

SENTIENT

Written by

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TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR FORESHORE - DAY 1

Broad shoulders. Navy t-shirt. Disheveled hair.

LT. COMMANDER MICHAEL DOWD towers against a savage red sky.

His face is drawn.

His eyes pooled with blood.

All is deathly quiet.

A NAVY VOX OPERATOR communicates from an unseen vessel.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR (V.O.)
What do you see?

Dowd stares out across the harbour.

What he sees, gives him pause.

FADE OUT

2 EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. OCEAN FLOOR - DAY 2

Pitch black.

SUPER: 48 HOURS EARLIER - ORDINANCE DISPOSAL MISSION

A light appears.

Royal Australian Navy Diver, CHIEF PETTY OFFICER LACHLAN HUNT emerges from the darkness. Hunt searches the ocean floor.

HUNT
Repeat.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR(V.O.)
What do you see?

HUNT
Nothing.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR(V.O.)
You're right on top of it.

HUNT
Still nothing.

Hunt passes by. Two Navy vessels hover on the surface above.

3 EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. SURFACE - DAY

3

A Zodiac dinghy floats next to a RAN Patrol boat.

A grizzled older NAVY VOX OPERATOR, (Voice over water) sits between two Navy divers in full kit, Lt. Commander Michael Dowd and another much younger man, facing away out to sea, LT. AIDEN FRANK.

Dowd speaks into his VOX.

DOWD

Lachy.

HUNT (V.O.)

Bloke.

DOWD

I'll take Tiger for a look-see.

HUNT (V.O.)

You want I should come with?

DOWD

No, return to surface.

HUNT (V.O.)

Copy that. Good hunting.

Dowd turns to Lt. Aiden Frank, still facing out to sea.

DOWD

Tiger.

Frank doesn't respond.

DOWD (CONT'D)

Aiden.

Aiden seems paralyzed, unable to respond.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR

Perhaps the Lieutenant would like us to review his dive checklist.

DOWD

No he would not.

Frank turns to the Dowd and the Navy Vox operator.

LT. AIDEN FRANK

All good.

Frank looks back out to sea.

The Navy Vox operator looks to Dowd and shakes his head.

DOWD

Do you know your heading?

LT. AIDEN FRANK

Yes sir.

DOWD

Take the charges. I'll follow.

LT. AIDEN FRANK

Sir.

Frank slides over the side and slips beneath the waves.

Dowd turns to the Navy Vox operator.

DOWD

Where do you get off speaking to an officer like that?

NAVY VOX OPERATOR

That kid doesn't know his head from his ass, sir.

DOWD

While your shiny 'ass' has been parked in an office chair for the last six months, that, 'kid' has been defusing IEDs in the Stan.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR

I heard about that. I heard a few other things too.

DOWD

You heard nothing. Are we clear?

NAVY VOX OPERATOR

Sir.

4 EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. BENEATH THE OCEAN SURFACE - DAY 4

Hulls of the two Navy vessels bobble on the surface above.

Dowd slips beneath the waves and begins his descent.

The light dims.

His heartbeat slows.

The sounds of the surface become distant.

He checks his depth and continues.

Petty Officer Hunt passes-by on his ascent to the surface.

The two men acknowledge one another and continue on.

We're deep now, getting deeper. Dowd can see the ocean floor but not Frank.

DOWD
Tiger, where you at?

FRANK (V.O.)
Did you see that dog?

DOWD
Dog?

FRANK (V.O.)
At the wharf.

DOWD
What dog?

Dowd cruises low and slow over the ocean floor, searching for Frank.

FRANK (V.O.)
There was this really sad-looking dog. There was another dog, he was a really happy dog, he was a terrier.

DOWD
A terrier?

FRANK (V.O.)
Oh yeah, well the happy dog, he bounds across the wharf and rocks on up to the sad dog and says, 'Bloke, what's wrong?'

DOWD
Hold up, the dog's talking?

FRANK (V.O.)
Yeah, yeah, so he asks, 'What's wrong?'

DOWD
Ok, what does he say?

FRANK (V.O.)
He's like, 'Oh, I don't want to talk about it,' and so the happy dog says, 'Oh, I see what's happening here, you need help, you need to go see a psychiatrist' and the sad dog says, 'No, no I can't see a psychiatrist', and the happy dog says, 'Dude, you just...'

Frank's voice breaks.

DOWD

Aiden?

FRANK (V.O.)

