

Wag the Dog

(Comedy) (1998)

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Major Characters

Conrad Brean.....Robert DeNiro
An extremely cynical and intelligent advisor who specializes in “fixing” political crises. In this case, he decides to create the illusion of a war so that the American public will not become obsessed with a sex scandal involving the US President.

Stanley Motss.....Dustin Hoffman
A very superficial, rich and stereotypical Hollywood movie producer who agrees to “produce” the war that Brean wants to start.

Winifred Ames.....Anne Heche
An assistant at the White House who works with Conrad and Stanley on the plan to keep the American public focused on the war, rather than the President’s sexual problems.

Sergeant William Schumann.....Woody Harrelson
An insane and very unstable soldier in a military prison, who is accidentally chosen to be the “rescued hero” of the war.

Fad King.....Denis Leary
A friend or associate of Stanley’s who is supposedly good at thinking of new ideas, names and products that can be sold to the public (A “fad” is a product or idea that becomes extremely popular, but only for a short period of time).

Johnny Green.....Willie Nelson
Another friend of Stanley’s who writes and sings country music.

Senator Neil.....Craig T. Nelson
A conservative US Senator who is running for President, who tries to use the sex scandal as a way to convince people to vote for him.

Plot Summary

This is probably one of the most cynical movies ever made about American politics. It is the story of Conrad Brean, an amoral political consultant who agrees to help the President of the United States survive an explosive scandal, in which a young teenage girl publicly accuses him (the President) of having made inappropriate sexual advance at her while she had been visiting the White House. Brean does not care whether the charges are true, but he is determined to manipulate the public so that they will not focus on these charges, at least until after they vote in the upcoming Presidential elections.

The accusations become public just 11 days before the nation will vote, and while the President is visiting China. Brean must act quickly, and thus with the help of White House assistant Winifred Ames, he travels to Hollywood in order to talk to Hollywood movie producer Motts. Brean decides the best way to keep the public's attention off the scandal is to create "a crisis," and he therefore convinces Motts to produce various scenes in a completely fictional war against the small European country of Albania.

Over the next several days, Brean, Motts and their various partners successfully convince the American public that Albanian terrorists were in the process of moving a small nuclear bomb across the Canadian border and into the United States. Unfortunately, other powerful forces within the government, including Senator Neil and the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) appear to be fighting Brean and Motts, and they seem to end the crisis before it can truly help the President. Therefore, in one last desperate move, Brean and Motts create "an American war hero," Sergeant William Schumann, whose rescue they hope will save the President in a giant explosion of patriotism. Ultimately, Brean's plan appears to succeed, but the democracy may be injured beyond repair....

A Brief Note on the Timing of this Movie's Release: When *Wag the Dog* appeared in the Fall of 1998, President Bill Clinton was fighting for his political survival because of the sex scandal involving Monica Lewinski. The makers of this film were certainly aware of the problems that Clinton was having, but what happened in the weeks after it came out was truly ironic. Clinton seriously considered going to war with Iraq, just as the Lewinski scandal was leading to his impeachment by the US Congress, and naturally, many accused him of acting more to save his Presidency than to protect national security. The events of December 1998 showed that reality can be as interesting and ridiculous as fiction.

Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

The President faces a crisis, and calls Conrad Brean to save him.

Why does a dog wag its tail?

"To wag" a tail is to move it back and forth, which dogs do when they're happy. If the tail is wagging the dog, the implication is that the dog is being manipulated or being made to look foolish.

Who are you gonna ride in the stakes?

A reference to the Belmont Stakes, which is a famous horse race.

Never change horses in midstream.

An expression which suggests that when things are going well, you should keep doing what works (in this case, you should reelect the President since the economy is doing well). A “stream” is a tiny river.

That’s Mr. Fix-it.

A nickname for a person who can fix anything that is broken.

John Levy’s staff, his assistant, and Amy Cain, press.

“Staff” are the people who work in an office for the same person, as secretaries and other types of assistants.

If it gets out, you leaked it.

If a news story “gets out,” it becomes known to the public. “To leak” a story is to intentionally but secretly tell a member of the media about it.

When it broke, the President said “get me Conrad Brean.”

A news story that “breaks” is one that becomes known to the public.

He had an illegal immigrant nanny?

A “nanny” is a woman who works in a house taking care of the kids, cooking and cleaning. Many nannies in the US are illegal immigrants.

He gets ahead in the polls and you get a little nervous.

“Polls” are public opinion surveys that are the obsession of every American politician who wants to be elected.

He made a pass at some sentry?

“To make a pass” at someone is to make a sexual or romantic advance.

A “sentry” is a guard, and often a person who is in the military.

Firefly girls.

The name of the (fictional) group of teenage girls who are supposed to be learning about the government when they visited the White House.

One of these girls expressed an interest in a Frank Remington bust.

A “bust” is a statue of a person’s head (Remington was a famous sculptor).

They went in the office behind the oval office.

The very famous office in the White House where the President works.

The Secret Service will back me on this.

The well known but secretive organization that is responsible for protecting the President and other top political leaders.

The girl is alleging...?

“To allege” is to officially claim or declare, without giving proof.

If it's a story and it breaks, they'll have to run with it.

In this case, "to run with it" means to accept that the news story is going to become known, and thus work with it as well as possible.

He's ill.

Another word for physically sick (And the reason given for why the President must stay another day in China).

Get that out now!; Tell the jackals how sick he is.

A "jackal" is a wild dog, or in this case, a reference to reporters.

Issue a bulletin; He's got some rare strain.

"To issue a bulletin" is to make an official announcement to the news media. A "strain" is a type of animal or virus, and here, refers to a strain of flu virus.

You're goddamn right it has nothing to do with the B3 bomber!

"Goddamn" is a crude intensifying adjective to show anger or other emotion. The B3 bomber is an Airforce Plane that was never built.

I don't know why these rumors get started.

"Rumors" are stories or other unofficial news that are often not true, but are deliberately talked around by various people.

The rough cut of the Neal commercial.

