

Ops

Pilot (2006)

Note to readers familiar with earlier scripts:

This pilot, which takes place largely in Brazil and a former Soviet republic, opens with McGinty and Vanowen still working for SOS (and their nemesis, Barker). As you'll see, it's after the events of the opening that they decide to quit and form their own company. McGinty and Vanowen don't know each other -- or trust each other -- particularly well in this pilot.

This is all in the effort to make the premise and relationships a little more clear. For instance, Brooke and Tina meet each other in the episode, and the business plan is explicitly laid out.

[teaser]

BRAZIL / JUNGLE CAMP

An American businessman is pulled out of a crappy jeep by three BRAZILIAN KIDNAPPERS. The man has a hood over his head, hands bound together. He's dragged, screaming, into a broken-down shack, where the kidnappers pull off his hood, revealing JOE MCGINTY. He pleads for his life. Says he has a family. His company will pay ransom, just please don't kill him. The lead kidnapper tells him to shut up, and exits.

There's another hostage in the shack: RENE BOUTAREL (mid-40's). This French mining expert has been held captive for almost two weeks. He tries to comfort McGinty, telling him it will be okay. But once McGinty is certain that the kidnappers aren't listening, his whole demeanor changes, like flipping a switch. He explains that he works for SOS, the company that was hired to extricate Boutarel. McGinty got himself kidnapped so they'd take him to Boutarel.

Boutarel wonders why his company didn't just pay ransom. McGinty explains that the insurance policy has the option to pay ransom or attempt extraction; extraction is cheaper. Kidnapping is a business, and you have to contain costs.

Boutarel asks if McGinty is a mercenary. McGinty explains he's an account representative, and not to use the "m-word" because that's offensive to an operation specialist.

Suddenly, there's a "shock and awe" assault on the kidnapper's camp, led by THEO VANOWEN and his team. The goal isn't to kill the kidnappers, or even apprehend them, but to scatter them into the jungle and quickly extricate the hostage. There's an odd moment when one of the kidnappers has a clear shot of Vanowen and hesitates. He and Vanowen seem to recognize each other. Neither shoots.

Using a cell phone smuggled near (but not up) his ass, McGinty contacts the extraction team. McGinty and Vanowen have funny banter about cell phone coverage (surprisingly good) and labrador retrievers. We see that Vanowen is really good at his job, which is Getting Shit Done.

The extraction goes without a hitch, until one of the kidnapper's young children gets in harm's way. Vanowen is able to grab the child and keep her safe, but it then becomes a standoff between Vanowen and the kidnapper-father, who thinks the soldiers may hurt her. It's only McGinty's cool-headed negotiation that defuses the situation, reuniting father and daughter. Vanowen and Boutarel are both impressed.

We button the scene with more witty McGinty/Vanowen dialogue. They can have a discussion/argument about anything while shit is blowing up everywhere.

For the pilot, we play straight through into...

[act one]

RIO

BARKER, McGinty and Vanowen's prick of a boss, chews out McGinty for putting himself in the operation, considering he's not field-trained. (McGinty is supposed to be a behind-the-scenes, customer-relations guy.) McGinty counters that he couldn't just put a soldier in a suit. The kidnappers would never believe it. Barker also chews out Vanowen for using a four-man team when the company protocol is three men.

Vanowen says he's getting pretty fucking sick of protocol. He abruptly quits, to Barker and McGinty's great surprise. Barker asks what exactly he expects to do on his own. This is Vanowen's one shot to put away some real money for a real retirement, and he's blowing it.

Vanowen is unfazed.

A BAR IN IPANEMA

Later, McGinty and Vanowen commiserate about what an asshole Barker is. But it's more than that. Vanowen tells McGinty that he recognized one of the kidnappers. The guy worked for SOS, just a year ago. Vanowen suspects that SOS was behind the kidnapping in the first place. It's a hell of a business model: kidnap a guy, then charge the insurance company to extract him. Rinse and repeat. Vanowen knows he can't prove it, but he can't keep working for the Devil. That's the real reason he quit.

McGinty says that if Vanowen's leaving, he's leaving, too. What's more, they should go in business for themselves.

McGinty makes a compelling, if somewhat improvised, case for why Vanowen needs him as a partner. There's millions to be made, especially if they can get a contract in Iraq -- the promised land.

In fact, McGinty thinks he can already get them their first job. Boutarel wants protection for his future scouting trips, and has told McGinty he'd get the French company to hire them.

Vanowen says yes. But he's very much of the "trust with verification" mindset. He's not ready to put his full faith in McGinty yet. There's a lot of shit to figure out.

