

THE STUDIO

"THE CHINA PROBLEM"

(SPEC SCRIPT)

Written by

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EXT. OLIVE AVE. - MORNING

A Kool-Aid movie billboard looms over Olive Avenue. As the camera CRANES DOWN, we see a string of traffic.

MATT (O.C.)

Sal, give me the latest. What's our five-day opening on Kool-Aid?

SAL (O.C.)

You'd be looking at the numbers yourself if you were here on time. Where the fuck are you?

The CAMERA LANDS on Matt's convertible. He's at a standstill in Burbank traffic on the way to the Continental Studios offices. His cell phone is mounted to the dashboard. Sal appears as one of four squares on a mobile Zoom call alongside Maya, Quinn, and Tyler. Their voices come through the phone.

MATT

I'm on Olive by the Whole Foods. There's some charity thing.

Maya sips water through a bottle straw.

MAYA

Omigod if you're by Whole Foods can you get me a green juice. I'm doing a cleanse.

TYLER

I would do a ginger shot detox.

MATT

I'm not stopping at Whole Foods. I'm trying to run a movie studio.

QUINN

Over Zoom? What is this 2020?

SAL

What do you know about 2020 you were like five years old.

MATT

Sal, the numbers.

A FIREFIGHTER, 30s, holding an empty boot with a sign that says "Boot Drive," approaches the driver's side of Matt's car.

SAL
We're looking at an eighty million
five-day open.

The firefighter holds the boot out to Matt.

FIREFIGHTER
Will you support our boot drive to
raise money for the families of
firefighters we lost this year?

Matt's puts up a "one minute" finger to the firefighter.

MATT
Eighty million?

FIREFIGHTER
Most people give five dollars, but—

SAL
Finance says we're on pace to break
even in four weeks.

MATT
Griffin Mill didn't hire me to
break even. He hired me to make a
billion dollars.
(to the firefighter)
Sorry, I don't carry cash.

The firefighter points to a QR code on the sign.

FIREFIGHTER
We take Venmo.

Matt SIGHS. He reaches to take the phone off the mount on his
dashboard. He fumbles it and the whole mount with phone
falls. The gang makes an UNINTELLIGIBLE COMMOTION.

MATT
Cheap Chinese shit.

Matt bumbles around the floorboard of the car for the phone.
He looks up and sees the traffic has started to move.

MATT (CONT'D)
(panicked)
Sorry, next time!

Matt starts to drive. He plants the phone and mount back on
his dashboard as he navigates lanes.

QUINN

It's still the best open of the year. Griffin can't be mad at that.

MAYA

In a down year, honey. T-Swizzle did a ninety-three mil five-day open with music videos last year.

MATT

Really? Holy shit. Maybe we could get her to tweet about Kool-Aid. Tyler can you get ahold of her people?

TYLER

(sarcastically)

Oh I'm sure the only person actually more famous than Jesus has nothing better to do than tweet about Kool-Aid.

SAL

She hasn't tweeted regularly since 2023. At best we could get an Instagram story but those are rarely about other people.

MAYA

An Instagram story? Might as well shit on that pile of cash and light it on fire.

TYLER

Ew.

SAL

Why are you shitting on it first?

MAYA

Now a Reddit AMA where she casually drops that she just went to see the Kool-Aid movie...

QUINN

Sal why do you know how often Taylor Swift tweets?

SAL

I have two teenage daughters, Quinn.

QUINN

...that makes it even weirder.

MATT

Guys, focus. Taylor Swift or not we need to light a fire under this movie's ass. Everybody in my office in twenty for a marketing brainstorm.

QUINN

That's when you're supposed to hear my Curry Barker project pitch.

SAL

Who the fuck is Curry Barker?

QUINN

You would know if you spent literally any time trying to find anything original to make. He's a YouTuber who had the biggest distribution deal at Toronto last year.

SAL

I find stuff that makes money. Matt I want to talk to you about this manga we should be acquiring.

MATT

Guys, we don't have time for any of this. My office in twenty.

Maya, Tyler, and Sal log off the call, but Quinn stays behind.

QUINN

Matt, you can't keep doing this.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. QUINN'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Quinn sits in her office chair with her phone in front of her face, continuing the conversation with Matt.

QUINN

It's been a over a year and you haven't given me a real shot to get my own project made. It's embarrassing.

MATT

Quinn. None of us are going to get any more movies made if we don't get more people to drink the Kool-Aid. Please. My office, in twenty.

Sal walks by Quinn's office and notices she's still on the phone with Matt. Quinn hangs up. He walks in.

SAL

What were you just saying to Matt?

QUINN

Nothing.

SAL

(beat)

I'm on to you.

Sal backs out of Quinn's office.

EXT. OLIVE AVE - CONTINUOUS

Matt looks up from his phone and suddenly slams on his brakes. The Firefighter walks up to the side of his door and holds the boot out again. Matt checks his surroundings. He's only made it twenty yards down the road.

INT. MATT'S OFFICE - MORNING

Matt, Sal, Quinn, and Tyler pace around the office. A whiteboard with various ideas stands opposite Matt's desk. Sal tosses a paper weight. Quinn chews the end of a pen.

