally realized this the day after the boot camp scene. I needed to let the actors create their own characters and if the audience believed it, then the actors had accomplished their jobs.

If I learned anything from the production of this play it is the process of dealing with actors on the stage. Throughout the rehearsal process, there was a constant emphasis on ensuring that the actors were accommodated both physically and emotionally. I had never been involved in anything like this before. I had always read about directors and writers that had difficulties with actors, but I just assumed it was because on professional productions actors were pampered and spoiled. Well, college actors are no different. I believe the following example best describes my point:

After the costumes were introduced the actors were feeling uncomfortable in their uniforms. One day the actor playing Manning was having a difficult time remembering any of his lines. We stopped the rehearsal and Debbie asked him what the problem was. He explained to her that he was unable to remember his lines because he was distracted by the helmet he was wearing. He said that when he spoke

his voice echoed in his helmet which distracted him from remembering his lines. Debbie told him to work around it, but he could not. At the end of the night he asked if he could dispense with the helmet. I told him that he was playing the role of a soldier in a play about war and in war people wore helmets. He did not respond well to this answer and continued to pout. The next rehearsal Debbie and I told the actor he did not have to wear the helmet as long as he held it in the hospital scene. With Manning not wearing the helmet, it made no sense for Jones to wear his helmet because the Manning character was more scared of combat than Jones, so in reality there would never be a time that Manning would not wear his helmet and Jones would. Our solution was that neither actor would wear their helmet during the hospital scene. Of course after the Saturday night performance, someone mentioned that it was odd the soldiers were not wearing helmets.

* * *

The play opened on March 30th in room 209 at Texas State University-San Marcos and played for three nights²³. It was an exciting experience for me, but also frustrating. At this point I had no control over the production. I could merely observe. Overall, I was pleased with the audience reaction to the play. They laughed at the comical elements and were quiet during the serious moments. Afterwards, I gained a lot of quality feedback. Before each performance we handed out critique sheets for the audience to mark what they liked about the play and what they did not like.

²³ I was hoping we would use the studio stage, but it was unavailable for use. At first I was a bit disappointed about using room 209 because, to me, it would always be a classroom first. However, once the production started I felt the small room created an intimacy between the audience and the stage—which was something I wanted to create with this play.

On Saturday night we had a talk back session. In this session, the cast and crew sat on the stage and answered questions from the audience. I was pleasantly surprised by the responses we received. Most people said they appreciated that the play was non-biased and not a political statement. I was surprised by the amount of military veterans in the audience, who seemed to come out of the woodwork after the performances; many of my friends I served with in Iraq came to the show. They said they enjoyed the play because it capsulated the frustrations they were feeling about the war. Several Vietnam veterans attended the play (most relatives of actors in the show) and all expressed to me an appreciation for the play. Micah's dad was a Vietnam veteran and he spoke with me at length about Vietnam and feelings my play brought up for him.

From the beginning, I wanted Sandbox to be a play that connected with people. One can argue forever the dramatic aptitude of the average theatergoer, but I think they want palatable art. I wanted Sandbox to help people understand the war on a basic level.

* * *

After a few months away from the script I revisited it again and looked over the areas of the play I felt the audience responded to the least, particularly the character of Manning. Originally, I wanted Manning to contrast the beliefs of Jones, but I also wanted him to be a formidable soldier—the intent was that a non-biased audience member could watch the performance and understand Jones' and Manning's points of view on the war. After watching the performance, I rewrote Manning to be more comical and annoying. From his inception, I wanted Manning to be something

of a disillusioned do-gooder with some comical elements. I did not feel that the actor playing Manning made the character as comical as he could have been. Ultimately, it is the job of the writer to make a character's motivations apparent in the script; therefore, I felt it was necessary to reshape Manning into a more comical character that everyone could laugh at. In the script, I rewrote much of his dialogue and made his conversations more over the top and ridiculous than previously. Once this was finished, I considered the script completed and stuck it in a drawer. A few months later on the advice of a professor who had read the script (who will also read this paper), I went back to see if in fact my writing was bad or if it was bad acting that made it difficult for me to get my point across. I tweaked some of the dialogue, but did not deviate from my characterization of Manning as a character people could laugh at. A film called The Ruling Class changed that. The film The Ruling Class, starring Peter O'Toole, was based on a play of the same name. The film followed Jack Gurney, played by Peter O'Toole, a paranoid schizophrenic who became the 14th Earl of Gurney. The film was a biting satire on the British establishment. After the film, I did not feel I could understand the frustrations of the British people as much as I could understand how upset Barnes was with the ruling class. With this in mind, I went back to Sandbox and reshaped Manning's character to be more of what I had originally intended for him. With this play I did not want the audience to read the program and say, "wow, this writer is really pissed off about the war in Iraq."

The only major change that remained in the play was the dialogue of Assil. In the first draft in Act I, Scene 8 Jones and Manning discuss the problems in Iraq. I removed this scene and extended a previous conversation between Assil and Sergeant

Jones. I felt that the new scene added to the relationship between the two while also adding some more depth to Assil's character.

* * *

There have been various books and television programs about the subject of Iraq. These programs are presented to be "ripped from the headlines" and factual. The reality is that most of these books have an agenda; I have little faith in the journalistic ideals of fairness in the American media outlets. Welcome to the Sandbox was my response to this. I wanted to portray life in Iraq as realistically as possible. In the end, I was very pleased with the performance; I owe all credit to the cast and crew of the production. The actors had to deal with getting new lines at a moment's notice and I felt they handled the situation very professionally. I also thought that Debbie went out of her way to make sure my vision of the play was realized.

In my mind the purpose of theatre is to create something that challenges the audience into a different way of thinking about the world. Now, almost a full year after I began writing, the war in Iraq continues to rage and the themes of Welcome to the Sandbox are prevalent. It is my hope that this will not be the last production of Sandbox, but the first in a string of productions that will hopefully engage audiences and enlighten them about some of the troubles we face in the world today.

SCENE ONE:

SLIDE: THE LOCALS

ALI stands alone. He is wearing an American military combat uniform and boots. His uniform is without patches and a name tag. He looks at the audience as if looking into a mirror. He methodically checks his uniform to ensure it is pressed and all of the buttons are buttoned. Once he is satisfied with his appearance he stops, stands tall and admires himself. ASSIL enters from behind and watches her cousin. She is an Iraqi woman of medium build. She is wearing western clothing and makeup. She is holding a box of cigars. Ali sees her in the mirror and is startled.

ALI

Oh, it is you. Hello Assil.

NANCY

Where are you off to?

ALI

No where important. I just got these back from the cleaners, wanted to make sure they still fit.

NANCY

I was worried about you today.

ALI

Why?

NANCY

That mission you were on sounded dangerous.

ALI

These days the job is no more dangerous than driving to work.

NANCY

You heard about what happened in Falluja didn't you?

ALI

This area is not Falluja.

NANCY

It's still not very safe.

ALI

Safer than some areas. Besides, on the missions now, the Americans merely observe. Our army is doing more of the heavy lifting.

NANCY

That's probably worse. Don't let one of them shoot you.

ALI

(laughs)

I think I will be okay. It's the I.P.'s that are shooting people.

NANCY

Right, the Iraqi army is just shooting themselves.

ALI

Assil, it is not that bad.

NANCY

I just want you to be careful. Going on all these missions...

ALI

There is nothing to worry about.

(beat)

NANCY

I am proud of you Ali.

ALI

What are you talking about?

NANCY

You just...seem like you have found something here.

ALI

I am trying to do my part.

NANCY

And to think, you were in Saddam's army...for what?

ALI

I do not want to talk about it.

NANCY

Three days?

ALI

Would you rather I stayed in the army?

NANCY

Of course not.

ALI
Then why bring that up?

NANCY
Oh Ali, do not get upset.

ALI
I am...am not upset.

NANCY
(chiding)
Ali, my big cousin. The pacifist who was in the Army for three days. And now look at you, in your uniform, all prim and proper.

ALI
Would you stop?

NANCY
Why?

ALI
You are embarrassing me.

NANCY
You should not be embarrassed. I think you look as good as any of the Americans.

ALI
I appreciate that.

NANCY
(playfully)
Even if they won't give you a name tag.

Ali looks down at his uniform. The two share a chuckle.

ALI
A name tag would be nice wouldn't it?

NANCY
You have *only* been here for three years. I am sure they are working on it.

(beat)

NANCY
(playfully)
Yep, people come and go, but my Ali stands firm. Right Ali?

ALI
That is right.

NANCY

So have any new people come in lately?

ALI

No, same group.

NANCY

I was just wondering because I think replacing Captain Warren will be a task.

ALI

What do you know of Captain Warren?

NANCY

He just seemed like a good soldier.

ALI

A good soldier? So you know what makes a good soldier now?

NANCY

No, no. He just seemed like one.

(beat)

NANCY

(eager)

They are going to replace him with someone, right?

ALI

Assil, how many times do I have to go over this with you?

NANCY

What?

ALI

Every person that stays for more than a month, you ask them the same thing.

NANCY

That is not true.

ALI

If you truly want to escape, get out of Baghdad.

NANCY

Ali, you know it is not that easy. If--

ALI

I have to go. We will talk about this later.

NANCY

I just don't see what--

ALI
I have to go.

NANCY
Ignoring me will not help.

ALI
Actually, it does.

NANCY
So where are you going now?

ALI
You know where.

NANCY
Well, can you at least give these to the Colonel?

Hands Ali the box of cigars.

ALI
I will. Thanks.

Ali begins to walk off stage. He stops
and turns to face his cousin.

ALI
You taking the bus home tonight?

NANCY
Yes.

ALI
Be careful. There is supposed to be a high activity of
I.E.D.'s out there. I know they don't usually hit the busses,
but--

NANCY
I'll be careful.

Ali walks off stage. Lights fade.

SCENE TWO:

SLIDE: THE LIBERATORS

The balcony. LIEUTENANT COLONEL
STACKHOUSE and SERGEANT FIRST CLASS
JONES are looking out at the city.
Stackhouse stands like a proud statue.
Jones' stance is more nonchalant.

STACKHOUSE

See that?

JONES

What?

STACKHOUSE

That.

JONES

I don't see anything.

STACKHOUSE

It's quiet out there.

JONES

Yes, sir.

STACKHOUSE

Interesting, isn't it? How quiet it is. If you watch enough
T.V. you'd swear this place was like hell on Earth.

JONES

Lots of explosions on the T.V.

STACKHOUSE

Exactly. This is something you would never see. A living
breathing city.

Stackhouse places his hands on his hips
and takes a deep breath, filling his
lungs with the city air. He releases
the air through his mouth and smiles.

STACKHOUSE

Yep. There are definitely worse assignments than this.

Jones mocks Stackhouse and takes in a
deep breath. He coughs and gags.

STACKHOUSE

What's wrong with you?

JONES

Nothing, sir, just taking in the city. Smells like...

STACKHOUSE

You know, sergeant, a man can't choose the battlefield he fights on--

JONES

Smells like shit.

STACKHOUSE

I don't know if I told you, but my old man was in World War Two. He was a pilot.

JONES

(still dazed from the smell)

My uncle was in Korea.

STACKHOUSE

You know, there was not an Airforce then. It was still part of the Army. And flying wasn't for nancy-boys like it is today--

JONES

My uncle drove a tank.

STACKHOUSE

--flying was done with sheer guts and determination. Not by computer nerds. Hell, now they probably don't even need pilots.

JONES

It was a different time, sir.

STACKHOUSE

Yep, I'm sure if the old man was in today, he would have been an infantryman.

JONES

Just like you, sir.

STACKHOUSE

But he would have been in the action! I know it! Not stuck baby-sitting a bunch of Iraqi pseudo-soldiers. He would have been in the fight.

JONES

A man can't choose the battlefield he fights on, sir.

STACKHOUSE

That's for damn sure.

A flash of light bursts, there is the sound of an explosion. The two are slightly taken aback.

STACKHOUSE

That was close.

JONES

Shit, that was a big one. I actually felt that.

ALI runs on to the stage.

ALI

Did you feel that?

JONES

(sarcastically)

No. Did you?

ALI

(ignoring Jones' response)

Could you tell where it hit?

STACKHOUSE

Somewhere downtown. Must have been a car bomb.

JONES

That was rather loud for a car bomb.

ALI

They are getting more destructive every month.

JONES

What do you know about it?

ALI

(annoyed)

What? Nothing.

