

"ROCK"...AND A SOFT PLACE

A Play by

Jerry L. Crawford

.....
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.....

NOTE:

THIS IS THE REVISED VERSION

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Jlc

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by

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SPECIAL GRATITUDE

to

Actor

Andre de Shields

and

to

Director

Ed Sherin

Andre and Ed led nine young actors in a very successful staged reading of this play in October, 2004, rehearsed at The American Place Theatre and performed at The Director's Theatre, New York City. Our Equity Stage Stage Manager was Matt Stern.

Thanks, also, to my Dramaturg and Special Assistant, Paul Truckey, who aided our work in N.Y.

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NOTE ON DESIGN/CASTING:

None of the men are officers; "Rock" is a Master Sergeant and the others are Specialists of varying class. The three 1957 U.S. Army uniforms were olive brown with the short Eisenhower jacket, dress blue with the longer, fuller jacket; and work/combat fatigues. Each scene denotes the dress code. Scene 7 uses casual, civilian wear. The play uses no "realistic: settings (walls, rooms, etc.). Lighting and selective units or props easily denote locale. The "backdrop" for scenes could be a skim with imaginative use of lighting or even projections. Sound and music are very important; specific needs are detailed in the script. Scene 6 ("Death Ballet") is the most demanding segment, calling for top level, professional sound/lighting design and choreography.

While ten is a quite large cast by current market standards, the fact that nine of the men are between the ages of 20-25 renders the challenge much easier and pulls the work into both professional and amateur-collegiate level production possibilities. The key, lead role of "Rock" is unusually dominating and marks a challenge for any producing group. He must be an African-American of maturity (50 ideal) and an excellent dancer, especially tap and, ideally, ballet/ballroom. In no way is he "soft" or effete; like his nickname, he should be rock solid/ultra masculine—dancing more like James Cagney or Gene Kelly than Fred Astaire, but, out of the tradition of just such great dancers. The role of Rock is the central character, but, is an anti-hero or an antagonist used in the lead role. Thus, the nine soldiers are a collective protagonist vs. Rock. In terms of traditional play structure, Rock aligns with the kind of anti-hero central character typified by Macbeth, Richard III, and Iago. In other words, a worthy man, appealing, yet powerful, proud, and working toward questionable goals.

The dance in the play (including, of course, Scene 6) almost qualifies the material as a strange, limited form of "musical." However, the form of the play is fundamentally serious drama with a good deal of comic interpolation. Direction should focus upon the metaphor of the play, allowing the dance to elevate the style of the material up from traditional realism. This is particularly true in the final moments of the play.

DATES/LOCALES

- Scene 1: "SELECTIONS"—October, 1957, Ft. Carson, Colorado
- Scene 2: "MISSIONS"—the next day, Ft. Carson, Colorado
- Scene 3: "SKILLS"—the next day AND various times over the next 22 months, Ft. Carson, Colorado
- Scene 4: "FINAL DAYS"—Early to mid-summer, 1959, Ft. Carson, Colorado
- Scene 5: "DISPERSIONS"—August, 1959, Ft. Carson, Colorado
- Scene 6: "FINIS CORONAT OPUS" ("The End Crowns the Work"). or, "DEATH BALLET"—many undefined times and places
- Scene 7: "REUNION, MYSTERY, AND FINALITY", October 17, 1969, a representation of an old log cabin high on Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado Springs, Colorado; again, a realistic room is not needed, but, key units of representation include the fact there are no windows; there is one thick, wooden door, an old stone fireplace, an old table and chairs or stools.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

- "ROCK": 50, African-American, cell commander and leader; wry sense of humor, handsome, always in control; clear, clipped speech with no accent of any kind. Crucial: he is an expert dancer, especially tap. He wears a neatly trimmed mustache.
- "KRAUT": 25, German-American; ranking member of team cell; droll humor; short; balding prematurely; just a hint of a German accent.
- "LONG NUTZ": 23; English-American, second ranking member of team cell; southwestern Texas drawl and humor; very tall and lean.
- "DICTIONARY": 22; German-American; intense/tense; crew-cut hair, glasses; short on humor, speaks rapidly with an expansive vocabulary.
- "GUNG HO": 24; Russian-American, quiet, short; slight build; no sense of humor, adores the military and speaks softly, but, forcefully. He is ultra-patriotic.
- "CHESTY": 23; African-American, skinny as a rail with no chest or muscles; warm, pleasant sense of humor; speaks quickly, clearly; intelligently theatrical and rebellious. Dislikes dancing.
- "NAPOLI": 24; Italian-American; dark hair, dark eyes, dark sense of humor; speaks with a hint of an Italian accent.
- "SIX EYES": 23; German-American; large features, thick, large, horn-rimmed glasses; jokester; speaks with a strong, sibilant sound.
- "SICILY": 25; Italian-American; Hollywood handsome; brash sense of humor; speaks loudly with laughter-infused, clear speech with no accent of any kind.
- "FAT DADDY": 22; Polish/Jewish-American; very short and rotund; crew-cut hair; joyous, gregarious sense of humor with loud, clear speech..

“If it were done when ‘tis done, then
‘twere well
It were done quickly; if the assassina-
tion
Could trammel up the consequence,
and catch
With his surcease success; that but this
blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all
here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of
time,
We’d jump the life to come.”

MACBETH, William Shakespeare

“...all should have an equal chance. This is the
sentiment embodied in the Declaration of Independence...
I would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it.”

Abraham Lincoln, Independence Hall,
Philadelphia, February 22, 1861

“Assassination is the extreme form of censorship.”

THE REJECTED STATEMENT,
George Bernard Shaw

“When Abraham Lincoln was shoved into the tombs, he forgot the
copperheads and the assassin...in the dust, in the cool tombs.”

COOL TOMBS, Carl Sandburg

FOR:

Jim, Wayman, Bob, Curt, and Harold

and

in memory of

Warren

“Ipso facto la dee smoochee”

SCENE 1

“SELECTIONS”

(October, 1957; an empty room save one chair; U.S. Army Base, Ft. Carson, Colorado. Nine soldiers in olive brown dress are standing at attention in a line from u.r. to d.l. No movement and dead silence for a full minute. Twilight is filtering in—seemingly from a window. Far away, Taps are played. Another ten seconds or so of silence. A door off-right is heard to open and shut. A Master Sergeant in brown dress enters, casually, smoking, one hand in a pants pocket. He stops, surveys them as he smiles, removes his soft cap and tucks it into his belt. He pulls up a wooden chair, sits on it backwards, flicking his ashes into the palm of one hand—later he will deposit the ashes and the butted cigarette into a pants pocket. A handsome African-American of 50, his speech is clear and clipped with no accent, but, in tones uniquely soft, controlling—he has a wry wit and enjoys his impressive, unique semantics. He is proud without being arrogant. Everything about him seems earned by life experience, special military experience. His obvious charm and congeniality thinly mask a very tough man and soldier.)

ROCK

At ease, ladies.

(The nine troopers relax, but, not fully, individually reacting to his label.)

Do you think it a given right that a government may train you to kill another human being?

(Awkward silence.)

Muse on that later and should I ask you again, I should hear nine responses simultaneously.