SAL

We could turn the Chicago River into Kool-Aid.

QUINN

That has to be an environmental problem.

SAL

Nobody gives a shit about the environment anymore. They turn it green every year for St. Patrick's Day.

TYLER

There's no way they'd let us dump a bunch of food dye and sugar into the Chicago River.

SAL
We could Dave Matthews Band it.

Tyler and Quinn stare at Sal. It's not registering.

SAL (CONT'D)
Dave Matthews Band. 2004. Emptied
like eight hundred pounds of liquid
shit from the band's tour bus right
off the bridge into the river.

MATT
Hit a bunch of tourists on a boat.

SAL
Now they're the biggest band in the
world. Can't argue with results.

TYLER
What if we have like a wall-
breaking competition with a bunch
of those strongmen busting holes in
a house?

MATT
With the housing market like it is?
Might be a bad look.

QUINN
We could always double down on
exclusive popcorn buckets. People
see movies multiple times just to
collect popcorn buckets.

SAL
Yeah and we can make one where
every time you stick your hand in
it, it goes, "OH YEAH."

Matt fakes sticking his hand into the imaginary popcorn
bucket Sal is holding.

SAL (CONT'D)
(more suggestively)
Ohhh, yeahhh.

MATT
(joining the bit)
Oh, yeaahhh!

Quinn and Tyler look unamused as Matt and Sal beat the gag to
death.

QUINN

I prefer Dave Matthews over this.

Suddenly, Maya bursts through the door with her cell phone in one hand and water bottle with straw in the other.

MAYA

(to Matt and Sal)

Stop whatever the fuck this is.

(to everybody)

You all are going to shit. a. brick when you hear this. I just got off with Trish in finance. She heard from the international team pre-sale tickets for Kool-Aid in China are – fucking – *huge*.

MATT

How huge?

MAYA

Like, more than any American film in the last ten years huge.

TYLER

(incredulous)

Even "Endgame?"

MAYA

Even "Endgame."

MATT

"Endgame?" How much did Endgame do?

MAYA

Six. Hunny. Mil.

MATT

Fuck Dave Matthews, we're going all-in on China.

Maya gives a confused look to Tyler who makes a "Don't ask" gesture. Matt goes to the whiteboard and quickly wipes everything away before writing CHINA in all caps and circling it.

MATT (CONT'D)

Who do we know working Asian markets?

QUINN

Well it's not that easy, China is totally different from Japan or Korea. You have to deal with their censors and—

MAYA

My friend manages Lucy Shen.

Maya pulls up her phone to show Shen's social media profile.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Over one hundred million followers combined on Douyin and Little Red Book.

MATT

What is that?

TYLER

Douyin is the Chinese TikTok.

MATT

I thought TikTok was the Chinese TikTok.

QUINN

Jesus, Matt.

TYLER

Little Red Book is another Chinese app, except people here can actually get their videos seen in China.

MAYA

Videos and livestreams. We're going to do a livestream with Lucy and Ice Cube straight to every tween, teen, and mom in China.

SAL

Wait, shit. Ice Cube has a no foreign press clause in his contract.

MATT

Leave Cube to me.

INT. QUINN'S OFFICE - LATER

Quinn walks into her office. She looks down at her keyboard and notices a yellow sticky note attached to a card.

She picks it up and examines the note: "Call Me." She peels the note off the card and walks to her door.

INT. CONTINENTAL OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

Quinn walks out of her office and over to her secretary's desk, holding the note up in her hand.

QUINN

Did you let someone into my office while I was gone?

SECRETARY

(nervous)

No, I-I...I just went to make copies. I was gone for thirty seconds I swear.

Quinn turns and walks back into her office.

INT. QUINN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Quinn walks back by her desk and looks at the business card.

QUINN

(to herself)

Aptly Eight Productions.

She pulls up her phone to Google the name. Nothing comes up. She puts her foot on a trash can to open the lid. She pauses for a second, then puts the card in a desk drawer.

EXT. RECORDING STUDIO PARKING LOT - DAY

Matt and Sal approach the door to Ice Cube's recording studio. There's a keypad.

SAL

If we gotta get tough, we'll get tough.

MATT

We're not going to have to "get tough." Cube wants this to make money as much as we do. Besides, his contract carve out was for international travel.

SAL

Not to promote the film internationally.

MATT

Bingo.

Matt tries to open the door but it doesn't budge.

MATT (CONT'D)

Fuck?

He looks and sees the keypad.

MATT (CONT'D)

Oh, right. Uh.

Matt tries some random numbers on the keypad. Nothing.

SAL

Hold on.

Sal moves Matt aside to try his own random combo. Nothing.

SAL (CONT'D)

The shit?

Sal hits the keypad with his palm. A FOOD DELIVERY PERSON walks up, correctly inputs the code, and then holds the door open for Matt and Sal. Matt nods sheepishly.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Ice Cube is in the vocal booth. He removes his headphones as Matt and Sal walk in.

ICE CUBE

How can I help you, my guys?

