

# THOSE GODDAMN ANIMALS

This smell. I can't stand this smell, this stench. This cell smells like sweat and fear. Someone was in here for a long time before I ever got into this mess. Who knows how long they were in here before who knows what happened? They probably killed the poor bastard. Those goddamn animals.

I can hear someone screaming behind the door. They're torturing him. I know they are. It's some type of interrogation. They're asking him questions, but he keeps screaming, "Stop! Please, stop!" All I hear are grunts from the interrogators. I can't understand a word they say. Nothing that comes out of their mouths makes sense. It's no language I've ever heard.

I can't stand his screams! I put my hands over my ears and huddle in the corner. It's no use. His screams get even louder. For a moment I let my hands down and listen. He's screaming for help now. I can't take it.

I have to help him.

I stand up and run towards the door as fast as I can. My shoulder slams into the padding covering the door and I fall against the ground. My breath escapes me. He's still screaming, and I can't help him. I can't even help myself. I'm trapped. There's no way out. The screaming continues for only a short while longer. They killed him. I know they did. Those goddamn animals.

My stomach finally relaxes. At least I can breathe again. That noise... There's a fan above me. It's continuously whooping,

breaking whatever silence there could have been.

And there's a mirror. Was that there when I got here? I can see myself. Is that me? I look like a mess. When was the last time I slept? Oh, God! What have they done to me? I can't even remember who I am. There's something wrapped around my neck. Dog tags. Am I in the army? Lieutenant Ronald D Whittaker. That's...

Wait! This isn't a mirror. It may seem that way on this side, but on the other side—they're in there! Those goddamn animals. They're watching me. I bet they're in there, behind there, watching me, studying me. What do they want with me?

"Let me out of here, you bastards!" I yell at the top of my lungs. I run over to the mirror and press my face up against the glass. "Let me go! I know you're in there! I know you're listening!"

No response. Just the whooping of the fan.

I step back, collapsing to the ground when I hit the padded wall behind me. There's footsteps in the hallway. They're coming. They heard me. The door opens before I have a chance to do anything. In the hallway there are two of them. Their appearance alone grips me in fear. They're dressed in formal dress suits, and if you weren't paying attention like me, you might for a moment think they were human. They weren't. They're hideous beasts. One of them has the face of a lizard with burning, red eyes. His forked tongue slithers out of his mouth and he hisses as he steps into the

cell. The other looks much like a reptile too, but he has the snout of a crocodile, complete with a hundred or so sharp teeth. His eyes glare at me just the same. They're going to kill me like they did the rest. Goddamn animals.

The door shuts behind them with a large clang. They say nothing. They just take their positions inside the cell, all the while their eyes fixed on me. The fan continues to whir.

"What do you want from me?" I ask, trying to be as diplomatic as possible. I know they won't allow me to negotiate, but I have to try.

The crocodile grunts at me and snaps his jaws together.

"What's going on here? Why have you put me here?"

The lizard makes a chattering noise with his mouth and slithers his forked tongue.

"I can't understand you. If you're trying to talk to me, I can't understand you."

Again the crocodile grunts.

I stand up slowly with my arms in the air, attempting to pretend I mean no harm. "I don't have the answers you're looking for. You have to let me go. I'm not of any use to you."

The lizard reaches into his suit pocket and pulls out a syringe; meanwhile, the crocodile approaches, his arms extended towards me. He's grunting louder and louder. Before he has the chance to touch me, I kick him in the stomach as hard as I can. He curls up in pain, falling to his knees. The lizard immediately jumps on me from the corner. On the ground, we're struggling against one another. One of my hands has a hold of one of his arms, and his other hand

has a hold of my other arm. The syringe is getting ever so close to piercing my neck. I can barely hold him off. He's stronger than me!

Just then I throw my knee into his stomach, and as he winces, I slam the syringe into his neck and inject all of whatever it was into him. He passes out, and I toss his limp body off from me.

The door of the cell crashes open, and standing outside is a group of angry reptiles, all dressed in some sort of camouflage suit, their guns aimed and their fingers about to pull the trigger.

I close my eyes.

Three men sit in a room lit with florescent lights. Two of them are in suits, the other is wearing a white coat. All three of them sit at a plain, white table and each sits in his own plain, white chair. In one of the walls there is a window, and on the other side there is a white, padded cell. In that cell there sits a man, curled up in the corner, covering his ears so as to not hear the screams outside his door. His name is Whittaker, Lieutenant Ronald D Whittaker.

"Lieutenant Whittaker is experiencing most of the same symptoms as the rest who were exposed to the substance we developed," says the man in the white coat, a doctor of some kind. "He's mentally unstable, psychotic, delusional, schizophrenic... His memory is full of blank spots. He's *extremely* paranoid."

In the padded room behind the window, Whittaker throws himself against the door and falls to the ground.

"Ouch," says one of the agents, the men in the suits.

"That's where his case differs from the rest—he responds to the other soldiers

who were afflicted by the substance,” says the doctor. “I think it would do us some good if we were to study the lieutenant over an extended period of time. I believe we may be able to find...”

“No,” interjects an agent. “The higher-ups have deemed this project obsolete. All of the subjects will be terminated. Including Whittaker.”

“But this project has been in the works for years! Look, I don’t have a problem with you eliminating the other subjects, but if we were to throw it all away now we would be forfeiting the deadliest biological weapon in...”

The agent interrupts the doctor again, “You know we don’t make the decisions.” The agent stands up. “With Whittaker’s case we see that the project is not living up to our original goals.”

“Let me go!” Whittaker yells with his face and hands pressed up against the window.

“Please don’t do this,” pleads the doctor. “He doesn’t remember anything! He can’t remember *anything* of what we did to him. He can’t even remember his own name for Christ’s sake!

The other agent stands up and replies, “It’s out of our hands.”

The agents step out into the hallway, shutting the door behind them. The doctor reluctantly gets up and steps over to the window. He sees Whittaker on the floor, resting against the wall when the door opens. Whittaker jumps.

“They’re making a huge mistake,” the doctor says to himself.

“What do you want from me?” Whittaker asks the agents.

The doctor brings his hand up to his forehead and looks down at the ground. “I’m sorry, Ron,” he says quietly. The doctor hears struggling, but he refrains from looking. When the brawl ends, the doctor slowly removes his hand from his face and again looks into the padded cell. They’re all on the floor, but Whittaker is the only one of them conscious and not crippled with pain. “Oh my God...”

The door on the padded cell flies open. For a mere instance, Whittaker looks over to the soldiers standing outside. At the sound of deafening gun fire, the doctor closes his eyes.

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