

**A GAMBLE**

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FADE IN:

EXT. PRISON-DAY

Stark. Cold. Imposing. Dark clouds loom in the distance as they creep closer to this secluded area.

A male voice, JOHN BANNON.

BANNON (V.O.)

This has been my home for the past 2 years.  
Nice, huh?

INT. PRISON-DAY

INSERT: 5:32. April 27.

JOHN BANNON, early 30s, glances up from his watch. Walks the hallway of the prison, people here and there. Noise abundant.

BANNON (V.O.)

I was doing six years for running stolen cars. Most people would probably say that I deserved it. I probably did. What it's worth, I made it a point that nobody got hurt.

The convict walks the tier of the block.

BANNON (V.O.)

But I was doin' my time, minding my own business. What happened next wasn't part of my sentence.

Bannon sits on his bunk and grabs a copy of Kurt Vonnegut's "Hocus Pocus" and a pair of glasses. Puts on the spectacles.

BANNON (V.O.)

No. I would have remembered this.

The harsh clang of a bell.

EXT. PRISON-NIGHT

Rain batters the penitentiary.

INT. PRISON-CELL

Bannon sleeps in his bunk. Sweat streaks his forehead. Fidgets as the sound of faints yells, screams, and the rain mix

together.

INT. CELL-DAY

Bannon awakens abruptly. Silence.

He blinks a few times, wipes his eyes, and slowly sits up. A faint light filters through the tiers from the skylights above.

The convict sighs and stands as a sensation slowly comes over him that shows in his expression. Confused, steps over to the bars and listens. Nothing. Not a god damn thing. Not one noise. Not one person.

As he listens closer, lays his hand on the door--and it creaks open. The hand pulls away like the metal was burning hot.

Slowly he takes the initiative and steps out of the cell to the tier. Nope, nothing out here either. A haze covers the other side of the skylights. Continues on.

INT. HALLWAY

Bannon slowly walks. Nothing. Steps into a room. Tries the light switch and it works.

INT. OFFICE AREA

The administrative offices. Again, nothing.

Bannon leans over and picks up a phone. Dead.

A scratching sound.

Looks on the other side of a file cabinet and finds a hamster in a Habatrail. On top a card to "Robbie on Your 10th Birthday." Beside that in a frame a picture of a woman and a young boy.

INT. OFFICE

Bannon pushes open the Warden's door and steps inside the empty office.

Through the window the man sees a thick bank of fog block out the rest of the world on the other side of the high concrete outer walls.

Tries the phone on the desk. Dead.

A faint noise. A thick door opens and closes. Glass clinks together. Follows.

EXT. HALL

The sounds stop.

Bannon enters the staff dining room and then the kitchen. On the counter a hearty sandwich and an open beer.

Suddenly, DAVE DELBERT, 40s, muscular, white and tattooed appears, .357 in hand. Pulls back the hammer. A tense pause. Lowers the gun.

DELBERT  
You're Bannon, right?

BANNON  
Yeah. Delbert?

DELBERT  
Yeah.

Delbert crosses to the sandwich on the counter.

DELBERT  
Want some food? Damn guards eat well. Even got beer.

Delbert starts in on his meal.

BANNON  
You can eat now?

DELBERT  
I always get hungry. Some kinda hypoglycemia or shit like that.

BANNON  
No. It's just nobody's here. Doesn't that strike you as weird?

DELBERT  
Hell yeah it's weird. I ain't lookin' a gift horse in the mouth, though. What am I gonna do? Freak out?

Bannon studies him a moment.

BANNON

I guess not.

DELBERT

Right-o. As soon as I'm done with my  
breakfast, I'm outta here.

INT. HALLWAY

Delbert and Bannon walk.

DELBERT

This is great. I feel like the king of  
crap mountain. And this is my castle.

BANNON

I guess I'm the court jester.

A sound. Delbert whips around, gun in hand.

DELBERT

Come outta there! Come the hell outta  
there or you're dead!

Pause. Slowly, ED JENKINS, late 40s, heavy and with thick  
glasses steps out of a room.

DELBERT

Who the hell are you?

JENKINS

Ed. Ed Jenkins.

DELBERT

I know you. How do I know you?

JENKINS

I'm, uh, a transfer from upstate. I'm  
in for bookmaking.

Lowers the revolver.

DELBERT

Bookie, huh? Well, come on then.

They continue.

EXT. PRISON YARD-DAY

9:57. April 28.

Bannon lowers his watch. They look up.