MATT

Oh, I think you'll find it is us who is helping you, my guy. So I'm sure you heard - Kool-Aid, best open of the year.

ICE CUBE

Hell yeah, I already got my guy looking up a new part-time spot in the Cotswolds.

MATT

Cotswolds, wow, really.

ICE CUBE

(smiles)

First-dollar gross, baby.

MATT

Well you might want to tell your guy to double the budget. Our pre-sales in China are through the roof.

ICE CUBE

Love me some General Tso's man.

Ice Cube daps up Matt. Sal sticks his hand out too but Cube leaves him hanging.

MATT

Yeah, so all we need from you is to come by the studio today and do a quick interview with this influencer-

ICE CUBE

Hey, ho, whoa. I'm busy man. I'm locked in on this album. And you know I've got a foreign press carveout.

MATT

Not technically foreign - it's Burbank, so...

Sal steps in a bit.

SAL

Mr. Ice Cube.

ICE CUBE

Just Cube, man.

SAL

Mr. Cube. Fuck the Cotswolds.

ICE CUBE

Fuck the Cotswolds?

MATT

(incredulous)

Fuck the Cotswolds?

SAL

Fuck the Cotswolds. If we pull this off, you'll be able to buy Buckingham Palace. Just give the Chinese a little bit of love-

MATT

This is our ticket to one B, Cube.

ICE CUBE

One B?

Matt nods.

ICE CUBE (CONT'D)

Shit, okay. One B. One interview.

INT. SOUND STAGE - DAY

A SMALL CREW is prepping an area of the soundstage for the interview — adjusting lights, setting up multiple phones. Chinese influencer LUCY SHEN, 20s, gets makeup touchups while Matt, Maya, Sal, Quinn, and Tyler hover around Ice Cube. He seems restless, looking around and snap-clapping his hands. A CREW MEMBER, 40s, wearing a headset and holding a clipboard walks up with a lavalier mic.

CREW MEMBER

(to Ice Cube)

So yeah, just clip this to your shirt and the app will translate everything you say.

Ice Cube takes the mic as the Crew Member walks off.

MAYA

Cube, looking fabulous as ever.

ICE CUBE

Thanks, Maya. You know how I get in front of phones.

MAYA

Babe, if you want me to do the interview with you, you know I'm always camera ready.

MATT

(nervous laugh)

No, come on, Cube's a pro; he lives for this stuff.

Matt gently takes Maya by the arm to lead her away. Quinn and Sal flank them.

MATT (CONT'D)

Don't embarrass him. You'll make him more nervous.

QUINN

I don't know, Matt, maybe Maya is right. She could help him out.

SAL
The godfather of gangster rap
doesn't need help doing a
livestream.

Matt feels his pockets for his phone. It's not there.

MATT
Shit. Quinn can you go to my office
and get my phone off the desk.
Griffin needs to know about this.

QUINN
I'm not your fucking assistant
anymore, Matt.

Quinn leaves the set. A CREW MEMBER with a headset and a clipboard walks in.

CREW MEMBER
Quiet on set, lock it down, we're
going live in five...

The crew member silently counts down with their fingers.
Tyler comes over to the rest of the gang with his phone
pulled up to the live stream. They huddle around him.

TYLER
(quietly)
Here we go.

Lucy Shen begins her livestream introduction in Mandarin. The
only words we can make out are "Kool-Aid" and "Ice Cube." She
gestures to Ice Cube with a big smile.

ICE CUBE
(stern)
Nihao, motherfuckers!

MATT
(wincing)
Not quite family friendly.

MAYA
They probably don't even know that
word.

ICE CUBE
Sorry, I meant, how you doing
China?

Lucy laughs.

LUCY

So, Mr. Ice Cube, how excited were you to hear China can't wait for Kool-Aid?

The interview continues in the background while the gang looks over Tyler's phone. Comments and weird but happy-looking emojis fill the screen at break-neck speed.

MATT

Anybody know what any of this means?

MAYA

No fucking clue.

TYLER

It looks happy, though.

An eggplant emoji with a water emoji and heart eyes pops up in a comment.

SAL

Don't need to know Chinese to know that's good.

Ice Cube and Lucy are smiling. The interview is going well.

LUCY

And have you ever been to China?

Ice Cube looks more confident.

ICE CUBE

You know, I haven't. Maybe one day. I've been to Japan. Oh, and Taiwan. Best potstickers. Taiwan is my favorite country in Asia.

Lucy hesitates. The emojis on the phones start to turn angry.

LUCY

Taiwan is China.

ICE CUBE

What? Nah they've got their own flag and everything.

LUCY

No, Mr. Cube, Taiwan is China.

Ice Cube starts to get visibly frustrated. The gang is looking at the phone as the flood of angry emojis and comments.

MATT

What is happening right now?

Maya and Tyler look at each other.

TYLER

Oh, fuck.

Maya and Tyler immediately head towards the interview area to cut it off.

MAYA

Okay, thank you everybody!

Everybody around looks confused as Maya and Tyler try to take the phones down. Sal follows them trying to put things back up.

