



BASED ON THE BOOK BY MICHAEL ARCHER

# GUNPOWDER PRINCE

SCREENPLAY BY JONATHAN WOLF

The background of the slide is a collage of movie stills. At the top left, soldiers are in a trench during a battle. Below that, a young man in a military uniform sits in a vehicle. At the bottom left, a close-up of a man's face with a beard. On the right side, a man in a military uniform looks out over a landscape, and at the bottom right, soldiers are in a trench with a large fire in the background.

# LOGLINE

In 1968, an impressionable young radio operator stuck in a Marine base under siege by the North Vietnamese finds an unlikely mentor whose revolutionary tactics save 5,000 Marines from annihilation during the largest and longest battle of the Vietnam War.

# COMPS

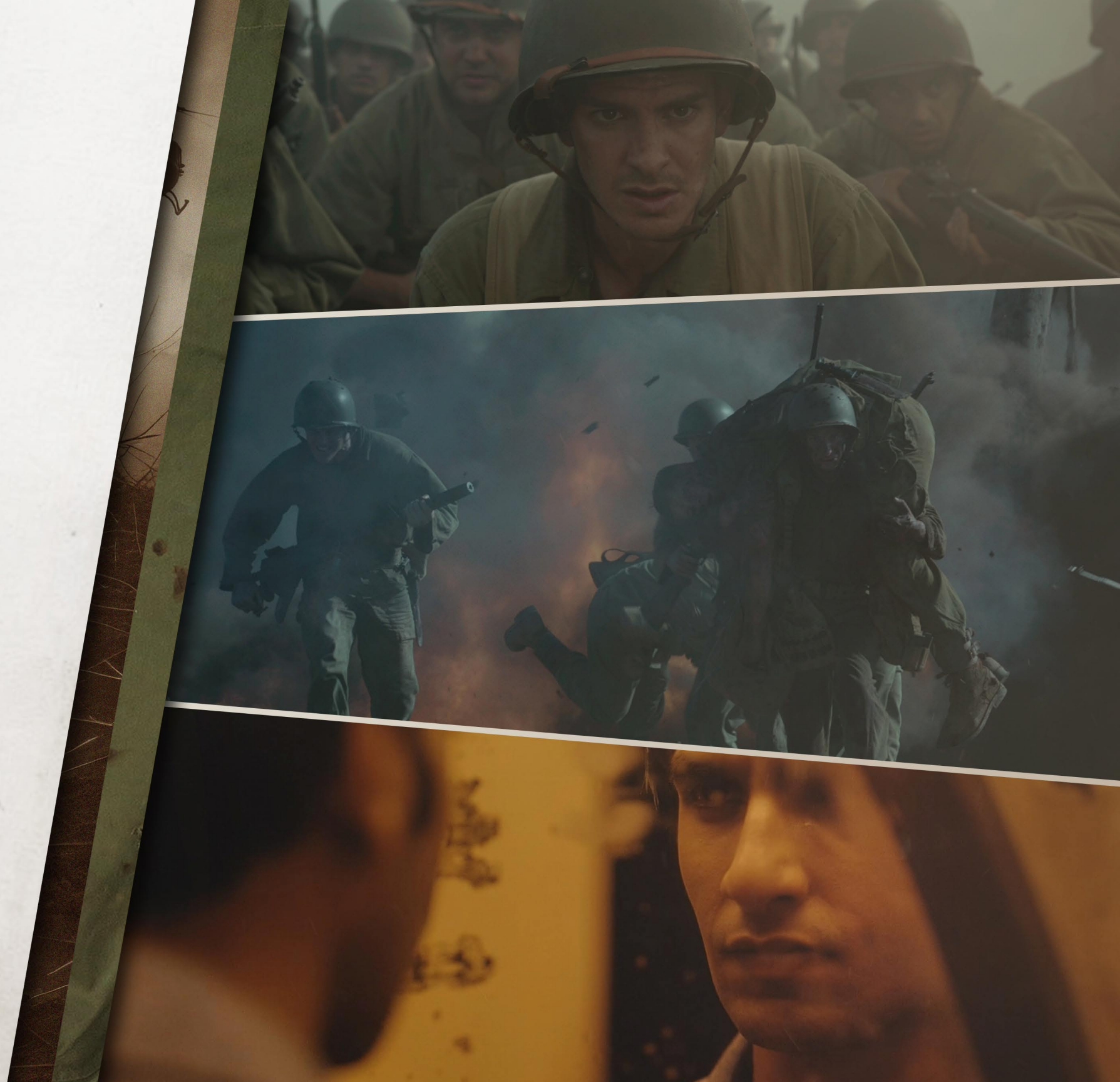
The confined intensity of trench warfare as seen in Sam Mendes' 1917 collides with the idiosyncratic genius of a single man who turns the tide of a war, as seen in the Imitation Game.

