

ACT I

Scene 1

Open on a well furnished house---balcony over looks the city, from quite high up. The upper portions of sky-scrappers are visible in the background. It's 10am.

A NYC skyline. The kind of view that the very rich might have an opportunity to enjoy.

Stage left, there is an entrance to the apartment... coat rack, place for shoes. A skateboard, well worn, is against the wall. Up Center, the balcony. Up right, a hallway leads deeper into the apartment.

Center, there is a couch and coffee table. A few toys for a child---around 5---are scattered here and there, though neatly assigned to the corners of the room they're kept in.

Stage right, there is a door, heavily fortified. It's been designed to look like it belongs here, but it's a bit too large for the home.

We hear a deep RUMBLE from somewhere outside, followed closely after by another.

The door to the outside opens and RACHEL rushes in, followed by DAVID.

Rachel is in her mid-30s....in good shape and with sharp eyes---she's dressed smartly and has a gun at her hip. She's a police academy trainer and left there mid-day.

David has a mop of unkempt hair, a black AC/DC shirt---the kind bought in semi-trendy stores among the goth and skater set---and has a skateboard he leans against the wall as he comes in.

Rachel goes to the couch, grabs the remote off of the back of it, and turns on the TV.

NEWS CASTER

It made landfall near FDR and Broad Street.

I've...you can see the immensity of it and what the destruction....

I've never seen anything like this before. It's destroyed most of 1 New York Plaza. Shadow, Revenant, and Bantam have been getting as many people out as they can.

Aegis has destructed the thing but there's no sign of Pulsar.

A loud RUMBLE and CRASH is heard on the news cast and then, fainter but still loud, out beyond the window.

David rushes to the balcony and is looking off to the SL, where we can't see.

DAVID

Jesus, mom, it's huge.

NEWS CASTER

CONTINUES UNDERNEATH WRITE THIS LATER

RACHEL

David, get your emergency kit.

DAVID

Like Reggie's is going to be far enough....

RACHEL

Now!

David, giving one last look at whatever it is, heads in and down the hall.

Rachel pulls out her cell phone.

RACHEL

Jules?

This is Rachel.

Yeah, we just saw it. I need to....

Jules? Where's Adam?

I don't know, but look at the news, Jules! He needs someone else there. Where is Adam?!

David returns to the living room with a large case, metal and fancy. It looks like some kind of future tech and, though it looks big, he hefts it easily.

He swings it over the couch and drops it on the cushion.

He's transfixed, looking at the TV.

RACHEL

I don't care. When you find out where he is, call me.

Jules...listen, Jules....it's going to be okay.

No! Stop!

It's going to be okay. This is Adam and John. It's going to be okay.

I love you, too. Call me when you hear something.

Rachel hangs up and looks at the television, her face drawn. Her resolve is starting to break.

NEWS CASTER

It grabbed Aegis with one of it's tentacles and...oh, Jesus.....he's gone through two buildings.

Where'd he go? Has anyone seen him?

The creature---it's....oh, god, it's turning back into the city. It's...it's just WADING through buildings!
The dust rising from the ruins---it's hard to see...

Rachel closes her eyes, as if praying, trying to keep herself together.

RACHEL

John, don't you fucking do this to me.

DAVID

Mom!

NEWS CASTER

Aegis is alive! He's alive!

He's grabbed one of its tentacles and flew in fast enough to pull it back towards the bay!

Rachel's head drops, a ragged sigh leaving her.

David puts his hand on her shoulder.

DAVID

It's gonna be okay, mom. Dad's got this.

The lights start to dim, fading and pulsing. Not a brown out, but something different---something deliberate.

RACHEL

Joe.

David grabs the case as the lights fade again.

The outside is still full day, but the room itself is getting unnaturally dark.

As the lights fade down all the way, even dimming the light from outside, Joe appears in the room.

Joe is hurt. His left arm is bleeding and his coat and shirt are torn. He has small nicks and scrapes along his exposed face---debris that become shrapnel. Not all of the blood on him is his.

He eyes look like he's waded through Hell.

Joe catches himself on the couch. David drops his case and grabs Joe, steadying him.

RACHEL

Joe?

JOE

Rachel. David.

RACHEL

Get him something to drink, David.

Rachel takes Joe and settles him onto the couch.

RACHEL

(as soon as David's gone)
Joe, where's Adam?

JOE

Rachel...

RACHEL

Don't fuck with me, Joe. Where's Adam?

Joe's head dips down. His jaw clenches.

Rachel stands up, backing away in shock.

JOE

We couldn't...

RACHEL

God. Oh, god.

JOE

He just...

RACHEL

No. No no no no no. Joe, look at me. FUCKING look at me, Joe. Adam's not dead.

JOE

Rachel, he..

RACHEL

No. Adam can't die. That thing couldn't kill Adam!

JOE

It was the other one.

RACHEL

Other one...

JOE

Adam died killing it.

*David comes back in the room with some water,
which he gives to Joe.*

Joe holds the cup, staring into it.

Silence passes between them.

Joe sets the cup down.

RACHEL

Why are you here?

JOE

Rachel.

RACHEL

Why are you here?

JOE

I came to get you.

RACHEL

You left him.

JOE

Rachel...

RACHEL

You left him, Joe! You left him alone, with that...
that thing!