MCGINTY'S TOWNHOUSE / MARYLAND

McGinty and his wife BROOKE get into a major argument about the business, and his leaving SOS without warning her. It's clear they have a lot of issues independent of this situation, and that their marriage is on pretty rocky ground. She insists on staying for the business-plan meeting with Vanowen, since it's largely their money that would be bankrolling it.

Vanowen shows up with his sister, TINA, who serves as his business advisor. It's an awkward meeting, with Vanowen shooting down proposed company names (he doesn't like Peregrine; if that's a falcon, then the name should be Falcon), and McGinty holding a hard line on profits (50/50 split, despite Vanowen's greater experience). Vanowen insists that Tina be the accountant/business manager/sole employee.

Now that Vanowen's put up with the business stuff, we go to the...

FIRING RANGE

Vanowen wants to know what kind of shot McGinty is. McGinty shoots confidently. But not a single bullet hits the paper target. Vanowen: "You don't shoot. Ever. Are we clear on that?" McGinty readily agrees.

Barker shows up, confronts them. He warns them that others have tried to set up shop on their own, and they've always failed on their own. Failure could mean going out of business, or getting their heads blown off by unseen snipers. There's a definite "if you're not working for us, you're working against us" vibe. Threatening.

But McGinty and Vanowen are undeterred.

PARIS / BOARDROOM

McGinty gives a presentation to French company GEMISTRAT about Falcon's experience and capabilities, making them sound much more established and impressive than they really are. Vanowen, whose resume McGinty plays up to the hilt (since it is Falcon's only asset), is in the room but does little more than grunt and nod.

Gemistrat wants to invest in a mine in Uzbekistan, but the investment is conditional on getting an independent assessment of the site's security. Currently the mine is guarded by the Uzbekistani army. McGinty is pitching Falcon to do the security assessment – with the implicit understanding that they would then have a leg up on getting the bigger contract of implementing their own security recommendations.

Boutarel is in the room nodding enthusiastically (he is the one who recommended McGinty and Vanowen). Also present is MAKAROV, an Uzbek official who is really gregarious and probably completely corrupt.

McGinty and Vanowen get the job. Only afterwards does Vanowen say he doesn't like Russians. Doesn't trust them. McGinty tries to get to the root of Vanowen's russophobia, but gets nowhere. Vanowen says they can do this job, but that's it. No more Russia. No more Where-the-Hell-istans.

UZBEKISTAN / THE RIDE TO THE MINE

McGinty, Vanowen, Boutarel and Makarov en route to the mine. It is a uranium mine in a mountainous region. Boutarel is the representative sent by Gemistrat to recommend whether or not they should make this investment. With them are three other experts:

- a highly introverted French ENGINEER who never speaks
- a no-nonsense Russian woman, POSTOVA (40's), the delegate sent to review the deal as part of a Russian-U.S. nuclear nonproliferation initiative
- Her assistant, NADJA (mid-20's), whom all the men lust after.

We realize quickly that Makarov, their host, is a very powerful and well-connected official. A warm, friendly, bearlike man whose business suit is always rumpled, he is one of the dictator-president's closest friends. Everyone, including soldiers at road checkpoints, defers to him with a respect bordering on terror. (In Uzbekistan, accidentally annoying a friend of the president can land you in prison or worse.)

We learn that the only reason the French company is willing to hire this new unproven PMC instead of their favorite, SOS, is that Uzbekistan has a bad history with SOS stemming from their operations there in the 90's, and flat-out refuses to hire them again.

McGinty and Vanowen don't speak Uzbek, but McGinty knows a little Russian. Nadja translates and they pick up on the tension that seems to be everywhere. Soldiers at checkpoints are jittery; they glimpse a car full of foreign journalists pulled over and searched; Makarov's cellphone keeps ringing for terse, snappish conversations that sound like all is not well. But to his foreign guests, he is all smiles, assuring them that Uzbekistan is very quiet and safe, they have put the recent troubles behind them and this is a great time to invest. He makes wry jokes about the degree of paperwork, old habits from the Soviet period.

All the way, we build up the mine, Vanowen asking questions about its location, current security, if they have considered certain types of terrorist threat, etc., Makarov assuring them how good the Uzbek soldiers are, all Soviet trained etc., they will be very impressed.

ARRIVAL AT THE MINE COMPOUND

When they get to the mine, it's completely deserted – unguarded. Not a soldier in sight.

They enter the mine. Makarov flips out. Gets on the phone to the army, yelling this is outrageous, how could they leave the mine unprotected? The yard is starting to fill with workers coming up from below; the men are milling about, rumors spreading, why did the soldiers all leave? Makarov grabs the foreman, shouts at him to send everyone back to work. The man obeys, but the workers ignore him; it becomes a full-fledged riot.

