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## God of Baghdad

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# **THE GOD OF BAGHDAD**

A Play in One Act

By Phillip Trezza

## **CHARACTERS**

Phil – Army medic in Baghdad, African-American, Male, 23-28

Psychiatrist – civilian mental health professional, Female, 30-45

## **ACT 1**

(two comfortable CHAIRS face each other on an otherwise blank stage; lights up on PHIL and PSYCHIATRIST, seated, facing each other in a powerful silence; Phil is in full battle rattle with helmet off, as though he's has just come in from the field; she wears a GREEN DRESS, has a NOTEBOOK on her lap, PEN in hand)

### **PHIL**

I didn't sleep much last night.

I don't sleep much at all.

War whispers to me,

it hisses, it calls.

I can hear it, feel it,

the buzzing of flies

swarming wracked bodies

with no life in their eyes.

Put 'em in a bag,

put 'em on a truck,

I'm the medic,

The coroner,

The Soldier,

Man, fuck!

The first dead guy

I ever saw

had a caterpillar mustache,

a round in his skull.

Bloated and glossy  
while the sun got hotter,  
dumped near a field  
where the kids play soccer.  
Words of my platoon mate's wives  
come at night.  
They say:

**PSYCHIATRIST**

Bring em back safe, Doc.  
Bring em back, alright?

**PHIL**

You know, when a big bomb goes off in a Baghdad street, you see it first.  
(SFX – light flash)  
Then you hear it.  
(SFX – distant boom)

The dust rides the shockwave. Before it hits you in the chest.  
(speaks into a handheld RADIO from his VEST)  
Raider 7, this is Raider 4 Doc. You got a location on that explosion? Over.

**PSYCHIATRIST**

(her voice emerges as if it's a radio transmission)  
Raider 4 Doc. Roger. Explosion vicinity three blocks to your east. The corner by the mechanic shop.

**PHIL**

Raider 7, this is 4 Doc. Roger. Any friendlies hit?

**PSYCHIATRIST**

4 DOC, this is Raider 7, negative. Does not appear coalition forces were hit. Vehicle borne IED with likely civilian casualties. We're the only platoon out here. That means you're the only medic. We'll help you all we can. Just show us what to do, Doc. Over.

**PHIL**

(SFX: pops of distant gunfire)

Raider 7, Raider 4 DOC, roger. Let's get over there, set a cordon. Over.

**PSYCHIATRIST**

4 DOC, Raider 7, we got your back. We'll provide a perimeter and try to help triage. Iraqi Police are headed your way. They'll provide support and casualty transport. Over.

**PHIL**

Raider 7, Raider 4 DOC. Make sure the cops don't load casualties until I evaluate. I don't want anyone bleeding out on the way to the hospital. Over.

**PSYCHIATRIST**

(in radio transmission voice)

4 DOC, Raider 7, Roger that. Let's move.

**PHIL**

Roger. Moving.

Breathe. Just fucking breathe. Freak out later.

Raider 7, Raider 4 Doc. I can't see shit. Dust is everywhere. Are you guys on scene yet? Over.

How could anyone place  
so much fury and hate  
into a car, on a corner,  
where the street kids play?  
Pink and red blood,  
limbs, skin and brains,  
wads of wet clothing  
with human remains.  
Bits of the building,  
hit by the blast,  
Mixed with pieces,  
of humans are cast  
across the wrecked street  
as far as I see.  
My platoon and the crowd,  
start calling for me.

Out here I'm everything,  
the good and the bad,  
who lives and who dies  
I'm the God of Baghdad.

(Phil returns to the chair opposite Psychiatrist, a bit drained by the recollection  
he just shared)

(he lifts his head; Psychiatrist and Phil together focus on a spot as if they see a  
television; they are watching the ghost of the Twin Towers' fall)

(Psychiatrist gasps and covers her mouth; she reaches for Phil's hand; they  
clasp)

Mom. Jesus. What just happened?

Remember when you took me up there?

I do. Like it was yesterday.

The elevator ride took so long I felt sick. Maybe I was just nervous. Excited. I couldn't wait to  
get to the top.

When I finally looked out...

The city on a bright sunny day. The haze on the horizon. Top of the world.

Nothing's ever made me feel so big and small at the same time.

(Phil returns her hand to her lap; she shakes her head, knowing, frightened)

It's burning, mama.