Rachel closes in on Joe, who stands up.

RACHEL

You're supposed to be helping him!

She pushes him, hard, in his wounded arm.

JOE

Damn it, Rachel.

RACHEL

Why aren't you out there? You fucking coward.

DAVID

Mom.

RACHEL

You get to run? Why aren't you actually doing anything?

Joe's had enough at this point and gets in her face.

JOE

Because I can't, Rachel! Because it was only ever John and Adam and now Adam's dead! Because Diana, Lindsay and I aren't on their level. Because we never were.

Now John's doing what he has to because he's the only one who can and we're trying to make sure that people don't die. Don't you think I would rather be able to help him with that? To get revenge for what killed Adam? I want to tear the world down with my bare fucking hands and all I can do right now is help stupid, screaming people who are too scared to stay put so I can teleport them out.

So I'm here, getting you out of the way so John can do what he has to do. You don't get to blame me for this. You don't get to look down your nose at me for not doing what I can't do.

RACHEL

Don't tell me what I can't...

JOE

I haven't gotten Carl out yet! My husband is waiting on me to get you out, so don't, for a fucking second, think I'm going to keep taking shit from you. You're scared, I get that, but get your shit and get ready to go.

Rachel rushes into the hallway.

DAVID

He's going to be okay, right?

JOE

If he's not, I don't think we'll be around long enough for it to matter.

Rachel comes back in with a case like David's.

JOE

Still got those?

RACHEL

Be prepared.

Rachel and David gather close to Joe, near the window.

The lights in the apartment start to dim, unnaturally. It fades down three times before it hits black.

JOE

You didn't strike as a boy scout.

RACHEL

We don't get to feel safe. Not in this family.

JOE

(in black)

I'll get you as safe as I can.

The lights fade to black and then come back up, with Joe, David, and Rachel gone.

NEWS CASTER

He's....he's just floating there.

Aegis isn't moving anymore. The creature---it doesn't seem...it looks like it's expecting a trap.

It's...oh, god....it's got him. Aegis isn't even fighting anymore. The mouth....it's...

Aegis has just been eaten by the creature.

There's no....I...

I'm getting unconfirmed reports that a nuclear strike might be authorized to destroy it. The further it goes inland, the more damage will be done. If it strikes at it's current location, we're getting estimates that up to 1 million people will die from the blast and radiation.

This...this feels like the end of the world.

There's a deafening ROAR.

NEWS CASTER

It's screaming. It's.... what's happening.....

There's the sound of an explosion.

NEWS CASTER

It's throat---it just exploded! It's toppling backwards....it's...oh god.

Aegis---Aegis is alive! He's hurt---badly, but he's alive!

He seems to have killed it!

He's flying down into the wound....he's disappeared.

I can't see....I can't see from here what's happening--- he must be...

Aegis has appeared again....he's barely keeping up in the air---he looks ready to drop at any minute!

He just left---some kind of burst of speed---I can't see him now.

Reports are coming in that the creature seems to be dead. That it fell back into what was already destroyed....we're not going to know the total death counts for some time, but....this is amazing.

We're hearing that the nuclear strike has been aborted! They still want to evacuate the Eastern tip of Manhattan, but, providing this thing doesn't come back to life, we're out of danger of a nuclear strike!

Aegis (John) lands heavily on the balcony. He was wearing a trenchcoat, which is pierced through with small holes in dozens of places. He's bleeding quite heavily and barely able to keep himself standing as he stumbles into the apartment.

He falls towards the hallway, catching himself on the wall.

NEWS CASTER

(all of the newscaster's lines, from here on out, are at the same time as what's happening with John)

We don't know what this thing was or where it came from. We're being told that there were 2 and that Pulsar died killing the other.

JOHN

Ray?

His voice is a weak, shuddering thing.

NEWS CASTER

Shadow, Bantam, and Revenant managed to teleport hundreds of people in the path of destruction to safety. We don't as of yet have confirmation on how many or who is alive, though authorities are putting a list together, which will be posted online.

JOHN

David?

He slips and collapses, sliding down the wall that leads into the hallway.

He curls in on himself, starting to shake violently.

NEWS CASTER

We are being told that the phone lines are being flooded currently and only to call 911 in case of an emergency and not to check to see if loved ones are safe. As soon as the police have a full list, they will release that online and to news agencies. They are currently working at the sites to find survivors.

All we know right now is that Aegis went into the belly of the beast to defeat this thing. He stood, firm, and saved the people of New York City.

Is this why those with super powers erupted 2 years ago? Was it, somehow, to protect us from things like this? Are there going to be more?

Right now all we can be sure of is that this city--- this country, perhaps even this world, is grateful to its protector. We don't know where he's at currently, but there are still people who need him.

Aegis, if you can hear this...if you're okay, you have all of our gratitude.

Shadow and Bantam are currently helping with the rescue efforts and soon, we hope....Aegis will be there to help find anyone trapped in the rubble.

(concurrently with the newscast)

A strangled cry struggles to escape him, but he's fighting with everything he's got to keep it under control.

His head tilts back and he takes a deep breath, followed by a hoarse sob which he chokes down.

His eyes are up on the ceiling as he begins to shake, unable to keep it in anymore.

