

TUNNEL RAT

by

Only the Don knows

FADE IN

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The foliage is thick and green. Water droplets trickle off palm fronds and steam rises from the ground where the sun beams down onto a small clearing.

The jungle is alive with the buzz of insects and the caws of tropical birds.

SUPER: VIETNAM 1968

There's movement from a wall of elephant grass. A machete slashes through the grass. It's wielded by a Grunt, a Marine on patrol. He's just a kid, but here he's the POINT MAN.

As he enters into a clearing, three more heavily armed GRUNTS emerge from the thicket. They're covered in mud, soaked with sweat, and swarmed by mosquitos. It's miserable.

A RUMBLE emanates from under their feet. The Point Man holds one hand high in a fist to signal an ALL STOP.

They ready their weapons when, just a few meters further, a swarm of BATS erupt in a dark cloud from a small opening in the ground.

The Grunts lower their weapons and share a nervous CHUCKLE of embarrassment until another sound piques their attention.

A muffled SCREAM. They ready their weapons once more. This time, a Vietcong SOLDIER scrambles from a trap door.

RAT-A-TAT-A-TAT-A-TAT-A-TAT-A-TAT!

The Grunts open fire with an excessive barrage of rounds. The soldier only made it out of the tunnel to his waist before slumping over dead.

The Grunts approach. The Point Man points to his own rifle and then to the soldier and shrugs. The soldier was unarmed.

The gunfire draws the rest of their SQUAD into the clearing. Thirteen members in all.

The SQUAD LEADER comes forward. He quickly assesses the situation and directs the Squad with hand gestures to surround the perimeter.

The Squad disperses in all directions from the opening except for the Squad Leader, the Point Man, and one Grunt with the name WEASEL scrawled across his helmet.

Weasel is the Squad's TUNNEL RAT. He's young, short, and scrawny. The joint in his mouth has little to do with his faraway stare.

Weasel knows he has a job to do and goes right to the tunnel opening. He examines the trap door and assesses the entry.

The Point Man and Squad Leader have pulled the soldier from the tunnel and are rifling through his clothing for papers.

Only Weasel notices that the soldier is missing most of one lower leg. He stares at the bloody stump with curiosity.

The Squad Leader slaps Weasel's shoulder and derails his train of thought. He has his full attention.

Squad Leader points to the opening. He holds up five fingers, points to his watch, and then to the grenades that hang from his harness.

Weasel nods. He sheds his rifle, pack, and helmet. He checks his pistol, checks the bayonet on his belt, and tests his angle flashlight. A-OK.

He swings his legs into the opening and takes one last hit off the joint before he hands it to the Squad Leader.

He sets the dial on his watch for five minutes. He gives a quick salute to the Squad Leader, the middle finger to the Point Man, and drops from sight.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Weasel drops about two meters before he lands on a sloped tunnel floor. He quickly draws his pistol and aims into the deep dark void.

He waits motionless and listens. Dead still and quiet. Quite the contrast from the noisy jungle above. Sweat streams down his face.

When he turns on his flashlight, it reveals a tunnel one meter high and half meter wide. For the next five minutes, this narrow beam of light is his life.

With pistol at the ready, he starts to advance with the light held outstretched. He pays close attention to the floor and walls for signs of boobytraps.

Sure enough, a trap becomes visible in the distance. As he approaches, Weasel's earlier curiosity is answered.

A bear trap holds the missing lower leg. Weasel shakes his head and smirks that the soldier sprung his own trap.

As he sidles by the trap, he stops to take a closer look. The trap didn't sever the leg. The leg extends ten centimeters beyond the jaws. Curious.

Weasel wipes his brow from sweat and continues forward.

Another form emerges into his light. A soldier sits motionless, propped up against the tunnel wall with a bayonet in hand and covered in blood.

Weasel does not shoot. He gets closer to see that the soldier has been disemboweled. The smell causes him to snort and curl his nose.

Once past, he notes that the soldier's innards had been dragged a good three meters beyond. Rats, the size of a small dog, feast on the fresh banquet.

The sight, stench and stifling heat is too much. Weasel gets nauseous and is forced to swallow his own vomit.

He continues onward.

The tunnel ahead shows sign of a recent cave-in. Upon closer inspection, he finds that the tunnel wall had fallen outward into a natural cave.

He aims his light into the cavern. The limestone cave looks pristine with delicate stalactites and straw formations.

The cave floor drops rapidly to a deep, dark abyss. The air is much colder in the cave and he can see his breath. He takes a moment to draw in some well deserved coolness.

A metallic CLICK draws his attention back to the task at hand. It came from further down the tunnel.

Now on his belly, he slinks down the tunnel until he enters into a large room. Here he is able to slowly stand erect.

He pans the room with his light. An operating table, an I.V. stand, and other medical supplies. A field hospital.

