

ALMEIRA
A Comedy Drama for Television

S D Anugyan

Foreword for ‘Almeira’ Extract

Another dream that never came to pass. ‘Almeira’ was designed as a comedy fantasy adventure, pitched as ‘X-Files meets Sinbad the Sailor’ – and now I see that the title is completely wrong for the intended family audience.

Almeira is a fictional Arabian country that decides to go independent and relinquish much of modern technology. The stories are about four young people of different nationalities who are mistakenly recruited to investigate some of the mysterious goings on, their adventures leading to revelations about themselves and the world, and to a burgeoning ‘Age of Romance’.

I designed the series as a creative protest against the way the Arabic world was being presented, and etched into our thoughts. Where was its cultural richness, its spirituality? More to the point, where was the romantic Arabian Nights that had mesmerised me in my youth? This was written as an attempt to bring all that back. It was fun to do but ultimately got nowhere as I couldn’t find anyone interested in developing the concept further. Here are a few opening scenes of the first episode for your enjoyment. Probably best read whilst eating popcorn.

S D Anugyan 2018

Note: Some of the formatting has been lost whilst translating to PDF.

INT. BRITISH CONSULATE OFFICE. ALMEIRAN CAPITAL. DAY.

COLONEL HAWKINS (45) and GENERAL DILLWILLY (60) are discussing Almeira.

DILLWILLY

It is your choice to stay, old chap. We wouldn't order anyone to do so.

HAWKINS

I am sure the Almeirian government would appreciate our support even if we are pulling out.

DILLWILLY

Jolly good, a bit of token presence in this area would do us no harm. I don't know why you are volunteering though, Hawkins. Any idiot could remain. We have plenty of those.

HAWKINS

No wife, sir. I have nothing waiting for me back home. Besides, I've taken a shine to Almeira. The food agrees with me.

Dillwilly looks at him as if he were insane.

DILLWILLY

Yes, well. Let us trust they still have food after President I-Am-Not-A-Sultan Ar-Razi finalises his divorce from all the other Middle Eastern states. What are they thinking? Are they going to survive by selling spices and fruit? They could have had the pipeline run through the country, creating revenue and...

HAWKINS

(interrupting)

They have their own ways of doing things, sir.

DILLWILLY

Damn right they do! They're not like us, Hawkins. Take Ar-Razi for instance: splendid fellow, ace at bridge, generous, declares Almeirawill be without religion, then goes to pray at the mosque for guidance on the issue. Says he wants independence for women just before marrying his fifth wife. Wants to cut back on technology as if any return to the Dark Ages is a good thing then orders an upgrade of the satellite TV system. Don't even mention his University of Mystical Claptrap.

PRESIDENT AR-RAZI (55) enters with SECURITY CHIEF AL-QUFF (40) who is carrying a rolled-up sheet of paper. Ar-Razi is beaming affably, Al-Quff brusque and efficient.

DILLWILLY (CONT'D)

Ahh, Ar-Razi, old chap. We were just having a chat about your country's future.

AR-RAZI

All present and correct?

DILLWILLY

Ahh yes, well, naturally...but I have to confess as to being a tiny bit puzzled as to the new course of the pipeline.

AR-RAZI

This is why Security Chief Al-Quff is here! Commander, show the gentlemen your map!

Al-Quff unrolls one of the sheets of paper and pins it on a board. It is blank. He produces a marker pen and proceeds to draw the rough outline of his country. Ar-Razi beams proudly. He puts a cross at the centre of the 'map'.

AL-QUFF

This is our illustrious city. And this is where the pipe was to run.

He draws a dotted line through the top left quarter of the map.

AL-QUFF (CONT'D)

This is where it will run now.

He draws an unbroken line above the previous, outside the border.

AR-RAZI

You see? Our neighbours will be happy.

DILLWILLY

And you will be broke, man!

AR-RAZI

The pipe will have gone through flamingo breeding grounds. They would not have been happy.

DILLWILLY

But how will your country survive, man?

AL-QUFF

We have our ways.

AR-RAZI

We want to be alone and proud. We will be like England.

DILLWILLY

(flattered)

Democratic, fair-minded, independent.

AR-RAZI

We will be like England!

DILLWILLY

(carried away)

Stiff upper lip, reserved, cool.

AR-RAZI

We will be like Italy.

DILLWILLY

Ahh well, yes, um, was there anything else? My flight is in an hour and..

AL-QUFF

We want to know about your team.

AR-RAZI

The team of dreams, yes!

AL-QUFF

The key personnel you promised us. To keep an eye on things.