A dome of thick fog stands outside the walls and covers the sky. Swirls gently but much more like soup than just fog. A hazy light filters through that.

JENKINS

What the hell is going on?

DELBERT

It's fog. That's it.

BANNON

Look at it. It's so uniform. It hasn't even come over the walls.

Delbert notices this, too.

DELBERT

Yeah. Strange.

Bannon takes a deep breath.

BANNON

And the air. It's so stale. That's the one advantage of being out here. The air is always fresh. Now it's stale.

Jenkins and Delbert notice this, too.

A door opens to the side. Again, Delbert whips around to ALEX WILLIAMS, early 60s and African-American.

DELBERT

Dammit, Al. There better not be anyone else because I'm ready to shoot for the hell of it.

Williams steps up to the others.

WILLIAMS

You boys find anyone else?

BANNON

No one.

JENKINS

No.

DELBERT

Well, screw this. I'm leavin'.

Delbert crosses to the front gate and pulls it open. Hesitates at the edge of the fog and then glances back at the other three.

Warily looks over the wall of fog but can't make out a thing. Slowly, reaches out and into the muck. Hand disappears from sight even at that distance.

Delbert's eyes widen and he pulls back to the others.

DELBERT

Uh, maybe I should make sure it's all right.

Bannon nods.

BANNON

I have an idea.

EXT. GUARD TOWER

They all climb to the top of the wall.

DELBERT

What now?

BANNON

On three sides there's just forest. But this side overlooks the parking lot.

DELBERT

So?

Bannon glances over the interior of the tower and centers on a couple walkie-talkies. Grabs both.

BANNON

It's usually filled with cars. You can see it from the offices right there.

Bannon gestures to the administration building.

BANNON

Those cars should be there.

The convict palms one of the radios.

BANNON

And this should hit one of them.

With that, heaves the radio and it disappears into the fog. A second. Two. Nothing.

WILLIAMS

Try it again.

Throws the other one. Nothing.

JENKINS

Maybe you just missed.

Delbert glances over the tower office and finds a clock. Picks it up, throws it in the yard and it shatters on the concrete.

DELBERT

The parking lot is concrete. We would have heard them hit.

Jenkins nods.

DELBERT

(to Bannon)

What now, professor.

Bannon thinks.

BANNON

We send out a scout.

All are wary of this.

EXT. YARD

Bannon holds the hamster from the administrative offices in his hands. Delbert begins to tie a piece of yarn around its torso.

BANNON

Be careful. It's delicate.

DELBERT

I'm tryin'. What do I look like? A damn seamstress?

He finishes.

BANNON

Okay.

They walk over to the gate. A crouch down, Bannon sets the hamster on the ground as he puts a pen through the roll of string.

BANNON

Okay, partner. You're free. Go.

The hamster hesitates for a moment then moves forward. Quickly enters and disappears into the fog. Slowly, the string begins to unroll as the hamster moves out.

JENKINS

What do you think happened? Maybe it's some kind of government experiment.

DELBERT

Shut up.

JENKINS

Maybe it's just a bad dream.

With that, there's a "click" and the .357 in Jenkin's face, the hammer pulled back.

DELBERT

Keep talkin' and you'll find out.

The fat man shuts up.

All turn their attention back to the string. Unwinds a little more. Then a little more. It stops.

DELBERT

What happened?

WILLIAMS

Maybe it doubled back.

Bannon gently pulls back on the string and the slack tightens up.

BANNON

No. He's still there.

Then the string begins to rise about five feet. Everyone stunned. Then it slackens and drops.

Bannon pulls back. Nothing. A little more. Nothing. Quickly pulls until the other end reaches them.

Bannon holds the end up, still tied in a nice little circle.

DELBERT

He got loose. That's all.

WILLIAM

You had it tied behind his front legs.  
He couldn't have squeezed out.

BANNON

And why did it rise up like that?

Delbert frustrated.

DELBERT

It sprouted friggin' wings! I need  
something to eat!

With that, the hothead storms back into the prison.

LATER

10:34.

Delbert paces nervously, another beer in hand. The six-pack rests on the ground nearby, two slots empty.

Williams sits with his back to the wall.

Bannon by the gate and studies the fog. Jenkins stands nervously near Bannon as he eyes the angry man.

BANNON

Let's narrow this down. We all agree  
this happened when we were all  
asleep. And it happened overnight  
from the clocks with date attachments.

They nod.

BANNON

Maybe it was something in our sleep. I  
didn't sleep well and had a nightmare.

