

BASKET CASE

by

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COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

TITLE CARD:

During Christmas 1914, five months into World War I, a multitude of unofficial truces were called along the Western Front. These truces came to be known, in whole, as the Christmas Truce.

Troops on both sides were given the opportunity to collect and bury bodies, exchange gifts and even play soccer together. Accounts vary: young Charles de Gaulle and Adolf Hitler were both opposed to the good tidings but others would argue that it was the jolliest time of the year.

We here at B.C. H.Q. are inclined to agree. It was the best goddamn Christmas of them all.

FADE OUT TO BLACK

FADE IN:

INT. TRENCH DUG-OUT - NIGHT (Christmas Eve, 1914)

Four sand bags - four men in dim, unsteady electric light. A wreath on the wall, garland hangs from the entrance; they lounge as best they can around a makeshift table. Three men have two cards a piece while the last deals: Blackjack.

WILLIAM (16) with mere whiskers for an upper lip, strokes them all in the same direction. An American with all the pomp of a bourgeois Englishman and none of the circumstance, he eyes -

OLIVER (19), deep in thought; his cards on the table. He lost a middle finger in a machining accident but manages just fine thank you. He twirls his mustache around a Jersey accent in admiration of -

EDWARD (26) whose mustache is bushiest of them all. Edward ashes his CIGARETTE in his helmet and deftly maneuvers around the stache to take another puff. Texan as a 10 gallon hat and ready to play, he looks at -

The DEALER (16), dead and without an arm. His features otherwise similar to William's.

EDWARD

Oliver?

Next to the Dealer's bad arm, Oliver leads.

OLIVER

Uh -- I'll hit? No. Stay. WAIT.

Hit!

Edward uses the Dealer's good arm to push a card over.

OLIVER

Shit. Take em.

Oliver rolls some cigarettes to the Dealer. William stares the Dealer in the eyes -- their expressions match.

WILLIAM

I'll stay.

Edward takes a contemplative puff on his CIGARETTE.

EDWARD

I figure I'll stay too.

Edward waves the Dealer's arm around in circles.

EDWARD

Alright Dealer, show em and blow  
em!

He drops the arm on the table and flips the Dealer's cards. All the men lean in to see: A BLACKJACK.

EDWARD

Well I'll be damned.

OLIVER

What a gas.

They roll any remaining cigarettes over. Edward uses the arm to collect them.

WILLIAM

Fritz you fu-

An EXPLOSION. The light goes out.

Oliver and William SCRAMBLE in the darkness.

Edward's lit cigarette glows.

WILLIAM

The cigarettes!

The light flickers. William, sprawled across the table, claws for cigarettes. Oliver has tackled the Dealer and Edward remains smoking on his bag.

OLIVER

It's alright buddy, they don't want  
to hurt you.

The light comes back on. Cigarettes litter the ground. Half-off the table, William hangs his head in defeat. Oliver hugs the Dealer.

Dazed, they blink in the light and reassemble onto their sandbags.

Calm and collected, Edward places his helmet on his head - a cigarette peeks out.

EDWARD

Welcome to the front gentlemen.

END OF COLD OPEN.

ACT ONE

EXT. TRENCH - DAY

SUPER: TWO DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS

William mans the machine gun and dictates a letter to Oliver, coffee nearby. Edward, CIGARETTE tucked behind his ear, writes for himself.

A BURST from the machine gun. Nobody jumps.

WILLIAM

Bollocks! Missed.

OLIVER

You know that means balls right?

William sneers.

OLIVER (cont'd)

Should I write that in?

WILLIAM

What -- No! Tell him I'm working like the dickens.

OLIVER

Want me to write anything realistic?

WILLIAM

Fine. Tell him I'm knee deep in shit --

Oliver scrawls on a notepad.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

and that's just for the company. Do you have any cigarettes?

Oliver scoots next to Edward.

OLIVER

I'm all out champ.

(at Edward)

So Ed. Tell me about this dame of  
yours.

Edward keeps writing.

EDWARD

She's twice as pretty as you.

OLIVER

And how pretty am I?

EDWARD

For a jackass? Mighty fine.

Oliver laughs.

EDWARD (cont'd)

How about you Will?

WILLIAM

His name is Johnathan. He's a good  
chum.

Oliver chuckles.

OLIVER

And us?