A "rough cut" of a media production is the first draft or filming, before it has been completely edited (Neal is a reference to Senator Neil).

Has the President changed his tune?

"To change one's tune" is to think or behave differently than before, but note that a tune is also a song, and here, the song Senator Neil is using in his commercial is "Thank heaven for little girls."

The Presidency is about honor, principles and integrity.

"Integrity" is a interesting word that means high moral character.

Whoever is leaking this stuff to that geek at the Post...

A "geek" is a funny little word that refers to a socially awkward person (often one who is very smart and wears glasses). "The Post" refers to *The Washington Post*, which is a very important newspaper.

"I hope this won't screw up the B3 program."

"To screw up" is a critical phrasal verb meaning to do something badly.

"Deploy the B3 before it's fully tested?!"

"To deploy" something means to begin to use it, especially when used in a military context.

What crisis? :: I'm **working on** that.

"To work on" something is to try and solve it, often by thinking a lot.

Get General Scott and the Joint Chiefs of Staff...on a plane to Seattle.

"The Joint Chiefs of Staff" are the leaders of the US Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, who report directly to the President.

He's nervous to talk to the Boeing people.

Boeing is the world's biggest manufacturer of commercial and military airplanes. It is located in Seattle, Washington.

Where did you go to school kid, Dartmouth?

"Kid" can be an affectionate term for a young person or child. Dartmouth is a University in the state of New Hampshire.

Then show a little spunk!

A cute little word for energy or excitement.

It won't prove out.

This is a phrasal verb I've never heard used, though it probably means that it won't be shown to be true.

We just gotta distract them; We have two weeks to the election.

"To distract" someone is to get their attention away from what they were thinking about by getting them to think of something else. (Note that in rapid speech, 'have got to'----->'gotta')

I gotta go to LA to see a Hollywood producer.

"LA" is Los Angeles, America's most wonderful city. A movie "producer" is the person who puts up the money to create the film, and helps to organize what will be needed to make it successful.

Conrad decides that the President and the nation need a good little war, and that Stanley Motss is the man who can produce it.

See you at National.

A reference to National Airport, near Washington DC.

During the Reagan administration, 240 marines were killed in Beirut, and 24 hours later we invaded Grenada; That was their M.O.

"M.O." stands for "Modus Operandi," which is a Latin term meaning the agreed upon way of doing things. All of this refers to real events in 1984, when President Reagan ordered the invasion of the island of Grenada, a little after 240 US soldiers were killed in Beirut, Lebanon.

What did they find out about the Gulf War? Our video of one bomb falls down a chimney, and that building could have been made out of legos.

A “chimney” is the tower which allows smoke to escape from fireplaces or factories. “Legos” are plastic parts used to make toy buildings for kids.

Albania.

A small country in Eastern Europe, next to Greece and Yugoslavia.

They seem shifty, standoffish.

A person who is “shifty” is dangerous and can’t be trusted. A person who is “standoffish” is distant, cold and hard to get to know.

This is why we have to mobilize the B3 bomber.

“To mobilize” is to organize to use, often in a military context.

We turn to Melissa Gardener at KZAB in Santa Fe, with this breaking news.

Note that American radio and TV stations are usually identified by four letter codes or names, which represent the owners of the station.

Santa Fe is a beautiful city in the state of New Mexico.

A local firefly girl accused the President of sexual misconduct.

“Misconduct” is an interesting word for bad or unethical behavior.

Folks in America are waiting for a response from the White House on these harsh allegations.

“Harsh” is an excellent adjective meaning cruel, bitter or powerful.

I want the top people at the Albanian desk!

The “top people” in any organization are the most powerful or best.

“The Albanian desk” refers to those in the US State Department who are responsible for American policy toward Albania.

Roust them out of bed! CIA! NSA! Sirens blaring.

“To roust a person out of bed” is to wake them with loud noises. The CIA is the Central Intelligence Agency and the NSA is the National Security Administration; Both are powerful and controversial spy agencies.

“Sirens” are the devices that make loud warning sounds on police cars or ambulances. It is said these cars are “blaring”

We’ve said flat out that there is no B3 bomber.

To say something “flat out” is to say it as directly as possible.

If it is true, he must step down.

“To step down” from a political or corporate office is to resign or quit.

I say on behalf of the American people, come home.

This is another way to say “for.”

Face the music, whatever that may be.

“To face the music” is an interesting expression which means to face the results or consequences of one’s previous actions.

Accusations have surfaced which could effect the outcome.

Another word for official charges of wrong-doing or bad conduct.

Get me my veggie shake and remind me to turn over in 10 minutes to tan the other side.

A milkshake made of vegetables!

We have mutual friends in Washington.

If two people have a “mutual friend,” they both are friends with that same person.

Yes, that’s what he inscribed; How did you know that?

“To inscribe” is to write a personal note or sign an autograph.

Ooh, this guy is fucked.

In this context, if someone is “fucked,” they are in a lot of trouble. Very crude, but fairly common.

We need to fight a holding action.

A military term which refers to a defensive way of fighting so that the enemy does not make any progress or gain any land.

They’re going to run this guy through the shredder.

“To shred” paper is to tear it into tiny little pieces, so this is Motss’ way of saying that they are planning to politically destroy the President.

If we can hold the break in the dam until the election, we have a chance.

“The break in the dam” is the little crack or hole in the dam that threatens to crack open, allowing water to flood below.

He’s going to come back some time; What’s one or two days going to buy you?

“How are a couple days of delay going to solve this problem?”

Brier rabbit couldn’t get out of this.

“To get out of” a difficult situation is to escape from it, or to solve it.

We’ve just learned that the State Department has set up a special Albanian task force at Ops center.

A “task force” is a small group of people who are brought together to work on a specific situation or problem.

Is the situation in Albania related in any way to the Muslim fundamentalist anti-American uprising?

“Muslims” are followers of the Islamic religion, while “fundamentalists” of any religion are usually conservative people who are strongly devoted to the religion’s most basic beliefs. An “uprising” is usually an armed revolt against a government.