As he cries, he curls up, almost fetaly against the wall, trying to hide himself as much as he can. To not be seen.

He's shut his grief and fear up inside him he's losing control of it.

(During "there are still people who need him")

As it rips out of his throat, he looks towards the TV. The sound of the TV begins to waver.

He focuses his fear and hurt and grief at the set, which, as the scream builds up inside him, emits a loud SMASHING sound just before it

explodes.

His scream continues, his eyes cast to the heavens as the lights burst out, shutting out the world.

scene 2

*Single spot on Aegis, who sits on the couch.
Alone. The rest of the stage is in darkness.*

The Therapist is not seen. They are located in front of John, who interacts with the disembodied voice as if the person is in front of him.

John is distracted and distant. He's close to agitation....he clearly doesn't want to be here.

THERAPIST

Normally, this is when I ask a new patient something about themselves, but I know at least a bit about you.

JOHN

Comes with the territory, I suppose.

THERAPIST

You helped my brother.

JOHN

Hm?

THERAPIST

My brother. He was in the Churchhill Downs apartment complex.

JOHN

Churchhill?

THERAPIST

There was a fire...an explosion that happened in the kitchen at the bottom. Construction had caused problems...lot of people trapped inside.

JOHN

Oh. This was....around Halloween?

THERAPIST

Yeah.

JOHN

How's he doing?

THERAPIST

Won't shut up about it. You flew him to the next building.

JOHN

Yeah, well---one of the benefits of being me is that flying is really cool.

THERAPIST

I can imagine.

JOHN

You'd think people would be more afraid if I picked them up to fly them somewhere. I mean, if I dropped them or if something happened---they'd die. But, for some reason, they don't freak out.

THERAPIST

And why do you think that is?

JOHN

I don't know. Trust?

THERAPIST

And why do you think they trust you?

JOHN

So we've switched into therapy mode?

THERAPIST

Is that a problem?

John is quiet for a moment, turning it over in his head.

JOHN

I've never given them a reason not to trust me before.
It's easy to.... as a kid, I used to dream of being a
supero and... I just trusted that they wouldn't let
me down, I guess.

THERAPIST

Before? Why did you say before?

JOHN

Hm?

THERAPIST

You said "you've never given them a reason not to
trust you before." Why before?

JOHN

Oh. Figure of speech.

THERAPIST

Do you feel like you've given them a reason not to
trust you?

JOHN

You mean, like regular people?

THERAPIST

Is there someone else?

*John goes quiet. He takes a drink from a bottled
water and sets it back down.*

THERAPIST

(after some time)

Did you want to talk about...

JOHN

(interrupting)

No.

THERAPIST

What's it like? Being part of a superhero team?

JOHN

Not what I thought.

THERAPIST

Why's that?

JOHN

Aside from....

Aside from a few of the others who erupted, it's not like we really have any super villains to fight. And they don't just run around causing havok for us to find. So we're kind of like police deputies or a rescue team.

THERAPIST

And how is that?

JOHN

Harder.

THERAPIST

Why?

JOHN

With a bad guy---you've got something....concrete. Something you can do something to but there's been almost none of that. When you're rescuing people from a disaster---you're always too late for some of them. I mean, the closest thing we come to actual superheroing is...

THERAPIST

Is what?

JOHN

You don't have the clearance. I'm not allowed to tell you.

THERAPIST

Are those things that weigh on you?

JOHN

No. Those have a purpose and a plan and... I say no if I don't think what we're doing is ethical. I've been asked to do some things that I wouldn't.

THERAPIST

By who?

JOHN

You're not cleared for that. Government types. Those ones feel closest to what I thought this would be. I don't even get the worst of it. Bantam scouts the area. Revenant scans for people and Shadow teleports in and takes people out. We just help with the heavy lifting.

THERAPIST

How'd you come up with those nicknames?

JOHN

(slightly embarrassed)

At first? Because it sounded cool. Did you ever see the pictures where we tried costumes?

THERAPIST

I remember those.

JOHN

They---don't look good. It's not like there are many of us in the world--- The names stuck because it's much easier to listen to Aegis than John. Someone says "John's arrived" and no one knows what you're talking about. Aegis gets people to listen.

THERAPIST

Aegis is a shield?

JOHN

Yeah. From greek mythology.

THERAPIST

You big into mythology?

JOHN

I like it, but not big into it. The name sounded cool. I remembered it from something.

THERAPIST

Any idea what?

JOHN

Something I read? No clue anymore but the word was there when I wanted something to call myself.

THERAPIST

So you're the shield.

JOHN

Yeah. Pretty much.

THERAPIST

How difficult is that?

JOHN

Used to be pretty easy.

THERAPIST

And now?

LIGHTS FADE UP ON THE WHOLE ROOM

Three bottles of whiskey and one of everclear are empty on the bar behind John. John stares ahead, not really there at the moment. He gets up and pours the last of the everclear into a cup, which he shoots in one go.

His phone, on the table, gets a text.

John doesn't notice it.

He puts his head down, frustrated.

The door quietly opens.

Rachel comes in and shuts the door.

The slam of the door hits John hard. Before he can realize what he's done, he spins around reaches a hand out.

Rachel slams, HARD, into the wall behind her. The force that's holding her up has cranked her neck to a dangerous degree.