MATT

What the hell are you doing?

Tyler run walks over and pulls Matt closely by the arm.

TYLER

Ice Cube just pulled a Dave
Matthews Band all over China.

Matt's face shifts to sudden realization.

MATT

...Oh no.

INT. QUINN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Quinn sits at her desk staring at the Aptly Eight business card. She dials the number. Two RINGS, and then a MYSTERIOUS WOMAN'S VOICE.

MYSTERIOUS WOMAN (V.O.)

Hello, Quinn.

QUINN

Who is this?

MYSTERIOUS WOMAN (V.O.)

I know your talents aren't
appreciated at Continental.

Quinn leans forward, business card still in her hand.

QUINN

How did you get into my office?

MYSTERIOUS WOMAN (V.O.)
I'm doing big things. And I want
you to be Vice President of
Production at Aptly Eight.

Matt, Maya, Sal, and Tyler burst into Quinn's office. Quinn quickly hangs up and sets the card down on her desk.

MATT
Quinn, you're Chinese.

QUINN
Half.

MATT
How seriously do they take this
whole Taiwan thing?

MAYA
Ice Cube just John Cena'd this
motherfucker.

QUINN
What did John Cena do to Ice Cube?

MAYA
A few years ago, John Cena was
promoting the Fast and the Fuckable
or whatever it's called and he
said, "Taiwan will be the first
country to see the movie."

TYLER
It turns out the Chinese do *not*
like it when you call Taiwan its
own country.

MATT
And Ice Cube just did in front of
millions of Chinese people.

SAL
Repeatedly.

Quinn types into the search bar on her computer.

QUINN
Wow, word travels fast.

Quinn tilts her monitor as Matt and Maya move to see what's on the screen. Sal notices the Aptly Eight card on Quinn's desk.

The search bar says "John Cena Taiwan" but all the results mention Ice Cube and Kool-Aid. Quinn clicks on a video link. LI SHULEI, a Chinese government official, is giving a statement in Chinese.

QUINN (CONT'D)
He's talking about the movie.

SAL
You speak Chinese?

QUINN
No dumbass, there are subtitles.
(beat)
Holy shit.

Matt and Maya back up from the monitor, faces agape.

MATT
They're pulling Kool-Aid from theaters.

INT. MATT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Matt speed walks into his office, the rest of the gang in tow. His phone is on the desk ringing. He takes a quick look at the screen and silently mouths, "OH FUCK." He answers.

MATT
Griffin—

GRIFFIN MILLS (V.O.)
(through the phone)
Shut up. How the fuck could you let something like this happen?

MATT
Mr. Mills, this was all a big misunderstanding. I'm fixing it.

GRIFFIN MILLS
You have forty-eight hours. If that movie isn't back in Chinese theaters by Friday, you're all out.

Matt looks at his team. He waves Tyler out of the room.

MATT
Tyler is getting the influencer back as we speak.

Matt hangs up and starts to walk out the door.

MATT (CONT'D)

(to Maya)

Make sure Cube and Lucy are still on the lot. We need to kiss some ass immediately.

Matt and Maya exit. Sal steps in the way of Quinn following and pulls the Aptly Eight business card out his pocket.

SAL

What the hell this is?

QUINN

What, you mean you haven't heard of Aptly Eight Productions?

SAL

I mean. Sure I have...but why do you have their card on top of a script on your desk?

QUINN

What do you think of them?

SAL

What I *think* is you're trying to shop deals outside of the studio. And if Matt found out your ass would be on the curb so fast.

Quinn snags the card from him.

QUINN

I'm not shopping deals, but maybe I should because it's not like Matt's going to help me get a movie made.

SAL

It's called loyalty, you Judas.

QUINN

Aren't you Jewish?

SAL

Yeah, and you know who else is a Jew?

Quinn rolls her eyes.

QUINN

Jesus.

SAL

Matt Remick.

EXT. CONTINENTAL OFFICES - MOMENTS LATER

Matt, Maya, and Tyler walk down the steps in front of Continental. Tyler hangs up the phone.

TYLER

Lucy is still here but nobody has eyes on Ice Cube.

MATT

Shit. We need to get back to the soundstage before he's gone.

An overly cheery CONSTRUCTION WORKER holds his hand out to stop the gang.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER

Hey there folks! Sorry, but you're going to have to go around.

He points to the very obvious yellow tape blocking the path.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER (CONT'D)

Just started resurfacing.

MAYA

Do you want this studio to go under!?

TYLER

Girl, chill.

MAYA

I'm sorry, I haven't eaten in thirty-six hours. Fucking juice cleanse!

Maya throws her cup on the ground and it splatters all over the unfinished surface.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER

Aww, maaan.

MATT

It's fine, we'll go around.

The group starts their detour.

MATT (CONT'D)

(to Maya)

It's going to be fine. We just need to fix the optics.

MAYA

I think you need to let me be there
this time.

Tyler looks at a text on his phone.

TYLER

Cube left the lot ten minutes ago.
We still have Lucy.

The gang stops walking. Matt takes a DEEP BREATH.