JONES

Calm down. I'm just busting your balls.

STACKHOUSE

Where is the kid tonight?

ALI

My cousin? She left a little while ago, but she wanted me to give you this.

Ali hands Stackhouse a box of cigars.

JONES

What is that?

STACKHOUSE
Cuban cigars.

ALI
(to Jones)
Our Uncle runs a store. They have a lot of tobacco products.

STACKHOUSE
They sell these over at Loyalty, but they are for shit.

Pulls one of the cigars out of the box.

STACKHOUSE
These...

Sniffs the cigar.

STACKHOUSE
Are great.

ALI
Sergeant Jones, I have something for you too.

Hands Sergeant Jones a DVD.

JONES
What? You didn't like it?

ALI
No, no, I did.

JONES
Well, I was giving it to you.

ALI
It's okay, you can have it back.

JONES
This is *Three Kings*, a good movie. You sure you don't--

ALI
Okay, okay, I will take it back.

JONES
No, that's okay. I'll keep it.

ALI
Okay.

JONES
(offended)
This is a good fucking movie.

ALI
It's all right.

JONES
How is it just all right?

ALI
The Iraqis...they--

JONES
What?

ALI
They are not Iraqis. They are Lebanese.

JONES
No shit?

ALI
Yes. They are not Iraqi.

JONES
Well...it's still a good fucking movie.

STACKHOUSE
(oblivious of the conversation
around him)
I wonder what that car bomb hit? I hope it hit the Palestine
hotel, where those damn reporters live.

JONES
(scolding)
Sir.

STACKHOUSE
I mean, I don't want anyone....to get hurt of course, but if
someone had to...why not the reporters?

JONES
The explosion didn't stop the traffic, that's for sure.

STACKHOUSE
Amazing isn't it. Can you imagine if that happened at home?
Time would stop.

JONES
The people are resilient here, sir.

STACKHOUSE
Or too dumb to know better. Well, I'm off to bed. Got a
mission in the morning.
(to Ali)
Tell your cousin thanks for the cigars.

ALI

I will.

JONES

Sir, do you have any missions coming up next week?

STACKHOUSE

What? Why? Oh...we got that new guy coming in don't we?

JONES

Lieutenant Manning, yes sir.

STACKHOUSE

Well, I should be around. If I'm not here just put him in Captain Warren's old room.

JONES

(in jest)

You sure? That's not a very lucky room.

STACKHOUSE

It'll be fine. Besides, Warren was a fruitcake. I'm sure Manning will be better.

JONES

And don't forget about those forms either.

STACKHOUSE

What?

JONES

I need your leave form turned in by this week--

STACKHOUSE

I'm not taking leave.

JONES

Well, you still need to turn the form in. I also need the forms that prove you watched the safety briefing and the sexual harassment briefing.

STACKHOUSE

I already gave you those forms last week.

JONES

This is a different set. I also need your signature for that clothing issue, but I can just forge that.

STACKHOUSE

Really? Can you just forge the others then too?

JONES

Honestly, I already forged the one for the clothing issue. It was due last week.

Stackhouse silently debates ordering Jones to forge all of his paperwork, but thinks better of it.

STACKHOUSE

Okay, I will get you the rest of those forms tomorrow then.

JONES

Thanks, sir.

STACKHOUSE

What kind of damn Army are we living in?

JONES

Good night, sir.

STACKHOUSE

Good night.

Stackhouse leaves the set. Ali is staring out into the night.

JONES

So what do you think?

ALI

I don't have to fill any forms out.

JONES

Not that, what the Colonel said.

ALI

What did he say?

JONES

Iraqis, resilient...or too dumb to know better.

ALI

Oh that.

(beat)

ALI

I'm not sure.

Jones smiles and gives Ali a big friendly pat on the back.

JONES

Want to play some video games?

ALI

No thank you. I'm going to turn in for the night.

JONES

Suit yourself.

Jones walks off the stage. Ali remains, staring out into the distance. Gunfire can be heard in the background, the lights fade.

SCENE THREE:

SLIDE: THE NEW FRUITCAKE

Afternoon. MOD Entrance. THE FOYER of the MINISTRY OF DEFENSE is bustling with SOLDIERS walking frantically to and fro carrying various types of boxes of equipment. A thick layer of dust and building debris blanket the floor. Furniture in the FOYER is sparse. There is a small desk accompanied by an old chair. The traffic of soldiers dissipates and LIEUTENANT RUSS MANNING walks onto the stage. On his back rests a forty-pound ruck sack. He also has a large green duffle bag slung over his right shoulder. He scans the room for someone to talk with; however, everyone has disappeared. He drops his duffel bag next to the unmanned desk. He picks up a notebook resting on the desk and begins to flip through the pages. As he does this, Ali enters the room. He confidently walks past Manning and towards the back of the room. Manning notices Ali and drops the book.

Manning
(desperately)

Excuse me.

Ali continues to walk.

MANNING

Excuse me.

Ali turns to face Manning.

ALI

Me?

MANNING

Yes, *you*. Are you an interpreter?

ALI

I am. Can I help you with something?

MANNING

I'm looking for Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse. Do you know who he is?

ALI

Yes, I know him.

MANNING

Then do you know where he is?

ALI

No. I don't know where the Colonel is. He may be--

MANNING

(impatiently)

Then can you at least tell me where the Tactical Operation Center is?

ALI

The TOC? It's upstairs on the second floor.

Sergeant Jones enters the room. He is dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and military trousers.

Jones

Can I help you, sir?

MANNING

(searching for some type of rank to properly address Jones)

Yes...uh...I'm looking for Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse.

JONES

Lieutenant Manning, right?

MANNING

That's me.

Jones

I apologize, sir. The word was you weren't coming in until tomorrow. I'm Sergeant First Class Jones.

Jones extends his hand and the two
shake hands.

JONES
Yeah, it's a good thing you caught me, sir. I'm actually the
guy tasked to show you around tomorrow.

MANNING
Great...great is the Colonel in or--

JONES
I'm not really sure where he is right now.

Jones
(to Ali)
Is Colonel Stackhouse out on a mission?

ALI
I don't know. I know he went out to Adhamiya this morning,
but I thought he came back.

JONES
(to Manning)
Sir, this is Ali. He is our resident translator. He grew up
here, went to school here--

Manning
Great, now you're helping us out. That's just great. Glad to
have you on board. The coalition forces are always looking
for locals with a positive attitude.

The three men all happily nod their
heads in approval of each other and
share an uncomfortable silence.

MANNING
So are you working with me or are you just tasked with
showing me around?

JONES
Basically you're going to be the O.I.C. of this project we
have--

ALI
(pointing towards the exit)
Sir, I'm going to--

JONES
(to Ali)
Sure, sure I'll talk with you later.

Ali walks offstage.

Jones

I don't know what all you were told, but--

MANNING

I know I am going to be in charge of special projects, but no one said exactly what.

JONES

That figures. We've got one big project now. We're supervising the construction of a hospital. I'll let the boss give you more information and let you guys do your officer mind-meld thing. But basically, we just manage the money between Uncle Sam and the local Hajji's building the site.

MANNING

Sounds exciting. How are we coming along?

JONES

Oh, you know. The standard is, we give them a bunch of money, they make no improvements on the project and ask for more money.

Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse saunters into the room gnawing on a cigar. Manning notices and quickly walks up to Stackhouse and presents a salute.

MANNING

Sir, Lieutenant Manning, reporting for duty.

Stackhouse returns the salute and breezes past the Lieutenant.

Stackhouse

Carry on.

JONES

Sir, this is the new project officer.

Stackhouse shakes Manning's hand. Judging by his mannerisms, Stackhouse has no idea who Manning is.

MANNING

(coughs at the smell of cigar smoke)

Pleasure to meet you, sir.

STACKHOUSE

You too.

JONES

Sir, Lieutenant Manning is the new special projects officer. He's from division.

STACKHOUSE

Of course, of course. Welcome to the Ministry of Defense, Manning. I thought you were getting in tomorrow.

MANNING

I was sir, but the bird that took me into Rustimaya arrived early and I was able to hook up with the log-pack coming out here.

STACKHOUSE

Log-pack? So you came with the chow.

MANNING

Yes, sir.

STACKHOUSE

We haven't had hot chow in what?

JONES

Three days, sir.

STACKHOUSE

Three days. What did they bring?

MANNING

I'm not sure, sir. I barely had time to jump in the truck. I wasn't--

STACKHOUSE

I hope it's roast beef.

MANNING

Sounds good, sir.

STACKHOUSE

With all the increased I.E.D.'s on the road we haven't had much traffic out here lately. So you can see why we are pretty excited about hot chow.

JONES

Sir, I was just giving the Lieutenant a quick brief on his duties here. Do you want to talk to him later or--

STACKHOUSE

Yes, yes tomorrow morning will be good. I have dinner tonight over with the Asam.

(looks at Manning)

He's my Iraqi counterpart. I don't know if Jones told you we share this base with the Iraqi military.

MANNING

I was aware of that, sir.

STACKHOUSE

(in contemplation)

Good, good. Manning? Manning. So, you're from brigade?

MANNING

Division, sir.

STACKHOUSE

Where did you do your platoon time?

MANNING

Third brigade.

STACKHOUSE

So you are still waiting for that company command, huh?

STACKHOUSE

Where's third brigade now?

MANNING

They are out east, sir.

STACKHOUSE

So did you guys get any action out there? I heard it was getting hot.

MANNING

No, sir. Actually, I was platoon leader prior to the mobilization. I spent most of the time as the X.O. for the platoon in Iraq.

STACKHOUSE

Alright Manning...well, hopefully you won't be pushing much paperwork around here. Sergeant Jones will get you squared away with a room.

JONES

Taken care of, sir.

STACKHOUSE

Good. Good. Then I will see you men in the morning. Don't forget to grab some chow. The Soldiers around here are like locusts.

Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse exits the stage.

MANNING

That was interesting.

JONES

Don't mind him, sir. There is no better commander than Colonel Stackhouse.

MANNING

Actually, I had a commander out at--

JONES

He's great with the men too. You know he actually begged to come out here. He was supposed to have some staff job at brigade, but he pitched such a fit the brigade commander allowed him to come out here. Said he "wanted to get in the fight."

MANNING

He seems very spirited.

JONES

He's no bullshit, either. All the saluting, proper uniform...you don't have to do any of that shit here as long as get your work done.

MANNING

(as if talking to himself)

This is definitely a long way from the flag pole.

Sergeant Jones grabs the Lieutenant's duffel bag. Manning notices this and puts on his ruck sack.

JONES

(looking over the unmanned desk)

Sir, was there anyone sitting here when you walked in?

MANNING

No, should there have been?

JONES

The damn C.Q.

MANNING

I can find the room if you need to--

JONES

No, no it's alright. I'll take care of that later. Let's get you to your room.

The two men walk off stage.

SCENE FOUR:

SLIDE: THE BIG PLAN

The briefing room. There is a large table on stage surrounded by seven chairs of various size and shape. Hanging in the back ground is a large laminated world map and a large laminated map of Iraq. Gunfire and sirens can be heard in the background.

Ali is in the room dusting off the table. Lieutenant Manning enters, Ali stops to address the Captain.

ALI
(embarrassed)
Good morning, sir.

MANNING
A Salam-a-lakem.

ALI
Aleikum salem.

MANNING
You must be Ali.

ALI
Yes, sir. You may remember I was outside when you first arrived.

MANNING
(patronizing)
Of course, of course. So you ready for this project?

ALI
It will be no problem, sir. I am used to this work.

Manning
Might be pretty tough, but I'm sure you can handle it.

ALI
Yes, yes.

MANNING
Great. Great.

The two men share an uncomfortable silence.

MANNING
Sergeant Jones should be here shortly. He got caught up downstairs.

ALI
That's fine.
(smiles and laughs)
I guess we will just wait then.

MANNING
Yes.

The two share an uncomfortable silence.

ALI
How is your family?

MANNING
My family, great.

ALI
You are not married?

MANNING
No, no I am. I just don't wear the ring. I don't want it to get caught on anything.

ALI
Yes.

MANNING
I had a friend. He was wearing his ring and got it caught as he was trying to get out of a Bradley. Tore his finger clear off.

ALI
Oh, that's not good.

MANNING
Yeah, I know. Poor guy. So since then I don't wear the ring, but, yes, I do have a wife.

ALI
Any children?

MANNING
Newborn baby.

ALI
Oh good.

MANNING
It's pretty exciting.