'You're just being proud and you don't have to be because, shit happens, you just need to get help, you need to see a psychiatrist' and the sad dog says, 'No, you don't understand, I can't' and so the happy dog says, 'Can you give me just one good reason why, why you can't see a psychiatrist?' And the sad dog says, 'Yeah, just one, ... I'm not allowed on the couch.'

DOWD

... You're shitting me.

FRANK (V.O.)

Yeah.

DOWD

Yeah.

FRANK (V.O.)

Boss?

DOWD

Yeah.

FRANK

You need to get back with Kayla.

DOWD

This is about my marriage? Aiden?

Dowd searches around for Frank. Exasperated, he looks to his GPS tracker.

DOWD (CONT'D)

Where are you Lieutenant?

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)

She was good for you.

Dowd looks to a GPS on his wrist. He sees a blip.

DOWD

Why are you seventy metres to my east?

Dowd ascends to get a big picture view. A dim light illuminates the sea bed in the distance.

DOWD (CONT'D)

Where are you at Aiden?

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)
I'm growing a spine like the son of
an Admiral ought.

Frank's response hangs.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR(V.O.)
(Alarmed)
Is there a problem Commander?

DOWD
(To Vox Operator)
No problem.
(To Frank)
Aiden? Aiden?

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)
Yeah.

DOWD
Stay there mate. I'm coming to you.

Dowd descends east then drives hard along the ocean floor.

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)
I found the ordinance.

DOWD
That's good. Where?

5 EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. OCEAN FLOOR. ORDINANCE SITE - DAY 5
Frank hovers before a massive World War 2 spiky contact mine.

LT. AIDEN FRANK
I'm looking at it.

6 EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. OCEAN FLOOR - DAY 6
Dowd navigates the sea grass towards a rise in the distance.

DOWD
Ok, wait for me.

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)
Charges laid.

DOWD
Wait for me.

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)
Ready to detonate.

DOWD
What?! Aiden? Wait upon my arrival!

Dowd redoubles his pace, paddling towards Frank.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR(V.O.)
Is there a problem Commander?

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)
It's too far.

Dowd paddles furiously over the rise. He sees Frank's silhouette against the mine.

DOWD
It's not too far. I'm nearly there.

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)
Too far gone.

DOWD
Negative Lieutenant! Wait! Wait
for me! Aiden!

An explosion erupts from the ocean floor.
A compression ring heads straight at Dowd.
The ring envelopes him in light and bubble.
His body is cast to the abyss.

7

INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. CORRIDOR - DAY

7

NURSES rush Dowd through the corridor.

Dowd's writhes with the bends.

A gentle hand reaches out to steady him.

Dowd looks up to see a pretty young nurse, the RED HEAD. On
any other day...but today all he can do is grit his teeth.

The trolley stops abruptly.

The foreboding figure of COMMODORE LAURENT FRIESNER leans
into Dowd.

Dowd, barely able to speak, grabs Friesner's arm.

DOWD
Aiden?

FRIESNER
Lt. Frank is dead.

Friesner whispers into his ear.

FRIESNER (CONT'D)
If you live, you'll wish you
hadn't.

A SENIOR NURSE steps forward to confront Friesner.

He steps aside. The nurses push Dowd into the Barometric room. The door shuts behind them.

A thumping heartbeat, a racing monitor then...

FADE OUT:

8 INT. SYDNEY. BAROMETRIC CHAMBER - MORNING

8

Flat-line. Dowd wakes.

DOWD

Wait!

The power quits. The door auto-opens.

Dowd's vision is blurred. His head is swimming.

He's panting and covered in sweat.

His mobile phone is glowing. It's hums at him like a Tibetan singing bowl.

His head tilts.

Dowd is transfixed.

He reaches for his phone.

Too hot to touch! He retracts.. He clenches his fist in pain.

Dowd looks to his burnt open hand then to the open door.

9 INT. SYDNEY. ROOM HOUSING BAROMETRIC CHAMBER - MORNING

9

Dowd pushes the barometric chamber door open.

His phone pulses light into the room.

He staggers out, looks back to the phone then to the room.

A howling wind rakes the building.

SPICK, SPACK, SPECK, a storm hammers the building with a growing hail of shrapnel. The structure groans with the wind.

Dowd makes his way to the exit and wrenches the handle.

The door flings-back.

A BODY COLLAPSES ONTO HIM.

Both drop backwards to the floor.

A glowing mobile phone flies onto the floor.

Dowd flails about wildly. He pushes the body away and jams himself up against a filing cabinet.

Dowd peers over to discover it's the pretty young red head nurse.

Dried blood has pooled around the nurse's eyes, nose and mouth.