FAT DADDY

The military is expected to train a soldier to kill the enemy, right, Serg?

ROCK

I said to "muse" on that before responding.

FAT DADDY

Yes, sir.

ROCK

What?

FAT DADDY

Sorry. Serg.

ROCK

(Smiling, warmly, pleasantly suddenly.)

Sergeant.

FAT DADDY

Sorry. Sergeant.

ROCK

Make it, "Rock."

FAT DADDY

Pardon, Sergeant?

ROCK

You may all call me, "Rock," a nickname given me universally, Paris to Guadacanal. Matter of fact, in this special, in this elite, unit, or, cell, it is the one and only nomenclature you will ever use with me. I have no given name, no middle name, no sur-name. Do you girls gather my meaning? You may nod assent.

(They do so. Rock rises, walks, sits alternately as the scene progresses.)

Nor do YOU any longer have a given name, a middle name, a sur-name. As you have just entered this room off a ton and a half truck having never met one another before and having never spoken out loud to one another, you are never, repeat, never to share past personal information. You are never to discuss you past life in civilian America or anywhere, unless alone with me and I, I alone, broach a subject! Clear?

(They nod assent.)

I have been observing each of you in your respective training and duty, I have studied your records, test scores, education, and behavior. Trust me, babes, I chose you because I love you. I think you are perfect for the initial training cell in

the most secretive and awesome plan ever forged by our government, our nation. Other countries are a bit ahead of us—especially certain Islamic groups. We will more than “catch-up.” Now, you will never know who chose me to select and train you. Tomorrow when we gather, I will thrill you with our mission. Each of you will be trained in one special skill. This skill will exhilarate you—it will come to define you. We will hone each skill for twenty-some months, or, until I deem you “ready.” At that point, we will cease working as a collective cell. All or most of you will return to civilian life. Only then may you pursue further education, regular employment, perhaps marry—or, remarry—have a family, and, possibly, never use your skill again. **UNLESS WE CALL UPON YOU.** To be called would be rare and it is not likely to happen unless there is special military or civilian need for your service. You will be sworn to secrecy and silence regarding the training and beyond. After discharge at some point in 1959, you will always be under benevolent surveillance, shall we call it? Partially for you own well being. You will learn to live with that fact with no fear or concern. It is the natural result of our training. Rest assured, should you ever break your oath, at best you would never hear from us and you would lose our protection—which would be a mistake. I see questions cascading in your eyes—put them aside for now and trust me and the training to reveal all that is essential. As for life on this base during training—you will be largely isolated, save medical and dental checkups and the like. Everything you need for training and downtime or relaxation will be provided. Outside or civilian communication will be restricted save controlled monitoring. Families or others will simply know you are on highly confidential training. Now, before I assign you a code or training name as your nomenclature within the cell, know this: if you do not walk in here tomorrow at 0800 and stand at attention, you will be taken to the reception station and recycled into a standard training unit. The risk and mystery are intriguing, don’t you think? This is fail-safe time. Ahhh, relax. We will play cards, see films, dine, and drink with privilege. OK, on your feet, my “nine little Indian squaws,” and listen up at attention.

(They all come to full attention.)

When I say your happy, new, clever and amusing name, march your sweet ass out the door to your barracks east marked with a red Z, accommodate your bunk and area, and get some chow in the special “mess” room located at the rear of the building. Then get plenty of shut-eye, “ipso facto, la dee smoochee.”

(Pause; he points with each name and commentary, then jerks his thumb over a shoulder, and each man exits off- right one by one.)

“Kraut”—ranking cell member under me from this moment forward.Go!

“Long Nutz”—ranking cell member under Kraut. Go!

“Dictionary”—third in cell rank. Go!

“Gung Ho”—fourth in cell rank. Go!

“Chesty”—fifth in cell rank. Go!

ROCK (Cont.)

"Six Eyes"—sixth in cell rank—I like the symmetry. Go!

"Napoli"—seventh in cell rank. Go!

"Sicily"—eighth in cell rank. Go!

"Fat Daddy"—ninth in cell rank—teach you to speak out of turn, eh? Go!

(Perplexed, bewildered, they have all exited, snappily, only FAT DADDY with a smile. Pause.)

With luck, one. Maybe two. Three would be a miracle.

(He smiles, puts on his cap, and, snapping his fingers rhythmically, he slowly and expertly tap dances out of sight as lights fade into darkness, out of which comes the sound of a morning bugle as daylight emerges on the same room, empty.)

SCENE 2

“MISSIONS”

(As bright mountain sunlight pours over the room, the nine troopers enter in a military file with KRAUT counting cadence. Seemingly, the light is filtered through barred windows as crossing patterns are formed on the floor.)

KRAUT
Companyyy, Halt! Assume diagonal dress, Hah!

(The soldiers align far u.r. to far d.l.)

KRAUT (Cont.)
At ease.

(Silence.)

FAT DADDY
(Glancing up the line from his far d.l. spot.)
How ‘bout that, Rinks, nobody took a powder.

LONG NUTZ
(Looking at his watch.)
Maybe Sergeant Rock did....I have 0800.

KRAUT
0757....you’re fast.

LONG NUTZ
(Big, toothy grin.)
Never been called that b’fore.

DICTIONARY
(Nervous, intense.)
I certainly thought about jumping on that ton-and-a-half to recycle.....

GUNG HO
(Hint of challenge in his tone.)
So why didn’t you?

DICTIONARY
Too damn curious. Besides, double-pay? Unheard of in this man’s army.

CHESTY

My brothers were both Navy....maybe I should have.....

(He cuts off as KRAUT and SIX EYES
shoot him a look.)

Shit. Sorry. Right. No families, no history. 'Won't happen again.

SIX EYES

Better not. This guy seems like a good egg, but, bottom line is all business.

DICTIONARY

Pretty scary. We'll all slip up. How in hell do we refrain from mentioning things
from our past?

KRAUT

Practice. Practice makes perfect. Starting now.

(That remark brings a bit of silence.)

LONG NUTZ

What's with this "cell" stuff an' the dumb-ass names? Hell, I already
fergot mine.

GUNG HO

(Not missing a beat.)

Rock, Kraut, Long Nutz--wonder why--Dictionary, Chesty, Six Eyes,
Napoli, Sicily, Fat Daddy. You call me, Gung Ho, comrades.

LONG NUTZ

Not bad, Shorty, not bad! Fer yer information, I am 6 foot 5 ½ inches--that
answer yer question?

NAPOLI

(To SICILY)

Our fearless leader is late, is he not, Dago?

SICILY

You speak da Eng-lish to me, Wop?

(They laugh loudly. A door is heard to open
and shut off-right.)

KRAUT

Can it. Ten-hut!

(They all pop to as ROCK enters in dress blues.
He pauses to look at them, checks his watch,
lights a cigarette and pulls up a chair, this time
sitting on it properly but with legs crossed.)

ROCK

At ease, ladies. Sit where you are on the floor, smoke if you have them, ashes in your hand.

(KRAUT, DICTIONARY, NAPOLI, and SICILY take out cigarettes and light up. As soon as they take their first drag, ROCK speaks.)

ROCK (Cont.)

The smoking lamp is out.

