

COVID Rant
(Working Title)

by

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Second Revision

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1 INT. BORDER PATROL HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

1

A Border Patrol Agent is standing by the double doors of the entrance, leafing through a magazine. It's cold by the doors and you can see his breath. This is Sergeant ALFRED EISNER (57), seasoned agent who is weeks away from retirement, having given more than his allotted share of his life to the force. He's waiting, somewhat impatiently, for his partner, Officer LIAM O'CONNER, a newly trained recruit. He's wearing a white, form-fitting hazmat suit without the helmet on. He's got the usual police paraphernalia on a tool belt around his waist. He looks at his watch, then pushes the talk button on his communicator.

EISNER

Dispatch, do you want to page
young O'Conner again?

He disconnects and goes back to leafing through the magazine. Momentarily, over the PA system.

DISPATCH

O'Conner. Your Sergeant is looking
for you. Speed it up.

A couple of minutes later, the young Officer comes out of the restroom buckling on his tool belt and looking sheepish. Eisner looks up and tosses his magazine on the nearest chair.

O'CONNER

Sorry, Sarge. I had trouble
getting the suit sealed again.
First day jitters, I guess.

Eisner shakes his head.

EISNER

Come here. Let's make sure you're
sealed properly. You can't go out
there if you've got leaks. Assume
the position.

O'Conner spreads his legs and puts his arms out. Eisner walks around him examining all of the seals, then bends down to make sure the crotch and leg seals are secure. When he's satisfied, he stands up.

EISNER

Looks good. You'll get the hang of
it quickly enough. OK, let's go
protect our borders.

They walk out the doors into the cold of the night.

2 EXT. BORDER PATROL HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

2

The two agents are walking, silently, through moderate snow towards their intercept vehicle, a ruggedized, 4x4, box van-like vehicle. Half-way there, Eisner glances at O'Conner.

EISNER

Where's your lunch kit, O'Conner?

O'CONNER

Shit! Sitting on a chair in the office.

O'Conner turns and trots back to the headquarters building. Eisner watches him slam through the doors and come back out carrying his meal kit. He turns and resumes his walk to their vehicle.

Eisner opens the driver's side door and pulls his Kevlar vest from behind the seat and puts it on, then he gets into the driver's seat. A few seconds later, O'Conner repeats the process on the passenger side.

3 INT. INTERCEPT VEHICLE - NIGHT

3

Eisner opens the console and taps in the security code, then punches the start button of the all electric vehicle. The control panel lights up and all the gauges start to register. The two agents are bathed in a red glow. Eisner waits a few seconds until all the lights stop flashing.

EISNER

Checklist.

O'CONNER

Ready.

EISNER

Batteries. Number 1, 98%. Number 2, 100%, Reserve 86%

O'CONNER

Check.

EISNER

Drivetrain, bearing light, right front, on and steady. No other warnings.

O'CONNOR
Check. Mechanics noted that it
will need replacement in 10,000.

EISNER
Tires. Clockwise. 240, 240, 235,
240.

O'CONNOR
Check.

EISNER
Transmission, 67%.

O'CONNOR
Check.

EISNER
Wash, three quarters.

O'CONNOR
Low.

EISNER
It'll do. Too cold for mud
anyways.

Eisner pushes a test button on the radar display and
watches it cycle through it's tests.

EISNER
Radar, 100%

O'CONNOR
Check.

EISNER
GPS, 12 satellites.

O'CONNOR
Check.

Eisner turns to another display next to the radar and
toggles on the power switch. He punches in coordinates. It
flickers on and displays an infrared image.

EISNER
Skynet locked on.

O'CONNOR
Check.

Eisner then pushes the test button on the communication display. It beeps a few times as it cycles through it's set channels.

EISNER
Radio, 100%.

O'CONNER
Check.

EISNER
Drones. Three onboard and locked.
100%, 80% and 100% charged.

O'CONNER
Check.

Eisner turns on all of the driving and search lights and the rear camera.

EISNER
Driving lights, Forward and rear
search. On and working.

O'CONNER
Check.

EISNER
Rear camera, clear and working.

O'CONNER
Check.

