

SENTIENT

Written by

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TEASER

FADE IN:

A dishevelled man in a Navy T-shirt stares across Sydney harbour, his eyes pooled with blood, his face drawn.

LT. COMMANDER MICHAEL DOWD towers against a savage red sky and all is deathly quiet.

A NAVY VOX OPERATOR communicates from an unseen vessel.

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

Dowd's view of the harbour is revealed.

A sea of human bodies cover the surface.

EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. OCEAN FLOOR - DAY

Pitch black.

SUPER: 48 HOURS EARLIER - ORDINANCE DISPOSAL MISSION

A light appears. Royal Australian Navy Diver, Lieutenant Commander Michael Dowd emerges from the darkness.

DOWD
Repeat.

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

DOWD
Nothing.

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

DOWD
Still nothing.

NAVY VOX OPERATOR(V.O.)
Have you looked in the sea grass?

DOWD
No, I didn't think to do that.

Dowd looks to the hull of a Navy vessel hovering on the surface above.

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

Navy Diver, LIEUTENANT AIDEN FRANK paddles towards a rusted metallic object through the murk.

LT. AIDEN FRANK

You know, you could just get a new girl.

EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. OCEAN FLOOR - DAY

Dowd searches around for Frank.

DOWD

I don't want a new girl. Where are you?

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)

My ex is into mature men. I could introduce you.

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

DOWD

Why are you seventy metres to my East?

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)

That's where the ordinance is.

DOWD

Seventy metres from the GPS marker?

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)

Correct.

DOWD

How does a bomb float Aiden?

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)

Don't know, don't care, laying charges.

DOWD

Wait.

LT. AIDEN FRANK (V.O.)

I got it.

DOWD

Wait 'til I get there.

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

Frank paddles blithely towards the object.

LT. AIDEN FRANK
Relax, I'll lay charges and be home
in my jammies before.

DOWD (V.O.)
Negative Lieutenant! For once will
you just.

A World War Two mine rises from the murk. Frank recoils.

EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR. OCEAN FLOOR - DAY

Dowd paddles furiously over the rise.

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.

INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. CORRIDOR - DAY

NURSES rush Dowd through the corridor.

Dowd's writhes with the bends.

The forboding figure of COMMODORE LAURENT FRIESNER watches
them pass. Dowd, barely able to speak, grabs Friesner's arm.

DOWD
Aiden?

FRIESNER
Lt. Frank is dead.

Friesner leans into Dowd to whisper 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 a Barometric
Chamber room. The door shuts behind them.

A thumping heartbeat, a racing monitor then...

FADE OUT:

INT. SYDNEY. BAROMETRIC CHAMBER - MORNING

Flat-line. Dowd wakes with a jolt.

DOWD

WAIT!

The chamber's power supply quits. The door auto-opens.

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

He's panting and covered in sweat.

He sees his mobile phone glowing, accompanied by a resonating hum like a Tibetan singing bowl in full song.

His head tilts.

Dowd is transfixed.

He reaches-out to touch his phone. The closer he gets, the more his hand shakes until it too begins to glow. Dowd clenches his fist, retracts it then looks to the open door.

INT. SYDNEY. ROOM HOUSING BAROMETRIC CHAMBER - MORNING

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, collapsing a body onto him. Both drop backwards to the floor. Another glowing mobile phone flies onto the floor.

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

It's one of the nurses. Dried blood has pooled around the nurse's eyes, nose and mouth.

Dowd crawls towards her and checks for a neck pulse. Nothing.

He closes her eyes and gently rests her head on the ground.

Dowd looks to the Nurse's phone. It's glowing and resonating in-sync with his.

INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. CORRIDOR - MORNING

Dowd enters the darkened corridor, clutching at his chest.

He spots a darkened exit sign then 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, mouth a gasp.

He 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 nose to the back of his hand. Dowd looks to his hand.

FLASHBACK TO:

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

Dowd stands before a room of NAVY ENTRY OFFICERS including a dapper Aiden Frank.

The formidable, yet 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

INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. CORRIDOR - MORNING

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. Is that just the wind?

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.

INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. OFFICE - MORNING

Dowd locks the door behind him then jams a chair under the handle. He keeps his eye on the handle for movement.

He steps back towards the windows.

A hypnotic red glow seeps through venetian blinds behind him.

Dowd turns and reaches for the draw-cord.

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

Dowd turns alarmed to discover scientist, DR. AMON TEICHER wearing infectious diseases protective kit. Teicher sits next to an oxygen tank with 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.

EXT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL - MORNING

Dowd stares out the window in disbelief. We pull back to reveal, all of Sydney is enveloped by the storm.

FADE TO:

TITLE:

"SENTIENT"

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. OFFICE - DAY

Dowd stares out of the window, stupefied by the storm.