ALI
Yes.

MANNING

You?

Yes. ALI

MANNING
You have children?

ALI
Ah, children, no I don't have any children.

Married? MANNING

ALI
Yes. Just married.

That's great.

ALI
Thank you.

MANNING

So, are you a Christian?

Uh...no--

ALI

MANNING
I just saw a catholic church near here on the way in. I just assumed that--

ALI
Why did you assume that?

MANNING

I...no reason. So you are a Muslim then?

Yes. ALI

MANNING
Well, that's good. But you still respect Jesus, right?

ALI
Jesus? Of course, of course, a very good man, Jesus.

He *was* that.

Manning looks at his watch and begins to pace around.

MANNING

So, you've been doing a lot of training with the Iraqi army here?

ALI

I don't train, just interpret.

MANNING

But you have been working with them?

ALI

Oh, yes.

MANNING

I helped train some Iraqi Army troops up at division, they were pretty squared away.

ALI

Okay.

Sergeant Jones enters from the other side carrying a large cardboard box.

JONES

Good morning, sir.

MANNING

Morning.

JONES

(to Ali)

Hey, put this over there would you?

Jones hands Ali the cardboard box. Ali takes the box and puts it down.

JONES

Well, you look all cleaned up from your run.

MANNING

Yep. Ready to work.

JONES

So I guess you found the shower and toilets to your liking?

MANNING

I did.

JONES

So what latrine did you use?

MANNING

The one on the second floor.

JONES

The Hajji latrine!

MANNING

I was going to ask you about that. Don't you have any regular toilets?

JONES

That's my bad, sir. I forgot to show you the toilets. The third floor has American toilets...and toilet paper. The second floor has the Iraqi toilets.

MANNING

I was curious how you guys were doing that.

JONES

You didn't take a shit on the floor did you?

MANNING

(embarrassed)

What? No. NO. Just urine, I just urinated I mean... I didn't, I mean is that how you--

JONES

No, we had KBR install some toilets as soon as we moved in. Trust me, no one was looking forward to the alternative. I tried it once though. Actually, it wasn't that bad. It's just the wiping part I don't get.

MANNING

Okay, okay.

JONES

(to Ali)

I don't see how you guys can do that? Wipe with your hand? Gives me the willies.

ALI

Why do you talk about this?

JONES

Well, it's something alright, I saw --

MANNING

Sergeant.

JONES

(to Manning)

Okay. Okay.

Jones pulls out the map and starts looking over it.

JONES

(to Manning)

So what did you think of that running route this morning?

MANNING

It was an...interesting route, to say the least.

JONES

Not quite the same as running around the lake at division, is it?

MANNING

Not quite.

JONES

Yeah, we only recently opened up that road. When we first got here we took so much mortar fire the Colonel didn't want anyone leaving cover.

MANNING

Is that what happened to all the buildings, mortar fire?

JONES

The buildings, sir?

MANNING

They are all stripped bare and falling apart.

JONES

No, no that was done by the Iraqis.

MANNING

Unbelievable.

JONES

Yeah, it happened during the invasion. Were you here for that?

MANNING

I was training in Georgia, but I have studied the campaign.

JONES

Well, it was some crazy shit.

MANNING

I'm sure.

JONES

Yep. I was Platoon Sergeant at the time. We were on the tip of the spear of the initial push.

(takes a moment to feel good
about himself)
Anyway, so we come in and just blow the shit out of
everything in the A.O. And I mean anything. Soldiers,
civilians, dogs, whatever.

MANNING
Whatever keeps the terrorists on the run.

JONES
Right, so we blew the shit out of everything and once we took
the city we just let the hajji's run amuck. You probably saw
it on television when--

MANNING
That was during the tearing down of the statue and the--

JONES
--hitting them with the shoes, yeah all that. So the Iraqis
are just running around like fucking headless chickens,
looting and tearing shit down. Pandemonium, sir. The
government buildings got hit the hardest. This was one of
them.

MANNING
(deadpan)
Amazing.

JONES
Did you see the Saddam shrines, too?

MANNING
(makes a rectangle shape with
hands)
I saw one. Those are the large stone structures.

JONES
The rectangular ones yes. They were all over this place.
Saddam as a military man, Saddam as a religious figure...it's
nuts. But my favorite is the one on the far end of the
complex. It has had little damage, but instead there is a
giant cock spray-painted on Saddam's crotch. Saddam as a porn
star!

MANNING
Savage.

JONES
They sure didn't like that bastard.

MANNING
Who would?

JONES

(contemplating)

I'll be honest, sir. I don't know if tearing apart their army and letting them loot was the best idea.

MANNING

It would be hard not to loot if you spent your entire life under someone's thumb. I'm sure they needed the release. And remember, they are not as evolved as we are.

JONES

(looks at Ali)

Tore up a lot of shit though. I don't know. Not my call.

MANNING

Just growing pains of a new nation, Sergeant. Just keep the faith. All will work out for the best.

JONES

We'll see, I suppose.

(beat)

But that's neither here nor there. Did you have a chance to look over the paperwork I sent you?

MANNING

I did and I will get that back to you tomorrow.

JONES

The sooner the better. We mainly just need to get you on the rolls for admin. purposes. I also need you to run through a few power point slides on surviving in a combat environment.

(beat)

Let's get down to it then. This is more than anything else a chance for you, sir, to meet Ali and Nancy, who happens not to be here, introduce yourself and get up to speed with what is going on.

Lays out the map and motions for everyone to gather around it.

JONES

This here is the sector where the hospital is being built. As of now, the project is about, what Ali...thirty percent complete?

ALI

Maybe a little more.

JONES

Okay thirty percent complete for American standards, probably fifty for theirs. So here it is. As you can see it's a rather large facility.

MANNING

You have been working on this for how long now? Four months?

JONES

Almost five, sir.

MANNING

That doesn't make much sense, Sergeant.

JONES

What?

MANNING

Just seems like you should be almost done.

JONES

The issue we keep having is money and supplies.

ALI

And men.

JONES

And men. We often don't know who is going to show up for work and of those that do, how many are actually fit for the job. You'll see it when you get out there. The workmanship here is...let's just say there have been some challenges. Bricks are not always flush, walls lean, electrical outlets are not being connected properly. It's a challenge sir. It's a long process.

(playfully slaps Manning on the back.)

But don't worry sir, you'll get all the first hand experience you can handle.

MANNING

(uncomfortable with Jones touching him)

Great.

ALI

(to Jones)

You didn't mention the problem we had last month. That set us back at least three weeks.

MANNING

Last month?

JONES

That's right, I forgot about that. Or at least was trying to put it out of my head.

MANNING

What happened last month?

JONES

You know that this A.O. falls under 3rd Brigade?

MANNING

Right.

JONES

They also run all of the projects in the AO. I'm sure Colonel Stackhouse told you this.

MANNING

Yes.

JONES

The policy is, if there is insurgent activity in the AO we shut down production. The hospital is in a predominately Shia neighborhood and lately we have had some militia problems. Or at least more than usual. They attacked one of our convoys so the brigade went to the local sheiks and clerics and told them to cut the shit out.

MANNING

Did he have proof the Sheik's knew about it?

JONES

No but they knew about it. They know about everything going on around here. Right, Ali?

Ali shrugs his shoulders as if to say he doesn't know.

Jones

They do. So brigade put a kabosh on the project and no work was done for a good two weeks. And you know what?

MANNING

What?

JONES

It worked. We've had problems since. The only problem we have now is financial.

Nancy enters the room.

JONES

Well, look who it is.

NANCY

Sorry I am late. The traffic was terrible.

ALI

Was there an attack?

NANCY

A car bomb went off across town. The busses were running slow.

JONES

Sir, this is Nancy. She's been helping us out on projects for the past three months, but she has been working here for...what?

NANCY

Three years.

JONES

Three years.

MANNING

Glad to have you aboard. So do you work with Ali or--

NANCY

Sometimes, yes. Other times I help Sergeant Jones and talk to the people building the hospital.

JONES

Nancy does just about everything around here, sir. She originally worked at FOB Patriot as a cleaning lady.

MANNING

Really?

NANCY

Yes. I pressed the uniforms.

JONES

Yeah, they fired all of the locals and brought in some Indians and others from various godforsaken countries.

MANNING

Security problems?

JONES

No. Not really. I mean, yeah, they said it was security problems, but I chalk it up to a little paranoia.

NANCY

The engineer battalion tried to keep me on, but it was against the policy.

JONES

When the brigade commander found out about it, he got Nancy hired back on. Now she is working with us.

MANNING

Helping to rebuild her country. That's great, just great.
(to Sergeant Jones)
Must be exciting having so many so loyal to the cause.

Nancy smiles and looks at Jones.

MANNING

What?

NANCY

I want to come to America.

MANNING

Maybe one day you can do that, too.

NANCY

I have already got all of my paperwork together.

ALI

Ah.

NANCY

What?

ALI

Let's not talk about this.

NANCY

I just need someone to get it to the right people at the embassy.

ALI

Lieutenant Manning, you must excuse my cousin. She is a smart woman, but somewhat delusional.

NANCY

(to Ali)

But I do have my paperwork.

ALI

And how do you plan on getting there? You have money?

NANCY

As of next month I will.

MANNING

Well, I don't know anyone at the embassy, but I'm sure your paperwork will be reviewed fairly.

Nancy looks at Ali who is visibly upset.

NANCY

Thank you, sir. Maybe you can look at it?

MANNING

Um...sure I can take a look at it. I can't promise anything, but...yeah I'll check it out.

ALI

Sir, don't worry about it. She can find another way.

MANNING

No. No, its fine. I'll be happy to check it out. Ali, you just have to realize that women are going to want more from here on out. I think you should think about that.

JONES

Sir?

MANNING

Yes.

JONES

(pulls his walkie-talkie to his
ear then puts it down)

Hate to break up the..uh..."love fest" here, but the Colonel just got back from his mission. I suggest if you want to catch him, now is a good time since he's probably tired enough to sit still.

MANNING

Let's go. Ali, Nancy, nice to meet you and I look forward to working with you both. I'm sure if we can channel all of your passions into the project, we should do fine.

ALI

Thank you, sir.

NANCY

Thank you.

Manning and Jones leave the room
leaving Ali and Nancy alone.

ALI

Why do you act his way?

NANCY

I do want to go to America.

ALI

And you think this man can help you? You have known him for five minutes.

NANCY

I have the money and the paperwork. I just need someone to look at it! What is wrong with that? He can pass it along.

ALI

Like the last person did?

NANCY

That's not fair. He tried.

ALI

I'm sure he tried. The military men have other things to worry about than helping you.

NANCY

I don't believe it.

ALI

And what will you do if you do get out? You don't have any family in America. Where will you work?

NANCY

I can find a place to work. There are lots of jobs in America.

ALI

For an Iraqi woman? What job would that be?

NANCY

I don't know it's--

ALI

You don't know because there is not one.

NANCY

I'm sure there is a mosque I can go to. They will help me.

ALI

You are not American. They will never truly accept you. If you want peace go live with your uncle up north. It's safer there. You can find a husband and--

NANCY

That is all Iraqi men say "find a husband." Why? So I can spend my whole life in the home? Why do you insult me like that?

ALI

And why do you insult me? Don't you think I know what you are capable of, cousin? I know you can do more than raise children, but if you want to make a change, make it here! In our country!

NANCY

This is not a country--

ALI

You have no support in America! Do you think it will be like the movies? Is that it? You will arrive and people will just shower you with opportunity?

NANCY

You can not be scared of leaving Iraq like your father was. He could have found another airline to work for.

ALI

He made a calculated decision to stay here.

NANCY

It was a poor decision.

ALI

How was he to know about Saddam and the Americans? No one believed there would actually be an attack.

NANCY

But there *was* an attack. And I plan to make the most of it.

ALI

Then make the most of it here! We can start something wonderful here. We will be the cornerstone of a new nation.

NANCY

I just want to live in a place where I am not worried about getting shot.

ALI

That is why we must make the change here. So future generations will have more than us.

NANCY

And I hope they will.

ALI

(sarcastically)

But what do you care, right? You'll be half way across the world.

NANCY

That's not fair.

SCENE FIVE:

SLIDE: DEFENDING THE GAP

Night. Briefing room. Lieutenant Manning sits at the table scribbling away in a notebook. Ali enters the room.

ALI

Sir?

MANNING

Yes, Ali.

