

T62 Afghanistan 1988

by

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DESCRIPTION

A Soviet tank crew at the ass-end of the war in Afghanistan is trying to make it home in one piece.

CHARACTERS

- COMMANDER
- GUNNER
- LOADER
- DRIVER

MISCELLANEOUS

- Sound design is crucial to the production.
- Light Russian accents but only to indicate who they are.
- The actors are young, the cream of their generation
- All actions are mimed

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DRIVER sits stage left on a low chair or cube. COMMANDER sits behind him, on a higher chair or even a ladder. GUNNER sits to COMMANDER's right. LOADER sits behind GUNNER.

SOUND: The grind of a tank along a road. It is not deafening, but then again it is not mild.

COMMANDER mimes looking through a periscope. GUNNER mimes looking through his viewfinder. DRIVER mimes driving.

COMMANDER

Do you see anything?

GUNNER

No.

COMMANDER speaks without heat.

COMMANDER

Shit. Shit.

No one says anything, but everyone is worried.

COMMANDER

Stop.

DRIVER clutches and shifts into neutral, presses the brake, moves the steering laterals to "0."

SOUND: Tank engine idling, radio static—behind this, slight, the wind of a storm.

COMMANDER

How did this happen?

DRIVER

Not my fault, sir.

COMMANDER

I'll ask you again, how did this happen?

DRIVER

The storm—

COMMANDER

How is it we're all alone out here with you doing the driving?

DRIVER

The snow storm made it—

GUNNER

It was impossible to see anything, sir—

COMMANDER

Did I ask you?

GUNNER

No sir.

COMMANDER

Don't answer questions I didn't ask you. Back to you: how did this happen?

DRIVER realizes that no explanation will do, and COMMANDER knows that his question has no satisfactory answer.

COMMANDER turns to his right for the radio, puts on a headset, turns up the volume: static. He turns a dial to different frequencies: only static.

DRIVER

The snow storm must have—

COMMANDER

We are the luckiest of the lucky few.

COMMANDER takes off the headset, turns down the volume. They all sit in silence, the tank engine idling. Storm winds have picked up in volume and are now a constant.

COMMANDER

How much fuel?

DRIVER

We had enough to make the staging area for the retreat.

COMMANDER

Withdrawal—negotiated withdrawal—

DRIVER

Yes, sir. Enough to make the negotiated withdrawal.

COMMANDER

Don't forget—comrade Najibullah is now in charge, and our Afghani comrades have been declared capable of defending their own—

A snort of disgust from LOADER interrupts COMMANDER—a snort strong enough for snort to come out. LOADER wipes his nose on his sleeve.

LOADER

Sorry, sir.

COMMANDER

You disagree?

LOADER

Nothing, sir.

COMMANDER

Snot, sand, and Afghanistan. What else do you have up there?

LOADER does not respond but then does.

LOADER

I think a pile of shit has more brains than The Ox—

COMMANDER looks through his periscope.

COMMANDER

But now it's The Ox's wasteland, Loader.

LOADER

It wasn't ever ours.

COMMANDER

Wasteland. Always nothing but a waste[land]—

LOADER

We didn't win, did we, sir, was what my snot meant.

COMMANDER does not respond, continues looking through his periscope. Everyone else is nervous.

GUNNER

Sir? Sir?

DRIVER

Can't turn it off, sir, to save fuel—the heater—

COMMANDER

Aware of how a T62 works, Driver.

DRIVER

Should move, sir.

GUNNER

Turn around, sir, follow our tracks back to the highway—

COMMANDER puts away the periscope. He turns to LOADER, speaks in a low, even voice.

COMMANDER
Of course we didn't fucking win.

DRIVER
Sir—

COMMANDER
We could not have ever "won," no one ever fucking wins in this
hellscape—

They are all brought to a quick alert by the SOUND of a single gunshot against the hull of the tank. Immediately COMMANDER looks through the periscope and his vision blocks, DRIVER looks through his vision blocks, GUNNER looks through his periscope. LOADER waits, shivers.

COMMANDER
Gunner?

GUNNER
Nothing, sir.

COMMANDER
Driver?

DRIVER
Nothing, sir.

COMMANDER
Your guess—stone driven by the wind or—

DRIVER
Commander—

COMMANDER
Always what we don't know, can't see—can you retrace the
compass bearings? No tracks left—

SOUND: Another gunshot against the hull.

COMMANDER
Driver—

DRIVER presses in the clutch, engages the gear, pulls the left steering lateral to “2,” and the tank pivots to the right to turn around. DRIVER gears up as the tank moves forward.

COMMANDER is looking through the periscope.

COMMANDER

Stop! Stop!

DRIVER gears down, presses the brake and clutch—tank slides to a halt.

SOUND: Under the tank idle are indistinct voices through the hull.

DRIVER

Sir?!

COMMANDER

Not ours, if that was your question.

GUNNER

So why have we [stopped]—

COMMANDER does not answer.