Multiple bodies in various degrees of dismemberment are strewn about the room. He begins to gag once more.

Another CLICK! He drops to one knee and points his light to a far corner. A Vietnamese NURSE huddles with a large bone-saw held in her hands like a sword.

Weasel approaches slowly with the barrel of his pistol pointed to the ceiling. He means no harm.

As he nears, the Nurse scowls and presses a finger firmly to her lips. The international sign for 'BE FUCKING QUIET!'

Weasel is confused. As he gets closer, she appears more fearful until he realizes that she is not looking at him, but behind him.

He crouches and turns. The flashlight is swatted from his grip. He instinctively fires one round.

BANG!

The FLASH from the deafening gunshot lights the room like a strobe. Three large forms are silhouetted against the white limestone walls.

The nearest form SHRIEKS and can be heard as it scurries away. Weasel grabs his flashlight and tries to track it. None of the forms can be located.

As he looks around, the Nurse runs up from behind, grabs his hand, and pulls him into another corner of the room.

Before he can speak, she clasps her hand over his mouth and shakes her head. He understands and nods. She removes her hand slowly and points to where they just were.

Two BEASTS, about a meter in height, come from the darkness and look frantically for Weasel. Only the Beast's hairy hunchbacks are visible.

She points to the Beasts and then to her ears. She then points to her eyes and shakes her head. They can hear but not see.

Weasel nods. He gets it. He points to the Beasts and holds up three fingers as if to ask 'Only three?'

She shrugs. She does not know.

The two Beasts, unable to find Weasel, split up. One circles the edge of the room and the other jumps up and perches on a medicine cabinet like a gargyle overwatch.

Suddenly, Weasel's eyes go wide and he looks to his watch. They've only two minutes to get out of the tunnel.

He points to his watch, holds up two fingers, points to the exit and then makes an explosion motion with his hands. She gets it.

Weasel and the Nurse skirt around the two Beasts and slowly creep back towards the opening.

As they leave the room and enter the tunnel, the back of the third Beast can be seen entering into the cave. It leaves a blood trail.

Weasel and the Nurse wait but for a few moments. They advance down the tunnel with their backs to the wall until they get to the cave entrance.

Weasel motions for the Nurse to go first while he covers the cave entrance. She shakes her head in fear.

Weasel points to his watch and to her with conviction. Without thought, he STOMPS his foot.

As soon as his foot hits the ground, he realizes that he may have just sealed their fate.

An ear piercing SHRIEK comes from the cave. Weasel grabs her hand and they move as fast as they can on all fours towards the tunnel opening.

He pushes her forward...past the disemboweled soldier...past the bear trap...and then Weasel is stopped in his tracks.

He turns to see a taloned hand clenched around his ankle. He raises the beam of light towards the Beast's face, only to have it swatted away again by its other taloned hand.

The passing flash of light glinted off of what could only have been fangs. Really...long...fangs.

Weasel doesn't hesitate and empties the last of his nine-round clip into what should be the Beast's face.

BBBBBBBBBANG!

The Beast's grip releases and he is free. From the indirect light, the carcass looks to fill most of the tunnel.

He reaches for the flashlight until he hears the other Beasts come closer. He turns and can see light from the tunnel opening. He decides to leave the flashlight.

As Weasel shuffles back, he can tell that the other Beasts have difficulty skirting around the blockade of death.

He turns and crawls as fast as he can.

He gets to the opening and the Nurse is too short to climb out. He pushes by her and motions to let him go first.

Reluctant, she must let him pass.

Weasel begins to chimney up the opening. He scrambles up and out into the sunshine.

EXT. JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

The Point Man and Squad Leader have their backs turned away from the opening to watch the perimeter.

Weasel rolls onto his belly and reaches into the opening. The Nurse grabs his hand and he pulls with all his might.

As she surfaces, her face beams with a broad smile. She's made it and...then her faces turns to sheer terror.

Weasel is suddenly jerked towards the opening as she is pulled from below.

A silent tug-of-war ensues. She is too fear stricken to scream and he is under too much effort to call for help.

Weasel starts to get pulled into the opening. Sweat trickles down his arms and into his hands. He's losing his grip...he's losing her...she's...gone.

His last vision of her is being pulled into the darkness with an expression of betrayal.

He pulls his bayonet and prepares to jump back into the tunnel until a hand grabs the back of his belt.

He gets jerked out of the hole by the Squad Leader, just as the Point Man tosses five grenades into the tunnel.

BBBBBOOM!

Dirt and debris erupts from the opening and falls amongst the clearing.

The Squad Leader crouches down and sticks the joint back in Weasel's mouth. He shrugs his shoulders and splays his hands as if to ask 'Well?'

The Squad Leader and Point Man are oblivious as to what just occurred below their feet.

Weasel takes a long, deep, drag on the joint. He gives a shaky thumbs up as a tear trickles down his cheek.

FADE OUT