DELBERT

What a revelation! In a prison? Who  
would have guessed you'd hear screams.

WILLIAMS

I slept fine. I've had 32 years to get used to it.

JENKINS

You know, I read a book once where all these people went back in time a few minutes and there wasn't anyone there. After that, time started to collapse the world. Maybe the world forgot about us and went on.

Delbert finishes his beer and throws the bottle past Jenkins and Bannon and into the fog. No sound at all.

BANNON

It may be an experiment. Maybe just in our minds. But I doubt it.

The hothead starts in on another beer.

JENKINS

I saw a Twilight Zone like that once.

DELBERT

The cops'll be rollin' in here any minute and I'll be standin' here, like a good little boy.

WILLIAMS

We might just be dead.

Everyone looks to Williams.

WILLIAMS

I know that I can never pay for what I've done on the outside. Maybe this is "His" way of punishing us further.

DELBERT

What? Like Hell?

WILLIAMS

Could be. Or maybe hell's on the other side of that fog. Along with the Devil himself.

DELBERT

Maybe it's Heaven. Full of cold beer,  
Harley's, and warm chicks. What I hear,  
if you accept God before you die, he'll  
absolve you of all your sins. I'll do  
it now. I'm sure he'll take a post-dated  
acceptance.

Delbert looks to the sky.

DELBERT

Whatta you say, man?

He laughs.

BANNON

I don't think we're dead.

JENKINS

No. Definitely not. We can't be dead.  
We're breathing. I don't think you have  
to breath when you're dead.

Delbert whips around.

DELBERT

Jenkins!

The angry man drops the beers on the ground. Terror comes over  
Jenkins.

JENKINS

Okay. I'll be quiet. Sorry.

Wearing an insane smile, Delbert pulls the .357 and slowly  
starts toward the fat man.

DELBERT

No. Not at all. If you weren't talkin'  
so damn much I wouldn't of remembered  
what someone told me. About a new convict  
who was in insolation since coming from  
upstate. A new convict who would talk all  
the time. A new convict who happens to be  
a multiple child rapist.

Delbert raises the gun. Bannon and Williams step forward.

JENKINS

No. It's not me. I'm in for bookmaking.

DELBERT

Bookmaking, huh? Okay, here's an easy one. How many championships has Michael Jordan won?

JENKINS

Uh, three?

DELBERT

Four, snapper head! We got ourselves a new hamster.

BANNON

Take it easy, Del. We don't know what we're up against. We may need all the people we can get.

DELBERT

I'll tell you what we're up against. My god-damn patience. Williams, go pull up the tow truck in maintenance, the one with the winch.

Williams nods and steps away.

LATER:

The black man brings up the truck.

Delbert yanks Jenkins over and unravels the steel winch line.

DELBERT

(to Bannon)

Go get us another couple radios, will ya.

BANNON

Look, let's think of something...

With that, Delbert whips the gun around and puts it right between Bannon's eyes.

DELBERT

How 'bout you make yourself useful before you make yourself dead.

A breath. Bannon relents and steps off.

INT. PRISON

Bannon searches an outer office and comes up with a couple of walkie-talkies. Tests them and they're good.

EXT. YARD

Bannon returns with the fat man near tears. A chain tightly around his waist and secured to the pulley's cord with a padlock.

Bannon hands Jenkins the radio.

JENKINS

Please don't make me do this. I'll be quiet. I'll go back to my cell.

DELBERT

Get moving.

Delbert shoves the gun against his temple and pulls the hammer back.

DELBERT

This is your last chance.

Slowly, Jenkins steps toward the fog. Hesitates. Delbert fires one shot by his feet. He takes one step forward and completely disappears. Williams operates the winch, lets out some sporadic slack.

BANNON

(on radio)

Jenkins, can you hear me?

EXT. PRISON

The fog everywhere, the fat man in the mist.

JENKINS

Yes. Please let me back in.

INT. YARD

Delbert grabs the radio.

DELBERT

Keep movin' or you'll be molestin' the business end of a 357.

EXT. PRISON

Jenkins moves forward into the thickness. Nothing.

INT. YARD

The other three wait. Listen.

EXT. PRISON

Slowly, the fog seems too thin in front, a hazy light between it.

His expression begins to relax.

JENKINS

Hey. It looks okay. It's weird but it looks okay.

INT. YARD

DELBERT

Whatta you see?

JENKINS (V.O.)

It's not the same. It's really beautiful.

DELBERT

What, goddamit?

Reception turns to snow.

