

DRONING

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

DR. JAMES TYRONE (45) runs down a narrow, red-bricked alley - exhausted, covered in sweat, stumbles as he runs. His side is wet with BLOOD, a gunshot wound.

He's wearing a white detainee jumpsuit with a series of numbers on the left breast and sleeve, a backpack, hair buzzed so close he looks like a new recruit in the Army.

High-pitched WHIRRING sound in the distance, getting closer, louder. James stops, looks over his shoulder, and a small, black, unmanned combat quad-rotor aerial DRONE enters the alley.

The only identifying marks on the vehicle are a series of numbers and an AMERICAN FLAG. It has TWO SUBMACHINE GUNS mounted to the airframe.

James runs.

The drone zooms after him, FIRING the submachine guns, BLAM, BLAM, BLAM!

James rounds a corner, the bullets blasting the brick to bits.

He sprints along the front of an abandoned factory.

The drone chases after, flying out of the alley, banks wide and shoots at him again.

He's showered by debris as he runs, the bullets blowing holes in the brick wall just above his head.

He tosses a small, square box at the drone. It has wires sticking out of it - looks homemade, pieced together junk held together by duct tape.

It bounces on the pavement and then emits a white FLASH so bright the entire area lights up. James shields his eyes.

After the flash, the drone spins in circles, then CRASHES into the factory and explodes.

INT. ABANDONED FACTORY - DAY

A long wall of filthy industrial windows, some of them broken with shards of glass in the frames, and a door with a faded Coors logo on it. The door hangs crazily on a single hinge.

James kicks the door open and enters the factory.

He hides behind the wall of windows, breathing hard, squeezing his wounded side. Carefully looks out the door and sees the burning remains of the drone.

James slaps his left palm against a pane of glass.

JAMES

Display.

A computer image materializes on the glass in the form of a detailed map of the area. A RED DOT pulses by the factory.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Expand.

The map expands and TWO pulsing BLUE DOTS appear, moving fast toward the red dot.

EXT. FACTORY - DAY

Two DRONES race along the factory's exterior, searching for James, their engines and rotors making a high-pitched, loud WHIRRING.

INT. FACTORY - DAY

James looks around the factory. The place is gutted, littered with brewing vats, some overturned, and abandoned furniture.

A murky sunset filters through the line of industrial windows. Dust particles move slowly in the dimming twilight.

James hunches below the windows, crosses to a wooden bar with a cracked glass tabletop - what's left of the beer tasting area. A shattered mirror above it with the Coors logo still hangs above the bar.

He throws his backpack on the bar, opens it, pulls out a small homemade HIGH POWER ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSE GENERATOR CANNON, followed by an EMITTER ANTENNA.

Slaps his palm on the tabletop glass.

JAMES

Display.

The city map appears on the cracked tabletop glass: The red dot is inside the factory and the two blue dots are steadily getting closer.

James removes his palm from the glass, the display vanishes.

He attaches a WAVEGUIDE PARALLEL TERMINATED TRANSMISSION LINE to the cannon and antenna.

Job done, he slaps his palm on the tabletop glass again.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Amplify.

The map appears on the glass, its display size increases, revealing DOZENS of blue dots racing toward the red dot.

He kneels down, opens a sliding door behind the bar and struggles to pull a BODY out, a MAN who looks exactly like James. He is dressed in identical clothing, breathing slowly, eyes open, but unconscious.

James reaches into the backpack and takes out a HANDGUN. He steps across the body and aims the weapon at the man.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Sorry.

He shoots the man in the same side as his gunshot wound, then tears open a sealed-foil the size of a fast food ketchup packet. It slips from his unsteady fingers.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Dammit.

A fine white powder has spilled out of the packet, a small mound on the floor.

James falls to his knees, attempting to collect the powder with his fingertips. When he touches the powder, he WINCES. Pulls his hands away, fingertips bleeding.

High-pitched WHIRRING outside!

James pulls himself up, looks out the windows and silhouettes of numerous DRONES come toward the factory.

A single drop of blood falls from his fingertip. It splatters on the floor and then...

...James pushes a button on the EMP cannon.

The cannon emits a little BEEP and a digital COUNTDOWN CLOCK appears on its computer screen, counting down:

"FIVE."

James drops to the floor.

"FOUR."

He empties the powder from the packet on the floor.

"THREE."

The drone submachine guns FIRE at the windows, glass SHATTERING.

"TWO."

James SNORTS the powder like a line of cocaine.

"ONE."

He SCREAMS.

"FIRING."

The army of drones crash through the windows and speed toward James, but...

...they stop suddenly, hovering above the bar, a windstorm of dust blowing around James and the factory.

James is lying next to the identical man, EYES OPEN, blood running out of his nostrils, body twitching.