# CONTEXT

In 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War, 5,000 Marines in the combat base at Khe Sanh endured a 77-day siege by 50,000 North Vietnamese trying to overtake the base. Outnumbered 10-to-1 and subjected to non-stop mortar and rocket fire, the battle was shaping up to become a 20th Century Alamo with far greater casualties. With the entire world watching, the brave U.S. soldiers managed to beat back the overwhelming forces arrayed against them due in large part to one very unusual Marine.

# WHY WE CARE

This is the greatest unsung battle in U.S. history, and amazingly, there's never been a feature film about it.





# THE GUNPOWDER PRINCE

**MIRZA MUNIR BAIG, AKA “HARRY”**

Born to Pakistani royalty before the Indian partition, educated at the finest schools in England, including Cambridge, he was known to his friends as “Harry.” Unable to attend officer training in England, Harry’s father, a diplomat in the U.S., pulled strings to get his non-U.S. citizen son into the Marines, where he flourished, showing an aptitude for military intelligence, cross-border infiltration and an uncanny ability to understand and outthink the enemy. After spending several years embedded with military intelligence and working for the CIA in Vietnam, Harry brought clarity to the seemingly unpredictable nature of the North Vietnamese military tactics and movements and developed a revolutionary targeting system for American artillery and bombing missions.

Driven by a burning desire to reclaim his family’s honor, which he felt was tarnished when his great-grandfather surrendered to the British in the mid-1800s, Harry believed that his purpose in life (and as a Marine) was to make his mark in service of his adopted country.

When Harry arrives in Khe Sanh, everyone on base believes they are doomed, but Harry has total faith in his abilities, even though he has not yet tested these theories. Initially, the Marines did not know what to make of this little brown man with a mustache, who wore a curved dagger on his belt and spoke like a British lord despite his Marine Captain’s uniform. Soon, however, Harry’s comrades came to realize the merit of his novel ideas and superior understanding of the enemy’s tactics and realized that they were in the presence of a military genius.

Harry’s unquestioning belief in himself and his mission yields results on the battlefield. He develops a loyal following among the young soldiers who come to see him as the one man who can save them from oblivion. Yet Harry’s cold-blooded decision-making will result in the decimation of the Marines’ local allies, forcing his acolytes to reconsider what kind of man he is.

# PROTAGONIST

## MICHAEL ARCHER

is a bright, naive and aimless 19-year-old from Berkeley, CA, who only enlists in the Marines in a moment of adolescent impetuosity, realizing what he has done once it's too late to change his mind. After a brief stint in basic training and radio school, Michael arrives in Khe Sanh just as the fighting kicks into high gear. After surviving a baptism by fire during a bloody battle in Khe Sanh Village, in which Michael fights bravely alongside the Bru, an indigenous tribe allied with the Americans, Michael emerges uninjured physically, but with his every belief and assumption about the world and war shattered. Having fully expected to die in that battle, he returns to the Marine Combat Base in Khe Sanh and immediately meets Harry Baig, our Gunpowder Prince, who takes Michael under his wing and casts a spell on him.

Desperate for something or someone to believe in, Michael latches onto Harry, whom he comes to hero-worship and work closely with. As the siege drags on, Michael watches his comrades and enemies alike die left and right, and he confronts his own imminent mortality day after day for almost three months. Enduring extreme physical deprivation and psychological stress, he grows battle hardened, but underneath the tough exterior, he is still just a boy in many ways.

