

Wide Awake

Written by

Paul Bae

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bigloopproductions@gmail.com

INT. ROOM

PRIEST

There was this guy, Bonhoeffer. A theologian. Writer. Thinker. Not a fighter. Believed in the Bible and its injunction, "Thou shalt not kill." He was executed by the Nazis when they learned of his plot to assassinate Hitler. Now, how does a Christian leader who believes and espouses the teachings of Christ get himself to the point where he can justify killing Hitler? Well, there's this thing about God. No one knows him. There's a lot of people who say they do, but they don't. How could you? It's like an ant trying to understand humans. It's impossible. How do we with our puny limited minds wrap our brains around omnipotence? Omniscience? Eternity? You ever try it? Thinking about eternity? It'll drive you insane. Thinking of it. But the real crazy part of that is we're in it. We're living it. A piece of it, but *in it* nonetheless.

PRIEST (cont'd)

I knew it as soon as I saw it. The fabric. The landscape. The architecture of it all. There's no horizon. I couldn't even see the ground I was walking on. No sky above me. It was all one connected tapestry of... I can't even call it "white" even though thinking of it, that's the closest description I can think of. Just... whiteness. Blankness, maybe. And there I am walking in it. Through it. To where, I didn't know. But I knew I had to keep walking. And then one day... Sorry. I don't even think there were days or nights. Just... this sense of time being one whole thing that happens all at once. When you're *in time*, it's like being an insect on a ruler. And you're only looking forward and back. But when you're outside it like I was, you're looking down on it. It's in your hand, like in one piece.

PRIEST (cont'd)

But after walking days, years... however you think of it in terms of time, it felt like forever and it felt like now. But I found a chair. And I sat in it. And then... and then that's when he started speaking to me. I say "He" but it wasn't really a man or woman. Just... a voice. And he talked to me. He talked to me for... it felts like years but it wasn't. You know? I can't explain it any better than that. It was... incredible and impossible. And the sound of it was so beautiful that... yeah, I cried during the whole thing. While he was speaking. I cried. And then when he stopped speaking, I woke up. Here. On Earth again. Everything was black char and smoke. The sky was on fire. And I woke up with my mission. Given to me by God himself. To find the Horseman. And wake him.

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

From QRX you're listening to The Big Loop. I'm Paul Bae. Today's episode: "Wide Awake." We begin with Part One.

INT. ROOM

PRIEST

They call me Priest cuz of the cross on my back. Here.

Sound of him lifting his shirt while seated. Relaxes back into his chair.

PRIEST (cont'd)

My father branded that cross into my back when I was twelve years old. He was drunk, on whiskey and Revelations. He'd caught me noodling myself in my room, you know how boys can be. He dragged me out to the back in the thick of night. He'd been drinking by the fire. Got it in his head that I needed more of the Lord.

(MORE)

PRIEST (cont'd)

Started quoting the last book, and then went on to Mark. "It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched." Well, he couldn't cut off my hands, cuz then who's gonna do the chores around the house? So, he had some irons in the fire. Ripped off my shirt, bent me over his chair. And branded that big old ugly cross onto my back. When I joined the Marines, first thing someone did was point it out and call me Priest. It stuck.

PRIEST (cont'd)

I'd been leading our Special Ops team for three years. We were in the south tip of Basilan province. Sniffed out our targets in these huts raised on stilts in a jungle swamp. We were waist deep closing in from the north side. Now, this is the part I have trouble remembering all of. Cuz it was so fast. I think one of our boys out on the flank tripped up a wire, or maybe it was them, but there was a fire fight. There was screaming up front. I think they were killing the hostages. That's what it sounded like. I shot one of them in the head. And then... then came the big light. The whole sky lit up white, and hot. Like the sun became this giant flashlight shined right down on us. And it wasn't just me cuz I remember everyone looking up at it. I don't even know if there was an explosion. I'm pretty sure I dove under water, but... that's the last thing I remember. Before waking up in that place. Where everything was... not white, really, not blank, but... like an empty canvas, but I was in it. Yeah, it doesn't make much sense cuz how do you make sense of something that doesn't really exist the way it does for you and me? There's no shared sense of reality here. I saw it. I was there. And I don't know how else to say it.

