

THE ART OF WAR
"THE SCARECROW ARMY"

Written by

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A "Kelly's Hero's" type comedy/adventure, set in Paris in the
1940s, focused around a group of oddball artists trying to save
the day
(loosely based on the "ghost army").

EXT. MCCLOUD'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

It's early afternoon on a late summer's day in 1942 and we OPEN on a typical mid western farm. We sweep in over the fields of Crawfordsville, Indiana, towards an old yellow farmhouse.

NASH (O.S.)

(Looking up at a classic image of Uncle Sam) Before it was time to do our part and the posters pointed back, reminding us that "Skill and Courage Counted", this place was all I knew. I could never bring myself to venture outside of it. I guess before the world called, everything I needed was right here. I spent a great part of those days in the fields helping my father, like a child, trying not to be underfoot... and the rest, locked deep in my own head. My father called it "woolgathering", dreaming, imagining and drawing a place where my brothers didn't have to watch over me, and inventing a means to liberate my parents from the worry, that I would never find my way.

FADE TO:

INT. MCCLOUD'S FARMHOUSE - NASH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Dust filters through the warm light as we drift past open jars of half-dried glue, broken tweezers, and stacks of artful conceptions, scattered across a child's bureau.

On a window ledge sits a small handmade PINWHEEL, overly taped to the sill but delicate in its design. Tattered lace curtains lift in the gentle breeze and the pinwheel begins to spin, shake and spring to life. The fragile legs bounce back and forth as its arm strains to draw back. . . It snaps forward and flings a tiny stone across the room. The stone bounces off a tall MASON JAR FILLED WITH WELL-USED ARTISTS BRUSHES, over a PILE OF OLD WATCH PARTS and deconstructed albeit neatly stacked TOYS, and then to a FAMILY PHOTO tacked to the wall. From the photo, it speeds off towards an old BELL dangling from an office grey DESK LAMP. It strikes the bell and falls directly into a empty glass, perfectly positioned on a STACK OF ART BOOKS and edge ragged and torn MAGAZINES. As we hear the dying chime, we look up to see a young man sitting at his DESK, intently hunched and quietly drawing.

NASH (O.S.)

Back then, I was sure there was a place, far beyond the north fence and the Crawfordsville county line, where I could free the thoughts and images from my head and paint them across the landscape.

His eyes and hands are focused on the PAPER, but his mind is a million miles away. The room around him is filled with more HAND DRAWN ART, PAINTINGS, SCULPTURES and CONTRAPTIONS. Clearly the room is one of an artist and tinkerer.

NASH; 18 years old and the youngest of the three McCloud brothers. Standing only 5 foot 7, fair in complexion and slight in build. He is not an ounce over 90 pounds, and there isn't a shred of real fight in him. He peers up and squints out of the open window; never lifting the PENCIL from the paper before him.

EXT. MCCLOUD'S FARMHOUSE - BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS - NASH'S POV

Beyond the small back-yard sprawls endless fields of corn and wheat. Here we see Nash's older brothers, LLOYD and CURTIS. The 20-year-old, 6 foot 2 McCloud twins stand knee deep in the corn and wheat, throwing the FOOTBALL and tackling each other with total abandon. Curtis powers the ball to Lloyd, who catches it and quickly spirals it back to his brother at double the speed. Curtis catches the ball in the gut and with a barreling grunt falls to the ground.

LLOYD

(trying to hold back
laughter, in his best
announcer's voice)

Oh He's down! He's down
hard folks!

In a beat. Curtis pops up from the tall grass holding the ball high above his head.

CURTIS

...and the crowd goes wild!

Lloyd runs and tackles Curtis; lifting him into the air and smashing him to the ground. The two boys break up laughing.

INT. MCCLOUD'S FARMHOUSE - NASH'S BEDROOM - DESK - CONTINUOUS

Back in the room, Nash watches and smiles. He pushes his design aside, his hand (indecisive) twitches and he taps his pencil on the desk once or twice before he begins to draw. In his world, and on the page, his brothers are bigger than life.