ALI

I am going to head to my billets for the night, if that's all right with you.

MANNING

Good night. Thanks for your help tonight with the Sheik.
(beat)

Wait! Do you have those comments for the A.A.R?

ALI

No, sir, I usually don't participate in that.

MANNING

Well, please take about fifteen minutes or so and jot down anything good or bad about the meeting this evening.

ALI

No problem, sir.

MANNING

Great. Thanks.

ALI

Sir?

MANNING

Yes.

ALI

So what did you think about meeting with the Sheik this evening?

MANNING

These are your comments, Ali. Put down whatever you saw.

ALI

No, no, sir, I'm not talking about the form. I mean...just in general what was your feeling of the meeting?

MANNING

I thought it was one of our better meetings.

ALI

I was just wondering your opinion of the Sheik.

MANNING

Oh, him? I think he is a great example for your country.

ALI

He always wants more money.

Manning goes back to his scribbling.

MANNING

Don't we all?

ALI

Of course, but--

MANNING

Yes.

ALI

It's just that--

MANNING

C'mon, it's okay, Ali.

ALI

I just don't know if you will agree.

MANNING

That doesn't matte. You can tell me anything.

ALI

Okay.

MANNING

Yes?

ALI

Uh...in the future I would just be a little more conservative before agreeing to hand him forty-thousand dollars.

Manning puts down his pen and stares at Ali.

MANNING

(curtly)

I didn't know it was your money to spend.

ALI
Uh...yes, sir. I'm...I apologize.

MANNING
Well--

ALI
I'm going to fill out that form and go to sleep. I'll see you tomorrow.

MANNING
Alright.

Ali begins to walk to the door.

MANNING
Ali.

ALI
Yes?

MANNING
Come back. I said you could tell me, so--

ALI
It quite alright. I will--

MANNING
No seriously, what...what is it?

ALI
(cautiously)
There have been two Captains before you. And both of them did the same thing.

MANNING
What?

ALI
Just gave the Sheik as much money as he wanted. And there was never a change. When they stopped construction there was a change. But we have never stopped giving them money.

MANNING
(laughs)
That is what you are upset about?

ALI
Yes.

MANNING
Ali, that is just the way it works around here. We have to support these projects to get the economy going.

ALI

Why not just give the money to the people then? Why not just build up the school and leave?

MANNING

Economics. We need to push the money into the economy and hope some of it sticks. We have the money, but your people need to be trained to use it properly. We have to lead the Iraqis to the water and allow them the opportunity to drink.

ALI

To drink?

MANNING

Yeah, it's an expression. You've never heard--

ALI

No, I--

MANNING

Okay listen, forget that, forget that. Think of Iraq as a garden. Iraq is the garden and the Iraqis have the tools. The Americans have the money to buy the vegetables. If we plant the vegetables, you will never learn how to plant.

ALI

Right.

MANNING

And we need you to plant, Ali! We need you guys to get your fingers dirty! See, the more growth that is encouraged the more people will want to live here. Hell, can you imagine what this place would be like with a robust economy! It could be a resort town!

ALI

Sure.

MANNING

But more than that, it could be a shining example of the future! It could motivate other countries to deter terrorists and join the global community!

ALI

I'm not--

MANNING

Here let me...maybe this will illustrate my point better. As Americans we have a duty to the world.

Manning walks to the large world map in the back of the room and grabs a marker.

MANNING

This is the world as we see it today. After the fall of communism some countries embraced the capitalistic ideal and flourished.

Manning draws a large circle around the middle of the map encompassing the middle east and most of central American and Africa.

MANNING

There is also this part of the world which has yet to embrace globalization. Most of these countries are terrible places to live with backwards people and oppressive leaders.

Ali points out a country in Africa on the map.

ALI

I've actually been there. It's not that bad.

MANNING

Well, maybe for you it's not. Look, some of these countries probably have certain areas that are not that bad, but I'm thinking globally here. Big conceptual stuff! And together all of these countries form what I like to call "the gap." If the free world can find a way to control this gap, to get these local economies going...then all of us will be a lot happier.

ALI

Really?

MANNING

Yes, I mean you should see some of the great things we have in America. Imagine this: one giant store where you can go to buy groceries, clothes, power tools and gasoline! And all at a discounted price!

ALI

I can't imagine that.

MANNING

With globalization this could happen! And that is not all! With globalization come all types of freedoms! Like the freedom to worship! You can be whatever religion you want!

ALI

You could always do that here.

MANNING

But everyone who was not Muslim, was oppressed!

ALI

Sir, everyone here is oppressed.

MANNING

Exactly! That why we have to get you guys out of the gap! Look, the Sheik is a microcosm of what we are trying to accomplish. He is the tool! And we got to let him dig around in the garden!

ALI

I just...

MANNING

What?

ALI

This...this gap, what does this even mean? When someone blows up a shop or shoots ten children they are not worrying about the gap.

MANNING

But they are trying to deter economic prosperity and an organized government! Whether they know it or not, they are affecting the gap! In fact, they are making it bigger!

ALI

So how do you stop this?

MANNING

With military force, Ali!

ALI

And that is why you are here?

MANNING

Yes! Yes! We've come to defend the gap!

ALI

Sir, I would like to draw you something as well.

MANNING

By all means.

ALI

This is what Arabs see.

First Ali draws a military base in Turkey then in Afghanistan, then in Iraq and so on...

ALI

All around this gap are military bases. This is not economics. It is a military strategy.

MANNING

No, you are not understanding. These bases are to keep the evildoers out! So that money can flow and the gap can decrease!

ALI

Unfortunately there are few that believe in your gap theory, sir.

MANNING

You think more believe it's a military strategy?

ALI

I think most believe it is the United States coming to our land. Sir, you must understand many have no ill will towards you.

MANNING

They are against us being here?

ALI

Yes.

MANNING

But we overthrew Saddam.

ALI

But what have you done since? There have been many promises.

MANNING

And you think what? They won't come through? In America we always deliver, Ali. We don't always get it right, but we try our hardest and give it our all.

ALI

I hope so.

MANNING

It's a long and difficult process, but we are still making inroads! We are still pushing the envelope. I mean is the hospital not proof of that?

ALI

Maybe you are right.

MANNING

I am, Ali, I am. It's taking awhile but we're getting there.

ALI

But what about people like me?

MANNING

You? You are doing great. You're actually putting your life on the line and helping your country!

ALI

But the gap?

MANNING

You'll definitely make it out of the gap once all this is over.

ALI

You misunderstand me, sir. I use to not be in the gap.

MANNING

Ali, this area was always in the gap.

ALI

But not all of us. My father made a large sum of money in the airline business and my uncle worked for the government. I lived outside of your "gap."

MANNING

I...I don't know what to tell you Ali. But at least you come from good stock. You should be able to rise up again.

ALI

Sure.

MANNING

Trust me you will.

ALI

But what of our government? When will it be stable?

MANNING

It just takes time. Democracy does not come easy, Ali. In my country it took years and years for it to take root. But it did and look at us now. I don't think its bragging when I say this, but America is the "beacon of hope and freedom throughout the world."

ALI

Sir, with all due respect, I don't think you want a true democracy here.

MANNING

What do you mean? Don't you? The chance to finally speak your mind and have opinions!

ALI

(defeated)

I suppose you are right. I better get that form. I need to get some rest.

MANNING

Ali, I'm right, you know I am. And democracy will take root here. There is a lot of potential.

ALI

Thank you for your time, sir. If your light is off when I finish the form I will just slide it under your door.

MANNING

Keep your chin up.

Ali leaves the room.

SCENE SIX:

SLIDE: THE BIG PROJECT

Day. Hospital building. There are two wheelbarrows filled with bricks on the stage. There is also a pile of rocks. On the rocks lays an old shovel. Manning enters the stage followed by Jones.

JONES

This is going to be a reception area.

MANNING

So is the main entrance from the street then?

JONES

Yes. And there will be the double doors here. The main hallway will start here.

MANNING

Looks nice. Bigger than I thought it would be.

JONES

See that wall?

MANNING

I thought I told them to fix that.

JONES

I told you, sir. They think it is fine.

MANNING

Wow. That is terrible. Those bricks aren't even flush.

JONES

I know, I know.

MANNING

Maybe I should have another word with their quality control.

JONES

Maybe.

Ali walks onto the stage. He is
fidgeting with his helmet. It is two
sizes too big.

ALI

The Sheik isn't here yet, but he is on his way.

MANNING

Good, I need to speak with him about the workmanship around
here.

ALI

Sir?

JONES

The Lieutenant is upset with the workmanship again.

ALI

Sir?

MANNING

The structure of this place is poor. Look at those bricks.

ALI

Looks fine to me.

JONES

The L.T. is upset the bricks are not flush.

MANNING

I'm more upset I gave them an order and it was not followed.
I told them specifically to keep the bricks flush.

ALI

Oh yes, but what did you expect?

MANNING

(frustrated)

I don't know, maybe some quality craftsmanship.

ALI

But that is how we work here.

MANNING

Well...it won't be on my conscience when this building falls on their heads.

ALI

Nothing has fallen over in the past. I assure you it is fine.

MANNING

Yeah, I guess that's why you have so many buildings that are falling apart.

JONES

(to Ali)

I think that is from the bombs.

MANNING

What?

JONES

(patronizing)

Nothing, sir. I think you *should* talk with the Sheik. I'm sure he will see your point of view.

MANNING

I hope so. I mean, look I appreciate the effort. The people here are definitely dedicated to reconstruction. They just may need some more motivation.

JONES

Sir, other than that what do you think?

MANNING

Overall, I think that--

Steady gunfire is heard. Bullets rattle off the stage.

JONES

Shit, get down.

The men get down. Jones ducks behind the structure.

JONES

Status report.

MANNING

I'm fine.

ALI

Me too.

Jones grabs the radio from his jacket.

JONES
Axe one-zero, Cowboy seven.

AXE ONE ZERO
(over a speaker system)
This is axe one-zero.

JONES
What the hell was that?

AXE ONE ZERO
Roger. It was a drive by. Are you alright, over?

JONES
We're fine. How the fuck did they get through the cordon!

AXE ONE ZERO
It was the IP's.

JONES
The police?

AXE ONE ZERO
Yes. We let them through. Then they opened fire on the hospital. Then they sped away. We don't have a enough men to pursue.

JONES
Alright. Keep your position. We're coming out.

MANNING
Why are they attacking us?

JONES
Shit. There are no workers here. Something must have been up.

MANNING
(demanding an answer)
Sergeant! Why were they attacking us?

JONES
They weren't attacking us. They were attacking the building!
Let's get the hell out of here.

MANNING
But why would they...?

JONES
Sir, we need to move. NOW!

SCENE SEVEN:

SLIDE: STATUS QUO

Stackhouse's room. The set consists of a large bed and a small television. Stackhouse is sitting on top of a stationary bicycle and wearing a cycling outfit. He is rapidly pedaling.

STACKHOUSE

So did you ever meet with the Sheik?

MANNING

He never showed.

JONES

There were no workers at the site.

STACKHOUSE

If there were no workers there, odds are someone knew about it. I doubt the Sheik did.

JONES

The attackers were dressed in police uniforms. They could have stolen them.

STACKHOUSE

Or they could be militia members also in the police force.

JONES

So are we sure it was the Madhi militia?

STACKHOUSE

We don't know who it was. Of course they will deny it, but you can't even talk to the militia men anymore without going through their press office.

MANNING

The Madhi militia has a press office?

JONES

They have more than that. They run the cities around here. Sure we patrol but--

STACKHOUSE

Sergeant, that's enough.

MANNING

If it is the militiamen this is...this is unacceptable. We need to act, sir.

STACKHOUSE

Calm down, Manning. Jesus Christ.

JONES

What should we do, sir?

STACKHOUSE

We do what we always do. Call the Sheik and set up a meeting. Tell him we are shutting down the operation until we find out what happened. We lean on him. See what he knows about a rise in militia activity.

MANNING

Sir, if I may, I would like to suggest a different approach.

Stackhouse stops cycling and sits up.

STACKHOUSE

What would that be?

MANNING

Up the force on the streets. Give them a curfew. Let's hit them where it hurts.

STACKHOUSE

That's not going to happen.

MANNING

Sir, with all due respect, we can not show weakness here! If we let up now, god knows what happens next. I mean where does it end? If we don't make our stand here, we could all end up wearing burkas!

JONES

(chuckling, not able to believe
what he just heard)

Are you joking?