DILLWILLY

Ahh yes, well, that is Colonel Hawkins's department, and as I am about to depart, I will do so and leave you in his capable hands. President Ar-Razi, it has been a pleasure.

They shake hands, Ar-Razi clasping the general's in both of his. Dillwilly pulls his hand away and nods at Al-Quff.

DILLWILLY (CONT'D)

Commander.

Al-Quff doesn't respond in any way. Dillwilly turns to Hawkins.

DILLWILLY (CONT'D)

Colonel, I now officially pronounce you official British security commander in Almeira, in charge of a small contingent of men only. You will report to HQ in London as stipulated and do your best to provide support to this country as needed insofar as it does not conflict with the interests of western democracy.

He salutes Hawkins who returns the gesture obediently.

DILLWILLY (CONT'D)

Gentlemen... good luck.

He leaves.

AR-RAZI

(calling after him)

Come back for a holiday, general!

There is a momentary silence as the three remaining men stand looking at each other. Al-Quff is the first to speak.

AL-QUFF

Colonel, the team...

HAWKINS

Ahh, I haven't actually met them. MI7 did the selection process. I have here some notes.

He pulls a file off the desk and opens it.

HAWKINS (CONT'D)

I haven't been given any names as of yet. I can tell you their backgrounds which make for interesting reading in themselves. First of all, we have a young lady...

INT.. ALMEIRA AIRPORT. DAY.

Chaos as people of all nationalities press in on the flight desks, shouting, waving papers and passports, attempting to get past security etc. Some people have even brought livestock. In the centre of one group is a YOUNG WOMAN wearing a khimar, yelling at the poor GIRL at the desk.

HAWKINS (V.O.)

...who is Almeirian born and bred, educated in France, with honours in both literature and political science. She is sensitive, compassionate and completely dedicated to her country.

YOUNG WOMAN

Let me out of this crazy place! I'll pay double for any seat you have. To anywhere! Triple!

INT.. AN OFFICE IN ALMEIRA.. DAY.

An intelligent-looking EXPERT is working on some sophisticated parts of a computer. Behind him another MAN is holding his desktop monitor in the air above his head and shaking it as if to get it to work. All around people are frantically clearing their desks.

HAWKINS (V.O.)

Then we have an IT expert from Switzerland who is familiar with tech we haven't even heard of yet. He can fix anything.

A woman rushes past, nudging the man holding up the monitor so that he over-balances and drops the monitor on the Swiss expert's head. The expert lies on the floor, probably dead.

EXT. A GROUP OF TRAVELLERS. A DESERT ROAD. DAY.

The mixed group contain MERCHANTS, FAMILIES, a couple of people in black thawbs and one well-built STRANGER who appears separate, though in their midst, wrapped in Arab clothes and wearing sunglasses. They are mostly on foot, a few on horse or donkey-back. One rusty old jeep trails behind, SPLUTTERING.

HAWKINS (V.O.)

Third of the group is an explosives and weapons specialist. He is ex-MI5, ex-CIA, ex-KGB so I call him Triple X!...

Silence

HAWKINS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Oh. Tough crowd. I guess you don't watch movies. A shame. They're jolly exciting. Anyway, we'll probably never know his real name.

'Triple X' steps on a hidden noose which quickly tightens. He is thrown onto his back as a donkey, at the other end of the rope, runs off into the desert, taking the SCREAMING agent with it. The others watch silently, hardly slowing their pace.

INT. A DARK CAVE . DAY?

DARK FIGURES scuttle around, lit only by a small fire burning at the edge of a pool. Above the pool is a MAN suspended, gagged and wrapped in chains.

HAWKINS (V.O.)

The final member of the team is an even bigger mystery. All I can tell you is that if there are any authorities higher than national intelligence organisations, I guess he works for one of them.

The trapped man is plunged into the black pitiless waters below.

INT. BRITISH CONSULATE OFFICE. ALMEIRAN CAPITAL. DAY.

The men are exactly as we left them while Hawkins finishes his synopsis of the 'dream team' and puts the file away.

HAWKINS

Other than that, gentlemen, all I can do is assure you that the four of them will be reporting to Commander Al-Quff in the palace offices at 1500 hours. Everything is going according to plan.

INT. PUB. BRITISH COMPOUND. ALMEIRAN CAPITAL. DAY.

LILY MCADAMS (20) punches somebody in the face, then takes a swig from the beer glass in her other hand. Most people are backing off from her ferociousness, but a few are heading towards it. The fight escalates as she kicks, punches and head-butts anyone who tries to intervene. All this to the sound of LOUD DISCORDANT TECHNO.

