

SENTIENT

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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 female NAVY VOX OPERATOR, (Voice over water) sits between two Navy divers kitting up for a dive, 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.

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

DOWD  
Tiger.

Frank doesn't respond.

DOWD (CONT'D)  
Aiden.

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

LT. AIDEN FRANK  
No he would not.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR  
Just saying, it's been a while sir.

DOWD  
The Lieutenant's a bad ass veteran now.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR  
I'm sure Lieutenant Frank gave those Al-Qaeda heathens some serious stick.

DOWD

He did.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR

The Admiral would be proud sir.

Frank turns, grinning ear to ear, shaking his head.

LT. AIDEN FRANK

Hey, did you see that dog?

DOWD

Dog?

FRANK (V.O.)

Back at the wharf.

DOWD

I didn't see any dog.

(To Navy Vox Operator)

Did you?

NAVY VOX OPERATOR

No, I didn't see a dog.

LT. AIDEN FRANK

Yeah, there was this really sad-looking dog.

Frank grabs the charges.

LT. AIDEN FRANK (CONT'D)

See you down there.

DOWD

Do you know your...?

Too late, Frank slides over and slips beneath the waves.

DOWD (CONT'D)

(To Navy Vox Operator)

Dog?

The Navy Vox Operator shakes her head, clueless. Dowd leans over ready to join Frank.

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.

Deep now, getting deeper. Dowd can see the ocean floor but not Frank.

DOWD  
What's up with the sad dog?

FRANK (V.O.)  
Oh there was a happy dog too, he was a terrier.

DOWD  
A terrier?

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

DOWD  
Hold up. The dog's talks?

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

DOWD  
Ok, I'll bite.

FRANK (V.O.)  
He's like, 'Oh, I don't want to talk about it,' and so the happy dog says, 'I see what's happening here, you need help, you need to go see a psychiatrist.'

DOWD  
A Psychiatrist for the dog?

FRANK  
Yeah so 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?

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

FRANK (V.O.)

'You're just being proud and you don't have to because, shit happens, it's not your fault, you just need help, you need to go and 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

What?

FRANK

You need to get back with Kayla.

DOWD

That was about my marriage?

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 you at Aiden?

5 EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. SURFACE - DAY 5

The Navy Vox Operator listened alarmed to the conversation.  
Chief Petty Officer Lachlan Hunt surfaces and rips off his mask.

HUNT  
What's up?

The Navy Vox Operator stays him with a raised hand. He presses the headphone to his ears.

6 EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. BENEATH THE OCEAN SURFACE - DAY 6

Dowd hangs suspended in the water, waiting upon Frank's response.

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

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

HUNT (V.O.)  
Mate, do you want me to come down?

DOWD  
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.  
His heart rate ascends.

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

DOWD  
Where?

7 EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. OCEAN FLOOR. ORDINANCE SITE - DAY 7

Frank hovers before a massive World War 2 spiky contact mine.

LT. AIDEN FRANK  
I'm looking at it.

8 EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. OCEAN FLOOR - DAY 8

Dowd navigates the sea grass towards a rise in the distance.

DOWD  
Ok, wait for me.

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

DOWD  
Wait for me Aiden.

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

DOWD  
What?! Lieutenant, wait upon my  
arrival!

Dowd redoubles his pace, paddling towards Frank.

His heart is pounding.

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

HUNT (V.O.)  
Mate, I'm coming down.

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)  
I'm too far.

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

DOWD  
You're not too far.

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

DOWD  
Negative Lieutenant! Wait...

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.



9

INT. SYDNEY. NAVY BASE HOSPITAL. CORRIDOR - DAY

9

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.

Dowd is beside himself.

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...

17

INT. SYDNEY. NAVY BASE HOSPITAL. BAROMETRIC CHAMBER - MORNING

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, 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 then looks to the open door.

18 INT. SYDNEY. NAVY BASE HOSPITAL. BAROMETRIC ROOM - MORNING 18

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 throat.

He spots a defibrillator on the wall and steps up to get it. His legs collapse from under him.

He forces himself upright, drags himself to the wall and pulls it down.

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

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.

19 INT. SYDNEY. NAVY BASE HOSPITAL. CORRIDOR - MORNING 19

Dowd stumbles into the corridor.

DOWD  
(Wheezing)  
Help!

The power's 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:

20 INT. NAVY TRAINING FACILITY - MORNING (TWO YEARS BEFORE) 20

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

21 INT. SYDNEY. NAVY BASE HOSPITAL. CORRIDOR - MORNING 21

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.

22 INT. SYDNEY. NAVY BASE HOSPITAL. OFFICE - MORNING 22

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 secure 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 and 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.

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.

DOWD  
Why?

TEICHER  
You won't like what you see.

But Dowd has to see. He parts the blinds. An angry red storm, swirling with menace, reveals itself beyond the glass.

Dowd presses his hands to the window.

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.

23

EXT. SYDNEY. NAVY BASE HOSPITAL - MORNING

23

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

FADE TO:

TITLE:

"SENTIENT"