MANNING

Sir, we need to hit them where it hurts. Just give me a team and--

JONES

Give you a team? What the hell are you going to--

STACKHOUSE

Enough. Both of you. We will proceed as normal.

(to Manning)

You will accompany me.

JONES
(chiding Manning)
I think that is the best way to handle it, sir.

STACKHOUSE
We will meet with the Sheik ASAP. Until then, Sergeant Jones, shut down all operations.

JONES
Yes sir.

STACKHOUSE
Sergeant Jones. That is all.

Jones leaves the room.

STACKHOUSE
Manning.

MANNING
Yes, sir.

Stackhouse gets off his bike, grabs a towel and begins to dry himself off.

STACKHOUSE
We need to get on the same page about something.

MANNING
Yes, sir.

STACKHOUSE
Until you understand the situation here you will do exactly as I say and not question it. Clear?

MANNING
Yes, sir.

STACKHOUSE
And until we get new orders from higher, we will finesse the situation. Understand?

MANNING
Yes, sir.

STACKHOUSE
God knows there is nothing I would rather do than load up the 50 Cal's and let em rip. It is my personal opinion that we lay waste to this whole area! But that is not the way we do business here.

MANNING

Yes, sir. I was not implying destroying the area, sir. In fact I would argue the opposite--

STACKHOUSE

That's all. If you're feeling frisky we are going to up the patrols in the AO. If you want I can get you a seat.

MANNING

Whatever you need, sir.

STACKHOUSE

That is all.

Manning leaves the room.

SCENE EIGHT:

SLIDE: THE TROUBLE WITH FORTUNE COOKIES

Night. Sergeant Jones' bedroom. The room has one bed and a small television. Attached to the television is a video game console. The floor is littered with magazines. Sergeant Jones is sitting on the floor straddling a large cardboard box. The box is full of assorted gifts. Some of them are sprawled out on his bed. He is listening to an IPOD and slowing bobbing his head back and forth. Nancy enters the room. Jones does not notice.

NANCY

Sergeant Jones?

Jones does not look up. He continues to bob his head.

NANCY

Sergeant Jones?

Nancy goes over to Jones and taps him on the shoulder. Jones perks up and quickly removes the headset.

JONES

(happily surprised)

Hey kid! What brings you to this neck of the woods?

NANCY

I heard about the attack today. I just wanted to make sure you were all okay.

JONES

Yeah, we are. Didn't Ali tell you?

NANCY

Ali, has been avoiding me.

JONES

Any reason?

NANCY

I...I don't know why...I...

JONES

Well, take this. It might make you feel better.

Jones hands Nancy a DVD from the box.

NANCY

Where did you get this?

JONES

From a secret admirer.

NANCY

A what?

JONES

Okay, not really a secret admirer. I signed up on one of those web sites for soldiers who need supplies. Have you seen those?

NANCY

I don't think I have.

JONES

Oh...well, I guess you wouldn't. Anyway, they are great. You see, when people think of war they think of Saving Private Ryan and World War Two and all that bull-shit. Like we're hunkered down in a foxhole or something.

NANCY

I don't understand.

JONES

Right...in America most of the movies about war have to deal with world war two.

NANCY

Why is this?

JONES

Because that is the last war we won, kid.

NANCY

Oh.

JONES

It's human nature, people like to remember the good old days.

NANCY

And those times were good?

JONES

No, in terms of combat, they were actually much worse. But Hitler was a real shit, and America was outnumbered and outgunned.

NANCY

And this was good?

JONES

Yeah, see, in terms of war, Americans like to view themselves as scrappy and tough, in World War two we were.

Nancy begins to laugh.

NANCY

You are kidding, right? America is not "scrappy."

JONES

Maybe not now as much, but we were. Now we...

NANCY

Yes?

JONES

Let's just say it is a lot harder to be in charge of the world than it looks.

NANCY

I don't really understand what--

JONES

Anyway, so back to the website.

NANCY

The website?

JONES

The website where I got my packages.

NANCY

Yes.

JONES

So people send us care packages because they think we are living out in the desert or something. In reality, some soldiers live better here than they do at home.

NANCY

Really?

JONES

So, since many people think we live terrible (a myth I plan on perpetuating when we get home by the way) people have set up these different web sites to send soldiers stuff they may not have access to here.

NANCY

So what did you ask for?

JONES

I just ask for the basic necessities. And a few things that I can't get here that remind me of home.

NANCY

Like what?

JONES

Like fortune cookies.

NANCY

Fortune cookies?

JONES

I love Chinese food and more importantly I love fortune cookies. So I asked for some and have gotten, let's just say, a great response. I think I may have a year supply already.

NANCY

And you only have to survive for seven more months.

JONES

That's funny. Yeah, seven more months.

(beat)

The shitty thing is I'm finding the modern day fortune cookie is lacking in quality.

NANCY

They do not taste good?

JONES

Not the taste, the fortune.

NANCY

The fortune?

JONES

That's just it, it's not a fortune. What is a fortune to you?

NANCY

It's...it's something that foretells your future.

JONES

Exactly. And you know what these cookies say?

NANCY

I...no. What do they say?

JONES

Listen to this one: IT'S ALL RIGHT TO HAVE BUTTERFLIES IN YOUR STOMACH. JUST LET THEM FLY IN FORMATION.

NANCY

Okay. So what?

JONES

So what?! This is not a fortune this is a statement. Butterflies in your stomach? That does not foretell anything.

NANCY

How many have you tried? I'm sure some of them have fortunes.

JONES

I have opened over two hundred fortune cookies in the past month. Fifteen percent have actual fortunes. The others...statements.

NANCY

(laughs)

Well, I hope you find your fortune Sergeant Jones.

JONES

Me too.

(beat)

NANCY

Are there lots of things like this in America?

JONES

Web sites?

NANCY

No, no, places that help people.

JONES

Yeah, I guess, I don't know. Why do you ask?

NANCY

No reason, really. I just hear all of this talk about how prosperous it is there.

JONES

Oh. Yeah, it's more prosperous than most places I imagine.

NANCY

Ali just doesn't believe I could find my way there.

JONES

Is he right?

NANCY

(defensive)

I have found my way around here. Sergeant, I make more money than any Iraqi I know.

JONES

I had heard that.

NANCY

I am a great asset to you.

JONES

You are, you are.

NANCY

So if I can do that here, why couldn't I succeed in America?

JONES

It's not that you couldn't, kid. It's the structure there. Ali, may be right. Did he talk to you about moving north?

NANCY

Yes.

JONES

Then maybe you should do that.

NANCY

I can't, Sergeant. I have seen too much. And so has Ali. He is just selling himself short. It is just so hard for me. Everyday I look around at all of these contractors from Europe and America and see all of the money they are making because of where they are from. I am better educated than all of them.

JONES

I know, kid.

NANCY
I learned much in the schools here.

JONES
And you and Ali were children of privilege I know all of this.

NANCY
Well, am I wrong?

JONES
No, no. But we have gone over this a million times. They want appease the Shia majority.

NANCY
And they should, but not now. The Shia, here, are not ready to lead.

JONES
(sarcastically)
The Shiites in Iran are.

NANCY
If I were you, I wouldn't be making that joke.

JONES
Probably not.

Nancy takes a moment to gather herself.

NANCY
Don't mind me, Sergeant. I think I am just worked up over what happened today. I didn't want to burden you.

JONES
You're not a burden, kid. Besides, its good to talk to someone that doesn't smell like a dead goat.

NANCY
(laughs)
A dead goat?

JONES
Yeah, you should see what I have to do to get some of my soldiers to shower.

NANCY
They don't smell that bad. Now a fisherman returning from the Tigris river, that is a smell.

The two share a laugh.

NANCY

I need to get going. I am glad you are all not hurt.

JONES

Okay, Well...thanks for stopping by.

NANCY

I will see you around.

JONES

And don't worry about Ali...or yourself for that matter.
Consider yourself under my protection.

NANCY

Thank you, Sergeant.

JONES

You don't sound so impressed. Don't let the crusty exterior
fool you. I'm pretty spry!

NANCY

I am very impressed.

JONES

Sure you are.

Nancy leaves the room. Jones leans over
and watches her walk out. He then
returns to sorting through his box.
Lights fade.

SCENE NINE:

SLIDE: NO LIGHTS, BIG CITY

Balcony. Ali is standing, looking out
at the city. Nancy comes up behind him.

NANCY

The city is quiet tonight.

ALI

What are you doing here? I thought you were going home.

NANCY

The roads were too dangerous. I was given a room on the other
side of the base.

ALI

How many forms did you have to fill out for that?

NANCY

None. That's good.

ALI

What is good?

NANCY

You are making jokes. You are not upset with me?

ALI

I can only be upset for so long, cousin.

NANCY

So you have accepted the fact that I am going to travel to America?

ALI

I have accepted the fact that, against your better judgement, you continue upon a course of action that will lead only to sorrow.

NANCY

(glib)

As long as you are not upset.

ALI

This Lieutenant, that is helping you--

NANCY

Manning.

ALI

Be careful around him, cousin. He is an idealist.

NANCY

Isn't that true of all Americans, idealists?

ALI

He is worse than most. Take the Lieutenant Colonel for instance. He respects us as people, and while he believes in this war, it is mostly because of his duty to his country and love for the military.

NANCY

And Manning?

ALI

Manning is sheltered. He believes his country is flawless. He is blinded by his own idealism and if not careful, he will cause you much harm.

NANCY

At least he's motivated to help me and our people. You speak of the Colonel. Look at him and the rest of you. What do you all do up here anyway? Smoking cigars, blabbering on about nothing. You could power car with the amount of energy Sergeant Jones spends on spewing nonsense.

ALI

I just want you be careful.

NANCY

Besides, Manning is no less of an idealist than you are.

ALI

There is a difference, Assil.

NANCY

What is that?

ALI

I have no other choice.

(Beat)

ALI

Remember when the city was lit? It was not that long ago.

NANCY

Lieutenant Manning said the power is the same, but instead of using it in the city, the coalition forces are spreading it out across the country. It's more fair--

ALI

More fair for whom?

NANCY

For everyone.

ALI

Forgive me, cousin. I don't want fair. I just want life to be the way it once was.

The two look out over the horizon.

Fade TO BLACK.

ACT II

SCENE ONE:

SLIDE: FRUITCAKE RISING

Balcony. Daytime. Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse, Sergeant Jones and Ali are all looking out over the city. Stackhouse and Jones are smoking cigars.

JONES

Ali. Ali, come check this out.

ALI

What?

Sergeant Jones points down towards the ground.

ALI

Oh my...

JONES

I thought I told you to do something about that.

STACKHOUSE

What is it?

Stackhouse looks down.

STACKHOUSE

Oh well, I'm sure it is nothing.

JONES

To him.

ALI

My cousin would never go for an American.

JONES

Why not?

ALI

Oh, so that is it then? Maybe you are just jealous.

JONES

Come off it. I am just pointing it out to you. I don't care how much Nancy hangs out with the L.T.

ALI

I wish he only was trying to sleep with her.

STACKHOUSE
Manning is sleeping with Nancy?

JONES
What? No!

ALI
Worse, he has convinced her that she can get to America.

STACKHOUSE
Oh, that again.

ALI
Yes.

STACKHOUSE
You never know. Maybe he can.

JONES
You're kidding right?

STACKHOUSE
Yeah, he probably can't.

Stackhouse lights a cigar.

STACKHOUSE
Still, you gotta admit, he has gotten results. It's been four months and the hospital is almost done.

JONES
He's still a prick.

STACKHOUSE
Hey, at-ease Sergeant.

JONES
Sorry, sir, but he is. Damn delusional west point grad.

STACKHOUSE
I resent that. I went to West Point.

JONES
That's right I forgot.

STACKHOUSE
Almost got kicked out, but I went there.

JONES
Not so book smart?

STACKHOUSE

No, not at all. I just got caught a couple of times in a few rather precarious situations.

ALI

Like what?

STACKHOUSE

Like making out with WASPY New York City girls.

JONES

What's wrong with that?

STACKHOUSE

In their car--

JONES

So, what you were in a parking lot or--

STACKHOUSE

On the middle of the football field.

JONES

I could see how that would become a problem.

Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse takes a deep drag of his cigar and sticks out his chest.

STACKHOUSE

What was I to do? I was young and in shape...

JONES

So did you score a touchdown that night, or--

A loud explosion is heard the balcony shudders and the three men duck for cover. The lights fade down on the balcony. The lights fade up on the entrance set. SOLDIERS are scurrying around for cover.