He didn’t phrase it right; He didn’t sell the line.

“To phrase” an idea is to express it. In this case, “to sell the line” is Mott’s way of saying to speak convincingly, like a commercial.

This is going to hold for 11 days? The guy fucked a girl scout!

“To fuck” someone is obviously a very crude and common way saying to have sex with them, and “girl scouts” are an organization of young girls that are known for camping out and selling cookies (The Fireflies).

You’re kidding! You’re not kidding?

“To kid” about something is to discuss it without being serious.

I’m in show business; Why come to me?

The Hollywood term for the making of movies and TV shows.

“54-40 or fight, Remember the Maine, Tippencanoe and Tyler, too.” They’re war slogans.

A “slogan” is a well known expression used in politics or advertising (All three above refer to 19th century military history, but few American would be able to identify the war, so I won’t bother!)

One video of one bomb; The American people bought that war.

This is a very cynical way of stating that Americans were manipulated into supporting the 1991 Gulf War.

Stan, get with it!

A great little expression that is used when you want to tell a naïve or uninformed person that they have to accept the reality of a situation.

I read the first draft of the Warren Report;

Says he was killed by a drunk driver!

The “first draft” of a document is the first written version, that may not have yet been edited. “The Warren Report” is the famous investigation that concluded that President Kennedy was killed by just one person.

One smart bomb falling down a chimney;

I was in the building when they shot that shot.

“Smart bombs” were explosives that the US military first used in the Gulf War, which in theory were extremely accurate, and thus prevented the loss of innocent life. In reality, they probably were not as ‘smart’ as the US Government wanted the public to believe.

1/10th scale model of a building.

This refers to a small version of a building that is actually only 1/10th the size of the original

You want me to produce your war? :: Not a war; It's a pageant.

"To produce" a movie is to pay for it and organize it, but you don't usually produce a war! A "pageant" is a parade or outdoor ceremony.

Stanley and his friends begin production of the war against Albania.

We need a theme, a song, some visuals.

A "theme" is the main subject or focus of a piece of writing or art.

"Visuals" are anything that can be seen, such as posters or paintings.

It's like the Oscars; That's why we came to you.

The "Oscars" refer to the Academy Awards, which is the annual show in which awards are given for best movie, actor, actress, etc.

They don't know what we do; Don't get me started!

This is a fairly common way of expressing great anger or frustration (i.e.... "I don't want to start talking about this ridiculous situation").

An ambassadorship? That's my payoff?

An "ambassador" is the head diplomatic representative of one country to another, and thus the "ambassadorship" is the actual position.

A "payoff" is another way to say pay or reward.

I would just do it for the fun of it, for a story to tell.

To do something "for the fun of it" is to do it because you would enjoy it, but not because you want to get paid or rewarded.

A figure of speech.

A certain way of saying something.

It's Miss America, and you're Bert Parks.

Reference to the Miss America beauty contest, and its host, Bert Parks.

They're oppressed.

A political word meaning repressed, abused or denied basic freedoms.

No, fuck freedom. They want to destroy the godless Satan, our way of life.

Note the nonsexual use of "fuck" as a verb with a direct object, which is a vulgar but fairly common way of saying that the object in question (in this case, freedom), isn't important. "Godless Satan" is used by Islamic fundamentalists to refer to the United States ("Satan" is the devil).

We just found out they have **the bomb**.

“The bomb” often refers to nuclear or atomic bombs.

They’d have to have a rocket and all of that shit.

Note that “shit” can be used in referring to a general situation, or just various things.

They are all a bunch of wogs; cross that out.

“To cross out” a piece of writing, or an idea, is to eliminate it (Motts uses the word ‘wog’ here, but I don’t think this is a word).

It’s a suitcase bomb! You don’t need missiles.

A bomb, which is of course, carried in a suitcase.

When it’s cooking, it’s cooking.

Motts’ way of saying “I am brilliant when I start thinking well.”

The bomb is in Canada, and in an attempt to infiltrate it into the USA....

“To infiltrate” something into a country is to get it in secretly.

That’s terrific, because it’s cost-effective.

If something is “cost-effective,” it’s worth doing because it can be done cheaply, or at least for less money than what it can later make.

This usually refers to business products, not wars.

Please write it down; Don’t editorialize.

“To editorialize” is to state an opinion on a controversial subject.

The President comes on the air.... “Be calm.”

Someone who is “on the air” is being broadcast on TV or radio.

We don’t need an Act 2.

An act refers to a particular part or section of a play.

It’s a teaser.

A “teaser” is something small that makes a person want more of it, such as one TV show, that gets people interested in watching more of the same characters.

John, you two-bit redneck shit kicker, how the heck are you?

“Two-bit” is a colloquial adjective meaning lousy, or not important. A “redneck” is a slang term for an uneducated male, often who lives in a small town. Note the addition of “the heck” is a dated way of adding emotion to questions---“How the *hell* are you” is more current.

Get out!

A great colloquial expression, short for “Get out of here!,” which in the right context, simply means “I don’t believe you.” Amazing, but true!

He's riding around in a pickup truck with a shotgun and a dog.
 A shotgun is a gun that fires metal balls, used for shooting birds.
 This is the classic stereotype of what a redneck does with his time.

Get your ass out here.
 A vulgar but effective way of saying "come here."

The President wonders about the possible Albanian backlash.
 A "backlash" is a violent or strong reaction against
 a belief or idea that has become increasingly popular.

You could have a war without enemies, but it would be a very dull war.
 A good little word for boring or uninspired.

Is there a backend on this? Percentage points? Money?
 A business term for money or other compensation, but rarely used.

Yeah, count on it.
 If someone tells you that you can "count on" something,
 they are essentially promising you that it will happen.

It's like the thing with the yellow ribbons and the hostages.
 A "hostage" is a person being held captive, usually by terrorists or
 criminals. A reference to the fact that many people put yellow ribbons
 on trees when Americans were held at the US embassy in Iran, in 1980.