Only when the siege ends and he finds himself and his closest comrades left standing as a result of Harry's brilliant but cold-blooded decision-making does Michael realize that his blind faith in Harry was misplaced.

# ANTAGONIST

## NORTH VIETNAMESE GENERAL VÕ NGUYỄN GIÁP

was the hero of Dien Bien Phu, the battle that drove the French out of Vietnam in 1954 and made Giap a legend. Trying to replicate that success in Khe Sanh, he is hamstrung by the Communist Party apparatchiks who confine his ability to respond to events on the ground, even as he engages in a lethal chess match with Harry, a man he has never seen or met, but who has studied Giap's tactics and, much to Giap's frustration, seems to understand how to counter him at every turn.

Yet ironically, Giap's greatest nemesis in this battle is not Harry or any American, but an arrogant, tyrannical Communist Party ideologue, who undermines him at every opportunity and prevents him from recalibrating his battle plans to account for the tactical maneuvers of the Gunpowder Prince.





# SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

## **CAPTAIN KENT STEEN**

A 26-year-old targeting officer with a sharp intellect and steely, unflappable demeanor, Kent cares deeply about his men and his job, and he takes great pride in his work. Though he is Michael's superior officer, the two men grow close during the siege and after, as Kent becomes a sort of big brother to Michael. Kent also recognizes Harry's brilliance early on, and the two men, equal in rank, work side-by-side for more than two months to help save the 5,000 Marines on base. During that time, these two very different targeting officers collaborate to create some of the most creative and lethally effective tactics in the history of modern warfare, growing to trust and respect each other implicitly along the way.

## **COLONEL DAVID LOWNDS**

In his late-40s, this battle-hardened, confident commander of U.S. forces in Khe Sanh was a World War Two hero in the Pacific Theater, who wears his signature handlebar mustache and authority with seeming ease. Although he is initially skeptical of Harry and his methods, Lownds is an intellectually open-minded, thoughtful warrior who comes to trust and rely on Harry, just as the men he commands come to rely on and trust his cool-headed decision-making.

## **JURATE KAZICKAS**

This Lithuanian-born, American reporter in her early 30s defies gender expectations and limitations to become one of the few female journalists covering the war in Vietnam from the front lines, earning the respect of the soldiers she is embedded with due to her straightforward, curious but tough-minded persona and fearlessness.

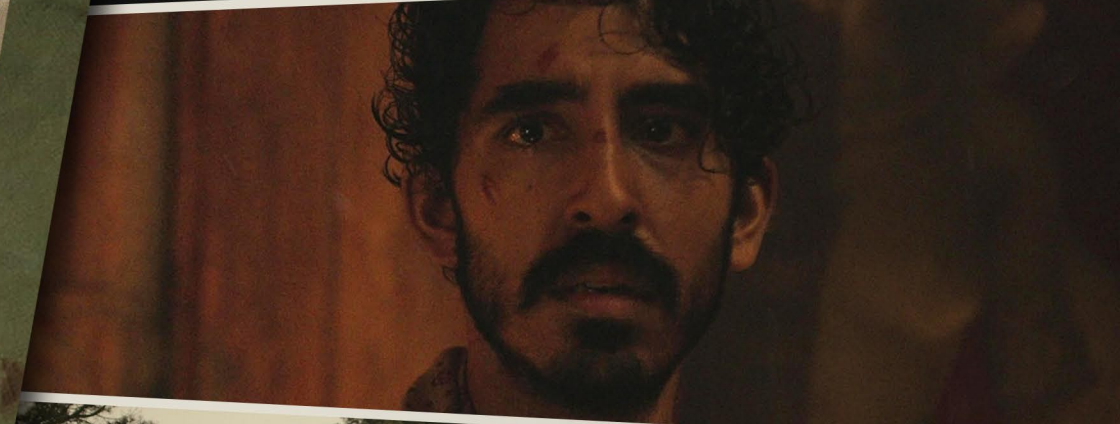
# PLOT SYNOPSIS

We begin with a tragic fire in a Bangkok hotel that claims the life of MIRZA MUNIR "HARRY" BAIG, an American of Pakistani heritage, along with his wife and daughter. Days later in Berkeley, California, MICHAEL ARCHER, a 22 year-old Vietnam veteran, receives a letter from his Marine comrade KENT STEEN about Harry's death and funeral.