Eisner taps another display that displays temperature and video of the interior of the rear of the vehicle, which is a secure, barred holding area.

EISNER
Temp, 15. Interior camera,
connected but no image.

O'CONNER
Noted. Do we proceed anyway?

EISNER
Yup. If we were expecting trouble,
we probably shouldn't, but it's
going to be pretty quiet. Ready to
roll.

O'CONNER
Roger. Ready.

Eisner turns off the search lights, puts the vehicle in gear and drives it out of the headquarters yard and onto the highway.

O'CONNER
What's our posting tonight?

EISNER
Area 57, covering 56 through 58.
There's a nice little hill on 57
that gives a good, unobstructed
radar view of all three areas.

4 EXT. INTERCEPT VEHICLE - NIGHT 4

The big vehicle drives out of the yard and proceeds down the highway towards area 57. The interior of the cab is illuminated with the red glow of the control panel and console.

5 INT. INTERCEPT VEHICLE - NIGHT 5

The highway is illuminated in front of the vehicle as it speeds along. The two agents are bathed in a dull, red glow. They drive along in silence. Eisner is concentrating on the snow covered road while O'Conner looks around, intent on what's happening in their surroundings.

EISNER
So, O'Conner, how'd you wind up in
the wilderness on the border at
night?

O'CONNER
(Distractedly)
Huh? I was assigned to this
detail. Is that what you mean?

EISNER
No, son. Why'd you sign up for
border patrol? Nice young man like
you must have had plenty of
options.

O'CONNER
Probably less than you think.

EISNER
Probably. You're not much of a
talker, are you?

O'CONNER

No, Sir.

EISNER

It's Sergeant, not Sir, if we're going to be sticklers about things like that. Call me Eisner or Al.

O'CONNER

Yes, Sir... Sergeant ... Al.

EISNER

Good. So, lets start over, shall we. What the hell are you doing here? Why border patrol? You running from something?

O'CONNER

You might say that. Nothing bad or illegal. Just life, I guess.

Silence.

EISNER

Do I have to ask for your personal file or are you going to tell me more on your own volition? We're going to be spending a lot of time together so it's worthwhile knowing how the other person ticks.

O'CONNER

You first, then.

EISNER

Nope. I asked first. You'll have plenty of time to hear this old man's story.

O'CONNER

Alright, then. You'll be sorry you got me started, though.

(Pauses)

I grew up in Toronto and went to UofT when I finished high school. Against my parents wishes I majored in English.

(MORE)

O'CONNER (CONT'D)

They wanted me to go into law or something, following in my sisters footsteps, one of which is a doctor and the other is an engineer, but I had great aspirations to be the next Richler, Berton or Atwood. Unfortunately, great aspirations did not translate into any kind of drive. My philosophy was that C's get degrees, so I did graduate.

I did some writing for a small magazine for about a year. The pay was abysmal to non-existent, but the writing was easy and I had lots of time to work on my great Canadian novel. When the magazine went out of business, which was no surprise to anyone except the owner, I had no novel, no income and no place to live.

I'd been watching the ads for the Border Patrol, which I considered to be quite well written, by-the-way, so I thought, why not. Presto magic, here I am.

EISNER

Why not, indeed. They usually don't post newbies here. What'd you do to piss them off?

O'CONNER

Nothing. I asked to be posted on the PRA border.

EISNER

Good Lord, son, why on earth would you pick the hardest, God damned assignment in the country as your first posting?

O'CONNER

(Shrugging)

Dunno. Looking for adventure, I guess. Something out of the ordinary. Something I could write about. Plus, I had a notion that I could do some good here. Maybe that was misguided. I don't know.

EISNER

Yeah, probably misguided. I'm not going to argue with you about that. As for adventure, it depends on what you call adventure. As far as I'm concerned there's not a lot of that going on in this part of the border. Maybe up north or in the mountains but not here on the prairie. What you get here is a lot of boredom, heartache, bleakness, and, this time of year, we throw in cold and snow just to drive home the point, whatever that's supposed to be. If that's your idea of adventure, then you'll feel right at home. C's get degrees, indeed.