Bullets STRIKE the dirt near the machine gun. William  
cowers - dirt showers down.

WILLIAM

Wisenheimers God dammit!

Oliver and Edward CRACK UP. A cigarette hits William's  
cheek.

EDWARD

For your troubles.

Edward places another over his ear.

EXT. TRENCH - NIGHT

The three men, separated from their fellow soldiers, form their own Ameri-squad. A BRITISH OFFICER speaks over them all into a megaphone.

BRITISH OFFICER

A German officer with whom we've been corresponding has agreed to a half-hour truce. You are to gather the brave Tommies who've sacrificed their lives for the King.

A collective sigh of relief and scattered cheers.

BRITISH OFFICER (cont'd)

Bring the bodies to the support line for a proper burial. If you find any wounded or otherwise living men carry them directly to the infirmary. Is that clear?

Collective affirmation. The officer turns to No Man's Land.

BRITISH OFFICER

Herr Spiegel. We are ready to commence the truce.

HERR SPIEGEL (O.S.)

As are we! Mark the time, 19:47.  
See you on the field gentlemen!

## BRITISH OFFICER

Alright men, Godspeed!

Cautious, the men climb over the trench wall. Laid out before them -

## EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

Barren, pitted and desolate. Bodies litter the ground, seldom grouped - some without limbs or other appendages. Figures of German soldiers distinguishable in the distance; all lit by innumerable flares.

Oliver plots every step. Edward and William push ahead.

## OLIVER

I would uh take it easy if I were  
you.

## EDWARD

There ain't time for easy!

Oliver lags behind.

## WILLIAM

Herman! We're over here!

William waves. HERMAN, handsome with a bushy mustache and British-German accent, recognizes them and waves back. William and Edward march up and feign a salute.

## OLIVER

At ease gentlemen.

Oliver catches up and twirls his mustache. William blushes, embarrassed.

## EDWARD

Age before beauty, Oliver.

Edward and Herman shake hands.



EDWARD (cont'd)

Why don't you two go and find us  
something good?

Oliver shrugs and William scrunches his face but both wander off.

HERMAN

I'd say we have you beat.

EDWARD

Now I'm liable to kick your ass if  
you keep that up.

Herman LAUGHS. Edward wiggles his stache.

HERMAN

I see all is well!

EDWARD

Yessir we're mighty fine. And  
yourself?

HERMAN

Stronger by the day. I'd never let  
the enemy know otherwise.

Herman winks.

HERMAN (cont'd)

Speaking of the enemy, you're  
acclimating well, yes?

Edward spits.

EDWARD

The Brits are as good as their tea.  
In America, we drink coffee --  
black just the way god intended.

HERMAN

I'm shaking.

(at Oliver)

And you! I hear you drink coffee --  
black.

Oliver attempts to flip Herman off with the wrong hand.  
Without a middle finger, he gives a weird thumbs up.

EDWARD

You've got no idea bud.

Another hearty Herman laugh.

EDWARD (cont'd)

Hell, neither are good for much. I  
think Will missed your head by a  
country mile today.

Behind him, William waves at the two and jogs back, his arm  
raised in victory.

Herman waves back.

HERMAN

You know we Germans don't all look  
alike.

A GERMAN SOLDIER passes by, almost identical to Herman.

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

12 minutes gentlemen!

Edward checks his watch-less wrist.

EDWARD

Well I'll be damned. It was good  
seeing you Herman!

HERMAN

And you, Edward. Should I expect  
any gifts from you this Christmas?

Edward turns to leave.

EDWARD

For Christmas.

HERMAN

For Christmas! Auf Wiedersehen!

Edward catches up to Oliver.

OLIVER

Auf wiener schnitzel!

EDWARD

Where's Willy?

OLIVER

He found some dog tags and checked  
out early.

EDWARD

Well, shit.

Oliver and Edward hasten their search often passing up only  
parts of bodies.

OLIVER

I think there's a full one here!

An arm sticks out of a crater with a WATCH strapped on.  
Oliver bounds to it and peers over the edge.

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

10 minutes gents!

Edward catches up.

OLIVER

Well - most of one.

EDWARD

I suppose it'll have to do.

They slide in at opposite sides of the body.

Oliver hefts the dead weight and shifts it onto his back.  
Edward grabs the legs and they make their way out.

Between them, the DEALER. Dirt and dust bump off as they  
hustle back.