The EMP cannon fires - BA-BOOM! All we see is bright light and then we zoom toward James' eyeball and enter his pupil.

INT. EYEBALL - DAY

Racing along James' OPTIC NERVE, we enter his BRAIN, seeing that his brain's NEURAL NETWORKS and NEURONS are firing like a July Fourth firework display.

Going deeper, CRAB-LIKE NANOBOTS, the same color as the WHITE POWDER James inhaled, become visible. They scurry along his brain's neural networks, a massive nanobot army.

Rocket by the nanobots and see that MILLIONS of them have gathered in his CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM.

An enormous nanobot MASS surrounds a surgically implanted ORGANIC MICROPROCESSOR attached to James' central nervous system and brain.

The organic microprocessor is the shape of a perfect golden rectangle, affixed to the Medulla Oblongata at the base of his neck. It is gold in color.

The nanobot army EATS into the microprocessor.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. ROOM - DAY

White walls, no windows, no markings, only a black door without a doorknob.

James sits at a desk with a glass tabletop. He's wearing the white jumpsuit, hair buzzed, and his palms are pressed to the glass. A blue electrical light vibrates around each finger.

He is in agony, eyes squeezed shut as he undergoes EBL - Electronic Brain Link, a brain-computer interface used for torture.

His body jerks, a sudden, violent movement, his eyes flash open and he looks directly at WENDELL GNASH (30s,) sitting across from him.

Wendell is dressed in standard issue Federal Agent black jacket, tie, white shirt.

WENDELL

Dr. Tyrone... James. Buddy. Come on. This has gone on long enough. Give us what we want and I'll make it stop. Easpypeasyjapaneasy.

JAMES

I... am... an...

WENDELL

Dude. You are an idiot. So cut it out. You're in here now. And in here you are whatever the hell I want you to be. Today you're a terrorist. Tomorrow you're a puppy. Next week, who knows? Maybe you're a... a...

JAMES

American.

WENDELL

Shitizen. Shitizen James. You're an American shitizan, that's all you are. What the hell happened to you, James? This is about protecting the Homeland. You used to know that. How can - you, the preeminent scientist on forced growth cloning - how can you fall so...? We're not the bad guys. You can't have 100 percent security and 100 percent privacy, not today you can't. It's all about give and take, buddy...

(beat)

I'll give you a bone.

Wendell taps the tabletop and two PHOTOS appear: James' WIFE (30s) and SON (10).

WENDELL (CONT'D)

If you give us what we want, I will show you your wife and son. Dude, this is a no brainer.

Long beat. James nods: OK.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Atta' boy. Good dog.

Wendell taps the tabletop and the photos disappear. He leans across the table, placing his ear close to James' mouth.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

OK, buddy. I'm listening.

JAMES

(dry whisper)

We're going... to have to make... some choices... as a society, and I've made mine.

Wendell sits back, crosses his arms, studies James, then smiles.

WENDELL

That sounds like hate speech, Doctor. I can have you arrested. Er. Uh. Rearrested.

(laughs)

There's no such thing as individual-rights-and-privacy anymore, James. I know that's your bag, but catch up, man. We are the only state.

(MORE)

WENDELL (CONT'D)

All of us together, googled in happiness. Peace, social justice, and the algorithm's way and blah, blah, blah, come on, don't be a willful dumbass. Don't bore me.

(beat)

We've spent a lot of time together, Dr. Tyrone, huh? Huh? Haven't we? I love the time we spend together. I love my job, James. This never gets old for me, even when you're boring. I mean, I'm living the dream, buddy. Think about that. I know everything about you. Inside and out, Shitizen James.

He raises an arm. The door opens. A WOMAN (20s) enters. She has two clear plastic bags filled with ash. She puts them on the table, some of the ash spilling out, turns and leaves.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

I am a man of my word, buddy.

He points to a bag.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Say hi to your wife and uh...

He points to the other bag.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

No, wait...

He points to the other bag.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Um... dang. I dunno which one is... uh... Say hi to your family.

(beat)

Not convinced?

Wendell taps the tabletop and a HANDHELD RECORDING of James' wife and son appears. Wendell steps into the shot, looks at the camera, smiles and waves. He pulls out a sidearm, shows it to the camera, then shoots James' wife and son dead.

The building shudders and the men react to the distant sound of an EXPLOSION and SHATTERING GLASS.

JAMES

(whisper)

You don't know everything...

LIGHTS go out. People SHOUTING, SCREAMING.

In the darkness, the blue light glowing around James' fingertips illuminates their faces.

Wendell and James stare at one another, then...

...James lifts his hands from the glass.

BLACKOUT.