RACHEL
John.

John's hand unclenches and she falls to the ground. He looks at his hand in horror and numble collapses on the couch.

LIGHTS FADE BACK TO COUCH

The spot on the couch has expanded some. John is more free to move in the small space perscribed to him.

THERAPIST
And now?

JOHN
Now I haven't been home in two weeks.

THERAPIST
Where have you been?

JOHN
Spent some time in the arctic. Went to our training facility---the place they tested us.

THERAPIST
Have you done any drinking? Drug use?

JOHN
I tried drinking. Bottles of whiskey and one of everclear---started to catch a buzz, but that's way too much to try to drink. I can't even get drunk anymore.

THERAPIST
Do you want to get drunk?

JOHN
Yes.

THERAPIST
Why?

JOHN

You're really asking that?

THERAPIST

Is it a compulsion?

JOHN

Because it could take the edge off. Because sometimes people need a fucking drink, okay? You've never felt like you had a rough day and you needed a drink?

THERAPIST

Sure. But I haven't been through what you've been through.

JOHN

And you can't do what I can do.

THERAPIST

Why haven't you been home?

JOHN

Because I'm the most dangerous force on earth and right now I'm not completely in control.

John sinks onto the couch.

THERAPIST

How are you not in control?

JOHN

I almost....

Look, I did my research. I watched and read things on PTSD. I'm not stupid, I know what's happening to me.

THERAPIST

And does that help.

JOHN

(After a silence)

No.

THERAPIST

And how do you feel about that?

JOHN

That it's not fucking fair. That I can sit there and know that this is what's happening. My mind is reacting to the death of my friend, the things I've seen, and near death trauma. I was ready, basically, to commit suicide to stop that....thing. And I did it but I'm alive now. I'm here and that should be a joyous fucking thing but it's not.

And I've read about survivor's guilt and trauma and there are no fucking answers. I go to sleep every night being thrown down that thing's....

I saw an interview with a vetran who would wake up hitting his wife.

Silence.

THERAPIST

Have you ever hit your wife in your sleep?

JOHN

If I hit my wife in my sleep, she'd die. If I freak out and think I'm in there, I'm going to blow the roof off my building.

I don't get to have nightmares like that.

THERAPIST

You said you went away....

JOHN

Yeah.

(to the unasked question)

I sheared off the top of a mountain of ice in my sleep.

THERAPIST

What are you hoping to gain through therapy?

JOHN

Am I ever going to be safe enough to be with my wife
and kid?

FADE TO BLACK

SLIDE

1 Week After the Attack

Scene 3

Lights up on the entire set.

*Joe and Carl are on the balcony, looking out
towards where the devastation was.*

*Deena (Bantam) and Kevin (Revenent) come in from
the outside door with some liquor in bags.*

*There's some beer and hard liquor as well as a
bottle of Champaign.*

John sits on the couch, not mentally there.

CARL

I never thought the smoke would stop.

KEVIN

From the attack? That was nothing.

JOE

He's only been in New York a few years. He doesn't
remember.

CARL

(getting it)

Oh. I didn't....

DEENA

Attack?

KEVIN

Yeah.

DEENA

Is that what we're calling it?

KEVIN

Got a better name?

DEENA

The attack is too...

JOE

It's only been a week, guys. They'll come up with a name for it.

DEENA

So glad 'they'll' do that.

Deena takes a beer and a bottle of whiskey and sits on the couch next to John. She takes the top off her beer and offers the bottle to John. John takes it, mechanically.

DEENA

To the fallen.

She holds her bottle out for John to clink it.

He does so.

JOE

To Adam.

Deena takes a long, hard drink of her beer. John takes a quick one from the bottle of whiskey before setting it on the table.

Carl and Joe get a bottle of beer from Kevin, and they clink theirs together, taking a slow drink.

DEENA

Shouldn't we do a viking funeral or something?

KEVIN

What?

DEENA

Put him on an aircraft carrier and set the thing on fire. Let him sink into the ocean.

JOE

Light up the horizon.

KEVIN

Put the fourth of July to shame.

DEENA

He shouldn't be buried. He shouldn't be in the ground.

JOHN

He won't be buried.

No one says anything.

JOHN

They're going to finally be able to take one of us apart. See what makes us tick.

CARL

They've done tests on all of you. Scans...

KEVIN

Not on Adam or John.

DEENA

Didn't work. Couldn't pierce the skin.

JOHN

Don't have to now.

He grabs the bottle.

He was skin was ripped into ribbons. All they have to do now is go inside.

DEENA

It's not right.

JOE

We barely get our lives. We don't have to give them our deaths.

JOHN

Yes, we do. Who knows what will happen to Adam's body as it decays. Can it decay? What if he goes nova? We haven't belonged to ourselves since we erupted.

John takes a long drink from the bottle.

JOE

Someone got some sad bastard music to put on? We might as well go all the way with this.

DEENA

Or, something happier...

CARL

(looking through his phone)

Who doesn't love some funk?

The door opens and Rachel and David come in. Before they can say anything, they note the mood, which silences everyone.

JOHN

When does it end?

DEENA

John?

JOHN

When do we get to stop? When do I get to just...

DEENA

John. It's okay.

