

"THE FEAR EATER"

FADE IN:

INT. BACK OFFICE - DAY

About 50 people are crammed into a stuffy, windowless office.

They are an eclectic group - students, office workers, housewives, children, pensioners.

They all seem calm and relaxed, despite the odd surroundings. They bide their time, sitting around on chairs and desks. Some read newspapers, some fill in crossword and Sudoku puzzles. Mothers nurse babies while toddlers play on the ground.

A core group pays attention to a tall, bespectacled, middle-aged man - CHARLIE - who stands in the middle of the room. He recites, as if from memory.

CHARLIE

Then Job answered and said, I know
it is so of a truth: but how should
man be just with God? If he will
contend with him, he cannot answer
him one of a thousand. He is wise
in heart, and mighty in strength:
who hath hardened himself against
him, and hath prospered?

His constituents listen attentively, some nodding their heads, but they are as serene and placid as everybody else in the room.

As Charlie speaks we pan to the door of the office where a man with Mediterranean features and an AK47 stands guard. He keeps his gun on the group, who take no notice.

In contrast to his hostages, this SENTRY seems agitated. He sweats profusely. Apart from the machine gun he is dressed ordinarily in T-shirt and jeans.

A second man enters the room. He is older than the sentry and has an air of authority. He also touts an AK. This LEADER also seems jumpy and anxious.

He scans the hostages. He beholds their serene demeanour with contempt. He focuses on Charlie, still reciting a Bible passage in the centre of the room.

LEADER

You.

Charlie turns around. The leader stares at him sternly and beckons him with the gun.

Charlie turns back to the group and smiles at them.

CHARLIE

Goodbye everyone.

People hug him or simply touch his arm as he is led out.

HOSTAGE ONE

Good luck, Charlie.

HOSTAGE TWO

May God be with you, Charlie.

HOSTAGE THREE

Peace be with you, brother.

CHARLIE

I'll see you all again.

There is no concern, sadness or anxiety to the farewells, just a mere matter-of-fact acceptance.

Charlie strides out confidently and with dignity.

INT. FRONT FLOOR - DAY

Charlie is brought out to a customer service area out front. Three men with AK47s stand beside the windows, occasionally peering out at the street below. A dead body of a security guard lies in the middle of the floor in a pool of blood. A sign on the wall gives the location as 'United States Passport Office'.

The leader prompts his hostage up to an open window. He always stays behind Charlie, using him as a shield, the gun pointed to his neck.

The reason for the leader's caution becomes clear. On top of buildings across the street we can see the outlines of police snipers. The sound of a police and TV helicopters can be heard overhead.

The leader positions Charlie in front of the open window. Charlie has remained unnaturally calm throughout this.

The terrorist leader looks at a clock on the wall. It reads 2.59.

We pan out the window and down the street to see the wide boulevard has been cordoned off by police. Police vans and cars are parked in front of the Passport Office building. Armed officers man positions behind their vehicles, looking up at the third floor of the four story building where Charlie can now be seen standing before the open window like a celebrity expecting to take in the adulation of fans.

Sniper rifles and TV news cameras point out from rooftops and windows along the street. Side streets adjoining the closed off main boulevard have been barricaded off. Crowds gather at these intersections behind police lines to get a look. On the main boulevard behind police lines TV news journalists give reports to camera. It is a siege-cum-media circus.

Charlie stares calmly out at the scene. Behind him the terrorist leader studies the clock intensely. It strikes 3.

The leader takes a step back from Charlie. He extends his arm and points the gun at the back of his head.

LEADER

Allah Akbar.

One GUNSHOT blows Charlie's brains out.

His body drops out the window and down to the street below.

A shudder runs through the crowds at the mouths of the side streets. Even hardened police officers are momentarily repulsed by the act.

On a counter behind the terrorist a landline phone rings. He answers it.

LEADER

(Into phone)

I told you I wasn't joking.

EXT. STREET - DAY

At the back of a police van a police negotiator speaks into a field phone.

NEGOTIATOR

(Into phone)

The government is prepared to
release some of the prisoners.

INTERCUT WITH LEADER

LEADER

(Into phone)

All of the mujahideen in American
jails must be freed. We will kill
one infidel each hour until our
demands are met or we are martyred.

The negotiator looks to his side where a hard-nosed SWAT
commander waits with a walkie talkie.

NEGOTIATOR

(Into phone)

I'm working on it.

LEADER

(Into phone)

You have one hour before another
dies.

The terrorist leader hangs up.

The negotiator looks at the SWAT commander and shakes his
head.

The SWAT commander talks into his walkie talkie.

SWAT COMMANDER

(Into walkie talkie)

Give the order.

EXT. SIDE STREET - DAY

Down a closed off side street SWAT officers suit up in
protective gear.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

A female TV reporter speaks to camera behind a police
line.

REPORTER

The terrorists, who have occupied
the building since midday, have
just killed a hostage. It's not

clear yet how many terrorists are in the building or if there have been other casualties...

EXT. SIDE STREET - DAY

The SWAT commander briefs his men, who are now fully decked out with balaclavas, helmets, grenade belts, Kevlar body plates and submachine guns.

They stand in front of an armoured assault truck. The top of the truck is fitted with a ramp that extends up and beyond the front of the truck.

SWAT COMMANDER

We don't know where in the building the hostages are being held. They may be used as human shields. We have to be fast and clinical. We also have to expect the worst, gentlemen. This operation is unlikely to conclude without the loss of innocent life.

EXT. BARRICADE, MAIN BOULEVARD - DAY

Uniformed officers CURTIS MILLER (35, slim but powerful, a keen thoughtful face) and ROY WALSH (40, brawny, easy-going) man a barricade that keeps a crowd penned down a side street.

The crowd crane their necks to get a look down the main boulevard. Curtis and Roy study them carefully.

A gaunt, haggard man with greying hair, who looks about 45, pushes to the front of the crowd. He is covered in a layer of sweat and despite wearing a long thick trenchcoat seems to shiver as if cold.

He moves with some discomfort as he squeezes through the crowd, as if suppressing a great pain. He arrives at the barrier. Unlike the rest of the crowd his eyes do not aim for the building down the street but latch onto Roy.

TRENCHCOAT

(To Roy)

The hostages are in a backroom on the third floor. There's seven or eight terrorists. I'm not sure exactly..

Roy looks at the man with contempt.

ROY
Fucking junkie. This isn't Rikki
Lake.

The man turns his attention to Curtis.

TRENCHCOAT
You have to listen to me. The
hostages are in a backroom on the
third floor. At least one other
person was killed beside the last
hostage. There's around seven or
eight terrorists...

Curtis glares at him.

CURTIS
What the fuck? Get out of here.

TRENCHCOAT MAN
I'm not joking. You have to listen
to me...

A sudden surge in the crowd squeezes the man back from the front of the barricade. People clamour to get a look as the armoured truck emerges from a parallel side street onto the main boulevard close to the siege building.

Having lost his place in the crush the man pushes his way back out of the crowd. He clears it and drops to his knees exhausted. He massages his stomach. He vomits on the ground.

Trembling, he manages to force himself to his feet. He lurches down the street holding his stomach.

He comes to an intersection and looks around. He sees a church and walks towards it.

INT. CHURCH - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The church is empty. He enters and takes the pew nearest the door. He is shivering, his teeth chattering.

TRENCHCOAT
Give it to me.

He closes his eyes and holds himself as if to keep warm. He starts to rock back and forth. He takes in a deep breath.

He falls onto his side in the pew. He balls up into a foetal position and shakes all over, almost like he's having an epileptic fit.

INT. BACK OFFICE - DAY

The hostages remain poised and calm. A small group stand in a circle holding hands and meditating. Some people kneel and pray silently by themselves. Others simply carry on playing Sudoku. There is not a hint of panic or stress in the room.

Except for the SENTRY.

With beaded sweat on his brow and his finger resting on the trigger of the AK, he scans the room incessantly for threats, for some justification for the stoicism on display.

The LEADER steps into the room. He looks around and settles on a woman completing a Sudoku puzzle near the door. He walks over to her. She is engrossed in the puzzle and doesn't notice him until he grabs the pen out of her hand and snaps it in half.

She looks up at him. Her expression remains impassive, nonchalant.

The leader grunts and walks back to the door. Passing the sentry he addresses him quietly.

LEADER

Why are they all so fucking calm?

A GUNSHOT sounds outside the room.

A brief flurry of gunfire follows, prompting the leader to hurry out of the room.

INT. FRONT FLOOR - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The leader cautiously moves into the front office.

One of his men lies on the floor by the window. Splinters of broken glass are strewn about him. He grasps his arm which pumps blood onto the floor.

The other terrorists stand tight against the wall, reluctant to look through the windows lest they too become victims of sniper fire.

LEADER

(Shouting)

Look out, you cowards. They must be planning an assault.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The armoured truck drives towards the front of the building. The ramp on top is sloped up so as to be level with the second floor, the highest it can reach to be effective as a battering ram and gangway. Armed SWAT officers sit on top of the truck.

The top of the ramp smashes through a second floor window as the armoured truck comes to a stop right at the wall of the building, actually thumping into it. SWAT officers race up the ramp and pour in through the smashed window.

Ropes drop down from a police helicopter above the building to the roof. SWAT officer abseil down expertly, land on the roof and head to an exit hut on the roof.

On the second floor the SWAT officers meet resistance - GUNFIRE from two terrorists.

They return fire. One terrorist is hit and killed.

The other flees up a stairwell to the third floor. He waits at the top and fires down the stairwell, pinning the SWAT officers on the second floor.

He is joined by a compatriot and they take turns firing volleys of shots down the stairwell, keeping the SWAT officers at bay.

A SWAT officer takes out a grenade, pulls the pin, makes a run up to the stairwell and flings the grenade up the stairs.

It detonates at the top and kills one of the terrorists. The other one scurries back and avoids the brunt of the blast. He runs through the smoke back to the top of the stairs and looks down to see a SWAT officer charging up.

He aims and fires, killing the officer. His body tumbles back down the stairs.

The others SWAT officers stay pinned down as the terrorist maintains a volley of shots down the stairs.

INT. BACK OFFICE - DAY

The sentry does his best to keep his nerves in check as the melee sounds outside the room.

The hostages observe him calmly as they listen to the gunfire ringing throughout the building. They betray no emotion whatsoever.

Curiosity gets the better of the sentry and he steps closer to the door. He ducks his head out.

He looks up an empty corridor.

One of the hostages - a soft-featured man about 30 - takes his chance. He runs forward and leaps feet first. His feet connect with the door, slamming it shut against the sentry's head. He drops the gun in pain.

Three other quick-thinking hostages overwhelm the dazed sentry. One of them seizes the gun and knocks the sentry unconscious with the butt of it. Another man takes a knife from the sentry's belt.

The flying hostage, DENIS, assumes the AK47. He leads the three men out of the room. They quickly but quietly move up the corridor to where rapid-fire bursts of gunfire can be heard.

Denis peers around a corner and sees the terrorist at the top of stairs shooting down at the SWAT men.

Denis aims the gun and turns the terrorist's back into Swiss cheese. The body falls forward down the stairs.

The sound of galloping footsteps comes up the stairs. Pre-empting the arrival of their rescuers Denis drops the machine gun and raises his hands in the air. The men behind copy him.

The SWAT officers emerge from the stairwell and instinctively aim their guns at the hostages.

SWAT OFFICER

Down on the floor.

The hostages comply. The gun is kicked away from Denis.

DENIS

There's four more terrorists in the front office.

(Pointing)

It's down that way. The hostages are all down that corridor. It's safe down there.

The SWAT officer listens keenly, establishing if these men pose a threat or not.

SWAT OFFICER

(To colleague)

Check out the corridor.

(To another colleague)

Keep an eye on them.

(To three other officers)

You three, with me.

He leads the three men in the direction of gunfire.

They arrive at a door and look inside the front office. The three remaining able terrorists exchange fire through the windows with the snipers on the buildings opposite and the officers on the street below. The fourth terrorist still lies bleeding on the floor.

The SWAT officers take aim and fire. They kill two terrorists instantly.

The leader is not hit. He turns and fires his AK47 at the doorway, forcing the SWAT men back behind the wall.

He makes a break for another door. It leads to a tradesman's stairway. He flees up the steps.

He rounds a corner and sees SWAT officers coming down the stairs towards him.

He retreats back down the steps in panic. The other SWAT men are charging up the stairs after him. He is trapped.

INT. FRONT FLOOR - DAY

SWAT officers have secured the front office. The injured man on the ground is the only terrorist left alive in this room.

From the tradesman's stairwell comes the sound of a GUNSHOT.

INT. BACK OFFICE - DAY

Denis and the other three have-a-go heroes are escorted into the back office by the SWAT men. They have their hands behind their heads as they are led by gunpoint.

Upon seeing them the other hostages vouch for them.

FEMALE HOSTAGE

These men are innocent, officer.
They're hostages, like us.

The SWAT officers look around the room. The sentry lies unconscious on the floor. Everybody is calm. It's calmer than a bus depot.

They take their guns off the three men. Denis and the others are hugged and greeted by the other hostages. The SWAT officers glance at each other with surprise.

SWAT OFFICER

How are they all so fucking calm?

EXT. STREET - DAY

Police, ambulance and fire trucks are all on scene. A TV reporter gives a report to camera outside the building.

TV REPORTER

This siege has concluded with no further loss of hostages. All but one of the eight terrorists have been killed in action. Initial reports suggest some of the hostages became active combatants...

Hostages are led out of the building under police escort. The TV reporter sees this and indicates to the cameraman to follow her.

She targets a middle-aged woman in the line filing out of the building.

TV REPORTER

Miss, would you care to tell us in your own words what happened in there?

The woman stops. She looks the camera confidently and the microphone is put under her chin.

WOMAN

A miracle. A miracle of God.

A uniformed policeman steps between the TV reporter and the woman.

POLICEMAN

There'll be time for questions later. These people have been through an ordeal.

The woman is ushered off and the TV reporter turns back to camera.

TV REPORTER

There you have it. In one woman's words, a miracle of God has happened.