Teicher approaches, wheeling his oxygen tank with him. He draws intimately close.

Dowd releases the blinds.

The two men now stand side by side, silhouetted against the hypnotic red glow spilling through the blinds.

Dowd paws at Teicher's name badge.

DOWD

Teicher?

TEICHER

Doctor.

DOWD

What is it?

Teicher looks to the red glow spilling through the blinds.

TEICHER

Yes.

Teicher is oblivious, seduced by the storm.

Dowd grabs Teicher by the lab coat lapels.

DOWD

Do you have another suit?

TEICHER

Just the one.

DOWD

Give me the tank.

TEICHER

You can't have the tank.

DOWD

Share with?

TEICHER

No.

DOWD

No?

TEICHER

No! What will, 'share with' look
like when the tank begins to empty?

Dowd wrenches a fire extinguisher off the wall, raises it ready to use as a weapon then looks to Teicher.

Teicher backs-up.

Dowd turns to the door and removes the chair propping the handle. He turns back to Teicher then exits.

INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. CORRIDOR - MORNING

Dowd enters the darkened corridor.

He scans the darkness behind then proceeds in the other direction towards the exit.

Dowd stops dead in his tracks.

The bodies, once piled at the door have disappeared.

Teicher joins Dowd, wheeling his tank along with him.

Teicher looks in the direction of Dowd's stare but there's nothing to see.

TEICHER

Something?

Dowd looks behind to the darkened corridor but chooses to proceed forward, drawn to the storm.

Dowd open the doors. The noise is overwhelming.

The foyer floods with the swirling, hypnotic light of the storm.

INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. FOYER - MORNING

Dowd discards the fire extinguisher and staggers towards the exit. Blood begins to stream from his nose, eyes and ears.

Teicher follows.

TEICHER

(Yelling)

Where are you going?

DOWD

(Yelling)

The Command bunker.

Dowd, oblivious, drives himself forward. It's like wading through wet cement. Teicher follows.

TEICHER

You can't go out there.

It strikes. Teicher's body begins to convulse. He collapses to his knees.

DOWD

Can't not.

Dowd takes Teicher by the collar and drags him forward until Dowd's legs give out and he collapses next to Teicher.

This is as far as they will go.

The storm rages outside.

EXT. WESTERN SYDNEY. FREEWAY - DAY

A freeway littered with abandoned vehicles.

The storm has subsided.

A resonance like a singing bowl hums away in the background.

A dense red haze hangs over the city.

A long shadow appears on the tar.

An outstretched palm feels the way forward. The figure, silhouette against the western sun, now comes into view.

HUBERT HESTON's silk tie flaps-about in the breeze.

His Italian designer suit and shirt are stained with blood.

He's blind, distressed and alone.

Heston bumps into a car, then another, then another then flings-back his arm as if to thwart-off an attack.

HESTON

Behind me.

Heston staggers on, pawing his way through the maze of abandoned vehicles.

HESTON (CONT'D)

Get behind me!

Heston trips and is flung to the ground. He winces, grabbing at his twisted ankle.

HESTON (CONT'D)

You have no authority!

Heston drags himself back up and limps forward but now, his path is blocked in all directions by abandoned cars.

He falls to his knees. He can go no further.
Heston holds his head in his hands and weeps.
From above, it's a simple maze to exit from, if you can see.

INT. SYDNEY. NAVAL HOSPITAL. FOYER - MORNING

Dowd wakes. His vision is hazy. His senses dulled.

He sees Teicher seated upright against a pylon.

Teicher maintains a thousand yard stare. Both men's eyes are pooled with blood.

Dowd hears barking outside. He drags his body around to look.

TEICHER (O.S.)

He knows you.

Dowd turns back to discover Teicher is alive, but is he?
Teicher maintains the thousand yard stare.

TEICHER (CONT'D)

(Louder)

He knows you!

Dowd is confused. Teicher gestures to a barking dog,
petitioning them through the glass door.

DOWD

Hec Waller.

Dowd staggers upright and opens the door. HEC WALLER romps
in, tail-wagging and leaps all over Dowd.

TEICHER

He knows you.

DOWD

The Admiral's dog.

Hec Waller goes over to Teicher and licks his face.

TEICHER

I don't.

Dowd offers Teicher a hand to lift him to his feet.

Teicher rises to meet Dowd face to face.

DOWD

Lt. Commander Michael Dowd.

EXT. SYDNEY. NAVAL BASE - DAY

Dowd and Teicher exit the building, Teicher wheeling his squeaky-wheeled oxygen tank along with him.

The natural light is blinding. They cover their eyes.

Debris is strewn everywhere. Broken glass crunches under-foot.

The raking wind has passed but a stream of smoke and mist wafts through the buildings.