Yes, but that was a naturally...that was a put-up job?
 A "put-up job" refers an event that appears to be spontaneous,
 but was in fact well designed in order to manipulate people.

Are you shitting me?!
 An interesting use of "to shit," here meaning to lie to someone

Get a theme here, product placement.
 "Product placement" is a business term referring to the goal of companies
 to make sure that the products they sell are easily seen.

It can't be a ribbon. AIDS has ribbons. Fuck ribbons.
 A reference to the fact that in the US, many people have
 worn red ribbons in sympathy with those who have AIDS.

All of a sudden Canada is transformed into that
 place from the North from whence, terror comes!
 Motts loves to use ridiculous language; "Whence"
 is a Pre-Shakespearian English word for "where."

Mounties guard the border.
 A "mounty" is a Canadian policeman, often one on horseback.

You put me in a room with talent...electric!

A silly way to refer to people who have talent or certain skills.

I'm thinking armbands.

Strips of cloth worn around your arm, often used to make a political statement, such as opposition to a war.

Hunter green! Strong, pride, dignity. Not Kelly green.

This is a ridiculous way to discuss the differences in shades of green.

[Sung]----->Sit on my lap if you love me.

The part of the body formed by the legs above the knee, when one sits.

I don't think it's appropriate for what were doing.

A critical word meaning suitable, correct, or specifically not in bad taste.

The President spent the weekend pressing the flesh;

He wasn't campaigning, he was dating.

"To press the flesh" is a political expression referring to when politicians shake many hands while running for office. A silly play on words referring to the fact the President was now in a sex scandal.

***The first tragic images of the Albanian War are filmed for the public,
as the country quickly rallies to support the President.***

Taking refuge there days away from the election.

"To take refuge" is to run and seek shelter from those who are trying to cause you harm.

Young girls in rubble.

A word referring to the rocks and bricks that are left after a building has been completely destroyed.

It is her we are mobilizing to defend? Or is it she?

Put here to show you that even native speakers sometimes get confused as when to use the pronoun (she) or the object (her).

This is too static.

Something that is "static" is not moving, and thus perhaps boring.

What's this? :: Head shots.

The term photographers use to describe photos of people's faces.

This is handheld news footage; send it to everyone.

Film of news events, taken by small and easily moved cameras.

I like the sorrowful one.

A good little word meaning very sad or filled with grief.

I like the broad right here.

A stupid and dated word for woman or girl.

We're locked into Albania; Why?

To be "locked into" a situation is to be forced to continue working within it, usually because it's too late to go back and change.

Albania is hard to rhyme.

Two words rhyme when they have a similar sound
(Such as the words rhyme and time).

Jim Belushi.

A famous Albanian-American actor.

Is there a national dish? :: We could make it up.

A "national dish" refers to food that people of a country love to eat, such as pizza in Italy. "To make up" something, in this context, is to lie and pretend that something is what it really is not.

To the men and women of the 3-0-3 detachment, with their leopard skins.

The 3-0-3 refers to the fictional army unit that Motts and Brean decide will be the heroes of the war in Albania. A "detachment" is a separate group of people, and a "leopard" is a type of wild cat with beautiful spotted fur skin.

[Sung]-----> "I guard the American Dream."

"The American Dream" is the idea that if you work hard, you can go out and make a lot of money and be happy and free. Perhaps.

Why are they sticking with this age-old horseshit? This same garbage.

"To stick with" something is to continue doing it. Anything that is "age-old" is very old, and "horseshit" is a lesser known cousin to "bullshit," both of which mean nonsense, lies, etc.

The Times has got the firefly girl in the style section. The Post on page 12.

The Times refers to the *New York Times*, and The Post refers to the *Washington Post*, both of which are important newspapers. The "Style Section" is that part of a paper often dealing with fashion, cooking, etc.

I voted for Boog Powell on first base, he didn't get it, and it just depressed me. It's futile.

Boog Powell was a famous professional baseball player who played the first base position. "Futile" is a good word for hopeless or impossible.

I'm too claustrophobic; I can't vote in small places.

Somebody who is "claustrophobic" is afraid of small places. In the US, people vote in little private booths (but this is no reason not to vote!)

Albanian terrorists have a staging area for their atomic workshop; That's why she is fleeing.

A military term for a place where operations can be organized before carrying out a mission.

Albania doesn't really do anything for me.

A colloquial way to say "Albania doesn't really excite me."

We're not declaring war; we're going to war.

Note that only the Congress, not the President, can officially "declare war," and that hasn't happened since 1941.

This late breaking news just in from Air Force One.

This is the official airplane that carries the President of the US.

It's a direct buyout.

A business term for the buying of a company.

What is this menagerie! I just wanted kittens!

This is a place for wild animals, or even a zoo.

We have a schnauzer and what appears to be a losp oso.

Two types of dogs (Not very important to know).

What you have here is a cross between a dog and a...

If one makes "a cross between x and y," this means it is a combination of the two.

Get rid of the dog and keep the kittens.

A critical expression meaning to eliminate or take away.

My agent would be real miffed with me.

"Miffed" is an interesting little word meaning angry or upset.

This is your security clearance.

A badge or pass of some type that allows people to enter those areas that are considered very sensitive or secret.

We're going to do it digitally.

A reference to modern computer technology (0101010, etc.)

Can I hold the kitten? :: No, we'll punch it in later.

Note that with digital cameras, one can "punch in" an image on a photo, even if the object in the photograph wasn't there originally.

A wider set of **options**.

An alternative word for choices or perhaps possibilities.

All kidding aside, when this goes national, I get to put it on my resume?

“All kidding aside” is one way of saying “in all seriousness.” In this context, “to go national” means the film will be seen all over the country. A “resume” is an official summary of one’s experiences and education, which is used when looking for a job.

What is it? A guild thing or something?

A “guild” can be another word for a union (including a labor union).

Stop the makeup! She’s been raped by terrorists!

“Makeup” is the most common way to refer to cosmetics (lipstick, etc.)

She’s not pale enough!

“Pale” is a word to describe skin, and means very white or not at all tanned.