They rode in silence for some minutes.

O'CONNER

What about you?

EISNER

Later. Our turn is coming up soon and it's easy to miss in the dark.

6 EXT. INTERCEPT VEHICLE - NIGHT

6

The intercept vehicle is driving cross-country up a small hill that overlooks the vast plain. From this vantage point they have a clear (radar) view of areas 56 through 58. The truck comes to a stop on top of this hill. The interior of the cab is illuminated with the red glow of the control panel and console. Eisner reaches forward and switches on additional controls and displays.

7 INT. INTERCEPT VEHICLE - NIGHT

7

The two agents are sitting back in their seats watching the console and control panels, looking outside occasionally. Eisner reaches down and pulls his thermos out of his meal kit and pours himself a coffee. O'Conner follows his example.

O'CONNER

Well, I guess it's later. What's your tale? I've told you everything about me, so what about you?

EISNER

Well, I doubt that you've told me everything about yourself, but fair enough. What do you want to know?

O'CONNOR

How long you been doing this?

EISNER

By this I assume you mean sitting out in the middle of the prairie, at night, in the cold, watching for border hoppers?

O'CONNOR

Yeah, something like that?

EISNER

Three years, more or less, ever since Cynthia passed away, anyway. After she died I couldn't sleep at night so I started doing graveyard shifts. Besides, there's much less action this time of night, especially in the winter.

O'CONNOR

Cynthia was your wife?

EISNER

No, my only daughter. Her mother died of cancer quite a few years before. That was hard, raising my little girl by myself. I took a desk job for awhile so I had regular daylight hours. You know, so I could spend more time at home in the evenings and weekends. You don't have kids so you don't know what it's like.

As she grew up I didn't need to be around as much so I started back on patrols. They needed more senior officers by then because of the disaster across the border.

O'CONNOR

Yeah. What's that all about? We read about it but you bloody well lived it, I guess.

EISNER

I was from there, you know.

O'CONNER

From where?

Eisner nods his head indicating the border.

EISNER

There. Grew up here but lived in Calgary all my adult life. Married, had children. Worked in the patch. Had a good life. Then petroleum prices cratered followed by the first two waves of the first pandemic. I bugged out then and took the family and left. I got what I could for the house and moved to Regina. Things were bad here, but nothing like Alberta.

They had it rough. Even before they separated from the rest of the country they were isolated, and shunned, for all intents and purposes. I just don't know what was wrong with a lot of those people. They seemed to be more than happy to let the virus get out of control and then blamed it on the rest of the country. What made it worse was they were almost goaded on by the Government.

While the rest of the country was busy stomping out the virus, they let it go unchecked for so long that it caught hold and mutated beyond belief. There was nothing the rest of the country could do but lock down the borders. Nothing in or out to contain the virus, which proved to be mostly effective.

O'CONNER

Wasn't that about the time they decided to separate? They were being isolated anyway so why not go on their own. At least that's what I read.

EISNER

I suppose so. Dear Leader was doing a grand job of riling up the peasants. Not that he had to try very hard. Personally, from the time I moved there, I always thought that as much as they considered themselves individualists and entrepreneurs, the kind of people that pull up the bootstraps when the going gets tough, that they were a bunch of whiners. You know the kind that always complain that Johnny got the bigger slice of the cake.

Anyway, yeah, they took their ball and went home. What a mess. Winging it on the erroneous assumption that petroleum prices would skyrocket, bringing back the boom, that herd immunity would eventually set in and life in the PRA would be beer and roses once again. Didn't quite work out the way that way, and that's why we're sitting here now keeping an eye out for border hoppers.

O'CONNOR

I'd have thought that there'd be no one left over there by now, what with all the deaths and defections.

EISNER

You'd think, eh? No one wanted them as long as the virus is raging in their little kingdom, and Dear Leader needed to keep them there or there'd soon be no kingdom to lord over. We only hear rumours about what's happening on the other side of the border. Tales from border hoppers and defectors, but most are so far fetched that they sound like fairy tales.

They fell into silence, contemplating the snowy landscape through the windshield, and the consoles and control panels casting an eerie red glow on their faces. Finally...