EXT. BARRICADE - DAY

Curtis and Roy pile barricades on top of each other on the back of a police truck. Some onlookers still hang around but the street is open again to traffic and normal business is beginning to resume.

Curtis can't keep his eyes off the scenes outside the Passport Office building down the street.

The dead SWAT man is taken out of the building by stretcher to a waiting ambulance.

ROY

Don't look so pissed, Curtis. If you'd gotten into SWAT that could be you.

The tired-looking negotiator walks past Curtis and Roy en route to a police car. He unlocks it.

Curtis quits collecting barricades and approaches the negotiator as he sits into the car.

CURTIS

Hey, Dawson. What's the final math?

NEGOTIATOR

Haven't you heard? Seven terrorists dead, one captured.

CURTIS

No more hostages killed?

NEGOTIATOR

Not a scratch on any of them. They were in a back room, overpowered their guard.

CURTIS

On the third floor?

NEGOTIATOR

Yeah, that's right.

The negotiator closes the door and starts his car.

Curtis walks back to the police truck. He is about to hoist a barricade up onto the back of it when he sees the man in the trenchcoat. He is crossing the street at an intersection a block up. He walks with ease now, no sign of stress or injury about him.

Curtis drops the barricade and walks towards him.

CURTIS

(Shouting)

Hey!

The man looks at Curtis. He freezes for a second, then races to the corner. He disappears around it.

Curtis runs up to the intersection. He turns the corner and scans the street without stopping. No sign of the man.

He runs up the street, checking doorways and alleyways as he goes.

An old sedan car speeds across the next intersection. Curtis has time to see who's driving - the man in the trenchcoat.

Curtis runs to the corner and sees the car receding into the distance. It is too far away to make out the license plate.

Curtis looks up and around the top of the street. Eventually he spots what he's looking for - a CCTV camera.

INT. MONITORING ROOM, POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Curtis sits in a traffic monitoring room. Hundreds of monitors show live CCTV feeds from around the precinct. Some desks are manned by officers.

Curtis sits apart from them in a partitioned booth. He operates a playback machine. On the monitor of the machine footage plays - it shows the man in the trenchcoat hurriedly getting into his car and speeding off.

Curtis freezes the image. He zooms in on the registration plate and jots down the number in a notepad.

INT. POLICE STATION WORKFLOOR - NIGHT

Curtis sits at his desk, one of many in the grid pattern of the floor. Behind him officers file out and others come in as the shift changes.

Curtis types in the registration number of the car into a text box on his computer screen and presses 'enter'.

A picture of the man in the trenchcoat appears. The name JOHN AUSTIN is captioned beneath it.

Curtis clicks a 'Details' tab listed below the name.

Behind him Roy grabs an overcoat from a rack and puts it on.

ROY

You not had enough for today,
Miller?

CURTIS

I'm just checking something.

ROY

Pity they don't give out detective
badges for overtime.

Roy exits.

Curtis reads John Austin's personal details.

CURTIS

(To himself)

Clean as a whistle. Who are you,
John Austin?

EXT./INT. CURTIS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

The sounds of a cello reverberate throughout a tidy but small two-bedroomed apartment. The playing is fast, intense, a little disorderly but not incompetent - merely the playing of a professional letting off steam.

The front door opens. The cello stops as Curtis arrives in.

His wife Marie (35, attractive) comes out to the hall from her practice study. She looks anguished. She rushes to Curtis.

MARIE

Are you okay?

CURTIS

Yeah. I was just watching, like you.

She hugs him.

MARIE

I was worried. Jenny's been talking about it all this afternoon.

CURTIS

Where is she?

MARIE

She's doing homework at a friend's.

EXT./INT. KITCHEN, CURTIS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Curtis, Marie and their daughter JENNY (a pretty, sporty 15-year-old wearing a tracksuit) sit and eat dinner.

JENNY

Why would they do that?

MARIE

Some people are just sick.

CURTIS

They're not sick. They think they have a cause.

MARIE

They have a death wish. They're sick.

JENNY

(To Curtis)

You put your life at risk. Are you sick?

CURTIS

I have a cause too. Keeping you safe.

JENNY

I don't want anybody to die for me.

MARIE

That's not going to happen, Jenny. Your dad isn't going to die for you.

JENNY

May I be excused. I'm not very hungry.

MARIE

Okay. But take some fruit.

Jenny gets up, leaving her half-eaten meal, grabs an orange from a bowl and exits.

Curtis and Marie look at each other.

CURTIS

She'll be all right.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Curtis drinks a beer as he watches the nightly news. On the TV a slick, silver-haired news anchor called MIKE talks to three of the hostages. One of them is Denis. One of them is the woman who was briefly interviewed by the TV reporter.

MIKE

What was going through your mind in there, Denis?

DENIS

Nothing. I didn't think about it. I just saw the opportunity and took it.

MIKE

You've never done anything like this before I presume.

DENIS

I'm a data clerk. I've never even been to a firing range. I hope never to see a gun again in my life.

MIKE

Weren't you scared?

DENIS

That's the funny thing, Mike. Fear didn't come into the equation at all.

Curtis gets up and grabs his laptop from a sideboard.

He brings it back to the couch and sits down.

He brings up the Google search engine and types in 'john austin franklin county'.

CURTIS

Who are you, John Austin, and how do you know so much?

He hits the 'search' tab.

Several search results emerge onscreen. All are headlines of local newspapers.

'Teen miracle worker heals the sick.'

'Revival fever spreads through county.'

'Hoax faith healer preys on vulnerable.'

Curtis clicks the top link. It brings him into an online news article.

He reads. In the background Mike quizzes the middle-aged woman.

MIKE

Angela, how do you explain that feeling of serenity that the hostages all report experiencing?

ANGELA

What happened today was a
Pentecost, Mike.

MIKE

A Pentecost?

ANGELA

God sent the Holy Spirit down to us
in our hour of need. He sent it so
we could endure that terrible
ordeal.

MIKE

And why did God do that?

ANGELA

He wants us to be his apostles. He
wants us to spread his word. He
wants us to know that he is with us
in this war against this evil.

EXT. MARQUIS TENT - NIGHT

John Austin drives a battered sedan car into a field. A large marquis tent has been erected in the middle of the field. Dozens of cars are parked in rows up along the field.

He drives past the tent. By the entrance is a large poster with his sombre face. Beneath his face is a legend.

CLOSE-UP - POSTER LEGEND

"Faith healer John Austin."

BACK TO SCENE

AUSTIN

(To himself)

Fuck you anyway, Terry.

He drives round the back of the tent and parks beside a caravan. He gets out of the car and enters the caravan.

INT. MARQUIS TENT - NIGHT

TERRY (50, stocky, chummy, cowboy hat, string tie, black suit and waistcoat, white shirt) stands on stage. He uses a microphone to speak to a large audience. They are rustic types - families, elderly people, sick people, old

maids, farmers and truckers, waitresses, tough men in flannel shirts and baseball caps.

TERRY

Ladies and gentlemen, I can see there is hurt in this room. There is hurt and where there is hurt there is doubt. There is doubt that God is with you in these troubled times. But know this. God is beside you always. He walks with you. Nay, he walks in your very shoes. Haven't you forgotten that he is with you at all times?

Heads nod shamefully in the crowd.

TERRY

He has blisters on his feet from the marathons of your worries. He has aches in his knees from lifting your burdens. Don't you believe he is beside you?

The crowd indicates their agreement with more nodding heads. Random voices of consent emerge.

VOICE IN CROWD

Yes, yes.

ANOTHER VOICE IN CROWD

I believe.

TERRY

You have come to testify. You have come to cast away your doubt, to renew your faith in the good Lord Jesus Christ.

The voices in the crowd swell together, becoming a chorus.

VOICES IN CROWD

Yes, yes.

TERRY

Don't you want to be touched by God's grace tonight, people? Don't you want to be reminded he is with you in these hours of darkness?

CROWD
(Unanimous)
Yes, yes.

TERRY
Then get ready to welcome a man who
has been appointed by God himself
to be a channel of his peace. Give
it up for John Austin.

John walks out onstage. Rapturous applause follows.

He observes the excited crowd impassively for a few seconds before gesturing for them to be quiet with a lowering motion of his arms.

Terry hands John the microphone.

JOHN
Hush, hush, hush. Hush down there
now, people.

They simmer down.

EXT./INT. MARQUIS TENT - NIGHT

Curtis drives into the field and parks outside the tent. He walks up to the entrance. He stops for a moment to study the poster of John by the entrance.

He steps into the tent.

Onstage, John paces the boards speaking into the microphone.

JOHN
I am not special. I have only what
you have, but what you have
forgotten. The knowledge that God
is beside me at all times. You have
spurned God out of anger.

He casts his eyes around the crowd expertly. People glance away so as not to meet his gaze.

JOHN
Think of Lot's wife. Think of the
fallen angel himself. Think of the
company you keep when you spit in
God's face with your sin and
abomination. With your ego, your

greed, your lust. Think of the fire
awaiting the unrepentant.

The audience seems collectively chastened, wistful,
sombre.

JOHN

Now let me take all that from you.

John drops the microphone. It hits the stage with a clank
of feedback. He spreads his arms wide in a cruciform
shape, his palms upwards. He stares at the ceiling.

His arms start to tremble, his teeth chatter. His eyes
grow wide with a frightful, beseeching quality. His knees
shake. He takes in a deep breath.

Everybody is transfixed by the sight of him.

John drops to his knees, arms still outstretched like
he's taken on a heavy burden.

Initially people watch with a cautious, fearful
curiosity. After a few seconds their faces relax. Some
close their eyes and smile, gently nodding their heads,
rocking themselves back and forth. Others laugh, blissful
joy radiating from them. Others stare up at the ceiling
as if seeing something wonderful for the first time.
Others prostrate themselves on the ground, but eagerly
and gingerly, not piously. Others start to cry but in a
happy, joyous, cathartic way.

An ecstatic, serene peace appears to have descended. John
observes the phenomenon.

JOHN

God is with you always.

The sense of peace and togetherness grows. People are
buoyantly happy or quietly relaxed and content. Some
people hug the strangers beside them.

WOMAN IN CROWD

(Ecstatic)

I can feel Christ. I can feel him.

MAN IN CROWD

It's beautiful.

SECOND MAN IN CROWD

Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you.

Terry watches the effect John has on the crowd from the side of the stage.

Curtis also watches from the back of the crowd.

John lowers his arms and drops his head. He rises to his feet. He is deathly pale, covered in a layer of cold sweat and still trembling.

Terry walks back on stage and picks up the microphone.

TERRY

(Speaking softly)

Ladies and gentleman, this is truly a beautiful moment. The spirit of God is with us now surely. I want to call on any sick people here to come up and let the prophet lay his hands on them.

John glances sideways at Terry.

JOHN

(Quietly)

No.

Terry gives John a clandestine smirk.

TERRY

(Quietly)

Relax. They want it.

JOHN

(Quietly)

I didn't agree to this.

TERRY

(Quietly)

You want your money, don't you? They can go to the Hare Krishnas just to feel happy.

(To crowd)

Come up and feel the spirit of God touch you personally. Let him heal your mortal afflictions, let him rid you of the blight which sin has brought.

People scramble to the front of the stage.

A man in a baseball cap and flannel shirt, probably a TRUCKER, looks up at John like a teenage girl seeing Elvis for the first time.

TRUCKER

Prophet, if God sees fit to rid my
hands of arthritis.

The crowd in front of the stage grows, all seeking divine intercession.

WOMAN

Prophet, my asthma... if you could...

John crouches down at the edge of the stage and lays his hand on the trucker's forehead. He closes his eyes and waits a few seconds for dramatic effect. Everybody watches the miraculous faith healer and his subject. John opens his eyes.

He pushes against the trucker's forehead with his palm. The trucker falls back fainting. People behind grab him mid-fall and lower him gently to the floor.

John proceeds to the woman and follows the same routine. She falls back into the arms of the waiting crowd.

By now the trucker is slowly rising to the feet. He waves his hands before his face.

TRUCKER

My hands. They're healed.

Terry directs a STAGEHAND to approach the trucker and the woman with a bucket for donations. Terry is loving this.

TERRY

Don't crowd the prophet, people.
Make a donation and line up to feel
the power of God.

A woman pushes a crippled nine-year old boy in a wheelchair to the front of the stage. The boy looks up at John. John observes him sadly. The woman nudges the boy to speak.

BOY

Heal me, prophet.

John climbs down off the stage and crouches before the boy.

All eyes are on him. In the background Terry motions for the stagehand to push a set of steps to the side of the stage.

John places his hands on the boy's thighs. He closes his eyes.

JOHN

Lord, let your spirit enter this
boy. Help him deal with his pain.

He opens his eyes. There is awed expectation all around. John dabs a sign of the cross on the boy's forehead with his thumb.

BOY

Did God listen, prophet? Will I
walk?

John smiles with sad resignation.

JOHN

Trust in the lord, boy.

The boy smiles, reassured of his recovery. His mother is giddy with delight.

MOTHER

Thank you. Thank you so much,
prophet.

John climbs back up on stage. The stagehand hurries over to the mother with a bucket for her donation.

John makes for the side of the stage, his face rigid with suppressed anger. Terry intercepts him, grabbing him by the arm firmly, letting him know his work isn't done.

TERRY

(Into microphone)

The prophet is a busy man, people.
Pay your money and line up to have
the prophet work the Lord's mercy
on you.

The stagehand directs the first of a long line of people up the steps and onto the stage.

INT. CARAVAN - NIGHT

John waits impatiently as Terry thumbs through a wad of dollar bills. The caravan is a makeshift changing room complete with lighted mirror and table.

Terry stops thumbing. He plucks out a stash of bills and lays it down on the table.

TERRY

I don't know what you do with them, John, but I've never seen a reaction like you get.

JOHN

You've no doubt seen a few, Terry.

TERRY

You certainly get them riled up. If you agreed to more shows we could make some serious money.

JOHN

(Studying the bills)

That'll do me for a while, Terry. Oh, and one more thing?

TERRY

Yeah?

John punches him in the stomach. Terry buckles over.

John pockets the wad of cash. Terry straightens up, wheezing, clutching his stomach melodramatically.