MATT

Okay, I will do the interview.

MAYA

Oh, Matt...

MATT

With Quinn. Where the fuck is
Quinn?

MAYA

We need a slam dunk to fix this.

MATT

What happened when John Cena pissed
off China.

MAYA

It was their least successful
release in a decade. Only made a
fraction of what they expected.

MATT

How much?

MAYA

Two hundred mil.

MATT

We could work with two hundred mil.

Quinn and Sal jog up.

MATT (CONT'D)

Where the fuck were you all? Quinn,
I need you to do this interview
with me.

QUINN

Me, why me?

TYLER

"Optics."

MATT

(to Maya)

What did John Cena do to fix it?

MAYA

He apologized to the whole country.
In Chinese.

SAL

(to Quinn)

John Cena can speak Chinese and you
can't?

INT. SOUND STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

QUINN

Nobody knows who we are in China.
You need to present yourself as a
big, powerful executive who is
showing them respect and honor with
a dignified apology.

SAL

Respectfully, Matt, you need to get
on your knees and gargle.

Sal crudely mimes fellatio.

QUINN

Metaphorically sucking their dick
is only going to insult them.

SAL

When has anyone ever been insulted
by getting their dick sucked?

MAYA

Depends on who is doing the
sucking, I guess.

(to Sal)

If you were sucking my dick it
would definitely feel insulting.

MATT

That's cause he'd suck anybody's
dick for anything. It's
meaningless.

SAL

Exactly. I'd suck a dick for a diet coke right now. But you, Matt. You sucking a dick means something.

QUINN

I'm telling you: present yourself as a powerful person with deep respect for the Chinese.

The gang arrives back at the interview spot. The Crew Member hands lavalier mics to Matt and Quinn.

CREW MEMBER

Okay, one for you, and one for you.

MATT

Is there any way we can get like a ten-second tape delay on this thing? Just in case?

CREW MEMBER

Uh, no. Right this way.

He ushers them over to Lucy Shen, who is applying lip gloss and looking notably less cheery than when Ice Cube was there.

MATT

Lucy, hi. Thank you so much for sticking around a little longer.

LUCY

You'll be getting a call from my agent.

MATT

Great, looking forward—

CREW MEMBER

Places again everybody. We're live in five...

The Crew Member begins the silent countdown. Lucy starts to introduce the livestream.

LUCY

(in Mandarin, subtitled)

Hi again Shen fam. Here with me now are a very important American Kool-Aid man and a...

Lucy looks over at Quinn.

LUCY (CONT'D)
Half-Chinese woman.

She smiles at Matt, who is unaware it's now his turn to talk.

MATT
(realizing)
Oh, yes. Hi, hello...China. I am
Matt Remick, the head of
Continental Studios and this is
Quinn, one of our executives.

Matt glances at Quinn who gives a subtle nod as if to say,
"Keep going."

MATT (CONT'D)
I am a creator of Kool-Aid and I
have immense respect for the
Chinese people and the country of
China. All parts of it. Even the
ones that aren't clearly labeled
"China" on the map.

LUCY
So I understand you want to
apologize?

Matt takes a beat. He sees Sal just beyond the phones miming
fellatio again, this time to extremely exaggerated lengths.

MATT
Yes. I am so sorry, China. We
didn't mean to offend you. Please,
please go see this movie. And to
the Chinese government—

Matt gets down on his knees and puts his hands together.

MATT (CONT'D)
Please let this movie back in your
theaters so all the beautiful
little Chinese boys and
(gesturing to Quinn)
girls can see it.

Lucy seems uncomfortable. Quinn buries her face in her right
hand. Lucy looks at Quinn.

LUCY
(in Mandarin, subtitles)
Did you teach them about China?

QUINN
Oh, I don't speak Chinese.

LUCY
(in English)
How do you feel about this?

QUINN
You know, honestly, I think China
is being pretty unreasonable here.
I mean, there are plenty of
impartial people who have said that
Taiwan deserves ind-

Matt gets off his knees and interrupts Quinn, trying to put
his hand over her mouth and usher her off camera.

MATT
Okay everybody. Kool-Aid in
theaters this Friday, please!

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BACKLOT - MOMENTS LATER

Matt is angrily walking through the backlot with Quinn
keeping pace.

MATT
I can't believe you would do that
to me. You just made this so much
worse.

QUINN
Why couldn't you have just left all
of this to Maya and Tyler?

MATT
Because Kool-Aid is my movie and I
have to make this work.

QUINN
The Matt who hired me wouldn't be
caught dead with his name on a Kool-
Aid movie. He only cared about
making good movies.

MATT
Grow up, Quinn. How have you been
in this industry for this many
years and still not understand this
is the movie business.

QUINN

It feels a lot more like the Matt Remick business. I don't have to be here, you know?

MATT

What the fuck does that mean?

Just then, Sal catches up to them.

SAL

(pointing to Quinn)

Judas!

Quinn throws her hands up in the air, GRUNTS, and storms off.

SAL (CONT'D)

What's the play?