## TRANSITION MUSIC

## INT. ROOM

## PRIEST

I was seventeen when it happened. We were fixing a leak in the roof. He'd been drinking. And he slipped. Broke his neck two flights down. Now, the thing is, I'd been praying for him to die. You know? I could never prove it, but the way Mom took off on us when I was thirteen this one night. No note, no nothing. Or so I thought. But I wasn't stupid. I knew it was cuz of him. His beatings. The only reason he never killed her is cuz I always stepped in. Gave him a reason to redirect his anger. So when he slipped off the roof, I climbed down. And he was gasping for breath. Kind of reaching out to me, with his eyes. Begging me for help. But I'd prayed for that. God saw my plight, heard my prayers for justice, and finally answered. Who am I to disregard His will? So I watched my father die. Cracked a beer. Cuz he loved beer. Didn't drink it. Just... sat with it in my hand. Watching my father draw his last breath. Then, I grabbed a shovel and buried him at the back of the property. I turned eighteen three days later. And I left home. Went looking for my mom. Found her. But it was too late. She'd died two years prior. She'd just landed a new job and I guess in her excitement didn't see the delivery truck coming. The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Well, he took away her pain. Finally. And mine. So I joined the Marines. So I could get away. Search out God's will. And it was a good fit.

## PRIEST (cont'd)

God makes us in His image. And he made me an angel of death. It's all part of His plan. I was good. Real good. I moved up real quick.

(MORE)

PRIEST (cont'd)

And then after one mission in Afghanistan where I had twenty-three confirmed kills, I got called up to Special Ops. They called us The Angels of Mercy. I liked it.

INT. ROOM

PRIEST

I was always good at hunting people. If I wanted to find you, there's nowhere you could hide. But that's people. How was I supposed to find the Horseman?

TRANSITION

PRIEST (cont'd)

I started in the public library. Went through every historical mention of the Horseman of Revelations. Maybe I'd find a pattern. Signs to look for. Here's the problem: there's four of them. Pestilence, War, Famine, and Death. All these things run throughout history. Which one was I supposed to find? And was it a literal Horseman or something else? And if I found him, what was I supposed to do? I was told to wake him. And then...what? And why me? Is it because of the mark on my back? Have I been marked by God my whole life? Was he preparing me this whole time for this? Why me?

TRANSITION

PRIEST (cont'd)

I was watching the news one night. A story was running about one of the frontrunners in the election. I was barely paying attention because I was looking for ibuprofen for a splitting headache. And then the news story talked about how the candidate was the last surviving sibling... of quadruplets. That's when I turned to look at the TV. I walked right up to the screen and got a good look at him. Anthony B. Manning. Born into wealth.

(MORE)

PRIEST (cont'd)

The last of the Manning quadruplets and only survivor. Law school, professor, Senator, and now presidential nominee. And I stared and I saw it. Coming from his back. No one else around him was acting like they'd seen it, so I knew it was only me. It was clear as day. He had a glow. A dark glowing emanating from him. It was time. War, Pestilence, Famine. These were just iterations of Death. That's why there weren't four Horsemen. There was only one. Death. And I was coming for him.

PRIEST (cont'd)

I found his next public appearance. A high priced charity dinner at the Four Seasons. I snuck in through the delivery area. Disguised myself as one of the staff. Pushed a dolly with food all the way to his green room. Two of his guards stopped me for I.D. I handed them a card. And as they looked at it, I dispatched them. Real quick. Hauled their bodies over to a custodian's closet. Then I walked in.

PRIEST (cont'd)

Manning was sitting there with two of his advisors. I told him, "I'm here for you. I'm here to awaken the Horseman." And...that's when he started to glow. A dark pulsing glow. It spread to the whole room. He stood up and that's when I saw...that's when I saw the horns on his head. And it suddenly hit me. I wasn't sent to awaken the Horseman. Because how do you awaken Death? You don't. You put Death to sleep. He came at me, his eyes red with this glowing fire, he made this awful sound like a banshee screaming. And I shot him right between the eyes. And he fell.

PRIEST (cont'd)

He crumpled...so easily. I was expecting...more. How did I kill Death...with a bullet? I walked over to him. His advisors were holding each other crying, covered in his blood.

(MORE)

PRIEST (cont'd)

And I stood over him, his eyes wide open, blood pouring out of his head. His glow was gone. That's when I realized what was happening. God did not send me to awaken the Horseman. I had misunderstood. My pain, my misery was God's way of shaping me, like clay in the hands of a potter. Shaping me as he would a tool. A weapon. For you see, I wasn't sent to find the Horseman. I. Am. The Horseman. And I was now awake. I was wide awake. The Lord was coming, and I was sent to prepare a path for Him.