INT. FACTORY - DAY

BACK TO PRESENT:

Blood on his nose, mouth, ears, James wakes up next to the identical man - who is now dead.

He claws his way to a standing position - dizzy, weak - CRIES OUT, reaching behind his head. He touches the base of his neck, where there's a burn mark in the shape of a small, perfect golden rectangle, the edges red and swollen.

James coughs, spits out blood, takes a look around: Drones everywhere, destroyed by the EMP blast.

He glances at the dead man.

JAMES
(sincere)
Thank you.

He slips the handgun into the backpack, puts a hand on his wounded side, crosses to the door, exits.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

James hitchhikes on a lonely two lane highway, unshaven, hair growing out. Wearing jeans, boots, a denim jacket, carrying a 70 liter backpack.

A passing SEMI-TRAILER TRUCK pulls over. The DRIVER opens the passenger door, James steps inside.

TRUCK DRIVER
Where you headed, fella?

JAMES
Home.

The truck pulls away.

EXT. FARM - DAY

Sunset - James walks up a dirt road to a farmhouse, the semi-truck driving away in the background, kicking up dust.

There's another farm beyond his property, the sun setting behind it. A FARMER in silhouette drives a tractor, tending a field.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

James walks to the front porch. Stops, removes the backpack. He has the HANDGUN tucked in the back of his pants.

The front door opens and his WIFE and SON stand in the doorway.

Wendell appears behind them, GUN in hand.

WENDELL

Dr. Tyrone.

JAMES

Agent Gnash.

WENDELL

Wendell. Please. Call me Wendell.

(beat)

You know, you really made things difficult for me, James. They all think you and your family are dead and I'm batshit crazy. But they don't know you like I do. If anyone can get off the grid without dying, my money's on you.

James massages the back of his neck with one hand and at the same time reaches behind his back and grips the handgun.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

But someone has to pay the price. Someone has to die. Right? Take one for the team? Like your... what do I call them? The ones I killed, your wife and son? Like you? What was that like, James? To shoot yourself?

JAMES

It... hurt.

WENDELL

Him. It hurt him. Not you so much. They're real people. They feel pain. They have emotions. Geez, you're ruthless. You're no better than me, pal.

(beat)

I knew you'd come here eventually. So I just... waited.

JAMES

I knew you'd be here, waiting.

WENDELL

Dude... that's just weird, isn't it? This whole thing is so freakin' weird. Hard to wrap my head around it.

JAMES

Alone, Wendell. I knew you would come here alone.

WENDELL

Got all the backup I need, buddy.

He places his weapon against the woman's head.

JAMES

Everything you want is right over there.

James points to a barn. A PITCHFORK leans against the wall. Wendell shoots James a skeptical look.

WENDELL

I've toured the barn. It's full of animals and animal shit and that's it.

In the distance, the farmer stops the tractor and watches James and Wendell.

JAMES

Under the barn. Deep under.

The farmer jumps off the tractor and start to walk toward them.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Science and engineering lab, comprehensive exabyte data storage, forced growth cloning tanks...

James sees the farmer coming their way, then raises his arm to shield his eyes from the setting sun. He squints.

JAMES (CONT'D)
It's all there. Everything you
want. Everything you need.

Wendell turns and looks. The farmer waves.

WENDELL
What an asshole. Been watching him
work for days. That's all he does,
work, work, work, busy bee.

The farmer is getting closer, doing a light jog now.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
And what. Is. He. Doing?

Wendell shows his gun to the farmer.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Gun. Hello? Federal Agent?

The farmer keeps coming.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Stupid redneck.

Wendell shoots at the farmer. BLAM!

The bullet misses him. He keeps coming, passing the barn now, and then... James pulls his handgun, aiming it at Wendell.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Oh. Geez. Go ahead, Dirty Harry.
Make my day. Kill your wife for me.

JAMES
She's not my wife.

WIFE
I'm his drone.

Wendell reacts.

James nods in the farmer's direction.

JAMES
Pitchfork.

Four sharp TINES pass through Wendell's torso.

He looks down in shock, mouth bloody, then looks up, eye to eye with the farmer - who looks exactly like him.

Wendell slips off the tines and falls on his back, dying. The farmer slams the pitchfork into the ground, right by Wendell's head.

James steps forward and whispers:

JAMES (CONT'D)

My wife and son are alive, Agent Gnash, and unlike you, they are very far away from here.

James looks at the drones of his wife and son.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Thank you.

(beat)

And thank you, Wendell. This wasn't easy, but... you made it easier. And I'm glad you got to meet the new and improved you - your replacement. And don't worry. He knows you, buddy. Everything about you. Inside and out. Citizen Wendell, American.

Wendell dies, encircled by James and the three drones.

FADE OUT.