TERRY

John, I seem to have acquired a pain in the stomach. Could you lay your hands on me?

He looks at John mockingly. John glares back at him as he packs some things into a satchel.

TERRY

Hehehe.

Terry walks to the door. He turns back at the jamb and looks at John.

TERRY

You'll call me when that runs out.

Terry exits.

John slumps down in a chair. He looks at himself in the mirror with disgust. He knows Terry is right.

CURTIS (O.S.)
Pretty impressive out there.

John turns to see Curtis standing in the doorway.

JOHN
I'm finished.

CURTIS
I was hoping you could help me.

JOHN
Go to your local physician, fella.
He'll do more for you than I will.

CURTIS
That's not the impression you gave
out there.

JOHN
I was forced into that. I never
said I worked miracles....

John stops mid-sentence. He examines Curtis more closely. Some sense of urban reserve seems to give Curtis away.

JOHN
You don't look like you're waiting
to be raptured. Who are you? Some
journalist? Some amateur debunker?
I'll tell you it's crap to your
face if you want.

Curtis steps into the caravan.

CURTIS
Curtis Miller. And it's not all
crap. You did something to those
people out there.

JOHN
So does Oprah and Jerry Springer.

CURTIS
You did something to the people in
the Passport Office too.

John squints at Curtis. Recognition dawns.

JOHN

You were the cop I talked to.

(Beat)

So what brings you out here? Am I arrested?

CURTIS

This isn't a business call. At least not yet.

(Beat)

You got it right. The hostages were in a back room on the third floor. There were eight terrorists. I'm curious how you knew.

JOHN

The news channels had similar estimates.

CURTIS

You seemed pretty sure.

JOHN

I was high, okay. Outta my mind, doped up.

CURTIS

The Patriot Act is very powerful. People have been arrested for knowing less.

JOHN

You don't think I'm a terrorist.

CURTIS

Granted, you'd be the strangest Mujahideen I've seen.

JOHN

Do you see many, officer? Do crowd control cops deal with high-end terrorism?

CURTIS

I bet that boy in the wheelchair can't sleep tonight, waiting for his legs to work tomorrow.

JOHN

(Angry)

I told Terry I'd do a revival. I didn't know the prick would tout me as a faith healer.

CURTIS

You don't heal the sick. You don't read people's minds. You don't contact the dead. What do you do?

John grabs his bag and stands up.

JOHN

I go home for late suppers and watch late-night TV.

He steps around Curtis to exit.

JOHN

Unless you want to call on the powers of the Patriot Act I'll be off.

EXT. CARAVAN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Curtis follows John out of the caravan.

CURTIS

Look, you risked exposing yourself yesterday. You wanted to help. Then you ran. Why the change of heart?

John stops and looks back at him.

JOHN

I figured you wouldn't understand, so why wait around and make things difficult for both of us.

CURTIS

I wouldn't understand what?

A beat.

John steps a little closer to Curtis.

JOHN

Tell me something, Curtis. Is there anything in this world that frightens you? One thing that scares you more than anything,

scares you to death? A fear, a phobia? Anything that inspires an irrational dread?

CURTIS

I didn't come here to talk about me.

JOHN

If you want to know the truth this has to be a two-way conversation.

CURTIS

Well...

John waits on Curtis's admission.

CURTIS

Heights. I'm absolutely terrified of heights.

John seems to consider this revelation.

JOHN

You know Sunshine Coffee on Aston Boulevard?

CURTIS

Yeah.

JOHN

Meet me there at 12 tomorrow.

John goes to his car and opens the door. He throws his bag on the passenger seat and sits in. Curtis comes to the window.

CURTIS

How do I know you'll show?

JOHN

If I don't, I'm sure you already know my address, officer.

John starts the car. Curtis watches as he drives off.

EXT./INT. SUNSHINE COFFEE - DAY

Curtis checks his watch as he finishes a coffee in the Sunshine Coffee Shop. Office types and tourists proliferate.

John arrives in. He has a rucksack on his back. He doesn't sit but indicates with a nod of his head for Curtis to follow him.

EXT./INT. OFFICE BLOCK - DAY

Curtis follows John to a tall office block. Both enter the lobby.

CURTIS
Why here?

JOHN
You'll see.

John leads Curtis to the elevator.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

The glass-fronted elevator gives a view of the streetscape. The people and cars below grow more insect-like and toy-like as it ascends.

John stares out nonchalantly. Curtis faces into the wall, his fists gripping the handrail.

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

Curtis lingers in the doorway of the exit hut in the centre of the roof.

A low flat-topped guard wall about two feet wide traces the perimeter of the roof.

John stands looking over the edge. He looks back at Curtis and beckons him.

JOHN
Come on over.

CURTIS
I'm fine right here, thanks. What did you bring me here for, John?

JOHN
Let me show you.

CURTIS
Show me here.

John walks over and picks up the rucksack he's left beside the exit hut.

JOHN

You're scared of heights. That must be awkward for a cop, a man of action.

CURTIS

Everyone's scared of heights, aren't they? Or falling to be exact. Or hitting the ground to be even more exact.

JOHN

How did your phobia affect you?

CURTIS

I don't have to live in a bungalow if that's what you mean.

JOHN

How did it affect your job?

CURTIS

How do you know it did?

JOHN

I didn't. But I think you've just told me.

CURTIS

Okay. If you're so interested...

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. BUILDING, SWAT TRAINING CAMPUS - DAY

Curtis is decked out in SWAT gear. He stands on top of a grey featureless building in the middle of nowhere. It is a siege training building in a SWAT training facility deep in the countryside. Distant mountain ranges perforate the belly of the skyline.

Curtis stands frozen looking over the edge of the building as dozens of similarly attired officers abseil down the face of it. Behind him an instructor shouts.

INSTRUCTOR

Get down that building, officer. What's the matter with you?

CURTIS (V.O.)

I couldn't go over the edge. It didn't matter there was a protective mat below. I couldn't even look down without getting nauseous. You don't get to be part of SWAT with a fear of heights. I thought I'd gotten over it years ago. I obviously hadn't.

END FLASHBACK

John opens the rucksack and takes out a rope and harness used for mountain climbing.

JOHN

I want you to put this on and come over to the edge of this building.

CURTIS

Not a chance.

JOHN

Then I want you to get onto the wall and walk in a straight line.

CURTIS

Hahaha.

JOHN

You'll have this rope tied to you.
(Indicates pipe fitting by hut door)
It'll be secured to this pipe.
There's no wind. Even if you slipped there's not enough slack for you to go over.

CURTIS

Either you're crazy or you think I am.

JOHN

You can't fall, Curtis. Your fear is irrational.

CURTIS

It doesn't matter.

JOHN

All I'm asking you to do is walk a few feet. You walk every day of your life.

CURTIS

No. No way.

John stashes the gear back in the rucksack.

JOHN

Well, we're done here.

He moves into the hut and down the stairs.

Curtis hesitates for a second, then follows.

CURTIS

Hey. Wait.

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY - LATER

Curtis sits on the wall at the corner of the building. He faces in towards the exit hut where John stands.

His hands grip the edge of the wall tightly and his feet are planted squarely on the roof. The mountain climbing rope is secured tightly around his waist. The other end of the rope is tied to a pipe fixture near the exit hut. The rope is taut, stretched out to its limit.

JOHN

Okay, Curtis, whenever you're ready climb up onto the ledge.

CURTIS

(Shaking head)

This is as far as I go.

JOHN

Just put your knees on it. You can keep your hands on the edges.

JOHN

Uh-uh.

Curtis doesn't budge.

JOHN

Do you want to wake up every morning wondering, just because you

wouldn't do something as simple as
kneel on a wall?

Curtis looks behind him. The city below is like a gun pointed at him. It seems to oscillate as he starts to get dizzy. He quickly turns away and grips the wall harder. His breathing becomes rapid.

JOHN

Don't look then. Just close your
eyes, feel the ledge with your
hands and climb up.

Curtis shuts his eyes. He tries to control his breathing. He keeps one hand on the inner edge of the wall and moves the other to the outer edge. He slowly manoeuvres his knees up onto the flat ledge top of the wall, all the time keeping his eyes closed.

John takes a deep breath. His hands start to shake, his knees tremble. Shivers run down his spine and his teeth chatter. When he speaks it is faint and with a quiver.

JOHN

Okay, Curtis. Open your eyes.

Curtis opens his eyes. He looks straight along the wall to where it ends at the next corner. Beyond it are the tops of buildings on the next block, beyond them the open sky.

He hesitates. Then he takes a deep breath and glances quickly down.

The people on the street below are like ants.

Curtis doesn't look away. He continues to stare down. He SMILES.

He stands up on the ledge and walks along it. His first couple of steps are tentative but he soon speeds up and arrives at the next corner.

He looks out across the rooftops of the city with joyful wonder. He stares down at the streetscape where people go about their business oblivious to him, the cars like matchbox toys.

He LAUGHS.

He continues on around the perimeter of the building, walking with a spring in his step, perfectly content to be up at this height.

He looks back at John but John has his back turned to him. He is hunkered down and holding himself.

Curtis pays no mind and carries on walking the perimeter.

He takes a few steps backwards out of bravado. He stops and takes in all the different views of the city available to him now.

He looks back at John. John stands with the end of the climbing rope in his hand, unhooked from the pipe.

This does not faze Curtis. He unhitches the rope from around his own waist. He drops it on the roof and continues his circuit of the roof.

He notices two cleaning ladies observing him from the top window of a building across the street. They have become engrossed in his bravura display and stare across at him with shock and trepidation.

When he's directly across from them he stops and turns out facing them.

He smiles at them and performs a grandiose bow, his upper body extending dangerously over the edge of the building.

The cleaning ladies RECOIL IN HORROR, their hands reaching for their mouths. But they CANNOT STOP WATCHING.

Curtis laughs. He turns around and steps down onto the roof. He walks over to John, who he notices is covered in a cold sweat. John exhales a lungful of air.

Suddenly Curtis puts his hand to his head as if overcome. He looks at his own feet, then back at the wall he's just walked. He seems suddenly shocked, as if he is only now fully aware of what he has actually done.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Curtis drives behind John's sedan, following him down a deserted country road.

John turns down a byroad, little more than a track. Curtis trails him.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Both cars stop in front of a small cabin with a backdrop of woodland.

INT. KITCHEN, CABIN - DAY

John brews up a stew at the stove. Curtis drinks coffee at the kitchen table.

CURTIS

What was that back there?

JOHN

What do you think it was?

CURTIS

I think what I would normally have felt, what I should have felt... my fear... you felt.

JOHN

(Glibly)

But that's crazy.

A beat as Curtis acknowledges this.

CURTIS

But it's true, isn't it?

John tastes the stew.

INT. KITCHEN, CABIN - DAY - LATER

John and Curtis eat their stew at the table.

CURTIS

So what? Am I cured now?

JOHN

I'm not a miracle worker. You try that again you'll feel like you did at SWAT camp.

CURTIS

It feels miraculous.

JOHN

When people lose their fear for the first time it can seem like a transcendent experience, an

epiphany even. They attribute their newfound peace of mind to whatever mystical tradition they've been schooled in. Many of them visualise the gods they've been conditioned to worship - Jesus, Allah, Buddha, Gaia.

CURTIS

That's why the hostages were able to act so quickly and decisively. They weren't paralysed by fear. It's why I was able to walk the ledge.

INT. LIVING ROOM, CABIN - DAY

John pours Curtis a whiskey from a well-stocked collection of blends he has in a cabinet. The living room is crammed wall to wall with book-lined shelves. The books are on all topics imaginable. There is no TV.

A crucifix hangs on a wall. Above the crucifix a novelty sticker is taped.

CLOSE-UP - SLOGAN ON NOVELTY STICKER

You don't have to be crazy to work here but it helps.

BACK TO SCENE

John pours himself a whiskey and sits down.

JOHN

The first person whose fear I took was Billy Johnson.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

A group of boys, aged eight to twelve, form a circle on a school lawn. In the centre two boys prepare to fight. JOEL PETERS, a big brute, looks eager; BILLY JOHNSON looks anything but. Billy is a slightly built, effeminate-looking boy. He looks absolutely terrified but there is nowhere to retreat to. The crowd forms a protective cordon, eager to appease Joel temporarily with this sacrificial offering.

Among the crowd is a tall, skinny, sombre and nervous-looking boy - John at aged nine.

JOHN (V.O.)

I was nine. Up to that point I'd been aware of sensations in my brain, like static from a detuned radio. But I thought that was normal. I had no idea how unusual I was. Then all of a sudden the radio dial was moved slightly and the signal became clear and loud.

Joel rolls up his shirt sleeves and advances on Billy. Billy quakes, his face drained pale.

Joel lunges at him. Billy dodges out of the way. Joel comes in again and grabs Billy in a bearhug. Billy weasels out of the grip and backs away.

The crowd is getting animated. Joel lunges at Billy again and again Billy ducks out of the way.

JOHN (V.O.)

Billy was a new kid - quiet, not a fighter. He was petrified. As I watched I felt a familiar sensation surge in me, only this time stronger than it had ever been before. It wasn't empathy or excitement. It wasn't my own fear. It was something powerful, uncontestable. Something knocking at my soul - begging, pleading to get in.

Eventually Joel manages to grab a hold of Billy. He wrestles him to the ground.

JOHN (V.O.)

That day I let that force in.

In the crowd John's face turns marble white. His hands start to shake by his side. His teeth chatter, his knees go weak.

JOHN (V.O.)

I got goose-pimples all over, broke out in a cold sweat. My heart raced. My palms grew clammy. My balls contracted. The temperature

seemed to drop instantly. I felt sick. I felt pressure on my bladder. And it happened.

A damp stain spreads across the front of John's trousers. Engrossed in the fight, the other boys don't notice.

John turns and pushes his way through the crowd.

He runs to a wall at the end of the lawn and drops to the ground. He vomits.

Behind him we see the back of the crowd, still absorbed in the fight.

JOHN (V.O.)

It lasted a few short brutal minutes.

In the background the crowd parts. The fight is over.

Joel walks off. His lip is bleeding and he looks a bit roughed up and stained with grass and earth but nothing major. A few sycophants trail after him congratulating him.