I gotta go.

(Phil pulls hand back; he walks away from the psychiatrist)

## **PSYCHIATRIST**

(radio transmission)

Raider 4 DOC, this is Raider 7, we're arriving at blast site time now. Setting up cordon. Are you  
on site? Over.

## **PHIL**

Raider 7, 4 DOC, Yeah. I see you.

(Phil engages audience)

Listen up! When evaluating and triaging I need you to make sure they're alive. First thing you do  
is stop any major bleeding.

Tourniquets! If the limb's missing, or the bleeding is bad, put a tourniquet on it.

Strap it high and tight on the bone, for arms or legs. Let's go! Once you get it on, let me know so I can evaluate. If the bleed's in an area where you can't get a tourniquet, pack it with gauze, put a shit load of pressure, and call me to help.

Hey you! Let's get the shirt off of that one. You see the shrapnel? We need to see what's going on. Get those clothes off. Cut 'em away, cut 'em away. Goddammit, let's go!

Good, good. Now wipe the blood off.

(Phil makes a scratching motion)

Bend your fingers like claws. Make a scratching motion to find puncture wounds. We can't fix it if we can't find it.

There!

Run your fingers down the torso and across the back. See, look, there's one. Look for any more holes. If there's an entry wound you need to check for an exit wound. It's not just the big ones that kill them, it's the little bastards we don't find.

You got a patient for me? Okay, let's see.

(Phil kneels to Psychiatrist who lies sprawled; she wears a BRIGHT RED  
LEOTARD; around the red thigh is a TOURNIQUET)

You got a tourniquet on this chewed up leg. Good job.

Nice placement. High, tight. Bleeding's under control.

(Phil assesses)

Okay, so after we fix the big bleeds we do a head-to-toe.

ABC. Airway, Breathing, Circulation.

Make sure the airway's open. Tilt the head back and lift the chin. Make sure they're breathing.

Make sure they've got a pulse.

If they're not breathing and do not have a pulse, they are dead.

(Phil assesses the rear of Psychiatrist's head; pulls back a hand; a  
focused, crimson spotlight stains his upturned palm)

Alright, that's a wasted a tourniquet. Move on.

Go.

(Phil rises; waves frantically offstage)

Wait! Hey! No, no, no.

*As-salamu alaykum.* What are you doing? Stop! Put him down, put him down.

I need to check him first! If he's got have a bad bleed, he'll die before you get him to the hospital.

No, man. No.

Can you not understand me? English?

Of course not. Of course you don't understand me.

I guess they'll just die in the back of your fucking truck then.

Goddammit.

(Psychiatrist, on her knees beside a blotch of bright crimson light)

### **PSYCHIATRIST**

Doctor! Mistah! Mistah!

### **PHIL**

*Salam.*

(Phil approaches gently; as he nears, she grows more hysterical)

This your kid? He yours?

(she tears at her dress, digs up dirt and throws it over herself)

I understand. I know. Lemme take a look. Okay?

I don't like the look in his eyes.

Not much bleeding. I guess that's a good sign.

Airway's open.

There's some char on his lips.

He's not breathing. No pulse.

Ma'am, you can't understand me, either.

Fire.

(tries to pantomime the concept)

Fire. In the blast. Your boy breathed in fire. His airway is scorched. The face is burned. His lips. See?

(Psychiatrist quiets, not from calm but shock)

### **PSYCHIATRIST**

Mistah finished?

(how can he console her?; he can't)

**PHIL**

Yeah.

Finished.

(walks away; lights a CIGARETTE)

After a day like this

I go back to base,

and climb to the rooftop

of our bombed-out space.

I listen to the prayers

from distant minarets,

second guess decisions,

chain-smoke cigarettes.

Gunfire in the city

Flashes of light.

War's thunder rolls,

through the Arabian night.

I suppress thoughts of home,

Family and friends,

my heart can't be with them

'til the mission here ends.

But while I'm here I'm everything,

the good and the bad,

who lives and who dies

I'm the God of Baghdad.

(Phil tosses away cigarette)

The fucked-up thing

in all this sorrow,

I gotta get up and do it

all again tomorrow.



(he returns to the chair opposite Psychiatrist)

Days like this, Doc, you know.

You start wondering what days like this are doing to you.

(head in hands)

God.