

Note from the Author...

This is an outtake from Track Limits, explaining how Mika and Matteo found out about Mark and Jordan's relationship...

Algarve Interlude.
A Track Limits outtake
By M A Ford

"Mika, we are very late."

"I know," Mika said as they left the rental car in the car park and climbed the steps towards the hotel lobby.

"Mark, he say bed by ten."

Mika shrugged. "They took longer to serve than I thought. But I'd heard great things about that restaurant, and tonight was our only opportunity. And it was good," he added, pausing by the lift as Matteo bent down to re-tie a shoelace.

"Ah, so good fish," Matteo agreed, looking up at Mika. "But wine, I prefer Italian."

"You prefer everything Italian," Mika laughed. "Coffee, cars, clothes."

"So? Is normal," Matteo protested. "Is best."

They took the lift up to the fifth floor, but as they were about to walk out onto the corridor, Mika suddenly hissed "Shh!" and put out an arm to stop Matteo.

"What's wrong?" Matteo hissed back.

Mika, his back to the wall, pointed towards the corridor. "Jordan!" he said in a low voice. "Coming this way."

Matteo looked confused. "But it is very late!"

Amazingly, the lift door was still open. Mika shoved Matteo back in, and thumped the Doors Close button. "What floor is Jordan's room?" he asked.

"Three."

"Then we'll go up to the top floor, just in case he's going down to the lobby, and then we should be clear when we come back down."

Matteo nodded, but looked confused. "I not understand. Why was Jordan in Mark's room?"

Mika shrugged. "Who knows? Discussing tactics? Strategy?" But he was thinking hard. At Spa, he'd been conscious that there was something going on between

the drivers of the number 17 car. There had been an atmosphere, tension between Mark and Jordan, and at one point he'd almost wondered if they'd had an argument. But then they'd got that fantastic podium and he'd forgotten about it. However, at the track today, he'd caught Mark looking at Jordan across the garage, with an intensity that had shocked him. That was when he'd begun to wonder exactly what the relationship was between the two men was.

The lift reached floor seven, and the doors opened. Matteo got out.

"Matteo! We don't need to get out, we're going back down to our room."

But Matteo had gone, and Mika had no choice but to follow his teammate. "You idiot," he called in a low voice. "Get back here!"

"There is gym. Come see," he said, peering in through the door at the running machines and bikes. "Tomorrow, gym, not food. Okay, Mika?"

Mika nodded. "You may have a point. But we'd better get back to our rooms. Come on!"

This time, the lift had gone, and they seemed to wait for ages before it came back up to the seventh floor. Idly, Mika wondered how many hours of his life he'd spent waiting for hotel lifts. As he tapped his fingers on the door, he watched as a frowning Matteo seemed to be doing a strange sort of dance, checking all his pockets. Eventually, he gave up. "Matteo, what's wrong?" he asked.

"My phone. I no find. I think it is in the car," he said, as the lift finally arrived.

Mika sighed, but got in and pushed the button for the ground floor. With a jerk, the lift started down, and Mika watched the numbers change. Six, five, four, three. It stopped, and the doors opened. Mika pushed the close doors button, but just as the doors began to slide shut, he caught sight of Jordan stepping into the lift opposite. Stranger and stranger.

On the ground floor, Mika leaned back on the lift wall. "Go quickly," he said to Matteo. "I'll hold the lift."

Most of the lights were off in the lobby, the pretty receptionists replaced by the night security man. Matteo scurried off, returning quickly with his phone.

"You'd lose your head if it wasn't attached," Mika said, shaking his head.

Matteo grinned. "No! I have HANS unit for that!"

This time, the lift went straight to the fifth floor. They got out and looked around cautiously. "There he is again!" Mika muttered. But this time Jordan was heading away from them, down the corridor towards Mark's room. Mika grabbed Matteo's arm, gestured with his other hand for him to be quiet, and headed quickly toward the other wing, where their rooms were situated.

“Mika, why was Jordan going back to Mark’s room?” Matteo asked, sounding puzzled. “You think something wrong?”

Mika wrinkled his nose, smiling. “No, I think something’s right,” he said. “I’ll explain tomorrow.”

With a yawn, Matteo shrugged. “Is good. Goodnight, Mika,” he said as he closed his door.

Once inside, Mika rapidly got ready for bed. It really was late, especially considering they were expected at breakfast at seven. But as he lay down, his mind kept coming back to Mark and Jordan. Were they involved? It didn’t shock him – his brother Tommi was gay, and he’d often gone out to gay clubs with him. But he’d never heard of any gay racing drivers. It might be difficult for them. If he was correct, that is. For all he knew, it could just be some issue with the car or the team...

He slept badly – which didn’t bode well for the next day’s practice – and woke far too early. Thinking of the sports room up on the seventh floor, he decided to go for a quick run, to make up for all that food the night before. It was only just after five am, and everything was quiet.

As he strolled down towards the lift, he saw a door open at the far end of the corridor. He stopped to watch a figure emerged, wearing a hoodie. Despite the dim lighting, he recognized the blue and yellow colours of the Randolph Racing livery.

Jordan – because it was clearly him – stepped backwards into the corridor. Then another figure stepped out into the shadows, bare-chested, and pulled Jordan back into a close embrace.

Mika bit his lip, feeling as if he was intruding into a very private moment between his team-mates. Somehow, it seemed right, the two of them. Mark seemed so lonely at times, and Jordan, behind the F1 shine, was rather lost. It would do them good to find each other. Although it had to be said that kissing in the corridor in a hotel packed full of motorsport personnel was possibly not the best idea.

Mika turned round silently and went back to his room. Instead of the planned run, he put the kettle on and sat on the balcony, enjoying the cool morning air and a cup of coffee. Later, he’d tell Matteo all about it, and find some way to shut his impulsive co-driver up until Jordan and Mark were ready to come clean. But for now, he just sat back and watched the sky grow lighter, feeling that things were actually beginning to fall into place for Randolph Racing.