Billy stands in the centre. His lip is bleeding and his shirt is torn but he is okay. A few boys walk up to him and congratulate him.

JOHN (V.O.)

I could see Billy was okay. He hadn't won the fight but he'd put up a good show. It had been enough to make Joel back off. It was a stalemate, honours even.

A group of boys now notice John collapsed in a heap.

BOY

Hey, look at Austin. He's wet himself. Hahaha.

SECOND BOY

Austin, you freak.

Billy and his new mates walk by. Billy looks over and he and John catch each other's eye for a few seconds. Billy carries on walking with his friends.

John, a urine- and vomit-stained heap on the ground, continues to take the abuse of the crowd of boys. He is this moment's schoolyard entertainment.

JOHN (V.O.)

Billy didn't say anything but I knew by the look he gave he understood something had happened between us. He sensed what I knew. I'd felt his fear instead of him. Unburdened by fear he'd been able to think clearly and defend himself.

END FLASHBACK

Curtis, his whiskey forgotten, looks at John in amazement.

JOHN

Billy and I never spoke to each other in our lives.

CURTIS

You're like... a vampire or something.

JOHN

Only I'm the one who gets drained. If you're looking for metaphors...

John nods up to the crucifix.

CURTIS

You say it's not religious.

JOHN

There's no divine aspect to what I do, at least none that has been revealed to me. It's simply an undocumented natural phenomenon. Someday science will have an answer for it, just like it now has for vertigo.

CURTIS

But you're known as a faith healer?

JOHN

I earned that reputation as a teenager. It was my foster mother's

idea. When I had enough money to buy this place I cut ties with her. I never liked being a stage act.

CURTIS

Because you don't like fooling people?

JOHN

It's not just that. What age do you think I am, Curtis?

Curtis thinks.

CURTIS

I'd say mid 40s.

JOHN

That's very generous. I'm 32.

A beat as Curtis takes this in.

JOHN

The fear doesn't vanish. It just moves over to me. There's a price to pay, and I pay it. I feel that fear, that dread, that anxiety, that despair, that anger, that violence. It takes a toll. I've endured many lifetimes of psychological trauma. Other people's trauma. And it doesn't just affect me mentally. It affects me physically as well.

CURTIS

I'm sorry.

JOHN

Sorry for what?

CURTIS

Today, when you took my fear... I didn't realise it had an impact on you.

JOHN

Don't sweat it. One person's fear is no problem. An alcoholic doesn't get drunk on one beer.

CURTIS

But it still takes a toll on his liver.

(Beat)

I'm curious. Why break your habit to intervene at the passport office?

JOHN

A niece of my stepmother's worked there. I remember she was kind to me when we were young.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

John walks Curtis to his car.

CURTIS

I have another question. You can sense fear and choose to absorb it. If you can't see the person, how do you know whose fear you're taking?

JOHN

You're talking about the hostages.

CURTIS

The terrorists were scared too. How did you know you weren't helping them out?

JOHN

When I sense someone's fear in the air I can't identify them from it. It doesn't work like that. I can only guess as to the situation they're in. I've gotten quite good at it. The hostages' fear was simply more intense than the terrorists. They hadn't anticipated the event. They had no psychological controls for it. Those in most danger knock the loudest, even if they're unaware they're doing it.

Curtis sits into his car.

CURTIS

You're a remarkable person, John.

JOHN

Now you're satisfied I'm not a terrorist, what do you propose to do about me and my strange condition, Curtis?

CURTIS

I figure it's your concern, no-one else's. You've suffered enough. Your secret's safe.

JOHN

We'll see. Goodbye, Curtis.

John turns and walks back to the cabin.

Curtis watches him enter, his mind piqued by this mutant, this freak of nature. He starts the ignition and drives away.

EXT. DISCO BAR - NIGHT

Two pretty college girls in party dresses stumble out of a disco bar.

One of them waves back in ironically to someone in the bar.

She and the other girl walk up the path laughing. They are both tipsy.

FIRST GIRL

Are you going to call him?

SECOND GIRL

What do you think?

They both laugh some more.

The first girl sees a taxi coming up the street and hails it. It stops.

FIRST GIRL

Want me to wait, Shauna?

SHAUNA

No. Here comes one now.

Sure enough, another taxi is coming down the road. The first girl is whisked away in the first taxi. Shauna waits for the second to pull over and she gets in.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

In the back seat Shauna text messages on her mobile phone.

CLOSE-UP - PHONE SCREEN

"What u up 2? ☺"

BACK TO SCENE

She looks out the window as the driver passes by a turnoff.

SHAUNA

Hey, you missed my turn.

The driver pays no attention to her.

SHAUNA

Carrington Avenue I said.

The taxi driver hits the accelerator. The car speeds up and Shauna is whipped back against the back seat. Her vexation grows.

SHAUNA

Hey, stop.

She leans forward and taps him on the shoulder.

He slams on the brakes suddenly. She jolts forward between the two front seats and he grabs her head under his arm in a stranglehold.

He starts to squeeze and Shauna starts to choke.

She glimpses his taxi driver ID card - a picture of a bald, bland, flat-faced man with glasses and a moustache. The driver name on the ID is 'The Pied Piper'.

She starts to lose consciousness. The Pied Piper releases his hold and pushes her back.

She slumps in the back seat, drained, trying to regain her breath.

The taxi starts up again and veers through the empty late-night streets.

Shauna just about makes out the face from the ID card in the rearview mirror before she blacks out - a robotic, expressionless, determined face.

EXT./INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Curtis arrives at his desk to find the station abuzz with activity. He addresses Roy Walsh in the adjoining cubicle.

CURTIS

(To Roy)

What's going on?

ROY

The pied piper's struck again.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM, POLICE STATION - DAY

Captain JACOB CARSON, a beefy, middle-aged black man with a perpetual tone of forbearance, addresses a crowd of uniformed cops. On the board behind him are several pictures of Shauna - holiday snaps and graduation photos.

CARSON

Shauna Graziano was last seen getting into a taxi outside Benny's disco bar on Saturday night. There's no doubt it's the same guy as the last two times.

The captain holds up some polaroids. They show Shauna naked and tied to a bed. Jawlines tighten in the room.

CARSON

It's the same routine. The Pied Piper is taunting us.

ROY

Pied Piper. Dickless fuck more like.

CARSON

The detectives are flat out on this case. Keep your eyes peeled as you go about your business, gentlemen.

INT. CURTIS' DESK - DAY

Curtis sits looking across the floor but not taking anything in. He has a look of concentration on his face.

After a few seconds he picks up his phone and dials.

EXT./INT. CABIN - DAY

John sits in the lotus position in the centre of his living room. He has his eyes closed and his fingers pinched up in the guise of meditation.

The phone ringing interrupts his exercise.

He rises and goes out to the kitchen to answer it.

INT. KITCHEN, CABIN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

He picks up the phone.

JOHN
(Into phone)

Yes.

INTERCUT WITH CURTIS

CURTIS
(Into phone)
John, it's Curtis. We need your help.

JOHN
We?

EXT. CABIN - DAY

John paces the porch of the cabin. Curtis leans against the porch rail.

JOHN
You don't even know where to begin looking.

CURTIS
The girls were all kidnapped in the north city area. It's also where the bodies of the last two were dumped. We think that's where he's from. That's how he was able to watch them. It's probably where Shauna Graziano is being held.

JOHN
It's a big area.

CURTIS

But you can sense a distress call.
It's like a beacon to you, right?

JOHN

If I'm close enough. If it's strong
enough.

CURTIS

I think she'll be sending out a
strong signal.

JOHN

If she's still alive.

CURTIS

He keeps them for days, taunts us
with letters and polaroids. He gets
off on it.

JOHN

Did you read the paper this
morning? Every page was full of bad
news. Misfortunes befall people all
the time. There's always someone
who needs help, Curtis. I can't
bleed myself dry for everyone.

CURTIS

This is different.

JOHN

It's different because you might
get a promotion from it, right?

CURTIS

That's nothing to do with it.

JOHN

Don't think I'm selfish, Curtis. I
used to visit a nursing home when I
was younger. I'd sit with the old
folks and take their fear of death
away. The ones I liked I'd wait
outside all night when they were
dying and help them pass on
peacefully. Back then I didn't
realise what a toll it was taking
on my body. I know now. I can't go
back to doing that.

CURTIS
You could really help this girl.

JOHN
I don't owe anybody anything. I've
a right to live my life.

CURTIS
You call this a life? Hiding away?

JOHN
It's better than being leeches off
by people who don't even know what
you're doing for them.

A beat.

CURTIS
You only have to find her. Once you
do we can end it quickly.
(Beat)
We're not asking for free, John.
We'll pay.
(Beat)
You won't have to promise crippled
boys they'll walk again.

John stops pacing. Evidently Curtis has struck a nerve.
Eventually...

JOHN
So, what do you want me to do?

EXT./INT. CURTIS' CAR - NIGHT

A plain-clothed Curtis drives John through city streets.
John has a map of the city open in his lap and a biro in
his hand. Segments of the map have been shaded in with the
biro.

JOHN
We could be driving for weeks and
find nothing.

CURTIS
You'll get your money either way.

JOHN

Out of your pay cheque. This is off-duty for you, Curtis. You embarrassed of me?

CURTIS

I figured the captain wouldn't understand so why make things difficult.

John smirks, recognizing his own words. He looks ahead.

JOHN

Pull over here.

CURTIS

(Excited)

You found something?

JOHN

Yeah. A service station. I'm hungry.

Curtis sees the service station ahead. He drives into the lot and parks.

CURTIS

Okay, I'm paying. What do you want?

John puts his fingers to his temples and rubs them. He closes his eyes for melodramatic effect like a fairground psychic.

JOHN

Wait.

(Rubbing temples)

I've got something.

Curtis views him sceptically.

JOHN

I'm sensing a lot of anxiety in the air.

John looks in through the service station window at the cute female cashier.

JOHN

It's the cashier. She's worrying about how she'll flirt with you when you go in.

CURTIS

This isn't a time for jokes.

JOHN

Lighten up, Curtis. I'm the martyr
but you're the one with the
complex.

EXT. SERVICE STATION PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Curtis talks on his mobile phone. In the background John leans against the bonnet of Curtis' car finishing a sandwich.

CURTIS

(Into phone)

Yeah, don't wait up, honey.

(Pause)

Love you too.

Curtis hangs up. He takes his coffee cup from the top of the car and takes a sip.

JOHN

We probably won't find her, you
know.

CURTIS

We have to try. You've got that gift
for a reason.

JOHN

A gift? Hahaha. A gift he says.

Curtis drops his coffee cup into a bin and sits into the car. He starts the engine. John drops his wrapper into the bin and sits in.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shauna lies tied naked to a bed in a grotty, dark bedroom. Her mouth is muzzled with a ballgag. Her cheeks are tear-stained.

A cat roams around the room. The sounds of traffic can be heard through the window.

The door opens. The pied piper comes in. He wears a white vest and pants.

He takes off his glasses and wipes them with the hem of his vest. He puts them back on and looks at Shauna.

Their eyes meet.

He walks over to a dresser, pulls out a drawer and takes out a pair of pliers.

Shauna's eyes glow with alarm.

The pied piper smirks as he notices her distress. He places the pliers on top of the dresser and approaches the bed, pulling his vest over his head.

PIED PIPER

But first...

EXT./INT. CURTIS' CAR - NIGHT

Curtis and John continue their methodical patrol of the city. The streets at this time are mostly empty.

They are cruising down a neglected neighbourhood where derelict buildings punctuate those that are merely run down.

CURTIS

You still getting nothing?

JOHN

On the contrary, I'm getting little signals all the time. I could have you stopping on every street if you had the time.

John points out a house as they pass it.

JOHN

There's something going on in that house right there that you don't want to know about.

CURTIS

Don't I?

JOHN

You've no proof and no warrant. Social services would probably have the kid back in a day or two anyway.

CURTIS

You don't have to tell me all this stuff.

JOHN

Not such a great gift after all, is it?

CURTIS

I can see why you keep to yourself.

JOHN

Even if I locate this girl you don't have a warrant? What are you going to do? Burst in like Dirty Harry?

CURTIS

If I have to. A young girl needs me.

JOHN

This case has really upset you.

CURTIS

I have a daughter. She's 15.

JOHN

Ah. The apple of your eye.

CURTIS

Jenny's a good kid. She's going to be a doctor someday. If she doesn't make it as a gymnast first.

JOHN

A gymnast?

CURTIS

Yeah. She won the district competition this year. She's in the regionals soon.

Curtis comes to life talking about his daughter, pride evident in every word.

JOHN

She sounds like a hard worker.

CURTIS

She is.

JOHN

Like daddy.

CURTIS

She gets that from her mother probably. She's her own little pers....

John lurches forward and grabs his stomach. He looks like he's been kicked in it.

He starts to shake and struggles to catch his breath.

Curtis quickly parks up on the kerb as John dry gags. Finally he vomits on the floor.

CURTIS

Can you tell where it's coming from?

John looks through the windscreen and points out a dilapidated apartment building a little up the street.

Several windows in the building are broken, some sealed up with corrugated iron sheets or wooden boards.

JOHN

That building. The top floor. The apartment on the right corner.

CURTIS

You sure?

JOHN

It's strong, Curtis. I've never felt it this strong from one person before. Jesus, hurry.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The pied piper lies on top of Shauna. He slides back and forth into her, raping her. All the time tears stream down between her closed eyelids. She sobs softly. The ballgag has been removed and lies on a bedside locker.

Suddenly her eyes open.

She looks up at the ceiling over the pied piper's shoulder.

Her tears cease. She opens her mouth as if in awe. Her mouth curls into a smile. Her face now looks transformed - calm, serene, blissful.

POV - SHAUNA

Hovering above the bed is a glimmering, spectral vision of the Virgin Mary.

The Virgin smiles down comfortingly at Shauna, like a doting mother to a child in a cot.

BACK TO SCENE

The pied piper grunts his climax into Shauna.

He climbs off and pulls on his trousers. The cat continues to roam around the room.

Shauna lies smiling serenely up at the ceiling.