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

5 minutes! Bring em in!

They waddle faster.

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

I can hear them loading the guns,  
come on men!

Edward spots the Dealer's uniform: GERMAN. His eyes wide.

EDWARD

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

They reach the trench and topple in.

EXT. TRENCH - NIGHT

Oliver and Edward fall over themselves. The Dealer rolls to  
a stop against the opposite wall.

They dust off and hop up breathing hard. Edward pulls out a  
cigarette.

Oliver watches him, incredulous.

OLIVER

What about Jesus?

Edward points with the cigarette to the Dealer. He lights it and takes a preliminary puff.

EDWARD

He's one of theirs.

Oliver leans in.

OLIVER

Aw shi --

Bullets STRIKE near them. Oliver ducks.

HERR SPIEGEL (O.S.)

OSCAR SESSHAFT. Sorry gents!

OLIVER

Did you know?

Edward takes a drag. Oliver falls to a seated position, head in hands.

A beat.

EDWARD

Can't toss him over, got too much  
respect for the dead.

A British shell WHIZZES overhead. Oliver tracks it.

OLIVER

I guess it's time.

Edward holds up the Dealer's arm and watch, 8:15.

EXT. TRENCH DUG-OUT - NIGHT

Edward wears the watch and smokes a new cigarette with fervor. The rest of the Ameri-squad abides, settled in opposite the Dealer.

William paces over and crouches face to face with the Dealer. He cocks an eyebrow.

OLIVER

Should we bury him with the others?

William stands, blinking.

WILLIAM

He didn't bleed red, white and blue  
did he?

OLIVER

Well, red.

William frowns.

Edward puffs in deep thought.

EDWARD

We'll bring him back tomorrow  
night; I doubt our friends would  
find a dead body inspiring.

Edward directs the other two to pick up the Dealer.

EDWARD (cont'd)

I don't want to find myself on the  
business end of a British bullet.

William hesitates but they lift and carry him in.

INT. TRENCH DUG-OUT - NIGHT (LATER)

Now outfitted in a British uniform, the Dealer lies on the makeshift table. William dresses the Dealer's bad arm while Oliver prepares the Dealer's 'bed'. Edward attempts to hang the wreath and puffs a now much shorter cigarette.

OLIVER

(at Edward)

His bed is ready your majesty.

EDWARD

Good. Status report Sir William?

WILLIAM

All wrapped up.

OLIVER

And you King Edward?

EDWARD

Quite right, chip cheerio --

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

Lights out, first watch up!

One final pull and Edward flicks the cigarette away.

EDWARD

Will, garland. I'll be seeing  
you -- chaps in the morning. Make  
sure he sleeps well and get him a  
cigarette.

Edward strokes his stache.

EDWARD (cont'd)

It's good for the complexion.

OLIVER

Yessir!

Edward strolls out.

END ACT ONE.

ACT TWO.

EXT. TRENCH - DAY

All three pee into a ditch with some semblance of coordination. Behind them, Oliver's coffee and the Dealer laid against a wall. A LIT CIGARETTE in his mouth -- eyes closed for privacy.

The Dealer's head slumps over.

Edward, done first, buttons up and begins his morning stretches.

Oliver, second, grabs his coffee and checks on the Dealer. He tilts the Dealer's head back to vertical and leans against the wall.

William tidies up, finishing last.

BRITISH SOLDIER (O.S.)

Officer coming through!

They scramble and the entourage marches up.

BRITISH OFFICER

Good morrow!

The trio salute.

BRITISH OFFICER (cont'd)

At ease.

Nervous, they come together to obscure the Dealer.

EDWARD

Morning officer! Just uh watering  
the flowers.

The Officer LAUGHS.

BRITISH OFFICER

I prefer geraniums.



EDWARD

I'm partial to bluebonnets myself.

The Officer parts the Ameri-sea and crouches face to face with the Dealer.

BRITISH OFFICER

And your friend?

OLIVER

Poppies?

WILLIAM

Ha he's --

The Officer lifts the Dealer's eyelids and pulls back to give the Dealer a good once over:

Limp arm; its absent accompaniment.

Cigarette burning.

Lifeless eyes -- the Dealer stares back.

EDWARD

Come on bud, no time for rest!

Edward rushes between them and the Officer backs up.