Dirt and dust fall from the ceiling. Manning runs onto the stage followed by Nancy.

MANNING

They got mortars! Take cover over there.

Manning grabs Nancy's arm and pulls her behind a large structure on the ground.

NANCY
I think that's it. (calm)

MANNING
Wait.

NANCY
Okay. Okay.

MANNING
Are you okay or...

NANCY
I'm fine, thank you. It's been much worse.

MANNING
You are very brave.

NANCY
(flattered)
It's just the way life is here. You learn to deal with it.

MANNING
You would have to.

Nancy and Manning stand up and dust themselves off. Ali runs onto the stage.

ALI
Is everyone all right?

MANNING
Yeah, we're fine.

ALI
The militias are acting up again.

MANNING
I don't know what happened, but our little truce seems to be over.

ALI
(to Nancy)
Are you all right?

NANCY
Yes.

ALI
You too, sir?

MANNING

I'm great.

ALI

Sir, I appreciate you looking after my cousin.

MANNING

Not a problem. It's the least I can do for what she has been able to accomplish lately.

NANCY

It's nothing anyone could not have done, sir.

MANNING

It's important and I think it is good for these councilmen to see a woman involved in the process. Hopefully, it will open their eyes.

NANCY

The hospital is important to me.

MANNING

It's important to all of us.

Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse runs onto the stage. He is wearing a full combat load and carrying his M-16. He has a cigar in his mouth.

STACKHOUSE

Everybody okay?

MANNING

We're fine. Where are you going?

STACKHOUSE

There is word that something breached the front gate. I'm going to check it out!

MANNING

Be careful, sir.

STACKHOUSE

Yeah, you better take the locals and get cover.

MANNING

Of course.

Stackhouse runs off the stage.

ALI

Sir, I can take my cousin now. If you are needed elsewhere--

MANNING

Yes. The mortars seem to be gone. I'll go prep for the mission tomorrow.

ALI

We're going out in the morning again?

MANNING

Every other day, you know that.

ALI

I was hoping tomorrow might be different.

MANNING

We're too close to let up now. That hospital should be finished--

NANCY

(eagerly)

Next week.

MANNING

Next week or the week after. We have a lot to be proud of. And it is all because of your hard work.

NANCY

Thank you, sir.

ALI

Yes, thank you.

MANNING

(to Nancy)

I have something you may be interested in.

NANCY

Yes?

MANNING

I've put your paperwork through my chain of command. Looks like the embassy is going to review it.

NANCY

That's great! Does that mean I can go to America?

MANNING

It has to be approved first, but it's a start. At least you have your foot in the door.

NANCY

That's wonderful. Thank you so much. Ali can you believe it?/

ALI
(in disbelief)
It's wonderful.

NANCY
Sir, I...I don't know what to say.

MANNING
You don't need to say anything. You deserve this opportunity
and I hope you can get it.

NANCY
Oh thank you so much.

ALI
So what does this mean?

MANNING
It means that the decision is now in the government's hands.
She has the paperwork in and the money has been paid.

ALI
The money?

MANNING
Yes.

ALI
(to Nancy)
The money? How much money did you put up?

NANCY
As much was necessary.

ALI
What are you thinking! Did you not think of talking to me
about this?

NANCY
What's done is done.

MANNING
Ali, it's all right. The money is in good hands.

ALI
And what if she is denied?

MANNING
Then the money will be returned.

NANCY
Yes. It will be returned.

ALI
By our government?

MANNING
The system will work trust me.

ALI
I appreciate the gesture, sir.

MANNING
Not a problem!

ALI
I hope so.

MANNING
Great. I'm going to head up to the TOC and see what is what. Nancy, sorry I couldn't tell you the good news under better circumstances, but I thought you would want to know.

NANCY
It's the best news I've heard in a long time, sir.

MANNING
Ali, I will see you in a few hours?

ALI
Yes, sir.

Manning walks off the stage.

ALI
(defiantly)
You are not going to America and that is final. I'm going to have a talk with your father.

NANCY
And why not?

ALI
You can not survive there.

NANCY
Lieutenant Manning thinks I can.

ALI
Lieutenant Manning does not live in reality!

NANCY
Have you learned nothing from the past four months? Are you blind to the amount of progress that has been made here? The hospital is almost finished.

ALI

So what?

NANCY

So what? The reconstruction is working! Why can't you see this? Why are you so hesitant to admit that the Americans are on the right side.

ALI

There is no "right" side. It's all--

NANCY

All what?

ALI

It's--

NANCY

What? Say it!

ALI

Confused! It's all a mess! How many people have died here since the Americans came? How many? And what I am just supposed to forget that like you have. I am just supposed to shut up, give myself an American name and play along! I can't do it.

NANCY

You've never believed in anything in your life! But it's time, Ali. It's time you took a stand for what is best for our people.

ALI

And what is that exactly? To build more hospitals and schools?

NANCY

Yes.

ALI

And how long will that school last before it either falls apart or runs out of funding? Where will your optimism be then?

NANCY

You don't sound rational, Ali.

ALI

No? What do I sound like then?

NANCY

You know what you sound like.

ALI

No, I don't. What do I sound like.

NANCY

You sound like a...like a terrorist.
(beat)

ALI

What? What did you just say.

NANCY

You heard me.

ALI

(livid)

A terrorist? You are sounding too much like an American. A terrorist? And what exactly is that anyway?!

NANCY

You know what it is!

ALI

No I don't! Is it someone from Iran or Syria sent here to destroy the Americans?

NANCY

Well--

ALI

Is it! Because that is what they would have you believe! Or is it some poor uneducated local with nowhere to put his energies?!

NANCY

Ali--

ALI

No, tell me! Explain to me why there are multiple militias throughout this country! Is it because there is some great master plan of terrorism? Or is it because people are trying to find a place to feel safe in their communities?

NANCY

I don't care, Ali!

ALI

Terrorist? How could you even think I would do such a savage thing.

NANCY

I don't know what you are, Ali. But I do know that I can not handle this anymore! I don't care what you want! I just want out!

Manning returns to the stage.

MANNING

What's going on?

NANCY

Ali and I were just finished.

MANNING

You have been cleared to stay the night. Here is the key.

NANCY

Thank you, sir.

MANNING

(to Ali)

Are you sure everything is all right?

Nancy takes the key and walks off the stage

ALI

Sir?

MANNING

Yes.

ALI

I respectfully request that you no longer involve my cousin in anymore plans regarding America.

MANNING

Excuse me?

ALI

Sir, she is very impressionable. I don't want you getting her hopes up for something that will never happen.

MANNING

You just need more faith Ali.

ALI

(frustrated)

Sir, please stop. She does not have money to simply throw around. The family needs it.

MANNING

It's going to get her away from here, Ali.

ALI

It's lost. All that money is going to be lost. The government will lose it all.

MANNING

(frustrated)

This is how the system works. Look, we talked about this.
Just have faith the process will work!

ALI

I'm running out of faith, sir.

MANNING

It's hard work, Ali. Just hang in there.

ALI

This is ridiculous.

Ali throws his arms up in frustration
and walks away.

Manning

Ali? Ali, come back. Let's discuss this some more.

ALI

There is nothing else to say, sir.

SCENE TWO:

SLIDE: THE MAN IN THE MIDDLE

Jones' bedroom. Sergeant Jones is
laying on his bed reading a magazine.
Ali enters the room. He is fuming.

JONES

Ali? Glad you came by, here...

- Jones grabs a large manila folder from
under his bed and hands it to Ali.

JONES

I need you to sign those and make two copies of each. Bring
me a copy and keep a copy for yourself.

ALI

Very well.

Jones notices Ali is upset.

JONES

What's wrong with you?

ALI

Manning.

JONES

Giving you some more of his great ideas is he?

ALI

It's not me he is giving them to. It's Assil. She is still talking about going to America. She even put up the money!

JONES

(sits up on the bed)

Really?

ALI

Yes.

JONES

Well, maybe that is the best thing for her then.

ALI

It's Lieutenant Manning. He keeps putting these ideas in her head!

JONES

Ali, you know we are hombres, but if you came in here to bag on the L.T. I don't want to hear it.

ALI

Do you think this is a good idea?

JONES

Of course not.

ALI

Then can you talk to Manning?

JONES

Why don't you talk to him?

ALI

I tried. The man is like a brick wall! I don't know what goes through his head.

JONES

Take it easy.

ALI

Do you know what she called me? She called me a terrorist. My own cousin. That is how wrapped up he has her!

JONES

She said you are a terrorist?

ALI

Yes, because I am not 'thinking positively!'

JONES

I'll talk to him.

ALI

Who does he think he is? He comes in here spewing nonsense!
That is not what we need here!

JONES

Ali! Calm down. Look, between us, I don't like everything he
does either.

ALI

Then someone needs to talk to him!

JONES

I will. I will.

ALI

I'm sorry, sergeant.

JONES

Hey, you want to play some Halo?

ALI

No, I am going to bed.

JONES

You sure? I got this entire post wired now. The games are
pretty intense. There is some guy, call sign MEATHEAD, I
think it's that little bastard PFC Brennan.

ALI

I'm going to go now.

JONES

Yeah, he never leaves the FOB. Probably sits and plays all
day.

ALI

(sarcastically)

Thanks for the talk.

JONES

See you in the morning.

Ali leaves stage. Jones begins to set
up his video game. Manning walks in.

MANNING

Sergeant Jones I need to speak with you.

Jones puts down his controller in
frustration.

JONES

When did this place turn into a sewing circle?

MANNING

Excuse me?

JONES

Nothing sir. What can I do for you?

MANNING

Due to the increased activity we are going to be keeping a closer eye on the locals and foreign nationals around here.

JONES

Are you referring to someone in particular?

MANNING

What?

JONES

The way you said "around here."

MANNING

You're impossible. Just watch yourself and makes sure you are squared away for tomorrow.

JONES

Always ready, sir.

MANNING

Good. Good. Well...that is all then.

JONES

Yes sir.

Manning leaves. Lights fade.

SCENE THREE:

SLIDE: COMIC BOOK YAHUDEE

Evening. Sergeant Jones' room.

Jones, Manning, and Ali file into the room. Ali is holding a bandage to the back of his head.

JONES

(to Manning)

Don't look so down, sir. It's only minor setback. At least you didn't get hit in the head with a rock by a little kid.

ALI

Thanks.

JONES

(to Ali)

Well, you should have been wearing that helmet I gave you.

ALI

That helmet, is three sizes too big.

MANNING

(to Jones)

Minor setback? Someone spray-paints all over the hospital and you call that a minor setback?

JONES

(to Ali)

A helmet is a helmet. I have ordered you a helmet, it's not in.

ALI

You ordered it four months ago.

MANNING

The paint gentlemen! Aren't you at all concerned about the paint!

JONES

Oh, of course sir, of course. But at least the hospital was only defaced it could have been destroyed.

(to Ali)

If you would have given me your paperwork earlier--

MANNING

(to Jones)

I don't know what that spray-paint even meant. What was that weird looking star?

JONES

It was supposed to be the star of David. They were trying to paint the Israeli flag.

MANNING

And they were trying to show what?

JONES

A partnership between the Americans and the Jews. It's not the first time. Those symbols have popped up before.

MANNING

What do you think Ali?

ALI

It's no good.

JONES

Of course it's no good. It's those damn militias, sir. They hate us, they hate Jews and they want to show everyone that both groups are in cahoots with each other.

MANNING

I knew that the people in here had problems but--

JONES

Yeah, big problems. They really don't like Jews around here.
(takes a more playful tone, to
chide Ali)

Do you, Ali?

ALI

I...I don't wish to talk about this.

JONES

But it's true. I don't really understand it myself. Is it all Iraqis that don't like the Jews or just some?

ALI

What is this? You are talking crazy, I don't care about Jews.

JONES

Yeah, but you kind of do. C'mon seriously what's the deal with that?

MANNING

(tired of Jones' antics)

Jones, let it go.

JONES

No c'mon, I want to know.

MANNING

Jones!

JONES

You like Superman don't you?

ALI

What?

MANNING

Sergeant Jones!

JONES

Well, do you like Superman?

ALI

Yes, I like the movies.

JONES

It's settled then, you don't really hate Jews. There I have just solved all the problems in the middle east.

MANNING

What?

JONES

Sir, many people all over the world love American pop culture and as a result love Superman.