DELBERT

Jenkins.

Snow.

DELBERT

Jenkins!

The cord on the truck rises a few feet and then goes limp.

BANNON

Pull it back!

Williams yanks the lever and the cord begins to recede. Slowly, the empty harness comes back, still locked. No blood. Nothing.

DELBERT

Oh shit. Not again.

The hothead throws down the cord.

WILLIAMS

He sounded happy. We didn't hear any  
fightin' or screams. Maybe he made it.

DELBERT

Made it? Made it where, pops?

WILLIAMS

Heaven, son. Heaven.

This gets through to Delbert for a moment. Then he turns away.

DELBERT

Heaven, shit. I have a better chance  
of gettin' to Heaven than he did. And I'm  
a god-damn killer.

With that, the killer walks off.

INT. PRISON-LOCKER ROOM-DAY

The sound of metal that smacks metal.

Hammer in hand, beer in the other, Delbert hits at a padlock  
on a locker. The lock gives, throws it away, and pulls open  
the door.

Freezes. Eyes widen.

Slowly, Delbert lifts out a suit jacket. Navy blue and double-  
breasted.

The beer set down and the hanger tossed away. The jacket  
slipped on. Crosses to the mirror and admires himself.

FATHER (O.C.)

What the hell are you doing?

Glances over to his FATHER, late 50s and crusty.

DELBERT

Hi dad? How do I look?

Father steps up and skeptically studies his son.

DELBERT

Just like you always wanted me to look.  
Clean cut and stayin' out of trouble,  
huh?

FATHER

Are you kiddin' me? You? You're bad and  
have always been bad.

DELBERT

You don't have to be that way.

Delbert goes back to primping as his father comes up.

FATHER

That suit doesn't mean anything. The  
man inside it doesn't mean anything.  
You're right where you belong and you  
should stay right here.

Expression goes dark as he glares at his daddy.

Then he's alone again.

EXT. YARD-DAY

11:51.

Williams and Bannon sit on the truck and drink the other  
beers.

WILLIAMS

What do you think is happening, son?

BANNON

Life's a game. Maybe we just crapped  
out. I don't know. Maybe the world  
ended and nobody told us.

A look at the old man.

WILLIAMS

Well, it's not by accident, I'll tell  
you that. Someone is guiding us  
through this.

Bannon takes a swig of his beer.

BANNON

Maybe so, pops. Maybe so.

Just then, a door flies open and Delbert exits. He crosses intently to the truck. Another walkie-talkie in his hands.

DELBERT  
Get the hell off.

Both slowly climb down from the truck.

BANNON  
What're you doing?

Delbert slips behind the wheel.

DELBERT  
I've had enough of this crap.

Tosses the gun onto the dash.

DELBERT  
If it's my time, it's my time.

Delbert guns the engine as he holds up his radio.

DELBERT  
I'll let you know if I make it.

The truck moves through the gate and disappears into the fog. Bannon grabs the other radio.

INT. TRUCK

Again, nothing but the truck and the fog. Delbert locks the button on the radio and sets it on the dash.

DELBERT  
Nothin' yet, boys. Just all this shit.

INT. PRISON

DELBERT (V.O.)  
I could run into a wall right now and not even know it. Screw it. Wait. It's clearing. It's all right. Shit!

The sound of tires that lock up and the truck crashes, metal on metal.

BANNON  
Del. Del!

DELBERT (V.O.)

Ugh. What the hell is this? You gotta be kiddin'. Keep back! I'll blow your ass away!

Two shots fired and then snow cuts the signal.

BANNON

Del! Dammit!

Bannon's eyes show his racing thoughts.

BANNON

We gotta get some guns.

INT. PRISON-DAY

Using a sledge hammer, Williams and Bannon break open a caged-off area to an endless stream of automatics and shotguns.

INT. OFFICE

The two men barricade in the warden's office, guns lined up.

WILLIAMS

If they wanted to kill us, why didn't they just come in and do it?

BANNON

I don't know. Maybe they thought we were armed.

WILLIAMS

No. They took that crazy white boy quickly. And cleanly. And the other one, too. They know what's going on.

Bannon's eyes trace the room before he steps over to a public address microphone. Turns on the power. As he speaks, his voice can be heard outside on the speakers.

BANNON

Whoever is out there, we are no threat to you. We just want to get out of here alive but won't die without a fight. If you have a representative, send him in to negotiate with us. You can have the prison. Just let us go.

Reaches over and shuts the power off.

LATER:

Darkness settles over the scene. Automatic lights come on outside.