Dowd crawls back to her. He opens her mouth, places his head next to her face and rests his hand on her chest.

Nothing.

DOWD
(Wheezing)
Help.

Dowd grabs at his own throat. He's parched. He coughs. It's all a struggle.

He spots a defibrillator on the wall. He steps up to get it. His legs collapse from under him. He forces himself upright, drags himself to the wall and grabs the defib.

He drops down next to nurse, rips open her blouse, flips open the defib and presses the start.

Nothing. He stabs at the button. It's dead.

He tosses it, raises himself over her and presses down repeatedly on her chest. Over and over until he arms fold in, flopping him over the dead nurse.

DOWD (CONT'D)
(Wheezing)
Help.

Trembling, sweaty, he cannot summon the energy to bring her back.

His eyes are then drawn to the Nurse's phone.

It's glowing and resonating in-sync with his.

What is going on?

Dowd stumbles into the corridor.

DOWD
 (Wheezing)
 Help!

It's blacked-out.

He points back to the dead nurse.

DOWD (CONT'D)
 Please.

He turns towards a darkened exit sign, gaining momentum as he goes until he stops dead in his tracks.

A pile of bodies, stacked to the ceiling, obscures the swing-door to the exit.

Phones within the pile, glow and hum in-sync.

It's a temple of the dead. Dowd stands, aghast.

He approaches.

Dowd rolls-back one of the bodies. Dried blood has pooled around its eyes, nose and mouth. They're all the same.

A blood droplet falls from Dowd's own nose to the back of his hand. Dowd looks to his hand. The droplets rolls up his arm.

FLASHBACK TO:

11 INT. NAVY TRAINING FACILITY - MORNING (TWO YEARS BEFORE) 11

Dowd stands before a room of NAVY ENTRY OFFICERS including a dapper son of the Admiral, Aiden Frank.

The formidable, proud figure of VICE ADMIRAL J. DEAKIN FRANK stands at the rear of the class, watching-on. Beside him, the Admiral's dog, HEC WALLER and the icy Commodore Laurent Friesner.

A blackboard notice tasks the Trainees, 'Chemical attack, know the drill!'

DOWD
 Your base has just been hit. You
 have seconds to act. Take me
 through it.

ENTRY OFFICER ONE
 Kit-up?

DOWD
 In a hurry. Breathing ap first.
 Eyes then body.

ENTRY OFFICER TWO
What if you don't get kit?

AIDEN FRANK
Then you get dead.

That gets a laugh from the trainees. Dowd and Admiral Frank exchange looks.

DOWD
Also in a hurry. Thank you Mr. Frank. Next!

ENTRY OFFICER THREE
Find command. Establish contact. Seek orders.

DOWD
And...

The room is silent.

DOWD (CONT'D)
Ready for war. Someone is coming to kill you.

RETURN TO PRESENT

12 INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. CORRIDOR - MORNING 12

SPICK, SPACK, SPECK, the growing storm hammers a window in a room off the corridor, smashing the glass and returning Dowd to the present.

The door to the room creaks-open.

Dowd releases the body and stares into the abyss behind him.

From the abyss, something stares back.

Dowd rises slowly then backs into an office door.

13 INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. OFFICE - MORNING 13

Dowd unlocks the door and backs inside.

He looks to his hand. He's trembling.

He wipes his bleeding nose, closes the door the jams a chair up against the handle. It's the wrong size, he can't lock it. He tosses the chair and backs away from the closed door.

A hypnotic red glow seeps through venetian blinds, filling the room behind him.

Dowd turns. It mesmerizes.

He approaches the window. He reaches for the draw-cord.

TEICHER (O.S.)
I wouldn't do that.

Dowd turns alarmed.

He stumbles back, knocking over a three tier of inboxes.

Panting, squinting, scientist, DR. AMON TEICHER wearing a Hazmat protective suit comes into focus.

Teicher sits next to an oxygen tank, his mask retracted to his forehead.

The two men take each other in for a moment.

TEICHER (CONT'D)
You won't like what you see.

But Dowd has to see. He pushes aside the blind to reveal an angry red, swirling storm, powering past the window.

Dowd presses his hands to the glass.

The storm outside begins to slow, then pause, as if it has seen him. Dowd's head turns. He doesn't understand what's happening.

The storm hovers...then rushes up, slamming into glass.

Dowd is jolted back.

He stares out of the window in disbelief.

14 EXT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL - MORNING

14

Outside, all of Sydney and for as far as the eye can see is enveloped by the storm.

FADE TO:

TITLE:

"SENTIENT"