

Plan of Attack

Written by

J.E. Clarke

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Janetgoodman@yahoo.com
917-328-5253

INT. DRONE COMMAND CENTER - DAY

A small, dark claustrophobic space.

Gazing down on two well padded CHAIRS - a bank of blinking VIDEO MONITORS and KEYPADS. It's a gamer's wet dream - right down to drink holders in the seat arms.

Only one chair's occupied. For now...

BURKE (20s, camo uniform) swivels in his seat like a kid. Slurps soda through a bendy straw.

Blinking at a screen, Burke grins:

On the monitor: A SKINNY FIGURE stumbles across a DESERT FIELD. High rez screams out details - the man's Arabic features. Empty hands. The wound oozing through a torn tourniquet around his leg.

Burke zooms in on the man, squints.

BURKE

Tough nuggets you can't hear me, pal.
'Cause if you could, I'd ask what you prefer. What'll it be? A shot to the heart or the head? Double tap's quick and merciful. All you gotta ask is where.

Of course, the man doesn't hear or respond. Burke shrugs.

BURKE

Coin toss? Works for me.

Behind Burke, a door SQUEAKS. Burke jumps, quadruple taps his keypad.

On the monitor: An unseen DRONE COPTER spits out bullets. The man crumples. Twitches on the ground. A pool of blood expands quickly under his head and chest.

Seconds in, the man lies dead. What was once alive is now shredded meat.

Burke whips around in his chair to see:

REGGIE (30s, same uniform) lingers in the door. He stares up at the monitor, surveils what remains of Burke's victim.

BURKE

Dude, could you knock? You almost made me miss my shot!

REGGIE
It... doesn't look like that to me.

BURKE
Yeah but, I'm an artist. You made me
waste bullets on that kill!

REGGIE
Where's his weapon?

BURKE
Weapon? What the fuck you mean?

Entering, Reggie slips into the "co-pilot" chair. Points at
the screen.

REGGIE
Regulations matter. You need to ID
targets as combatants. And that...
doesn't look armed to me.

BURKE
(grunts)
I only target hostiles. Trust me - I
got a sixth sense about these things.

Type. Type. Reggie zooms in on the corpse.

REGGIE
So, where's his weapon?

BURKE
Uh, under him? He *fell* on it, ok?

Burke glares at Reggie. Double takes.

BURKE
My turn for questions. Who the hell
are you, anyway?

Reggie digs a LANYARD from his collar. Flashes a BADGE.

REGGIE
Part of the programming team. Special
ops and updates. Need to know.

BURKE
An egghead, not a shooter? Cool. You
code. Leave the fun to me.

Burke burps for emphasis. Turns back to his screens.

Fingering a JOYSTICK, he sweeps a bank of cameras across the
desert. VARIOUS BUILDINGS in view.

Each screen displays a different angle. Multiple FIGURES in each one: MEN. WOMEN. KIDS, too.

Burke zooms in on a LITTLE BOY.

BURKE

Uh-oh, Charlie Brown. Guess you and Snoopy shoulda played hooky!

REGGIE

Wait!

Reggie grabs for Burke's wrist.

Burke squirms away, flicks his scope LEFT.

BURKE

Oops. Too slow. Psyche anyway!

Burke's cross-hairs dance away from the child, settle on a group of MEN. Grinning, he shoots Reggie the stink eye.

BURKE

Chill. I'm just fuckin' with you. And I *don't* shoot kids.

He shrugs, SLURPS more soda.

BURKE

I mean, not intentionally. So much.

He TAPS a button. The unseen quad-drone RIDDLES two MEN. And the wall. Other potential targets scatter.

Burke draws a bead on one. Picks HIM off, too.

REGGIE

Wow. That was -

BURKE

An expert shot? Yeah, I'm pro. The parents busted my balls in high school, but all those years of gaming *did* pay off.

Burke aims on another target. This one's a WOMAN.

BURKE

Don't judge me. I swear, I saw a knife. Watch my artistry this round. Don't blink-

Reggie grabs his hand again. This time, connects.

REGGIE

Not yet. I'm here for a reason.

Burke kicks back, eyes Reggie head to toe.

BURKE

I figured, Mr. Code Writer. Wazzup?

Reggie fishes a CHIP from his front pocket. Plugs it into the console. CLICK.

REGGIE

Like I said - upgrading's what I do.

All the screens FLICKER. Blackout in unison.

Then reset.

Where there was once high resolution, the buildings now loom in stark silhouette. Completely different angles. Now the figures are blurry. Half seen wraiths that glow and pulse...

BURKE

Wait, you fucked it up!

REGGIE

Not "fucked up". Infrared. An enhanced mode we're testing out. Sure, you can't see features as clearly. But now they can't hide behind walls. At higher modes, they say you can ID based on heart beat signature. And using body heat, this tech can sniff those... hostiles out.

BURKE

Huh. Well, this takes some adjusting.
But -

Playing with the joystick, Burke zooms around... draws beads on various shadowy FIGURES.