ALI

What is this man talking about?

JONES

Superman, Ali. Superman is a Jew.

ALI

Superman is not a Jew. He is from...a different planet.

JONES

Are you worried he is a Jew?

MANNING

Sergeant! This conversation is ridiculous. Besides, Superman is not a Jew. He is from Krypton and disguises himself as Clark Kent, the...uh...

JONES

The news reporter.

MANNING

Okay, Clark Kent, fine. He is still from another planet.

JONES

Of course he is from another planet, but the story, sir, the story of Superman is one of the Jewish migration to the United States.

(beat)

MANNING

I always assumed Superman was a Christ figure.

JONES

See, and that is where most people are wrong! Superman was an orphan at birth brought to a land where he did not fit in. Like the Jewish people coming to America. Then once here, he was able to flourish and became a type of Superman. Which coincidentally, is what the Nazis said they were trying to create. A race of supermen.

MANNING

Do you actually do any work around here?

JONES

So in effect, by coming to the United States the Jewish people, or "superman", was able to break free from the shackles of evil, flourish in a foreign land and then learn to fight that same evil that oppressed them. It makes perfect sense!

ALI

What about his special powers?

JONES

Well, that was added later. Did you know that when Superman first appeared he could not even fly. He merely leapt across buildings. Besides, the powers don't change anything. Superman is symbolic of the Jewish plight regardless of his powers.

ALI

So what is your point?

JONES

My point is, embrace it, Ali. Embrace the West.

ALI

I think, I do.

MANNING

I don't think that is completely fair to Ali. He has come a long way in his beliefs. Just the other night we were sharing our various viewpoints on--

JONES

You weren't talking about that gap theory--

MANNING

Indeed we were. Ali finally realizes that to succeed the gap must be mended.

A cell phone is heard. It belongs to Ali.

ALI

Hello?

Ali walks away from Manning and Jones.

JONES

(to Manning)

That's just what we need. A neoconservative Iraqi.

ALI
(into the phone)
What?

MANNING
(to Jones)
Why is that so bad? The seeds are here. With some guidance
they can be sown.

ALI
(into the phone)
Are you sure? How can this be? There was nothing going out
there today!

Jones turns to Ali

JONES
What? What happened?

ALI
(to Jones)
Did you send Assil out today?

JONES
What?

ALI
Did you send Assil out today.

MANNING
Who? Who is Assil?

JONES
Assil is Nancy. Ali what is it? What happened to her?

ALI
She's been shot!

SCENE FOUR:

SLIDE: SOMBER COWBOY

Night. The balcony. Stackhouse is
standing outside smoking a cigar. He is
visibly depressed. A cigar box is
resting on the balcony. Jones enters.

STACKHOUSE
Look who came out of his hole.

JONES
Good to see you too.

STACKHOUSE

Yeah, we are going to be one short tonight. Ali is not coming.

Stackhouse takes a long drag off his cigar.

STACKHOUSE

How many more times are we going to have to go through this shit?

JONES

I'm not sure.

STACKHOUSE

Just when you think you can live with losing a man...honestly, I never thought I'd be so upset about losing a civilian. I know that sounds terrible, but its the god's-honest truth.

(beat)

STACKHOUSE

I knew her longer than any Iraqi on this post.

JONES

The sad part is...where she was gunned down, it was supposed to be a secured area.

STACKHOUSE

Secured by who? The Iraqi army?

JONES

Yes.

STACKHOUSE

Shit.

JONES

That's what I was thinking.

STACKHOUSE

Did I ever tell you what happened the other day? When I told you something had breached the perimeter? Did I ever tell you what it was?

JONES

No, sir.

STACKHOUSE

It was an old blue truck packed with explosives and one idiot driver. He had pulled up to the gate and got stuck between the narrow barricades. His bomb wouldn't explode. So while this idiot is sitting in the car, stuck, trying to blow up the car, I went through our escalation of force. Then, the Sergeant Major shows up.

JONES

The Iraqi Sergeant Major? With the American rank?

STACKHOUSE

The same.

JONES

He's a cowboy.

STACKHOUSE

He walked right up to the car and didn't even hesitate.

JONES

He dismantled the bomb?

STACKHOUSE

He shoved his pistol into the driver side window and started firing at the dashboard. Suddenly the car goes up in flames.

JONES

Crazy bastard. I didn't hear of any injuries--

STACKHOUSE

No. He's okay. He just got knocked on his ass from the explosion.

JONES

Crazy.

STACKHOUSE

Maybe so, but when he stood up his men went ape-shit. Cheering and clapping. They started doing that silly Iraqi dance they do. That's why that guy is a damned legend around here.

JONES

Sounds like it.

STACKHOUSE

I had hoped that here at the MOD, I was creating more men like this.

Jones

Don't be too hard on yourself. You've tried more than most.

STACKHOUSE

It's hard to make a John Wayne out of a Hajji, Jones. And that is what this place needs. About five-hundred John Waynes. Maybe then innocent women wouldn't get shot to hell for no reason.

JONES

You going out tomorrow?

STACKHOUSE

Yeah, oh-dark-thirty.

JONES

I want to come. I need to get my head clear.

SCENE FIVE:

SLIDE: A LONELY PLACE TO DIE

Sergeant Jones' room. Jones is sitting over a large box. He is filling it with shoes. Ali enters the room. Ali is dressed in civilian clothes and carrying a back pack.

JONES

(sounding depressed and distant)

Don't you know how to knock?

ALI

Sergeant Jones?

Jones begins violently putting the shoes in the box.

ALI

What are you doing?

JONES

I'm cleaning up, what does it look like? Just because...people leave, does not mean someone does not have to pick up their slack.

ALI

So that is what you have been doing the past three days, picking up the slack?

Jones stands up and closes the box.

JONES

Something like that. Do you want something or--

ALI

I spoke with the Colonel, Sergeant. I am going to take some leave, take Assil back home.

JONES

Right, well...when do you think you will be back?

ALI

Probably in a week or so.

JONES

Good. Good, I will need you back as soon as possible. You know this area better than most. I'd hate to be without an interpreter.

ALI

It was not your fault she died Sergeant. She knew the risk when she joined, as we all do.

JONES

(sarcastically)

You don't think I know that? I mean, how was I or anyone supposed to know that she would be in danger. I mean, granted she is a woman, walking around by herself, in the most dangerous city in the world.

ALI

You were always kind to her.

JONES

Of course she should be by herself!

ALI

There is nothing to do now.

JONES

Right, right. Well, I'm glad one of us is taking this so well.

ALI

What do you expect me to do! Do you not think I have pain about this! She is my cousin!

JONES

I'll see you in a week.

ALI

In a week.

Ali exits. Jones kicks the box in frustration. Like a vision, Nancy enters from the other side of the room. Jones stands alone.

JONES

What do you want?

NANCY

I don't like to see you so angry.

JONES

I'm not angry. I'm intensely working.

NANCY

Funny that you are working on that, seeing how it was my favorite task. Bringing shoes to the children.

JONES

Yeah, it was really worth it. Countless hours spent putting shoes in a box so that the kids parents can sell them for money. Something to be proud of.

NANCY

But that is their choice. At least you are trying to make a difference.

JONES

Do you want something or are you just going to torment me the rest of my life?

NANCY

I guess that depends on you. If you can come to terms with yourself.

JONES

Well, it is kind of hard. In case you haven't noticed, I'm spinning my wheels here.

NANCY

No, you are making a difference!

JONES

Yeah, made a big difference with you, didn't it?

Nancy is taken aback.

JONES

I'm sorry, I really am. I just, can't believe you still feel this way. I mean, you're dead.

NANCY

Are you also not willing to die for your country?

JONES

Yeah, die fighting!

(beat)

JONES

But you are fighting, aren't you? While people like me are counting down the days to go home, you are fighting every day.

NANCY

I thought you were going to protect me.

JONES

I tried, kid, honest I did. And if I could trade places with you, I would.

NANCY

I did not ask for much, Sergeant Jones. I just wanted a happy life. Was that too much to ask?

JONES

No. It was not.

NANCY

Watch over Ali, Sergeant. He is a good man. He is just frustrated, but he loves you so. Whether he admits it or not, he wants nothing more than to be a part of something positive. Something bigger than himself.

(beat)

JONES

I think that's true for most of us in this business, kid.

Nancy exits the stage. Sergeant Jones is alone with a box of shoes in front of him. From where Nancy exits, Manning appears.

MANNING

Sergeant Jones, hurry.

JONES

What?

MANNING

There has been a problem at the hospital!

SCENE SIX:

SLIDE: IT ALL COMES CRUMBLING DOWN:
PART I

Hospital site. Rubble and dirt litter the stage. Captain Manning and Sergeant Jones walk onto the stage. Manning is holding a brick. Jones is looking around, surveying the devastation.

JONES

This place is trashed.

MANNING

Thanks, Sergeant.

JONES

Well, I'm just saying--

MANNING

Sergeant, for once, please dispense with the cavalier attitude.

JONES

Sure.

MANNING

I just...how could this happen?

Manning paces around impatiently.

MANNING

Was it not good enough for them?

JONES

It was fine, sir. It's...it's not your fault.

He paces around frantically.

MANNING

That's it then? We have to respond! We have to take action!

JONES

Sir, I'm sure the proper authorities will be notified and--

MANNING

No, no, that is unacceptable. We tried it their way! They need to try it our way! If they can't protect their own hospital, something that will actually help them, then we have to!

JONES

Sir, it's--

MANNING

Am I wrong! Tell me if I am! I mean look at this place! There was nothing, *nothing* controversial about it. I mean, you want to mortar Americans? Destroy our convoys...fine!

Holds up the brick.

MANNING

But this, it was a hospital. It's built to help people. To help their people! Something else must have happened. Terrorists must have snuck in and blown this place up! I'm going to talk to the Colonel. We have to beef up security!

Throws the brick down in anger.

JONES

Sir, I don't know if the Colonel will--

MANNING

Then I'll talk to a full-bird, or a General, someone!

JONES

(frustrated with Manning)

And what would that be? We've been over this and I told you early on--don't expect too much!

MANNING

This can not go unpunished!

JONES

We are not in the punishing business, L.T.

MANNING

They must understand!

JONES

It's no use! Quit bellyaching!

MANNING

What? What did you say to me!

JONES

(changes his tone, but does not
back down from Manning)

Look it's not your fault. Maybe if you had been here a month or so earlier you would feel different.

MANNING

What is that supposed to mean?

JONES

We were putting in a water system then and--

MANNING

So?

JONES

It didn't go too well. Actually, it went to shit pretty quick.

MANNING

This isn't a water station! This is was a hospital!

JONES

Same difference! We put that damn water station down in the heart of Sadr City. It pumped perfectly clean running water from the city well. I was so amazed with how the water purification system worked, I even volunteered to drink the water myself.

Manning is pacing frantically, barely listening to Jones.

Jones

When the word got out the water system was full of young and old smiling faces, all waiting patiently in line to get some water.

MANNING

(inspecting the damage closer)

I'm glad some locals are on board.

JONES

Looking at those people in the eyes, for the first time, I believed. I believed we were going to make this work.

MANNING

Good for you.

JONES

The water was distributed through five water faucets that faced a city road. That night, the faucets were stolen. The next day no water was available to anyone. Three days later, I received a call from the neighborhood council. They were upset about the faucets and wanted them replaced.

MANNING

And you didn't do it.

JONES

No, no we did. We replaced them. This time they lasted two days. After that, we never replaced the faucets. Now the site has been all but stripped and the purification system is not quite as reliable as it once was.

MANNING

Were the vandals ever caught?

JONES

Vandals? No the vandals were never caught. The faucets faced the street and five houses had a perfect view of them. All they would have needed to do was set up a perimeter or a neighborhood watch to ensure no one would steal the faucets.

MANNING

But it didn't happen.

JONES

No. No, it didn't. After the second incident, I went with the O.I.C at the time, Captain Reynolds, and personally talked with the Sheik. And you know what he said?

MANNING

What?

JONES

He asked me for more money.

MANNING

Did he know who stripped the water site?

JONES

No. He said he knew nothing about it. And that day...that was it for me.

(beat)

I realized that I could not get too upset about anything around here and I could not become personally invested. Why? Because I would always lose.

MANNING

America does not lose!

JONES

There is no point! It's just an endless cycle. And the sooner you realize that, the easier it will be for you to get through the day!

