

EXCERPT FROM **BACK IN THE WORLD**, A DRAMATIC FULL-LENGTH PRODUCED PLAY IN ONE ACT. The play, a series of interconnected monologues delivered by four black veterans of the Vietnam War recall, reflect on and relive some of their searing experiences before, during and after their service in Vietnam. A fifth character—The Man—is a homeless Vietnam Veteran who lives day-to-day in Detroit and fights to maintain his sanity against the backdrop of urban gunfire and the sounds of police helicopters patrolling the skies and sounding (at least to him) like the Huey helicopters he became familiar with in Vietnam. The Man has something in common with the other characters; they may not remember his name but at one point or another, this nameless man has touched the lives of the other characters. Theatrically, he serves as something of a ghost providing “memory dialogue” with the other characters.

Anthony “Jam” Brazil is from Indianapolis. He is a veteran of the Fourth Infantry Division: “Duc Pho, May ’69. Saigon, October ’71, December ’71.” He has seen a lot of action and the persistent memory of it hurts. As he states early on in his monologue he has killed about as many people as are in the theater listening to him—some Viet Cong, some Chinese. But it is the innocent casualties he remembers most.

Brazil: I killed a seven-year old boy once. Seven or eight. Easiest thing I’ve ever done. Killin’ that boy. Didn’t look back, don’t regret it. I mean, that’s what bein’ a soldier’s all about, right? No frets, no regrets. They don’t train you to be a—a philosopher or social worker. They train you to kill, to survive, and that’s that. Find the enemy and kill ‘em. And, I mean—when you’re seventeen, eighteen years old and—*(Beat)*—We were taking fire outside of Duc Pho. The Fourth. My company was under some heavy fire and—in the first few seconds a couple of our guys bought it, *(Snaps his finger)* Just like that. One minute, they were there, next minute gone. One guy—a brotha—got it through the eye. Right next to me. Took the back of his head off. I didn’t really think about it till later—and, man—all I could think was—“That coulda been me.” This guy, we used to drink together, have some laughs, maybe, you know, do a little smoke. All that stuff. Got to be pretty friendly, I guess. After he’s killed, I can’t remember his name or what he looked like. I mean it was *like* that over there. Adrenaline. That’s what you lived on for six, eight, ten months

Brazil: (Cont'd.) at a time. Pure adrenaline. Pumped. Wired. Every sense is amplified. Anything that doesn't mean survival, forget it. Kick it out. You're hyped on what keeps you alive. *(Beat)* Insulation. When that blood was picked off next to me, I felt like a part of my insulation—part of my life-support system was gone. I mean—war strips you of compassion, of humanity. Makes you an animal. Shit, I was trained to be one and baby let me tell you somethin'—I was Kind of the Jungle. *(Beat)* When the fighting outside of Duc Pho stops, the slicks fly in and we, you know, establish a purple-out zone. Get the wounded out. Scoop up the dead. Charlie's either dead or shakin' ass through a tunnel, right? Outta nowhere, this eight-year old boy comes flyin' out of a hooch, runnin' as fast as he can for one of the Huey's. I see him and bring him down. Just like that. Funny thing, though. Before he even hits the ground—he blows up. Freaks the shit outta me. This kid—just—he just—all I could figure was—he was in a no-win situation from the get-go. Dead anyway you cut it. And, I mean, he probably didn't know what *any* of this shit was about. *(Beat)* I thought about that kid for maybe three, four days. *(Slight beat)* You know, that was one of the worst things that could happen to you over there? Time to think. You start thinking, "What in the fuck am I *doin'* here?" *(Small laugh)* That couple days I smoked enough Thai-stick, man, put a plow ox under! But—I couldn't get that kid outta my head.

The sound a weapon fire and explosion. The sound is more distant as if fading in a corner of memory.

Brazil: (Cont'd.) Started having these weird trips where I'd hold court in my head. Who was guilty? Charlie or me? I had to pull back like, whoa!, *right* damn now! I mean, you don't go in-country with a lot questions. I passed judgement real fast, jack. It was the V.C. that killed that boy. Not me. The sentence? Death by *my* hand. *(Beat)* I mean—kids are supposed to be—sacred, right? Not—not somebody's goddamn cannon fodder. Somebody's weapon. *(Beat)* At least, that's the picture they paint here. But, shit—I been out there. Humpin' them damn boonies. Barely nineteen, runnin' through a damn jungle with live, flesh-eatin' ammo. All in the name of "Democracy." And hell, I don't even know what that shit is! *(Long beat)* Back in the world, of you can call Indianapolis "the world." And all I'm trained to do is kill. Twenty years old now and that's all I

Brazil: (Cont'd.) know how to do. Not exactly the kind of thing you put on a resume. (*Thoughtfully.*) 'Course Indianapolis ain't exactly the kind of town where you need a resume. (*Brightening*) Remember that TV show *Hawaii Five-O*? Remember that? Yeah. Steve McGarrett. "Book his ass, Dan-O." I caught some afternoon re-runs of that shit and got the shock of my life, man. I'm home, O.K? Watchin' Steve McGarrett make Hawaii safe for rich white folk—and like in a *month*, man I see *at least* three episodes about Viet vets off the nut. Shootin' and hackin' the shit outta Hawaii. Drugged out and shit. And I'm thinkin' to myself—what is this shit? Is this the way people see me? Hey, so like, I'm getting' a little concerned, O.K.? Two months later, I reup. Four months later, I'm back in 'Nam. Don't need no resume. No references. Pay was steady. Plus, I get to ply my trade. I figured, yeah—if America can't deal with me at home—if I can't get a job and have to live like some damn niggah in Indianapolis—Indianapolis, man!—I will go crazy! Bugs, man! Start shootin' up the town. (Slight pause) Maybe even blow up Hawaii.

The Man: (*Off stage*) Book his ass, Dan-O!

Brazil: So listen. Where do they put me when I get back to the 'Nam? Where does the Army assign me? The Khan-Man's Kingdom. The "Pleasure Dome." Saigon.