Sydney is eerily quiet. A hum resonates throughout the city.

Hec Waller bounds off, stops then looks-back.

TEICHER

What kind of dog is Hec?

DOWD

A retriever.

INT. SYDNEY. CITY HOTEL ROOM - DAY

A darkened room.

A band of light spills onto a female form asleep on a bed.

The figure suddenly sits bolt-upright.

A mane of long blonde hair spills-down her back.

HEIDI FISK rips-off a sleeping mask.

HEIDI

Oh no. Oh no, oh NO!

Heidi leaps out of bed and runs out of shot.

The curtains open. Daylight floods the room.

An open suitcase lands on the bed and slams shut. She reopens it.

A stream of clothing, cosmetics and personal effects fly into the open suitcase whilst Heidi, 'self-talk' berates herself.

HEIDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You could have packed last night.

HEIDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

He might have called.

HEIDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

But HE DIDN'T, DID HE?!

Yet more personal effects are tossed into the suitcase.

HEIDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
They're going to send you to a
detention centre Heidi.

HEIDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You've overstayed your visa Ms.
Fisk. Customs will now escort you
and your fellow huddled masses,
yearning to breathe free, to a
HOLDING CELL WITH NO TOILET SEAT!

HEIDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Then, they're going to deport your
poor-broke, dumb-ass back to BUM-
FUCK, ARKANSAS!

Yet more clothes fly through the air. The suitcase begins to
take the shape of a heaped pancake.

HEIDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You don't wanna go to Bumfuck
Heidi.

HEIDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It don't matter where you go Heidi,
it comes to you! A town filled with
respectable white people who spend
the rest of their lives admonishing
you as a failed sinner, not just a
sinner, a failed sinner! After a
while in Bumfuck, HELL LOOKS LIKE A
HOLIDAY DESTINATION!

Heidi removes a dress from the heaped pancake and storms into
the bathroom, dressing as she goes.

BATHROOM

Heidi opens the door.

Light floods in the room. We see Heidi's face for the first
time in the mirror. Her eyes are pooled with blood. Congealed
blood stains her face around her eyes, nose and mouth.
Mascara tears cover her cheeks.

HEIDI
Oh Heidi.

EXT. SYDNEY. NAVAL BASE - DAY

Dr. Amon Teicher studies a wall.

Unseen, someone or something is hammering away in the
distance. Whomp, whomp, whomp!

Teicher is unmoved. His head tilts-ajar, absorbed by the vision before him.

The shadow of a person appears burnt onto the wall.

Teicher reaches out to touch it.

The shadow dissolves, scattering to ash in the wind.

He retracts his hand, shocked at the shadow's fragility.

A door closes behind Teicher.

A hand slaps-down Teicher's shoulder.

Dowd is at the end of it.

TEICHER

Anyone?

Whomp, whomp, whomp!

DOWD

(Referring to the whomp noise)

You can't hear that?

TEICHER

What?

Dowd's grasp suddenly evolves into a lean. Teicher catches him before a fall.

TEICHER (CONT'D)

Commander.

DOWD

Can you hear it?!

TEICHER

Are you alright?

DOWD

Hell yes! Are you deaf?

TEICHER

I'm experiencing some,
disorientation.

Dowd staggers ahead.

DOWD

Disorient this way.

Teicher shuffles forward until the sound of squeaky-wheeled oxygen tank brings the adventure to a halt.

Dowd turns back.

DOWD (CONT'D)
Are you going to drag that lame-ass
tank around all day!?

TEICHER
You don't want the tank now?

Dowd imparts a stare of death towards Teicher.

EXT. WESTERN SYDNEY. FREEWAY - DAY

Hubert Heston is huddled in a ball, his head flush against the duco of a four wheel drive, his arms wrapped around his legs.

Slow measured footsteps approach. A figure slides over a car hood. The feet land on the ground next to Heston.

Heston looks-up but cannot see.

The figure casts a shadow over Heston.

HESTON
Who's there?

A machete appears by the figure's side.

INT. SYDNEY. CITY HOTEL FOYER - DAY

Heidi exits an emergency stairwell into the hotel foyer.

It's dark and deserted.

Patrons' baggage is strewn throughout. Furnishings are overturned yet drinks still sit untouched on the remaining upright tables.

A cold shiver comes over Heidi. She covers her bare arms.

Heidi looks to the empty reception then to the glass exit doors. She makes a rapid beeline for the exit when she spots an open wallet on the reception desk.

Her eyes scan the reception for security cameras.

She runs her hand over the wallet, carefully peeling back the leather folds until a wad of cash is revealed.

She leaves the cash and opts to remove the ID of the owner, Dr. Kristoff Stamm.

HEIDI
Dr. Stamm.

She removes a photo of Dr. Stamm and his two daughters. One of them is a disinterested teen. The other is a doting daughter wrapped around her father.