The Dealer's head tilts back over. Edward rights it and brushes the eyes closed.

The Officer attempts to look around Edward but Oliver steps in.

OLIVER

Yeah! He hasn't been sleeping well  
since he -- well since he --

Oliver feigns losing his arm. The Officer rises.

BRITISH OFFICER

Ah. Yes. I would think the  
infirmary would do a better job on

(MORE)

BRITISH OFFICER (cont'd)

that arm. Just wouldn't go home  
would he?

AWKWARD LAUGHTER. Edward hops up.

WILLIAM

Nope!

EDWARD

Yeah he's a real tough son of a  
bit--

A shell WHISTLES and EXPLODES nearby. William dives to the ground and everyone ducks. Edward CHUCKLES.

BRITISH OFFICER

I suppose we must be off! Take him  
to the infirmary and get that re-  
wrapped. Ta da!

The entourage scamper away. Scattered SHOTS ring out. William places the Dealer's arm over his head for cover and snatches the cigarette for a puff.

Edward pops up just enough to shout over the wall but not enough to get shot. Oliver joins him.

EDWARD

Herman! Good morning!

HERMAN (O.S.)

And to you.

William calms down with a puff.

EDWARD

You missed!

Oliver toasts to that with his coffee.

HERMAN (O.S.)

I thought I saw you peeking out but  
couldn't risk the shot myself.

EDWARD

I'd say that's friendship for ya.

HERMAN (O.S.)

Tonight I try again?

EDWARD

Not if I get you first.

Edward slides down with a smile.

INT. TRENCH DUG-OUT - NIGHT

Makeshift table, sand bags, wreath, garland, the whole nine  
yards. The deck of cards on the table but no blackjack yet.

Edward pulls out a cigarette and Oliver lights it for him.

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

Herr Spiegel?

All but Edward lean forward to listen. Edward checks the  
watch.

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

Spiegel?

HERR SPIEGEL (O.S.)

Yes I've heard you.

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

It's getting rather late, shall we  
gather the men?

HERR SPIEGEL (O.S.)

Ja, we haven't forgotten. We've  
been discussing the matter,  
promise. Seeing as tomorrow is  
Christmas, why don't we do it then?

Nervous glances, most at the dealer.

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

I suppose. The men deserve that  
much.

CHEERS from both sides.

HERR SPIEGEL (O.S.)

My apologies for cutting our  
conversation short. The men have  
been gifted some holiday spirit!

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

And to you Herr Spiegel.

German CHRISTMAS CAROLS drift over. The three men, silent.

EDWARD

Well -

Edward takes a long draw on his cigarette.

BRITISH OFFICER (O.S.)

You there! Away from the nitro!

EDWARD

We needed a dealer anyway.

He smiles, cigarette between his teeth.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENCH DUG-OUT - NIGHT (AFTER THE GAME)

William puts away the cards and cleans up. Oliver and Edward relax against a wall each with plenty of cigarettes after several favorable rounds.

EDWARD

Shall we?

Oliver motions out.

Both stand to leave. Edward places a cigarette in the Dealer's mouth.

EDWARD

For your troubles.

They step out and light up.

EXT. TRENCH DUG-OUT - NIGHT

CHRISTMAS CAROLS. Oliver gazes up; Edward leans against the wall. Both smoke in silence.

Beat.

OLIVER

I think the smoke is finally  
starting to clear.

Edward glances up unconcerned.

EDWARD

Why in God's name did we volunteer  
for this?

Oliver exhales, smoke spills away.

END ACT TWO.

ACT THREE.

EXT. TRENCH DUG-OUT - DAY

Christmas. Scantily decorated, the trench looks somewhat more inhabitable. Somebody tried.

William steps out and YAWNS. A BRITISH SOLDIER bounds by.

BRITISH SOLDIER

Good morning lads!

Tired, William nods back. Edward plods out next to him.

WILLIAM

Today is the day then?

EDWARD

Merry Christmas Will.

EXT. TRENCH - DAY

Men climb out of the trench to join the festivities. Edward and William carry the now-stiff Dealer, noses turned up. Oliver keeps watch with a cup of coffee.

OLIVER

I think it's clear.

William steps forward --

OLIVER

Wait!

And stops with a glare.

OLIVER (cont'd)

OK, now go.

Edward and William parade through the trench to find a low exit.

OLIVER

Behind!