FADE TO:

NASH'S FANTASY - FADE TO 2D ANIMATION

As we watch the game through Nash's eyes (and hand), A DOZEN OR SO FOOTBALL PLAYERS, DRESSED in 1940'S STYLE UNIFORMS, pop out of the cornfield and begin to chase Lloyd as he cradles the ball. He breaks the first tackle and rolls the ball out to Curtis, who straight-arms into a hand full of defenders, knocking them to the ground. We first hear, and then turn to see, HUNDREDS OF SCREAMING FANS cheering the boys on. The twins now frantically run through a field of fresh cut green grass. CRISP WHITE YARD LINES draw themselves on the grass in the background, and an ANNOUNCER shouts the game's play-by-play as the boys cut and weave their way down the field.

ANNOUNCER

. . . And again folks, here come the McCloud brothers! Foiling every foe, and moving down the field like a well-oiled machine. Watch out world, these boys are unstoppable!

They push closer and closer to the goal line. The fans are now standing and cheering.

FANS

McCloud! . . . McCloud! . . .
McCloud!

In front of them, charging at full speed, is the last of the opposing team. One dives at Curtis, who at the very last second spins and pitches the ball back to his awaiting brother. Curtis charges through the opposing line, scattering players across the field. Lloyd crosses into the end zone and the crowd cheers. Confetti and streamers fill the sky as the two boys are lifted to the team's shoulders . . .

MOM (O.S.)

Nash? . . . Nash! . . . Lunch!

The game fades and the artist's hand sketches in the final touches.

INT. MCCLOUD'S FARMHOUSE - NASH'S BEDROOM - DESK - CONTINUOUS

Back in Nash's room. Drawings of the game fill the desk and spill onto the floor. Nash looks back out the window to see just the two boys tossing the football in the middle of the overgrown field. He gets up from the desk and heads downstairs.

INT. MCCLOUD'S FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

MOM is making lunch at the counter as Nash enters the family kitchen. Nash takes his usual seat at the TABLE. He spills a handful of PENCILS and a pair of SCISSORS onto the table. He puts the finishing touches on a DRAWING. His mother sets down a rolled up NEWSPAPER in front of Nash's DAD. She kisses him on the cheek, straightens his shirt collar and continues preparing lunch. Dad sits across from him, quietly staring out the kitchen window. Mom sets lunch down in front of the boy, who looks up and fondly smiles.

Lloyd and Curtis loudly enter the kitchen. They are sweaty and out of breath. They immediately set to playfully ribbing their younger brother as they take a seat at the table. Lloyd reaches over and messes Nash's hair. Curtis grabs half of the sandwich from Nash's plate and crams it into his mouth. Nash watches Curtis as Lloyd reaches in from the other side and takes the other half. Mom immediately sets another sandwich on Nash's plate. He shakes his head and smiles. All good-natured teasing. The brothers clearly are very affectionate towards one another.

Lloyd picks up the drawing and smiles.

LLOYD
(mumbling with his mouth still
full) Still livin' in that tiny
head of yours little brother?

NASH
(smiling)
It's my escape from you two slobs.

The older boys look at each other, whoop it up and grab Nash out of his chair; laughing. Amused by the daily routine, Mom turns on the RADIO and unfolds the newspaper in front of the boy's father. He glances down at the paper; on the front-page it reads: "War: Allies Prepare to Drive Enemy Out of France!" Just then the radio changes to the station's war report. The mood turns a bit somber and Nash sits back down at the table.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
(in an Edward R. Murrow
radio voice)

Just days after the American forces
stormed the beaches of Northern
France, American and British
officials report that they have
secured the coast and that
thousands of Allied troops are
quickly moving inland.

Mom pulls down the blinds a bit, slowly casting a shadow over
Nash's creation, darkening the pencil drawn sky. The colors
shift to greys and purples and hand drawn clouds roll in.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
The American War office reported
today that fresh American troops
will be needed in the coming months
to drive the enemy back to. . .

Mom quickly reaches over and snaps off the radio. The family
remains silent. Dad looks up solemnly from the paper at his
three boys. The twins stand behind Nash; towering over him.
Dad gives Nash a reassuring half smile, and nods at the
twins.

DAD
Curtis, Lloyd, I'm going to need
you to look after your brother over
there.

MOM
William!

DAD
I'm sorry, but he's always had
these two to watch over him.

Nash hangs his head slightly. Curtis places one hand on
Nash's shoulder, and with his other hand lifts up Nash's
chin.