At Arlington National Cemetery, Michael and Kent are puzzled by the presence of high-ranking military officials, including a CIA Deputy Director. They wonder about the true circumstances of Harry's death and recall their experiences with him during the Vietnam War.

The narrative flashbacks to January 1968. Michael, a 19-year-old Marine, arrives at Khe Sanh Combat Base during an escalating conflict. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA), led by General Giap, is preparing a major offensive. Michael is deployed to a smaller compound in Khe Sanh Village, working alongside TEX TALBOT as a radio operator.

When an indigenous Bru soldier (STARBURST) warns of an approaching NVA battalion, the compound prepares for assault. Michael finds himself trapped, unable to return to the main base. Over the next 24 hours, NVA troops surround the compound, launching a fierce artillery and infantry attack. Michael rises to the occasion, calling in critical artillery strikes and helping to guide a crucial ammunition resupply chopper.





After a tactical retreat, Michael is evacuated to Khe Sanh Combat Base, where he meets HARRY BAIG, an enigmatic Marine of Pakistani descent. He speaks with a posh British accent, wears a curved dagger on his hip like his military ancestors back in what was India, and possesses an unusual calm demeanor as artillery shells fall around him. During an artillery strike, Harry measures the crater left by one such shell, and calculates the trajectory, using his own methods to identify the exact location of the NVA artillery team.

Harry introduces SPOTLIGHT to the rest of the officers at Khe Sanh, a top-secret program which uses acoustic and seismic sensors to track enemy movements. He and his assistant, STAFF SERGEANT BOLSEY, develop an innovative system of cross-referencing intelligence to build a comprehensive picture of enemy positions. Despite initial skepticism from COLONEL LOWNDS, Harry's methods prove increasingly effective.

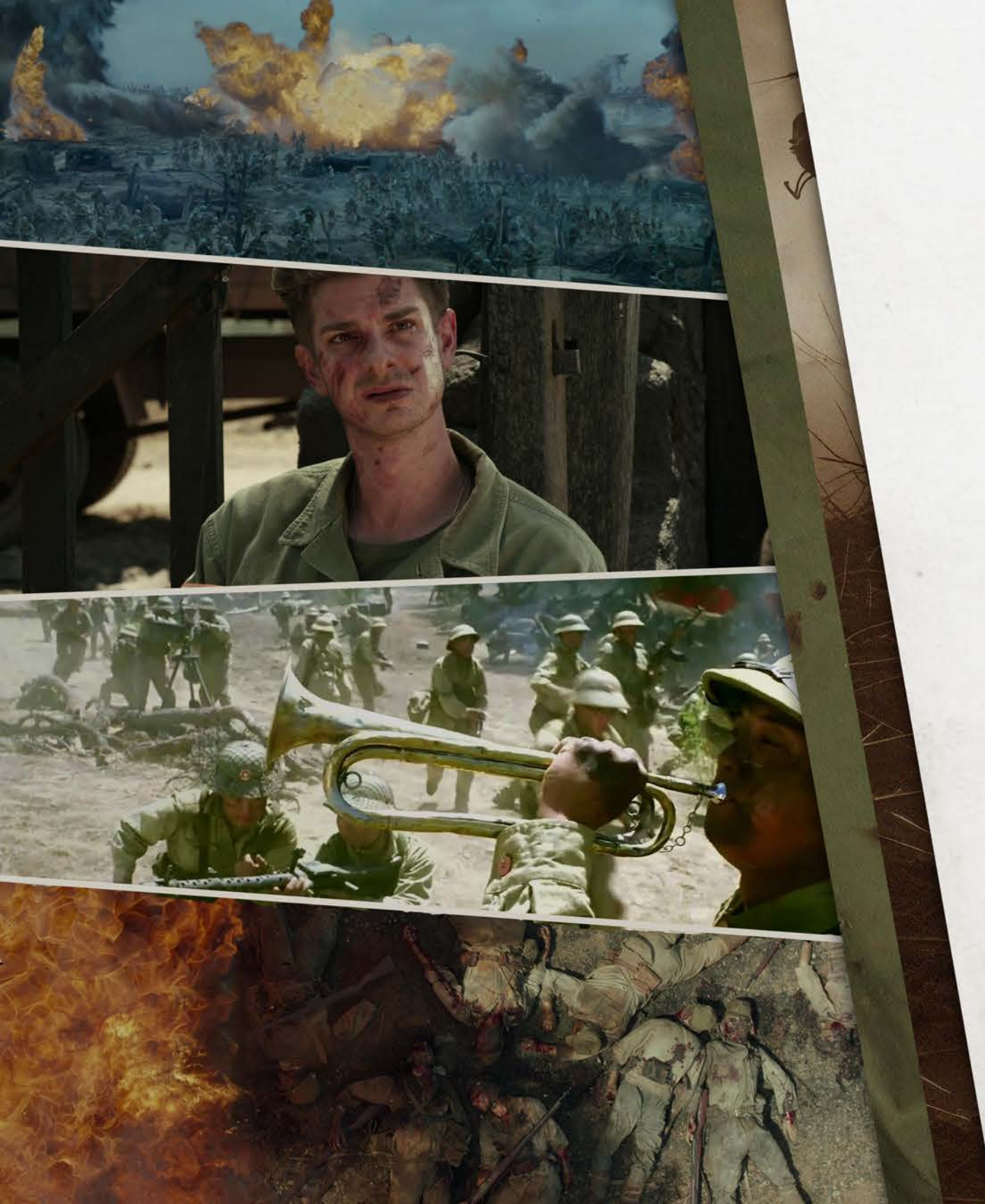
The Americans find themselves surrounded by an ever-increasing enemy force which outnumbers them 10-to-1. The North Vietnamese begin an intense siege on the Marine Combat base, hitting them with constant artillery and mortar fire for days on end.