The pied piper looks at her curiously. He follows her gaze to the ceiling. Nothing there.

He slaps her across the face.

INT. CURTIS' CAR - NIGHT

John spasms as if he's received an electric shock.

He is alone in the car. He is covered in a dry sweat and holds himself as if trying to get warm. He takes in a deep breath.

JOHN

Let it go, Shauna. Let it all go.
Give it to me.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shauna continues to gaze up at the ceiling with a beatific smile on her face. In the background the pied piper pulls on his vest.

Shauna starts to hum - "Amazing Grace".

The pied piper looks at her with contempt.

PIED PIPER

What is that?

She ignores him and continues to hum.

PIED PIPER

You shut up. You shut up now.

He marches over and slaps her across the face. She flinches momentarily but immediately regains her look of serene composure. She looks up into his eyes gently with an expression that seems almost sympathetic.

Her behaviour creep him out. He walks to the door. At the jamb he looks back again at her oddly blissful face.

She looks at him as if examining him. He is unnerved more than a little.

PIED PIPER

Liked it, didn't you, you whore.

SHAUNA

I pray God forgives you.

He lingers at the jamb, thinking.

Suddenly he walks to the dresser and picks up the pliers.

A loud knock echoes up to the room from the front door of the apartment.

He drops the pliers and goes out into the hall.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

He steps into his kitchen and retrieves a handgun from the table.

INT. HALL - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

He goes back out into the hall and walks to the top of a short stairs that leads down to the front door.

PIED PIPER

(Calling down)

Who is it?

INT. CORRIDOR, APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Curtis stands outside the door of the apartment. He is in a dank corridor with broken light fittings, molting carpet and peeling paint.

CURTIS
(Shouting through door)
Hi. I hate to bother you at this
hour. I need some help.

INTERCUT WITH PIED PIPER

PIED PIPER
You won't get none here.

CURTIS
I'm meant to meet someone in this
apartment block.

PIED PIPER
There ain't no-one worth meeting in
this block.

CURTIS
It won't take a minute.

PIED PIPER
I'm busy.

CURTIS
Can you open up, sir? I just need
to talk to you.

PIED PIPER
I said fuck off.

SHAUNA (O.S.)
(Screaming)
Help. Help. Help me. He's kidnapped
me.

The taxi driver runs back to the bedroom. He covers Shauna's mouth with his hand and reaches for the ballgag on the bedside stand which he's forgotten to strap back on her.

INT. CORRIDOR, APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Curtis takes his gun from inside his jacket and steps back. He gives the door a hefty kick and it swings open.

He dashes up the steps with his gun extended in front of him.

The pied piper runs back to the top of the stairs. Curtis sees him appear through the balustrades above. He also

sees the gun in the pied piper's hand. He doesn't hesitate. He aims and fires twice. The two shots instantly blot the pied piper's vest with blood and send him slamming against the wall. He slumps to the floor, dead.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Ambulance, police and forensics professionals go about their business around the now taped off building. A few local onlookers watch them.

Away from the building Curtis and John lean against Curtis's car. They are silent, taking in the scene. John seems thoughtful.

JOHN

My father beat my mother to death.

Curtis is caught off guard by this unexpected revelation. It's apparent they'd both been silent for a while.

CURTIS

Christ, I'm sorry.

JOHN

I saw him do it. I must have been about six. He always beat her but that night he went too far. I saw her lying on the floor. She saw me looking at her through the doorway. I remember her eyes so clearly, that look in them. It was like she expected me to do something.

CURTIS

You were a baby. You couldn't do anything.

JOHN

I did something all right. I ran. I ran as fast as I could away from there. I was put in a foster home afterwards. That's when I started to sense things around me. Other people's fear. That's when my stepmother made me the miracle boy.

CURTIS

She knew?

JOHN

Her real son died of cancer. I helped her with her grief. What is grief but fear? Fear we'll never see them again. Our whole life is the circumference of our fear, Curtis. You can measure your life by the things you dared to do - the fights you fought, the things you stood for, the girls you plucked up the courage to approach. And all the things you dared not do.

(Beat)

My stepmother called it my "trick". Even as she exploited me I felt she held me in contempt. Her real son had died and I was the consolation prize.

CURTIS

You've done a wonderful thing tonight, John. Thanks.

JOHN

Thank you, Curtis. It felt good to save that girl.

CURTIS

I want you to come round to dinner on Sunday.

JOHN

I will.

(Beat)

How are you going to explain finding her?

CURTIS

I hadn't thought about that.

JOHN

I think we work well together, Curtis.

CURTIS

What are you saying?

CARSON (O.S.)

How'd you find her, Miller?

Carson has arrived. John keeps looking at Curtis as Curtis hesitates finding an answer for Carson.

JOHN

What I'm saying, Curtis, is it's
time I came out of the shadows.

INT. CARSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Carson hosts John and Curtis in his office. He looks vaguely contemptuous of their presence.

CARSON

You expect me to believe this
bullshit?

Curtis looks at John, who then looks at Carson.

JOHN

Is there anything that frightens
you, captain?

EXT. POLICE STATION CAR PARK - DAY

Curtis leans against the trunk of his car, his arms folded as if waiting. John is in the passenger seat of the car.

CURTIS

(Calling back)
You all right, John?

JOHN

(Calling out)
Piece of cake. Like having a mild
cold.

Curtis checks his wristwatch.

CURTIS

That's half an hour.

He stands up, turns and opens the boot.

Inside is Carson. He is curled up like a foetus. He looks up at Curtis before climbing out of the trunk. He seems completely at ease.

CURTIS

No claustrophobia this time,
captain.

Suddenly Carson seems overcome by surprise.

CARSON

That's... that's remarkable. How long was I in there for?

John gets out of the car and joins them.

CURTIS

Half an hour. You normally can't stand confined spaces, right?

CARSON

It still doesn't prove anything.

John and Curtis share a glance. With a mischievous smile on his lips, John addresses Carson.

JOHN

How are you with heights, captain?

EXT. HIGH STREET - DAY

John walks out of a department store laden down with shopping. His trenchcoat is conspicuously absent. In its place is a new suede leather jacket. The rest of his gear is new too.

He strolls down the high street.

A short, sour-faced, denim-clad bloke with a MULLET hairstyle strides down the street. He walks in a straight line, swaying his shoulders exaggeratedly so the incoming pedestrians veer around him. He is heading John's way. John doesn't notice as he glances into his shopping bag to check his purchases.

John knocks into the bloke, who spins around instantly.

MULLET

Hey, watch it, old timer.

John looks back, surprised at the reaction.

MULLET

Yeah, you heard me, you fucking freaky looking bitch.

John stares at him.

MULLET

Whatcha staring at? Gonna do something about it?

The bloke glares at John. He spreads his arms, palms out as if beckoning John to advance.

MULLET

You just going to stand there, faggot?

John just looks at him.

MULLET

That's what I thought.

The bloke smirks and turns. He carries on down the path, his shoulders swaying exaggeratedly, clearing a path through the other high street pedestrians.

John stands and watches him fade into the crowd, contempt brimming in his eyes.

INT. HALLWAY, CURTIS' APARTMENT - DAY

Curtis talks into his phone.

CURTIS

(Into phone)

Thanks, captain. I appreciate it.

He hangs up and goes into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN, CURTIS' APARTMENT - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Marie is preparing dinner.

MARIE

So who am I cooking for on Sunday?
Another cop?

CURTIS

No.

MARIE

You don't have any other friends
but cops.

CURTIS

John Austin. He's a very special
man.

Curtis hugs Marie from behind.

MARIE

You're a very special man. That girl is alive because of you. I'm proud of you. So's Jenny.

CURTIS

Carson says my transfer to detective looks assured.

MARIE

More dangerous assignments.

CURTIS

More money. We'll be able to get out of this neighbourhood.

MARIE

Money isn't everything.

CURTIS

It may not be everything, but it's the next best thing.

EXT./INT. ROCK BAR - NIGHT

The MULLET stands drinking at a bar. An attractive young woman in goth make up sits on a stool beside him. He mouths off drunkenly into her ear. She takes it with casual forbearance, seeming to be humouring him.

The bar is busy, full of leather, denim, tattoos, patchouli oil and hair.

John sips a pint of beer and watches the bloke from across the room. He stands by a pillar for easy concealment when necessary but the boisterous crowd provides most of the camouflage.

Two heavily-built skinheads enter the bar. They take up positions beside the mullet and order drinks. The mullet is turned in facing the goth girl so doesn't notice them, or much else.

The skinheads face each other to chat. The barman places drinks before them.

The mullet and one of the skinheads are back to back, a narrow gap between them. The skinhead takes a swig of his

drink and leaves his pint down on the counter as he converses with his mate.

John winds his way through the crowd towards the bar. He is careful not to be seen by the mullet or the skinhead.

He walks quickly by them. As he passes he deftly reaches his arm in through the gap between them and topples the skinhead's pint over onto its side. The beer spills out and sloshes over the arm of the mullet's denim jacket. The mullet looks down at his sodden arm as John fades back into the crowd.

The skinhead hasn't noticed his pint has been upended.

The mullet glares up at the skinhead from behind. The skinhead is easily a foot taller than him and armoured with muscle.

As John walks through the crowd he inhales deeply.

JOHN
(To himself)
Give it to me. Give it all to me,
you fuckhead.

John's hand starts to tremble by his side.

The mullet taps the skinhead aggressively on the shoulder.

The skinhead turns around, not amused by the impolite interruption. He looks down at this bloke who is staring up at him with ridiculous determination.

MULLET
Hey, shithead. You spilled your
drink on me.

The skinhead now notices his drink has been tipped over.

SKINHEAD
No, I didn't.

John watches from behind a pillar. He takes a deep breath.

JOHN
Give it all to me, you little
fucker.

POV - JOHN

The mullet is visibly getting more agitated, jackhammering his index finger into the skinhead's massive chest. Voices are raised between them.

Suddenly the skinhead headbutts the mullet in the face. He collapses to the floor, his nose spouting blood. People scatter away from the scene as the skinhead delivers several brutal kicks with his steel toecap boots into his floored opponent's stomach.

BACK TO JOHN

John smiles at the treatment being dished out - vicarious revenge for the earlier altercation.

EXT./INT. CARSON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A frumpy, middle-aged black woman enters a living room with a tray of biscuits and three cups of coffee.

Carson and two men in suits acknowledge her entry with appreciative nods and thanks.

The men are CIA agent MARK THOMPSON (a dapper executive-type in a black suit, about 35) and MAJOR FRANK MCKENZIE (a gruff, surly man in his 40s, bearish in attitude and physique, also dressed in a suit). She sets the tray down on the coffee table and leaves. Neither Thompson or McKenzie touch the coffee or biscuits. Carson seems a little put out by their presence.

THOMPSON

I know this is a little unorthodox, captain.

McKenzie opens a folder and takes out a document.

MCKENZIE

You sent a report to your superintendent. A report about a man called John Austin. A psychic supposedly.

CARSON

Yes.

THOMPSON

He's a telepath of some sort?

CARSON

Well...

MCKENZIE

(Aside, to Thompson)

I thought police departments had stopped calling in psychics years ago.

CARSON

I didn't call him in. That was one of my men.

THOMPSON

Curtis Miller?

CARSON

Yes.

THOMPSON

And the two of them came to you with this story.

MCKENZIE

And you believe them?

CARSON

It's hard to say.

THOMPSON

You never entertained the probability he's a confidence trickster?

MCKENZIE

A quack. A crackpot. A nut.

CARSON

He... he does something. I don't know what it is. Some kind of mind control, psychological manipulation. But he's convinced Miller he found that girl through some kind of telepathy.

THOMPSON

It's not just Miller he's convinced. You sent the report.

Carson is flustered by the questions, the suspicion he's being subjected to. He's normally on the delivering end of grillings.

CARSON

What does the military want with this?

The two men look at each other.

MCKENZIE

We want you to tell us everything you know about John Austin, captain. From the start.

EXT. CARSON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The two men exit Carson's house. They sit into a BMW parked out front.

THOMPSON

It's probably another hoax.

MCKENZIE

Remember Paul Dabrowski?

THOMPSON

That was inconclusive. He died of a heart attack before anything could be determined. And that was decades ago.

MCKENZIE

Maybe the wait is finally over.

INT. CURTIS' APARTMENT - DAY

Curtis, Marie, Jenny and John sit eating a Sunday roast. John looks a little uncomfortable.

JOHN

It's a lovely home you have here.

JENNY

Dad tells me I should learn karate living round here, not gymnastics.

CURTIS

We're hoping to move to the suburbs.

There is an awkward pause as they eat.

JOHN

(To Jenny)

Your dad said you were a gymnast.

CURTIS

She's the best. She's in the regional final this Saturday. If she's not a doctor she'll be an Olympian.

JOHN

A doctor. You must work hard in school.

JENNY

Dad says I have to support him in old age.

CURTIS

(Smiling)

Darned right.

JENNY

(To John)

Dad tells me you helped save a girl's life.

MARIE

Jenny, I'm sure John doesn't want to talk about work.

Jenny seems annoyed at the correction.

JOHN

Your dad did all the hard work.

CURTIS

That's not true. Your dad did very little. This man did everything. We're all very grateful.

They all look appreciatively at John. His discomfort balloons.

JOHN

I don't know what to say in these situations.

MARIE

You don't have to say anything,
John. Just enjoy the food.

JOHN
It's a lovely meal.

JENNY
So what did you do to save that
girl?

MARIE
Jenny, please.

JOHN
(To Marie)
It's okay.
(To Jenny)
I just helped find her, that's all.

JENNY
You pieced together the clues?

JOHN
I guess that's how you could
describe it.

JENNY
So you're a detective? Like Dad's
going to be?

JOHN
I suppose so.

JENNY
She was being raped, wasn't she?

CURTIS
Jenny, please. It's not an
appropriate subject for dinner.

JENNY
Well, I think it's great that you
helped her, Mr Austin.

JOHN
Call me John.

JENNY
I think it's really great, John. I
don't suppose you'd be around on
Saturday for the final?

MARIE

Jenny, I'm sure John can't make it to a school final.

JENNY

It's the regional. It's important.

JOHN

I'd love to.