Vanowen and McGinty decide that whatever's happening, their priority is to get their VIPs to safety.

Makarov leads them to the main office – which, incredibly, is completely unprotected. Cursing, he starts collecting papers, disks, and stuffing them into a briefcase.

A group of rioting workers starts pounding on the office door; they haven't been paid in weeks, now they fear the mine is being closed, they think there is money in the safe and they want to grab it. In another minute they'll break through. Vanowen takes charge, issuing weapons to everyone in the party. They will have to defend the office against the mob.

[act two]

BROOKE AND MCGINTY'S TOWNHOUSE

Brooke arrives home at night to find an INTRUDER in the house. She's apparently surprised him in the middle of a robbery. He escapes out the back. She's not hurt, but certainly flustered.

Later, Tina arrives as the police are going through things. Brooke called Tina hoping she could track down McGinty, but no luck. Wherever they are, the satt phone isn't working. Brooke says that nothing was stolen, and there's no sign of forced entry. The cops think someone picked the lock, which feels weird for a break-in.

Tina and Brooke have a chance to bond a little, and we get a little more background. For instance, Tina is amazed that Brooke doesn't have a gun. Tina was in the military, but had to leave when she fell in love. Brooke asks if she married the guy.

It wasn't a guy.

Brooke is worried that she can't get ahold of McGinty, but Tina assures her the boys are fine.

THE MINE – OFFICE STANDOFF

Cut back to our guys trapped in the office by an angry violent mob. Vanowen, by showing strength and toughness, successfully defends the office, but it's only a matter of time before the rioters break through. McGinty shows a cool head, and acquits himself surprisingly well from Vanowen's point of view considering he is an MBA with no military experience. Boutarel, by contrast, panics and his actions nearly cause disaster.

Through it all, the French engineer and the Russian compliance specialist are remarkably calm, going through the mine paperwork. They discover irregularities that suggest uranium ore may be going missing. McGinty pushes for an answer: Could someone build an atomic bomb with that. No, it's not refined. But you could conceivably build a dirty bomb.

Translator Nadja, meanwhile, hangs close to Vanowen. At first, it seems like just wants to be close to the strongest guy in case there's trouble. But it turns out she has a thing for him, and a shared passion for Soviet firearms.

McGinty singles out the apparent leader of the uprising, who speaks English. Unarmed, McGinty meets with him, and talks a truce.

Thanks to our heroes' actions, the group of foreign VIPs escapes unscathed, and Makarov manages to retain the locked briefcase full of valuable stuff. We never learn exactly what is in it, but it's important to Makarov, so it becomes our McGuffin. (He gives the briefcase to McGinty to hold.)

Suddenly, the cavalry arrives. The army shows up in force, in full riot gear, and takes control of the mine. They seem well equipped and competent, with a tough commander. (Makarov explains that the troops had been diverted to deal with a terrorist attack, but everything is OK now and they are coming back.) Our guys sigh with relief. But to their shock, the all-powerful Makarov is arrested – dragged off by the government security forces.

[act three]

MINING COMPOUND

Our guys corral Boutarel and the French engineers: They need to get out, now, before they too are arrested, or worse. The exact nature of the upheaval, and what it all means, is not their concern at this moment.

Vanowen and McGinty need to hustle their small group safely through the military cordon around the area. (McGinty still has Makarov's briefcase, and really wishes he didn't.)

Up till now, the tone of the action has been somewhat whimsical, almost comedic. Boutarel's cowardice, Makarov's splenetic fury, then his fatalistic acceptance of arrest, and the continuing impossibility of keeping track of who is who in this country, are played largely for laughs. Now it starts to turn a little dark and scary, with bursts of machine gun fire, and half-glimpses of people maybe getting killed.

McGinty, working his cellphone gets ahold of someone Vanowen knows at the U.S. airbase nearby. This LIEUTENANT, an old buddy of Vanowen's, is able to cut through channels and tells them just to come to the airbase outer checkpoint with their VIPs, he will take care of them from there. Great relief. Except the lieutenant seems disturbingly, serenely clueless about the events happening outside his base – but whatever. They will head for the airbase.

One last obstacle stands in their way: the military cordon around the mine, manned by the government security forces. It is up to McGinty to talk his way through it. His attempt at bribery backfires; the guard gets suspicious and orders them out of the car at gunpoint. They are hustled into the concrete guardhouse, where they see Makarov among the prisoners being detained. He signals to them not to reveal they know him.