LILY

Come and get it then naff off! Crawl back under your beds and cry you wimpy numb-suckers...

A chair crashes on top of her, she drops her beer, reeling, then staggers upright, whirling to confront her assailant. As she does so though a hand clamps on her shoulder. She turns to face SERGEANT MILLAIS (25) who is standing with two other MILITARY POLICE. Other MPs are arresting people already.

MILLAIS

Nice to see you again, Ms McAdams. Now if you will be so kind..

He waves a pair of handcuffs in front of her face which twists in contempt as she shrugs his hand from her shoulder.

LILY

I haven't done nothing!

Millais glances briefly, wryly, around at the devastation then swiftly turns her to put on the cuffs. She shrugs again, surrendering to the situation. There is a sense of routine to all this. They've done the same dance many times before.

LILY (CONT'D)

Come on, Sergeant Millais. There's no work now without the oil and my flight's

not for another sodding week. A girl's gotta do something to relax.

MILLAIS

Have you tried knitting?

LILY

I'll give you 'knitting'! Come on! What you gonna do with me? Lock me in Her Majesty's B 'n' B? Make me watch 'The English Sodding Patient' - again?

MILLAIS

(as he leads her away)

Sorry to disappoint you, but as of noon today Almeira has relinquished British sovereign control and is entirely autonomous; so you will be taken and deposited at the offices of Commander Al-Quff of the Security Council of Almeira - if you can handle all these big words. It means, you are their problem now.

INT. KITCHEN. AN ALMEIRAN RESIDENCE. DAY.

AZA ALI (20), a demure woman in traditional clothes is trying to prepare tea and keep her cool while her MUM argues with her, DAD standing in the doorway as if unwilling to make a commitment one way or other.

AZA

It is not my problem, it is yours!

MUM

You cannot say that! As long as you live in this house you will do as your father wishes.

DAD looks a bit fazed, as if caught in a melodrama that is not his.

AZA

Almeira is changing.

MUM

But our ways do not change! They have accepted the dowry. You will marry the

boy in my mother's village, your wedding night will be at the Rising Moon Hotel, you will live in the house at the end of the street, and provide me with three grand-daughters and five grandsons, or two granddaughters and three grandsons if times are hard or should it be the other way round?

MUM starts counting absent-mindedly on her fingers, doing the arithmetic. AZA looks at her DAD for sympathy but he shrugs helplessly. Fed up and determined to do something about it, she puts down the tea and gets ready to go out.

DAD

Where are you going, Aza?

AZA

To the government offices. They will be able to tell me where I stand on this legally.

She leaves brusquely. Mum looks at Dad, outraged. He shrugs and pours himself some tea.

EXT. A BUSY STREET IN THE ALMEIRAN CAPITAL. DAY.

RALPH IVES (20) wanders absent-mindedly through the milling crowd. He stops to take a picture of the scene with his expensive-looking camera. Coming towards him are a few of the TRAVELLERS from before, including a GIRL (17) previously unseen, on top of a horse's back. The horse is being led by an older man, presumably her father. She is striking, partly because of her blonde hair which contrasts with her dark face under a cowl, but she also has an innocence that is mesmerising. Ralph doesn't see them as he is too busy being the tourist, until he has taken his picture and looks round just as they are passing. He and the girl lock eyes. He is stunned, he cannot move. Then the crowd gets between them and he loses sight of her. He tries to move but is pushed backwards, then forwards, all over the place. Behind him, Aza enters the front door of the Security Council Offices at the far end of the street

RALPH

Hey!

He is swept away, towards the Security Council Offices. The tide of people persist and he is pushed through the front door.

INT. AN UPSTAIRS OFFICE. SECURITY COUNCIL. DAY.

More chaos as people come and go. Aza is talking to the good-looking but cold female RECEPTIONIST. Behind her in the small queue is the perpetually smiling TERREL MUTWA (20), an ultra-neat Zulu from South Africa. He looks like his mother dressed him. Further back, along the wall is a line of four seats, at the end of which is a scowling Lily, her hands cuffed behind her.

AZA

(exasperated)

I did go to the Marriage Bureau and they sent me here.

RECEPTIONIST

Well, if you could take a seat, I will see what we can do.

Aza goes to sit as far away from Lily as possible. Terrel approaches the receptionist.

TERREL

Hello. Do you speak English?

RECEPTIONIST

Do you?

TERREL

Ha! Yes! I was sent from Cape Town University. It's in South Africa. I am writing a thesis on Myths and Secrets of Arabia. I was informed that I should come here.