CURTIS

You don't have to be nice, John.

JOHN

No, I'd love to. I've nothing on Saturday. Thanks for the invitation, Jenny.

JENNY

You're welcome, John.

INT. LIVING ROOM, CURTIS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Curtis pours John, seated, a glass of whiskey. John looks admiringly at the bottle.

JOHN

21-year old Glenfiddich.

CURTIS

I thought you might like it. You seemed to have a pretty good collection out there.

Curtis sits and the two of them taste their drinks.

JOHN

How long is your wife on beta blockers?

The question piques Curtis's curiosity.

CURTIS

How did you know?

JOHN

People constantly emit a low-level nervous energy. It's a default signal. But there's a few people I get nothing off. I discovered that

when I worked in the nursing home. Certain medications, beta blockers for one, block the signal.

CURTIS

Why do you suppose it's beta blockers she's on?

JOHN

She's a cellist, isn't she? A lot of professional musicians use beta blockers to deal with performance anxiety.

CURTIS

Jenny's right. You are a detective. I'm not sure Marie would like people to know.

JOHN

There's no doping regimen for art, Curtis.

CURTIS

Why do some drugs block the signal?

JOHN

Beta blockers block the action of adrenalin. There's a correlation between the chemical and the fear signal that I receive. I don't know how it works exactly, but when the drugs get into the blood they seem to turn it into a firewall.

CURTIS

We could do some trials on you.

JOHN

Like a guinea pig.

CURTIS

It might provide some answers.

JOHN

Once you stop short of dissecting my brain while I'm still alive.

CURTIS

You know that working for the police will be tough. There'll be questions asked.

JOHN

I think it'll be worth it. My problem always was I could borrow people's fear but I could never stop it at source. I was dealing with the symptoms, not the cause. You're what I always needed, Curtis. Somebody with the power to act.

EXT. MILITARY BASE, DESERT - DAY

A drone aircraft flies over an army training facility in the desert. From a viewing platform on the ground McKenzie and General ANDREW MEYER, a detached, patrician army functionary, observe it through binoculars. Both are in full military dress.

The drone approaches a desert hillside on which a simple target has been installed. A rocket streams out from the drone's underside and streaks towards the target. The hillside erupts in an explosion of dirt and fire.

MCKENZIE

Beautiful, isn't it? The drone will always comply 100 per cent with its programming. It doesn't hesitate, it doesn't get scared off. The drone has no capacity for human error because its mind is never dictated to by fear. No matter how well we train our soldiers we'll never eliminate fear and error. But we might have found something better than training.

MEYER

That sounds like a lot of talk, Major.

MCKENZIE

It need not be just talk.

MEYER

What do you propose?

MCKENZIE

We find out how he ticks, what he's capable of. We use him to try and identify others with the ability. We try and replicate it.

MEYER

Replicate it?

MCKENZIE

Induce it. Create it from scratch.

MEYER

It might not even be true.

MCKENZIE

We can find out pretty quick.

MEYER

Even if it is true, he might not co-operate.

MCKENZIE

Making people co-operate is my speciality.

A beat as Meyer thinks.

Another drone aircraft flies overhead. He puts his binoculars to his eyes to observe it.

MEYER

Okay.

MCKENZIE

You mean...?

MEYER

Major, you'll understand if I don't put this in writing, but Operation Clawhammer is hereby authorized.

EXT./INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

Raised seating around a school gymnasium houses spectators, mostly parents and families, who watch the regional gymnastics finals which are in full flow.

A balance beam is set up in the centre of the floor. It is surrounded by foam padding.

On the beam a teenage gymnast fluctuates between poised stillness and flamboyant somersaults down the length of the beam.

John enters the gymnasium. He takes a vacant seat near the entrance and scans the crowd. He spots Curtis and Marie. Their eyes are focused on Jenny who waits her turn on a bench alongside other contestants. They don't notice John.

John sits back and relaxes. He starts to enjoy the competition.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY - LATER

It is Jenny's turn.

She strides across the floor to the beam. All eyes are on her.

She arrives at the beam. She takes a deep breath, raises her arms gracefully and then lifts herself up onto the beam.

She stands on the end and looks down along the beam. The crowd is so quiet individual sounds of footsteps and distant doors closing sound like explosions in her ear.

She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. She looks down the beam.

The beam looks incredibly narrow, like it has shrunk.

Her heart beats faster. She doesn't move. She simply stands there with her arms raised above her head, one leg forward on the beam. She seems stuck.

In the crowd Curtis and Marie look worried.

John notices Jenny's discomfort and her parent's anxiety. A few impatient coughs and noises reverberate throughout the crowd.

Jenny's arms and legs tremble. She breathes faster. Her eyes seem to stare into the middle distance beyond the end of the beam. She is frozen. She closes her eyes.

John closes his eyes and inhales deeply. His hands start to shake.

On the beam Jenny's arms stop trembling. She opens her eyes and looks down the beam with confidence. The beam seems wider now, manageable. Her breathing slows. She narrows her eyes with determination. She raises her chin and confidently launches into her routine.

She completes a length of the beam with perfectly executed somersaults. It is the start of a glorious routine. She navigates the beam expertly, going back and forth along it in a series of deft somersaults, spins and stretches. The crowd watches and with every length of the beam she completes they appreciate that a routine like this was worth waiting. Jenny is on fire.

Only John is at odds with the rest of the crowd. He scarcely watches the performance as he sits forward with his hands to his stomach as if trying to relieve cramp. He breathes quickly, shakes all over. Nobody notices him - they are all engrossed in Jenny's performance.

She is nearly finished her routine - just one more length of the beam to go.

She sneaks a glance at her parents in the crowd. They beam with pride and delight.

She smiles and launches into her last length of the beam confidently. She completes a somersault, doing an impressive double revolution in the air, and then...

Whack!

Her foot misses the beam on the landing. She slides off the beam, her body banging against the side of it before she lands on her knees on the mat.

Surprised and sympathetic 'oohs' reverberate through the crowd.

Jenny can't believe it. Her face grows scarlet.

Curtis and Marie hold each other in the crowd.

The crowd starts to sympathetically applaud the effort but it is all Jenny can do to hold back the tears. It is a gargantuan effort for her now just to stand up.

She manages a stiff bow to acknowledge the crowd but her teeth are clenched together like she's biting through wire. She turns and walks off, stumbling slightly as she steps off the padding, her knees like jelly.

John looks on with disbelief.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Jenny, back in civvies, storms ahead of her parents to the car. She slings her bag in and gets in the back. She says nothing and doesn't look like she will for a while.

Curtis notices John having a smoke outside the school. While Marie gets into the car with Jenny he walks through the crowd to John.

John smokes intensely, his mind going over what went wrong.

CURTIS

Hey John, you turned up.

JOHN

I said I would.

CURTIS

Pity it didn't turn out better for her.

JOHN

She must be disappointed.

CURTIS

Heartbroken more like. It's a learning experience.

JOHN

Yeah.

(Pause)

Listen, Curtis. Can I talk to you?

CURTIS

Sure.

JOHN

In private.

Curtis is puzzled but follows John around the corner. Sufficiently distanced from the crowd, John stops.

JOHN

I'm sorry.

CURTIS

About what?

JOHN

When Jenny got up on that beam I used my... you know...

Curtis's face drops.

CURTIS

You did what?

JOHN

I thought it would help her. Clear her mind, help her perform. It should have.

CURTIS

I can't believe you went into her...

JOHN

I didn't go into her. I just unburdened her. You saw how nervous she was.

CURTIS

It's cheating.

JOHN

I just removed a psychological block. It's what trainers do, what sports psychologists work on.

CURTIS

Then why didn't it work?

JOHN

I don't know. Without feeling afraid she should have been able to perform to her optimum. That's the theory, anyway. But y'know, maybe people need their fear. Maybe they need it to know their limitations, or to give themselves that push to overcome them. I realise now I don't always have a right to take that from them.

CURTIS

I don't want you going near my daughter again.

JOHN

Curtis, I didn't... I thought it would help her. I saw how badly she wanted it.

CURTIS

She wanted it herself. Not using you like some drug.

JOHN

It's not like that. I thought it would help her focus, that's all.

CURTIS

It's not appropriate for you to do that to my daughter.

John looks offended.

JOHN

But it's appropriate to use it when you can get a promotion out of it, right?

CURTIS

I don't want you messing with her mind, her emotions.

JOHN

Fear isn't an emotion. It's more an energy. Someday it won't be any more mysterious than X-rays, radio waves, ultraviolet light.

CURTIS

I don't care about that. It's not right what you've done to her.

JOHN

Jesus, Curtis, you're sounding like I touched her or something.

CURTIS

In a way you did.

JOHN

That's despicable of you to say that.

Curtis grits his teeth.

JOHN

Anyway, the reason she was so bloody scared was because of you.

CURTIS

Me?

JOHN

Yeah, you. She tries so bloody hard to please you. Becoming a doctor, winning a medal, it's all to make you happy. That's why she pushes herself so hard - to make her loser cop dad feel like a winner. I could see how bad she wanted to please you. What she's really afraid of is disappointing you.

CURTIS

Stay the hell away from my family.

Curtis turns and storms off.

JOHN

Truth hurts, doesn't it, Curtis?

Curtis disappears around the corner.

INT. CARSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Curtis sits before Carson, who has a heightened air of gravitas about him.

CARSON

Don't think I'm trying to muscle in, Curtis. Your transfer is assured.

CURTIS

No, I'm in agreement. It's best John's relationship with the force is formalised. We've... had a falling out as it happens.

CARSON

(Concerned)

It won't jeopardise his cooperation, will it?

CURTIS

No. He needs the money.

CARSON
That's good. I'll need an update on
everything he's told you about
his...
(Struggles to find the word)
... powers.

INT. LIVING ROOM, CABIN - DAY

John speed reads "The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire". The phone rings. He closes the book and walks into the kitchen to answer it.

JOHN
(Into phone)
Yes?

INT. CARSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Carson speaks.

CARSON
(Into phone)
John, It's Carson. We have a
situation. How'd you like to start
work today?

INTERCUT WITH JOHN

JOHN
(Into phone)
Will I be working with Miller?

CARSON
(Into phone)
Not this time.

JOHN
(Into phone)
What do you want me to do?

EXT. INDUSTRIAL ESTATE - DAY

John stands alongside Carson in front of a row of factories, warehouses and office blocks in an industrial estate situated on the outskirts of town. It is the weekend and there is little life in the estate apart from carloads of uniformed policemen. Carson points out an office building.

CARSON

The methadone clinic's in that building.

JOHN

Odd location.

CARSON

You'd be surprised where they crop up. People don't want these things near them.

JOHN

I feel something all right.

CARSON

The guy holding the staff is a junkie, very unstable. We don't want him provoked. Can you sedate all of them?

JOHN

It shouldn't be a problem.

CARSON

You say it works best away from distractions. How about you get in the van?

Carson opens the back door of a police van. John climbs in. The door closes behind him.

INT. POLICE VAN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

John huddles forward and holds himself as if freezing cold. He breathes in deeply and starts to shiver. He rolls onto his side and starts to shake violently.

EXT. GATED ENTRANCE, INDUSTRIAL ESTATE - DAY

Two armed uniformed police officers stand guard at the entrance.

Curtis cruises past. He notices the officers on the gate.

He turns his car around and drives up. He rolls down the window to talk to the foremost guard.

CURTIS

I didn't hear anything over the radio. Any trouble?

The officer looks back to his colleague as if for instruction. When none is forthcoming he turns back to Curtis.

OFFICER
We have it covered, pal.

CURTIS
Need any help?

OFFICER
Like I said, it's covered.

CURTIS
I don't recognize you. What precinct?

The officer looks confused. He puts his hand up to indicate Curtis isn't getting through.

OFFICER
Eh, we have it covered, pal. Okay?

Curtis eyes them suspiciously.

CURTIS
No problem. Nice to work with you too.

He rolls back up his window.

He reverses out of the gateway. As he turns to drive off he takes a look at the officer's shoes. He registers that both men are wearing steel toecap boots, clearly not police regulation.

Curtis drives off.

He drives up the road, rounds a corner and parks. He walks a back road back to the industrial estate and walks along by the metal palisade fence at the rear of it. When he is certain nobody can see him he scales the fence.

He drops down into the estate. He sneaks around scoping out the space. All the buildings seem empty. In fact, most of them look like they haven't been used in a long time. Rusting machinery and decayed stockpiles of out-of-date merchandise clog up the yards of warehouses and factories. He scouts around clandestinely, using these as

cover. Eventually he spots two soldiers smoking outside the back door of a factory building.

Curtis waits and watches them from behind a stack of palettes. They stub out their cigarettes and go inside.

Curtis waits for a few seconds, then he runs across to the door and enters.

INT. POLICE VAN - DAY

John rolls about on the floor of the van convulsing. He is drenched in sweat and howls in agony. This is worse than he's ever been.

He throws up on the floor of the van.

INT. FACTORY BUILDING - DAY

Curtis walks down a corridor.

Footsteps echo around the upcoming corner. Curtis retreats back along the corridor until he comes to the bottom of a stairwell and hastily ascends.

He arrives on a landing and enters through a doorway.

This brings him out onto an empty balcony overlooking a factory floor. He walks to the balcony railing and cautiously peeks over.

Below him is no normal factory floor.

The floor has been partitioned with moveable screens to form a grid of makeshift cells.

In each cell a foreign-looking prisoner is being tortured by young US army cadets.

The cadets are all fresh-faced 18-year olds. They are barely out of High School but they go about their business with ruthless detachment and extreme prejudice.

Curtis watches on horrified at the scenes unfolding beneath him.

SERIES OF SHOTS

1)

A cadet holds a bound prisoner's head down in a bucket of water. He pulls the prisoner's head out by the hair.

CADET

You ready to talk, Mohammed? Huh?

The Arab prisoner looks near death - unshaved, bruised eyes, cut face and swollen lips.

In contrast the cadet looks like he should be worrying about his school finals and the Prom, his face still puffed with baby fat. He examines his prisoner with amusement. The Arab might be a new toy he got for Christmas.

CADET

You will, soon enough.