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

When we return, the conclusion of "Wide Awake," after these messages from our sponsors.

[MIDROLL AD]

INT. ROOM

PRIEST

The dominoes began to fall. I could see it happening in real time on the news. Manning was instrumental in crafting a key bit policy for the Middle East, and his assassination threw the peace process into disarray because they believed me to be a foreign operative. I would spread War, Pestilence, Famine. Death. God let me know who was in the way of the righteous. I watched the news all day and night. Watching. Waiting. And then, God spoke. I saw it happen on the screen. A senator from Maine was discussing Manning's death and the need for cooler heads to prevail. To carry on Manning's legacy in shaping peace overseas. His name was George Calvin. And as he spoke, I could see it: The glow. That dark pulsating glow. Satan had sent his lieutenants, and only those in God's army could see them. So I took up my post.

(MORE)

PRIEST (cont'd)

I assembled my M82, adjusted the scope for the conference center door, 3100 yards away. His assistant came out of the car first, and I waited. Then, the senator. He got to the door and stopped to shake someone's hand. That's all I needed. One shot to the head. Down he went. I didn't wait for confirmation. I'd see it on the news later that day.

PRIEST (cont'd)

A week later the whole news cycle was focused on a manhunt. They were convinced it was a foreign terrorist operation on American soil.

PRIEST (cont'd)

It felt like I had all of DC on the run. I was thorough in everything I did. The next one was a Congressman. I'd seen him on the news doing an interview and like the others, I saw it. The glowing. Like if shadows hung on him like a cape, and it glowed. And a dark halo over his head. I took him out from thirty-four hundred yards. I was lethal. God's perfect instrument. All I lived for now was carrying out the Lord's will. All day and night, I sat on the floor in my apartment. No furniture except for that TV. Waiting on a sign. And when God called, I obeyed. And I did it with joy. Because until then, I'd never understood God's will. Why did he create me? Why breathe life into me, form me from his imagination, just to have me raised under the roof of that sick son of a bitch? That sick bastard who would brand his own son's back with hot irons? But, his will was revealed to me. Jesus heals. But the scars stay. And they stand as witness to redemption. Just as Jesus had to reveal his wounds to Thomas, I have my scars, but the pain was gone.

PRIEST (cont'd)

I was eating a cold can of soup that day. The day I was called to the Great Darkness. He was giving a press conference.

(MORE)

PRIEST (cont'd)

He talked about the assassinations, how he'd directed the FBI to make this a top priority. That freedom would not be compromised by terror. And he glowed. A near blinding darkness wrapped about his shoulders. It was almost too obvious, but here it was. The American President was the anti-Christ. And God was using me to send him back to Hell.

PRIEST (cont'd)

It took me three weeks to plan it. I staked out the White House but it was too secure. So I focused on his itinerary. With meetings with foreign dignitaries in Washington. And there it was: a speech to the United Nations in New York. There would be a three second gap from his armored car to the building doors. That was when I'd strike.

PRIEST (cont'd)

I set up my position across the street and down two buildings. Twelfth floor. Perfect line to the gap. I lined him up. Exhaled deeply, readied myself...

PRIEST (cont'd)

And then, an explosion. I found myself on the floor, on my back. I don't know how long I was out for. I heard a commotion. Another explosion. I was looking up through smoke. A trio of faces in masks looking down at me, yelling. I was picked up, turned around. Cuffed. It was so fast.

TRANSITION

PRIEST (cont'd)

I was in some medical facility. Strapped to a gurney. I was going in and out of consciousness from the blast. I could feel a familiar wetness running past my ear. I was bleeding. I tried to fight out of the straps but I was too knocked out. A bright light was shone into my face and I went out.

## TRANSITION

PRIEST (cont'd)

When I came to, I was in what looked like a hospital room. Two armed military personnel were sitting on the other side of the room. I had an IV in my arm. I tried raising my head but it felt like a knife was being shoved into my temple. My head was killing me. One of the guards got up and left the room. I was trying to speak but was still too drugged up to move my mouth. The guard returned a bit later with three people. In lab coats. They weren't doctors. This wasn't a hospital.

