

Scenes for the Movie.

BY SCOTT HARRINGTON

The Stage is black and bare, except for a movie screen fills the background. Out of the darkness walks PETER, a young man, dressed in black. As he narrates, the screen behind him flashes images relating to the three milestones of 1965.

PETER. 1965: It was a good year. Sandy Koufax pitched a perfect game; Martin Luther King marched on Montgomery... and the National Coordinating Committee to end the War in Vietnam staged its first public burning of a draft card.

CJ comes running in from the wings, dressed in casual army attire, burning a small card.

CJ. *(burning his card)* C'mon, Pete. Don't be such a square!

PETER. This doesn't make any sense; we're in the army already! We're in the jungle! What good is burning a stupid card?

CJ. But it's like... poetry, man, a symbolic gesture to tell the world: You may take my body but the passion of my soul burns this card with an all consuming flame! C'mon, Pete, feel the metaphor! Feel it!

PETER. CJ, knock it off! There's Cong out here.

CJ. *(yelling to the woods offstage)* You'll never quench this spirit, Charlie!

PETER. You're crazy.

CJ. No, man, you just don't have any vision.

PETER. 1965 was also the year I met CJ. From Garrison, Kansas.

CJ. Now hold steady, I'm trying to set the scene—

PETER. CJ had enough vision for the entire squadron—

CJ. A little more angst!

PETER. He wanted to be a director—

CJ. More... pathos!

PETER. Whereas I had no direction.

CJ. Beautiful, Pete, that was... perfect!

PETER. We were at war. With our selves or with the commies, I never knew. It's hard to see when the world around you is fading to black. CJ used to say,

CJ. If you don't have any vision, Pete, you're gonna perish.

PETER. I guess I was blind.

CJ. Incoming!

PETER. Because part of us did die out there.

CJ. Peter, keep your head down, we got Charlie's all over the place!

PETER. 1965.

CJ. Peter!

PETER. That was the year my eyes were opened.

LIGHTS OUT. After a moment, we hear a commanding voice in the darkness.

CJ (offstage). Atten-hut!

PETER (*saluting offstage as LIGHTS UP*). Corporal Peter B. Willis reporting for duty, sir!

CJ. Peter B?

PETER (*embarrassed*). My middle name is Blanford.

CJ. And they said the leeches sucked. Now, let's take that entrance again. And this time, a little more gusto, a little more grit, a little more...hey-my-parents-didn't-brand-me-with a name like Blanford! Remember, Pete, you are a lean, mean, Viet Cong killing machine!

PETER. Sir, yes, sir!

CJ. And action!

PETER. CJ's passion was relentless—

CJ. That's it, work with me, baby, make love to the camera!

PETER. He was going to be a world-renown director—

CJ. Talk to me, Pete, let me see so those eyes!

PETER. And his big break was going to be the war documentary he made as soon as he escaped this fly-infested hell-hole.

CJ. I believe the term I used was gaping abyss of Asian horror.

PETER. Whatever the expletive, CJ was the consummate dreamer.

CJ. Excuse me, but I am more than a dreamer, mon frère, I am an artist!

PETER. This is ridiculous! The guys are outside having a smoke, and we're stuck in the barracks playing Cecil B. Demille!

CJ. Would you prefer Orson Welles?

PETER. I just want a smoke—

CJ. (*pretending to be dead*) Rosebud... Rosebud!

PETER. I'm trying to talk to you!

CJ. (*a la Gone with the Wind*) Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

PETER. Alright, alright, take it from the top—

CJ. The *very* top.

PETER. Well, where do I begin our little expository digression?

CJ. Roll 'em!

PETER. CJ drove me nuts because... while he saw a light at the end of the tunnel, I, for one, didn't care about being rescued. I didn't have the red carpet waiting for me on the other side of the Pacific. I couldn't burn my draft card because I had enlisted. I joined the army with a death wish to hopefully inject some vitality into the silver spoon existence I had been force fed my entire life.

CJ. And action!

PETER. You want to see drama? Try explaining to your corporate lawyer of a sorry excuse for a father why you're forfeiting your scholarship to Colgate to rub elbows with the grunts in Vietnam.

LIGHTS CHANGE to reveal CJ playing the FATHER. His demeanor is dark, menacing. Peter moves quickly about the room packing imaginary objects into an imaginary duffle-bag.

CJ (as Father). I will not accept this, Peter.

PETER. I didn't ask for your approval, Dad; just thought I'd tell you why my room would be empty in the morning—

CJ. I don't see the point in throwing your life away to be a hero—

PETER. Yeah, well, you don't see much of me anyway, Dad, so why start now?

CJ. You're a real fool, you know that? This pathetic little tirade is absolutely—

PETER. I'm tired of taking up space! And I refuse to be led around by your surrogate aspirations anymore! (*Father slaps him across the mouth*) I'm really going to miss these little talks.

