

MATTHEW MODINE'S FULL METAL DAIRY

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September, 1985. Becton Gas Works. Isle of Dogs, England.

The air here is strange. Stagnant. The mighty Thames, that once carried barges of coal here from Northern England, seems to have stopped flowing this day. I look around and see crumbled asbestos everywhere. The soil is stained cobalt blue. I presume it's from chemicals. Chemicals stupidly dumped or spilled onto the earth. The chemicals seem to be crawling, or oozing, toward the Thames. This would explain why the river surface is shiny. Oily. Reflective, like a calm, lake full of mercury. Heavy water.

Depending on the traffic, Becton is about a half hours drive from central London. This place was once the largest gas works in England. In the age of coal it must have been a beehive of activity. The science that gave the world the atomic bomb also gave birth to nuclear energy. So Becton Gas Works became purposeless. It became a grave yard. I can't imagine the toll it's closing put on the lives of workers who toiled on this poisoned piece of earth.

ANTON FURST, is our Production Designer. He is so cool. He looks like a crow. Black, black hair and a long beak-like nose. He never stops moving or thinking. He smokes a pipe. Anton has transformed the gas works into several Vietnamese locations. One corner has metamorphosed into a typical street in Da Nang. There's a beautiful pagoda being constructed off in a field. In an another corner, square coal silos, that could easily hold a large, three bedroom house, have had their huge cement legs blown out from under them and lay clumsily on their sides. They look wounded. Here is were Anton is recreating the destroyed city of Hue. This whole place is where we will stage our movie. This is our set! It's all so amazing!

If I look around, I can find signs of life returning to this dead place. It comes in different forms. Today it's cottontail rabbits, mice and a dozen different kinds of birds. There are grasses and small, delicate flowers that grow where the ground isn't chemical blue. And then I notice the palms. They're from Spain and they're suffering from the cold climate that they've been supplanted. The roots have been enshrouded in burlap, veiled in plastic and boxed into strong wood crates. Heavy steel chains are wrapped around the crates to aid in their transport from set location to set location. Huge holes have been dug to hide the crates. The holes look like they were created by mortar explosions. The Spanish palms don't speak English and, to my mind, seem sad. Even trees can feel like strangers in a foreign land.

ENTER, STANLEY KUBRICK film director, late fifties. An intense looking man. Compact in size and sturdy. But oddly, rather shapeless. He wears a green Marine Corps fatigue shirt over a white colored dress shirt.

His pants are baggy and loose at the waist. During his busy day, he seems to accent difficult moments by grabbing the pants' waistline, double fistful, and hikes them up. It's an interesting action to behold. Very tough. Street smart. An action that physically says "I can take care of myself!" or "I can pull up my own pants". It's a James Cagney kind of move that tells anyone watching that he's in charge. He wears his hair long for a man his age and his beard is wily and unkept.

Today, KUBRICK is directing a film about war. He's the man responsible for the displaced palms and the crippled buildings. This derelict gas works is his new play ground. The place where he will stage his film war. Film making, in a sense is war. There are many battles fought and military strategy is an asset often implemented over the course of production. There are days when just going to work could be described as active combat. On film sets, the Director is the General and he's in charge and responsible for the lives and well being of his troops. From pre-production to distribution. No one is supposed to get killed in reality but there is always the absolute possibility. Everyone involved in the production, from the caterer to the boom man, art department to wardrobe, electricians, props, grips, camera, all the way to actors. Each can suffer a physical injury. They can also suffer a spiritual or artistic death. During production we are all in his hands. We all work for him. He is Columbus. Discovering a new world. In Kubrick case, I've have seen that he is capable of exploring new frontiers. So, I tell myself to be strong. The journey might be long, but it is the journey, isn't it?

That this "film war" happens to be the Viet Nam war, is of no consequence. War is war. It is my feeling that, although the names, faces, and uniforms may change from conflict to bloody conflict, the participants are generally the same; young men. "Crazy tough" and "Phoney brave" as our script calls out.

I'm playing Private Joker, a combat journalist. I'm the interpreter for the three great artists that wrote, Full Metal Jacket. They are Gus Hasford, Michael Herr, and Stanley Kubrick. An artistic trifecta!

BECTON GAS WORKS, ISLE OF DOGS, ENGLAND. DAY.

I'm messing around with my M-16. Trying to get to know how it works. It's a cold and cloudy day. I see Stanley walking toward me.

KUBRICK

Do you want some coffee?

MODINE

Sure.