O'CONNER

How'd you wind up here then? Out in the middle of nowhere land helping a rookie through his first days on the job.

EISNER

(Laughing)

Yeah, I guess we got a little off topic. Not much more to tell, really. I was in the midst of the excitement closer to the main crossing points but this year the brass moved me here. They said I was getting too old for all that running around and wrestling shit I was doing. Posted me out to the quietest point on the border and told me to take it easy until they could force me into retirement. Literally putting me out to pasture.

Oh well. It keeps me off the streets and out of trouble, I suppose. I could have taken early retirement, but it would have killed me. Still might. Who knows.

They lapse back into silence. Eisner pours himself another coffee and watches the horizon. O'Conner continues reading the SOP manual.

8 INT. INTERCEPT VEHICLE - LATER

8

Eisner is eating soup and O'Conner is absently munching on a sandwich when an alarm starts beeping. O'Conner perks up, all ready for action. Eisner is unfazed.

O'CONNER

Hopper?

Eisner grunts. He puts down his soup, leans over and quickly types a command into the console. Infrared images in the satellite scan show a number of warm bodies moving across the prairie.

EISNER

Just deer. A coyote must have roused them from their midnight snack. Nothing to see here.

They both go back to their meals. O'Conner is still alert, watching the moving images on the infrared display.

O'CONNER

That doesn't look like deer. I've seen deer run and these look more like horses. They're moving pretty fast, too. Can we get a better look?

Eisner leans in and has another look at the display.

EISNER

You might be right. Send up drone number one and let's have a closer look, shall we.

O'Conner types some commands into the drone console and drone number one lifts off and hovers above the intercept truck. He then types in another command and touches the lead image on the infrared display, giving the drone it's target. A camera image from the drone flickers to life on another display. A marker appears on the infrared display tracking the drone across the prairie.

9 EXT. DRONE VIEW OF PRAIRIE - NIGHT

9

From the POV of the drone we can just barely make out the prairie grasslands in the dark, flying past below. Eventually we see the dim shapes of large animals running flat out. As the drone gets closer the onboard lights flick on by command from the intercept truck. The broad spotlight tracks a couple of lathered up, riderless horses. You can make out cinch straps and bridles on each of them. The drone tracks backwards to spotlight two other horses, similarly adorned.

10 INT. INTERCEPT VEHICLE - CONTINUOUS

10

Eisner and O'Conner are watching the action highlighted by the drone in the monitor.

O'CONNER

What do you make of it?

EISNER

Good question. First time I've seen horses come through the border. They've been ridden but I can't make out any riders. Think they got thrown somewhere?

O'CONNOR

I don't know. I don't even know what to think. Maybe they were thrown, but is that our problem?

EISNER

Doubtful. We haven't had any other alerts so probably not. Call back the drone and we'll keep an eye on things. The horses might have been a diversion.

O'Connor types a command into the console to call back the drone.

O'CONNOR

Think they'd go to that much trouble?

EISNER

Desperate people try desperate things. Hardly anyone gets through regular channels, either because they can't prove they aren't infected, or because Dear Leader won't let them. Racing horses through the countryside might just have had us gallivanting across the fields chasing ghosts. What's the SOP say if we come under fire?

O'CONNOR

Verbatim or paraphrase?

EISNER

Jeez, O'Conner. Just say something that tells me you know what it says.

O'CONNOR

Basically, if you come under fire, shoot back.

EISNER

Yeah, and don't hesitate, especially at night.

They continue to sit in the truck watching the displays on the lookout for anomalies.

Eisner and O'Connor are watching the scans. Suddenly, the buzz of alerts fills the cab. Radar has picked up movement on both sides of them. O'Connor flips on the satellite infrared and they pick up three images where the horses came from and another five at the edge of their other watch area. The computer has identified them as bipeds.

EISNER

Well, here's your action, O'Connor. The horses were just a stupid diversion. Maybe for both groups.

O'CONNOR

Sending up two drones.

EISNER

No. Don't bother. We'll drive over to the horsey set. The party of five looks like they're tracking into area 59. Contact whoever is looking after 59 and let them know that they're their problem.