CJ. Open your eyes, Peter. You go out there and you are pissing away everything you've worked for; everything I've worked for. Look at what you're doing!

PETER. Sorry, Pop, but I must be blinded by your love. (*LIGHTS RETURN as we come out of the scene*) And that was a wrap. I walked out the next morning, duffle bag in hand, and took my one-way ticket to Fort Dix. I didn't stop until CJ cast me to play the part of protagonist in his hypothetical creation.

CJ. So...you must be the leading man?

PETER. The tale is not always glamorous. CJ rants and raves about the way the light hits the brush, while I lie awake at night wondering if I should get up the next morning.

CJ. (*looking at the stars*). Stars, Pete, look at the stars...

PETER. Just chalk or fire up there, nothing special.

CJ. No, man that is beauty shining out of darkness. Here we are lying in this black pit, but no matter what's going on down here---there they are, glimmering hope.

PETER. You really believe all that nonsense you're spouting don't you, Mr. Director?

CJ; Well, I was waxing a bit poetic, but, yes. Beauty is...transcendent. It's always there. You just got to look for it. You've got to see that, Pete. If you don't have any vision, if you can't catch a gleam of purpose in this gaping abyss of Asian horror, the despair's gonna swallow you whole.

PETER. Then consider me digested.

CJ. Why?

PETER. Because we're in Vietnam, CJ, and I'm sorry, but I don't see any stars! Because despite all the lights, the camera, the action, the truth is this world is just a cold swamp waiting to kill us both—And if by some chance we do survive, it's not going to be the Academy Awards for either of us. We'll spend the rest of our lives working ourselves into the grave only to die of a heart attack before we retire to Fred's landing. There's no beauty, here, CJ, just pain.

CJ. Do you think you could do that again?

PETER. Do what?!

CJ. That little tantrum was really believable. I want to write it down—

PETER. I am through entertaining your flights of fancy, farm boy, I quit—

CJ. Hey, you can't walk just off the set, you're fired!

PETER. Fine!

CJ. Fine!

PETER. Go to hell!

CJ. You first.

CJ and PETER. Actors... Directors.

PETER. And in yet another gesture of figurative magnitude, our sergeant decided that our little outburst could only be rectified by several weeks of intense male bonding, better known as KP.

(CJ enters smiling)

PETER. Of course, CJ had something up his sleeve to make sure he still saw stars.

CJ. I come in peace.

PETER. Too bad we're at war.

CJ. Your call, man, you can scrub the floors like a good little grunt...or you can check out the primo stash I just scored with the driver from 82nd!

PETER. You didn't—

CJ. *(pulling it out)* The sweet portal to artistic enlightenment.

PETER. I got to do the floors—

CJ. Would you edit out the "woe is me routine"!

PETER. I quit taking orders from you remember?

CJ. You are gonna die a miserable, lonely death out here, Pete

PETER. Sounds good to me.

CJ. Do you think I like waking up at five in the morning with bugs up my butt?! You think I like walking through a field waiting for my next step to be forever!

PETER. Yeah but part of you isn't waiting for the click of a trigger to blow your brains out, is it? Laying awake at night fantasizing about trip wires and mortar shells sending you from here to kingdom come because you've got nothing! No family to fall back on; No future to look forward to—existence has become an empty shell ready to explode so why not go out in a blaze of glory, CJ, there's no point to anything anyway!

CJ. Maybe life is plot without rhyme or reason, but not in my movie. I got a big finale coming up—and it ain't gonna be to watch some communist pig slit my throat. I'm getting out of here...I'm going to make my film, I'm going to see my friends...I'm gonna live. And if you can't see any beauty in that, Pete, then nothing, not even Mary Jane can help you. Now, are you gonna stop mopping, stop moping, and start smoking or what.

PETER. As he held out that loosely rolled joint, I felt a turning point in our convoluted story, so I stood tall, stared my eccentric antagonist in the face and said (Pause) Allright, light it.

CJ. Woo! And the winner is: Sparky, the doorkeeper to dubyville at your service!

PETER. I've never done this before—

CJ. Just inhale, hold it, not too long, and then pass the magic dragon my way (*He puffs*). En guard!

PETER. What are you doing?

CJ. Just a little adaptation, my boy, maybe now that you're lit you'll learn to lighten up! (*CJ begins swinging the mop at Peter in a swashbuckling fashion*) Angel of mercy preserve us, we battle to our doom! And now, with each fleeting breath, we march forward while whiz bangs nip us in our buttocks! To War!

PETER (buzzed, laughing). Ha Ha.... You said butt. (*The Two clash swors*)

As CJ and Peter share the following exchange, the two mock-fight about the stage, feeding on each other's energy as the drugs help drown out the depressing backdrop of the mess-hall.

CJ. Alone amidst the harrowing fight of Nam, the two mop to their untimely death— (*they clash*)

PETER. A hit! A palpable hit!