(The four men blink, pausing. ROCK'S voice drops soft, but, very clipped.)

I said, "out." NOW!

(The four butt their cigarettes on heels of shoes and put the butts in their pockets, reluctantly.)

No offense, girls. From now on, only Rock smokes in this cell.

(He smiles.)

Wanted you to have one final drag. Make it last til summer fades, '59.

(A beat. He is never sarcastic when he refers to them with female or affectionate terms.)

Now, sweethearts, do you think it a given right that a government may train you to kill another human being?

(All speak at once—all say, "Yes, Rock!")

Really? Fat Daddy, elaborate.

FAT DADDY

Like I said last night, Rock, the military trains to kill the enemy.

ROCK

Did you "muse" on this as I asked?

FAT DADDY

Well, yes, I guess so.

ROCK

Don't think you did. Dictionary, what does "muse" mean?

DICTIONARY

To mediate, ponder.

CHESTY

As opposed to a "Muse," which is a goddess of song, poetry, the arts and sciences.

ROCK
And what is a "musette," Chesty?

CHESTY
I do not know, sir.....Rock.

ROCK
A small bagpipe with a sweet sound....as one might hear at the funeral rites of two Navy brothers who went down with the Indianapolis.

(Stunned silence; CHESTY'S eyes fill, but,
he chokes back his emotion.)

ROCK (Cont.)
Indeed, let us never speak of it again. Past sorrow has no place among us. Ever. And a "musette bag," Gung Ho, what does your photographic memory recall about that military device?

GUNG HO
I have never heard of it, Rock.

ROCK
And you a man with longings to transfer to the U.S. Marine Corps....shame on you. Tell him, Kraut.

KRAUT
A musette bag is a canvas or leather case or wallet suspended from a belt worn over the shoulder for soldiers to carry provisions.

ROCK
Or weapons. Weapons in search of soft places, soft spots.
(Pause.)
And what do I mean by "soft places, soft spots," Kraut?

KRAUT
I'm.....not sure, Rock.

ROCK
Care to guess?

KRAUT
Targets?

ROCK
Very good. At least, that will do for now.
(He removes his blue dress jacket; a musette

bag hangs over one shoulder. He removes nine Mars candy bars from it, handing each man one.)

ROCK (Cont.)

Have a Mars bar, pussies. Quick energy to prepare you for the missions I am about to reveal. Tomorrow we turn to skills and training. Go on, eat up, all of you.

(They proceed to do so.)

"I have a gentleman in the balcony, Dr.!"

CHESTY

"Twenty silver dollars and a box of Mars bars to that gentleman!"

ROCKY

Excellent, Chesty, excellent. You listened to Dr. I.Q. as a boy?

CHESTY

(Almost responds—catches himself.)

I wouldn't say, Rock.

ROCK

Precisely.

(Pause.)

Twenty questions, rapid-fire. Answer at will. What was the soft place for Albert Speer? One of you Aryan lads should know.

KRAUT

Architecture.....Nuremberg.

ROCK

And his cranium. What was the soft place for Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

CHESTY

(Theatrically, a heavy Southern drawl.)

Warm Springs, Georgia!

ROCK

Not far from home, eh, Chesty? Yes, Warm Springs...and his legs. What was the soft place for Benito Mussolini?

SICILY

Roma!

ROCK

And his heart. For Winston Churchill?

LONG NUTZ

London.

ROCK

And his voice box. For Charles DeGaulle?

SIX EYES

Paris.

ROCK

And that long neck. For Dwight Eisenhower?

GUNG HO

Normandy.

ROCK

And his back, as well as the Women's Army Corps.

(The men laugh, but, it subsides, uneasily.)

That will do, for now. Pretty fair associations for a bunch of lassies.

(Pause.)

The subject is "Missions." To be sent forth to perform stipulated service.

Better yet, that which one is destined to do, what one is fitted or suited to do...

Your Calling. The United States Army is organizing a series of squads at various bases across the country....collective training units with collective skills for night infiltration behind enemy lines for the purpose of killing the enemy. These are loosely being called, "Kill Squads." Surprise, surprise, Fat Daddy, we are NOT such a squad.

(Stunned silence.)

No, you were selected by me for more elite duty. We are smaller than a standard squad because we will never deploy as a collective unit. We are a "cell," which can be of any size, any number. Yet, we will train as a collective unit in order to determine by test and observation if even one of you may be able to rise to the level of mission, of missionary. It is my responsibility to raise you all to that level. My superiors say it cannot be done. They would settle for one of you succeeding, I suspect, though they expect none of you to do so. I am an eternal optimist. Think of yourselves as being between Rock and a hard place looking for a soft place. You need not worry if that soft place for you may turn out to be an enemy or a friend, an animal or an object, a time or a place. Learn this now: soft place is target and target is always only target. Nothing less or nothing more. Target is target. Memorize that and live it. Also learn that anything, ANYTHING, can be a weapon, become one. A ballpoint pen is a weapon...a finger is a weapon...a truck loaded with explosive is a weapon, as is any airplane or moveable object. A person armed with explosives is a walking weapon, albeit suicidal. That type of zeal cannot be trained. It must be instinctual, visceral, FELT! Well, all that you must think about now is training. Train with zeal as a missionary. Let training be

ROCK (Cont.)

the end-all-be-all for each of you. In this manner, you will be ready should the call ever come and you hear a soft place revealed, a soft spot targeted, followed by the phrase, "Finis Coronat Opus"—Latin, babies, for "The End Crowns the Work."

(Pause.)

Fatigues at 0800 tomorrow....perhaps you figured out that 0800 means 0805 for Rock. Now, watch this step....I challenge any of you girls to match it.....because you are going to have to do so!

(ROCK snaps his fingers and does a good twenty seconds of top-notch tap as he exits. The men sit on the floor, speechless, as lights fade to darkness with taps again playing out there somewhere.)

SCENE 3

“TRAINING”

(At sunlight on the third day, each of the nine soldiers enters carrying a neatly stacked pile of army fatigue dress, complete with cap and boots. They come to the front of the stage, facing full front, forming a horizontal line across the entire stage. They proceed to remove their olive brown uniform, stacking same in a neat pile by their feet, and quickly dress in fatigues as the morning bugle sounds in the distance. When each man speaks, he does not look at anyone else, keeping eyes front as each undresses and redresses.)

DICTIONARY

Are we at least allowed to discuss what he told us?

KRAUT

Just nothing about our pasts, civilian or army.

DICTIONARY

I guess we're to be trained as sharpshooters, marksmen—I don't get it—I barely passed basic I was such a bad shot.

GUNG HO

Nobody said you would use a rifle or any other kind of piece.

LONG NUTZ

Mebbee ya get ta talk the target to death.

(General laughter and high spirits.)

SICILY

Or whack them with your Oxford Old English!

FAT DADDY

Big mitts, Dictionary, you could always choke the poor bastard!

(As the fun and laughter continue, ROCK enters from right and behind them, pulling a large box on silent, rubber castors. The men do not

see him. He is in clean, sharp fatigues with a glass shine on his boots.)

DICTIONARY

Talk about big mitts! Your hams are as big as your butt!

FAT DADDY

I'm a hell of a catcher, tell you that for sure! Tigers had a look at me as a kid in Detroit!