MATT

Cube has to record an apology. It's the only chance we have to what the fuuuu

Matt and Sal turn the corner and get to the...

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

A CROWD of a few dozen protesters are in the parking lot holding signs and CHANTING.

CROWD

(chanting repeatedly)

Make Kool-Aid bomb, free Taiwan!

A TMZ Van pulls up. The door opens and a CAMERAMAN gets out.

SAL

Want me to turn the hose on these fuckers?

MATT

No. I'll fix this.

Matt waves his arms to get the crowd's attention.

MATT (CONT'D)

Everybody, please! Hey! Look, this is all just a big misunderstanding.

ONE PROTESTER steps out, points, and yells at Matt.

PROTESTER
Death to the oppressors!

Sal takes Matt and starts to usher him to his car.

SAL
These people are animals. They'll
never understand.

As Matt gets to his car, the Protester returns with a bucket of red Kool-Aid. He throws the Kool-Aid at Matt, getting his car, Sal, and a bit of himself, too. Sal grabs the protester as the crowd starts to engulf the area.

SAL (CONT'D)
Go Matt! Save yourself!
(to the crowd)
SAVAGES!

Matt gets in his car and peels out of the parking lot.

INT. QUINN'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Quinn storms into her office. She pulls the Aptly Eight business card out of her pocket and dials.

MYSTERIOUS WOMAN
(through the phone)
Quinn.

QUINN
Let's set the meeting.

EXT. RECORDING STUDIO - LATER

Matt briskly walks up to the recording studio door and starts KNOCKING on the glass. A SECURITY GUARD opens the door.

SECURITY GUARD
Man I can't let you in here looking
like that. You'll get red shit all
over the place.

MATT
I don't have a change of clothes,
what am I supposed to do?

SECURITY GUARD
We got a gift shop.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Matt walks into the studio's main recording room wearing oversized basketball-themed recording studio swag.

ICE CUBE
You look like a walking hate crime.

MATT
I feel like a hate crime's midlife crisis.

Ice Cube laughs.

MATT (CONT'D)
Speaking of crisis...I need you to record an apology to China.

ICE CUBE
See man, this is why I didn't want to say yes in the first place. It's never just one ask.

MATT
Cube. I'm begging you, man.

Ice Cube looks Matt up and down.

ICE CUBE
Alright, but it's only cause I genuinely feel sorry for your ass.

MATT
I will gladly take pity.

The Security Guard pops his head in the door frame.

SECURITY GUARD
Ay yo Matt, you're a star baby.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Matt and a handful of STUDIO EMPLOYEES are watching a TV tuned in to TMZ.

HARVEY LEVIN
(on TV)
A TMZ exclusive - a bloody brawl breaks out between the studio execs behind Kool-Aid and Free Taiwan protesters.

The footage is edited together in a way that makes it look like Sal is physically attacking the protesters and blood is everywhere.

TMZ EMPLOYEE

(on TV)

Watch how fast Remick bails here!

The footage shows close up on Matt's face as he peels out of the parking lot. We hear Sal's voice screaming "Savages!" in the background.

MATT

(under his breath)

What the fuck...

Ice Cube walks in with his phone out.

ICE CUBE

Yo Matt – check your email. You've been hacked.

He shows his phone to Matt.

MATT

What the FUCK!!

INT. CONTINENTAL OFFICES - LATER

Matt jogs into the lobby, where various STAFF are moving frantically, checking their computers and phones. Sal approaches.

SAL

They got our emails. I.T. thinks they're trying to hack our financials, too. Fucking Chinese!

A young FEMALE SECRETARY looks at Sal, shocked.

SAL (CONT'D)

(to the secretary)

Not you.

FEMALE SECRETARY

I'm Vietnamese, asshole.

Sal notices Matt's studio basketball clothes.

SAL
What are you wearing?

Just then, Maya approaches.

MAYA
Jesus, Matt. TMZ didn't get footage
of you wearing that, did they?

MATT
We don't have time to worry about
TMZ.

MAYA
You're not giving them a statement?

MATT
My statement is they can lick my
ass, okay?

Maya types on her phone, mouthing "lick my ass."

MATT (CONT'D)
Don't actually send that. The only
people we need to talk to right now
are in China.

MAYA
I've already put in a request to
speak with Li Shulei from the
Publicity Department of the Chinese
Communist Party. He controls all
the foreign media in China. We're
on hold in your office.

The trio start walking towards Matt's office.

SAL
Are you really going to play ball
with these Chicoms after they
hacked us?

MATT
We don't know it was them.

SAL
Please, Matt. It was them.

MATT
Well what choice do we have? It's
either this or we're all out on our
asses.

INT. MATT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Matt, Sal, and Maya walk in as Petra scurries up to them.

PETRA

Mr. Li is on Zoom, Mr. Remick.

Matt takes a DEEP BREATH and sits behind his desk.

MATT

Mr. Li, thank you so much for taking this meeting.

LI SHULEI (V.O.)

(through the phone)

Mr. Remick, you've put us in quite the predicament. We take no pleasure in removing Kool-Aid, but words have consequences.