CJ. Touche!

PETER. Ha Ha...you said tooshie. (*hey resume fighting*)

CJ. Illuminated by the sweet ganja, our protagonist hurtles past the lingering angst of self doubt and despair—

PETER. Out of the darkness and into the light! I am renewed! I am rejuvenated! I am stoned!

CJ. And with each clash of their splintering blades—

PETER. The two dance one step closer to oblivion—

CJ. While the laughter drowns the distant cries of fallen comrades—

PETER. Ha!

CJ. Alas...I am slain!

CJ begins to move in slow-motion while Peter continues the narration.

PETER. That night I felt alive for the first time in what seemed like an eternity. Beside the dirty tables of that mess hall, CJ and I transformed a desperate moment into an evening of conjured beauty, of imagined, uninterrupted bliss, but... alas... every good show has got to end.

CJ. Incoming!

PETER. Fire and smoke filled the morning—

CJ. Peter, watch out—

PETER. While a battalion of Reds surprised our sleepy squadron with an early attack—
CJ. I need ammo right here now!

PETER. Dirt scattered the air as K-50's rattled in my ears. I couldn't—

CJ. Peter, keep your head down, we got Charlie's all over the place—

PETER. I stumbled across open fire and just as fate was about to crash down upon me—

CJ. Peter!

PETER. I got thrown to the floor only to watch the ground beside me fly upward... It was CJ. He had taken the hit.

CJ. Rosebud... Rosebud...

PETER. He was bleeding everywhere and his hand quivered as it clung to his chest...

CJ. *(smiling)* Blanford... I really hope... you're filming this.

PETER. You're crazy.

CJ. A plot twist.

PETER. CJ, you're gonna make it, just hold on.

CJ. No. You are.

PETER. I sat there in the midst of screams and bullets as the one person who enough vision to see something in me perished before my eyes...

CJ. Don't... waste this.

PETER. And then he was gone... his eyes wide open. With CJ's dead body laying before me all the questions that had tormented me suddenly rose above the screeching pangs of conflict. What was the point? What was the reason? Where was the beauty in this?! I ran... where I did not know, blustering, frantic, I ran—

JUNGLE CHANT begins to rise in the background. Peter stumbles about the stage, only to be met by the flashbacks of his own memory.

CJ. I will not accept this, Peter.

PETER. Where was I going? Why was I running?

CJ. Open your eyes, Pete.

PETER. What was keeping me from turning around right now and swallowing that Russian Mausner whole? Why shouldn't I just give up?! I screamed to the high heavens as the vicious claws of Vietnames jungle tore at my face—

CJ. If you don't have vision—

PETER. I wanted to perish, I wanted to die, wanted to let the void have its way and consume the sweat that burned in my eyes.

CJ. Peter, keep your head down we got Charlie's all over the place!

PETER. When the pain was too great—

CJ. Don't waste this.

PETER. I stumbled in the merciless swamp.

CJ. Peter!

PETER. And there they were.

CJ. Stars, Pete—

PETER. Glorious and unwavering.

CJ. Look at the stars...

PETER. Blazing in the night sky above that mess we called war were the clearest bodies of heavenly magnificence I had ever seen—

CJ. There they are.

PETER. For the first time I could see what CJ had been babbling about—

CJ. Glimmering hope.

MUSIC FADES OUT.

PETER. Maybe there was a point to this story; maybe there really could be a light that shined out of the darkness.

CJ. And action!

PETER. When the smoke cleared, the enemy driven off, I found myself days later staring at the unmade bunk of my best friend. Underneath his pillow was a notebook—

CJ. Production Notes for—At War with Peter B...

PETER. A Blanford Story. I flipped through the pages and began to read...

CJ. I've got this friend—

PETER. About myself.

CJ. He's quite a character. But I see why we were cast to play these roles.

PETER. He's made me think—

CJ. He's made me wonder—

PETER. He's made me look at this dump and ask what the hell keeps me going.

CJ. All I can figure is...I guess it's him. We need each other. We may not know why everything is falling to pieces—

PETER. But there is beauty in the journey, beauty in the discovery,

CJ. Beauty in looking for the through-line.

PETER. And that's why I... am making this movie.

CJ and PETER. To tell our story.

PETER. When I finally got home, I decided I was going to make his movie in memorial of one who helped give me back my vision. I figured if that wasn't a meaning in all this chaos then nothing was. That's the purpose I discovered in those marshy fields called Vietnam.

CJ. Now hold steady, I am trying to set this scene—

PETER. That's the story I've told you here today—

CJ. A little more angst—

PETER. I found myself in 1965,

CJ. A little more pathos—

PETER. Because of the stars that shone in one peculiar Christopher Joseph from Garrison, Kansas, my eyes were finally opened.

CJ. Beautiful Pete, that... was perfect.

LIGHTS SLOWY FADE as PETER holds the moment with CJ framing the scene proudly.