Stanley and I walk toward his large Winnebago trailer. It's funny to see a trailer this size in England because over here the roads were invented before the automobile. Imagining this huge American box squeezing through the narrow streets is kind of impossible. The proverbial bull in a China shop.

I feel privileged to be asked into his Winnebago. Personal trailers on film sets are generally that; personal. To be asked or invited into someone's is generally a show of trust and openness. We enter and he begins to make the coffee.

KUBRICK and I are getting to know each other. We've spent several weeks together at this point. I've been kind of quiet up to now, choosing to listen and observe. As my father used to say, "You can't learn if your mouth is always open".

KUBRICK

Do you like strong coffee? This is Kenyan. It's African.

MODINE

Sure. Great.

KUBRICK sits down at the small dining table typical of all motor homes. Formica counter tops. Brown and yellow patterns over a field of pale white. On the table sits a powder blue manual type writer. KUBRICK looks at the piece of paper rolled in the type writer's carriage. Without looking up from what he's reading he asks...

KUBRICK

What do you think of the ending of the film?

The electric kettle whistles. KUBRICK flips off the switch and prepares the coffee. He uses a French Press. Before today, I'd never seen coffee made this way. For me, watching KUBRICK making coffee was like being in a chemistry class with Einstein.

KUBRICK

Do you think it's too...

Stanley either loses himself in the coffee or chooses not to finish the sentence, preferring perhaps for me to finish it. I hesitate.

KUBRICK

You know there's no bad ideas. Only better ones.

Let's not say, "That wouldn't work" or, "That's a stupid idea". If it's a stupid idea, the rule is we don't judge, we just keep moving until we find the right answer. Okay?

MODINE

I like the ending. I really feel that it's powerful. The child playing war inter-cut with Joker in battle. I think it shows, without saying, that we seem to prepare for war our whole life.

KUBRICK

Really?

MODINE

Yeah. It's one of the things that I liked most about the script. It's a powerful image to end with.

Stanley presses the coffee grounds to the bottom of the glass pitcher. I can't help feeling that he has discovered some new scientific way to make coffee. He pours two Styrofoam cups full of the thick black liquid.

KUBRICK

Milk? Sugar?

MODINE

Milk.

KUBRICK

It doesn't seem right.

MODINE

It's too black?

KUBRICK

No. The end.

WEEKS LATER, BECTON GAS WORKS, ISLE OF DOGS. MORNING

Everything is wet. It's cold. I'm dressed in my filthy, Marine combat fatigues, M-16, flak-jacket, and helmet. I'm smiling. I've picked a moment that I think is appropriate to tell a joke to the boss. KUBRICK is trying to decide where he wants to work today. Which battle he will fight.

MODINE

I got a joke.

KUBRICK

A joke? Let's hear it.

MODINE

Okay. Okay, you're dead...

KUBRICK

I'm dead?

MODINE

Yeah, you're...

KUBRICK

It's not funny.

MODINE

It's a joke.

KUBRICK

But I'm dead. That's not funny.

MODINE

It's a joke. Steven Spielberg is dead, too.

KUBRICK

Steven is dead?

MODINE

Stanley. It's a joke. Okay, you're in heaven. Spielberg has just died and he is being greeted at the gates of heaven by Gabriel.

MODINE AS GABRIEL

Hey, Steve! Baby! Welcome to heaven. Y'know God's really happy to have you here. He's really dug a lot of your pictures and he wants me to make sure that if you need anything, well, I'm your man. Anything you need, you come to me.

MODINE

So Steven looks around heaven. It isn't how he imagined it.

MODINE AS SPIELBERG

Thanks, thanks a lot. You know, can I call you, Gabe? There is one thing, Gabe, I've always wanted to meet Stanley Kubrick. Do you think you could arrange that? I'd really like that.

MODINE

Gabriel looks down. He kicks up some cloud mist and shakes his head.

MODINE AS GABRIEL

Of all the things you could ask for...Steve, baby, you know I can't do that. Everyone knows Stanley doesn't do meetings. I'm sorry kid.

MODINE AS SPIELBERG

Yeah, well. It was worth asking.

MODINE

So, Gabriel and Steven go for a walk. They're having a look around the pearly gates and, not two minutes later, Steven sees something in the distance. A guy on a bicycle riding toward them. The guy has long black hair and a beard. Glasses. He's wearing a green combat fatigue shirt and he's peddling straight toward them!

MODINE AS SPIELBERG

(whispering)

Oh my God! Gabe, look! Over there. It's STANLEY KUBRICK! And he's coming this way! Couldn't we stop him? You know, just to say, "Hi"? I mean he's coming this way!

MODINE

Gabriel gets a worried expression and takes Steven by the arm, forcing him into a puffy white cloud.