They’ll do the kitten thing optically.

Another high-technology word referring to digital computer images.

Find us the Anne Frank sirens.

This refers to the warning sound that police cars and ambulances make (Anne Frank was the famous Jewish Dutch girl who was killed by the Nazis near the end of World War 2).

That’s chilling.

This is a powerful word meaning very disturbing or scary.

I got an instinct for casting; Don’t ask me why.

“Instinct” is the intuition or inner feeling that people have, perhaps from experience or even birth. “Casting” refers to the job of finding the right actors to play the various parts of a movie.

Is it a stream? Pond?

A “stream” is a tiny river, and a “pond” is a big puddle or tiny lake.

Calico kitten.

A type of orange cat/kitten.

Let me talk to him. :: He’s mobilizing the 6th fleet.

A “fleet” is a group of ships that sail together in the US Navy.

I hate it when they start to meddle.

“To meddle” is an interesting word meaning to get involved, give unwanted advice, or interfere with.

How soon can you get this cut?
 “How soon can you finish filming this?”

They can leak it to the press and download it on Telestar 401 Transporter 21.
 A high-tech explanation on how to get the film out to the public.

The young Albanian national fleeing in this video
 is attempting to escape terrorist reprisals in her village.
 A “reprisal” is a violent act of revenge.

America has seldom witnessed a more poignant picture of the human race.
 An excellent word for emotionally touching or sweet.

Then you get the song, the image, the merchandising tie-ins.
 A reference to products that can be sold as a part of a
 bigger event, in this case the ‘Albanian war.’

***Stanley and Winifred return to Washington,
 and soon find themselves talking to the CIA.***

Do you think it’s too ostentatious? :: It’s fine, I’ll stretch out.
 “Ostentatious” means too showy, fancy or snobby. “To stretch out”
 is to relax by letting your arms and legs move as far as they can.

There are unconfirmed reports from a
reliable source that things are in motion.
 This is an important expression for the news media, referring to people
 who reporters trust, who agree to speak, so long as the reporter does not
 identify who they are. All of this refers to developments in the war.

The President is looking for a swift, painless
 and victorious conclusion to the war.
 “Swift” is a good word for quick or fast.

This comes from the highest levels.
 This usually refers to the most important people in a government.

The New York Times, The Sacramento Bee...
 All in remission; No mention of the firefly girl.
 If a disease like cancer is “in remission,” it is no longer threatening the
 body. This is Winifred’s way of saying the major papers have dropped
 coverage of the scandal because they’re focused on the war.

A young Albanian girl dressed in her whatever.
 This can be a widely used word when the speaker is not
 sure of the exact words that she wants to use.

Is there an Albanian harvest festival?

A traditional ceremony in many cultures to celebrate the arrival of various types of crops (wheat, rice, etc.)

Anyway, she gives him the secret whatever it is, **blah, blah, blah**, telling him this is a sacred traditional offering.

A popular way of implying that the details of a thought are not really worth saying because the listener already has the general idea.

It's given to the man who ties the first sheaf.

A rarely used word for a bunch of wheat or grain that is tied together.

A face of innocence, not cynicism.

"Cynicism" is a general belief that people act in their own interests, and there is little real good in the world. This film is *extremely* cynical!

Big Bird shrugs off his Secret Service.

In this film, "Big Bird" is the name that the Secret Service uses to refer to the President. "To shrug off" someone is to dismiss or ignore them.

How is Big Bird holding up?

"To hold up" is an excellent phrasal verb meaning to continue to survive, and is often used when a person faces great problems.

Ambassador to Togo?

A small country in Western Africa.

Boca Raton.

A city in Florida. In Spanish, this literally means 'mouth rat!'

I have a three year old daughter eventually headed for orthodonture.

"Orthodonture" is the (expensive!) area of dental medicine that tries to straighten or correct the way teeth develop, often by using metal braces.

What do I do? Lug them back in the District or dump them in the country?

"To lug" something is to pull or carry it with great effort. Here, the District is a reference to Washington D.C (the "District of Columbia").

There's no difference between good flan and bad flan.

"Flan" is a delicious custard dessert with a burnt caramel topping.

I am under medical care, the side effects of which...

"Side effects" are the unintentional results of taking certain medicines.

Quite touching.

A nice little word meaning emotionally tender or sweet, but frequently used, as here, in a very sarcastic or cynical manner.

There are no nuclear devices on the Canadian border.

A “nuclear device” is any type of nuclear bomb.

Our spy satellites show no secret terrorist training camps in the Albanian hinterland.

A interesting word for the back country of a nation, far from cities.

The border patrol, the FBI and the RCMP report no untoward activity along our picturesque Canadian border.

The “border patrol” guards the US borders with Canada and Mexico.

The FBI is the “Federal Bureau of Investigation,” which handles federal crimes (most crimes in the US are enforced at the state level).

I don’t even know what the RCMP is, so I wouldn’t worry about it!

“Untoward activity” is that behavior which is suspected of being aggressive or suspicious, and “picturesque” means charming or pretty.

It’s all well and good, but when the fit hits the shan, somebody has to stay after school.

A great expression is “when the shit hits the fan,” which means “when the real trouble starts.” In this case, the CIA agent got a bit confused!

Do you want to fill me in on that?

“To fill someone in” on something is to inform them.

Why do people go to war? To ensure their way of life.

“To ensure” is another way of saying to guarantee.

Your ability to fight a two ocean war? Against who? Sweden and Togo?

It has been American military policy to be prepared to fight a war in both Europe and Asia at the same time.

The war of the future is nuclear terrorism against a small group of dissidents, who, unbeknownst to perhaps their own governments, have blah blah blah.

“Dissidents” are those who strongly disagree with a government policy or the government itself, and often try to fight against it.

“Unbeknownst” is a strange and old variation of “unknown.”

If you’re not gearing up to fight *that* war, then eventually the ax will fall and you’ll be on the street.