JOHN

If we stop? If there's another tsunami or flood? How can we be responsible for everyone? How much blood is on my hands if I decide I just fucking can't today? How many died this week that I could have saved?

Joe places his hand on John's shoulder.

JOE

We've been handling it, John.

JOHN

And what about now? Who's dying now?

DEENA

John, stop.

JOHN

When does it fucking stop? When can I just.... I didn't ask for this!

JOE

None of us did.

John turns on Joe, violently.

JOHN

No, you didn't. You just got the easy seats.

JOE

Fuck you, John.

JOHN

Where were you when Adam died? Where were you when...

JOE

I was doing what I could, John!

JOHN

You weren't there. You sat there doing nothing.

JOE

I did what I could.

JOHN

What you could? Picked up the fucking scraps while Adam and I died!

JOE

Fuck you, John, you don't get to...

John gestures violently and Joe flies back across the room, slamming into the floor. As John marches towards him, lost, Joe is pushed along the floor and up against the wall, barely able to breathe.

JOHN

We were dying, Joe! And you and Deena and Kevin got to run away and leave me up there. With nothing! You didn't have to face that thing alone. You got to be a fucking hero while I had to do it. Where were you? Why am I the only one that can do this? What the fuck did I do? I save people! I help them and where the FUCK WERE THEY?

RACHEL

John!

JOHN

where were you, Joe? What was it like? Appearing on TV to talk to the world when you weren't there! When you didn't have to risk anything. Talking about sacrifice and fear and what do you know about that, Joe? TELL ME!

RACHEL

John!

Her cry gets through him, breaking him out of his memory. John looks at Joe, barely conscious on the ground.

JOHN

Joe...I'm...

Joe's released from John's power.

CARL

Joe?

JOE

(finding it hard to speak)
I'm...I'm okay.

JOHN

Oh, god. Joe...

RACHEL

John. Listen to me.

John turns towards the balcony. Rachel moves to stop him.

RACHEL

Don't you dare run, John.

JOHN

Rachel....I can't.

RACHEL

You don't get to fly away, John.

John moves past her and onto the balcony.

Rachel tries to stop him.

DEENA

Rachel, stop.

RACHEL

Don't.

DEENA

Rachel.

RACHEL

You don't get to run, John.

John slips from her grasp and goes over the railing.

Rachel rushes after, watching him fly away.

RACHEL

GOD DAMN IT, JOHN!

DEENA

Rachel! Don't do this. Do you have any idea what we've been through?

RACHEL

Don't you fucking dare.

DEENA

What any of us have been through? John, especially?

RACHEL

If you think you're going to sit in my house and tell me....

DEENA

How many bodies have you pulled from the rubble,
Rachel? How many friends have you seen died? How
many times have you put yourself on the line?

*Rachel crosses the space between them quickly.
Deena is more surprised than anything. Rachel
grabs Deena by the shirt and pulls her close.*

RACHEL

I've been a New York cop for 16 years, Deena. It's
2015. Pull out a fucking calender and ask me again if
I've pulled bodies out of rubble. Ask me again.

Your powers don't make you special. They don't give
you insight because you get to sit above it all and
watch regular folk die.

You don't know what it's like to really be afraid and
still put your life on the line.

DEENA

We do now.

RACHEL

Now. Once. You're still a rookie, in my book, and
rookies don't get to tell me what fear is like.

You've never chased someone with a gun and known that
if they fire and hit, you're dead. Well,
congratulations, you've just had your first time.

Don't sit there and tell me I don't know that or I
swear to god....

JOE

Deena.

DEENA

I'm sorry.

JOE

We're just trying to deal with it, too.

RACHEL

You're don't seem to be dealing with it too hard.

CARL

You haven't woken up with Joe screaming.

RACHEL

No, I walked into the house to almost get killed by my husband.

BLACK OUT

Scene 4

John is behind the couch, on his feet, and agitated. The light has grown from the last time we were in the therapist's office. It takes up a bit more of the room, though there's a different tonal quality to it.

THERAPIST

Where'd you go?

JOHN

Flew out over the ocean.

THERAPIST

Why?

JOHN

(laughing a bit)
So I could hit it.

THERAPIST

The ocean?

JOHN

Yeah. Hit it hard and tunneled deep. It's just about the only thing I can hit that doesn't just crumble.

THERAPIST

Did it help?

JOHN

Short term? Yeah.

THERAPIST

Long term?

JOHN

Well, I'm here...

THERAPIST

Have you talked about...

John doesn't answer. A long silence hangs in the air.

THERAPIST

Not to anyone? Your wife?

JOHN

No.

THERAPIST

Joe? Deena or Kevin?

JOHN

No.

THERAPIST

Because they weren't there?

JOHN

That...that wasn't fair to them.

THERAPIST

But that's what you think, isn't it?

JOHN

I'm not proud of that.

THERAPIST

It doesn't matter that you're not proud of it---it's still what you felt.

JOHN

They did what they could.

THERAPIST

But they couldn't do what you could do.

JOHN

No one could.

THERAPIST

Except Adam.

JOHN

Yeah.

THERAPIST

Tell me about him.

JOHN

Adam?

THERAPIST

Yeah.

JOHN

What do you want to know?

THERAPIST

What's worth knowing?

JOHN

Shitty poker player?