CHESTY

Watch it, Fat Daddy....you must be kidding....talking about Detroit, LOUISIANA, right?

FAT DADDY

Yeah, right, right, De-troit never never land!

SIX EYES

With my eyesight, the target damn well better be close!

NAPOLI

Closer the better, eh, Sicily?

SICILY

Depends on the target, Paisan. In the old country, men always liked to shoot downhill.....down at the target.

KRAUT

Cut the crap. You Rinks get it, don't you?

DICTIONARY

Get what?

KRAUT

"Sharpshooters. Marksmen." Not all of us. Euphemisms.

NAPOLI

Euph-a-what?

FAT DADDY

Experts....kill squad.

KRAUT

NOT a kill squad....you better start listening and remembering with accuracy. We train as a unit, perform alone. What the hell's the matter with you guys? Call it what it is.

ROCK

Such as a spade is a spade?

(Startled, the men react and come to attention.
Only FAT DADDY is not fully dressed—his boots
are not tied. Silence.)

ROCK (Cont.)

Dictionary, tell Napoli what a euphemism is while Fad Daddy ties his laces.

DICTIONARY

The substitution of an inoffensive or mild term or expression for one that might offend or disturb.

ROCK

Kraut, your pragmatic cell leader urges you to the explicitly correct term. . .
What is it I will train you to be, my Aryan warrior? Hmm, Kraut?

KRAUT

Assassin.

(Silence. No one moves.)

ROCK

And the definition of "assassin," Dictionary?

GUNG HO

(Instinctively.)

One who kills by surprise, secret, or treacherous assault!

ROCK

Or an "appointed" one? Actually, ladies, murder does not really apply
in certain operations. Did Brutus think of himself as a murderer?

CHESTY

Antony proved him to be one.

ROCK

Did he now? Since I asked Dictionary to explain the term, "assassin,"
and you girls became impetuous, let us give the chick a chance to reply. Now, my
beloved Dictionary, give these cuties the real definition of the word.

DICTIONARY

One of a Mohammedan secret order, which, at the time of the Crusades, practiced
secret killing while under the influence of hashish.

LONG NUTZ

Hot damn, we gonna get hash as daily issue?

(They all laugh, including ROCK, who breaks it suddenly with still another quick tap dance routine.)

CHESTY

Rock, that's really terrific! You have to be a professional!

(ROCK taps two steps to CHESTY and strikes him with a quick flick of two fingers to his throat.)

ROCK

Very professional! Now you got it.

(CHESTY'S mouth opens, but, no sound is emitted—he goes to one knee, hands clasped to his throat. The men are horrified. CHESTY starts to choke and rolls to the floor as ROCK leans down and presses the lower part of CHESTY'S throat. CHESTY gasps, sucks air, and lies there, panting.)

ROCK (Cont.)

Chesty will be fine in a moment. Element of professional surprise, eh, Chesty, m'love? In a month, no one will ever be able to do that to him again. Chesty, parle assassinare or terroriste, response is "tremein," eh? You do tremble.

(Pause.)

All right, grab some floor. I have a present for each of you.

(He grins at LONG NUTZ.)

No, it is not hashish, Long Nutz. We are not Mohannedans. However, we are American Negro, well, African-American to the rest of you, German-American, English-American, Russian-American, Italian-American, and Polish-American. Or should I say, Polish-JEWISH-American?

(FAT DADDY squints, but, remains silent.

No one speaks. CHESTY sits up, aided by KRAUT.)

Professional response—silence. Nice. From this instant forward, there is no calling a spade a spade. No race, no color, no ethnic nonsense, not even gender nonsense. Got that, ladies? GOT IT?

(All respond, "RIGHT, ROCK!" CHESTY is still recovering.)

Loverly. I am not of woman born nor man spawned. I do not see my target as such, either. Target is.....?

(Uniformly: "TARGET!")

How sweet it is, pussies, ipso facto, la dee smoochee.

(Pause; he is suddenly moved to inexplicable emotion.)

I shall say this only once and we will never refer to it again because you will need

ROCK (Cont.)

no word to define you. You will be the finest of its kind from the Mohammedan trained to the Sturmbannführer Otto Skorzeny trained!

(With relished sensuality.)

“Assassin. Terroriste.”

(Pause; he inhales deeply.)

Kraut, tell the twits who Skorzeny was among your brethren.

KRAUT

Member of the S.S.....a Major in the German army of the Third Reich who devised a scheme to rescue Mussolini from the Allies who had captured him. Also devised a system of infiltration into and beyond enemy lines for sabotage and assassination. A champion after the war of both the common German and Russian soldier whom he declared the true heroes of World war II.

ROCK

(Approvingly.)

Ah, I chose you well, little Kraut.

FAT DADDY

(Unable to contain himself.)

A fuckin' Nazi!?!

ROCK

(Turning directly to FAT DADDY.)

Shall we dance, “Putz?”

FAT DADDY

What?

ROCK

Let's dance, “Kike!”

(A beat of stunned silence.)

Come on, Mein Pollack, dance with the fuckin' “Nigger!”

(No one moves. Gently, as in a song, ROCK almost sings as he takes FAT DADDY into his arms and moves expertly into a slow waltz.)

As I said, darling, today is the end of such nonsense. My, you dance very well... ..it is true, is it not, what they say about stout men being light on their feet? And did you know, Fat Daddy, that a pollack is a fish of the North Atlantic? Never met a stupid assassin in my life. Mohammed to Skorzeny, sharp, sharp, sharp. The assassin eliminates as he creates mass terror.

(He stops abruptly.)

Grab some floor, Fat Daddy. Time for your holiday gifts a trifle early.

(He wheels the large cart downstage and

opens it. All eyes are on the lid as it yawns open.)

ROCK

Listen up, dames. I will hand each of you an object—a weapon, a tool, or, whatever. I will offer one hint to you concerning your object. Ask no questions, make no comment. Immediately take your object and depart for your barracks and area. Study and examine the object daily until you think you know it and understand it completely. Discuss the object with no one. Keep it out of sight somehow and safe within your area. As our general training proceeds over the weeks and months, ahead, I will...on occasion...solicit your presence in this room with me alone. What we do will remain strictly between us. Our general training will include calisthenics, general combat exercises, special assignments. There will also be some competitive sport experience and plenty of down-time relaxing with food, playing cards, even watching movies, Hollywood and“otherwise”—written material bearing on your object will be made available to you to assist with your research, study, and mastery of said object.

(He snaps off a couple tap steps, reaches into the the box, and withdraws a piece of metal piano wire about eighteen inches long with two reinforced metal handles on each end of the wire.)

Long Nutz—do you know what this is called?

LONG NUTZ

Nope, I do not, Rock.

ROCK

You need never know. Simply think of it as “piano wire with handles.” Hint. It is not for strangulation.

(LONG NUTZ instinctively retreats a step.)

Take it. And begin to develop your lower arm strength. Dismissed.

(A bit reluctantly, LONG NUTZ takes the wire and exits alone.)

Napoli—front and center.

(ROCK hands NAPOLI a small, black revolver.)

Hint. Very close targets. Dismissed.

(NAPOLI takes the pistol and exits.)

Chesty!