“To gear up” to do something is to prepare to do it. An “ax” is a sharp metal tool for cutting trees, and if “the ax falls,” this means that the consequences or results of your actions have arrived.

You can see this as a drill.

A “drill” is a practice session or test, to prepare for the real thing.

They’re nice enough people. They just haven’t thought it through.

“To think it through” is to think about it clearly and completely.

You could talk a dog off a meat truck.

A interesting line that says you can convince anybody of anything.

It was a phenomenal performance.

A good alternative word for amazing or incredible.

You turned them around!

Winifred's way of saying "You completely changed their minds."

Something has distracted the President.

"To distract" someone is to take their mind off what they are doing by getting them to focus on something else.

The wheat offering is ceremonial; The first cut of the harvest.

A symbolic gift to celebrate the arrival of the crop for that season.

I'm not proficient in Albanian, but the old woman is quite taken as the President is offering her the coat.

To be "proficient" in a language is to be fluent at it. If someone is "taken" by an action, they are emotionally moved or touched.

[Sung]-----> It's for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

These are the most famous words of the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson.

It was understated.

If something is "understated", it is not expressed too forcefully.

The fighting ends too soon, but a new war hero is born.

The situation in Albania is resolved.

Another word for solved, settled or taken care of.

Our troops along the Canadian border and overseas are standing down.

An official phrasal verb meaning to relax from a state of high alert.

Stop the choir!

A group of people who sing together, often at a religious service.

Knock it off!

A wonderful and widely used expression that simply means "stop it."

We've received information from the CIA that confirms the cessation of hostilities.

An official way of saying the end of fighting.

You think you're in a tight spot now; Try making
The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse!

A "tight spot" is another way of referring to a difficult situation.
 "The Four Horsemen..." is a well known story from the bible that
 has been made into many plays and movies. The "apocalypse" refers
 to the last book of the bible, when great violence and suffering shakes
 the earth in the days before Christ is supposed to return.

The Japanese in the caves of Okinawa didn't believe the war is over.
 A reference to the fact some Japanese soldiers continued to fight many
 years after World War 2 ended. Okinawa is a Japanese island.

It's like we sent him a Christmas Card and left out the fruitcake.
 "Fruitcake" is a horrible dessert that people still give as holiday gifts.

He was left behind and just discarded like an old shoe.
 "To discard" something is to throw it away.

Give me the Pentagon and a list of people in all military special programs.
 The huge five-sided building, located outside of Washington DC in the
 state of Virginia, that is the headquarters of the American military.

A shiny shoe.
 A word that refers to things that look new and polished.

A ballad of loss...and redemption.
 A "ballad" is a song that tells a short story. "Redemption" is the process of
 being forgiven for having done bad or sinful things in the past.

What key do you want it in?
 In this context, a "key" is a set of musical notes used to play a song.

Bottom of the 9th.
 A reference to the game of baseball, which has 9 "innings" or divisions of
 play. "The bottom of the 9th" is at the last part of the game.

Anybody here know Morse Code.
 A type of electronic communication that was used before telephones,
 in which dashes [----] and dots [....] were used to mean words.

Here's the deal.
 "This is the situation."

We drop him behind enemy lines.
 The line up to which soldiers from the enemy side have advanced.

Is there a way we can make it sound old and scratchy with a hiss.
 If a record is "scratchy," it has lots of pops and other distracting noises.
 A "hiss" is the sound a snake makes, as well as how old records sound.

I see where you're going with this.

"I see what you want to do here."

This is good, heartfelt.

A nice little word meaning deeply felt or touched, or possibly sincere.

People will weep.

"To weep" is to cry.

Put this in the Library of Congress, folk music section. **Right away**.

"Folk Music" is that music associated with the common people of a country, which often tells stories of struggle and hope.

"Right away" is a common and useful way to say immediately.

Who's seeing the guy from CBS tonight? Lure him!

CBS is a major American television company. "To lure" someone is to try and attract or seduce them.

Tell him...it's on your conscience.

"Conscience" is an important word referring to that part of a person which understands moral right and wrong in his own behavior.

This is a shitty business, and we need no ghost from the grave to tell us that.

"Shitty" is crude but very common and useful adjective, here meaning immoral or unethical. A "grave" is where dead people are buried.

Eight days from now, I'm going to be taking you folks into the second term.

"Folks" is another word for people. "The second term" refers to the fact that Presidents are elected for four years, but can run for a second four years in office.

It is in the works. It is being addressed.

If something is "in the works," it is being worked on by people as one speaks.

We are being proactive!

"Proactive" actions are those that are done in order to *prevent* a problem, rather than reacting to a problem once it occurs.

I see a lot of glum faces.

A nice little word for sad or perhaps in low spirits.

Don't be disconsolate.

A rarely used word meaning hopelessly sad or upset.

This is where the rubber meets the road.

A silly expression which refers to the point in time where things become interesting or exciting (The “rubber” refers to the tires of a car, which are made of rubber).

You think this is tough? I was four months into a production of “Song of Solomon” when I found out I didn’t have the rights!

In the entertainment business, “the rights” often refer to the legal right to use a book or song, without being sued.

Pain in the ass.

A good expression to refer to a person who always creates problems.

He says it’s corny.

A useful little word that means too emotional, sentimental or silly.

They said “it’s too theatrical.”

In this context, a way to say dramatic, or too emotional.

Everything was over their heads.

If an explanation or joke is “over the heads” of someone, this means that they do not understand it.

Each and every one of us thank that Supreme Power, whatever we conceive that power to be.

“A Supreme Power” is an indirect way of referring to God, without using that actual word. “To conceive” is to think of or imagine.

The threat of nuclear terrorism has been quelled.

“To quell” a threat is to suppress or stop it.

A simple quirk of fate.

An interesting expression that refers to the fact that things in life happen arbitrarily, without any particular reason. A “quirk” can be an unpredictable or sudden turn of events, and “fate” is the ultimate but unknown cause of all that happens.

I could have gone this way; It’s all a change of wardrobe.

“Wardrobe” is a common word for a personal collection of clothes.

