

DRAGAN'S APPARATUS

by

Woop diDoo

FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - EVENING

A quiet middle class suburban street, houses silhouetted against the red afterglow of sunset. Here and there among the houses, a lighted window. A line of STREETLIGHTS fades into the distance.

(Note: It slowly darkens to night during these events.)

VOICE (OS)

(Balkan accent)

Perhaps you will cooperate if I
show you what apparatus can do.

The nearest streetlight GLOWS BRIGHTLY then EXPLODES in a shower of sparks.

CLOSE ON a nearby double-storey house. Upstairs is a large room with windows looking up, down, and across the street.

Visible in the upstairs window is a MAN, standing, and a BALD MAN, seated.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM - EVENING

DRAGAN (40s) stands with a PDA-like CONTROLLER in his hand. PROFESSOR BRENT (40s) is tied to a chair.

THROUGH THE WINDOW we see the last sparks fall from the exploded streetlight.

DRAGAN

Just in case you think was luck...

Dragan punches some buttons. An ELECTRICAL WHINE sounds as unseen machinery seeks a target. The whine sounds in BRIEF BURSTS as some autofocus mechanism zeroes in.

The Professor looks at the ceiling.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)

Correct. Apparatus is mounted in
roof. For greater range.

The whine stops and a button on the controller lights up.

Dragan punches the button.

The NEXT STREETLIGHT explodes.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)

True fact. Range all way to end
of street.

(he studies the
professor)

Got you worried, huh?

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

The professor and his heavily pregnant wife JUDY hurry down the same street.

PROFESSOR BRENT
 Sit down here on the curb. Let me
 call a cab.

His wife looks up, sees their house at the end of the street.

JUDY
 I can make it home easily. Don't
 fuss. It's just a contraction.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM - EVENING

Professor Brent looks up at Dragan, hatred on his face.

PROFESSOR BRENT
 Don't threaten my wife and child,
 you coward. If you want something
 from me, threaten me.

A CELLPHONE rings. A popular love song for a ringtone. Dragan and the professor look at the pulsing glow of his cellphone in the professor's pocket.

DRAGAN
 Is your wife. She wait long time
 before call you. She not love you?

PROFESSOR BRENT
 Of course she loves me. She knows
 I work late and I don't like being
 phoned at work, that's why she
 waited before calling. Does anyone
 love you, you monster?

DRAGAN
 Not right now. But when I have
 money, I will have woman. Many
 woman, I think.

He punches some buttons on his controller.

Again, the ELECTRICAL WHINE.

DRAGAN
 Is good your wife use cellphone.
 Make focus easy...

The WHINE becomes INTERMITTENT, like something focusing, and stops.

A button on the controller lights up. Dragan punches it.

The NEXT streetlight EXPLODES.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)

...because apparatus senses electromagnetic radiation, like from cellphone. She keep phoning, I hope.

Professor Brent's cellphone RINGS again. A businesslike ringtone.

PROFESSOR BRENT

The university.

DRAGAN

They look for their Professor of Statistics. Should I say you busy with consulting?

Dragan pulls the ringing cellphone from Professor Brent's pocket.

Brent reacts with surprising speed. He GRIPS his cellphone in his teeth and rips it from Dragan's hand. He then SPITS it to the floor and TIPS HIMSELF OVER, still tied to his chair.

ON CELLPHONE

Pressing buttons with his nose, his face illuminated by the display, he calls his wife on speed dial and SHOUTS into the phone.

PROFESSOR BRENT

Judy! Don't use the cellphone.
It's dangerous. I repeat--

JUDY

(filter)
What? What's going--

Dragan's FOOT pushes Brent's head aside and GRINDS the cellphone into splinters.

ON WINDOW

It is totally dark now. Only the faintest outlines of the houses are visible in the moonlight. All the house lights are out, except for one house (the professor's) where a window glows. The TWO FARTHEST street lights remain.

A SERIES OF GRUNTS as Dragan appears silhouetted against the window, pulling Professor Brent upright so he can look out.

DRAGAN

You think you clever, Professor?
Huh? Look at street lights...

Dragan punches his controller. An ELECTRICAL WHINE with brief focusing BURSTS. Then the button lights up.

Dragan punches the button, and a streetlight EXPLODES.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)
 Just one street light, professor,
 then I promise you, I focus
 apparatus on your family.

He kicks the remains of Brent's cellphone.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)
 Don't need cellphone. Brain wave
 enough. See.

Dragan turns the professor, who is looking rather groggy, to look inside the room.

Dragan, lit only by the dim moonlight, crosses to a LARGE CRATE WITH AIRHOLES against a far wall.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)
 Meet my assistant.
 (calls)
 Snuffles.

No response. Dragan HITS the crate.

DRAGAN(CONT'D)
 Snuffles!

No response. Dragan BANGS REPEATEDLY on the crate and SHOUTS.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)
 SNUFFLES!!!