(ROCK hands CHESTY an entrenching tool.)

Hint. The point of the wooden handle. Center of chest. Dismissed.

(CHESTY exits with the tool.)

Six Eyes!

(ROCK hands SIX EYES another entrenching tool.)

Hint. The Metal spade. Center of back—spine. Dismissed.

(SIX EYES exits with the tool.)

ROCK (Cont.)

Sicily!

(ROCK hands SICILY a wooden, Italian rifle with no telescopic sight.)

Hint. No shooting downhill. Up, close range, exploding bullet. Dismissed.
(SICILY exits smiling with the rifle.)

Fat Daddy!

(ROCK hands FAT DADDY a gleaming bayonet.)

Hint. Upward into a kidney, never fail to twist for silence. Dismissed.
(FAT DADDY exits, frowning.)

Dictionary!

(ROCK hands DICTIONARY a knife with a 6 inch razor-sharp edge and dark, rubber handle.)

Hint. The voice box. Dismissed.

(DICTIONARY exits, breathing hard.)

Gung Ho!

(ROCK hands GUNG HO an Italian, wooden rifle, WITH a telescopic sight.)

Hint. Behind any moving target. Dismissed.

(GUNG HO exits, smiling.)

Kraut!

(ROCK hands KRAUT an Army issue, brown, woolen sock with a very heavy metal ball in it.)

Hint. Develop that left arm muscle—study the human cranium. Dismissed.

(KRAUT exits with the sock and ball. Alone, ROCK pulls from the bottom of the cart a floppy, stuffed, faceless human figure or doll. Taking the dummy into his arms affectionately, he reaches into the cart and a click is heard. Romantic waltz music, heavy with violins, swells up and ROCK waltzes beautifully, looking for all the world like Cagney or Kelly. He suddenly stops by the cart and kicks it adroitly with his right heel. The music stops at once; ROCK crushes the dummy into smaller form and drops it coldly into the cart. He slams the lid of the cart and pulls it out off right as lights fade to a pool d.l. where NAPOLI stands staring at his pistol, transfixed. He puts the barrel under his nose to smell it when he hears ROCK'S voice from the dark off-left. When ROCK enters, it is over a month later—thus, this segment and the others that follow in Scene 3, are new beats, not new scenes, which mark a great deal of time passing.)

ROCK

Napoli, dear heart, do you plan to sip that .38 or eat it?

NAPOLI

Beg pardon, Rock?

ROCK

Sniffing the barrel of a pistol will not tell you as much as tasting it.

NAPOLI

Tasting it?!?

ROCK

Certainly. Wet the small finger on your left hand and insert it into the end of the barrel.

(NAPOLI does so.)

Turn your finger, retract it, and taste it gently on the tip of your tongue.

(NAPOLI does so and reacts with a grimace.)

If recently fired, you will taste residue of smoke; if not, you will taste metal and cleaning oil. Well?

NAPOLI

Metal and oil.

ROCK

Yes. Are you familiar with the operation of the small .38 revolver?

NAPOLI

Somewhat....I will be more so, Paisan, ah, "Rock."

ROCK

Good. Now, how effective is such a weapon, do you think, at, say, six feet?

NAPOLI

With a lucky shot, can be fatal.

ROCK

Precisely. Fine start. At what range is this piece most effective?

NAPOLI

Very close.

ROCK

How close, exactly?

NAPOLI

Foot?

ROCK

Ideal at three inches. Now, where might the soft place be best located for a three inch shot?

NAPOLI

Temple or between the eyes?

ROCK

Think again.

NAPOLI

Heart or stomach?

ROCK

Only if you are stupid and full of dumb luck. Return to the cranium, but, think.

NAPOLI

Base of the back of the neck?

ROCK

Place a finger behind an ear and locate the tender spot to the side and beneath the bone.

(Napoli does so. He smiles)

Perfect soft place. Perfect for the .38. Perfect because the target never sees it coming, never flinches, and, usually, makes no sound whatsoever. Even if remaining conscious for fifteen seconds, speech will be gone within ten seconds and fatal coma commences within twenty. You will become proficient at this to the point of perfection, preceded by a clever hand movement called, "palming."

NAPOLI

Palming?

ROCK

Yes, sweetie. Palming. You will learn to wear the .38 in a sheath beneath a calf-length sock; you will become adept at fronting with a .45 caliber pistol and learn to palm it while you extract the .38 for the kill. None of this is difficult and you are a good Paisan.

NAPOLI
Just like my Pop.....
{Pause.}

ROCK
Odd that you would mention your father with pride. Is he not still at San
Quentin?

NAPOLI
(Defiance rising.)
Yes, but he was railroaded!

ROCK
Oh, was he now?

NAPOLI
Mama and I knew the truth!

ROCK
What truth?

NAPOLI
(Hesitating a moment.)
It was the old Purple Gang out of Cleveland.....set Pop up.

ROCK
Possibly. Tell me, do you miss "Mama" as much as "Pop"?

NAPOLI
I miss no one.

ROCK
My quintessential "loner." Not even a wife....

NAPOLI
Never. Mama's the only good woman I ever knew.

ROCK
(Smiling.)
WHITE HEAT.....

NAPOLI
Come again?

ROCK
Old film.....Jimmy Cagney....."Looka me, Ma, top of the world!" BOOM!

NAPOLI

Sorry, never much for the flicks.

(Pause.)

ROCK

I want you to learn all routes from Los Angeles to Mexico City.

NAPOLI

(Blinking, pausing.)

I.....I don't get it. L.A. to Mexico City? Why?

ROCK

In case you ever need to disappear south, and, quickly.

NAPOLI

I see, Rock, I see.....

ROCK

No, you do not. One day you may.

(Snaps fingers.)

Dismissed.

(NAPOLI starts to salute....)

ROCK

Never salute a non-commissioned officer! You should know better.

(Pause.)

Now, let me see you dance out of here!

NAPOLI

I been trying, honest....I just can't tap dance like you, Rock!

ROCK

Try again.

NAPOLI

I got no idea!

ROCK

It is not a matter of thought, Napoli. It is instinct-reaction! Now, DANCE! Best you can, dance!

(ROCK claps his hands. NAPOLI does an hilarious sort of Italian jig and bounces out the door as ROCK laughs uproariously. Silence for a moment. ROCK removes another pistol from a sheath beneath his right pant leg

and sock. He raises the pistol slowly, pointing it out front and upward, slightly over the audience. He hums for a few seconds, turns, returning the pistol to its place and taps out of sight. Lights make shifts as detailed throughout the remainder of the lengthy Scene 3. NOTE: at least by the following beat involving ROCK and LONG NUTZ, the use of sound effects is encouraged, namely, drums or even scored music if it is rhythmic and creates tension, such as, African drums and the like. Hereafter in Scene 3, ROCK never exits, rather just moving from a pool of light on one soldier to a pool of light on another; leaving the light, the men improvise some form of dance motif as an exit into darkness with their respective weapon. On the other hand, the soldiers should enter in darkness to the place where light will rise and reveal them. Also, by now, the men have carried their brown uniforms/shoes/etc. off-stage from where they had placed them as they changed at the start of Scene 3.