He plunges the prisoner's head back underwater.

2)

A naked man of North African or Middle Eastern descent sits strapped to a chair. An Iowa farm girl, barely 18, stands in front of him. She holds two electric clamps in her hands. The wires lead to a charging unit on the wall. The unit is operated by another cadet, a slightly built poindexter with glasses.

She attaches the clamps to the prisoners' genitals and nods at her colleague. He flips down the switch. The prisoner screams as he spasms with electric shock.

3)

Two cadets hold a black prisoner down on a bench. The prisoner is on his back and his head overhangs the bench and is tipped back. A cloth is draped over his face.

A third soldier pours water from a bucket over the cloth. The waterboarding causes the prisoner to shake.

4)

A cadet applies lit cigarettes to the torso of a blindfolded prisoner whose cries have no bearing on the blank expression of the cadet.

5)

A cadet insouciantly extracts a prisoner's fingernails with a pair of pliers. The prisoner's agony does not register with his torturer. He could be pulling the wings off a fly.

This prisoner is familiar - he is the terrorist who was wounded and lying on the floor of the Passport Office.

INT. POLICE VAN - DAY

John shakes violently in the back of the van. It is almost as if he's having an epileptic fit. He lies in a pool of sweat, vomit and possibly urine. He is in agony.

INT. FACTORY - DAY

McKenzie stands before a trio of cadets. They all stand around a prisoner strapped to a chair. This prisoner is also familiar to us - he is the leader from the siege at the US Passport Office.

He is naked and clamps are attached to his nipples. Wires lead to a charge unit on the wall. His body sags down in the chair. He is a skeletal wreck, close to death.

One of the cadets addresses McKenzie.

CADET

He didn't say anything else, sir.

MCKENZIE

If he didn't speak he knows nothing more.

McKenzie flips open his holster, takes out his gun and hands it to the cadet.

MCKENZIE

I hear you're good at shooting, soldier.

CADET

Best in my class at the academy, sir.

MCKENZIE

I'll bet you fifty bucks you can't get him in the eye.

CADET

In the eye, sir?

MCKENZIE

A straight shot. Don't tear any skin.

The cadet takes the gun. He looks at the prisoner. The Arab closes his eyes and lowers his head, making an instinctive and pointless attempt to shrink himself out of this situation. The young cadet seems to hesitate.

MCKENZIE

Don't worry. These prisoners have already been reported killed in action.

The cadet stares at the prisoner.

CADET

He's closed his eyes, sir.

McKenzie looks at the cadet nearest the charge unit.

MCKENZIE

Well, make him open them, soldier.

The cadet understands. He flips down the switch of the charge unit.

Electricity surges through the prisoner, causing him to spasm with shock. His eyes come open and alive with the shock.

The young cadet takes aim. He wasn't lying about being an expert shot. He shoots the prisoner dead in the eye. Blood spurts from the devastated eyeball and pours down the side of his face from the socket. The Arab slumps over dead.

The performance is greeted with a round of applause.

MCKENZIE

Well done, soldier. With more like you we'd have Afghanistan cleaned up in no time.

Meanwhile, the Iowa farm girl casually stretches out the little finger of her prisoner. He sobs pitifully.

PRISONER

No, please. No more.

CADET

Are you going to talk?

PRISONER

I don't know anything. I swear. I don't know. I'd have told you if I did.

She snaps his finger back the wrong way without blinking. The prisoner howls in agony.

It hangs from the joint at a right angle, the wrong way back. She observes his suffering with casual, bemused contempt.

CADET

Huh. Guess you don't know.

INT. BALCONY, FACTORY - DAY

Curtis watches these scenes of torture and mayhem with shock, dismay and revulsion.

THOMPSON (O.S.)

It takes a lot to win a war, officer.

He turns and sees Thompson standing behind him. Beside Thompson is Carson.

Curtis opens his mouth to speak but nothing comes out.

THOMPSON

Our country's safety depends on all departments of state doing their duty, Curtis.

Thompson looks at Carson.

THOMPSON

Captain, I think our man has probably gone through enough.

Carson gives Curtis a wistful look before he exits.

INT. POLICE VAN - DAY

John shivers in the back of the van. He looks worn out, exhausted.

The door opens and light streams in. Carson stands there.

CARSON

The situation's under control,
John.

John climbs out of the truck. A police officer drapes a blanket over his shoulders.

John looks around. The scene is exactly as it was before he got into the van - just a few police officers hanging around out in front of the building.

JOHN

Where are the hostages?

CARSON

They're being treated. Everything's
under control.

JOHN

Can I see them?

CARSON

It's best you go home, get some
rest. They've gone through hell. So
have you.

EXT. GATED ENTRANCE, INDUSTRIAL ESTATE - DAY

John drives out of the industrial estate. He salutes the two guards as he passes them.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - DAY

As he drives out of the park he glances at the guards in his rearview mirror. Something about them seems a bit off.

He drives up the road and turns a corner. He parks his car in the forecourt of a fast food restaurant.

He walks back to the perimeter of the industrial estate, avoiding the front gate.

He walks along by the palisade fence round the back of the estate. When he's certain the coast is clear he climbs over the fence. He drops down and starts to prowl around.

He arrives at the back of the office building with the supposed methadone clinic. There seems to be no activity.

He creeps around by the side and peers round the corner to the front of the building. He sees that soldiers in full military dress are now intermingled with the "police officers". The police van is open and dead bodies are being stretchered out from a nearby factory building and put into it.

John retreats from the corner. He goes around the back of the building and creeps across to the back of the factory building.

He tries an emergency exit. It opens and he goes inside.

INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM, FACTORY - DAY

Curtis is with Thompson in a room crammed with TV monitors. The workstations are manned by military staff. The screens show footage of the various interrogations. One screen shows John in the back of the police van.

Thompson produces a small bottle of pills from his pocket. Curtis recognizes the pills - beta-blockers.

THOMPSON

The information you provided was spot on. The beta-blockers worked perfectly. We fed them to the terrorists and they weren't affected by John at all.

CURTIS

(Horrorified)

You... you had him absorb the fear of the torturers, not the victims.

THOMPSON

Victims? Torturers? Haha. Come on, Curtis. Don't be naïve. This is a totalitarian war we're fighting. We need soldiers that are prepared to do anything to win it. Even things that go against their upbringing, their instinct, their faith.

CURTIS

You're turning them into sadists.

THOMPSON

Do they look like sadists to you? Farm boys? Girls next door? It

would take years to get them
hardened up to this level. With
John we can do it instantly.

CURTIS

He wouldn't agree to this.

THOMPSON

He's been drafted.

(Beat)

These teenagers have been brought
up to believe what goes around
comes around, all because of the
big spook in the sky. Thou shalt
not kill. Do unto others as you
would have done to you. Their moral
sense is driven by fear. If they
break God's commandments they get
punished. That's no good to us in
war. We need people who can do what
needs to be done. Take away that
fear of being punished and what are
you left with?

CURTIS

A messed up, empty husk.

THOMPSON

A perfect soldier. Imagine our
troops going into battle with an
army of John Austins behind the
lines taking their fear away.

CURTIS

Their conscience. Their identity.

THOMPSON

Things that get in the way. We can
get a young girl who's had less
dicks in her than the amount of
times I've been to the opera and we
can make her carve her initials
into a guy's scrotum without
blinking. That's power, Curtis.
That's what we need to win this
war.

CURTIS

There'll be an outcry.

THOMPSON

These terrorists are already dead as far as anybody knows. They all deserve the death penalty anyway. At least this way they're useful. They provide us with information that protects American lives.

INT. FACTORY - DAY

John treads gently up the stairwell.

He comes out on the landing. He spots a door and passes through.

INT. BALCONY, FACTORY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

He emerges out onto the balcony.

He goes to the railing and looks down.

Prisoners, dead or dying, are being put on stretchers and carried outside to the waiting police vans.

The floor is stained with their blood, faeces, vomit and urine. A few cadets mop up the mess.

John takes in the aftermath of the mass torture with revulsion. Then the penny drops. He realizes what he's helped achieve. Anger replaces revulsion.

He sees Curtis and Thompson come out from an antechamber and walk across the floor.

John's hand balls into a fist by his side. He turns and exits.

INT. STAIRWELL, FACTORY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Halfway down the stairs John sees a party of soldiers led by McKenzie waiting for him at the bottom of it.

INT. OFFICE, FACTORY - DAY

John sits across from McKenzie and Thompson in a small bare office. He eyes them with hatred. Two armed soldiers stand behind McKenzie and Thompson. A closed folder lies on the desk.

MCKENZIE

Sorry we lied to you, John. We thought you mightn't agree if we

told you the truth, or only fake it.

THOMPSON

This was a test run. We'll be honest with you from now on. We need you.

JOHN

You can't have me.

MCKENZIE

We already do.

JOHN

I won't sacrifice my life for this, to be a murderer.

MCKENZIE

War isn't murder. Besides, you're not actually there.

JOHN

I'm helping people become animals.

MCKENZIE

(Shaking his head)

Huh. These terrorists can strap bombs to themselves, step onto a crowded train and blow themselves up without a second thought. As far as they're concerned they're going to 72 vestal virgins in the sky. We need that kind of belief on our side. You can give our operatives that, John. You can take away their doubts.

JOHN

I bore this burden because I thought it would do good. I won't use it for this.

MCKENZIE

It is doing good, John. You think God doesn't want us to defend ourselves against these heathens? Every fucking terrorist we extract information from saves lives. You are doing good.

THOMPSON

We need you, John. We want to see what it is exactly that makes you so unique, and if we can identify other people with it. Or if we can recreate it.

JOHN

Recreate it.

MCKENZIE

Induce it in others.

JOHN

If there wasn't a war on you'd be in a mental institution. I won't be part of this.

MCKENZIE

If you're not with us you're against us, John.

THOMPSON

With this power you're a walking weapon of mass destruction. Withholding that makes you an enemy of the state.

JOHN

I'll never help you.

McKenzie opens the folder and looks over the document inside.

MCKENZIE

We have a report you had insider knowledge about the siege at the Passport Office. That makes you a terror suspect. You know what we do to suspects.

(To guards)

Take him to the state pen for a few days, give him a taste of Guantanamo.

EXT./INT. STATE PENITENTARY - DAY

John, handcuffed and wearing a prison jumpsuit, is escorted down a penitentiary wing. Inmates watch the new arrival from tiered cells that stack up three floors on either side of the central passageway.

Jeers escalate as he is brought to an empty ground floor cell. The warden directs him inside.

John sits on the bed as the guard locks the barred door.

EXT. POLICE STATION CAR PARK - DAY

Curtis storms through the car park. Carson follows him.

CARSON

I know it's hard to get your head around at first, Curtis. But the police are part of this war too.

Curtis arrives at his car and unlocks it. Before getting in he takes out his wallet. He produces his police badge from it and slings it at Carson.

CURTIS

You're welcome to it.

CARSON

Curtis, don't be rash. You've a promotion coming up. You can do a lot of good, Curtis.

Curtis gets into his car.

CURTIS

I guess I'll be on some blacklist now. Or maybe I'll meet with a little accident.

CARSON

Don't be ridiculous, Curtis. I know you'll keep your mouth shut. Marie and Jenny would want you to.

Curtis glares at him.

CARSON

(Ominous)

They're good Americans. Don't forget you are too.

Curtis starts the car and drives off.

INT. JOHN'S CELL, PENITENTIARY - EVENING

John sits on his bed.

INT. CANTEEN, PENITENTIARY - EVENING

Inmates file up in a long line to the counter to receive their meals. Others eat at long benches. The atmosphere is the usual for the evening meal - subdued, tense, vaguely fearful. Wardens supervise the process watchfully.

INT. JOHN'S CELL - EVENING

John inhales deeply, starting to absorb. He begins to shudder. He holds himself like he's cold. He falls over on his side and curls up into a foetal position as he goes through his usual routine of trembling, quaking and sweating.

INT. CANTEEN - EVENING

The noise in the canteen is deafening as prisoners chat loudly. Smiles abound as the atmosphere has turned carefree. The wardens seem confused by the gaiety and bravado on display.

A stocky Hispanic inmate queues up for his meal. He has a dopey smirk on his face. A black prisoner in front of him stops briefly to talk to a friend who is seated at the end of a bench. The Hispanic cuts in front of him.

BLACK INMATE

What you think you're doing, bro?

HISPANIC INMATE

What you gonna do about it?

The black guy grabs him by the shoulder and shoves him back behind him.

BLACK INMATE

Get back there, bitch.

The Hispanic elbows the black guy in the back of the head. He grabs him in a headlock. The black guy's friend jumps up and prizes the Hispanic away from him.

Several wardens rush over wielding truncheons. They batter the Hispanic and black guy.

Every inmate in the canteen stops eating and chatting to watch the melee.

An inmate in the queue eyes up one of the wardens breaking up the fight. He steps up and slams his fist into the warden's face. Two other inmates grab the other warden.

The wardens positioned around the canteen see what has happened and rush over.

They don't make it - prisoners hop up from the benches and pounce on them en masse.

It is ON - riot time.

INT. CELL - EVENING

John convulses on the bed. His sweat soaks the sheets.

The raucous sounds of fighting come from the passageway outside and the gangways above him.

INT. PENITENTIARY - EVENING

The situation has escalated from a riot to a prison breakout.

Prisoners unlock the cells of their mates with keys taken from prison guards who have been beaten unconscious.

At the security gate of the penitentiary wing a terrified warden is held at knife point by a group of inmates. On the far side of the security gate two prison guards observe the group fretfully. They look like they don't know what to do. On the monitor screen beside them violent scenes from various parts of the penitentiary unfold.

KNIFE-HOLDING INMATE
(To guards behind security
gate)

Open up or I open his neck. Believe
me nothing would give me greater
pleasure right now.

INT. CELL - EVENING

John quakes as he absorbs the fear of the inmates, what would normally keep them compliant and docile.

He struggles to rise from the bed and moves with some discomfort to the bars of his cell. He seems to have aged

in the past couple of days - his hair greyer, his face more gaunt.

He looks out at the mayhem - wardens lying unconscious or wounded on the floor, inmates running amok and freeing their friends.