There is a PITEOUS WHIMPERING and a SCRABBLING sound, like some animal trying to dig itself into a dark corner.

PROFESSOR BRENT
 Who or what have you got in there?

DRAGAN
 Snuffles. Magnificent black
 Labrador. Now, not so magnificent,
 sorry to say.

PROFESSOR BRENT
 What did you do to him?

DRAGAN
 You mean, what did he do for me,
 and for science? Watch.

Dragan punches buttons on his controller.

That ELECTRICAL WHINE again, a long burst and then shorter focusing bursts as the device homes in.

Professor Brent looks up at the ceiling. His head and eyes move, trying to track the source of the sound.

The sound stops, and a button on the controller LIGHTS UP.

PROFESSOR BRENT

So?

DRAGAN

So... focus now on electromagnetic radiation of brain of Snuffles. Apparatus very sensitive. Watch.

Dragan pushes a button, and THE MOST HEART-RENDING YELPING comes from the crate, like something experiencing UNBEARABLE AGONY.

PROFESSOR BRENT

Shut that off!

Dragan releases the button, and yelping dies to SUBDUED WHIMPERS OF PAIN.

DRAGAN

Hit sensory nerve. Too bad. Not always painful. Usually just lose function as portion of brain cook. Snuffles got nothing. Eat. Shit. Sleep. Is all.

(chuckles)

I wear tinfoil hats during experiments. For real. Not joke. Don't want cook my own brain.

PROFESSOR BRENT

Dragan, you're a monster.

DRAGAN

No, I'm smart. Only smart person could build apparatus. But...

(he becomes angry)

I am prophet without honor. Government will not finance me. Say I'm foreign. Every penny, my house, my savings, I spend on apparatus. I am bankrupt...

(shouting)

THAT'S WHY I NEED FORMULA!

Dragan punches buttons. WHINING, FOCUSING, the BUTTON LIGHTS.

PROFESSOR BRENT

(tired of repeating this)

Again, there is no formula. What you want is not possible.

DRAGAN

There is. There must be. And I
want it. You will give it to me
or...

Dragan punches the button, and the LAST STREETLIGHT explodes
in the distance.

Far off, the lighted window of Professor Brent's house is
the only sign of life in the moonlit streetscape.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)

...I don't need to tell you what
next target will be.

PROFESSOR BRENT

But again, why threaten my wife
and child, why not me?

DRAGAN

Because I can't afford to cook
your brain, you fool. What if I
wipe out your knowledge of formula?

PROFESSOR BRENT

The famous formula that doesn't
exist.

Dragan slaps him, then instantly regrets it.

DRAGAN

I'm sorry. I prefer to do nothing
that leaves mark.

(beat)

You know, I could wipe out entire
town and they would never know
it's me.

PROFESSOR BRENT

Until they do the post mortems.
And start wondering why the
cranial cavities smell like
barbecue.

DRAGAN

Very funny. Damage invisible.
Maybe show on microscope slide.
They will blame prions, not me.

Dragan holds up his controller meaningfully.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)

Make your choice. The formula, or...

He punches a button.

The ELECTRICAL WHINE starts again. A long burst as the apparatus positions itself roughly, then shorter bursts as it hunts for focus.

DRAGAN

It will take long time to locate target without cellphone. Brain wave very faint at long range.

Professor Brent follows the sound with his eyeballs.

On his face is the strain of someone who must reason with a madman.

PROFESSOR BRENT

Dragan, listen to me. There is no formula. Now switch off the machine, let me go, and I will say nothing of what's happened here.

Dragan is very calm. He looks out the window onto the silent street.

The ELECTRICAL WHINING continues in erratic bursts as the apparatus struggles to find focus.

Dragan starts speaking in a dreamy, reminiscing way.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

A brief view of the street on a normal busy day. Pedestrians on the sidewalks, going about their business, among them Professor Grant and Judy. Cars driving to and fro.

In the background, Dragan's house with Dragan looking out of the window.

DRAGAN (VO)

I would look on busy street. Everyone happy. Everyone with purpose. Appointments. Visiting friends. Regular paychecks. Social. Secure...

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM - NIGHT

Dragan looking out the window. Still in that dreamy, reminiscing tone.

DRAGAN

And me in here. Working. Not know if I succeed. Always money, money, money. Equipment expensive. Uncertain. Stress. You can not imagine what I go through...

During this soliloquy, behind Dragan's back, Professor Brent, still tied up, has been quietly inching his chair over to the crate.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)
 ...and then I notice, Professor Brent, my neighbor down street, is making money...

The professor, using teeth, nose, upper arms and shoulders, slowly works loose the crude fastener holding one hinged panel of the crate closed.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)
 ...his wife got fancy clothes. He drive executive car. He start family. So I snoop...