As the siege intensifies, Harry works closely with Michael, demonstrating an uncanny ability to predict enemy movements. He helps KENT STEEN and CAPTAIN JOHN FITZIMMONS launch precise artillery strikes that decimate NVA battalions. Harry's genius becomes increasingly apparent as he saves numerous Marine lives.

North Vietnamese General Giap, under pressure from a political apparatchik, is forced to launch increasingly desperate attacks. One such assault, led by Lieutenant Tonc, is completely destroyed by Harry's targeting strategy. Tonc subsequently defects, providing crucial intelligence about the broader Tet Offensive.

The NVA siege on the Marine combat base becomes increasingly brutal. One of the last planes into the base delivers JURATE KAZICKAS, an independent journalist who's come to document the lives of the Marines under siege. She's the only woman on the base and must endure harassment in order to do her job.





An NVA anti-aircraft shell takes out an Air Force transport plane as it attempts to land in the base, killing almost 50 servicemen right in front of Michael's eyes. From this point on, it becomes too dangerous to resupply the base by air.

Marine casualties mount, food and water grow scarce, and the base is continuously bombarded. Harry, Michael, and the targeting team develop innovative tactics to counter the NVA's attacks, including a hybrid system of precision artillery and radar-guided bombers. Michael grows to all-but worship Harry, who he sees as their savior.

In the final days of the 77-day siege, Michael receives a desperate radio call from Bru fighter "Starburst" about thousands of NVA soldiers, including tanks and flamethrowers, approaching Khe Sanh Village. Harry and Colonel Lownds make a controversial decision to remove bombing restrictions, calling in a devastating strike.

The bombardment succeeds in saving the Marines but – to the surprise of the officers around Harry -- results in the destruction of the Bru compound, killing hundreds of Bru soldiers and their families. This decision earns Harry the nickname "Butcher Baig" and creates a rift between him and Michael.

Years later, at Harry's funeral, Kent and Michael reflect on the complex nature of Harry's actions. Despite the controversial methods, they acknowledge that Harry's innovative tactics saved the lives of 5,000 Marines during the siege.

Whatever they may have thought about Harry's controversial decision in those last fateful hours, they owe their lives to The Gunpowder Prince, a brilliant but morally ambiguous strategist who made impossible choices during an impossible war.



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