But he doesn't shoot. Playful, he makes comic quips.

BURKE

(falsetto)

Oh no, Sir - please have mercy. I beg you! I have sixteen babies at home.

(brusque)

Sorry to hear 'bout that, Ma'am.
Labor must've sucked big time.

(falsetto again)

But my husband -

(MORE)

BURKE (cont'd)
(brusque)
Counting kids, martial counseling for
terrorists and birth control ain't my
pay grade. Pow!

Reggie raises an eyebrow.

REGGIE
You really do act like this is a
video game.

Burke snorts while sipping soda. Sucks some up his nose.

BURKE
Ow!

Rubbing it, he toys with more potential victims onscreen.

BURKE
(to Reggie)
Dude, it's either crack jokes or go
crazy. I'll take what's behind
Curtain A. Besides, these Sanders
started it. Someone's gotta
neutralize 'em. Crying over every
kill is mental masturbation for
softies, you ask me. *This* is how you
high score in the Drone Game...

Burke SHOOTs a cluster of glowing figures. FIVE go down. He
fist-pumps.

BURKE
Booyah!

Smaller figures - surely CHILDREN - scatter, run into a
building. Thanks to the infrared, Burke sees where they go.

With a sigh, he switches to a different CONSOLE.

BURKE
Gonna hide? Sure. Prolong the chase.
Guess I'll have to switch to the BIG
BOMBS now.

Reggie watches closely. Furrows his brow. Typing keys,
Reggie zooms in on the building's front.

REGGIE
Listen, I know I'm not a Trigger
Guy -

BURKE

No shit, Sherlock. You think too much.

REGGIE

I *think*... this looks like a school to me.

BURKE

(shrugs)

Yeah, using "safe zones" is their thing. Sanders love human shields.

REGGIE

Even *if* that were the case, don't we have an obligation to protect innocent liv-

BURKE

Obligation? This is all their fault!

Burke stabs a button.

Onscreen: a MISSILE streaks in. Followed by the blazing light and confusion of an EXPLOSION.

Smoke clears, revealing the building's DESTROYED. Dark scraps of human remains and rubble mar the landscape. No more heat signatures, though. All life's gone.

Reggie stares at the screen. Lowers his head, whispers a prayer (MOS.) Through closed eyes, he hears Burke chuckle:

BURKE (O.S.)

Whelp, off to collateral damage heaven all y'all go. Accomplished with minimal suffering, thanks to yours truly. They probably didn't even know what hit them...

Behind the men, the door SQUEAKS open.

Burke and Reggie swing around their chairs to see:

A wide-eyed THOMAS (20s, same uniform). In freak out mode, Tom clutches the doorframe, leans in.

THOMAS

Burke, holy shit. Didja hear? Someone just struck the Fifth Battalion. Dunno where they got the artillery, but reports are no survivors. HQ says this one's big!

CRACK.

Thomas stares down... at a blossoming wound in his chest.

THOMAS

Oh. Ow. Burke, what the h-

Thomas crumples - is dead before he hits the ground.

Burke chokes on soda, swivels towards Reggie.

Freezes at the sight of Reggie's GUN, pointed at his head.

REGGIE

I asked you not to kill them, Burke.

Reggie mock shrugs, eyes wide.

REGGIE

It's not my fault you went - as you say - crazy and attacked your own.

He nods towards poor Thomas' corpse.

REGGIE

And killed a fellow soldier, too.

Paralyzed by the too-close-for-comfort violence, Burke babbles. His eyes flick from the blood around Thomas...

...to Reggie's gun barrel. No way to dodge.

BURKE

Oh my God. What did you do?

REGGIE

Which God, Burke? Yours or mine? And the question is - what did YOU do?

Reggie pulls out the chip.

Monitors reset, revealing...

A DESTROYED MILITARY OUTPOST. Uniforms everywhere. Just like Burke's.

Reggie zooms in on one shredded corpse, shakes his head.

REGGIE

Doesn't look so much like a video game anymore.

BURKE

You did this. They were innocent!

REGGIE

Not as much as your victims. You targeted civilians. Even children. At least these were soldiers. Look... here, you can see their guns!

Burke shakes. Reggie gently pries the soda from his hand.

And pours it over the console. Smoke rises. Electricity SPARKS. Burke tries to swivel away from the heat.

Reggie wedges a foot against his chair, stops it from rotating.

REGGIE

This is real life. Don't look away.

Sirens WAIL. Burke sobs. Cringes at Reggie's gun.

BURKE

(whispers)

Just... don't shoot me.

The pain on Reggie's face is deep - genuine. Profound.

REGGIE

You'll have to be collateral damage. I'm afraid I can't let you tell.

He presses the gun against Burke's temple, at the exact angle a suicide would aim.

REGGIE

I promise to be quick and merciful.

BURKE

Please...?

REGGIE

No coin toss needed. And I won't miss.

CRACK. The gun FIRES.

The last monitor sparks. Then dies.

As does Burke. BLACK OUT.