Like Plato said, it doesn’t matter how the fuck you get there, if you get there.

Note the use of “the fuck” in certain questions and statements to express various emotions, from anger to cynicism.

Know any Latin? :: “I Claudius.”

This is a famous play from ancient Rome.

No effort will be spared to find this brave man.

This is a poetic way of saying that every possible effort will be made.

Those dashes and dots spell out a message in the Morse Code.
Dashes are short lines in punctuation (“---”),

I’m told his unit mates gave him the nickname ‘old shoe.’
Here, “unit mates” refer to his fellow soldiers in the (fictional)
303 army unit. A “mate” is a fellow worker or friend.

I can vaguely remember it.
This is an important adverb which means distantly or unclearly.

Trump that Senator Neil, you howdy-doody lousy....
“To trump” something is to beat it, or to do it in a more impressive
way. “Lousy” is an important word meaning of bad quality
(“Howdy-doody” is a reference to a 1950s TV show).

Just for the symmetry of the thing?
“Symmetry” is the balance or beauty that results
when two sides of something are seen as equal.

If Kissinger could win the Peace Prize, I shouldn’t be
surprised to wake up and find I’ve won the Preakness.
A reference to the fact that Henry Kissinger, an American Secretary of
State, won the Noble Peace Prize for helping to end the Vietnam war even
though he had also acted to continue it for many years
(The Preakness is a famous horse race).

The American public goes crazy for “the Shoe.”

Those are ratty shoes.
A funny and young person’s way of referring to something
of very poor quality, often because it is already very used.

That’s why were flinging them away.
“To fling” something is to throw or hurl it.

From the folk collection, and a fitting song about Private Schumann.
Another word for appropriate, correct, right or suitable.

I mean this from the bottom of my heart, as one of your race.
To say something “from the bottom of one’s heart” is to say it with
complete sincerity or honesty. Here, the word “race” is used to refer to
Albanians, but of course, Albanians are a nationality, and not a race.

The White House wants to know about the Congressional Medal of Honor for Schumann.

One of the highest awards an American can receive.

You ought to see how much granite you have to put in this thing.

A type of hard gray rock that is used for buildings and roads.

Guess who retains the merchandising rights.

A business term that refers to the right to sell goods that carry a particular image, such as T-shirts that are sold with Elvis Presley or Michael Jordan on them.

We got the shoeburger with cheese and 303 sauce.

The Fad King's ridiculous ideas for marketing Sergeant Schumann.

I just got Nike to have Dennis Rodman dye his hair a leopard skin color.

Nike is a famous shoe company, and Dennis Rodman is a famous Basketball player. "To dye" is to chemically change the color of something, such as hair (Something that Rodman loves to do).

A spontaneous moment of sheer patriotism.

"Spontaneous" is an excellent word that means done suddenly, without planning. "Sheer" is a powerful adjective meaning complete, and "patriotism" is the love that you have for your country.

The inaugural speech.

This is the speech that a President gives during his inauguration, which is the ceremony he participates in when he officially takes office.

Let's close out the thing in style.

"To close out" a project is to finish it.

Hell of a ride, Stanley.

A common way of saying that something was incredibly exciting.

Fucking amateurs!

An "amateur" is a person without any experience.

Knock wood.

A cute little expression which is a way of hoping for good luck.

Indeed, it is.

A more common word in British English, which means certainly, or perhaps of course.

We'll bring him back and stash him in the hospital.

"To stash" something is to hide it in a secret place.

Units of the 303 stormed the mountain hideaway,
freeing a tired but happy Willie Schumann.

“To storm” a place is to attack or surround it suddenly,
usually with great numbers and force.

A big mistake to reveal Schumann before the election.

“To reveal” something is to let it be known or seen.

Schumann is Jaws, and you don’t put Jaws in the first reel of the movie.

“Jaws” refers to the killer shark in the famous movie. A “reel” is an object
around which film turns, or in this case, a part of a movie.

You have to tease them.

Here, “to tease” means to attract by offering just
a little, so that people will continue to want more.

You take the fruit of 40 years, hard lessons, mistakes and you call it wisdom.

This is Mott’s poetic way of referring to experience. “Wisdom” is the
ability to use intelligence and experience.

You got decades left in you.

A “decade” is a period of 10 years.

What can I do to top this?

“To top” something is to do something that is even better or greater.

Ambassador to what? I don’t even like to go to Brentwood.

A wealthy neighborhood in Los Angeles.

Captain, you want to take her up.

“To take up” a plane is to have it fly up into the air.

A child at the airport breaks the ranks and runs up
to old shoe and rubs some meat on Schumann’s cuffs.

“To break ranks” is to separate from the others, and in this case, to
physically separate from others in order to get to the President.

“Cuffs” are that part of a shirt near the end of the sleeves.

***Conrad, Stanley and Winifred meet Sergeant
William Schumann, American hero and psycho.***

Keys to the manacles?!

“Manacles” are a devise used to chain hands together.

He’s in chains because he’s a convict.

A “convict” is a person who lives in prison.

He raped a nun.

A Catholic woman who lives in a religious community.

I need a little readjustment.

A readjustment is a small change, in this case relating to attitude.

All combat takes place in the rain at the junction of the 4 map system.

“Combat” is an official military term for fighting, and a “junction” is the place where streets meet each other.

He’s back from combat and torture, so he’s going to be a little fucked up.

“Fucked-up,” is a crude but common way to describe a person who is drunk or stoned from drugs, or as in this case, badly hurt.

I have a prescription here.

This is an official paper that doctors give to patients so that they can obtain certain medicines.

I want you standing by with a lot of this stuff. A crate of it.

A “crate” is a big container, often made out of wood.

An anti-psychotic.

A type of drug used to calm people with severe psychological problems.

This is nothing; Did you ever shoot in Italy.

Note that you can “shoot” both a photograph and a movie.

Try Italian starlets smacked out on benzamine.

“Starlets” are famous female entertainers. If someone is “smacked out,” they are stoned or deeply under the influence of a drug. “Benzamine” is a type of pill that some use as a recreational drug.