O'Connor starts typing to find out who's looking after that area and to hand off responsibility for the party of five hoppers to them. Eisner has put the truck in gear and is speeding cross country towards the party of three.

12 EXT. INTERCEPT VEHICLE - NIGHT

12

The truck with our two agents is bouncing across the snow covered fields at high speed. In the distance, in the dark ahead of the truck we can barely make out three individuals running through the snow. The truck slows down at the top of a hill. Drone number three is launched from the top of the vehicle and flies off in pursuit of the three runners. The truck takes off again. In the distance, the light from the drone turns on illuminating the lead runner.

13 INT. INTERCEPT VEHICLE - CONTINUOUS

13

The control panels now display the radar and infrared blips, plus the video feed from the drone. The front runner is loping along oblivious to the light from the drone.

EISNER

Interesting. Knows we're here and does nothing.

O'CONNER
What do they usually do?

EISNER
Stop and surrender, mostly. Some try to out run us. Not a lot of places to hide here, though. This one's different. Check out the other hopper.

O'Conner types in a command and touches the infrared display. The visual from the drone pans to the second runner. They, too, are loping along and not caring about the drone. Suddenly they stop. All three blips on the infrared stop. The drone stops and hovers. A few seconds later, the image stops and the display reverts to static.

O'CONNER
What the hell?

He frantically types in commands. Eisner drives on.

O'CONNER
Nothing. No signal.

EISNER
They must have shot it out of the air somehow. Get ready for some serious action, son, these are not your garden variety hoppers.

He cranks the wheel and tracks parallel to the hoppers who are all running again. The truck bounces wildly over the cold hardened prairie.

EISNER
Call it in. Tell them we're going to need containment east of 56. Confirm the coordinates and lock them into the runners. And send up both drones to track runners two and three. Set them up for evasive action if their target stops.

O'Connor types in commands with some difficulty because the truck is bouncing all over the place. He hits the launch button.

14 EXT. PRAIRIE ROAD - LATER

14

The intercept vehicle bounces along over the snow covered prairie. Both drones start to launch when the truck suddenly lurches sideways when it hits a hole.

One of the drones crashes into the roof of the truck and falls to the ground, bouncing along the frozen ground. The other wobbles then takes off.

O'CONNER (O.S.)
Shit. We lost one of them. The other one's good and on it's way.

EISNER (O.S.)
One'll have to do. Lock it on Runner two.

O'CONNER (O.S.)
Roger that.

EISNER (O.S.)
We'll see if we can cut them off at the road ahead of us.

The truck is approaching a rural road that crosses it's path. It dips down into the ditch and comes roaring up onto the road, then turns in the direction of the path of the hoppers. All lights go out. The interior lighting is dimmed to the point where it can't be seen. The truck comes to a halt.

EISNER (O.S.)
Suit up!

15 INT. INTERCEPT VEHICLE - CONTINUOUS

15

In the dim light of the cab of the truck, Eisner and O'Conner are putting on their hazmat helmets. When they're fully helmeted, O'Connor scans the console displays while Eisner hits the gas and takes off down the road driving by infrared on the heads-up display.

O'CONNER (ON RADIO)
Number one is heading our way. Two and three have veered off. The drones tracking number two.

EISNER (ON RADIO)
Copy that. They must know we're here, so they don't care or they have something up their sleeves. Either way, we might be in for a wild time tonight.

They pass a ravine heavy with brush and trees. The display shows runner number one rounding the edge of the ravine and approaching the road. O'Conner is watching out the side window when he spots him.

O'CONNER (ON RADIO)
 (shouting)
 There he is! I see him.

Eisner slams on the brakes. O'Conner grabs his rifle and jumps out of the truck as it's skidding to a stop. Eisner watches him turn on his helmet light and takes off running towards the hopper.

EISNER (ON RADIO)
 (shouting)
 Crap! O'Conner! Be careful.

Eisner now grabs his rifle.

16 EXT. PRAIRIE - CONTINUOUS

16

Eisner jumps out of the truck, turns on his helmet light, and takes off after O'Conner and the runner.