A pool of light rises far stage d.l. where LONG NUTZ stands, snapping his piano wire via its handles. He is not distracted by the sound of ROCK tapping into his area.)

ROCK

Not bad, Long Nutz, not bad. You right or left handed?

LONG NUTZ

As if you didn't already know, eh, Rock?

ROCK

Well, you were a switch-hitter at Texas Tech, were you not?

LONG NUTZ

Sure was, boss, hit about .300 either side of the plate. Nickname was "The Lubbock King of Swat." OK to speak of this?

ROCK

Only with me, Babe. Homeruns?

LONG NUTZ

Senior year, 30 portside, 12 starboard. I threw southpaw.

ROCK

There ye be.

LONG NUTZ

There I be what?

ROCK

The snap of the wire will never be equal as you have long standing muscular superiority from the left...the heart side. Knowing that, do you approach the soft place dead center of the back, slightly left, or slightly right for maximum effect?

LONG NUTZ

Slightly left, with the power?

ROCK

Slightly right, balancing the power. Consequently, the object decapitated will come clean with full strength and not tear or give. No dangle, no sound.

LONG NUTZ

Pretty gruesome, huh?

ROCK

Henry VIII's executioners often missed a clean cut on the initial swing. "Bloody" Mary's boys rarely sharpened an axe—made a mess of things. Beheading is a key ritual of assassination and terror tactics. The fear generated by any example of it is downright embarrassing. It overwhelms. Well, YOU need not be messy if your snap is strong and the wire comes through cleanly.

(Pause)

You like watermelon, am I right?

LONG NUTZ

Love it. Just the hearts.....no seeds, crisp and sweet.

ROCK

Tell me, do you consider watermelon a fruit?

LONG NUTZ

Of course.

ROCK

Is it food or beverage?

LONG NUTZ

Both, I guess. Sharon likes it when I fill a melon with gin.

ROCK
You miss your Sharon.....

LONG NUTZ
Surely do.....

ROCK
She lives alone now.....

LONG NUTZ
Yup.....fer the duration.....

ROCK
Three years married and no children.....

LONG NUTZ
Not yet, nope....

ROCK
(Out of the blue.)
What makes you angry, Long Nutz?

LONG NUTZ
Come again, Serg, Rock?

ROCK
What gets under your saddle to rile you enough to make you lose your temper?

LONG NUTZ
I never lose my temper, Rock.

ROCK
Never?

LONG NUTZ
Well, once when Sharon an' me came home an' found her sister in bed with my best friend.

ROCK
What was so wrong about that?

LONG NUTZ
The smell.

ROCK
What do you mean?

LONG NUTZ
(A hint of anger oddly rising in him.)
I got a keen sense of smell, see----the place smelled like sex for a week!
A week, god damn it!

ROCK
A keen sense of smell can be invaluable in our work. Just control the anger,
Toots—no place for anger in our work. Some emotion, yes, No anger. The
senses, yes.

LONG NUTZ
Right, Rock, right.

ROCK
The issue now is.....watermelon.

LONG NUTZ
How so, Rock?

ROCK
A melon will be at your footlocker each morning.....there is a post behind Barracks
Z to impale said melon. Practice your snap until you achieve a clean cut in less
than five-tenths of a second.

LONG NUTZ
Five-TENTHS! Half a damn second?

ROCK
Or less. Your height is your great advantage, and, that left forearm. Imagine
Fat Daddy trying to use this.

(LONG NUTZ laughs.)
Waltz away, Marie Antoinette!
(LONG NUTZ does so, crudely; ROCK moves into
another pool of light in which SIX EYES stands,
staring at the blade on his entrenching tool.)

ROCK (Cont.)
Wouldn't be much use in the pit of a silver mine, would it, Six Eyes?

SIX EYES
Oh, maybe to dig a hole for a stick of dynamite.

ROCK

Did you enjoy the deep dark of a New Mexico silver mine?

SIX EYES

Not at all.

ROCK

How long before you moved above ground?

SIX EYES

Three months—my math was superb—good with budgets.

ROCK

Tools? How were you with tools?

SIX EYES

Not very good....I can handle a wrench, a screwdriver.

ROCK

One of your favorite drinks....

SIX EYES

Yeah, Carol and I love our screwdrivers.....

ROCK

Miss all that, do you?

SIX EYES

Doggone right.

ROCK

Wild Turkey?

SIX EYES

Ah, now there's a man's drink.....

ROCK

With pretzels....salted nuts.....

SIX EYES

Never met a potato chip I didn't like, Rock.

ROCK

Watch that in the years ahead, honey, you have gained almost ten pounds since arrival in Z. One must be quick of foot....light in movement...for our work.

SIX EYES

As you say. Sorry. I'll have to pass those desserts of yours....wicked brownies, Rock.

ROCK

Thank you. Try one, not three. Be quick and light....

SIX EYES

That was important in the damn silver mines, too....

ROCK

Well, you are above ground.....for now.

(Points at the blade of the entrenching tool.)

Is the metal blade most sturdy when open or locked shut?

SIX EYES

Locked shut, I suppose....

ROCK

No, locked open you have twelve extra inches of thrust support. The point of the blade must strike the base of the spine just above the upper curvature of the buttocks. How far is your vision from 20/20?

SIX EYES

You don't want to know, Rock..

ROCK

I do know. The fact you are nearly blind is an asset when working in the dark. A target dummy of a different height will be hung behind Z each night, sunset. No glasses....blackface....blacktape....black fatigues....use all the other senses. Locate and strike the soft place. What do you think will help you most-ears, nose, tongue, fingers, feet, what?

SIX EYES

Ears? I hear more than I can see!

ROCK

Feet.

SIX EYES

How so?

ROCK

That tool is only a spine-snuff at less than three feet....learn to move as though Christ walking on water....all the senses combined will get you close and behind

ROCK (Cont.)

the soft place, especially, eyes, ears, and nose.....yet all are worthless without sureness of foot. Kiowa and Crow could walk on twigs and hot coals without making a sound. All in the feet. And in a sense of control. Develop a light step, Six Eyes, a strong right biceps. War-dance out of here, Pocahontas!

(SIX EYES leaves in a pathetic Indian war hop and ROCK yells loudly—full stage light rises on the entire training room.)

ROCK (Cont.)

PARTY TIME, LADIES! Two circles of five right here on your prats. HEARTS, girls, the game is HEARTS! Kraut and I deal.

(All nine soldiers race in and sit on the floor forming two circles of five with ROCK at the head of one circle and KRAUT at the other. ROCK and KRAUT deal playing-cards from a deck in their respective pockets.)

FAT DADDY

I refuse to eat the Queen of Spades again, everybody stand warned!

CHESTY

We pass to the right or the left first?

KRAUT

Discard three cards to the man on your left.

CHESTY

'Think I'm getting the hang of this—best to clear out a suit, if possible?

ROCK

(Smiling at CHESTY—a hint of a test of some kind?)

Or the black bitch if no protection for her.

CHESTY

Would I not protect the dark lady, Sergeant Rock?

ROCK

(Still smiling.)

I'm not sure yet.

(Pause; they stare blankly at one another.)

(LONG NUTZ discards three cards to his left.)

LONG NUTZ
Here ya go, Gung Ho! Hope you like 'em.