SOUND: Tank idle, indistinct voices shouting—and banging on the tank’s hull.

COMMANDER

A tale of empires.

The other three look at each other—no one knows where this is going.

SOUND: More banging now, rhythmic.

COMMANDER

Pride. Arrogance. Stupidity. Greed. Empire’s four horsemen. The English—

DRIVER

Sir—

COMMANDER in a quiet sing-song.

COMMANDER
Our Viet—Viet—Vietnam—

GUNNER
Sir, they have RPGs aimed—

With no urgency, COMMANDER speaks to DRIVER.

COMMANDER
Go. Go.

DRIVER guns the motor forward, bouncing all of them around as it barrels across the uneven snow-covered terrain. All but COMMANDER begin to shout/scream, voices rising over the roar of the diesel engine, urging the tank forward, forward, forward.

DRIVER, GUNNER, LOADER
Aaaaaahhhhhhh!!!!!!

Until.

SOUND: Brutal brutal brutal explosion as the RPGs hit the reserve fuel tanks on the rear of the T62, then the explosion of the on-board tank shells.

Then all goes silent. The four sit there, composed. They are now free to move about the stage.

COMMANDER
This would be the part where the Writer would use his art to have
the voices of—

COMMANDER raises his hand, as if saying “Present.” As the others speak, they do the same.

COMMANDER
—the Destroyed—

GUNNER
The Damned—

LOADER
The Sacrificed—hello!—

DRIVER
The “Honored Dead”—

COMMANDER

Rise up to haunt you—

LOADER

With Wisdom—

GUNNER

And Caution—

DRIVER

And Humility—

LOADER

And the Writer would point out how—

COMMANDER

Bang you over the head with how—

ALL

Four people trapped in a tank—

DRIVER

With only a limited view of the world outside—

GUNNER

Symbolize the Blindness at the Heart of the Enterprise—

COMMANDER

With the ability to deal out Death but no understanding of the larger "Why"—

GUNNER

And after the sermon the Writer's hope that—

ALL

Through his Art—

GUNNER

Those of Good Faith would take the hint and resist the Corruption—

COMMANDER

That comes with Empire.

DRIVER

Speak Truth to Power.

GUNNER

And save the lives of soldiers, and save the lives of everybody
that soldiers kill.

LOADER

But this Writer—

LOADER snickers.

LOADER

Sorry.

COMMANDER

What?

LOADER

I can't—I shouldn't—

DRIVER

You've obviously got something to say.

LOADER

It's all okay, really—the Writer's only doing what he thinks is
right—who can blame—

*But LOADER bursts into a long fit of laughter. The others watch, and then join in but on a much
lower level.*

LOADER

I'm sorry—I'm sorry—I thought about the Writer, then roly-poly
Gorbachev just popped into my head—that little port-wine stain—

GUNNER

That? Butter compared to what I had.

COMMANDER

What?

GUNNER

A dream about the zombie Brezhnev, the other night—made my skin crawl.

DRIVER

Ten bloody years—

ALL

Yep.

DRIVER

Ten bloody years the two of them kept us here.

LOADER

So what chance does the Writer have against two like that, eh?
What chance does “Art” have against a zombie and a repo man?
That’s why I had to laugh—

GUNNER

No, no, it was good you did—

LOADER

Couldn’t help it—

GUNNER

I hated being expected to say all the well-meant shit the Writer had planned for us—I mean, it had some poetry in it, but—

GUNNER spits.

GUNNER

No thanks.

LOADER

No “tanks.”

Laughter.

COMMANDER

Brezhnev—he's not dead, you know?

GUNNER

Zombie!!

COMMANDER

He will come along again, you know—

GUNNER

We know.

COMMANDER

Different suit, different tie—

DRIVER

At least Gorby got us out.

COMMANDER

There will be another one of him, too—

GUNNER

We know.

COMMANDER

Different tie, different suit—

GUNNER

But Afghanistan? It will last forever.

LOADER

The Suits will get us into and get us out of every Afghanistan they can find.

DRIVER

That's the nature of Suits.

COMMANDER

I don't blame the Suits, though.

The other three give him a look.

COMMANDER

I blame those who pay the salaries of the Suits.

LOADER does an evil chuckle and rubs his hands

LOADER

Bastards!!

COMMANDER

I blame those who say they support the troops and then don't bring them home. Don't end the wars that kill off the sons and daughters. Don't scream out in rage at every evil done in their names. Them I blame. Them I blame completely.

GUNNER

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori and all associated Najibullah bullshit.

LOADER overlaps with GUNNER.

LOADER

And all that United Nations shit, yeah.

COMMANDER

Exactly.

SOUND: Low at first, but the sound of raging fire rises along with voices in agony.

DRIVER

Come on.

The four take their place in the tank as the fire sound and voices rise in intensity to hellish levels. They are calm. They are dead. They are consumed in a long slow fade to black.