The commander interrogates them (the same one who arrested Makarov). He asks McGinty what is in the briefcase; he makes up a story. It's touch and go, but by emphasizing his foreign connections, McGinty manages to bribe their way out with the briefcase still unopened. As the young guard escorts them back to their car, the guard is suddenly riddled with bullets. The checkpoint is under attack – from the outside.

Our guys are suddenly caught in a firefight between the security forces, and whoever is attacking the guardhouse. Makarov comes running out. Vanowen seizes the moment, shoots a soldier who is about to gun Makarov down, and hustles Makarov into the car and they drive off. Boutarel is reduced to babbling terror – Vanowen just shot that soldier! He's put all their lives in danger! Vanowen tells him to shut up.

Makarov lights a cigarette; he is surprisingly cool, almost jaunty about his fate. He explains to the guys what is going on, in terms so simple that they actually explain nothing. (The president is angry at Makarov, maybe someone has been telling lies about him; not to worry, it will all be sorted out, he is an old friend.)

GAS STATION

They stop at a gas station on the highway. Boutarel puts his foot down: Makarov is a danger to all of them. He orders them to ditch Makarov and take the rest of them to safety, immediately. Vanowen points out that it is technically Makarov, not Gemistrat, who hired them, so he doesn't have to take orders from Boutarel. Makarov appreciates this.

They are worried about their car being identified. Noticing a TAXI DRIVER refueling at the same gas station, McGinty makes a deal to drive them to the airbase. The driver, a mean old guy with a photo of Stalin on his dashboard, is suspicious. McGinty convinces him they're foreign journalists and their car is broken (McGinty gets the driver to turn his back while Vanowen smashes a few vital parts).

TAXI RIDE TO AIRBASE

Now they reach the airbase – only to find it completely surrounded by Uzbekistani troops who are not letting anyone enter. A TV cameraman, who has been trying in vain to get through, tells them: Uzbekistan just said no more U.S. base in their country. The airbase is closed. No one gets in or out.

[act four]

ROAD TO NOWHERE

Vanowen and McGinty trying numbers on their cellphones, to arrange another ride. They finally get through to someone in neighboring Turkmenistan who can come in a helicopter and pick them up. (McGinty first has to approve the cost with Boutarel – who, by now a blubbering mess, gives them his credit card; McGinty reads the number over the phone.)

Makarov, driving, has turned uncharacteristically silent. Now, as they reach a certain dip in the road (a heavily forested, mountainous area), he says: This is where I get off. Turkmenistan is no good for me. Thanks for everything. McGinty is concerned; Makarov assures him that he will be OK, he grew up in this valley, the people who live here are his people. He stops the taxi and prepares to run off into the woods -- if only McGinty will give him his briefcase back.

Postova argues that the briefcase probably has evidence of the missing uranium. Makarov denies it, but refuses to show them what's inside. He cites Pandora, whose curiosity unleashed all the evil in the world, and also hope. Makarov says they have to trust him -- there is hope in here.

McGinty and Vanowen make a silent vote. McGinty gives him the briefcase back.

Vanowen takes the wheel and drives off. Their last glimpse of Makarov, a big man in an Armani suit carrying a briefcase, nimbly running off into the forest with unexpected grace.

As they drive off, they hear machine gunfire behind them. No way to know if Makarov made it or not. But we like to think he did.

THE CLEARING

They arrive at the clearing where the helicopter is going to meet them. Unfortunately, they're early.

They can see the army vehicles coming up a rise in the road, coming after them. Shouting through a megaphone to halt.

The helicopter is coming. Our guys decide to ignore the megaphone and go for the helicopter.

As they get into the helicopter, the approaching soldiers start shooting at them. The helicopter takes off. Narrow escape.

Safe in the helicopter, they breathe a sigh of relief – and do a double-take. The stuff in the helicopter is stenciled with the SOS logo. The pilot says this is their chopper, mostly I fly for them, but I also do other stuff on the side sometimes. McGinty and Vanowen share a private laugh: Barker would shit if he knew.

INTERNATIONAL HOTEL

Boutarel (along with the French and Russian) thank McGinty for saving them. Nadja says goodbye to Vanowen, and gives him her email address. He should write when he's coming back.

McGinty chides Vanowen about his dislike of Russians.

BROOKE AND MCGINTY'S TOWNHOUSE

After a heated discussion with Brooke about the job and their relationship, McGinty is going to be sleeping on the couch. Apparently, he's gotten used to it.

We LOOK DOWN on him from a high angle, revealing a tiny LED light, part of a miniature videocamera that's been hidden in the overhead light fixture. The earlier break-in was actually someone planting a bug in their townhouse.

Everything they say and do is being recorded.

We don't know by whom, or why.