(GUNG HO looks dourly at the 3 cards.)

GUNG HO
Son of a bitch.

SICILY
Hey, Rock, great, great chow last night!

NAPOLI
Pasta and sirloin, right up my I-talian alley!

ROCK
Nothing but the finest cuisine for my chicks.....

SIX EYES
Love those mashed potatoes....who the dickens really cooks for us?

ROCK
Military secret. Might be me, just might.

(Laughter--some believe it, some do not.)

DICTIONARY
Here y'go, Fat Daddy....read 'em an' weep!

FAT DADDY
(Exploding in anger.)
Fuck! Queen of spades and two little hearts! I'm dead!

(Lots of laughter.)

DICTIONARY
So try to dump her on someone else!

FAT DADDY
You kiddin' me, Bookworm? My only spade and you got first lead! Right down my gut again! And with the duce and Trey of hearts, no way to take 'em all and "shoot the moon"! Fuck this game!

GUNG HO
You always hang a lantern on your problem, Fat Man?

FAT DADDY
What's that supposed to mean, "Comrade?"

GUNG HO

Why shout out your hand and ruin the game? You never learn to follow orders?

FAT DADDY

Who just swore when they got their discard? YOU, Ruskie, YOU!

GUNG HO

Just try following rules and order for a change, silently.

FAT DADDY

(Whipping out his bayonet.)

How'd you like to follow this right up your skinny ass?!?

ROCK

TEN-HUT!

(Everyone stands at attention—long silence.

No drums or music now.)

ROCK (Cont.)

Sheath the bayonet, Fat Daddy.

(FAT DADDY hesitates, then does so.)

Gung Ho, stand where you are and remain. Everyone else pair up. Do it. Pairs, now!

(The other eight men pair up, facing one another.)

Boogie out of here with your partner....waltz preferred. Go. Now!

(The eight leave in a mix of good and bad waltzing.

ROCK walks up and stares into the eyes of GUNG HO.)

On the double, dance, no, RUN get that Italian rifle with scope I gave you and double back here. I shall wait...impatiently.

(ROCK snaps his fingers and GUNG HO runs out, full-speed. ROCK moves down front and does a lovely soft shoe and tap mix, humming/singing as he does so—simply enjoying himself for a stolen moment.)

“...way ...down...upon....the Swaaneeeeeee...river....far, far....from... home.....”

(When GUNG HO runs back in with his rifle, ROCK puts a “button” on the song/dance, arm extended toward GUNG HO, who is dumbfounded.)

The Carcano, please.

(GUNG HO hands him the rifle.)

Please pick up the playing cards.

(As GUNG HO picks up the cards from the floor, ROCK studies him carefully. Lights shift some as the two men stand staring into one another's eyes for a long moment, as though some decision was being made. It takes awhile before ROCK breaks this strange moment.)

ROCK (Cont.)

Mussolini's troops finally got free of these things. That is why so many pawn shops and mailorder houses sell so many of them. Perhaps this weapon is one reason the Italians shot so poorly, what do you think?

GUNG HO

Could be. And they had no Albert Speer running their military operation, as Hitler did with his crack troops.

ROCK

Very good. What do you think of this scope?

GUNG HO

Slightly off to the left.

ROCK

You could compensate and hit a soft place in motion at, say, a hundred feet, more or less?

GUNG HO

Depends on how fast the target is moving.

ROCK

Let us speculate, say, ten miles per hour, give or take an m.p.h.

GUNG HO

I would hit what I wanted to hit.

ROCK

How many rounds would you hit in, oh, six seconds?

GUNG HO

Manual bolt action.....clumsy.....one round for sure, maybe two.

ROCK

Make it three rounds with two hits, minimum.

GUNG HO

Wow, how large is the target?

ROCK

No idea. Could you deliver on a cranium?

GUNG HO

Might make three hits on a torso....

ROCK
Not on a cranium?

GUNG HO
Maybe.....need some luck with three bolt pulls, two resightings, three trigger pulls.....

ROCK
No tolerance for luck or misses.

GUNG HO
All in six seconds is one hell of an order!

ROCK
There are marines that could do it, I am told.

GUNG HO
(Sighs.)
Then a solider can do it.

ROCK
We shall see, shall we not? I have those papers, you know.

GUNG HO
My transfer request?

ROCK
Just so. Very unorthodox request. No precedent I know about, but, a most persuasive argument. Well done.

GUNG HO
Thank you.

ROCK
Rather by the backdoor, or, should we say, the sidedoor?

GUNG HO
Would it help if I make the Carcano sing in six seconds with three hits?

ROCK
On the cranium?

GUNG HO
One for certain on the cranium.

ROCK

Yes, that would help your argument for transfer.

(Pause.)

Hitler admired the Russian soldier even above his own, did you know that, Gung Ho?

GUNG HO

Yes, Rock, I did.

ROCK

You have been to Germany?

GUNG HO

No.

ROCK

Just Russia.

GUNG HO

You know very well I worked a year in Moscow.

ROCK

Were you, in fact, C.I.A.?

GUNG HO

Of course not, Civil service.

ROCK

You married a Ruskie?

GUNG HO

She speaks perfect English, you know that, too.

ROCK

Let us hope. Where is she now?

GUNG HO

New Orleans.

ROCK

French Quarter?

GUNG HO

No, north....out by the lake.

ROCK
Ever step aboard that streetcar by the levy?

GUNG HO
Streetcar?

ROCK
"Desire."

GUNG HO
Never heard of it.....
(Pause.)

ROCK
Lad, your potential is unlimited. Keep studying, young man. And master that Carcano. Now, how do you choose to dance out of here?

GUNG HO
I despise dancing. I don't get it, all this dance stuff.

ROCK
Keeps a man rooted in humanity, Juliet. Also, dancing is rooted in discipline! Craft! Training, timing, practice! Like a sense of humor, dancing retains our tie with music and with the female of our species. Never lose your humanity, Gung Ho, no matter our training or missions. Marines are always good dancers. Good assassins are also. For all you potential, you have a ways to go. Master the Carcano, master Russian dance. Start now.

(ROCK points off and GUNG HO gamely stomps off, looking more like a man marching the goosestep than a vodka drinking Russian—note, however, that this will change as time passes. ROCK laughs a bit at the exiting spectacle, then smiles, then turns very stoic and stares out front a moment as though trying to see into the future. Low drum/music rises again before he taps toward a pool of light rising far downright where KRAUT stands, slowly swinging his sock/metal ball back and forth in a rhythmic arc, his eyes locked on the motion. ROCK stops beside KRAUT, but, keeps one toe tapping to the beat of KRAUT'S rhythmic arc.)

ROCK (Cont.)
Yes. Yes, rhythm is the key.....very much like dancing.

KRAUT
Seems such a simple device.

ROCK

Tis the beauty of it, simplicity. One can be made in a few seconds....the key is the object inside.

KRAUT

A stone of comparable weight wouldn't do?

ROCK

One would think so, but, no. Should be solid metal. Unlike a police blackjack, this is more of a sling. Think David and Goliath.

KRAUT

Could it be thrown, actually slung?

ROCK

Too risky. Maintain control by wrapping the end of the sock or cloth over and under a few fingers....yes, that's the idea.