At the crate, the panel falls open. Professor Brent catches it in his lap and eases it softly down to the ground with his legs.

He peers inside the crate. Is that Snuffles cowering against the far wall?

PROFESSOR BRENT
 (urgent whispering)
 Come on, boy. Come on. Here boy. Here etc.

Dragan doesn't look around. The WHINING of the apparatus seeking its target covers any sound Professor Brent makes.

DRAGAN
 ...and I discover our Professor Brent, a professor of statistics, is winning on the Lotto. He has found formula...

At the crate, Professor Brent is desperate. Snuffles will not come out. He himself is still tied up. The WHINING from the apparatus is in very short bursts now, suggesting it is nearly locked on.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)
 ...to win at Lotto. To make easy money. I WANT THAT FORMULA!

Dragan swings around and sees Professor Brent by the open crate.

DRAGAN (CONT'D)
 What the FUCK you doing?!

He crosses to the crate and gives Professor Brent a SWINGING BACKHAND which KNOCKS HIM sideways to the ground.

Dragan STAMPS on professor Brent with DEEP CRUNCHING STOMPS.

PROFESSOR BRENT

Aaah! Ouch! Oof! etc.

Hearing a fellow being suffer awakens something in Snuffles. He comes FLYING out of the open crate, a BLACK BLOB OF VENGEANCE, and LEAPS for Dragan's THROAT!

Dragan staggers back towards the window, one hand trying to pull Snuffles away from him, the other still holding his controller.

DRAGAN

Get off! Snuffles! Back! Down!
Bad dog! etc.

PROFESSOR BRENT

(shouting)

You burnt out his obedience
circuits. You'll have to kill him
to stop him.

Lying sideways on the ground, Professor Brent notices that the catch on the open panel has a SHARP METAL EDGE, and he starts rubbing his ankle ropes against it.

Backed against the window, Dragan throws down his controller and picks up a KNIFE from a small table. He STABS Snuffles repeatedly.

Snuffles weakens. His movements become less violent.

Dragan flings Snuffles to the ground where he lies, a black blob, kicks a bit, and dies.

Dragan stands panting, a huge GASH in his throat, BLOOD coating the front of his shirt.

At that moment the SPORADIC WHINING stops. A BUTTON LIGHTS UP on the controller lying on the ground.

Dragan and professor Brent look at the lighted button. The SILENCE is EERIE.

Dragan smiles.

DRAGAN

Locked on. Last chance, professor.
Give me formula, or I make your
family to be vegetable.

Professor Grant is still lying on the ground tied to the chair, but his legs are now free.

PROFESSOR BRENT

(urgent)

Dragan. There is no formula. I was just lucky. I can give you the precise odds of me winning that money, if you have a calculator. They are miniscule. I will probably never win another thing in the whole rest of my life.

Dragan stands over the controller, his shoe touching the button. He gloats.

DRAGAN

I think you want vegetable, professor. How you like your wife? Like potato? Like turnip? And your little Brussels sprout -- is boy or girl?

With a TREMENDOUS GROAN OF EFFORT, Professor Brent flips himself to his feet and runs for Dragan with short hobbled steps, his chair bending him over like an iron hunchback.

Dragan is weak from the fight with Snuffles, and can't react quickly. He backs away, but Professor Brent spins and SLAMS the chair into him.

Dragan staggers, and Professor Brent SLAMS into him again.

Dragan STRIKES OUT with his knife, but he is weak and winded. His strokes are ineffectual.

Professor Brent, swinging the chair on his back this way and that, herds Dragan TOWARDS THE CRATE.

Dragan, backing away, CATCHES THE BACK OF HIS HEEL against the flapped-down panel, and FALLS BACKWARDS INTO THE CRATE.

Professor Grant manages to get a toe under the panel and FLIPS IT UP, TRAPPING DRAGAN IN THE CRATE! He turns around and backs his chair against the panel, holding it closed.

DRAGAN

Let me out! Gah! This crate full of dogshit. It stink.

There are series of BUMPS and BLOWS as Dragan tries to HACK THROUGH the crate with his knife. Eventually the end of the blade sticks out between two planks, and JAMS. There is a series of SQUEAKY SOUNDS and the BLADE WIGGLES as Dragan tries to free it. No use.

PROFESSOR BRENT

Thanks you for your assistance.

He maneuvers himself so that he can cut the ropes binding his wrists on the projecting blade.

With his hands free, he fastens the catch on the panel, and unties the rest of the ropes binding him.

Dragan meanwhile, weakened by loss of blood, has CEASED banging, crashing and swearing.

Professor Brent crosses to a SWITCHBOARD mounted on the wall and flips the switches down.

On the controller, the button light goes out and the display flashes "POWER OFF."

Professor Brent crosses to the window and BLOWS A KISS at the distant lighted window of his house.

PROFESSOR BRENT
See you soon, my darlings.

FADE OUT.