MATT

I take no pleasure, either. I haven't been pleased at all. How do we make this right?

LI SHULEI

If Mr. Cube were to come to China to apologize to the Chinese people in person, perhaps we could heal this wound and enjoy a mutually pleasurable outcome.

MATT

Mutual pleasure is what I live for, Mr. Li. Consider it done.

Matt hangs up the phone and looks at Maya and Sal.

MATT (CONT'D)

Cube's contract isn't that airtight, right?

INT. MATT'S OFFICE - THE NEXT MORNING

Matt jolts awake. He's under his desk with a contract on his chest, in the hoops clothes from the night before. He walks into the hall. Sal walks up and hands him a cup of coffee.

MATT

Hey, do I smell? I didn't go home last night.

Sal leans in to sniff Matt.

SAL
Yeah, you smell like shit.

MATT
As long as you can't smell the vodka. I spent the whole night trying to punch holes in Cube's foreign press clause.

PETRA
Matt, there's somebody here to see you.

MATT
No, no time.

PETRA
You might need to make time?

A WOMAN, 40s, in a dark suit approaches.

WOMAN
Matt Remick. Agent Scofield, CIA. I need to speak with you a moment.

Matt and Sal exchange dumbfounded looks. Agent Scofield takes Matt's arm and leads him over. Sal starts to follow.

AGENT SCOFIELD
(to Sal)
Just him.

Agent Scofield and Matt walk a few yards away. Petra inches in, pretending to be on her phone.

AGENT SCOFIELD (CONT'D)
I'll be brief. We know your offices were hacked. We also know you're in contact with the Chinese government.

MATT
Just about the Kool-Aid—

AGENT SCOFIELD
We want you to stay in contact with them. If we get verbal confirmation they attacked this studio, that constitutes an act of war against civilians in the eyes of the United States government.

MATT
Agent Scofield, I just make movies.

AGENT SCOFIELD
We've tapped your phone.

Matt looks down at his pocket.

AGENT SCOFIELD (CONT'D)
Get the Chinese government to admit
what they did. We'll be listening.

Maya approaches Petra in the background.

MAYA
What the hell is going on?

PETRA
I think we're going to war with
China?

INT. QUINN'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Quinn gathers her phone and her handbag in her office. She puts on her sunglasses and turns off the light as she exits.

INT. CONTINENTAL OFFICES - SAME TIME

Sal looks up from the floor of the Continental lobby and sees Quinn walking down the stairs. He looks over to see Matt is still talking to the agent, then starts to tail Quinn.

EXT. STUDIO BACKLOT - MOMENTS LATER

Quinn walks down the alley of the studio backlot. A few dozen yards behind her, Sal turns the corner and follows.

INT. SOUND STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Quinn walks into a dark, empty sound stage. She looks around and checks her watch. A FIGURE emerges from the shadows.

PATTY LEIGH
I knew you'd show.

Quinn does a double take.

QUINN
Patty?? You're...

Quinn looks at the business card again.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Aptly Eight. Patty Leigh. I can't believe you made an anagram.

PATTY LEIGH

I had my grandson do it. He's a little sex pervert like his dad, but boy is he good at puzzles.

QUINN

Did Matt put you up to this? To test my "loyalty" or some bullshit?

PATTY LEIGH

No, honey. This is very real. And Matt doesn't know a thing about it.

QUINN

You don't like your deal here? I'd kill for a put picture.

PATTY LEIGH

I'm planning my next steps.

Sal walks in to the sound stage, slightly out of breath. He sees Quinn facing Patty but can't see it's Patty.

SAL

Aha! I knew you were pitching behind Matt's back. Judas!

Patty turns around.

SAL (CONT'D)

Patty?? ...Judases!

QUINN

It's not what it looks like.

PATTY LEIGH

It is. I'm leaving Continental and I want Quinn to come work for me.

Sal walks closer to Patty and Quinn.

SAL

How could you do this to Matt? He's like a son to you.

Patty puts her hand on Sal.

PATTY LEIGH

I love Matty, but this is a sinking ship.

(MORE)

PATTY LEIGH (CONT'D)

(to Quinn)

He hired you because you have an eye for great movies and now he won't let you make them. I have investors lined up. We could make three of your movies next year.

SAL

Investors?

(to Quinn)

Matt gave you your job.

PATTY LEIGH

He's not going to be able to help her keep it, though. Yours or mine, either.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - SAME TIME

Matt barges in. Ice Cube takes his headphones off.

ICE CUBE

Alright man, I'm billing you for this shit, now.

MATT

Cube...you gotta go to China.

ICE CUBE

Hell naw. Apparently, I've already been there. And you know what? I read up on this Taiwan thing. That's some fucked up shit. I'm not even going to apologize now.

Matt frantically paces the space.

MATT

It's bigger than us, now.
It's...the CIA. They just came to my fucking office.

ICE CUBE

The CIA? Man. Fuck the police.

MATT

Goddammit you're so cool, and so frustrating, and so cool. Fuck!
I'll go myself!

EXT. RECORDING STUDIO PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Matt has his phone to his ear.