They slide to a wall and sit the dealer against it. A drunken BRITISH SOLDIER (2) trots over.

BRITISH SOLDIER 2

Too much of a good thing eh?

He ambles to the Dealer.

BRITISH SOLDIER 2 (cont'd)

What's your secret!?

He playfully punches the Dealer.

Nobody moves.

The soldier leans in for a better look.

WILLIAM

Oy, he's rightfully pissed.

William steps between them --

BRITISH SOLDIER 2

Pissed? He looks gutted ya wild

cun --

And socks him one back. The soldier stumbles but recovers laughing and claps William on the back.

BRITISH SOLDIER 2

The dog's bollocks.

He wanders off humming Christmas carols. Edward and Oliver stare at William.

WILLIAM

Balls, Oliver. It's all balls.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - DAY

Men play soccer and others CAROL with musicians. Officers from both sides mingle and drink. Christmas festivities.

Edward and William search for Herman, the Dealer between them. Oliver dances to the MUSIC.

EDWARD

There!

Edward directs with his head. They totter over.

WILLIAM

Herman!

Herman spots them and they arrive.

EDWARD

Merry Christmas Herman.

Arms open, Herman greets them.

OLIVER

They brought you a present.

EDWARD

I promised didn't I?

They lay the Dealer in front of a befuddled Herman.

HERMAN

One of -- yours?

WILLIAM

One of yours.

William hands Herman the Dealer's old clothes, folded. Herman, touched but confused, wiggles his mustache.

HERMAN

Thank you?

WILLIAM

(nervous)

I'll tell you about it later.

Herman stoops down and examines the Dealer. He lays the uniform on the man's chest and rises covering his nose.



HERMAN

Later Herr Klein. For now, we  
celebrate.

MONTAGE

Forming their own group, they dance to the music. They avoid shell craters and obscure the Dealer 'lounging' in one.

Soccer: William's legs to the knee crusted in mud. A GERMAN-BRITISH OFFICER pair peer at the Dealer, a lousy audience.

Drunk, they sing together. Oliver carries the Dealer on his back and joins in.

END MONTAGE

CUT TO:

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

Men stumble back to their trenches. William and Oliver have returned. Edward and Herman: DRUNK.

EDWARD

Goodbye Herman and treat him well!  
He's been a good buddy and a hell  
of a dealer.

HERMAN

Thanks for taking care of him. Will  
I see you tomorrow?

EDWARD

Sure as shit hope not!

They LAUGH and stroll apart.

INT. GERMAN TRENCH DUG-OUT - NIGHT

CHRISTMAS MUSIC and CAROLING. The Dealer's mouth holds a final lit cigarette. Herman supports him and waves his good

arm with the music unnoticed by drunken men. For all, jolly merriment.

The song finishes punctuated by a kiss on the Dealer's cheek -- and quick recoil.

END OF ACT THREE.

TAG.

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

Men MOAN in their cots. NURSES and DOCTORS dart from patient to patient. William and Oliver struggle to make way through the chaos.

They arrive at their destination: Edward's cot.

Edward, motionless. Eyes closed and mouth open. He has lost an arm; the stump wrapped in blood-soaked bandage.

William tears up and Oliver falls to his knees.

Edward opens his eyes, drowsy. He closes his mouth and smiles.

William peeks up.

WILLIAM

Ed -- Ed? You -- you grifter! You  
maniacal grifter!

Red eyed, Oliver stares at William and turns to Edward.

EDWARD

(slurring)

Thanks for coming.

Oliver rises. William snuffles.

OLIVER

Unbelievable.

WILLIAM

I knew it.

Edward, sluggish, LAUGHS.

EDWARD

I've gotta get me some more of that  
morphine.

OLIVER

Maybe we could finish him off.

WILLIAM

I'll grab his pillow.

Edward cracks a smile.

EDWARD

Guess what?

Edward struggles to move his mouth but manages to twirl one side of his mustache.

EDWARD (cont'd)

I'm gonna be promoted!

OLIVER

What!?

EDWARD

Yeap.

Edward lays back with a smile and closes his eyes.

OLIVER

Whatta prick.

Oliver sticks a cigarette in his mouth and they leave.

On Edward's bedside table, a vase of wilted yellow flowers and a picture of his 'mom': Oliver in a wig with makeup - twice as pretty.

FADE OUT

END.