Most of the cells have been emptied. A few unpopular cell-dwellers are ignored as they vainly beseech those on the outside to free them.

A few doors up from John an inmate frees his mate with a warden's ring of keys. The two of them run past John's cell.

JOHN
(Calling out)
Hey, let me out, man.

The inmate with the keys stops and looks at John. He smiles, enjoying the power he suddenly has.

INMATE
Sorry, dude. I've an important meeting. Tell you what, I'll pencil you in for next week.

John exhales. He stops trembling.

The inmate suddenly collapses. He tries to get back up but it is a struggle as he has gone weak at the knees. His heartbeat starts to pound. He hyperventilates, beginning a full blown panic attack.

John stares down at him commandingly.

JOHN
Hits you hard when you've forgotten what it feels like, doesn't it?

The inmate looks at John, clambers to his feet and tries the keys in John's lock.

INMATE
Just don't do it again, mate, okay?

EXT. STATE PENITENTIARY - EVENING

Prisoners descend from ropes down the walls of the penitentiary. They hit the ground and tear across the open fields.

They are intermittently framed by roving searchlights from the penitentiary's corner towers.

The sound of gunshots and barking hounds is heard over the landscape.

John is among the descending prisoners. He hits the ground and flees into the night, weaving around the probing searchlights.

EXT. MILITARY BASE, DESERT - NIGHT

McKenzie, in civilian clothes, exits an administrative building. He locates his BMW in a parking lot and gets in.

The sentry at the checkpoint salutes him as he drives out.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - NIGHT

McKenzie drives along an empty highway. Desert stretches off to either side into darkness. The silhouette of distant ranges marks the underside of the starlit sky.

The headlights of a car appear in his rearview mirror. He pays no notice as the car drives up behind him. It is an old sedan. John drives, wearing a baseball cap and with his collars pulled up to veil his face.

He starts to overtake McKenzie. He drives up alongside him for a few seconds.

McKenzie pays no attention until...

John swerves in and slams into the front side of his car. The jolt takes McKenzie by surprise and sends him off the road.

He hits the brakes. Tyres screech on asphalt before they plough through dust, sending spumes of the desert up around the car.

John drives ahead. McKenzie gets out and surveys the damage to his car. It is minimal. He goes to get back in when he sees the other car returning.

John stops about 30 metres away and blinks the car's headlights. McKenzie is by now very antagonised and marches towards the other car.

MCKENZIE

Who the hell are you, faggot?

John reverses and does a screeching 180. He drives up the road a little bit and stops.

McKenzie halts. He senses there's no point walking after the car as it will just drive off again.

John takes a deep breath. His hands shake on the wheel. He struggles to balance them.

JOHN

Come on, give it to me.

He slowly drives away.

McKenzie smirks. He has made up his mind. The situation is no longer bizarre to him - just a problem he knows how best to solve. He returns to his car and gets in. He reverses back onto the road, turns and pursues the provocateur.

John sees McKenzie following. He accelerates.

McKenzie pursues quickly. He soon matches John for speed.

The cars zoom along the empty road, all the time upping their speed.

John presses the accelerator. His dial hits 90. Behind him McKenzie matches him. McKenzie's mouth has turned into a leer with the prospect of violent revenge.

There is a truck ahead. It approaches a rise in the road.

John comes up behind the truck. He accelerates and swerves out to pass it.

The driver of the truck watches with astonishment as John overtakes him at an incredible speed and disappears down behind the crest of the hill.

McKenzie comes up behind the truck. He swerves out and passes it. He drives up alongside it as they both near the crest.

A car comes over the crest suddenly. It is on a collision course with McKenzie.

McKenzie speeds up.

The driver of the truck sees McKenzie doesn't have time to pass him. He hits the brakes. The truck skids to a halt. The driver of the advancing car also hits the brakes and the car skids to a halt, buying McKenzie a split second to swerve back into the correct lane ahead of the truck before he collides with the car.

McKenzie is unfazed by the near collision and continues in his pursuit of John.

John breathes heavy as he drives, sweat beads blotting his forehead. His hand trembles on the steering wheel. He takes in a deep breath.

JOHN

Don't stop now. Give it to me.

He hits the accelerator and pushes the car to an even more insane speed.

McKenzie hits his accelerator, matching him. He closes in on John's car.

They approach a mountain range. The road begins to slope upwards as it curls around a mountain, creating a steep incline down one side. Only a metal barricade fences the road off from it.

The curving road forces John to slow slightly but he still travels at a dangerous pace. It takes all his muster to negotiate the mountain road at this velocity while simultaneously absorbing McKenzie's fear.

McKenzie, sensing to follow at such speed is dangerous folly, begins to flag in his pursuit. He frowns as he drops his speed.

John's hands stop trembling. He looks anxious.

JOHN

No, don't give up. Get rid of all that ugly fear. Give it all to me, major. Be a man.

He takes in a deep breath, renewing his efforts to absorb. His hands quake again on the wheel. He grips the wheel tighter. He smiles even as he suffers, knowing it means his plan is working, that McKenzie is being lulled into this foolhardy chase.

McKenzie beams with renewed confidence and hits the accelerator. He closes in on John.

John vomits. It doesn't stop him speeding along the winding road.

McKenzie pursues, calm and composed. Up ahead John's car disappears around a corner.

Intent on catching John, McKenzie accelerates. He approaches the corner.

Suddenly John's car speeds around the corner. It is in the wrong lane and is coming straight at McKenzie.

McKenzie instinctively swerves out to avoid it.

He succeeds in dodging it. John cuts past on the inside lane. McKenzie frantically spins the wheel back round to steer the car back into the correct lane but the momentum of the vehicle drags it towards the barrier. The back of the car spins forward and slams against the metal barricade. It breaks right through it and the car teeters over the side.

John slows the car on his way down the mountain. He is covered in a cold sweat but his ordeal is over and he exhales and relaxes.

JOHN

Have it back.

As his car tips over the side of the mountain, realization of what's happening suddenly hits McKenzie. His eyes expand with fright. He opens his mouth and lets out a woeful, terrible scream. Urine saturates the front of his trousers.

The car tumbles down the mountainside, smashing against the rockface as it descends. Halfway down it explodes into flame. The fiery ball of debris continues tumbling down and finally comes to a rest at the bottom of the mountain in a broken pyre of metal, glass, rubber and flesh.

John drives back up slowly to the broken barricade.

He gets out of his car and looks down at the flaming wreckage below.

As he surveys the carnage the exertions of the night finally overcome him and he faints.

EXT./INT. CURTIS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Curtis arrives home. A newspaper folded under his arm is open on the jobs pages. He finds all the lights of the apartment off. He walks through it turning them on.

CURTIS
(Calling out)
Marie.

He carries on walking through the apartment turning on the lights and calling out.

CURTIS
(Calling out)
Jenny.

Nobody home.

He goes into the kitchen and turns on the light. There is a note in the centre of the table. He picks it up and reads it.

CLOSE-UP - NOTE

"Fear has found you."

BACK TO SCENE

Curtis' face drops. He takes out his mobile and dials a number. After a few rings it is answered silently.

CURTIS
(Into phone)
Where are they?

EXT. DERELICT BUILDING - NIGHT

Curtis parks outside a derelict high-rise in a run-down neighbourhood. He gets out and walks up to the boarded up entrance. He prizes open the hoarding blocking the doorway and passes inside.

INT. DERELICT BUILDING - NIGHT

He walks up the stairs, passing dark, empty, dilapidated floors. Beer cans and rubbish are strewn about. The

remnants of hobos' fires are evident in the eviscerated rooms.

As he nears the second highest floor he notices light emanating from an open doorway on that level.

He approaches the doorway and enters.

The light comes from a flashlight on the ground in the corner. He looks around. Nobody appears to be in the room.

Then he notices the window - the end of a ladder rests on the sill.

He goes to it and looks out.

The ladder is suspended between two buildings over an alleyway. The other end rests on the sill of a derelict building opposite.

Tied to the underside of the ladder is Jenny. Her hands and feet are bound to rungs on the ladder. Her mouth is gagged. She is positioned halfway between the two buildings, facing down to the alleyway eight floors below.

Curtis gets the flashlight and illuminates her. Her tears look slick in the glaring torchlight. He assesses the situation, pointing the flashlight down into the shadows of the alleyway below.

He starts to feel woozy, his fear of heights kicking in.

He retreats from the window sill.

He rubs his skull with his hand.

He looks back out along the ladder. He knows what he must do.

He places the flashlight on the sill, pointed out to illuminate the scene. He carefully climbs out onto the ladder and slowly, without looking down, crawls along it.

The ladder creaks as he moves along but it is sturdy and holds, although as he nears the centre it sags under his weight and Jenny's.

He arrives at where she is tied to the ladder. He straddles the ladder and undoes her gag.

CURTIS

Okay, darling. It's me. I'm going to undo your hands. Grab the ladder when I do.

He contorts into position and holds her around the stomach so she doesn't drop as he unties her hands. She grabs the rungs when her ropes are undone. She twists around and brings her arms up on the topside of the ladder.

CURTIS

Can you hold on?

JENNY

Yes.

CURTIS

I'm going to undo your feet.

He slides back and begins to undo her feet binds. He grabs one foot when the ropes are unfastened and lets her bring her other leg up onto the ladder. He grabs her and pulls her up.

It is a mighty effort for both of them but she manages to climb on top of the ladder.

They both sit precariously on the ladder.

Suddenly the alleyway goes dark.

Curtis looks back to the window. The flashlight's been turned off. He can't see anything in the dark room.

CURTIS

Follow me, darling.

Curtis turns and carefully crawls back along the ladder to the window. Jenny follows.

Curtis looks at the window. He can make out the silhouette of John in the window, looking out at them.

Dread mounts in the pit of Curtis' stomach but John just stands there in the window frame looking out at Curtis.

After a few seconds John disappears from the window.

Curtis carries on crawling back to the window.

He climbs into the room and looks around to check John isn't there hiding in the shadows. He then helps Jenny in through the window.

She hugs him tightly when her feet are on the floor.

JENNY

Oh, dad. He's got mum.

CURTIS

Wait here. I'm going to find her.

Suddenly the sound of feet tramping up steps echoes around the building.

Curtis leaves Jenny and goes out to the landing.

He follows the sound of footsteps up the stairs to the next level, the top floor.

He continues to follow the footsteps up another stairwell that leads out onto the roof.

EXT. ROOFTOP, DERELICT BUILDING - NIGHT

Curtis emerges out onto the roof.

John stands at the edge of the rooftop with Marie beside him. Her mouth is gagged and her hands behind her back.

John smiles at Curtis.

CURTIS

Let her go, John. You're not like this.

JOHN

I'm not like this, am I not? I'm not the type of guy to help teenagers torture prisoners? That's not me?

CURTIS

I didn't know anything about that. I would never have brought you in if I did.

JOHN

I saw you.

CURTIS

I sneaked in. I was as appalled as you were.

JOHN

The damage is done.

CURTIS

It need not be.

John steps forward. As he does he casually, one-handed, pushes Marie back over the edge of the building. She drops out of sight.

Curtis screams.

CURTIS

No.

He rushes towards the edge but John gets in the way.

JOHN

(Smirking)

Now it is.

CURTIS

You...

Curtis aims a punch at John.

John evades and punches Curtis in the side of the face. Curtis doesn't flinch. Fury is rearing up inside him.

He pursues John around the rooftop. John feints some punches which Curtis barely even tries to dodge. He doesn't need to deflect the blows. He can barely feel them.

He smacks John in the face. The blow stuns John and it is quickly followed by some more.

Curtis pours his anger out in his fists. He beats John senseless, pulverizing his head and upper body. All the time Curtis snarls like an animal.

When John hits the deck Curtis kicks him in the side and stomach.

John crawls away from him towards the edge of the roof.

Jenny comes out onto the rooftop. She sees what her dad is doing, sees the state John is in. She watches with numb horror.

Then she notices something. A rope is pulled taut from a pipe fixture over the side of the building.

She runs to the side.

John tries to get to his feet.

Curtis grabs him by the lapel and drags him up.

John looks him square in the face.

JOHN

Nice knowing you, Curtis.

Curtis pushes John over the side.

Jenny arrives at the side of the building and looks down. She sees Marie hanging down the side of the building, the rope secured around her waist. She is scared but alive.

JENNY

(Shouting)

Dad.

Curtis notices Jenny now.

CURTIS

Jenny, get away from here.

JENNY

Dad. It's mum. She's alive.

He runs over and looks down. Hope surges. Quickly the two of them hoist Marie up.

When she's on the roof Curtis ungags her.

She gasps for air.

CURTIS

You're not hurt.

MARIE

I'm all right.

Curtis thinks.

CURTIS

He was never going to kill you.

(Beat)

Or me.

Curtis goes to where he threw John off the building.

He looks down and sees that John has hit the suspended ladder on his way down. He is hanging off the side of it with his bare hands.

Curtis races down the stairs to the room.

He looks out the window at John clinging for his life.

CURTIS

John. Hold on.

JOHN

You really didn't know, did you, Curtis?

CURTIS

I swear. I handed in my badge. Now help me, John. Help me get rid of the fear to help you.

JOHN

I can't do that, Curtis. It's done too much damage already.

CURTIS

Okay, I'll do it myself.

Curtis climbs out along the ladder.

JOHN

You'd do this for me, Curtis? After what I'd done?

Curtis is a rung away from John. He stretches out his hand.

CURTIS

Let me help you. Give me your hand.

JOHN

Tell me something, Curtis. You're not scared for yourself right now, but are you scared for me?

CURTIS

Yes. Yes, I'm scared for you.

John looks at him with an expression of utter serenity.

JOHN

Thanks.

John lets go.

He plummets through the darkness. Curtis looks on aghast.

The whack of John's body against concrete punctuates the silence.

Curtis lingers on the ladder. His features are marked by sad resignation as he stares down into the shadows.

EXT. ROOFTOP, DERELICT BUILDING - NIGHT

Curtis emerges back out onto the rooftop.

He sees Marie and Jenny hugging each other in the centre of the roof.

Curtis walks over to them. He draws both of them near and hugs them tightly.

FADE OUT

THE END