THERAPIST

Was he bad at hiding his emotions?

JOHN

No---it's not a--- Adam just couldn't lie well. He liked poker, he just sucked at it. Impulsive. He'd chase an inside straight like an idiot.

THERAPIST

You a poker player?

JOHN

I like it, yeah.

THERAPIST

What do you like about it?

JOHN

Sitting around with friends, trying to beat them.

It's just---it's fun. It's the tension---you've got jack shit in your hand and you're praying that Joe doesn't figure out that he's got you and you go all in because that's the dumbest thing you can do, but if you pull it off with enough confidence, he's going to buy it.

And if he doesn't---well, you were ballsy and all it cost you was a couple dollars.

THERAPIST

A cost that didn't, ultimately, matter.

JOHN

I guess.

THERAPIST

And Adam?

JOHN

He didn't like to lose.

THERAPIST

Would he get angry.

JOHN

Yeah. Not at us. At himself. But he kept coming. He was a terrible winner.

THERAPIST

He'd rub it in your faces.

JOHN

He learned not to. He'd get so cocky that we could walk him into doing something stupid. Once he'd raised... He just locked in and wouldn't let go.

THERAPIST

What was he like?

JOHN

He loved the sky.

THERAPIST

Don't you?

JOHN

Hell yeah. It's... there's no way to describe it.

The entire world opens up underneath you. I love it, but Adam lived for it. He used to....

(John starts to laugh)

Once...we were at the Empire State Building. The observation deck. There were a bunch of tourists...

I was like, "Why are we up here?" I can see New York from any angle---literally any angle I want at any time, and he was just like, "be cool and go with it."

He started screaming at me. Saying that he couldn't take this anymore. It was all too much---Adam used to do community theatre and...he wasn't a great actor or anything, but when someone's screaming you're not judging their acting ability.

He just screamed at me and then leaped on that small railing and then flew up onto the big guard rails.

They thought he parkoured or something and Adam just let out this....scream....and jumped off the building.

They freaked out. The entire deck rushed to where he'd jumped---I don't know what they were thinking they'd see---you don't get a good view of the ground, but he was just floating there, laughing.

THERAPIST

Where they angry?

JOHN

No. They got to meet Pulsar and Aegis. They had a great story.

THERAPIST

Is that why he did it?

JOHN

He did it because he thought it was funny.

THERAPIST

Did he do that a lot?

JOHN

Not like that. But...

THERAPIST

What?

JOHN

We took turns once dive bombing that little sky tower on the Sears Tower. Where people can sit in the glass box like they're floating above the city. We looked like a suicide was going to hit the top of the glass.

THERAPIST

Did something go wrong there?

JOHN

They threatened to sue us.

THERAPIST

The people in the box?

JOHN

The owners of the building. Their lawyer just screamed at us for, like, half an hour and Adam kept trying not to laugh.

THERAPIST

Sounds like he wasn't afraid of much.

JOHN

He said he used to be.

THERAPIST

What changed?

John just gives a look to the invisible therapist.

THERAPIST

Ah...

JOHN

You know how someone learns martial arts and suddenly gets way too cocky?

THERAPIST

Yes.

JOHN

Well, we were like that on crack. Hard to be afraid when nothing can touch you.

THERAPIST

Nothing until...

The lights fade out...we see a moment of John starting to panic.

In the black, we hear an inhuman SCREAM--- something like what we heard before, from the creature, but slightly different. We're hearing it from inside the creature.

Other sounds---like there's something alive and moving.

John SCREAMS.

The lights flare BRIGHT, catching John's body rigid and in agony....then the lights snap back to black.

LIGHTS UP

John has collapsed onto the floor and is breathing heavily.

THERAPIST

John.

FADE TO BLACK

scene 5

SLIDE

3 weeks after the Attack

John stands by the door, looking small and afraid.

David and Rachel stand opposite him, near the entrance to the hall.

No one's sure what they can do now. Is he safe?

After a long silence....

RACHEL

How are you?

JOHN

I'm... I'm trying to be better.

RACHEL

How?

JOHN

Staying away from people. Seeing a therapist.

DAVID

Are you...did they give you something?

JOHN

(a little bit of a laugh, little bit of broken)

Nothing would work on me.

RACHEL

(gently ribbing him)

They can't have you take, like 4 bottles every two hours?

John's laugh is small, but honest.

RACHEL

Come in, John.

John takes a few step towards them.

David comes to him, haltingly. He reaches out a hand to John, who grabs it, hard. (Not in a way that would hurt David.)

As David pulls himself in to hug his father, John sags, being held up by his son. Rachel joins them as a sound escapes from John. It's the high keening of someone trying to stop their pain from escaping. It's not pretty or theatrical, it's the ugly, honest way that real people suffer. It's without walls or facade.

They hold him as he starts to break down.

DAVID

Dad...we're here.

RACHEL

It's okay, John.

John slips down to his knees, David and Rachel going with him. He's shaking uncontrollably, as he gives over more and more of his fear and grief to his voice, cutting over their voices as they comfort him.

They hold him and tell him they care about him. They love him. They're here for him.

VERY SLOW FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 6

John and Rachel are on the couch. She's curled up in his lap and dozing. He's absently stroking her hair and seems quite tired himself.