O'CONNER (ON RADIO)
 Hurry up, old man.

EISNER (ON RADIO)
 (puffing)
 Don't "old man" me. Keep your eyes
 on the target.

Eisner stops and glances at his wrist monitor which shows the infrared images. (Note that Eisner will be puffing from exertion with everything he says from now on)

EISNER (ON RADIO)
 Expect company. Two and three are
 turning.

The runner, followed by the two agents are spread out along one side of the ravine. Suddenly, the runner jumps into the ravine, filled with brush, trees and deep snow.

O'CONNER (ON RADIO)
 Shit! He's jumped into the ravine.
 Going in.

EISNER (ON RADIO)
 No, don't.

Too late, O'Conner has jumped into the ravine, following the runner. Eisner keeps on running in case the runner comes back out on this side.

O'CONNOR (ON RADIO)
 Jesus, it's hard slogging through
 here. Where are you?

There's a flash in the sky to the north where the other two runners were coming from. Eisner stops and checks his monitor.

EISNER (ON RADIO)
 Shit. They killed the other drone.
 They're getting close. I'm coming
 through.

He jumps into the ravine. He finds it harder going than the younger O'Connor, but he's making it through. The runner has broken out of the ravine. O'Connor isn't far behind him.

O'CONNOR (ON RADIO)
 I'm through. I see him. I've got
 him.

EISNER (ON RADIO)
 Take him down. I'm almost there.

Eisner sees another flash from O'Connor's direction, then nothing but static on the radio.

EISNER (ON RADIO)
 O'Connor, what happened?
 O'Connor ... Do you read,
 O'Connor?

Silence. O'Connor's infrared image on Eisner's display has stopped moving but all three runners are on the move again. They're running towards the road. Eisner slogs his way through the deep snow and brush as fast as he can. He clears the ravine.

17 EXT. PRAIRIE - CONTINUOUS

17

Eisner is running across the field in O'Connor's direction. As he approaches he sees a body in a hazmat suit lying on the ground. He drops down beside the body. A bullet has gone through the helmet and splattered O'Connor's head. Eisner hasn't noticed that his infrared display is showing the three runners converging on his location. He finally looks at his display and abruptly stands and turns around with his gun at the ready. Too late, runner three puts a bullet through his helmet. Eisner's body drops to the ground.

The three runners gather round. Runner Two takes the intercept vehicle control off of Eisner's belt and clicks the power button. In the distance the vehicle lights up.

Runner One takes Eisner's wrist control and all three walk towards the intercept vehicle. While they're walking, Runner One enters commands to relay to headquarters that it was a false alarm and that everything is under control.

RUNNER THREE

What do we do with these Joes,
Sarge?

RUNNER ONE

We'll bring the truck over and
load them into the back.

RUNNER THREE

I wonder how the others have done?

RUNNER ONE

We'll find out soon enough.

He pulls an old fashioned satellite phone off his belt. He clicks the transmit button three times then holds it down.

RUNNER ONE

Fifty-six secured.

Soon we hear crackly responses, each preceded by three clicks of the transmit button.

RADIO (O.S.)

Fifty-eight secured.

RADIO (O.S.)

Sixty secured.

RADIO (O.S.)

Sixty-one secured.

There's a pause.

RUNNER TWO

That's it?

RUNNER ONE

Good enough. Four out of eight was
more than we could have hoped for.
Operation Super Spreader is a
success.

(beat)

So far.

They walk on in silence.

18 EXT. PRAIRIE ROAD - LATER 18

The three runners step into the intercept vehicle. Runner Two is behind the wheel while Runner One enters commands into the console. The truck starts down the road then turns into the ditch and heads across the field.

19 EXT. PRAIRIE - LATER 19

The intercept vehicle stops beside the two bodies and all three runners get out and load the bodies into the back of the truck. They get back in and turn the vehicle around and head back to the road that they came from.

20 EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT 20

The intercept vehicle is driving down the highway at high speed. An incoming missile blows it up.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Similar intercept vehicles representing areas 58, 60 and 61 are blown up by missiles.

END MONTAGE

FADE OUT.