MATT

Petra? Clear my schedule and call the jet. I'm going to China.

INT. SOUND STAGE - CONTINUOUS

SAL

Matt has done everything for us.

PATTY LEIGH

Matty can't get out of his own way. The livestream. TMZ. He's done nothing but make things worse.

Sal's FaceTime rings. He answers. It's Maya.

MAYA

(on phone)

Matt is going to China. Where the fuck are you guys?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CONTINENTAL OFFICES - SAME TIME

Maya is standing by Petra's desk, glaring at her.

MAYA

How could you let this happen when we might be about to go to war with China?

INT. SOUND STAGE - SAME TIME

PATTY LEIGH

Did she just say we're about to go to war with China?

MAYA (O.S.)

(through the phone)

Is that Patty? Are you hiding in a haunted house? It doesn't matter, we need to stop Matt before he ends up a hostage—

INT. CONTINENTAL OFFICES - SAME TIME

PETRA

-Oh! I almost forgot!

Petra picks up a sticky note off her monitor and reads it.

PETRA (CONT'D)

The CIA called. They concluded
China didn't hack us. Just some
twenty-year-old protester.

MAYA

And when did you tell that to Matt?

PETRA

Oh, I haven't yet. He seems busy.

Maya's eye twitches as she takes a sip from her drink.

MAYA

Fucking juice cleanse!

Maya chucks her entire bottle into Petra's trash.

MAYA (CONT'D)

(to her phone)

We have to stop Matt.

INT. SOUND STAGE - SAME TIME

Sal ends the FaceTime and looks up at Patty, who gives him a knowing shrug.

SAL

Investors, huh? I'm open to a pay
cut.

EXT. CONTINENTAL OFFICES - SAME TIME

Maya is fast-walking texting. Several BLOOP sounds in a row.

MAYA

(to herself)

Shit.

She dials and puts the phone to her ear. It RINGS.

MAYA (CONT'D)
Come on, Matt...

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. PRIVATE AIRPORT TARMAC - SAME TIME

Matt walks on the tarmac towards a private plane. He looks at his phone and sees Maya calling. He hits "end call" and starts dialing. The phone RINGS as he walks up the steps to the plane.

MATT
Mr. Li. Ice Cube wants to be there.
Soon. But in the meantime, you're
getting the next best thing.

LI SHULEI (O.S.)
(through the phone)
Josh Duhamel?

MATT
No, me. I'm wheels up in ten.

LI SHULEI
Mr. Remick...

MATT
I am the most powerful man on this
film. I owe it to you and the
people of China to pay you the
respect of apologizing in person.

LI SHULEI
(beat)
That is very dignified, Mr. Remick.

INT. PLANE - CONTINUOUS

Matt sits down in the plane. He takes his phone off his ear and looks at it, then puts it back.

MATT
(furtively)
And, you know, it's okay what you
did to the studio.

LI SHULEI
Excuse me?

MATT
The hack. I'm not mad.

LI SHULEI

Are you insinuating the Chinese government launched a cyberattack on your company?

MATT

I'm not insinuating, I'm just saying...if you said you did, I wouldn't be mad.

LI SHULEI

Mr. Remick, your shame knows no limits. Do not come to China. Your movie will not be shown here.

MATT

No, Mr. Li, I-

Li hangs up. Just then, Maya bursts onto the plane.

MAYA

Matt! The Chinese didn't hack us-

Matt has a deer-in-headlights look.

MATT

It's over, Maya. The Remick years are over.

MAYA

(sympathetically)

Come on, babe. Let's go back.

INT. CONTINENTAL OFFICES - LATER

Matt sulks into his office with the Gang in tow. Griffin Mills sits at Matt's desk.

QUINN

I can't believe you were about to risk World War Three for us.

SAL

And smelling like ass, no less.

GRIFFIN MILLS

Matthew.

Griffin whistles and points right in front of the desk.

MATT

Griffin. I know you're going to fire me.

(MORE)

MATT (CONT'D)

And I know even if you didn't,
Amazon would as soon as they buy
us. But don't fire my team. They're
the only reason we were able to
take IP as shitty as Kool-Aid and
make *some* money from it. They
deserve to be here. They make the
studio better, and you're an idiot
if you let them go.

GRIFFIN MILLS

Amazon isn't going to buy
Continental, Matthew. Apparently,
your actions over the last few days
have made Continental too "toxic"
of a brand. Leave it to the woke
mind virus to save us.

Matt looks over at the team.

GRIFFIN MILLS (CONT'D)

Which means I'm still in charge.
And the board wants me to fire you.
(beat)

But...I hate the board. So fuck
'em. You're all staying on. Milk
this goddamn movie for all it's
worth. And then let's talk sequel.

Griffin gets up and leaves the Gang stunned.

SAL

What the fuck just happened?

MATT

I think I just saved the company?

The Gang shares some hugs.

QUINN

(to Matt)

God, you really do smell like shit.

MATT

Well, I cleared my calendar for
today. How about you tell me about
that Curry Barker pitch.

Quinn smiles.

QUINN

My office in twenty?