MODINE AS GABRIEL

Steven, listen, come over here. That's not STANLEY KUBRICK. That's GOD! He just thinks he's STANLEY KUBRICK!

I laugh at my joke. Stanley's been pulling on his beard while listening to the joke. He looks up, I think amused, I can't tell. He looks off toward something in the distance and asks...

KUBRICK

Have you been thinking about the ending.

MODINE

(still smiling from the joke)

Yeah. I like it the way it is. I don't know why you'd want to change it.

KUBRICK

Keep thinking about it.

Stanley walks off. I think he like the joke. Except the part about being dead.



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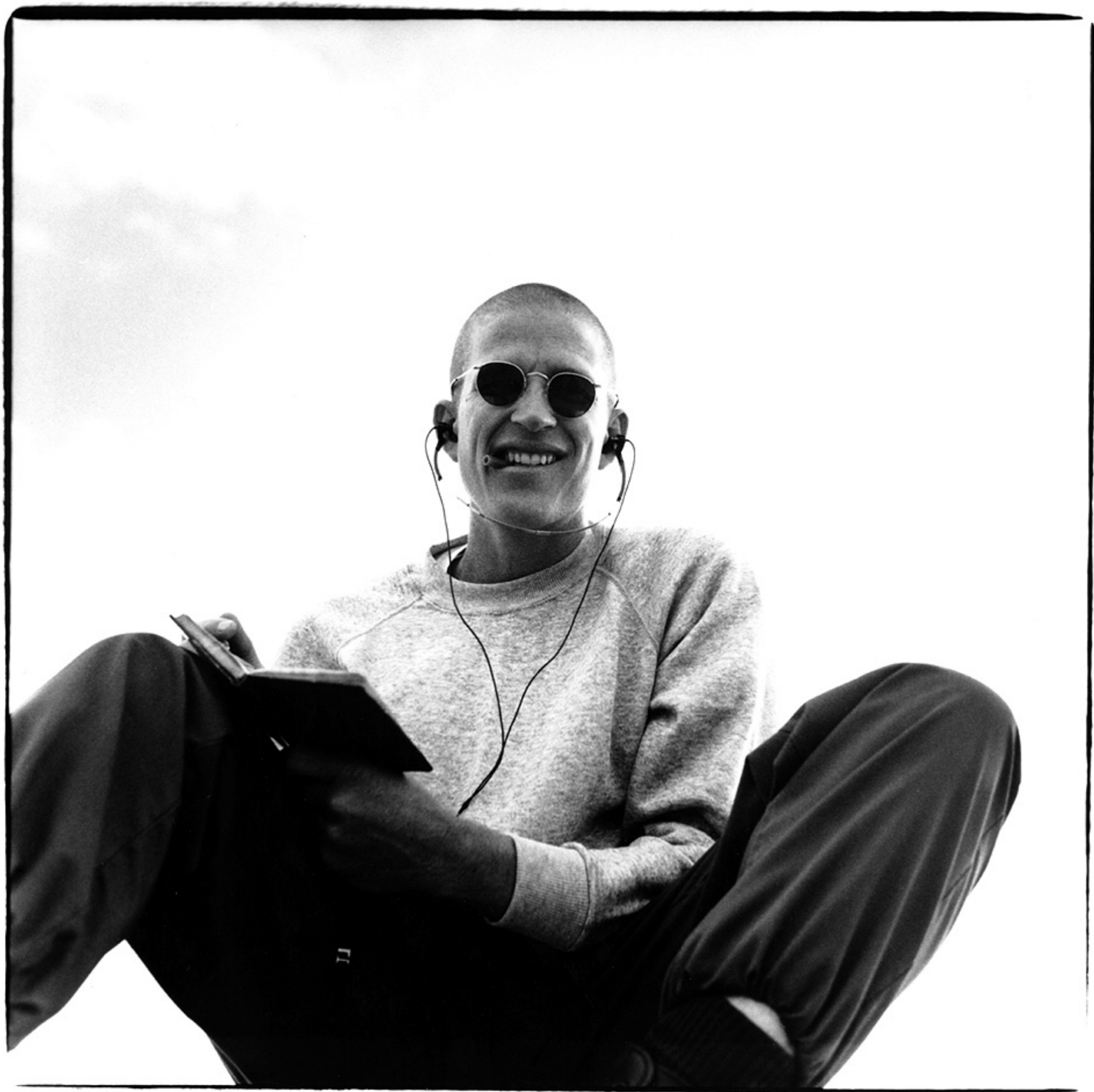






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