Heidi turns the photo over. Written on the back, 'To Daddy from Sammy XXX.'

Heidi is stalled, captured by the relationship in the photo.

HEIDI (CONT'D)

You have two beautiful daughters
Doctor, and they love you. Sammy
loves you much.

Heidi removes \$100 from the wallet along with Dr. Stamm's business card.

HEIDI (CONT'D)

I'm just going to go ahead and
borrow this hundred. I figure you
don't need it but I have your card
and I'm going to pay you right
back, just as soon as I'm situated.

She takes another \$100.

HEIDI (CONT'D)

We'd better call that \$200 but I'm
good for it.

Heidi closes the wallet and places it back on the table. She begins to head for the door then turns back and collects the wallet.

HEIDI (CONT'D)

Here's what I'm thinking. If I
leave you here, a thief could come
by and steal you so I'm just going
to hold on to you until.

EXT. SYDNEY. NAVAL BASE - DAY

The Admiral's dog leads Dowd and Teicher to an imposing building in the distance, the Command Bunker.

Whomp, whomp, whomp!

TEICHER

What is that?

DOWD

Yes.

TEICHER

The building?

DOWD
The Command Bunker.

A fire axe presents itself in a glass case.

Dowd removes his T-shirt, wraps his hand and back-hands it.

Job done, the glass smashed, Dowd unwraps the T-shirt from his hand and reaches in to take the prize only to cut his hand on a jagged piece of glass lodged in the frame.

Blood runs down his arm.

DOWD (CONT'D)
Damn.

Teicher removes a handkerchief and attempts to bandage the wound. Dowd retracts his hand.

DOWD (CONT'D)
Is that thing clean?

TEICHER
Clean as the glass.

Teicher removes the glass shard embedded in Dowd's hand.

DOWD
What do you, SHITE, do, Doctor?

TEICHER
I'm a doctor.

Teicher bandages the wound.

DOWD
What kind of Doctor?

TEICHER
I'm a defense contractor.

Hec Waller chases his tail, impatiently demanding progress.

DOWD
And you work at the hospital?

TEICHER
We have a lab in the basement.

DOWD
We?

TEICHER
A team of eight.

DOWD
But just the one suit?

Teicher smiles at getting caught-out.

TEICHER

I wanted to get to know you better.

DOWD

How's that working out?

Dowd heads towards the bunker, axe in hand.

TEICHER

I'll let you know.

Teicher follows.

EXT. WESTERN SYDNEY. FREEWAY - DAY

SENIOR CONSTABLE WASIM SABBAN, machete in hand, sporting NSW Police overalls and a close-cropped Muslim beard, looks down upon Hubert Heston, his arms still wrapped around his legs.

HESTON

Friend, if you could help me, I would be so appreciative.

Sabban is gagging. He wants to speak but is experiencing an anaphylactic reaction.

HESTON (CONT'D)

If you could just call my wife or church, my phone's not working, I can't see it. I can't see to enter the damn code. If you could just call for me.

Sabban's machete hits the ground, followed by Sabban.

He collapses, face-up to the sun.

Sabban exhales a massive breath then lies silent.

Above, a flock of jet airliners circle the city of Sydney.

HESTON (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Hello. Hello.

EXT. SYDNEY. NAVAL BASE. THE COMMAND BUNKER - DAY

Hec Waller, Dowd and Teicher arrive at the bunker.

DOWD

The entrance is just.

They turn the corner.

Dowd stops dead in his tracks.

The entrance is covered in a pool of soot.

Admiral Frank is standing shoe in hand, smashing his head up against the entrance.

VICE ADMIRAL J. DEAKIN FRANK
Open this door!

Dowd and Hec Waller run to the Admiral.

Teicher is riveted to the spot.

He's looking at something completely different.

Hec Waller arrives at the Admiral's feet.

VICE ADMIRAL J. DEAKIN FRANK (CONT'D)
Open this door!

DOWD
Admiral?

Dowd staggers-forward, axe in hand.

DOWD (CONT'D)
Admiral?

Admiral Frank turns to Dowd.

He's dripping blood and delirious.

Frank's stature, that of a formidable figure is now starkly contrasted by his face, that of a disoriented old man.

Admiral Frank looks to Dowd, puzzled and distressed.

DOWD (CONT'D)
Admiral Frank?

Teicher catches-up and grabs Dowd by the back of his T-shirt.

TEICHER
Look.

DOWD
What?

TEICHER
Look.

DOWD
What? What am I looking at?!

Teicher drags him back by the T until the big picture of the wall comes into view.

TEICHER
Look!

The ash remains of a sea of bodies has been freeze-frame captured, burnt onto the outside wall of the command bunker.

Admiral Frank is the last man standing.

END OF ACT ONE