His beaming features are a bit too much for the receptionist who simply waves him towards the seat by Lily and turns to the next person in the queue.

TERREL (CONT'D)

(leaving)

You are very pretty.

She smiles momentarily, unexpectedly, as he goes to the seat. Suddenly Ralph is pushed in through the office doorway. He twists and turns in the riptide till he is shoved into the one remaining seat, between Terrel and Aza. He sits, stunned. Lily is looking

boldly at a slightly disconcerted Terrel while she fiddles about with her handcuffs.

Suddenly Commander Al-Quff sweeps in with a SECURITY OFFICER and stands over them commandingly.

AL-QUFF

Ahh you are all here. Excellent.
Right on time.

They are all silent as he appraises them, starting with Aza and finishing with Lily, when he looks puzzled and she scowls in return.

AL-QUFF (CONT'D)

I thought you were a man.

Lily starts to rise as if she is going to punch him one, but Terrel responds quickly, easing her with a hand on her shoulder and standing up. He thrusts his hand forward to Al-Quff.

TERREL

Very pleased to meet you, sir. My name
is Terrel Mutwa and...

AL-QUFF

There is no time for pleasantries.
We have something for you already.
Come this way please. All of you.

His manner makes it clear none of them dare to refuse. Lily is the only one non-plussed as, the last to follow, she casually deposits the handcuffs with the receptionist. As they all leave, the receptionist, also non-plussed, opens a filing cabinet and tosses them in to join all the others which are already there. She has quite a collection.

INT. INCIDENT ROOM. SECURITY COUNCIL. DAY.

The Incident Room is a hybrid between an Operations Room in a military base wallcharts, computers etc. and a plush Middle-Eastern lounge: cushions along the walls, settees, carpets, tapestries etc. As Al-Quff enters with the others behind, Ar-Razi enters from the opposite side. With him are two YOUNG WOMEN dressed in minimal 'Arabian nights' garb. They are identical twins, only differentiated by the colours of their clothes.

AR-RAZI

Ah Al-Quff! There you are. I have something of considerable importance to decide and your opinion will be most valuable.

The two groups meet in the middle of the room. Lily is chewing gum. She blows a bubble whilst considering Ar-Razi's two companions disparagingly.

AR-RAZI (CONT'D)

Which of these two do you think should be my Personal Assistant?

AL-QUFF

(coolly)

I don't know, Your Excellence. I liked your last one.

AR-RAZI

Really? What happened to her?

AL-QUFF

You married her, Excellency.

AR-RAZI

So I did. Well, I can't very well marry both of these, can I?

AL-QUFF

It is quite a dilemma, sir.

TERREL

Why don't you marry one, and give the other the position?

AL-RAZ

(eyes lighting up)

You are very smart! It is possibly immoral, and I won't do it, but you think outside the box. I like that. Who are you?

AL-QUFF

This is the team, sir. We have a situation.

He goes to the map of Almeira on the wall. The others all follow. Ar-Razi, now more leader than playboy, looks keenly on. The twins,

now temporarily 'off-duty', go and sit down, put their feet up and pick up some science magazines which are lying about. They start to read.

AL-QUFF (CONT'D)

This is an encampment to the east of the city. Two families who also provide surveillance. We have not heard from them for several hours and they are not responding on any radio frequency. Mobile phones do not work there. It is a dead spot.

RALPH

(nervously, playing
along)

Eh why hasn't anyone gone to see?

Al-Quff looks at him severely, though it is not clear why he does not volunteer an answer. Ralph gulps.

AL-QUFF

You will go and see. And report back immediately.

RALPH

(irrepressibly)

But if communications are down...

Another look from Al-Quff and Ralph shuts up again. A GIGGLE distracts them all from the matter at hand, and they look to see the twins, one laughing out loud at what she is reading, the other silently.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SECURITY COUNCIL OFFICES. DAY.

Two jeeps draw up outside just as Al-Quff and the four bewildered youngsters emerge from the offices. The first jeep has a bunch of party balloons floating behind. Al-Quff looks inquiringly at the DRIVER.

DRIVER

(to Al-Quff)

It's my niece's birthday, sir. I was just on my way.

AL-QUFF

You will have time to do both.

He gestures for the others to get in.

AL-QUEFF (CONT'D)

What are you waiting for?

Lily and Aza climb into the first jeep, Terrel and Ralph the other, nodding hesitantly to the SECOND DRIVER. The jeeps ROAR off down the road, disappearing in the dust.

End of 'Almeira' extract.

Copyright S D Anugyan 2018