

# THE OPERATORS AND THE TARGETS

## 1. The Grey Country

The Operators get up in the morning. They leave their homes and travel through the mirages of the desert to a small military base. They enter air-conditioned containers, leaving the howling wind outside. Inside it's quiet, the only noise comes from the gentle humming of computers. They sit down and are illuminated by a dozen grey screens. From here, they follow the Targets in another desert, thousands of miles away, sometimes for weeks on end. They watch the pixelated white people walking around in the Grey Country. They watch them visiting neighbors, playing with their kids and tending their livestock. They watch them sleep at night, glowing white figures against the dark, cold desert surroundings.

At the end of the shift, the Operators leave the containers, drive back home through the desert. They walk around, visit their neighbors and play with their kids.

At night they lie awake. They're anxious. The adrenaline built up during the day, has nowhere to go. The grey screens eat into their thoughts and dreams. They dream of the white people in the Grey Country.

## 2. The Grey Noise

The Targets only hear the buzzing of the drones high up, just out of sight, but never out of their minds. They know they're being watched, but not by whom or why. They wonder what the Operators in the sky see. They wonder who watches over them when they lie sleepless at night.

The constant faraway buzzing penetrates the minds of the targets; the grey noise, it eats into their thoughts and dreams. They know that someday a missile will hit their village, their house or their car, but they don't know when. They develop words and expressions for these sensations and anxieties; try to make sense of the grey noise from the blue sky.

## 3. Intermezzo 1

## 4. The Voice

The Operators have special words and expressions for their targets and actions. 'Engage' is like a film directors 'action'. 'Rifle' is a laser marking of a target. 'Flash' is 'fire'. 'Impact' is when the target has been struck by a missile. 'Splat' is when a person is killed.

It is an orderly, calm language, allowing them to carry out their missions.

The names of the drones they're operating are different: Reaper, Predator, Avenger, Grey Eagle and Global Hawk; and the missiles: Brimstone and Hellfire. They speak of righteous purpose and divine destiny. Of a world with no greys.

A deep voice breaks the silence of a container and tells two operators, a man and a woman, to engage a white pickup truck. They go through the post-launch procedures, check each other's weapons. The woman holds the joysticks firmly, her eyes focused on the blurry screens. She gently presses a button, whispers 'flash', and something hisses a thousand miles away. The man says 'impact' and the white pickup truck explodes on the screen. 'Excellent job', says the voice. Then it's silent.

## **5. The White People**

After a strike, the Targets feel a strange sort of relief; lightning doesn't strike twice. At the same time they know this is no natural lightning, and it can strike as many times within the same couple of square meters, the same 'kill-box', as there are missiles on the drones.

Grandparents, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters burnt to ashes, buried alive under collapsed houses, bloodless bodies perforated by shrapnel like hailstones through a paper-kite. The survivors emerge from the ruins covered in dust, the white people.

Online, the Targets read news stories about precision bombing and terrorists. They see determined politicians and hear talking-points about collateral damage. Sometimes they recognize the remains of their village, or a name of a family member.

On the internet, the Targets also find pictures of the drones, and weave their shapes into their traditional carpets. In bright sienna's, indigo's and earth colors the drones replace the Soviet tanks and AK47's of the past and form new mandala-like patterns. The carpets tell the stories of the giant buzzing wasps in the sky, of daily life under siege, and the all-seeing eyes in the sky above.

The children look to the blue sky in fear. They long for overcast days and grey clouds to blind the drones. They long to be invisible to the eyes of the Operators.

## **6. Intermezzo 2**

## **7. The Parents**

The Operator is a young woman. She sits in the sun on the tarmac in front of a drone. You can just see the camera unit over her shoulder. She is excited as she talks about her 'job' and how much she enjoys it. She doesn't look scary or timid, but not exactly fierce either. She looks caring and mild, possibly a bit shy, or insecure, yet trustworthy and dependable. Someone you'd want watching over you.

She recalls a story from a mission, an anecdote. She was operating a drone 'over the grey country' and spotted some white people that looked like a group of enemy fighters getting ready to ambush a group of 'friendlies'. She saw the white people had something that looked like an RPG and that they were hiding in a house. With no time to lose, she and her partner had to act quickly. Luckily, they were able to 'take the enemy out' before they could do any harm to the 'friendlies'.

She smiles to herself and looks into the camera. She looks proud, but also a little nervous, as if she hopes for some acknowledgement; not just for her action, but for the team. She loves the teamwork

and protecting the 'friendlies' on the ground. It's hard work, but people depend on her, so she does her best for her team and her country.

She talks about her family. Her father is an IT engineer, her mother a school teacher. They're proud of their only daughter. They know she would like to continue her studies, but they're also pleased she joined the US air force, and they're happy she's stationed close by. They know she takes part in combat, but they also know that the enemy never gets a chance to see her, defend itself against her or harm her in any way.

Every night her parents thank God for the drones. Thanks to the drones, their daughter doesn't have to go the Grey Country, she is safe in the container in the desert. Even when she's on duty, her parents sleep very well at night.

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The Operators and The Targets. Single channel video, stereo sound, duration 12:25.  
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