PRIEST (cont'd)

They came and inspected me. They kept looking at my head, just above my ears. And the base of my skull. They were talking to each other about imaging, retraction. Stitches. They looked happy, almost relieved. And then this woman walked in. You could tell from the way everyone else reacted that she was important. She put a hand on my forehead, and smiled at me. I tried to lift my hand, and she touched it with hers.

PRIEST (cont'd)

She started saying my personal information back to me. My name, birthdate, place where I was born. My schools. My family members. She knew everything. Went up through every mission I led. Even the black ops. She knew it all. Then she got to Basilan province. The day of the white light. The day God called me to his presence. The day everything changed.

PRIEST (cont'd)

She said... she said the light in the sky... the one we all saw in the middle of the firefight. It was a concussive gas. Meant to knock us out. We were taken by enemy forces to a secret location. That's where our people lost track of us.

(MORE)

PRIEST (cont'd)

They had no idea where we were, but they had an idea what they were doing with us. We were the next phase in the enemy's disinformation war. They had handpicked a bunch of us, all highly trained, probed our minds, and figured out the best ways to manipulate us. Most of them were sent back home with missions to meet with important dignitaries, with bombs implanted in them. It wasn't suicide bombs cuz they didn't know what they were doing, what they were walking into. For me, with my skills, they had something different in mind. They saw the cross on my back. Did some recon on my family, my mother, my father. His church. And they figured out my weakness, and guided me there to the thing I most wanted: healing.

He's starting to break.

PRIEST (cont'd)

Redemption. Purpose. They gave me a way to make sense of everything: by having God speak to me. They took me and placed...these packets in my brain. They manipulated everything. They put signs on their targets. For me, they made mine glow dark, to stand out from everyone else. But the thing is, it was me who interpreted it. No one told me what it was, what was going on. All they had to do, was tweak my vision a little bit. That's all it took. A slight change to the way I see things. And give me a story I wanted to hear. A story I'd been looking for all my life. About my pain. My scars. A way to make it all make sense. And she's telling me this...and... I'm thinking about all the people I killed. That *I killed*. I murdered innocent strangers, because I so badly wanted to believe in a story. A fucking *story*. About me.

Losing it.

PRIEST (cont'd)

The reality is... there is no reason for what I went through. No purpose.

(MORE)

PRIEST (cont'd)

I was branded... for nothing. I knew that but... how do you accept that? We're born. We suffer. And... that's it? Good luck with life? And it's not even unfair because there is no *fair*. What is *fair* in a universe where things just happen for no reason?

PRIEST (cont'd)

Everyone left the room. Except the woman. She stayed. She pulled up a chair and held my hand. I was so weak. I started crying. I'd never in my life cried in front of anyone, but there I was, crying in front of this stranger. These half sentences coming out of me, about there being no meaning to anything, about there being no God. No meaning. And then I felt her grip get tighter. I looked up, and she had this look in her eye. She was almost smiling. And she said, "There may be no God, but there can still be justice. Do you want justice? Against the people who did this to you?" She brought out a laptop. And showed me the photos of the people who did this to me. The ones who opened my brain and made me see God and Heaven and anti-Christ. And I looked at her, holding my hand, and I said, "When do we begin?"

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

The Big Loop is written and produced by Paul Bae. Mixed and engineered by Steve Jin. Today's episode stars NATE DUFORT. Many of you may know him from his hilarious comedy podcast series, MY NEIGHBORS ARE DEAD. We asked him to try a dramatic role and, as you heard, he delivered. We'll put all his links up on our website at THEBIGLOOPPODCAST DOT COM, where you will also find all the music from today's episode. Including this incredible song by PORTRAYAL, an indie band out of the UK who we think are going to break big soon.

(MORE)

PAUL (cont'd)

And most of the music you heard during the episode is by the gifted composer DANIEL BIRCH. We encourage you to go to our website, click on their links and PURCHASE their music. Follow us on Twitter, @BIGLOOPPODCAST, and on Facebook. And finally, if you like what we're doing at The Big Loop, please consider joining us on Patreon where we have tons of behind-the-scenes videos and bonus material and insider news at [Patreon.com/bigloop](https://Patreon.com/bigloop). And...that's it for this week. We'll be back in two weeks with another story. There's no way for you to prepare for those one. So until then, tell your friends, tune in, peace out.