WILLIAMS

You know, my sentence is up in six months.

BANNON

Really.

WILLIAMS

Too bad I got cancer. Doctor said I got three months, at the most. It's like. What's the word?

BANNON

Ironic?

WILLIAMS

Yeah. Ironic.

Bannon sighs.

WILLIAMS

All I've been thinkin' about for the past twenty-five years is gettin' out and seein' my kid. His mom stopped bringin' him when he was eight. She got remarried. Thought it best that he have a father who was not in the pokie.

BANNON

Probably a good idea.

Williams takes a deep breath.

WILLIAMS

But I figured if I get out and find him, there's nothin' she can do. I figured I've deserved what I've gotten all these years. But this? No.

The black man sets his gun on the desk.

WILLIAMS

I've gotta go, boy.

The white boy nods. Williams crosses to the door.

WILLIAMS

If we're still where we should be, I'll try to come back. If not, give your life over to God, boy.

He exits.

EXT. YARD

Williams steps up to the fog. Removes a tattered wallet, pulls out a faded photo of a LITTLE BOY.

Looks up to the wall of muck.

INT. OFFICE

From the window, Bannon watches the man as he disappears.

INT. PRISON-CELL-NIGHT

Gun in hand, Bannon steps into his cell.

Picks up a book, opens it up, and removes a snapshot of a PRETTY WOMAN in her mid 20s. With a smile, he tucks it in his shirt pocket.

BANNON (V.O.)

Her name is Suzie. A secretary. We dated for about four-months before she found out what I really did for a living.

INT. KITCHEN-NIGHT

Bannon sets the gun on the counter, opens the big refrigerator, and takes out a plate of cold cuts.

BANNON (V.O.)

I got sent on my vacation here shortly after that. I thought I didn't care, like she was a dime-a-dozen. I was wrong.

Begins to make a sandwich.

INT. DINING ROOM-NIGHT

Bannon eats alone, emotionless.

BANNON (V.O.)

I should of paid attention more in school, I guess.

EXT. YARD

The man steps into the yard.

BANNON (V.O.)

Why did I go, too? I don't know.

Bannon walks up to the fog and stops. Looks at the gun in his hand then throws it away.

BANNON (V.O.)

Second sense, I guess. I knew I would go crazy if I stayed here. And maybe an overwhelming sense of curiosity. Either way, I knew I didn't have a choice.

With that, he disappears into the fog.

INT. FOG

The convict slowly makes his way. As before, the soup begins to thin and replaced by a white light. Bannon winces.

BANNON'S POV

A whiteness blinds him then slowly relents to a hazy, but beautiful valley with a waterfall. A couple beams of static make the vision more blurred.

INT. FOG

Eyes flicker in confusion.

The scene begins to electronically break apart and turns to another white light.

Bannon's eyes widen as he looks up.

BANNON

Je-sus Christ.

INT. VIEWING AREA

Down below in a vast hanger flooded with lights stands Bannon. To the left is the huge ball of fog, all encased in this giant craft.

A myriad of ALIEN CREATURES watch this human as ALIEN GUARDS swarm over him, who tries to fight but very much in vain.

An ALIEN HOST turns from the window. In his hands gently rests the hamster which he carefully pets. Behind him a large neon board with all four of the convicts' pictures. Below that several unreadable alien markings that change like a tote board.

Behind the creatures a variety of strange gaming tables, like a bizarre Las Vegas. Behind that view ports that look out to space.

The Alien Host refers to a console.

ALIEN HOST

Well, we have two winners who correctly picked the order of departures. Mr. Gal from Zeon sector and Ms. Calto from Pytho Nine.

Several of the aliens tear up tickets and throw them away.

ALIEN HOST

You can pick up your winnings at the cash-out window.

INT. HANGER

Bannon dragged to an open door and thrown into a dark area. The door slides closed behind him with a "clank!"

INT. ROOM

Darkness. The sound of Bannon as he beats on the door.

BANNON (V.O.)

You know, all in all...

Another door slides open with a "whoosh!" A faint light illuminates his face as his eyes widen.

Delbert's dead eyes stare at Bannon.

BANNON (V.O.)

...it's a great lesson on how crime doesn't pay.

No sound. Bannon mouths the word "shit". Then sucked out into

space to join Williams', Jenkins', and Delbert's floating bodies.

EXT. SPACE

The spaceship disappears into the distance, tacky multi-colored lights blinking all around it.

BANNON (V.O.)

If I only knew.