Who are you sons-of-bitches?

The odd plural of “son-of-a-bitch,” which is a crude but common term for a mean, abusive or unpleasant person.

The President is monitoring the situation carefully.

“To monitor” a situation is to seriously watch over it.

What do we do now, Mr. win-an-emy-social-conscience-whale-shit-save-the-rainforest-peacenik-commie-fucking-hire-a-convict-shithead?

Presented here to show you that an insult can, in theory, be an endless series of adjectives and noun phrases. “Emmys” are awards given for TV shows. Whales and rainforests are favored political causes for many Americans on the political left. A “peacenik” is an antiwar activist, and “commie” is a dated slang word for a communist.

A “shithead” is a fun insult word, usually used just by itself.

Little affirmative action fuck!

“Affirmative action” is the policy of promoting blacks and other minorities who have suffered discrimination in the past. Once again, note the colorful use of “fuck” as a simple but insulting noun, with Winifred’s colorful use of nouns serving as adjectives!

This is nothing. Piece of cake.

One way to say that something is very easy.

Producing is like being a Samurai warrior.

Japanese soldiers who lived hundreds of years ago.

Let’s go, come on!

The greatest and most versatile of all phrasal verbs, here meaning hurry-up.

The guy is a nutcase.

An excellent and funny way to refer to a person who is crazy.

He is doped to the gills.

“Doped” is an old-fashioned word for stoned, or under the influence of drugs. “Gills” are organs found on the side of a fish.

Try a 10AM pitch meeting...and you haven’t read the treatment.

A “pitch meeting” is a Hollywood expression for meetings where people try to convince producers to pay for the making of a movie (“To pitch” is to advertise or try and persuade). A film “treatment” is a brief summary of the film.

Produce him, or rank him in another of a series of broken promises.

“To rank” something is to put it in a particular order in comparison with others, or as here, to place a person in the same group as others.

He has sustained minor injuries and he will be medicated for some time.

“To sustain minor injuries” is to be hurt, but not too seriously. If a person is “medicated,” they are under the influence of (legal) drugs.

The driver of the rig doesn’t have his green card.

A “rig” is a type of truck or tractor. A “green card” is the card that allows immigrants to permanently live and work in the United States.

You want Schumann to be rescued by an illegal alien?

“Illegal alien” is the ridiculous but official term to describe a person who is illegally in the United States (“Aliens” also refer to beings from different planets or outer space).

What’s all this moping about?

“To mope” is to be extremely sad or gloomy, or to sulk or complain.

I like the night life, I like to boogie.

“To boogie” is a very 1970s word meaning to dance or party.

***The war against Albania saves the President,
but two people pay a very heavy price....***

He’s alive! Strike that.

Another way to say “Never mind, I was wrong.”

What is better than the triumphal homecoming of a war hero?

“To triumph” is to win or be victorious, and this is the rare adjectival form of that verb. A “homecoming” is the official return of a person who has been away a long time.

You can’t save the world. :: Ain’t that the truth.

A very colloquial way of agreeing with what was just said.

The success of the President at the polls is based not on these events, but on the spin given these events.

“To spin” is to turn something around very quickly, but spin as a noun has become a political term referring to how a story is manipulated or explained in order to make the public think in different ways.

Never give up!

A critical phrasal verb meaning to surrender or stop fighting.

The President is a product.

A cynical line which implies that the President can be sold to the public like any consumer product, from soap to cars.

I’m going to get these people straight.

“I am going to inform these people as to what is happening.”

You knew the deal when you signed on.

A common way to refer to an agreement.

I’m talking a secret account, getting laid whenever you want.

“Secret accounts” usually refer to secret bank accounts.

“To get laid” is a crude but common way of saying to have sex.

Marine Guards will salute you all the time.

“To salute” is to raise your hand to your forehead as a person passes by.

I did this for credit, and I’m not going to stand here and let two dickheads from film school take it.

A funny insult similar to “shithead” (A “dick” is slang for penis).

Are you nuts?!

An interesting little colloquial word meaning crazy.

The New York Times called it “a thrill ride for the ages,” but they didn’t mention the producer.

A “thrill” is anything that is extremely exciting.

I’m going to let some limp-dick film school pussy take the credit?

Another colorful insult. A “limp dick” is a soft penis, and “pussy” is a very vulgar word for female sexual organs.

If I didn’t step up, you’re nowhere.

“To step up” is to agree to take on significant responsibility.

I put this together out of spit and polish.

A fairly rare expression for a lot of hard work.

This is a complete fucking fraud and it looks 100% real.

A “fraud” is a legal term for anything that is designed to fool or trick someone else.

They told me I couldn’t remake *Moby Dick* from the point of view of the whale.

A funny line; *Moby Dick* is the most famous whale in literature.

I made this lame turkey fly---pure Hollywood.

Motss’ way of claiming that without him, it never could have been done (“Lame” means unable to walk correctly, or weak).

For once in my life, I will not be pissed on.

Here, “to piss on” someone means to show them great disrespect.

Do you swear to uphold the duties of a citizen of the United States of America, to defend her from all enemies, foreign and domestic?

This is the question that all people must answer when they apply to become a citizen of the US. “To uphold” is to officially support.

Do you make this pledge with full resolve? :: Si.

A “pledge” is an official promise. In this case, “resolve” is determination or dedication. “Si” means “yes”in Spanish!

He was 57 or 62, depending on the bio.

A short word for biography, which among journalists and others, refers to the basic facts of a person’s life history.

He will no doubt be sending troops back to finish the job.

“Troops” are soldiers who serve in the army.

Wag the Dog

Possible Questions for ESL Class Discussion

1. Could this happen in real life? *Has this happened in real life?*
In the United States? In your country?
2. What does this movie seem to be saying about politicians and politics?
3. What is more manipulative; Politics or advertising?
4. Is there a single admirable character in the film?
5. How would you describe Stanley Motts to a friend? And Conrad Brean?
Would you let your daughter marry either of them?