KRAUT

Always go for the cranium, temple?

ROCK

Preferred, yes, although an expert can site on the center of the chest or low at the spine center between the kidneys.

KRAUT

Seems to me the target would scream like a pig.

ROCK

Only if the swing is off or too soft. Begin by practicing on fairly large objects...start with a grapefruit...progress to a walnut. In time, a marble, finally, a button.

KRAUT

May I ask a question?

ROCK

(Ceases tapping the one foot.)

You may.

KRAUT

Why did you select me as "ranking cell member"?

ROCK

A question for your question: knowing what you now do, who would you choose?

KRAUT
Dictionary.

ROCK
Too intense, too tense. Too cerebral. Good heritage, I grant you.

KRAUT
Chesty?

ROCK
Given to emotion, an artist's sensibilities. Too soft. He begins to worry me.

KRAUT
I understand. Me, too. Well, you put Long Nutz right up there with me.

ROCK
Why did I do so?

KRAUT
He's a pretty loose goose.....you surprised me with him, that's all.

ROCK
Steady nerves in that long drink of water....just like you. Only weakness is his nose.

KRAUT
His nose?!?

ROCK
Never mind.....not really a problem.

KRAUT
Does my ancestry bear on your choice?

ROCK
Certainly.....to some degree.

KRAUT
Is that some sort of insulting generalization? Cold blooded, Aryan killers?

ROCK
Nonsense. Precision, control, given to detail. The Third Reich could have been the most successful, progressive force in history had Hitler remained with his early instincts and been an architect. Or an actor. Did you know he loved film and theatre?

KRAUT

Yes, I know he designed at least three theatres for his dream of rebuilding Berlin as a model city.

ROCK

Just so. In 1938, using the former exhibition room of the Berlin Academy of Arts, Speer created a huge scale model of this dream. The grand boulevard was Hitler's "avenue." All this was to be completed by 1950. A primary goal was to impress us, the Americans, did you know that, too?"

KRAUT

No, but, it doesn't surprise me. He deemed Americans the most impressionable of peoples.

ROCK

Do you think Hitler had good taste in architecture and in furnishings?

KRAUT

His living room at the Chancellery was furnished with a measure of "Gemutlichkeit," yes.

(ROCK smiles, sensing he is being tested.)

ROCK

And what did you think of Bormann's campaign, "Kirchenkampf"?

(KRAUT smiles, pleased with ROCK and himself.)

KRAUT

Foolish. Hitler knew very well the people needed the church—any campaign against it was absurd.

ROCK

And why was that the case?

KRAUT

The church has always been a key way to control the masses. Look at the Muslims.....look at the Mormons. The Fuehrer remained a Catholic to the moment of his death.

ROCK

His suicide.

KRAUT

A bit of the Roman in him, perhaps.

ROCK
Not just a coward?

KRAUT
Hardly.

ROCK
Do you suppose Fat Daddy knows what "Guten Tag" means?

KRAUT
I imagine Fat Daddy has only heard, "Heil Hitler," as echoed in Hollywood films.

ROCK
And what do you think of Fat Daddy?

KRAUT
That some sort of trick question?

ROCK
How so?

KRAUT
I have no feelings about Jews one way or another.

ROCK
And Poles?

KRAUT
Look, Rock, I may be of strong German ancestry, my uncle may have been in the Luftwaffe, but, you know that I had a brother killed in North Africa as a member of the United States Army!

ROCK
Settle down, baby, ride easy.
(Pause.)
You bareback or saddle?

KRAUT
(Warms at once.)
Either—in a race, saddle, of course.

ROCK
Ever ride for fortune and glory?

KRAUT

I was the right size when younger, but, my father needed me at the factory.

ROCK

That will be YOUR factory one day, will it not?

KRAUT

I suppose, yes.....my remaining brother couldn't handle it.

ROCK

Why not?

KRAUT

Compulsive drinker.

ROCK

Wild Turkey and ball bearings do not mix?

KRAUT

Canadian Club. No.

ROCK

But you will be "Master of the Ball Bearing."

KRAUT

(Laughs)

Well, I'd rather be at the track.

ROCK

Chicago track gets a lot of weather, right?

KRAUT

Yes--if I ever get my own nag, it'll have to be a mudder.

(They laugh; pause.)

ROCK

How old were you when you started to lose your hair?

KRAUT

(Cooler now.)

Teens....I'm a worrier.....

ROCK

Pays to be so here. Remain worried. Keeps you alert. One day you can buy an expensive toupee.

KRAUT
I'd be embarrassed.

ROCK
Maybe.

(Pause.)

I chose correctly when I named you ranking cell member under me. You may find it interesting to know that I gave you and Long Nutz the most difficult weapons to master.

KRAUT
I suspected as much.

ROCK
One more thing—what did the Fuehrer think of the American Negro?

KRAUT
Well, Jesse Owens brought Adolph Hitler great distress.

ROCK
(Smiling.)
Yes, with Jesse's "primitive, low animal skills, such as speed and stamina," right?

KRAUT
Just so.

ROCK
And, "coarse sexuality," right?

KRAUT
Depends on the individual person, does it not?

(They stare into one another's eyes a long moment—some sort of standoff. Then ROCK begins to tap one foot again. Slowly, KRAUT taps a foot along with him. At last, they break into full rhythm together and laugh. ROCK jerks a thumb over his shoulder.)

ROCK
On your way, Bojangles, and perfect that sling swing!

(KRAUT taps out expertly, pleasing ROCK who applauds. As ROCK claps, he moves into the light rising on CHESTY, who is thrusting with his entrenching tool by the handle, as

(though it were a fencing foil.)

ROCK (Cont.)

You played Laertes at Drake in good ole Des Mo-Nez and you out-fenced your Hamlet every time. Why didn't you get cast in the lead? Too suntanned?

CHESTY

The honky had this deep baritone voice...must have been the reason.

ROCK

Why a private school in Iowa....so far from home and your brethren peanut farmers?

CHESTY

Applied all over hell for a scholarship.....got one at Drake.

ROCK

But no "color blind" casting?

CHESTY

Not in roles like Hamlet.

ROCK

Yet you were the superior actor?

CHESTY

Some thought so.

ROCK

Your native hue was too dark for Denmark?

CHESTY

Prof Fiderlick called 'em as he "seen" 'em. I had no quarrel with Prof.

ROCK

No shit, Little Eva, that a fact?

CHESTY

A fact.

ROCK

All the way from Alpharetta, Georgia, for a drama scholarship?

CHESTY

Wasn't in drama.

ROCK

That's right.....your true calling—second base.

CHESTY

I made the pivot well....

ROCK

Double-play expert..... the arm none too strong?

CHESTY

True.....I had the range for shortstop, not the arm.

ROCK

Light on your feet?

CHESTY

And fast.

ROCK

Fast, or, quick?

CHESTY

Both.

ROCK

Yet you resist dancing.

CHESTY

I can dance.

ROCK

I do not doubt it. Then dance for me.

CHESTY

No way.

ROCK

You defy me simply because I am as black as you, Mercutio? You trade on racial issue with defiance?

CHESTY

No.

ROCK

Then explain.