CURTIS
He'll be fine, Dad . . . We'll all
be fine.

Lloyd reaches in and messes Nash's hair. Mom quickly turns
away, bringing her APRON to her eyes.

MOM
Of course you will. You're
McClouds.

Through the living room window, beyond the kitchen a distant BUS can be seen blazing up the dirt road; far beyond the fields. Dust spills out from behind it, like a rocket.

MOM (CONT'D)
(trying to smile)
Don't you worry, I'll keep your
father busy until you get back. I
may have been born a city girl...

A DOG starts BARKING from outside and Dad looks up at his wife and smiles.

DAD
It's time, boys.

Mom turns and clutches Dad's shoulder. She pauses and then gathers herself. She hurries off to the living room.

INT. MCCLOUD'S FARMHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The twins gather their things as Nash finishes his drawing and then slowly follows the two to the other room. Next to the front door sit THREE BAGS. As the bus pulls-up the road to the McCloud home, Mom gives the bags a quick check and tightens the straps. She uses her apron to wipe the corners of Lloyd's mouth, and quickly finger-combs Curtis's hair before helping the boys to the porch.

EXT. MCCLOUD'S FARMHOUSE - FRONT PORCH/FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

As the boys step out onto the front porch with their bags Mom anxiously rushes back into the house.

MOM
(as the door swings open)
I need a photo!

She reappears with an OLD BOX CAMERA. Again she does her best to put on a brave face. She gathers her family on the porch, steps and with hands shaking, puts the camera on a fence post and sets the timer. She rushes back to join her family for the snapshot; the boys and their father are standing in awkward poses with strained smiles.

MOM (CONT'D)
Damn it, boys. Smiles!

She quickly unties and hides her apron and straightens her dress just as we see a flash.

The captured image fills the screen. They hold tight as a family for another second or two before Dad speaks.

DAD
Remember boys, keep your heads
down. Brawn might keep you safe,
but brains will bring you home.

The twins shake their father's hand and kiss their mother on the cheek as the military bus pulls to the edge of the old dirt driveway. The bus knocks and shudders in the Midwest heat.

THE BUS

The old Crossley Hawk bus is dusty and beaten. Each of its cracked leather seats is filled with a new recruit. Hand stenciled in white paint, the old coach reads "Camp Atterbury U.S. Army Recruitment Camp".

EXT. MCCLOUD'S FARMHOUSE - FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Dad holds back the grief as he looks over the departing group of young men, but Mom can't bear it. Tears fall down her still smiling face.

LLOYD
(cocky)
Don't worry Mom, those Jerries
don't know what they're in for!

Curtis, as usual, is a bit lower key and protective of Nash. He rubs his little brother's head. He leans in to whisper something in his father's ear.

CURTIS
Pop. He's so scrawny.... No
bullet'll find him!

A small smile comes to his father's face.

Nash slyly slips a drawing to his mother. He hugs her tight as Lloyd and Curtis clamber onto the bus. Nash goes to hug his father but gets a handshake instead. As he starts to walk away, his father reaches out and puts one hand on the boy's shoulder and the other does a quick pat of his head; Nash turns back and smiles. It's the closest thing to a hug from the old farmer.

DAD
Remember, son, use your brains.
Got it?

Nash nods and steps onto the bus.

INT. CROSSLEY HAWK BUS - CONTINUOUS

Nash struggles with his gear as he walks to the very back of the old bus. He sits and watches his Mother and Father embrace in front of the family home.

As the bus leaves the drive, their father waves. A small tear falls from his father's eye. He quickly brushes it away. Their mother carefully unfolds Nash's drawing.

CUT TO:

THE DRAWING

It's a sketch and an elaborate pop-up of the three brothers standing in front of a hero's welcome. As she folds and unfolds it, the figures wave back at her and the tiny crowd lifts a banner that reads: "HEROES RETURN HOME".

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CROSSLEY HAWK BUS - CONTINUOUS

Nash's eyes stay locked on his parents until the farm slowly disappears into the landscape. The old bus gets lost in a dust-cloud; and in the half-light of late afternoon we hear.

NASH
(whispering to himself)
It's gonna be okay.

FADE IN:

TITLE: "THE ART OF WAR"