MANNING

So, that is it then? I'm supposed to--what?--listen to the wise sergeant's story about the water pump and...what...lay down like an old dog. Not me! Like it or not, this problem will be fixed! These people, these ungrateful people, will know what it is like to live in the real world! We will have justice!

SCENE SEVEN:

SLIDE: IT ALL COMES CRUMBLING DOWN:
PART II

Briefing room. Sergeant Jones and Colonel Stackhouse are sitting in the briefing room. Stackhouse is wearing reading glasses and looking over a document.

JONES

Sir, with all due respect, I can not believe you are allowing Manning to do this.

STACKHOUSE

I have to admit, he has brought in a lot of suspects.

JONES

He's already brought in four truck-fulls today. I've never seen so many detainees.

STACKHOUSE

As soon as Manning told the I.P.'s we are looking for a Sunni, it was like Sharks to chum.

JONES

Great, so we are starting our own religious war now?

STACKHOUSE

Come off it, Jones. You know as well as I do the attack was retaliation. Let Manning have a crack at this. Besides, the powers-that-be at division are upset. They want us to bring someone in.

JONES

So that is it then?

STACKHOUSE

For the moment we let Manning see what he can do.

JONES

Sir, you have not seen him lately. He is a raving mad man.

STACKHOUSE
(ignoring Jones)
You know, these cigars...

Holds one up and sniffs it.

STACKHOUSE
...are not quite as good as what I had grown accustom to.

Stackhouse stands up and stretches.

STACKHOUSE
You going to the BUB?

JONES
Yeah, I'll be there in a second.

Stackhouse nods and exits the stage.
Manning enters.

MANNING
Sergeant Jones.

JONES
So how is the questioning going?

MANNING
We are not questioning people here. I'm just rounding up likely candidates and sending them up to higher.

JONES
So someone else is doing the dirty work. Convenient.

MANNING
Did we ever get a final damage report on the hospital?

JONES
Just that the entire thing needs to be rebuilt.

MANNING
All that work and for what? There should have been better protection.

JONES
It was the fourth day the hospital was open. I don't think anyone counted on a convoy of trucks barreling in and destroying the place.

MANNING
So, what then? We rebuild?

JONES
Yes.

MANNING

How long will that take?

JONES

It was just a bad deal, sir. You've done all you can on the project.

MANNING

If we would have made a move earlier and nabbed those people who were targeting the hospital none of this would have happened!

JONES

It would have happened eventually, sir.

MANNING

Really? Really! Maybe if we took things a little more seriously around here--

JONES

Wait a minute, sir. That is not fair, no one wanted this.

MANNING

Well, there was nothing done to stop it either. We need to up the patrols, get the men out there. Find out what the hell is going on outside these walls! Look at all of the people I have detained in less than a week!

JONES

Are those people even guilty of anything? When does it stop?

MANNING

It will after I am satisfied with the number of detainees.

JONES

And when will that be?

MANNING

(notices something off stage)

Probably sooner than you would think.

Ali wanders onto the stage. He is wearing civilian clothes. He is escorted by a soldier dressed in fatigues. The soldier drops off Ali and exits.

ALI

Lieutenant Manning, you wanted to see me?

MANNING

I did.

JONES

What is this? Tell me you didn't call *him* in!

MANNING

I want to question him and see what he knows.

JONES

What he knows? He's an interpreter. He doesn't know anything.

ALI

Know about what?

MANNING

(to Jones)

You said yourself these people know everything about what happens around here!

JONES

That was a joke sir! You can't take that completely serious!

MANNING

Don't try and protect him now, Sergeant. Sergeant Jones, keep Ali here in my office and --.

JONES

This is the briefing room.

MANNING

Just keep him here! I'm going to get the Colonel!

JONES

Sir--

MANNING

Is that understood sergeant!

JONES

The Colonel is--

MANNING

Is that understood!

JONES

Yes, sir.

Manning storms out of the room.

JONES

You okay?

ALI

I'm fine.

JONES

The hospital was destroyed.

ALI

What?

JONES

We think it was a Sunni militia. Which one? We don't know. Nancy's death was all over Al-Jeezera. My guess, they took revenge on a Shiite hospital.

ALI

That's terrible.

(beat)

JONES

Ali.

ALI

Yes.

JONES

You didn't know anything about this did you?

ALI

Of course not.

JONES

Cause if you do, tell me know before he finds out.

ALI

I don't know anything.

JONES

Because Manning is on a warpath.

Manning walks into the room.

MANNING

Let's get to it. Ali.

ALI

Yes, sir.

MANNING

We need to talk.

ALI

Okay.

MANNING

Where have you been all week?

ALI
I had nothing to do with that explosion.

MANNING
We'll see.

ALI
No, we won't. I leaving.

Ali stands up and tried to leave.
Manning steps in front of him.

MANNING
Sit down, Ali! This is not over.

ALI
I'm through.

MANNING
Where are you going?

ALI
I came here, because I was asked. Not to be questioned, like a criminal.

MANNING
No, you will sit down! We have a hospi--

Manning grabs Ali by the arm. Ali pulls away violently.

ALI
What did you expect! What did you think would happen with your hospital!

MANNING
What is that supposed to mean!

ALI
You come in here with all these ideas and for what? Did you once ask what the people in this area wanted!

MANNING
So you did know!

ALI
I did nothing! What is this? I knew it would never last. I know that every month a new project is started and nothing is accomplished!

ALI
(agitated)
Laying my cousin to rest.

MANNING
And that's all you've been doing?

ALI
Sir, what are you trying to say.

MANNING
I'm not saying anything.

ALI
Are you trying to imply that I knew something about the bomb?

MANNING
I'm just asking questions. I want to get to the bottom of this.

ALI
The bottom of what?

MANNING
The explosion, Ali! The explosion! Now quit playing games!

JONES
Sir, take it easy!

MANNING
Sergeant Jones, I am through Mickey Mousing around. We need some answers!

ALI
I know nothing.

MANNING
You are one of the only people who could have known the weak spots of the hospital's structure.

ALI
A ten year old boy could have done that damage. You said yourself the structure was poor.

JONES
Okay that's enough. Sir--

MANNING
(to Ali)
Quite an observation.

JONES
This has to stop.

MANNING

That's why this place will always be what it is. No one here has any belief in anything. Maybe if you put more effort into these projects--

ALI

Why do you care? I thought putting money into our economy was good. I thought it was about helping the people here.

MANNING

Yeah, people that want to help themselves!

JONES

That's enough!

ALI

No one ever wanted you to come here! You make all of these promises and what do you do?

MANNING

(disgusted)

Listen to this! How ungrateful.

ALI

See how you have changed. And because of what? Your project was not completed? Those explosions happen here everyday. And they kill innocent people. My cousin, she was an innocent person. Do you even know what it is like to see someone die?!

JONES

Ali, shut up.

Ali moves towards Manning.

ALI

No. I am tired of this. I am tired of being accused of actions I know nothing about. Did you know my mother was accosted by the police? My own mother!

MANNING

Things happen. I'm sure--

ALI

What would have happened in your country if that had happened! Something bad, I am sure. But not here! We are not even treated as citizens in our own country.

Manning steps up to Ali. The two are nose to nose.

MANNING

You are out of line!

ALI

Then do with me what you will. But don't ever accuse me of something I have not done simply because you do not trust me!

MANNING

How can I trust someone who questions the American military to my face? You aren't even in the military.

ALI

I'm here aren't I?

MANNING

And you're paid to do as you are told! Not to speak out! These are dangerous times. There is no room to waver. You are either with us or against us!

ALI

Right or wrong is that it?

MANNING

It's that simple.

ALI

It's not that simple! We are not all terrorists, and we do not fall into your "gap." We are people. I am a person, Lieutenant Manning.

MANNING

Right now you are under questioning. And you will watch your tongue.

Manning puts his index finger in Ali's chest. Ali pushed him back.

ALI

Don't touch me.

MANNING

What? Did you just strike me? I'm a military officer...you

Manning shoves Ali back.

ALI

Keep your hands off of me.

Ali begins to pace around like a beast.

MANNING

You savage! You're nothing but a savage!

Manning steps towards Ali and punches him in the face. Ali takes a step back then punches Manning in the stomach. Jones goes to grab Ali, but his arm meets Jones' head. Jones steps back.

ALI

Will you never understand! What does it take!

Manning tackles Ali and begins punching him harder and harder. He punches him in the face.

MANNING

How much do we have to give!

ALI

Stop! Stop it!

MANNING

Why can't you just do what you are told!

Jones jumps on Manning and puts him in a half-nelson. He drags him back.

Stackhouse runs in the room. He finds Ali lying on the floor beaten.

STACKHOUSE

What the hell is going on?

MANNING

He did it sir! He knows about the bombing!

ALI

(crying)

I know nothing. Please just leave me alone.

JONES

Sir, he doesn't know shit! The L.T. here--

STACKHOUSE

Christ!

Jones releases Manning. Manning dusts himself off.

STACKHOUSE

Manning, go to your billets! Jones, pick him up and get him out of here!

Manning leaves. Jones picks up Ali from the ground.

ALI
(to Stackhouse)
Sir, I didn't do anything.

STACKHOUSE
(to Jones)
Get him the hell out of here!

Jones helps Ali off of the stage.
Stackhouse stands alone.

STACKHOUSE
Christ.

SCENE EIGHT:

SLIDE: WELCOME TO THE SANDBOX

Briefing room. Manning enters the room
with his duffle bag. Jones is in the
room setting up.

JONES
So, you're leaving us, are you?

MANNING
Yeah, they need me back at division.

JONES
Yeah.

MANNING
What good is a special project officer who can't finish the
project, right?

JONES
You take care, sir.

MANNING
(looking at the map)
What do you have there? New hospital?

JONES
We are going to try a school this time.

MANNING
That's good. This area needs a new school.

JONES
Your replacement should be here any minute if--

MANNING

No, that's fine. I'm sure he'll be great.

JONES

We'll see. Ali, is okay, in case you were wondering.

MANNING

I heard his name was cleared.

JONES

Yeah, couldn't come back here though, on account of striking an officer. But Lieutenant Colonel Stackhouse pulled some strings, got him a job as a gate guard on one of the FOBs.

MANNING

That's...that's good. I shouldn't have struck him.

JONES

You were tired, sir.

MANNING

And frustrated.

JONES

And frustrated.

MANNING

Goodbye, Sergeant Jones.

JONES

Goodbye, sir.

Manning begins to pack up.

JONES

Oh sir, we did get a letter back from the embassy about that trip to America. I know that Nancy is dead, but I thought you might want to know what--

MANNING

What happened?

JONES

It was denied.

MANNING

Why would you want to tell me that?

JONES

Just thought you should know.

Jones snaps to the position of attention and renders a salute to Manning.

JONES

Good bye, sir.

MANNING

Good bye, Sergeant Jones.

Manning leaves, CAPTAIN RUDDING arrives, fresh-faced and eager to work.

JONES

Hello, sir. Did you sleep well?

Rudding

Slept great. Thanks. Are those the maps?

JONES

Yes, sir.

RUDDING

Well, I can't wait to get started.

JONES

Me neither. Let me ask you, sir. What latrine did you use this morning?

RUDDING

The one on the second floor.

JONES

The Hajji latrine?

RUDDING

Don't you have any regular toilets?

JONES

That's my bad, sir, I forgot to show you the toilets. The third floor has American toilets...and toilet paper. The second floor has the Iraqi toilets.

RUDDING

Makes sense.

JONES

You didn't take a shit on the floor did you?

RUDDING

What? No. NO. I didn't.

JONES

We had KBR install some toilets as soon as we moved in. Trust me, no one was looking forward to the alternative. I did try it once. It wasn't too bad...

The two voices fade out. Lights fade.
Gunfire can be heard in the background.

THE END.

VITA

Adam John Musil was born in Wichita, Kansas, on December 3, 1976, the son of Dan Joseph Musil and Laura Ruth Musil. Upon completing high school, he entered Missouri Valley College on a basketball scholarship. Two short years later, after realizing he could not jump very high, Adam transferred to the University of Texas at Austin. He received a Bachelor of Science from the University of Texas at Austin in May 2002. In August 2003 he entered the Graduate College of Texas State University-San Marcos. It was during this time that Adam was deployed to Iraq as an Army photographer and found the inspiration to write Welcome to the Sandbox.

Permanent Address: 1011 Brodie St. #5

Austin, Texas 78704

This thesis was typed by Adam Musil.

