

The Deer Hunter : One Last Shot

Alex Murray

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In this report, we will be looking at the second game of Russian Roulette between Michael Vronsky (played by Robert De Niro) and Nikanor Chevotarevich (played by Christopher Walken) in the movie *The Deer Hunter*. The scene can be found on youtube[1].

Aspect	Description
Genre	War / Drama
Plot and themes	Nick and Michael were captives in the Vietnam war and were previously forced to play Russian Roulette against each other by their captivators for some sick entertainment. They miraculously escaped by asking for 3 bullets instead of 1 to make the game more interesting, and then shooting the captivators at the right moment in time. This scene is said to be one of the best in movie history and you should definitely go watch it too! Nick recuperates in a military hospital in Saigon with no knowledge of his friends. After being released, he goes AWOL and aimlessly stumbles through the red-light district at night. Lost, he starts playing Russian Roulette for money. In a last attempt to save his friend, Michael joins the game of Roulette and tries to jog Nick's memory. But Nick knows he can't go back to the life he had before the war, and decides to test his luck one final time.
Setting (inside/outside)	The scene takes place in a gambling den in the Red-light district in Saigon, Vietnam.
Use of camera (camera shots/movement)	The camera is fairly typical. It alternates between two frontal views of Nick and Michael, a shoulder-shot from behind Michael and an overall view where Nick, Michael and the game's moderator are visible.
Lighting and colour	There is a fairly stark white light illuminating them from above. There are no other lights in the room as far as I can tell.
Sound and music	There is no music. The sound alternates between being very silent (so we can focus on the sound of the chamber clicking and the two men talking to each other) and being very loud, with people arguing in the background in between turns.
Props	The only prop being used in this scene is the revolver.

Costume	Nick looks like a broken man. He has bags under his eyes, his face looks old and used, yet he's wearing a clean, white collared shirt and a red headscarf. This could possibly be a way to symbolise his heroic ability to survive the many games of Roulette that he has. Michael is wearing a green suite and slightly lighter green shirt underneath. He looks clean and well groomed overall. Actually, everyone in the room, even the crowd, is wearing collared shirts.
Acting/performance	Christopher Walken does an amazing job at expressing the mixed emotions the character feels before pulling the second trigger, and of course, no other actor but him can pull off the iconic de-ranged stare required for the first half of the scene.
Spoken language	There's not much to say about the spoken language.
Facial expression and body language	The first time Nick pulls the trigger, his face is cold and detached from reality. This is a man with nothing to lose and everything to gain. Before Michael picks up the gun, there is a shot of Nick head-on who looks down at the gun for a moment and then back at his opponent, as if challenging him. As Michael picks up the gun, holds it to his head and says: "I love you man" before pulling the trigger slowly, we see Nick begin to break a little. Michael clearly doesn't want to be here – he has a family and a life to tend to – but he's here and he pulled the trigger because his friend Nick means everything to him. At first Nick almost looks a little astonished (he nods slightly, acknowledging the situation) and transitions into disbelief. Nick slightly shakes his head and squints his eyes (it's very subtle), wondering why, of all people in the world, Michael has decided to come and play against him. Michael asks him to come home, at which point Nick's face transitions into sorrow. He wants to come home, more than anything, but he cannot. He will never be able to return to a normal life after what has happened. Words fail him. He lifts the gun but Michael stops him and asks him to remember the old days. The trees, the deer hunting. Nick remembers and utters: "Yeah, one shot." before lifting the gun to his head and pulling the trigger, thus killing himself.

"One shot" is in reference to what they talked about when they used to hunt deer, and has multiple meanings in this context. For one, Nick is showing Michael that he is not in some drug crazed fog and remembers everything. "One shot" is also the whole point of the movie and indeed of life itself: You have one shot at life and you have to do it right. Nick feels he screwed up and thus, decides to end his life in "One shot."

By analysing this scene as an "active viewer" it has made me think about why the characters acted as they did more in depth.

References

- [1] *One Last Shot - The Deer Hunter (7/8) Movie CLIP (1978) HD*. <https://youtu.be/OuGSXf1BoWU>. accessed 2017-09-22. 1978.