The TV is playing and is the only real light in the room. It's something harmless---old tv comedy. Something light---not challenging. Maybe soemthing the audience remembers or a parody of such a thing.

John clicks the tv off, dimming the room even more.

JOHN

Baby.

RACHEL

(mostl asleep)

Hm?

JOHN

You have to get up, I need to sleep.

She nods sleeiply and pulls herself up to nuzzle in his neck.

He kisses her forehead and smiles at her...she's already asleep.

He lifts her easily, getting up and carrying her into the hall.

After a time, he comes back into the living room and takes a pitcher of water from the fridge.

He takes a long drink, closing his eyes as he feels the cold of the water spreading throughout his frame.

He opens the sliding glass door and is about to walk onto the balcony when Rachel comes from the hall--clearly tired.

RACHEL

I thought you were going to bed.

JOHN

I need to sleep. It's not safe for me to sleep here.

RACHEL

But...you've been sleeping next to me all week.

JOHN

I've been laying next to you. I haven't been sleeping.

RACHEL

But... for a week?

JOHN

That's about how much I sleep now.

RACHEL

Since the....

JOHN

Since we all erupted.

RACHEL

That was two years ago.

JOHN

Yeah.

RACHEL

You've slept next to me almost every night since then.

JOHN

I can sleep. I just don't have to. It's like a nap.

RACHEL

So you've been going to bed, for two years, without being tired?

JOHN

Yeah.

RACHEL

What the fuck, John?

JOHN

What?

RACHEL

You've been.... you've just been pretending...?

JOHN

No. Not pretending. I'm able to nap a bit.

RACHEL

Why wouldn't you say something?

JOHN

I didn't want to lose that.

RACHEL

Lose what?

JOHN

Sleeping next to you.

RACHEL

I...

JOHN

You're the only person who ever.... the first time you stayed over you just rolled over onto me to sleep and it was the most comfortable thing in the world. I'd never fallen asleep holding someone.

You made that easy. I wasn't going to lose that.

RACHEL

So you've just been staying up the last week?

JOHN

Reading on the tablet or watching movies. I've been binge watching some series.

RACHEL

Why wouldn't you...?

JOHN

Because it doesn't get to take that.

Rachel walks to him, kisses him on the cheek, and puts her arms around the security guards at the Krannert Art Museum must be really bored most of the time

John is on the couch. Most of the room is lit, though differently than when it's his house.

He's a bit less agitated, but still not through.

NOTES FOR NEXT TIME

Group therapy---starts with stories of veterans and others who might be at a support group.

Chairs in the dark around where John is. Voices come in from the dark.

As it transitions into Joe, Deena, Kevin, Rachel, and David, they start to fill those chairs

Grandpa's Iowa Jima stories---left the fire.

Scene7

John is on the couch. Chairs have been placed, in the dark, around him in a loose circle. Other members of the cast, currently playing the voices he's hearing, are standing in the dark, unseen.

As they tell their stories, as other characters, they will slowly start to fill out the seats as the characters we've seen...once they no longer have something to say.

DESERT STORM

I just couldn't ...I was drunk. A lot. It was how I dealt.

AFGHANISTAN

I hear ya.

DESERT STORM

Lisa and I...we were barely talking. I didn't want to be seen by anyone. And my kid---she just wanted her dad and I didn't know what to do. I would sit there and.... how do you tell your kid you're going to be okay. That daddy's going to be okay when he's fucking not. I wasn't. Ever. And I was....she just wanted to be a fucking kid, right? Go out and play and I...every time I went out there, there was too much...

Nothing was in control out there. There was no way to... and I just couldn't.

So Lisa took her one weekend to her grandmother's and I. Just. She never wanted Lisa to marry someone in the military. She'd been an Air Force brat and had warned her what it could be like. And all I could hear was her fucking voice telling Lisa, "I told you so. See what happened? I told you!" And what am I bringing her now? I'm not the guy she married...that guy didn't come back, instead this... this thing is all that's left and I want to be who I was again. I can feel him somewhere in here---and he's not me. He's not this...thing...that came back.

And I was hammered and thought I was going to throw up. I didn't but I sat at the sink, washing my face, and he was just looking at me in the mirror. Just burning anger and...just fucking staring at me. So I headbutted that fucker. And it felt good. It was a pain I could do something about...I could...

That's fucking stupid.

THERAPIST

It's how you felt.

VIETNAM

I know how that is. Punched in a car window once.

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

Shatter it?

VIETNAM

(laughing)

It ain't the fucking movies, man. I shattered my damn hand.

The others laugh. John is still a bit disassociated with everything.

DESERT STORM

I just kept hitting the mirror.

In the morning--it was my kid who found me. Bleeding from my face on the floor---my fucking kid.

Silence passes.

THERAPIST

Thank you. Anyone else?

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

I've been back a year. Haven't had a drink in 8 days. Want one. Want it bad, but...

I went to a movie---stupid action film, right? Robots n shit. Just wanted out of the heat. They...the camera jsut kept hitting me with things. Boom: dude's face. Boom: Explosion. Boom: parts of a robot flying everywhere.

It was a robot. it's not a person, but all I could see was body parts and the truck that---

It was behind us. It was too full, they sent me to the one in front, which didn't...it was supposed to be the point vehicle and they wanted it lughtly manned.

I don't know what the weight tolerance was, but we went right over it. or it was remotely controlled. I don't know, but...

I was supposed to be on that one. I was running late...just...late. Not because of anything, and I would have been on that...

I mean, why me, right? What did I do? Johnson had three kids back home. What do I have? Phillips was a doctor. He worked his whole life to help people andhe

(MORE)

Operation Iraqi Freedom (CONT'D)

got all this training to put people back together and all I could do was watch as....

Every single one of them was worth more than me. Even Meyers and he was a fucking prick. But....I don't know what I think about fate anymore, because I'm here and they're gone.

Silence.

THERAPIST

Thank you.

VIETNAM

Ever seen a Huskie come down to get you?

A few affirmatives are given--not many.

VIETNAM

Man, that thing was like an answered prayer when it showed up. Small, funny looking helicopter but two of the times I thought I wasn't going to make it one of them came out of the blue to get me.

Left 17 friends on the field during my three tours. Never knew where things were coming from.

There was one, though....McDaniel---young kid. Barely looked like he could shave yet. Hell, I could barely shave.

Funny how you look back and...you know how you feel younger or older than you actually were? Like right now, I have to remind myself I'm not 25 anymore but when I was 25, I was about to turn 90, shit I saw. I was an old man back then, older than I am now.

But this kid---if he had tried to buy a drink, I'd have called him a liar.

Bullet had slipped under his helmet. Hit him as he fell. Not one that immediately killed him, but had blown part of his brain away. When we removed the helmet, it was mostly blood.

But when he was still there...between the screams, he was telling us this story about this girl he'd banged last night. At the prom. Called me Skippy ten times....eyes looked right through me.

"Should have seen her Skip. Hot as anything but shy when she took it off." And then he'd scream and see where he was and then he'd slip back into that place.

He didn't die in the jungle, however the fuck far away from the people he knew. That kid died as I held him and he was back from the prom and losing his cherry.

McDaniel was luckier than I'll ever be. He got to choose his death and it wasn't like the others--- realizing they were dying in a shithole that no one cared about for reasons I still don't understand.

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
To the lucky ones.

ALL
(mumbled)
The lucky ones.

THERAPIST
What about you?

JOHN
Me?

VIETNAM
We've all seen some shit, son.

DESERT STORM
Saw you on the tv.

AFGHANISTAN
We're all the same here. Afghanistan wasn't Vietnam.

VIETNAM
Vietnam wasn't Iraq.

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
Iraq wasn't New York.

VIETNAM

But we've all put it on the line.

JOHN

I'm not...I'm not like you.

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

You lost Pulsar.

AFGHANISTAN

You fought for your brothers.

VIETNAM

This isn't the place to compare pain.

THERAPIST

What you felt isn't made less because of the differences in your stories.

John starts to speak and then falls silent.

AFGHANISTAN

Sniper had been taking out our people. Lost three in 6 weeks.

I wasn't even in the shit. I was supply. I fought spreadsheets and argued with people who wanted more...everything. Rations, gear, bullets. I was a bean counter. I wasn't supposed to be in danger. I was just supposed to complain about how god damn hot it was.

But I couldn't go from quarters to the supply tent without running. Feeling like he was out there, crosshairs right on my skull. One night, he fired at me.

Or someone near me. There was a bunch of us. We scattered, hit cover. I got in cover and just froze.

The others were getting into position and doing everything they were supposed to and I....I couldn't move, man. I just...

And I'll feel those here, sometimes. Like someone's aiming at me and I just can't move. Caused a car wreck. Killed a kid. Because I couldn't shake a sniper from Afghanistan.

JOHN

I was alone. Pulsar had died...

John comes to a halt.

Joe sits in a chair as he starts to speak.

JOE

Thing grabbed Adam and...god, the scream. Adam was fighting, trying to fly out of its tentacles but--- I saw his eyes when he was thrown into its mouth. Last person he saw.

It crunched down on him and I saw him fold up.

Stage goes black.

We hear the SCREAM and the sounds of the creature, from the inside, as we did earlier.

Lights snap back on. John is bolt upright in his chair...muscles taut. He's going through this again.

A hand reaches out to his shoulder from the darkness and he eases a bit as it touches him.

JOE

I've never heard a sound like that come from someone's mouth. He just.....exploded. Every bit of power he had...one last fuck you to that thing. Its jaw came off...

DEENA

(sitting in a chair)

The other one---it tried to grab the one Adam killed. It was mourning.

JOE

Son of a bitch had killed Adam. I don't give a fuck.

DEENA

And then it turned on us...heading into the water. It just...it flew through the water.

JOHN

It wanted revenge. It wanted to kill as many people as it could.

KEVIN

John could barely keep up. Shadow teleported us back Manhattan but we were in the wrong place.

JOE

It was too quick. I didn't know where it would hit the land.

KEVIN

He got us there, too late. How could something that big big so quick?

DEENA

Morning commute. People getting to work. It dropped the roof on them.

KEVIN

I scanned through them...felt all of them dying. Calling out. Begging to god...

JOHN

I could have...if that thing wasn't still there...

JOE

I couldn't do anything against it.

DEENA

None of us could.

KEVIN

Only John, now.

SHADOW

All we could do was get them out of the way.